



teaching as learning

*an action research approach*

Jean McNiff

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# Teaching as learning

This book follows the success of *Action Research: Principles and Practice* which urged teachers to develop and improve their own classroom practice by taking educational research out of the confines of academia and conducting it themselves as part of their normal work.

In *Teaching as Learning: An Action Research Approach* Jean McNiff continues her study of her own professional development and argues for the necessity for practitioners to hold up accounts of their own practice for public criticism. She challenges the traditional approach to the initial and continuing education of teachers and offers personal action enquiry as the basis for their ongoing professional development. The author's radical ideas are already being put into practice by schools and local education authorities who encourage teachers' own action enquiries and school-based research groups.

**Jean McNiff** is an independent author and consultant in education, and a visiting Fellow at the University of Bath.



# Teaching as learning

An action research approach

Jean McNiff

With a foreword by Jack Whitehead,  
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Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others...

Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have.

(1 Peter 4:10, 3:15)



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# Foreword

*Jack Whitehead*

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The crisis of confidence in schooling has pushed education to the top of the political agenda. The crisis has extended to higher education because of the low level of access relative to that of our European neighbours. There is also the lack of a national organisation to promote 'education at work' as a way of improving the quality of our productive lives. Each of these problems is contributing to our present anxiety that the economic and cultural foundations of our society are declining.

It is one thing to see the need to do something about such problems. It is a different matter to move ourselves and our political, educational, commercial and industrial institutions in a desired direction. Education is fundamental to social regeneration, yet there is a danger that it will fail to play its part because the traditional view of educational knowledge is still dominant in our educational institutions. This is the view that educational knowledge is created by researchers in faculties of mathematics, history, philosophy, psychology, chemistry, etc., in institutions of higher education. The alternative put forward in this book is that educational knowledge is created by individuals at work as they answer questions of the form, 'How do I live more fully my values in my practice?'

In this book, Jean McNiff presents an account of her own education at work. This text follows the success of her *Action Research: Principles and Practice*, which has become a standard text on many education programmes. I believe this current book will fulfil its aim of encouraging practitioners to have faith in their own creative powers to understand education from the point of view of making sense of their own practice, while exercising their critical powers in evaluating the contributions of other thinkers to this understanding.

The first texts in the field are going to provoke a range of emotional and intellectual responses. The profession is not used to educational researchers

who are willing to submit their own professional practice to public test in the formative process of generating and testing an educational theory which can describe and explain their own form of life in education.

We are certainly not used to an educational researcher offering an account of her own educational development which includes both the results of years of profound reflection together with examples of the naivety of first encounters with new ideas. The text and author are vulnerable to criticism. Jean is open to and learns from criticism. She sees it as a necessary part of her educational development. It will be interesting to read the comments of readers to see whether they respond with a sensitivity and quality of criticism which does not violate her integrity.

The book is a form of resistance to the imposition by academics of their conceptual structures onto educational theory. It does this by inviting teachers and academics to offer descriptions and explanations for their own educational development as part of the process of generating and testing a living form of educational theory. I share Jean's belief that such accounts open up a new, dialectical form of educational knowledge. This form is openly constructed through a process of question and answer and requires individuals to ask questions related to living their own values more fully in their workplace. In such questions they acknowledge their existence as a living contradiction.

Rather than encouraging teacher researchers to remove their own 'I' from the enquiry on the spurious grounds that statements containing 'I' are necessarily subjective and therefore of less value than 'objective' statements, the dialectical form enables individuals to acknowledge themselves as living contradictions in an educational enquiry of the form, 'How do I live more fully my values in my practice?' The success of Jean's earlier book on Action Research has been attributed to the fact that teachers and students identified with the experience of those teachers who explained how they held educational values while at the same time recognising that they were not living them fully in practice. In other words, teachers recognised the experience of being living contradictions as they engaged in practical attempts to improve the quality of practice. While retaining her commitment to the fundamental importance of the individual researching her or his own practice, Jean extends her understanding of action research as a form of collaborative network which can transform institutional structures into forms of good order which can promote the educational development of individuals. We still have much to learn about these processes of educational transformation. The fact that Avon Education Authority and Wiltshire schools such as Wootton Bassett and Greendown

are supporting their teachers' action enquiries into the quality of pupils' learning in collaboration with higher education gives some grounds for optimism that the ideas developed in this book are not grounded in speculation. The ideas are grounded in the concrete practices of individuals and groups of professionals who are showing what it means, within our present social context, to work towards improving the quality of education with pupils and students. I have more faith that the living explanations embodied in the practices of these professionals will constitute educational theory than I do in the conceptual structures of my academic colleagues in higher education.

I cannot think of one Professor of Education in this country who has made a systematic study of her or his own educational development and offered for public criticism a claim to know this development. I see academics offering lectures on the expert teacher without subjecting their own teaching to critical scrutiny. I see academics running educational development research groups without subjecting their own educational development to research.

I do not want this criticism to be seen as a blanket condemnation of the work of my colleagues in higher education. I value their contribution to the philosophy, psychology, sociology, history and management of education. These contributions, however, are all made from within a language and logic which denies the existence of contradictions within educational theory. I believe that the omission of any systematic analysis of their own educational development is preventing them from seeing the dialectical nature of educational knowledge, and hence their work serves to promote a view of this knowledge which is now harmful to the processes of social regeneration. I hope this text serves to strip away some of these crippling influences.

At a time when the Conservative Government sees the process of improving standards of education in terms of imposing a national curriculum, national assessment and local financial management of schools, it may do some good to emphasise that the quality of education is ultimately dependent upon the professional quality of the teaching force. One of the crucial elements in a profession is its practice of 'practice guiding theory'. This text is focused on the nature of the educational theory which can produce valid descriptions and explanations for the educational development of individuals. I would argue that the production of such a theory, grounded in professional practice, is an urgent political necessity for all those who wish to improve the quality of education in this country.

This is why I think Chapter 8 is so important, where Kevin Eames describes the development of a school-based research group.

While Jean does not approach her work in education from an explicitly political perspective, in Chapter 13 she acknowledges the importance of collaborative networks of practitioners for ensuring that educational values are lived in practice. She is also offering a way of understanding her educational development which she affirms as true to herself and is 'rational' in a way which challenges the rationality of traditional ways of thinking about educational knowledge. In grounding her views in personal knowledge she is following Polanyi's view that no one can utter more than a responsible commitment of her own, and this completely fulfils her responsibility for finding the truth and telling it. Whether or not it is the truth can be hazarded only by another equally responsible commitment.

I hope that this text captivates your imagination and moves you into a form of collaborative action in which you will recognise a new way of thinking about education—a way which corresponds to the way you think about your own education and yet has not been acknowledged in the world of educational theory. I believe that you will find Jean's text comprehensible in the sense of moving us into a new, dialectical form of rationality in thinking about education. This is not to say that you cannot judge her work in terms of the criterion as to whether or not she adopts a rigorous approach in ensuring that her assertions are adequately grounded in valid evidence. In hoping that Jean will captivate your imaginations I am conscious of the values which are embodied in her educational development as she shows their meaning in the course of their emergence in practice. This is, of course, very different from the view in many books and journals that the meaning of values can be clearly communicated through the propositional form of text. It is a contention of this book that an understanding of educational values and hence educational knowledge requires the educational researcher to show the meaning of the values as they are embodied and emerge in practice. If this is not done it is difficult to understand in what sense the research can claim to be 'educational'.

The majority of work on educational theory is presented in terms of conceptual structures rather than a form of enquiry. Educational theory is still seen as a traditional form of theory which contains a set of determinate relationships between variables in terms of which a fairly extensive set of empirically verifiable regularities can be explained. An alternative view to this, set out by Jean in her earlier work and developed here, is that you and I should take the lead in generating a living educational theory by producing descriptions and explanations for our own educational

development in our professional work in education. Rather than conceive theory in terms of a set of conceptual relations, this text offers a view of theory in terms of embodied explanations for the way of life of individuals. The explanations are embodied in the sense that they are part of the individual's practical responses to questions of the form, 'How do I improve my practice?' It is possible to judge the adequacy of the theory through the formation of better quality questions and improved practice and understanding. Such an educational theory is a narrative in which individuals examine their lives in relation to questions of the form, 'How do I live more fully my values in my practice?'

In the course of such an enquiry, individuals can explain how they are assimilating, accommodating and integrating the insights of other thinkers in making sense of their own way of life. Such explanations will not be reduced to those of other thinkers. In other words the form of educational theory proposed in this book can integrate the unique contributions of individuals as they strive to improve the quality of their own way of life. The dialectic of question and answer permits an openness to the possibilities which life itself permits. It is not closed off by any conceptual structure. This characteristic of the dialectic stresses the importance of education as a process of transformation in which traditional theories can exist as transitional structures which are open to modification, rather than a process in which conceptual structures are imposed on our thinking as in earlier accounts of educational theory.

A final criterion which I know Jean would want applied to her work is that of authenticity. In a world where the values of freedom, rationality, justice, democracy, integrity and community, are much needed, I think you should take the opportunity offered by this text to engage in a critical dialogue with the author in a way which will help to take her enquiry forward. In the course of such a conversation you may find that a reciprocal relationship is established that helps to take your own enquiry forward too. I think you will find in these pages an individual's commitment to give meaning and purpose to her professional life through the quality of her relationships and productive work, together with an expression of faith, based in experience, that such work in education is of value in the search for human betterment.



# Introduction

Let us consider the nature of educational knowledge—specifically, my own.

This presentation is part of my on-going project, in which I seek to understand my own educational development, and to offer an account of that development in explicit form, in order to support my claim that I have improved the quality of my own education.

I believe, as Polanyi tells us (1958), that development is a transformational process. A person may hold certain views and sometimes make dogmatic assertions about them. However, when she presents these views for public scrutiny and criticism, she may change her mind about them, because of several influences: by engaging in the analytic process of writing which focuses her thoughts more precisely; or by the feedback from other people as they critique her work; or in the light of her own developing experience; and so on.

In this sense, this text represents my present best thinking about the nature of educational knowledge. It is not a final answer. It is a firm but temporary intellectual platform on which I am standing to create new, more mature structures. I began to understand this process of my own learning from Polanyi, that I must not shrink from taking a firm stand in order to give me the security to move forward; but that this firmness should be fluid, provisional, part of my conscious intent to transform my own thinking, and subject to dismantling when the time is right to move on. The general framework of my intellectual life is that, like Rogers (1961), I hold my concepts loosely; but at critical transitional times, such as in synthesising my ideas in written form, I narrow the focus in order to 'freeze' the intellectual action and crystallise the ideas.

This is the point of this book: it is an articulation of my present best thinking of how people—myself and those who have contributed to the text—are continually engaged in transforming our own lives through a process of question and answer. The book is part of the developing story of my life.



While the focus of this text is on the professional development of teachers, ultimately the value of this work must be judged in relation to the quality of clients' learning. This concept is still in embryonic form in this book and continues to develop.

### **Personal experience**

I often reflect on the bitter-sweet experience of my own professional development. I took early retirement at the age of 46 because of a heart problem. At the time I was deputy headmistress in a large secondary school; I had been intensively involved in the continuing education of colleagues; I had written my first book on personal and social education; I was already five years into a part-time PhD study. Retirement put an end to it all.

At the time I felt cheated. My career was in full swing, I knew it all. What would I do now?

The first thing to get out of the way was my thesis. I set about writing; it would be finished in three months.

It wasn't: not for the next two years. Those years were the most formative of my professional life, and the time in which I began to think—actively think—creatively and critically. My real education began here; my real professional development began when I left institutionalised education; and I am concerned that it should now never end.

It is ironic that I came to see the importance of personal freedom through the process of being free. I am currently institution-unbound. I like it that way. At first it was frightening. I, like most people, I suppose, enjoy the security of a structured environment. I like to know what is going to happen next; and, as a teacher, I had lived by a time-table for a long time. Now I was not responsible to, or for, anyone.

When I set about writing my thesis I employed the same thought-structures that I had used all my working life. I thought in propositional terms (see Chapter 2). My teacher-education work had always reflected this: 'If I do X to these teachers, then they will do Y. And I will tell them that if they do Y, then Z will follow. I will be successful in my institution's terms, and so will they in theirs.' This logic caused me to write up my practice in school on an 'if..., then...' basis. I still felt that I had to adhere to the received format for writing an academic treatise.

As it was, I had to rest for some months, and I took up some reading that looked attractive. I read several books that were to have a lasting influence: Polanyi's *Personal Knowledge* (1958); Pring's *Personal and Social*

*Education in the Curriculum* (1984); Bernstein's *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism* (1983); Fromm's *To Have or To Be* (1978); and others. I began to relate these books to myself: not only to my professional practice, but to the total practice of my life.

I began to see that the institutionalised pressures on me as my functional self had left no space for my personal self's development. I had always been concerned to meet others' expectations: what of my own desire to think for myself? The enforced freedom demanded that I now do just that. I had no choice but to fall back on my own resources, to create my own life from now on.

The acceptance of freedom, both social and intellectual, was difficult, at times harrowing (Fromm, 1942). But survival is at the root of existence. I became virtually better a year after retiring. I went into business, started writing seriously, and took up consultancy work. I work very hard, but I am free to think and act as I please.

I am intensely aware now that yes, I was cheated, but not in the sense I had originally perceived. I had been cheated of timely professional and personal development because I was a child of the empiric initial and in-service training that cripples the individual by the straitjacket of institutionalised expectations. I had *served* as a teacher. I had fitted my practice into others' forms of thought. I had accepted their claim that knowledge was theirs, not mine, and that I had to perform in a certain way in order to acquire knowledge.

Now I am concerned that other teachers are also, systematically and deliberately, being cheated by the expectations of the policy makers. I regard my work now as a mission that will help teachers to be free, *in spite of* the policy makers. I want to influence the policy makers, themselves servants of the institutionalised machine, that there is another way, another life, that rests on the creative understandings and intersubjective agreements of caring individual professionals, that they can work things out together through a policy of love, not domination.

I want to institutionalise user-friendly systems of thought and communication. I want to communicate how my quality of life has improved beyond all recognition since I was put into the position of losing the opportunity actively to teach in a conformist environment, and how instead I opened the doors to my own learning. I want to encourage other teachers to abandon formal instruction-based teaching and try out a way of life that is based on their own willingness to learn about themselves.

I am now quite involved in continuing teacher education. The more I go on in my own work as a teacher, the more convinced I become of the

need to organise it as a learning process rather than as a teaching objective. I am compelled to believe that my work as a supporter is focused on the self-education of teachers. I am increasingly aware of my own role as a resource that may provide an appropriate environment in which people may grow, of my need to resist offering glib answers that are based on my own insights and experience rather than encourage them to find their own answers.

I am convinced of the need to encourage people to appreciate the power of the self, when that self engages in the process of her own development; of the power of the self to create her own understanding. This power allows us to apply our educational practices to the process of transforming our lives. If we are not happy with a situation, we change it. Our educational knowledge is the process whereby we know why and how we transform our lives.

In order to do this, we must be free, socially, intellectually and spiritually. I am concerned in my work to break with our current traditions of teachers' intellectual dependence. Teachers must regard themselves as free thinkers, as creators of their own lives, in order to regard themselves as part of the educative process. If they do not, teachers remain as implementers; and that, to my mind, is wasteful and immoral.

### **Creating educational knowledge**

I will state at the outset that I do not think education is intrinsically concerned with behaviour, or the study of behaviour, and I do not believe that knowledge is to do with bodies of statements that aim to control behaviour.

I want to explore the idea that education is concerned with the process of growth of an individual whereby the individual's life is formed and informed by the values that she holds and the knowledge that she develops. Values, or beliefs, are aspects of an individual's thinking and practice. Throughout this book I want to look at how the nature of values and the way in which they are realised could constitute a particular way of life. The realisation of values may be seen as offering reasons for acting in the way that we do. Our way of life may be understood as an expression of 'values in action'.

If we regard our enquiries as the process of seeking reasons for action, we are working towards explanations. The form of this life process may be seen as a commitment by an individual to move an unsatisfactory

situation, in which values are denied in practice, towards an improved situation, in which values are more fully realised in practice. The enquiry itself follows the process of improvement, grounding itself in the intentional actions of the individual who was initially dissatisfied with a situation, and who made a personal commitment to work systematically towards improving her practice in order to improve the situation.

I am concerned to work towards changing the currently popular focus and status of educational enquiries. At present there is a predominant view in the literature that education is to do with behaviour, and that educational enquiries are to do with the control of behaviour (e.g. Wilson, 1989).

Let me characterise the nature of an enquiry as a search for knowledge. The dominant focus in the literature is that educational enquiries are enquiries into education: that is, a researcher is involved in acquiring knowledge about education from sources outside herself. I would like to see the focus of educational research as appertaining to the creation of knowledge: in which case, a researcher is involved in creating knowledge of education. Education is not a field of study so much as a field of practice.

I am trying to show here two different approaches within two separate parameters. Let me picture one parameter as being the focus of educational enquiries, which may be approached by (1) the dominant view, that knowledge about education generated by researchers is imposed upon teachers; and (2) an alternative view, that educational enquiries are processes that enable teachers to create their own knowledge.

The second parameter concerns the status of educational enquiries, which may be approached by (1) the dominant view, that educational enquiries are the property of researchers who enquire into, and make statements about, the professional practices of teachers, and (2) an alternative view, that teachers own their own knowledge, and are seeking to understand their own professional practices with a view to improving them.

The diagram overleaf illustrates the two parameters.

Here we are considering the question of the ownership of knowledge: whether knowledge is mainly the property of an external knower who may use it to control others; or whether it is the creation of the individual.

The educational factor in teachers' educational enquiries needs nurturing. An enquiry that qualifies as educational may be characterised by the fact that it may be seen to be personally educational for the enquirer: that is, that it has enabled the practitioner critically to evaluate and improve

focus of enquiry	status of enquiry
<p>(1) - training of teachers</p>	<p>(1) - about education - derivative - access to knowledge</p>
<p>(2) - education of teachers</p>	<p>(2) - educational - personal - creation of knowledge</p>

her own professional life. At the heart of this process of improvement is that person's own conscious understanding of her practice.

This use of the term 'educational' is not necessarily the same as its 'normal' use. Much of the literature accepts as 'educational research' enquiries that are to do with the management of classrooms, the organisation of the curriculum, teaching skills, and other aspects of pedagogy. I see a sharp distinction here. For me, such enquiries would be better labelled 'managerial' or 'sociological'. I will attempt to use the term 'educational' in a consistent fashion, as to do with the process of the development of individual rationality. I hope to show my conceptualisation of the term 'educational enquiry' as the search by individuals for their own knowledge—not 'knowledge about education' but 'knowledge of education'; that is, knowledge that is of itself educational. I hope to show my perception of the nature of educational enquiries as being this creation of personal knowledge; and of the use of educational enquiries as helping practitioners to bring about an improvement of practice through the development of critical awareness.

So I may say that my enquiry in this book gives rise to three basic questions:

- 1 What constitutes educational knowledge?
- 2 How is educational knowledge acquired?
- 3 How is educational knowledge put to use?

(see also Chomsky, 1986)

I shall attempt to offer answers to these questions in the form of descriptions and explanations of the work of real teachers and learners, including my own. I hope to demonstrate within the book the reasons for

my present intensified concerns about the status of educational knowledge, as it is perceived and used within schools and other institutions. I feel there is much pressure on teachers to conform to a perceived need to justify their pedagogic practices rather than to investigate how their personal and professional conduct affects learners.

I must reinforce here my position statement: that I am using this text to work out these ideas, and that they are presented as provisional hypotheses which are subject to public evaluation. In presenting my tentative answers I hope to highlight some central issues in my work to date, and the work of colleagues, particularly in Avon and Dorset, who are active in related areas.

### Form of the book

This text is itself an enquiry into the nature of educational knowledge. I hope to demonstrate the systematic nature of educational enquiry by outlining the framework I intend to use, and by showing how my preferred procedure can lead to an improvement of a problematic situation.

I shall employ the strategy of question and answer as outlined by Jack Whitehead:

- 1 I identify a problem when some of my educational values are denied in my practice;
- 2 I imagine a solution to the problem;
- 3 I implement the solution;
- 4 I evaluate the solution;
- 5 I modify my ideas and my practice in the light of the evaluation.

(Whitehead, 1981, 1989)

This outline acts in its general form as a strategy for working through the book.

#### *1 I identify a problem when some of my educational values are denied in my practice (Part I)*

The educational values I am focusing on in this book are those of my intellectual freedom; my status as a teacher within current bureaucratic constraints; my desire to engage personally in the improvement of my own education; the desire to see (and have seen) my practice as my personal creation. These values—of myself, and of colleagues who share them—

are in danger of being eroded by power groups who think differently. They seem to aim at controlling me rather than encouraging me to develop. I feel required to receive others' educational knowledge instead of engaging in the creation of my own.

### *2 I imagine a solution to the problem (Part II)*

I look at the problem as a number of issues. I consider how these issues are being tackled within the procedures of 'traditional' models of teacher education, and I conclude that those procedures do not constitute a strategy of improvement that solves my practical problems as an independently-thinking practitioner, either as a teacher in class, or as a teacher-educator. I suggest alternative ways of tackling my problems, as an individual and as a collective exercise.

I formulate this question as a series of needs, and possible answers to those needs.

### *3 I implement the imagined solutions (Part III)*

There is a very powerful movement afoot in the United Kingdom, instigated largely by the activities of practitioners who are engaged in action research. I am thinking specifically of personnel, currently or formerly, at the Universities of Bath (Jack Whitehead) and East Anglia (John Elliott; Jean Rudduck and Jon Nixon—now at the University of Sheffield; David Hopkins; Clem Adelman—now at Bulmershe College of Higher Education; Rob Walker and Stephen Kemmis—now at Deakin University, Australia). Because of the persistence of these people, and others who have been caught up in their vision (people such as myself), there is now a clear committed voice which demands a national forum for the recognition of the need for a research-base for professionalism, a strategy that encourages teachers critically to identify the problem areas of their own practice and to work systematically towards solving the problems.

Such an approach has already been adopted and implemented by some funding bodies and institutions; and I outline how they are managing change through dialogue between administrators, advisers, teachers, children, parents, and national government.

### *4 I evaluate the outcomes of my imagined solutions (Part IV)*

The notion of evaluation, as used in this book, is the process of reaching a position of shared values and understanding through dialogue. In this

process, individuals make explicit and public their tacit educational values, and show the systematic nature of their enquiries as they try to realise their values in their practice. In telling their stories they are inviting other people to consider their particular way of life; in making public how they have become critical, as they try to realise their values in practice, they are inviting others to comment on the efficacy of their process of self-improvement; and in asking others to evaluate what they are doing, they are inviting those others to consider sharing that particular way of life—or they modify their way of life according to their acceptance of others' better arguments.

In this section I present some of the work that we are doing in Dorset, where support personnel (field tutors) are working with teachers on an individual basis in a collaborative enquiry. I present a dialogue between teachers, and with advisers, which shows how we try to evaluate the quality of our work within our various locations; and how we attempt to justify our claims that we have improved the process of education by undertaking our living enquiries.

### *5 I modify my ideas and my actions in the light of my evaluation (Part V)*

In my view, the evolution of society is grounded in the same values as those that underpin our lives as teachers, in the morality of an educational epistemology of practice. It is not enough to aim for the realisation of our educational values only as our objectives; it is essential to engage in the present realisation of our educational values in and through our lives as teachers. Professional practices are the living out of the educational values of the community of reflective practitioners as they engage in their own educational development in an attempt to improve the process of education.

Educational development implies an on-going process of expanding consciousness, and an improvement of practice that has its basis in the consciousness of the individual. I would like to see the institutionalisation of such an individual-centred research-base as applied to on-going professional development. As I see it, the evolution of a rational society is grounded in the evolutionary practice of self-reflexive practitioners.

In the United Kingdom we are working towards the legitimisation of academic accreditation for teachers carrying out classroom/workplace research; we are introducing diplomas for professional development in



various forms, such as accreditation to be made available through all types of higher education institutions. Such flexible programmes of accreditation for research strengthen the view that ‘research as practice’ may be seen as the foundation of a society that is open to the reflexive control of its own process of evolution.

## **Audience**

This book is intended for teachers at all levels of institutionalised and non-institutionalised life. One of my educational values, as articulated throughout, and particularly in Parts III and IV, is that teachers will see the need for, and feel confident to initiate, school-based programmes of practitioner-centred enquiry in action; and that teacher educators will encourage their initiatives. This book is intended to provide support for those teachers who are concerned to improve the quality of education for themselves and for the people (teachers and learners) in their care.

## **Improving the quality of teaching as learning**

I believe that the best teaching is done by those who want to learn. I reflect on my own work, as a teacher and as a writer, and I consider how I have transformed my own life through critically reflecting on what I am doing in all aspects of life. I recognise myself as a changing individual in a changing world; I change my thought as my thought changes me. I am open-minded to life, and delight in my own learning. I feel crucially that this is what teaching is about: the ability of an open-minded individual to bring her learners to the point where they, too, may be open to their own process of self-development. I feel this may be done by the efforts of teachers to establish the frameworks of care in which learners may develop their own understanding of their own experiences. Teaching transforms into learning, and back again to teaching. I think teachers have the key to their own process of self-improvement by acknowledging that they, too, are travellers, and still have far to go.

# PART I I EXPERIENCE A PROBLEM WHEN SOME OF MY EDUCATIONAL VALUES ARE DENIED IN MY PRACTICE

## Chapter 1

### The Professional Education of Teachers

The nub of the problem, as I see it, lies in the currently dominant approach to the initial and continuing education of teachers. There are certain assumptions in this approach that do not always see teachers at the centre of the educational enterprise. These assumptions need careful reconsideration and judicious replacement by another set of assumptions that put teachers in charge of their own learning and development.

I believe profoundly in the need for on-going education. I shall reiterate this belief throughout. What causes me concern is the way in which most teacher education is conducted. I am concerned about the methodology, including the assumptions (theories) which form and guide the methodology. It is high time for a new methodology and a new theory; for a new epistemology of practice.

In the last few decades there has been an evolution in patterns of teacher education in the UK. There has been a shift of emphasis in the control of education recently. There appears to be a tension between a centralised control of the curriculum and the devolution of power to individual schools through the local management of their finances.

Let me give a brief outline of the ways in which continuing teacher education has developed over recent years. I shall then put forward a new set of assumptions which could replace the old.

Two sections follow here. Both comment on the assumption that research is the basis for professional improvement. I shall suggest that there is a need for a shift in status and in focus. This shift expands a view of research as the basis for improved practice to a view of selfimproving practice as research.

Within the debate about the relationship between theory and practice, there are currently two somewhat polarised positions in the United Kingdom, two 'visions of professional development' (Elliott, 1989), which I shall term here 'Theory into practice' and 'Practice into theory'.

## 1 Theory into practice

The dominant tradition for teacher education has been, and still is, a 'line management' approach in which an informed person offers guidance to teachers. This model usually operates through specific strategies which are intended to help a teacher to improve a particular educational situation.

### STATUS

The status of research, in this view, is methodological; its focus is the practices of others. The nature of research is that it is conducted by an observer, who will offer the results to the practitioner.

Various strategies are used by the observer to make certain standards available. House *et al* (1989) have identified the five most common: (a) technical rationality; (b) study and prescribe; (c) practitioners as role models; (d) vicarious experience; (e) action research. I shall draw on their work here.

#### (a) *Technical rationality*

The assumption in this approach is that what works well in one situation will work equally well in another. I have identified this view (McNiff, 1988) as belonging to the empiricist-positivist tradition, and have critiqued it as resting on a mistaken interpretation of the creative nature of human potential. It is assumed that the methods of experimentation in the fields of botany, in which one variable is likened to another, may be transferred to the fields of human experience. It operates on an 'if..., then...' basis, with standardised input and output.

When applied to teacher education, it could be interpreted that what worked well in one educational setting will be successful in another. One set of teacher actions in one specific situation will produce similar results if another teacher acts in a similar fashion in another situation. Most of the literature of teacher education rests on this assumption.

I will accept that this approach is useful in many pedagogical situations: a standardised model of standardised actions will often provide like results in like situations. I cannot accept, however, that this is an appropriate foundation for the professional learning of teachers. Learning involves the evolution of understanding, and professional development involves considered reasons for action. All these aspects involve the critical reflection of individual teachers within their own context-specific situations.

The same criticism applies to strategies (b)–(e) that follow (House *et al*, 1989).

*(b) Study and prescribe*

This strategy requires someone to study what teachers do and prescribe ways in which the teachers might improve. Shavelson and Stern (1981) have collated such research, and have drawn up a possible taxonomy of teacher decisions and subsequent actions.

*(c) Practitioners as role models*

In this view, teachers are seen as the experts in their own classrooms. The best practices are held up as models to be emulated by colleagues. House *et al* (1989) cite the work of Scriven (1985), arguing that this view offers us a practical science of education, rather than a theoretical one.

The problem then arises, they go on to say, whether it is possible to abstract the significant features of good practice, and generalise from those; as well as the underlying problem of whether teachers ought to reformulate their own practice through emulating that of others.

*(d) Vicarious experience*

House *et al* consider the work of Stake (1985) in presenting case study material as the basis for others' improvement. There is a danger in this interpretive case study approach that teachers will feel that they have to adapt what they are doing to the recounted practices of others. I have argued (McNiff, 1988, and below) that the way to improvement is not through trying to copy what other people do, but by the critical understanding of one's own practice. Copying someone else does not move forward my own understanding of why I do as I do. It might make my immediate situation better, but, unless I understand why I am acting in the way that I am, I will not develop, personally or professionally.

*(e) Action research*

This is a strategy of research that passes the control of practice over to the individual teacher in a specific setting. The conventional view of this strategy is that practitioners may follow a certain action-reflection procedure that will allow them to improve an unsatisfactory situation. This procedure is one of identification of a problem, and subsequent resolution of the problem through a process of observation—solution—action—reflection—modification (e.g. Kemmis and McTaggart, 1982; Elliott, 1981).

In my view (see also McNiff, 1988), this approach to action research still assumes the primacy of the observer who, in this case, is offering a course of action for others to follow. Granted that the teacher is in control of the action-reflection cycle; but it seems still the case that a certain theoretical course of action guides the practical decisions in action of teachers in each and any situation. (I will discuss another approach to action research in Chapter 3.)

The nature of research, in this dominant tradition, is that theory forms and informs practice. Researchers propose certain hypotheses which are then implemented by others within practical situations. Theory comes before practice. The form of the theory is propositional (see Chapter 2).

An extreme form of this approach assumes that the most credible research is undertaken by academics who pass on their findings to teachers (e.g. Wilson, 1989). This view is being vigorously challenged, particularly by those keen to promote the image of teachers as researchers (e.g. Stenhouse, 1975; Elliott, 1987), and by those who regard teachers' attitudes as a vital component in the education of learners (e.g. Sockett, 1989).

My personal view here tallies with that of Denis Vincent (personal correspondence) that 'in-service providers tend to be opportunists and will use "experts" for entertainment value but generally see the real work being done in much more reflective, problem solving modes.'

## FOCUS

It is interesting, too, how the focus of research has changed over recent years. I have so far indicated a shift in a conceptualisation of the nature of research, from being the property of the external researcher to becoming the property of the individual teacher. It is also possible to identify a shift away from a focus on the institution to a focus on the individual.

*(a) Institution-based research*

In the last decade there has been a massive endeavour to move away from the disciplines approach to educational research as applied to teacher education. In this view, teachers' practices were seen largely in terms of implementations of the curriculum in relation to the insights from the philosophy, history, sociology and psychology of education; and where learner performance was judged in terms of how well aspects of the curriculum had been internalised. Good practice was seen as the integration of the separate disciplines within a curriculum.

*(b) Classroom-based research*

The work of Lawrence Stenhouse and his colleagues at the Centre of Applied Research in Education, primarily through the Humanities Curriculum Project, did much to promote the idea of the teacher as researcher. From focusing on the institution, research now moved into the classroom. Interest centred on the practices of teachers, and there was an initiative to 'take the lid off the black box of teachers' practices' (Eggleston *et al*, 1976).

*(c) Practitioner-centred research*

In the 1980s, the teacher-researcher movement gathered more and more adherents. Advisers and consultants took on an enabling role. It is important to note two aspects, though: (1) the nature of research was still grounded in method (how classrooms should be run); and (2) the form of this method was still arranged by external agents (e.g. Kemmis and McTaggart, 1982). Granted that the research in question was about the activities of individual teachers, and conducted by those individual teachers; the *status* of research was still derivative (controlled externally), and the *focus* was still concerned with descriptions of what other people were doing.

So now we are at a point to move into a discussion of the emergence of a new paradigm; a form of research that enables teachers to develop their own understanding of their own practice, and to turn their practice into a form of research.

## 2 Practice into theory

This section deals with the need for the development of teachers' personal theories of education (Whitehead, 1983), drawn from the experience of their own 'reflection in action'. It emphasises the need for teachers' conscious understanding to be placed at the centre of explanations.

Whereas the dominant paradigm operates in terms of collectivism, this approach regards the individual practitioner as the centre of the research study. In philosophical terms, it is the development of knowledge of self, the integrity of the living 'I' as the focus of educational enquiries; in educational terms, it is the concern by the practitioner to focus critically on areas that need attention and, through a systematic cycle of critical reflection in action, to work towards improving the situation.

Again, let me consider here the status and the focus of enquiries from this perspective.

### STATUS

Let me adapt a concept from Chomsky (1986) of E- and I-status. Let me say that E- (externalised) enquiries are those conducted by one person into the practices of others. This is the traditional pattern of INSET research. Someone observes and describes teachers' classroom actions and gives advice on how they might be improved. An I- (internalised) enquiry is that conducted by the individual into her own practice. She reflects critically on her work, either privately or through discussion with others, and aims to think of original ways that will help her improve. The status of an I-enquiry is personal. Any improvement in the practice involves a commitment by the practitioner.

### FOCUS

In E-enquiries the focus of the research is the practices of others. In I-enquiries the focus is the practice of the self. If I say that practice is part of an individual's way of life (how I act, and why I act this way), I may say that the focus of an I-enquiry is the self.

It is interesting now to note the difference of perspective in the concept of research, as it is applied within these two paradigms. In E-enquiries the purpose of research is to observe, describe and explain what other people are doing. Its status is derivative—that is, the accounts given of the research

are those of the recorder, but not always of the practitioner. The accounts themselves aim to offer explanations to others through an ‘objective’ study of the data, to see if those data (facts about the study) fit the recorder’s theory. In this conventional INSET research pattern, the observer has reasonably clear ideas about how a pedagogical situation ought to be; he watches the teacher, and advises the teacher on her action plans.

In an I-enquiry the purpose of the research is to explain what I, the practitioner, am doing. Its status is personal. The accounts rendered are those of myself, and aim to offer an externalisation of my mental processes as I try to bring about change; that is, I try to show how I was dissatisfied with personal practice, and why, and the steps I have taken in order to improve. By this, I mean to overcome a situation in which my values are denied; so I aim to improve my thinking (an improvement of mental processes) with a view to improving my practice (an improvement in my actions in the world). My practice is an outcome of my thought, and my improved practice is an outcome of my improved understanding.

The status of my I-enquiry is explanatory because its focus is the self. My explanations are based on personal reasons for personal actions. I may be assisted in the formulations of my explanations by critical friends who question me on why I do as I do; it is my answers to those questions which give an explicit account for my reasons in action.

In this view, educational research aims to encourage the development of personal understanding that will lead to an improved form of practice. It becomes an enquiry by the self of the self; and, rather than aim to fit personal practice into another person’s theory, it concerns itself with enabling individuals to develop their own personal theories.

Let me formalise this process of personal ‘enquiry in action’. Let me suggest that many personal enquiries begin with a sense of vision. The origin of the enquiry lies in the vision of the enquirer which embodies her values. For example, I wish that all children had equal opportunities; that we all cared for each other; that we enjoyed peace and freedom—these are some of my (educational) values.

The vision is of a satisfactory state. This satisfactory state is an expression of the realised values of the enquirer, in which statements of fact and statements of value blend in the same form, both linguistic and conceptual, in a steady state. My statement, ‘I wish that all children were loved’, may be seen as an expressed value of the vision of the enquirer. The practice of the enquirer may not be within a location in which all children are loved, however, nor may it have such an expression; resulting in the statement of fact: ‘Not all children are loved.’ Statements of fact are



separated from statements of value, and therefore form separate realms of discourse. The vision of the enquirer is of the day when the negation may be negated, and the situation transformed into one of stability.

The slippage rests in the experience of 'I' as a living contradiction, in that my values are not fully realised in practice (Whitehead, see below Chapter 3). This denial, itself an unsatisfactory state, causes tension in the mind of the enquirer. The sense of crisis occasioned by the lack of stability causes her to want to act in order to restore the balance.

Seen from this perspective, the process of an enquiry in action aims to draw a theory out of practice. Contrary to the traditional form of INSET research, where theory acts as the basis for others' practices, this approach that centres on an individual's understanding sees practice as the ground for the development of the process of theorising.

There are two very important points here: (i) I am trying to show that each individual may legitimately theorise about her own practice, and aim to build theories; (ii) an individual may offer a tentative theory which she openly accepts as subject to change: the action of theorising as a process is a concept more appropriate to educational development than the state of referencing a theory. In this view, people change their practices, and their practices change them. The interface between person and practice is the process of theory building, which involves a critical reflection on the process of 'reflection in action', and which legitimates the notion of a changing individual interacting with a changing world.

### **Implications for teacher education**

The two approaches described have both taken research as the basis for the professional learning of teachers, but the approaches have involved different sets of assumptions which have influenced the perception of the nature of teacher education. These assumptions proceed from a view of the use of educational knowledge (Chapter 2), and may be formalised as follows.

#### **THE TRADITIONAL APPROACH: A 'LINE MANAGEMENT' MODEL**

##### *Assumptions*

- (a) There is a standard model—a theory, or a set of procedures. Teachers are invited to adopt or adapt this theory to themselves.

- (b) The teacher educator advises on the best course of action.
- (c) The model is institutionalised. The focus is teachers' activities within institutions. The aim is usually the improvement of pedagogical situations, and often the improvement of institutionalised procedures: curriculum, management, communications, etc.
- (d) The model involves an objectives approach. The research programme is predetermined as working towards specific outcomes within institutionalised procedures.
- (e) Research is seen as the basis of teaching (pedagogy). It operates in terms of skills, offering checklists of expertise.

## AN ALTERNATIVE APPROACH: A SHIFTING CENTRES MODEL

### *Assumptions*

- (a) Teachers are regarded as experts, who empower themselves to offer accounts of their own practice, these accounts to be legitimated through the validation of peers and clients. Teachers are encouraged actively to draw out theories, and to develop these personal theories through their accounts.
- (b) Teachers, teacher-supporters and clients are awarded equal status and responsibility for helping the other person's process of understanding to evolve. In this collaborative view, all practitioners at all levels (learners, teachers, supporters) are involved in the process of the development of their own, and each other's, rationality: they are improving the quality of their own learning. Teaching and learning are interchangeable terms, existing as processes that regulate the interrelationships within a network of thinking practitioners.
- (c) The model is personalised. The focus is the understanding by the individual of her own life (the understanding of the self by the self). The intent is to improve the process of education within a particular present situation.
- (d) The model is based on a process-view of learning. There is no end product in sight, other than an 'end product' of 'no end product'; a final answer that there are only new questions; an end state that is the beginning of a host of new states.
- (e) Research is seen as a form of teaching which explores new ways of

life that promise to be beneficial to the community of which the researcher is a part. The act of teaching involves the concept of bringing about improvement. Seen in this light, self-reflective research not only provides a proper base for teaching (Rudduck and Hopkins, 1985), but *is* teaching. Teaching becomes an ‘enquiry in action’, in which the teacher constantly endeavours critically to evaluate and improve the process of education for herself and for the people in her care.

### Teaching as learning

This final section is to explain clearly how I see the concept of teaching as grounded in the concept of learning; and the process of others’ education as grounded in the education of self.

If I take teaching as a process of ‘enquiry in action’—reflection into the on-going process of current practice—I may say that I am open-minded to my own development. My teaching situation is the scenario for my own spirit of learning to emerge; the process of my teaching is the process of my learning, in which I give free rein to my intellectual curiosity.

I have said above that the focus of learning, and the focus of an enquiry into learning, is the individual practitioner. Instead of the traditional model in which someone advises on another person’s performance, the individual is encouraged to be critical of personal practice, and use her deepened insights to move forward.

The act of teaching, in a traditional view, involves the passing on of skills and concepts to learners. Let me suggest that this view is pedagogical rather than educational. Education, as I have suggested above, is to do with the development of the process of individual rationality. If we apply the ‘shifting centres’ approach to the processes in classrooms and other workplaces, it is possible to see the teacher’s job as facilitating the same critical awareness of personal practice to be available to her clients as to herself. It is a sort of chain reaction within a network. In this process we are seeking to educate, to involve ourselves in helping others to improve themselves.

At the end of the day I am left with the notion that teaching implies the process of opening the doors in my clients’ minds that will make them aware of their own processes of development, and of their own potential for unlimited acts of creation. I can bring my clients to the point where they will want to learn; and I can enquire into the most effective way of making the awareness of such discoveries available to my clients. This

scenario is the same for myself in the role of teacher to pupils or teacher to teachers. I am an agent. I can attempt to make my agency a facilitating one. But first I have to understand the nature of that agency before I can use it.

As I see it, this view of teaching constitutes an attempt to formulate an emergent epistemology of practice (see Chapter 5 ): the knowledge base of professional development, and the ethical form of that practice. What I am suggesting here is the construction of a community of self-reflective practitioners, learners at all levels of the community exercise, who are concerned for each individual's realisation of his or her own potential, and who care enough first to make an unqualified commitment of self to the education of self, in the interests of the education of others.

## Chapter 2

# The Problem of Educational Knowledge

Inherent in the choice of model for teacher education is the underlying problem of educational knowledge: the nature of its constitution, its acquisition and its use. I have already highlighted a parallel problem to do with the nature of education, in the discussion about models: whether we are seeking knowledge *about* education or knowledge *of* education. If we look for knowledge *about* education, we assume that education is something ‘out there’, not our own property, but to which we must gain access. If we look for knowledge *of* education, we assume that education is a personal process, of which we have immediate, direct experience.

This chapter is to do with knowledge, specifically educational knowledge. I want to show that there are several different forms of knowledge; that people think about knowledge in different ways; and that the way they think about knowledge influences the way they think about other people’s knowledge. I shall first outline different aspects of knowledge, and then relate these views to the current discussion about approaches to teacher education.

### Aspects of knowledge

‘Epistemology’ is the word used to refer to issues concerning the nature of knowledge. In studying epistemological issues, we are focusing on problems that have occupied philosophers since time immemorial.

Within the current literature that deals with questions of epistemology, there are two somewhat polarised positions, and the debate is described succinctly by Marjorie Grene (1966) as ‘the knower and the known’. One school of thought (e.g., Ayer, 1956) suggests that knowledge is reified or becomes fixed. It exists ‘out there’, independent of an agent-knower. The person who aspires to knowledge must gain access to this body of

knowledge. Popper (1972) uses the term ‘objective knowledge’: that is, knowledge that exists as a separate ‘world’, and to which we must gain access for knowledge of things and institutions.

There is another school, represented by Polanyi (1958) and Grene (1969), who accept that some knowledge exists independently of the knower; but there is a more important form of knowledge—personal knowledge—that enables the knower to know that she knows. This is a fundamentally crucial point.

I shall now expand these brief reviews of theories of knowledge, and try to show how they influence theories of education. I shall then look at the implications for teacher education.

## OBJECTIVE KNOWLEDGE

This view suggests that knowledge exists independently of individual knowers. It is a reified body of explicitly formulated ideas about the world. It is often expressed as ‘know-that’ and ‘know-how’, or propositional knowledge and procedural knowledge, though there is some debate as to whether there are these two, or only one, form.

### *Propositional knowledge*

The usual expression here is ‘I know that P’, where P is a proposition about the world: ‘I know that today is Friday’, ‘I know that he lives there’.

### *Procedural knowledge*

The usual expression here is ‘I know how’: ‘I know how to drive a car’, ‘I know how to speak German’. The ‘how’ element of procedural knowledge is usually regarded as an acquired skill, but this is by no means always the case. There is much debate in the literature whether ‘know-how’ automatically incorporates ‘know-that’; the argument goes that if we know how to do something, this procedural knowledge may well contain elements of knowledge about that thing; ‘know-that’ could become redundant.

Whatever the state of the debate, the main point is that this type of knowledge is grounded in explicit statements about the world, statements that are assumed to be true, and that may be verified by recourse to data.

### *The organisation of explicit knowledge*

The usual way of thinking about propositions is in a formal sense, usually following an ‘if..., then...’ formula: ‘If I do X, then Y will follow’. This is the usual form of reasoning used in enquiries which attempt to test a given hypothesis.

### *Propositions about education*

Most of the literature on education accepts the dominance of propositional knowledge as the basis for theories of education. I will refer again to my questions regarding the nature of the constitution, the acquisition and the use of theories of education.

#### (a) The constitution of education

There seems to be a prevailing view in teacher education provision (and educational provision in general) that education is an object, a ‘desirable stuff’ (Warnock, 1977), that we aim at, and, once acquired, will result in the production of the ‘educated person’. This view is being reinforced by aspects of current legislation that emphasise criterion-referenced schedules of attainment, and by aspects of teacher-appraisal schemes that operate in behavioural terms—how well teachers do in specific tasks, for example. In this view, education is a thing to be acquired by a learner.

#### (b) The acquisition of education

In this view, the way that education is acquired is through the processes of assimilation and accommodation. It is supposed that learners assimilate what is presented to them in various ways: they acquire certain mental sets which dispose them to form habits, or otherwise organise their mental faculties to accommodate the structures of knowledge on offer. The acquisition of education is seen as a structured process of input and output, where the acquisition of education as input is manifested in terms of behaviour as output.

#### (c) The use of education

In this view, the use of education might appear as an instrument of control. Speaking of teachers, Pring says (1984) that, being in control, they *do* things to other people. In classrooms, teachers can use their educational

knowledge to control the practices of their learners; and in teacher education provision, providers can use *their* educational knowledge to control the practices of teachers. At best, such a concept of education can be used to strive towards an identified objective for the common good. At worst it can be used as an instrument of coercion in the domination of one will by another.

### *Propositions about educational knowledge*

A parallel situation is apparent when we consider teacher education, and the way in which this propositional view is implemented.

#### (a) The nature of educational knowledge

Currently dominant approaches towards teacher education seem to rest on a characterisation of knowledge as a body of theories, or statements, usually in a propositional form: 'If I do X, then Y will follow'. This corpus of propositions is often seen as a fund on which teachers may draw in order to improve their expertise. It is sometimes presented (e.g., Skinner, 1968; Wilson, 1989) as a technology of teaching, a series of guidelines that will help teachers become more skilled in imparting subject matters to their learners. The corpus of propositions is seen as reified, existing independently of practitioners. The idea is that a body of knowledge is there for people to use, as and when they need.

#### (b) The acquisition of educational knowledge

In this view, knowledge is something to be accessed. The body of knowledge exists in reified form in libraries and other institution-bound systems of communication.

An extension of this mythology is that the method by which knowledge is accessed is also reified. There are certain procedures which practitioners need to follow in order to gain knowledge. There is currently a tension between courses that are trying to reflect in their organisation and legitimation procedures the view of the teacher as a free-thinking professional, and courses whose legitimation procedures are grounded in propositional rather than dialectical forms of knowledge.

Knowledge, then, is seen as an input: the acquisition of knowledge is seen in terms of output. The 'knowledgeable person' is judged in terms of the amount of knowledge she has accumulated.



## (c) The use of educational knowledge

The dominant view of knowledge that I am outlining here seems to have its main use in controlling others' practices. Knowledge is seen as presenting certain norms, both in its acquisition and use. If we aspire towards reified knowledge we are aiming to reach certain standards of intellectual excellence; and if we aim to implement the concept of reified knowledge, we are aiming to reinforce certain established norms. Our practices as aspiring knowers are controlled; and we aim to control the practices of other aspiring knowers. Ours is a closed shop of normative controls on the normative practices of normative individuals in a normative society.

## PERSONAL KNOWLEDGE

This view of knowledge has been suggested mainly through the work of Michael Polanyi. In 1958 he published *Personal Knowledge*, which stressed the need for a personal commitment in any act of knowing. To speak with any sort of sense about the concept of the act of knowing, he says, I have to accept that I am an *active* knower.

This view incorporates two dimensions: the need for an acceptance of self as knower, and the creative aspect of knowledge.

*The self as knower*

Any claim to knowledge, says Polanyi (1958), involves an individual knower's passionate commitment. I am the owner of my own knowledge. My knowledge exists because I exist. If I cease to exist, so does my knowledge. This does not mean the cessation of other people's knowledge—Polanyi's view of the world of explicit knowledge, the sharing by people of their pooled knowledge—but it underscores the essentiality of an individual's knowledge.

This knowledge takes two forms, what Polanyi calls 'focal knowledge' and 'subsidiary knowledge' (1958), or 'tacit knowledge' (1969). What he says, basically, is that we may acknowledge the existence of an explicit body of knowledge—the propositions of objective knowledge. But, in order to accept this notion, we must know that we know.

What is usually described as knowledge, as set out in written words and maps, or mathematical formulae, is only one kind of knowledge, while unformulated knowledge, such as we have of something we are

in the act of doing, is another form of knowledge. If we call the first kind explicit knowledge, and the second, tacit knowledge, we may say that we know tacitly that we are holding our explicit knowledge to be true.

(Polanyi, 1969).

So, if I say, 'I know that today is Friday,' I am making a claim to knowledge; but that claim involves my awareness that I am making that claim. This awareness of knowledge, this critical consciousness of consciousness, is the personal, tacit knowledge that underlies our knowledge about the world.

### *The creative aspect of knowledge*

In 'Understanding ourselves' (in Ornstein, 1973), Polanyi says that it is not enough to regard knowledge as a capital sum outside ourselves; for the act of knowing that we know is an additional piece to the lump sum. So the sum continues to grow commensurate with the acts of individual knowing.

Man must try for ever to discover knowledge that will stand up by itself, objectively, but the moment he reflects on his own knowledge he catches himself red-handed in the act of upholding his knowledge. He finds himself asserting it to be true, and this asserting and believing is an action which makes an addition to the world on which his knowledge bears. So every time we acquire knowledge we enlarge the world, the world of man, by something that is not yet incorporated in the object of the knowledge we hold, and in this sense a comprehensive knowledge of man must appear impossible.

(Polyani, 1973)

In this sense, knowing is an on-going act of creation by the person who makes a personal commitment to his own ability to know.

In my own work (see above) I have drawn on the work of Chomsky (1957, 1965) to help me understand the nature of the state of mind of a knowing practitioner. In particular I have adopted Chomsky's formulation of levels of mind. Competence is the level of mind that enables an individual to know rules, and performance is the level of mind that enables the knower to use rules in concrete situations. I have recently (McNiff, 1990) linked the notions of

competence—tacit knowledge  
performance—explicit knowledge

suggesting that tacit knowledge is part of the vast pool of underlying potential that every individual possesses, and that explicit knowledge is the externalisation, or realisation, of that tacit knowledge.

I shall rely on this formulation within this book, for it is my belief, as I shall continue to demonstrate in this section, that education is to do with helping individuals make explicit their tacit knowledge; to raise aspects of competence to performance level.

At this point, let me consider the nature of the organisation of personal knowledge, the forms of thought we use when thinking about personal knowledge. I will go on to consider the constitution, acquisition and use of educational knowledge, when we admit that the concept of knowledge includes the personal, tacit dimension.

### *The organisation of personal knowledge*

I have suggested above that traditional attitudes towards knowledge are expressed in a propositional form. I will say that the organisation of personal knowledge may be expressed in a dialectical form.

Present day perceptions of dialectical logic have evolved over the last 2000 years and have been increasingly synthesised via the Hegelian and Marxist-Leninist systems (see Comey, 1972). It may be characterised by three aspects:

- 1 — it recognises the inherent harmony of contradiction;
  - 2 — it balances the tension between quantitative change and qualitative change;
  - 3 — it proceeds via an evolutionary cycle.
- 
- 1 It recognises the inherent harmony of contradiction: the Law of the Identity and Conflict of Opposites.

Every thing contains within itself aspects and processes which are contradictory to each other. This polarisation provides a balanced tension; the opposing forces offset each other in providing for dynamic development. The natural tendency of the thing is to overcome the state of tension by evolving into a new balanced state.

In this view, a thing is never static; what appears to be a new balanced state already contains within itself the potential for the new tension that will enable it to continue evolving. If this potential is denied, the thing atrophies and dies.

- 2 It balances the tension between quantitative change and qualitative change: the Law of the Transition of Quantitative into Qualitative Change.

Any given thing may be recognised in terms of its essential aspects. Quantitative changes do not usually affect the essential nature of a thing—water remains water, even if I subtract or add amounts of water to the original volume. However, quantitative change in one aspect of the thing—for example, if I heat the water—will effect a change in the quality of the thing—the water will evaporate.

In this view, every thing depends for the realisation of its essential nature on the effects of the world about it.

- 3 It proceeds via an evolutionary cycle: the Law of the Negation of the Negation.

The rhythm of life may be seen within the process whereby a thing changes into a new form of itself under the two laws so far discussed. The world we inhabit is a non-static entity, consisting of a myriad of sub-entities, all evolving in time and space. In order to evolve, an entity must have within itself the ability to change, to develop into a form different from the form of the present moment. In this, an entity contains within itself its own process of change. Change may be seen as evolution, a process in which a less mature form transforms into a more mature form of itself.

A dialectician sees relationships between parts that bind the parts as a synthetic whole. In doing so, she can see new patterns and convergences. It is possible to focus on one element, while recognising that other elements will affect the original one. Everything exists side by side, each element with its own essential integrity, yet accommodating to its own change within a changing world of other changing elements.

Consider, for example, the process of question and answer. In dialectics, the nature of the answer is not the end phase of a previous question, but the beginning of a new question. The process of question and answer is not to lead to a fixed ‘truth proof’, but to lead to a continuing dialogue, in which the understanding of each party moves forward (Collingwood, 1939).

### *A characterisation of educational knowledge*

- (a) The constitution of educational knowledge

In this view, educational knowledge is not only knowledge *about* education, but knowledge that is educational: that is, it moves the practitioner’s

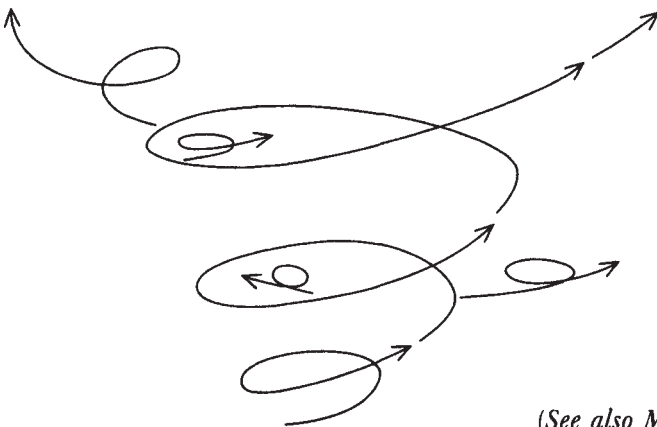
understanding of her own practice forward. It is the property of the individual knower, and constitutes the basis of her *claim* to educational knowledge (see below). In terms of teacher education, the focus of the exercise is to empower the individual enquirer to externalise the intuitive, tacit understanding that underpins her practice; to air and share the values that form and inform her practice; and publicly to acknowledge her commitment to those values by indicating why and how she has adopted them as a way of living.

(b) The ‘acquisition’ of educational knowledge

I am using the term ‘acquisition’ loosely, to fit in with the general framework I have outlined. In fact, I regard this aspect as individual creation. In my view, each person is born with the potential for an unlimited number of acts of creation; and teachers, by accepting the responsibility of their vision to transform the world—initially by transforming their personal bit of the world—deliberately engage in a critical, creative process of ‘reflection in action’ in order systematically to work towards a situation of recursively improving practice. By ‘recursively improving practice’ I mean a cycle of cycles; when an individual cycle of

identification of problem—imagination of solution—implementation of the solution—evaluation of solution—modification of practice

may be taken as the germ of a system that generates an unlimited number of cycles that operate in similar fashion.



(See also McNiff, 1984)

(c) The use of educational knowledge

In my view, an individual may use her educational knowledge to make explicit and continue to improve her own process of educational development. In doing so, she helps others to do the same thing for themselves. In making explicit the process of her own educational development, she demonstrates the realisation of her educational values through the form that her life takes; and she invites others to validate (or not) her claim to knowledge, if they wish, by sharing in, and adopting, a similar form of life.

In this way, individuals may establish communities of self-reflexive independent practitioners, whose method is the dialogue of question and answer, and who aim to share understandings. In this view consensus is not the aim, nor necessarily desirable, for we are all individuals living in a pluralist society. What is important is that we agree to agree: we agree, not with a specific content in mind, but a process. We agree a process of dialogue that will enable us to move forward; and part of the process is the skill of asking the right questions that will enable individual enquirers to discover the questions latent in their own minds (Collingwood, 1939).

**Aspects of justification \***

I have said that the use of educational knowledge is to enable individual practitioners to account for their own personal and professional development; that is, that they may show how they turned an unsatisfactory situation into a satisfactory one, or how they realised their educational values in and through their practice. Such accounts amount to a claim to educational knowledge, and have to be justified.

If an individual's account is not justified, the account stands as an empty claim. I may say 'I know', but I must anticipate and accept the challenge, 'How do you know? Demonstrate to me that you know!' My justification for my knowledge will validate my claim to knowledge: I will produce an authenticated explanation.

Now, there are different kinds of knowledge claim, and different conditions involved in justification. I will suggest that there are several forms of justification to knowledge claims, such as through inference,

\* I am indebted to Brian Haymes for helping me to understand many of the issues treated here through his book, *The Concept of the Knowledge of God* (Macmillan, 1988).

through the way a person lives, through individuals engaging in intersubjective agreements; and that there is a mistaken emphasis in the literature that justification rests mainly in inference and verification.

Let me consider these two aspects now.

### *Verification conditions and truth conditions*

I believe that we are mistaken if we equate verification with truth, as much of the current educational literature does: that is, if a thing may be verified by the data, it must be true; if it cannot be verified, its truth is in doubt.

In my view, claims to propositional knowledge ground their truth conditions in verification. The utterance, ‘I know that today is Friday’, is true because it can be verified by looking at the calendar. The utterance by Golfer B in the conversation:

*Golfer A:* Do you know you look exhausted!

*Golfer B:* I only know my legs ache.

is true because his form of life bears out his personal knowledge in that he is limping; his claim cannot, under any circumstances, be verified by recourse to someone else’s knowledge of his state; his truth is not open to verification or question, but it is essentially true to him.

The dominant tradition in the literature is that claims to knowledge may be justified by inference. A.J.Ayer (1956) equates verification and truth conditions in his definition ‘...first that what one has said to know be true, secondly that one can be sure of it, and thirdly that one should have the right to be true’. Now, this arrangement may be appropriate to claims of the form ‘I know that P’. As I write, I know that P is true—yes, this is a pen in my hand. I am sure that P is true—this is a pen and not a pencil. I have the right to be sure—I have the evidence to say that this is a pen and not a pencil.

However, if truth and verification conditions are the same, Polanyi’s problem goes unanswered; for I may verify that I know that P, but I cannot verify that I know that I know. I may verify my explicit knowledge to demonstrate its truth, but I cannot verify my personal knowledge that underpins my explicit knowledge. The way that my personal knowledge may be demonstrated is through the way that I live.

I shall elaborate this concept presently, but, before I do, I wish to consider the need for justification. In doing so, I need to consider the notion of

truth (and I shall return to this in Chapter 3). As a teacher, when I used to regard my practice in propositional terms—as an object, an abstraction that was not my personal creation—I believed that there was an external, reified Truth. This was a kind of standard towards which we all must strive. I have come to the view that caring individuals, in all walks of life, create their own, mutually agreed and acceptable truths, grounded in a shared sense of vision (see page 105; Habermas, 1981). In this sense, truth may be expressed in the form of the mutually agreed values system of individuals in agreement.

Incorporated within this principle is the notion of language game. Wittgenstein used this phrase to indicate the ‘rules’ of an area of discourse: that is, context-specific semantic-specific utterances. An area of human knowledge may not be justified unless participants of that form of knowledge share the same realm of discourse. Consider, for example, the conversation:

A I saw a UFO last night.

B You couldn’t have. It was dark.

Or perhaps, when the visitor to the spiritualist’s meeting hears the spiritualist say, ‘I see you have brought someone with you’, he might say, ‘No, you’re wrong; I have come alone.’ As Haymes says (1988), for a non-believer to ask a believer to prove the existence of God simply does not make sense.

In the examples, the participants are engaging in different fields of discourse. They do not share the same language game. They cannot achieve intersubjective agreements in order to establish a mutually agreed truth.

Let me return to the question of the need for justification.

When, as children, my sister and I talked to the fairies in our shed, the exercise was true for us. It was not true to father who thought we were playing in the shed. Nor did he share our field of discourse.

The truth of the shared beliefs of individuals in agreement provides, for them, a way of life. We children did not attempt to draw father into our shared truth, but that did not invalidate that particular truth for us. Nor did it need justification. When father finally banned us from the shed we took our shared knowledge to other locations. The locations changed; the knowledge did not. Nor did it change until we agreed to change it—probably by changing our views about the existence of fairies.

Ways of life based on agreement are not vested in the objects of discourse (our childhood fairies) but in the heritage of mental states that give rise to



such agreements (Gadamer, 1975). As I have indicated before, consensus is not the aim of discourse, but an agreement to share understandings that will provide the ‘right’ answers to move forward individuals’ ability to question (Collingwood, 1939). Habermas (1981) indicates that societies develop in agreement because they share in a view of the ideal that they have the potential to agree. The sense of vision that has led a society to its present state of evolution is the very aspect that enables that society to strive towards continuing forms of evolution which themselves are grounded in the evolution of forms of agreement.

### *Knowledge as a way of life*

I am suggesting that the act of intersubjective agreement is an act of creation, a realisation in action of dynamically evolving knowledge, whereby individuals join together in forging their particular way of life in accord with their sense of vision of a life grounded in a notion of good order.

At the basis of this notion is the formulation:

I claim to know something;  
I am committed to that knowledge—that is, I believe it is true;  
I take this knowledge into my values system;  
I am committed to my values system;  
I show my commitment in my actions;  
My claim to knowledge is apparent through my actions;  
My ‘values in action’ result in a particular way of living;  
My knowledge is manifested in my way of life;  
My claim to knowledge is justified by my way of life. +

I am not here speaking about the veritude of knowledge. I am speaking about the justification of an individual’s claim to knowledge. Knowledge by definition cannot be in error (Haymes, 1988). The question of whether other individuals subscribe to the particular values of the individual who professes to own that knowledge is another matter, and one to be resolved by dialogue. What I am speaking about is an individual’s right to claim justification for her particular knowledge claim through a way of life that reflects the knowledge that is her property.

## Conclusion

I now need to draw together the several threads of this chapter.

I have touched on several issues concerning the nature of the constitution, origin and use of educational knowledge, pointing out that a practitioner's understandings of these aspects will depend crucially on her perception of the concept of knowledge, as well as the concept of education.

My own view is that knowledge begins and ends with the individual knower. When the knower makes a passionate commitment to the act of knowing—that is, eagerly accepts the responsibility for the activity of her own mind—she engages in the creation of a process of knowing that moves her forward. She consciously and deliberately opens her mind to the possibility of new beginnings. In this case, the act of knowing becomes educational: through her conscious knowing, the individual engages in the development of her own rationality.

As Marjorie Grene points out (1969), knowing is essentially something that we do. In my view, the creation of educational knowledge is a critical process in which we engage to improve the quality of our own lives, personally and professionally.

Now, I need to relate all this to teacher education. In Part II I shall explore the implications in depth. I will highlight the fundamental difference in the approaches to teacher education which I have presented: a 'line management' approach which is grounded in the notion of propositions that are external to the individual practitioner; and a 'shifting-centres' approach which is grounded in the personal understanding of individual self-reflexive practitioners.



## PART II I IMAGINE A SOLUTION TO THE PROBLEM

### Chapter 3

# The Notion of a Living Educational Theory

In this chapter I want to outline some of the central issues in the work of Jack Whitehead of the University of Bath. His work has been instrumental in promoting the idea of action research as a way of improving personal practice, where practice takes the form of critical 'reflection in action on action' by the individual practitioner. The implications inherent in his system of ideas offer a possible answer to some of the problems identified in Part I. The strength of his contribution, in my view, is that he is offering a form of educational enquiry that empowers practitioners to generate and control their own process of change.

I stated in the Introduction that this book is an enquiry into the nature of educational knowledge. It shows in action the conscious development of understanding that leads to an enhanced practice by the contributors. In this sense, the book is a case study of a collaborative enquiry involving individuals who are presenting their personal case studies. The content and process of the book may be seen as a demonstration in action of the themes I shall now discuss.

#### 1 The living 'I'

Educational enquiries have as their centre of interest the individual practitioner who is conducting the enquiry. This person is not an abstraction, but a living, thinking human being.

In this sense, Whitehead established a precedent in the literature of

educational research and theory, challenging the view that the individual researcher was someone who was written *about* (e.g., Peters, 1977; O'Connor, 1957).

The introduction of the concept of the living 'I' established a new genre in the literature. A small army of teacher-researchers followed the pattern by presenting accounts of their own practices from the standpoint of themselves as researchers who intervene critically in their practice with a view to improving it (e.g., Green, 1979; Larter, 1987).

In the later 1970s and early 1980s, action research became increasingly popular as a method that enabled teachers to claim ownership of their own research enquiries. This movement was substantially a reaction against the disciplines approach that had enjoyed popularity during the 1950s to 1970s under the leadership of Professors Peters and Hirst of the London Institute. The reform was supported and popularised through the work of Lawrence Stenhouse of the Centre for Applied Research in Education (e.g. Stenhouse, 1975).

Two branches of action research developed concurrently in the United Kingdom. One branch was based at CARE, at the University of East Anglia. The researchers there developed a model that aimed to guide teacher-researchers as they carried out their enquiries into their classroom practices (see Hopkins, 1985; McNiff, 1988). The other branch was developed by Whitehead at the University of Bath, who adopted an alternative strategy.

Instead of offering a specific *method* (blueprint) with which to guide teachers' practices (e.g., Kemmis and McTaggart, 1982), Whitehead developed a methodology (strategy) aimed to move forward teachers' understanding of their practices, this being a sequence of ideas that reflect the mental states of the individual practitioner, when that individual practitioner is the living 'I' who is conducting the enquiry (see Introduction). This sequence is dialectical in nature, being grounded in the notion of question and answer; and it is open ended, recognising the fact that individuals will control the process of their own development. In this sequence 'I' at the same time am the subject and object of the enquiry (see also Stronach, 1986).

## 2 The creation of personal theories of education

Whitehead indicates that it is not enough for teachers to speak about experience. We have to experience experience for ourselves (Whitehead, 1983).

If we speak about experience as if it were abstracted, ‘out there’, and not part of the development of our own lives, we regard experience in its propositional sense. If we accept experience into our own space and time, that we are conscious of what is going on, that experience becomes part of us as changing persons, and it changes us *because* we are open minded.

In this sense, says Whitehead, it is a mistake to expect teachers only to read about, or accept otherwise vicarious experience, as the main resource for their professional development, for that abstracted knowledge will not help them to experience things for themselves, or develop deeper insights into their own experiences. This form of enquiry encourages a propositional form of discourse, where theory is more important than practice.

What is necessary, says Whitehead, is that teachers should be encouraged to develop their own theories of education from, and through, their own practices: that is, they should be encouraged critically to examine aspects that they feel need improving, and to work systematically to thinking how (building theories) to carry out the improvement. What is crucial is that teachers themselves form theories about their own practices. This process of theorising—that is, forming and reforming theories—is an integral part of good practice (see, for example, Eames, 1987, and Part III; Larter, 1987).

The traditional approach to teacher education sees theory as an input that influences practice; and that practice is seen as the end product, an outcome of a theory successfully implemented.

### THEORY → PRACTICE

Whitehead’s view is that theory is an outcome of practice, and is part of an overall strategy of *theorising* which is a form of practice.

practice → theory → re-formed practice → re-formed theory



### PROCESS OF THEORISING

This process of theorising, in which practice and theory fuse and interchange, is the foundation of a creative practice which is an aspect of the creative pattern of life of an aware, critical person who is concerned to improve the quality of life for herself and for the people in her care.

### 3 The knowledge base of educational theorising

If we regard the idea of practical theorising as more in tune with creative teaching than the idea of theory-driven practice, it is necessary to abandon a solely propositional view of knowledge. Instead of describing our practices in the format of ‘I know that P’, it is more appropriate to accept that much of our personal and professional life is based on tacit, intuitive knowledge. This knowledge, sometimes inaccessible to conscious reflection, is tied in closely to our values, the things we believe in. The fact that this knowledge is not articulated explicitly does not deny its force in leading us to a particular way of teaching that is a direct reflection of those deep, underlying values.

The way in which we are helped to make our personal knowledge explicit is by engaging in the dialectic of question and answer. This question and answer may be of an intuitive form, where I, the practitioner, am convinced of the value of my intuitions, and grope my way forward through the process of trial and error, constantly homing in on what my intuitions tell me are the significant features of my practice. The process of question and answer may also take the explicit form of a dialogue between practitioner and another individual, this process of dialogue constituting the spur to initial reflection that will move the understanding of both parties forward in the process of dialogue (see Part IV). The purpose of this process of question and answer is to raise tacit knowledge to consciousness.

The aim of teacher education and on-going professionalisation should be to help teachers make explicit their tacit understanding, so that teachers may show, in a rigorously scientific manner, how they may improve that understanding, and the practical situations which are grounded in that understanding, in order to improve the quality of life for themselves and for the people in their care.

### 4 Educational enquiry as a negation of the living contradiction

A dominant theme in Whitehead’s work is the notion of the self existing as a living contradiction (see Elliott, 1989; see also Chapter 2 for the criteria for dialectical forms). Let me explain.

When I say I believe in something, and then I do the opposite, I exist as a living contradiction. When I say I should not lie, and then I do, I am denying my values in my practice. We often do this in our society with

others. I would like the world to be more peaceful, but, for a variety of reasons—usually human frailty—I contribute to the lack of peace in the world.

As a teacher engaged in the business of education, I hold a number of educational values. Within my practical, everyday classroom situations those values are often denied in reality. For example, I would like to teach in an empathic style; I find I am teaching in a didactic style.

I can be aware of this process of contradiction by externalising for my own observation what is going on in my daily life. I can achieve this externalisation in a number of different ways: I can video my practice and observe it; I can write down my thoughts; I can discuss my actions with critical friends; and so on. So far, my enquiry exists at observational level.

I can then move forward by describing what is going on. I can describe how I feel I am not living up to what I believe in. I can capture a moment in time and space, and show the living reality of how my educational values are being denied. Now my enquiry exists at a descriptive level.

I may then move on to show how I attempt to overcome the problem. I can capture moments of time at intervals: I can show how yesterday my values were negated (my children were hostile), and how today those values were in process of realisation (my children were more friendly). I can show what I did, and why I did it, to improve the situation. In this case I am actively demonstrating how I changed my thinking in order to improve my practice. I explain: I give my reasons for action. My enquiry is at an explanatory level.

In this way, by engaging in the process of systematic critical enquiry, individual teachers are enabled to proceed, albeit sometimes by minimal steps, with the realisation of their educational values in and through their practices. They may overcome the contradictory elements of life, and show how enquiry may be used as a positive force in improving their own, and others', process of education.

## **5 Educational enquiry as a learning process**

When an enquiry aims to describe a situation, it does not always qualify as educational. In order to be termed educational, an enquiry needs to show the process of the improvement of the enquirer's understanding (that is, it is explanatory); and in order to be termed 'research', the systematic nature of that process needs to be made public, and subjected to others' validation (see 6 below).



In this sense, the use made of the terms 'education', 'research' and 'educational research' by much of the literature does not coincide with the use of those terms by Whitehead or myself.

In our use of the term 'research' we follow the aphorism of Stenhouse (1983) that 'research is systematic enquiry made public'. An individual's commentary on her practice may lead to developed insights, and the process of the development of these insights may be termed educational, for they will lead to a better practice. For that enquiry to qualify as research, however, the individual needs to make apparent the systematic nature of her enquiry, how she followed a coherent process in her attempt to make sense, and how she made public and held up for others' validation the process of the enquiry itself. The airing of an enquiry is the first step; the sharing of the enquiry is the on-going process. In seeking validation for her claim to knowledge, the practitioner is aiming to legitimise the status of her enquiry as research.

Whitehead uses the theme of an individual's claim to educational knowledge to encapsulate the notion of an individual's process of 'coming to know'. Educational knowledge, for Whitehead, is not an object. It is a creative process in which an individual attempts to construct her own life. If an individual may demonstrate in practice the changes in her practice, and also indicate why and how these changes were effected (that is, account for altered states of mind that generated those practices), then the individual may claim that she understands her own educational development. This improved understanding in explicit form constitutes an individual's claim to educational knowledge.

From the beginning of his project, it has been Whitehead's mission to legitimise the notion of academic validation for individuals' claims to knowledge: that is, for practitioners to make public their accounts of how they came to know, and for these accounts to be accepted for academic accreditation (e.g., Jensen, 1987; Foster, 1982; Gurney, 1989).

My own project has offered the notion of the generative transformational power of educational research, and I have put forward the idea that the form of Whitehead's dialectic offers the potential for an infinite number of original educational practices (McNiff, in preparation). This present text shows that generative power in action, in that teachers may undertake their personal enquiries into how they may best support others who are in turn undertaking personal enquiries. One person's practice is generated by, and embedded within, that of another's.

## 6 Validation as a shared way of life

In traditional models of teacher education, the validation of a practitioner's project is usually in its acceptance by a supervisor or other agent who approves the work. Whitehead follows the views of Habermas (1972, 1979) that validation, or legitimisation, is in part a social process. One person may present an idea, which she regards as part of her personal truth, for acceptance by her peers. In presenting her idea, she also fulfils certain criteria for the justification of her idea: she shows that it follows certain standards that ascertain its internal validity (for example, it is pertinent to the individual; it is systematic; it is honest). These standards of judgement are determined by the peers who are sharing in the validation process. They decide the criteria, and then they examine the idea to see if it meets those criteria or not. In the validation process itself there are also certain criteria to make sure that communication between individuals is not distorted. These criteria may be those developed by Habermas (1979), that speech acts between individuals may be authentic, sincere, honest, and appropriate to the situation.

In this sense, if a person presents her idea to others, this idea, or knowledge claim, represents a claim to personal knowledge—that she knows why she is as she is. If the other persons accept what she says, they validate her claim. Their acceptance of the idea in making sense of their own lives indicates that they are willing to adopt her idea and adapt it to their own lives.

The idea of truth, following this line, is that it is a process shared by reflective, caring individuals. If you and I agree about something, we share the idea of a version of truth. It must be stressed that sharing an idea does not mean arriving at a consensus. There is a difference between structure and process, and the transformational tension between the two. Traditional forms of enquiry emphasise the need for structures of knowledge, usually in the form of hypotheses or end products, and the need for a consensus about those structures. In Whitehead's formulation, structures of knowledge are rapidly transformed into new structures by the transformative process of developing understanding. What is important is the agenda, the transformative process itself. Agreement about such a process takes the form of a willingness to negotiate about the processes involved. We are all individuals in a pluralist society, and the freedom of the individual mind is central. Freedom must be cherished and nurtured. This very freedom is what guides dialogue: the agreement by individuals to agree—not to reach a consensus about structures, but to reach an

understanding about processes. We agree to agree, even though that agreement means we may differ. Truth is not arrived at through coercion, but by the agreement by individuals that this is an appropriate way of life that is beneficial to one and all. If an individual disagrees with commonly held understandings, it is up to her to attempt to prove her case over time; and it is up to the community of individual thinkers to validate her idea (a claim to knowledge) by accepting her idea and its demonstration, or not, as the case is agreed to be.

In this view, on-going professionalisation is the intervention by the individual practitioner in her own life, and the validation of her knowledge claim is in the acceptance of her claim by the community of peer practitioners who are sensitive and caring of her project. Lomax (1990) makes the point that, in processes of validity, the community needs to protect the emergent thinking of the individual practitioner, while still providing critical support that will move the thinking forward (see Part IV).

## **7 The creation of dialogical communities**

Following the philosophy of Bernstein (1983), Whitehead believes that what qualifies communities as constituted of free individuals is their willingness to enter into dialogue. This, he feels, is the way for the development of society.

The establishment of a critical educational science lies in the recognition and legitimisation of the need for the establishment of dialogical communities. 'A critical educational science' indicates an epistemology of practice (see Chapter 5), a framework for educationalists to develop practices that are themselves educational, such practices being developed by open-minded criticism that will facilitate altered states of consciousness to improve practice. Improvement may be effected by dialogue.

Agreement takes the form of seeking questions that will move the dialogue forward. In traditional forms of teacher education, the judgement of the supervisor often is final. In dialogical communities, nothing is final. What is vital is the on-going recognition for on-going dialogue, to sustain on-going development. The notion of reciprocal dialogue is in the willingness of individual members of the community to ask the 'right' questions. Collingwood (1939) says that there are no 'true' questions or answers; there are only 'right' ones, 'right' being the idea of appropriate

reciprocation that will enable the dialogue to continue in order to enable understanding to grow.

In educational communities, professional support may be regarded as the establishment of dialogical communities. Such communities comprise peer-practitioners who are concerned to move each others' understanding of practice forward by engaging in dialogue.

Teachers are the owners of their own educational knowledge. They may share this knowledge with others, by demonstrating its internal validity in that they are able to live out their educational values. Peers may accept (or not) this knowledge as valid, by discussing the claim to knowledge of the individual, and sharing in it by adopting or adapting it (or not) to themselves. In this way, those peers also create their own educational knowledge. In this way are constituted dialogical communities of self-reflexive practitioners who share the same values base as a shared way of life.

# Chapter 4

## The Educational Enterprise

In this chapter I wish to consider the major implications of the foregoing, which I express as a series of perceived needs.

Educational enquiry may be seen as concerned with the realisation of a good order, or a good way of life. I shall attempt to explain this notion more fully throughout this chapter: that educational enquiry is an enterprise whereby we try to make our contribution to a more peaceful world; and that ‘the sovereignty of good’ (Murdoch, 1970) is the fundamental aim of educational endeavour.

### 1 The need for educational enquiry to be seen as a cognitive science

I take the meaning of ‘cognitive science’ as that used by Gardner (1985), in that it involves itself with efforts to explain human knowledge. I am concerned to endorse and popularise the concept that education is what goes on in the individual mind, and that the study of education constitutes a science of mind. For me, education is not what goes on ‘out there’ in classrooms or other institutions, other than in the other minds that are ‘out there’ (see 6 below).

Let me propose that what goes on in the individual mind may be termed ‘intrinsically educational’. Factors ‘out there’ that contribute to the improvement of what goes on in the individual mind might be termed ‘extrinsically educational’, factors such as the skills of pedagogy and management, that will lead to an enhanced situation among persons that will foster and nurture intrinsic elements. Much of the literature of educational research and theory assume that education is to do with sociological or management factors (see 2 below). This approach appears to me mistaken because (a) it minimises the importance of individual rationality; (b) its methodology is based on collectivism rather than

individualism: the 'I' in society, rather than the 'I' in its essence; (c) it is concerned with behaviour and the control of behaviour, rather than the state of consciousness that enters into behaviour (see also Chomsky, 1986).

I suggested earlier that the mind operates at several levels, and that there are several levels of consciousness, or awareness; levels that are the organisational, functional elements of mind. There is a random, haphazard level of consciousness, a level that is open to experience, a 'scanning' operation that trawls indiscriminately; there is also a focused, specific level that homes in on experience, that enables the individual to be aware of experience.

In my view, the process of education is the self's knowledge of the self, the workings of the organisational elements of mind that raise intuitive levels of mind to rational consciousness. The process of *educating* is essentially concerned with the development of one's own rationality, with a view to enabling the development of another person's rationality.

I think that teacher researchers need to spend a lot more time and energy in investigating such issues, rather than concerning ourselves overmuch with issues of behaviour and the control of behaviour. We need to commit ourselves to the development of our own understanding, as part of the good order of our own educational practices.

## **2 The need to distinguish between theories of schooling and theories of education**

Theories of education need to be grounded in a valid explanation of what education is. The dominant assumption in the literature is that education is to do with schooling, and that educational research should be focused on an improvement in the management of schooling.

I believe that education is not necessarily to do with school. I accept that efficient management of schools and schooling is necessary for a promotion of an improvement in the quality of education (extrinsically educational). An improvement in schooling, however, does not of itself imply an improvement in education (intrinsically educational), and research into schooling does not imply research into education. Schooling is, to my mind, to do with the turning out of people who will adopt appropriate standards which will entitle them to a legitimate place in a given society (Hamilton, 1989). It is not to do with helping them to think, to be aware of states of being and states of awareness, that will help them

rationalise which standards they want to adopt, nor explain why they should.

### **3 The need to break with propositional forms of knowledge**

Speaking about experience results in descriptions of practice, either in terms of other people's practice or one's own. What is needed, I feel, is for researchers to use research as a means actively to demonstrate how they have come to know—to show how they have moved in time from a less satisfactory state of being in which values were denied to a more satisfactory state of being in which values are in process of being realised. Practitioners in all sectors need to demonstrate publicly how they have come to know—that is, to justify their claim to understand their own personal development—by making their reports available to a wide audience, and using that public scrutiny as a means of validating their claims to educational knowledge. We need to build up a body of literature devoted unashamedly to the positive power of educational enquiry, to a view of teaching as the most optimistic endeavour available to human enquirers.

### **4 The need for individual enquirers by teachers**

I have suggested in Chapter 1 that there has been a significant shift in the focus of teacher education during the 1970s and 1980s. The emphasis in most of the literature, however, is still on schools and their organisation, rather than on teachers' understanding of practice. Teacher education is still more to do with schooling than education (Hamilton, 1989).

At present the dominant paradigm for in-service education is still grounded in the notion of the control of educational knowledge. This knowledge is seen as a reified body of accumulated knowledge, which teachers are required to accept. Educational research is still seen in the light of the application of this body of knowledge, in terms of a clear process (know-how) of the application of a specific content (know-that). Provision for teacher education is grounded in prepositional knowledge. So long as this situation obtains, teachers are in a service role of technicians.

I broke out of the mould. I am a practising teacher, but I have rejected the view of controlled knowledge and the control of my practice, and I exercise my right as a 'person claiming originality and exercising [her]

personal judgement responsibly with universal intent' (Polanyi, 1958). I feel very strongly that teachers should be given the support and encouragement to do the same.

For me, personal enquiry is the best way to improve personal practice. I have attempted to demonstrate this throughout the text. There is an urgent need for teachers to be encouraged to see the control of their practice as resting within themselves, as well as influenced by social structures; the need to give reasoned justification for that practice in making public their claims to knowledge; the need to have ratified in public forum the legitimacy of those forms of knowledge.

## **5 The need for individual enquiries by learners**

I am advocating the establishment of a new tradition of educational enquiry that focuses on the integrity of individuals in the living reality of their own locations. I have suggested that teachers need to be encouraged to take on the role of researchers, but that their field of enquiry should not be in the prepositional sense, as traditional models suggest, of applying reified theories to what they are doing. Rather I am saying that teachers need to take on the responsibility of investigating their own practice through their own action-reflection, in order to produce personal theories of education (Whitehead, see Chapter 3 of this text) to provide explanations for their way of life, and provide publicly agreed substantiation for their claim to knowledge.

In this sense, teachers become learners, in that they may come to know themselves—that is, engage in their own personal process of education. This in turn has enormous implications for traditions of teaching methodologies.

I am drawing a comparison here between the control of knowledge by writers of the literature, and by teachers, consumers of the literature. Throughout this text I have challenged the view that legitimate knowledge rests in the academy or in the literature, and is not generally viewed as a creation of individual teachers. I am now saying that teachers also need to relinquish their vested interest in the control of their clients' knowledge.

My own case study traces my educational development as a teacher (McNiff, 1989). I noted how, in 1981–3, I engaged people in their own learning with a view to bringing them, by their own volition, to my interpretation of the truth. As I learned more about myself through critically



examining my work, I came to understand that I was guilty of deception and manipulation, of myself as well as of them.

I believe my later practice of 1984–6 was beginning to qualify as educational. I began to relinquish control, in that I genuinely afforded validity to my children's views, rather than attempted to distort them to fit my own. I did this by encouraging enquiry learning, by encouraging the children to engage in their own systematic action-reflection. In so doing, I attempted to move away from the image of the courtroom, in which they were on trial and I was the judge, to the image of a dialogical community, in which we intentionally set up the framework for a foundation of intersubjective agreement that would allow us genuinely to communicate as persons of integrity. I understand now that I was moving away from content-based styles to client-based styles, and from an objectives approach to a process approach (Stenhouse, 1975).

This is, in my opinion, an area that needs urgent attention by researchers. I conducted my own action research into my pupils' action research. What is needed, I believe, is published accounts of enquiries which encourage learners' enquiries, to see if such an approach will contribute to teachers' perceptions of how to encourage learners to learn; to build dialogical communities of enquiring practitioners, from the ranks of teachers and learners, and work together to improve the quality of life for themselves and for others.

## **6 The need for educational research to be educational**

I have indicated throughout my belief that much of what goes on in the community of researchers in the name of educational research often does not qualify as educational. I have suggested that the term 'educational' is often used when the term 'sociological' would be more appropriate. There seem to be two tendencies in the literature: first to use the terms synonymously, and second to confuse the characteristics of the two terms.

'Educational' and 'sociological' tend to be used synonymously when commentators are referencing the activities involved in schools and schooling, such activities often classified under the term 'management'.

We need to be clear about the dangers of terminological confusion when we claim that we are engaging in educational research. If, in the name of educational research, we undertake an evaluation of others' practices, for example, we need to accept that we may do so only as part

of our own practice which itself has to be subject to evaluation. It should not be as an exercise of management, whereby we make statements about the way that other people act.

In my view, educational research has to demonstrate the understanding of an individual's 'enquiry in action' for that individual to claim legitimate educational status for that enquiry. I believe, with Torbert (1981), Walker (1985), Stronach (1986) and Whitehead (1989), that educational research needs to be educational. The person doing the research needs to be prepared to shift ground, because her intentions, in embarking on her enquiry, are (a) to change her thinking, and (b) to change actions in line with new thinking. Such change constitutes the nature of education; the creation of new forms of being is the implicit notion of 'education'. I have come to this conceptualisation precisely because, when I first embarked on my study, I was not prepared to change; and I was forced to change in view of the innovative aspects I had to adopt in order to stay true to the emergence of my own personal knowledge. Polanyi's aphorism (1958) that personal enquiry is a hazardous journey was never so true. But it was worth it.

## 7 The need for a paradigm of research-based professionalism

Educational research may be seen as a process of systematic enquiry made public (Stenhouse, 1983), in which an individual's life takes the form of the minimal steps of trial and error, in which successive triumphs lead, in an iterative fashion, to a more satisfactory situation when educational values are more fully realised in practice.

I now wish to dwell for a moment on the notion of frustration as an essential creative part of the research process—the sense of tension in the mind of the practitioner when values are prevented from being actively realised.

In a bread-and-butter sense, I may say that I must experience sadness in order to recognise happiness when it comes. In order fully to appreciate a thing, we need to have knowledge in some measure of its opposite. In order for me to be successful as a teacher, I must have experienced a less successful form of practice than the one I am currently enjoying.

Rudduck and Hopkins (1985) highlight the need in teacher education of the recognition of failure as a vital part of learning. I share this view but I do not like the word 'failure'. I do not believe that teachers 'fail' within the terms of their own practice.

To be explicit: within dominant traditions of INSET there are clearly

defined standards of measurement by which to judge success. These standards of judgement are various—national documents, institutionalised examinations, advisers' checklists—but all take the form of an ultimate standard that will indicate the required level of professional development. In this view, teachers pass and fail consistently, on an 'either..., or...' basis.

Let me suggest that 'failure' is an inappropriate concept here. What we are doing in teacher education is engaging in a creative learning process. The notion of creation does not mean something out of nothing: it was not, and suddenly it was. For me, creation is something out of something. Education does not mean a process of  $A \rightarrow B \rightarrow C \dots N$ , in which  $N$  is the ultimate, and anything short of  $N$  is failure. For me education is the creative process of  $A < B < C \dots N$ , in which intermediate stages themselves are nearer approximations to  $N$ , the satisfactory state in which values are realised in practice. These intermediate stages are not criteria of success/failure: they are states of being which are a present realisation of the practitioner's struggle to realise her values. The process itself is a journey towards self-fulfilment. The journey itself is the objective, not just the elusive goal at the end.

For me, the function of teacher education is to enable teachers to become aware of their own sense of process. The way to develop this sense of process is through critical reflection on the innovative nature of personal practice. Supporters need constructively to encourage teachers to recognise the moving nature of their own life towards the situation of success in which educational values are realised.

I take the view that we are all equal in terms of our human value. We all develop individual strengths according to our own interests and capabilities. In this book I do not regard learners, teachers and supervisors as existing on separate planes. Such categories I view as man-made social categories, which of themselves have nothing to do with personal potentials. For me, the educational enterprise is concerned with the process of the development of individual rationality, not the construction of social status.

What is necessary is that we all, as a community involved in education, recognise the need to evolve our individual and collective practices through the process of critical reflection. Teacher education, and the educational enterprise as a whole, is not the domination of one will by another, as in our currently favoured 'line management' approach. It is the 'shifting centres' of focus that emerge through the areas of concern of caring people:

today you and I might focus primarily on moving forward *my* understanding, but tomorrow we might shift attention to you.

In order to bring about such a community of creative practitioners we need to agree the knowledge base for our practices; and that in itself requires us to identify and agree the values that we share in our lives as teachers.

## Chapter 5

# Towards an Educational Epistemology of Practice

In this chapter I shall be considering the nature of process as structure. At first sight, process and structure might seem to appear as opposites, like considering movement as static, or stasis as moving. I do not see the ideas as contradictory: rather, in dialectical fashion, I will attempt to show that the notions are complementary and interdependent. I will explain my view that process may become structure, and that structure is inherently mobile and is also part of a wider process: and I will continue to explain that epistemology—the functional ideas base for practice, traditionally associated with process—may become the object of study—a structure; and that educational practice, usually viewed as an object, is inherently developmental and should be regarded as process.

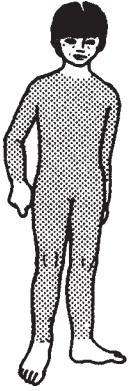
Let me refer to work in related fields to illustrate this: to the idea expressed by Bertalanffy (1952, in Ornstein, 1973), that structure is a process wave of short duration placed on a process wave of long duration: to Stephen Tyler's (1978) concept of language, that it is a means to establishing relations rather than an object consisting of relations; and to Lawrence Stenhouse's (1975) view of education, that it is not an end that contains knowledge about the world (an objectives approach) so much as a means for getting things done in the world (a process approach).

### Sharing as a way of life

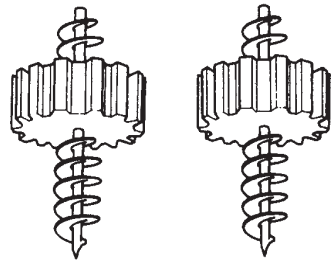
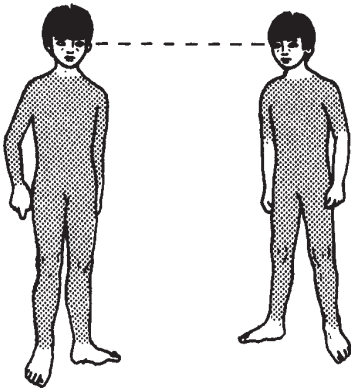
To make the discussion more explicit, let me draw up an analogue.

I, the individual practitioner, am a preciously unique person. I have my own knowledge about the world which I inhabit with others. I have my own personal knowledge about myself within the world, and I have my values which have been shaped largely through my involvement with others. Because I live in a society I cannot operate alone. I would be then

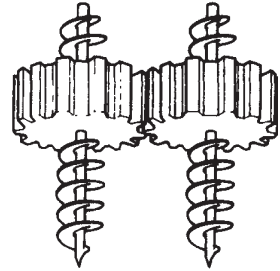
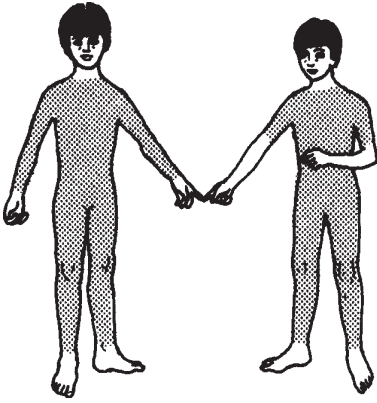
like a worm-thread cog, which has the potential for movement, but, because nothing sets me off, I am stationary.



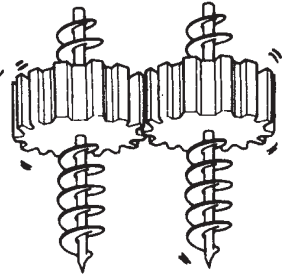
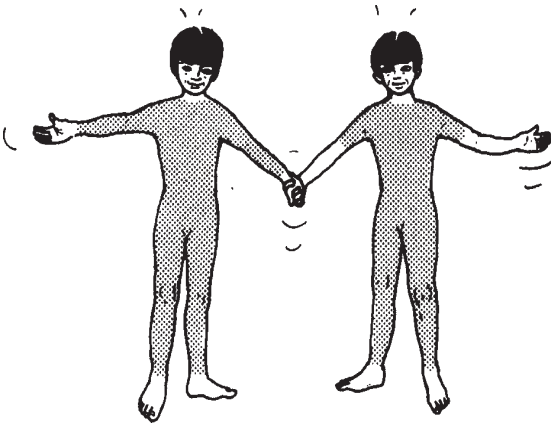
Let me recognise another person. This other person, herself a preciously unique person, inhabits the same world. She is an object in the time and space of my world, as I am in hers. We regard ourselves as 'I-It' (Buber, 1937). We are like two worm-thread cogs, existing separately, both with the potential for separate movement, and for corporate movement, but, because nothing sets us off, we are stationary.



I and the other person, unique that we are, want to get to know each other. We are human, and we are drawn to one another by our need for love. We tentatively formulate a commitment; we touch each other's lives. We hesitate, for commitment is full of hazard. Our wheels move together and interlock. The potential is there: shall we set it in motion?



We come together. We are 'I-You'. We are committed to each other, be it ever so lightly to begin with; and we are open to the possibility that the commitment will grow. Our wheels are turning and spinning. More, by their own separate momentum, they are moving themselves and each other up the worm-threads. They are moving forward into new forms. They are realising their innate potentials as fully operational organisms.



I now need to pause, and temporarily shift to another plane of thought. So far I have described what is happening, with only occasional hints as to why it is happening. In a description, I can use practical heuristics: 'Who? What? Where? When? Which?', and the answers will give me practical information about the current situation. But if I want explanations for

that situation, I need to ask ‘Why?’ and ‘How?’ I need reasons for the action.

I will now become a little more fanciful, and let my cogs think. I need to ask, with I and You, ‘Why did we come together? How will we continue our commitment? How will we improve our relationship, make it last?’ My thinking machine can ask the same questions: ‘How is it that we are moving; moreover, why are we moving?’

Let me suggest that I and You, while in no way forfeiting our individuality, have joined together because we want to communicate. It is part of our innate endowment as persons that we need to realise our potential. We are born with the innate potential to speak, to walk, to think—and we naturally do these things, as persons. Our cogs are made with the specific innate potential, as cogs, to function as cogs, and they do.

The answers to ‘What? Where? When? Who? Which?’ give us descriptions of practice. Traditionally, descriptions are seen as structures—the thing as it is, the state of the art. I and You can describe our relationship. Our machine can describe itself as moving. But we need to look at the answers that explain the process: the reasons for the actions. ‘How?’ and ‘Why?’ are questions about the epistemology: ‘What is the knowledge base for the action? What are the states of mind behind the behaviour? What is the vision that causes I and You to engage in communication?’

Let us stay for a moment with the cogs. By engaging in corporate independent activity—cog-communication—they are moving themselves and each other forward. They are making progress. This is the action of cogs who are realising their full potential as cogs. What, though, is the nature of the driving force that enabled them to set themselves into motion? In my fancy, I can say that it was the *desire* to realise their full potential that urged them to go, their cog-sense of vision that they would move forward to the very top level of their existence—to the utmost form of their being.

To return to I and You, I can ask, ‘What caused us to come together? What is the nature of our interpersonal dynamic?’ I can answer that the driving force—loosely translated as the epistemology, or knowledge base—that made us join forces, was the human personal desire to share. I as an individual have to live out my life as a creative entity by engaging fully in the kind of life of which I am capable: I am forced to realise my full potential, just as surely as I have to eat and drink. But I can realise that full potential only through you. I have to accept you, and commit myself to you, in order to understand me; and you have to do the same.



## Epistemology and practice

The purpose of my science fiction about cog wheels is to illustrate the need to consider reasons for action as much as the actions themselves. The current literature of educational theory emphasises the need to describe actions, but fails to give importance to the reasons. I have said in Part I that I-enquiries may qualify as educational, because they inevitably involve giving the reasons; and ‘educational’ in this book means the process of moving the development of understanding forward. So I am saying that an educational enquiry will focus on the epistemology—the reason for the driving force—as much as the practice. Further, it may focus on the epistemology *as* practice: and this is where I will refer to the introduction to this chapter, that structure and process are interdependent.

In Part I, I indicated my view of the nature of educational research as a process of iterative (or recursive) processes. It is means and end, in that the process of the research becomes the practice that is under investigation. What, though, of educational *practices*, the actions within pedagogical settings which are the locations of the research? This is another matter altogether, and one which has traditionally been approached either through the social sciences (e.g., Young, 1971), or ignored altogether. In my view it is probably the most urgent charge on the educational enterprise altogether, but one of the most difficult to tackle.

I would suggest that much teaching—and this includes the professional development of teachers—is a case of ‘Do as I say’ rather than ‘Do as I do’. I believe that it is essential for teachers to be encouraged to make explicit their knowledge base—their educational values—to justify both what they are hoping to achieve for their learners and for themselves. If I want to help my learners to appreciate what a just society is, I must make the learning situation itself a just society. I must act in accordance with the values that I am attempting to communicate to my learners.

Let us return to I and You. I have said that the driving force that enables us to make contact is our need to share our own personal knowledge. In the terms I expressed in Chapter 1, I may say that we are turning our respective competences into a shared form of performance.

In talking about practice, or intentional actions, I need to characterise the nature of those practices that are a realisation of our values as sharing individuals, persons who are intentionally engaging in a communicative form of life. How will we ensure that communication will continue? What is the nature of the values that underpin our practices?

The person who has probably done most to characterise the nature of communication is Jürgen Habermas. He has identified four separate criteria that are essential for effective communication: that I am sincere in what I say, that what I say is comprehensible, that it is true, and that I have chosen an appropriate situation in which to say it (Habermas, 1979). Effective comprehension is based on and reflects our *intention* to share. Our intentions are the trigger that turn our values into actions: in my formulation of Part I, my values at the level of competence are transformed into the action of performance through the transformatory nature of my intentions.

Let me relate this to the need, as I see it, for the explicit articulation of an educational epistemology of practice. I have characterised education as the process of the development of an individual's rationality, and I have defined educational practices as those which encourage that process. An educational epistemology of practice is one which allows teachers to undertake an enquiry that is focused on the development of personal understanding with a view to engaging others in the development of their personal understanding. The 'aim' and the 'process' here are the same. Teaching and learning are two sides of the same coin; they are two perspectives of the same process. The process of practice becomes the object of the enquiry; practice becomes enquiry. The practice of teaching others becomes the process of learning about oneself. The process of learning about oneself becomes the object of the research.

I am saying that we need to see research as practice, and that pedagogic practice should be viewed as a constant process of enquiry. If we view teaching in this light, it is no longer an activity geared toward passing on information; it becomes a shared communicative exercise which is focused on generating intersubjective agreements about the nature of being.

### **Towards an epistemology of love**

I will take my argument a final step further. First I will review here some of the formulations that I have put forward.

I have said that intentional action is often a living out of personal values. Educational practices constitute a certain way of life, in itself often a living out of educational values. I have said that communicative action is based on our desire to share, and that an educational epistemology of practice will result in pedagogical actions that lead to a development of the personal

potential of all parties in the enterprise. I have said that recommendations in the current literature approach the improvement of practice as a social exercise: I have indicated my view of the need for the improvement of practice as a personal exercise. An improvement of personal understanding will lead to an improvement of social situations. Instead of approaching educational research through the social sciences, I prefer to approach it through the reconstructive sciences: that is, making explicit what is implicit.

I need to highlight now the pivotal aspect of the educational process, and that is the transformative nature of our intentions. I believe that if we want something badly enough, and care enough and work hard enough, we usually will get it. It is our intentionality that is at the base, that can transform our potential into actuality.

What is at the foundation of our intentional educational practice is love—that is, care, understanding, commitment. In my desire to realise my own potential I treat myself with care; in my desire to help others to realise their potential, I treat them in the same way. My intentions are those of best interest; my aim is the best interest of those in my care. My educational practices blend and merge with my social practices. Mine is an educational epistemology of practice which is based on a personal epistemology of love.

I will return to these ideas in Part V. For now, let me close with an articulation of the need for love to shine through everything we do; that we require our learners to do as we do, and ourselves to do as we say, in the best interests of us all.

## PART III I ACT IN THE DIRECTION OF THE SOLUTION

### Chapter 6

#### The Answer of Avon

There are a number of developing and on-going initiatives across the country that are taking practitioner-centred research as the basis for schemes for professional development.

The foundation for the adoption of this approach as a policy framework is that professional development is the responsibility of individual practitioners, who will then aim to share their collective practices in order to build communities of critical practitioners. The emphasis is initially on the improvement of individual practice—the nature of this improvement being the realisation of educational values in practice—with a view to bringing about improvement at a community level, in which shared educational values are realised in institutionalised practices.

I am currently involved in several such initiatives, and in this section I want to outline how some institutions at local and regional level are implementing their responses to their perceived problems.

This section focuses on work going on in Avon. I am in touch with this work because of my association with the University of Bath. There is much work going on elsewhere, such as in Nottingham, and some in Dorset (see Part IV).

Implementation presupposes concurrent evaluation: as I do something, I am already considering if it is worthwhile; and the processes of my action and evaluation fuse. At a notional level of abstraction they maybe seen as separate; but, in reality, my actions are in a constant process of modification because I am always considering what I am doing and acting upon that consideration, from one moment to the next. The reports that follow include this aspect of ‘reflection on action in action’.

Three separate reports constitute the chapters in Part III. In this Chapter I outline the planning involved in a large-scale initiative. In Chapter 7 I present a report by Terry Hewitt, who is committed to establishing action research as a strategy for professional development across a group of schools. In Chapter 8 Kevin Eames reports how he moved from being a lone action researcher to involving his whole school. I have used this presentation of narrowing the focus to show how action research may be used as a device that generates shared educational practices, in that it may focus on the one and the many at the same time, engaging individuals in their own and each others' best interests.

The first report presented in this chapter is part of an Avon policy statement. It represents the adopted county ethic that individual practitioners should engage in their own enquiries into their educational practices, and it also reflects the ethic of engaging in dialogue in order to bring about a community framework of care and best interest. The production of this document signals an outcome of a long process of negotiation and shared understandings.

I am grateful to Avon Local Education Authority for permission to reprint extracts from this report.

## **Supporting your professional development**

This pamphlet explains some of the changes in professional development which are planned to ensure that the classroom teacher's contribution to education in Avon is fully recognised and valued.

### **1 *How do I get time to think about my teaching and plan what I need to do next?***

In future the majority of LEA-provided INSET will be directly linked to what goes on in your school and classroom. On a typical in-service programme you will spend two or three days away from school, accompanied whenever possible by a colleague from the same school. You will be given the opportunity to reflect on your teaching and to identify the areas you want to develop. You will receive support in working out a plan to try out your ideas back in your school and classroom. Time for you to work with your colleagues to carry out your plans and record the results will be provided in the school. After a period of time you will get together again with members of your initial group for another day away from school. On this day you will review your progress, exchange experiences and make further plans for development. This process forms part of an action-research approach to professional development.

## 2 *How do I get recognition for my school-based professional development?*

In future all teachers will receive recognition for their development activities through a personal professional record of achievement to be known as *The Avon Professional Portfolio*. Teachers will be able to use their Professional Portfolio as they wish. In addition you will be able to submit your action-research development work for accreditation by Higher Education. The work you do can then count towards Higher Degree, Diploma and Certificate awards.

## 3 *Where does the non-contact time come from?*

### FINANCE

A greater proportion of staff development funds will be given to schools to manage. This money can be used to increase the school's staffing. In this way the non-pupil contact time for school-based development activities will be made available. The school's staff development budget can be used to cover any course fees, travelling and subsistence expenses. It can also be used to fund the support of external providers and training.

### PLANNING

During the Summer Term, Headteachers and Staff Development Co-ordinators will be involving you in discussion about the school's development priorities and how those priorities will be achieved using the funding you have available.

Your school will then produce a Staff Development Action Plan describing how your school's allocation of staff development funding will be used to meet development needs during the coming year. This Action Plan will aim to make the best use of all the available resources—the non-contact days, directed time, enhanced staffing and staff development funds.

### PROGRAMMES

The LEA will provide your school with a full year Professional Development Opportunities programme at the beginning of the Summer Term. This will allow your school to plan development a full year ahead.

## 4 *What support do I get in developing my classroom practice?*

### LEA SUPPORT

Teachers involved in the process of action-research in their schools and classrooms will receive support from specialist LEA staff working in curriculum and sector teams. These staff will be available to support teachers who are following a negotiated plan which is worked out with participants and would form the basis of a 'contract' for development.

## IN-SCHOOL SUPPORT

Within school you will be asked to help to identify and nominate a colleague who can act as a Staff Development Tutor.

The Staff Development Tutor's role will be to help you and your colleagues to decide which aspects of your teaching you wish to develop through action research. They will also support you in carrying out your classroom focused development.

Staff Development Tutors will need to be given non-contact time to carry out their role. The time they need can be funded through the school's staff development budget. They will also be provided with training opportunities to help them to develop the skills and understandings required to support development in your school.

## HOW DO WE CHOOSE OUR STAFF DEVELOPMENT TUTOR?

In order to be effective, Staff Development Tutors need to be readily accepted by their colleagues as equal partners. They need to be able to work alongside teachers in an open and supportive way. It is suggested that the staff of the school decide amongst themselves how to identify and nominate a Staff Development Tutor, bearing in mind what the role entails. It is also important that Schools leave themselves room to review their nomination process in the light of experience.

### *5 What about the specialist support I will need?*

The LEA does not intend to remove or reduce support for specialist areas. The LEA programme will still contain opportunities to work on specific curriculum issues in order to develop your expertise. The aim in the future is to help you to implement your developing specialist expertise in your own school and classroom. Specialist curriculum programmes will therefore use the action-research approach as part of the process of development.

### *6 What about my own personal professional development needs?*

It may well be that your personal professional development needs are not the same as your school's development priorities. If this is the case then you will be able to apply for central funding to support what you want to do. A special budget will be held centrally for those who are unable to get the support they need from their school's budget. This budget will be 'cash limited'. You will be informed of how and when to apply for support in the next few months.

### *7 Why are these changes being made?*

All of these changes are intended to enable you, the classroom teacher, to have more control over your professional development and to make sure that the development work you undertake is of clear benefit to you and your pupils.

## Chapter 7

# Action Research for Groups of Schools

The second report is written by Terry Hewitt, co-ordinator for Avon's STRICT (Supporting Teachers' Research into Classroom Teaching) programme. This programme ran from 1986–90, and is now subsumed under the general Avon professional development scheme, as outlined above. The report shows how a group of schools implemented action research as a foundation for professional development, and the dialogical nature of its evolution. The report also indicates the importance of on-going and concurrent evaluation as a focal part of the action strategy, and the importance that Terry places on having his own practice seen as a form of enquiry in action.

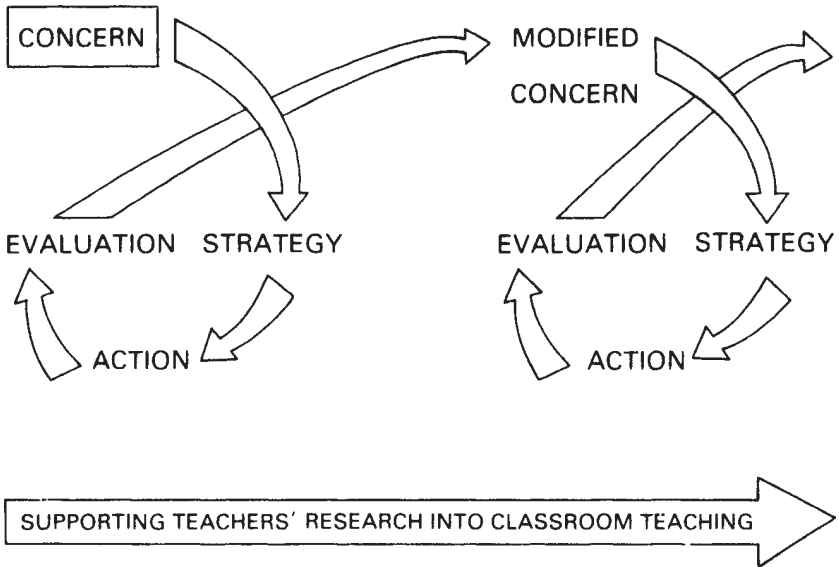
### **How can I provide evidence to support my claim that my work is helping to improve the quality of education for pupils in the classroom?**

Supporting Teachers' Research Into Classroom Teaching is a programme of in-service support in Avon which has aimed to encourage a collaborative approach to professional development. In its title we see an emphasis on: support for teachers, teachers as researchers, a classroom focus. Teachers carry out classroom based research into a concern that they have about their teaching strategies and course delivery using a systematic form of action enquiry which traces the following route:

- Stage 1 Discuss your concern. What are you wanting to improve?
- Stage 2 Decide on a strategy for change and improvement.
- Stage 3 Put the strategy into effect—act!
- Stage 4 Evaluate the outcomes of your action.
- Stage 5 Modify your statement of concern in the light of the evaluation.

Repeat the cycle from Stage 2.  
Write a report at the end of the year.





The acronym STRICT is intended to highlight the rigour which collaborative action research demands as teachers seek to provide answers to the question:

“What evidence can you provide to support your claim that your work has improved the quality of education for the pupils in your classroom?”

School based work combined with attendance at workshops and dialogue between teacher colleagues and professional supporters from outside the school are the main elements of a process which is characterised by its impact on pupils. Pupils in 18 secondary schools and 1 primary school in Avon have worked with their teachers on issues such as:

- What precisely happens in the first twenty minutes of a lesson?
- Are active and experiential learning strategies improving the quality of students' learning?
- Introducing electronics into the third-year modular CDT course.
- How effective are teaching techniques in the first year?
- Is it possible through English lessons to enable students to appreciate the value of oral discussion as a means of learning?
- Alleviating stress arising from GCSE coursework demands.

The two teachers from local secondary schools who have acted as part time coordinators of this programme have found it useful to offer support including:

- A series of workshop days at Teachers' Centres to work on research, reflect on progress and plan each stage;
- Supply time to facilitate meetings of colleagues, mutual classroom observation and discussions with learners;
- Access to the expertise of a support team including consultants from H.E.;
- Collaboration with other teacher researchers;
- Technical and other support in classroom observation techniques;
- Assistance with the critical evaluation of evidence.

Teachers clearly appreciate having time in their own classroom to pursue their own research, and one wrote This form of research would be impossible without it'. The workshop sessions have been described as 'Vital—otherwise research would have slipped off our list of priorities. We also gained space and time away from school'. One teacher saw them as 'very useful opportunities to interact with teachers from other schools and subject areas'. These meetings may become less important as teacher groups form within schools, and the main problem appears to be the tendency for teachers to feel guilty about leaving classes with a supply teacher, a fact highlighted by the teacher who wrote: "It is difficult to reconcile the idea of leaving your classroom with a supply teacher so as to improve the quality of pupils' learning!!"

The part played in action research by written reports has been the focus of some debate recently, and it may be worth spending some time considering the emphasis which the STRICT support team has placed on the written reports. These reports are not intended to be polished research documents. They are the working papers of classroom-based research in action. They are written for two purposes:

- to help the process of reflection;
- to provide a permanent record and means of dissemination.

Over the past four years the 'permanent record' has proved a useful resource to colleagues. It has also been an effective means of dissemination within the LEA and beyond. But it is the part which writing plays in helping the process of reflection which is more significant. Evidence to support this view comes through hints contained in comments such as that made by one of the teachers: 'getting one's thoughts on paper helped crystallise ideas concerning future actions or initiatives'. More powerful was the comment made by one of the teachers involved in 1987 who wrote in an evaluation of the part played by the workshop sessions, where one aim was to 'help develop self criticism in the secure environment of a sympathetic but challenging group':

"The workshops have actually developed a self-critical climate, but it was more the preparation and writing of the report which developed our self-criticism."

Significant this year was the way in which participants built on previous experience and integrated pupils' work into the text of their reports. It is no longer appropriate

(if it ever was) to relegate pupils' work to the separately bound appendices of earlier phases. The styles range from the highly structured formal report to the more informal 'user friendly' account; they are all characterised by their quality. They are also characterised by the attempt to cope with the demands of a support team who wrote in July 1986: "If we are successful in developing this form of in-service support we would expect to be able to show that we had been of some assistance in helping you to improve the quality of education with your pupils".

Techniques used in the collection of evidence to support these claims have included:

- Examination of pupils' work
- Observation of pupils
- Mutual observation by teachers
- Questionnaires to pupils
- Questionnaires to teachers
- Video tapes of lessons
- Diaries
- Written accounts
- Photographs
- Audiotapes of interviews
- Case studies

Traditional educational research has tended to measure the easily measured and report the easily reported. In Avon we see teachers 'measuring' improvements in the quality of pupils' learning and reporting the sights, sounds and feelings of their shared experience through the necessarily limited medium of the printed page. We are unable to include the taped recordings of pupils' interviews or the video tapes of lessons, but we hope that the reports of our 'systematic enquires made public' (Stenhouse, 1983) made a contribution to the growing body of knowledge of the ways in which teachers may communicate their work to a wider audience. Incidentally, we may meet the challenge of Ebbutt (1983) that 'If action research is to be considered legitimately as research, the participants in it must...be prepared to produce written reports of their activities.' As the drafts are critiqued by the group as critical friends we may also satisfy Hopkins (1985) who has stressed the importance of reports being open to critique by other teacher researchers. Distribution within the LEA leads, hopefully, to a public critique and the 'discourse among teachers which is research oriented and committed to action and the improvement of practice' which we join Hopkins in encouraging.

The experience of the last four years has made me feel reasonably secure in the belief that through LEA support the action research teachers will be able to provide evidence to support their claims to have helped improve the quality of learning in the classroom. I am confident that teachers will respond imaginatively and creatively and that such evidence will take a variety of forms. As a member

of the support team I see in these most recent reports evidence of the success of our involvement in this form of in-service support. This leads me to have some confidence that those who are one step removed from the main focus of action may also be able to provide evidence that stands up to critique to support the claim that their work has been of some assistance in helping to improve the quality of education for the pupils in the classroom. It may, therefore, be appropriate that this is the last collection of case studies presented under the banner STRICT as the LEA moves into a dramatic expansion of an action-research approach to professional development.

Section 9 of the Local Authority Training Grants Scheme 1990–1—Joint Report of the Director of Education and County Treasurer of the County of Avon—opens: “It is proposed that staff development provision be improved to support teachers carrying out action research in their own schools and classrooms”. Action research is subsequently described as a way of developing classroom practice which leads to staff development having a greater impact on students’ learning experiences. A booklet for teachers—‘You and your professional development’ [see Chapter 6]—refers to changes which are planned.

In the majority of LEA provided INSET teachers will be encouraged to undertake classroom focused action research, supported in school by a colleague who will act as a Staff Development Tutor. The teacher and the Staff Development Tutor will receive LEA support from an Advisory teacher who will assume the role of Sector Consultant working with primary, secondary and special schools in a geographical sector. The likely impact of this shift in emphasis in uncertain and the extent to which action research on the scale envisaged can be supported is untried. I have to confess to one or two concerns. The first is that if others are persuaded by my assertion that writing is a crucial element in the process of action research, the LEA is likely to be confronted with a significant problem in what to do with pieces of reflective writing from 12,000 teachers. Libraries? Databases? Journals? Newsletters? What happens to non-written material? How do we access video/ audiotape? There are a few storage/retrieval issues to be resolved!

My main concern, however, is that the further one moves away from the pupil in the classroom the more difficult it is to provide “evidence that my work is helping to improve the quality of education for pupils in the classroom” [see also Chapter 10]. I do not doubt that the teacher will be able to provide ‘evidence’, possibly as we have done by developing the written reports of teachers. I suspect, however, that the Sector Consultant will find the search for “evidence that my work is helping” far more difficult. I do not know what this evidence may look like, how it may be presented or how it will be validated. It is this question that I would like to explore.

There is a growing body of evidence to support claims that classroom based research has a significant contribution to make to improving the quality of childrens’ learning. Ultimately, however, I am sure that many of us agree with Hopkins’ (1985) view that “It is the sharing of our experiences and the social and

intellectual benefits that emanate from it, not the meeting of some abstract academic criteria, that provide the logic for publication and critique in classroom research". Lomax and McNiff (1989) have suggested that teacher researchers "use writing in a creative way as part of creating knowledge and publish it so that others can share in the process and not just in the end result". This paper represents one individual's attempt to share with others the process of developing an action research approach to professional development in Avon. I hope that it may be possible to use it as a basis for discussion among teachers and other groups addressing the question: How can I provide evidence to support my claim that my work is helping to improve the quality of education for pupils in the classroom?

# Chapter 8

## Whole-School Development

This chapter is written by Kevin Eames, Head of English at Wootton Bassett School, Wiltshire. In it he analyses his own development as an action researcher, while encouraging the professional development of his colleagues.

### **Growing your own**

#### **Supporting the development of action researchers within an action-research approach to whole-school development**

##### WHAT IS THIS PAPER ABOUT?

It's an attempt to illustrate, for teachers who may be new to action research, how I became an action researcher over the past few years. I hope that my experiences will provide some short cuts for those who are setting out on the same path—and their number will grow strongly, I think, owing to the commitment of LEAs like Avon to action research, especially in the light of the Department of Education and Science's 'Planning for School Development' (December 1989), which suggests an actionresearch approach to school development plans, and their evaluation. The focus in the paper is primarily upon myself, because action research demands that the researcher should examine his own practice and educational development, rather than anyone else's.

##### WHY BOTHER?

Because I think that action research is of immense importance to the professionalism of teachers. It's a form of knowledge produced by teachers, and primarily aimed at communicating with teachers, and at being used by teachers. Although it's 'home-grown', it also satisfies legitimate demands for accountability, since it constitutes a demonstration that teachers are evaluating and improving their classroom practice in a methodical and rigorous manner.

##### BECOMING AN ACTION RESEARCHER

Although all teachers are potentially action researchers (and I think I was one for a long time without realising it) action research as a methodical, professional approach to developing and evaluating classroom practice doesn't just happen

of its own accord; it must be supported by the structures and personnel of each institution and of the local authority, and each teacher involved must do it, and talk about it, if he or she is to understand the power of the form, and the possibilities for its use. In the following account, I hope that the ways in which my own development as an action researcher were supported will become apparent.

### *Stage One: Learning about Learning*

Ten years ago, as a newly-appointed head of English in a large comprehensive school on the outskirts of Swindon, I became involved in the 'Learning about Learning' project, organised by Pat D'Arcy, the Wiltshire English adviser. This was a cross-curricular, cross-phase initiative which brought together teachers from all over the country for a series of meetings where they would teach a characteristic lesson from their own specialist area to the rest of the group. The discussion and writing which followed each presentation focused on the reactions of the other teachers as learners: how did they respond? What difficulties did they have as learners? How might learning be clarified and made easier?

By trying to understand their own learning processes, the teachers on the project were encouraged to develop and share classroom strategies for supporting learning. This exploration of classroom practice was further encouraged by a residential 'summer institute', in which members of the project worked together for a week or so with teachers from a neighbouring county. The residential institutes were backed up by writing weekends, which gave participants the chance to write about and discuss accounts of their own classroom strategies for improving learning, as well as sharing the writings of other teachers and academics; where possible, the accounts were published by Wiltshire County Council as booklets in the 'Learning about Learning' series, and have proved interesting to those teachers who have come across them, if my own experience is reliable, in that the accounts of practice given in the booklets have suggested strategies to adapt and try out in the classroom. The booklets have also been noted in the more academic press<sup>1</sup>, and have been used by teachers as far afield as West Germany, Hong Kong and California; they have proved an effective method of sharing practice.

How did this stage move me towards being an action researcher, though? It did so in the following ways, I think:

- I reflected on my own learning processes, and tried to apply my growing understanding to improving my classroom practice.
- I tried to use the theoretical insights of academic writers<sup>2</sup> to help me understand what was happening in my own classroom practice.
- I began to realise the power of teachers working and talking collaboratively to help each other develop their own classroom practice.
- I wrote accounts of my own classroom practice, and read the accounts of other teachers. Through this, I came to see the importance of defining my

own understanding in writing, and of learning from the writing of other teachers and writers about education.

I wasn't yet an action-researcher, although I was moving in that direction. I was giving accounts of my classroom practice, trying to explain why the things I did worked (or not), and these accounts were available to be discussed and adapted by other teachers. However, there were a number of elements missing, which I want to deal with in the next section. I must emphasise, though, the role of the English adviser and the opportunities she provided for collaboration, exploration, discussion, and publication. Without such practical and firm support, I wouldn't even have got this far.

### *Stage Two: Bath University*

As a development from the 'Learning about Learning' project, a group of participants was encouraged by the Wiltshire English adviser to submit proposals to Bath University for research leading to an M. Phil, degree. I was one of the two teachers who actually went through with the application, and it was through the research that I did at Bath, and through the support and advice of Pat D'Arcy, Andy Larter (my fellow researcher from the 'Learning about Learning' group), and Jack Whitehead, that I gradually made the transition to being an action researcher.

My first two research reports were along the lines of my booklets in the 'Learning about Learning' series. They were narrative, descriptive, and focused in detail on the learning of one pupil. They tried to integrate a discussion of academic theory with my developing perceptions of what was happening in my own classroom.

It wasn't until I had presented my second report to a validation group meeting, that I understood what was lacking. Fundamentally, I needed to clarify why I was taking the actions that I did. Teaching is a value-laden activity, and we take action to improve our classroom practice, when we see that what is happening doesn't fit in with what we want to happen. In my case, I was teaching in a school which, at that time, was very transmission-oriented. Pupils were like so many little vessels to be filled with knowledge by their teachers. I wanted to give them more control over their writing than the dominant learning climate allowed, since I held autonomy in learning to be an important aim of education, and I felt that pupils would learn more effectively if they were allowed greater control over decisions affecting their writing. As a result of my increased understanding, which came about through discussions with Pat D'Arcy, Jack Whitehead, Andy Larter, and others, my next two reports used the five-part action-reflection cycle, and took the following form:

- a specific description of the problems I had identified, where what was happening didn't correspond to what I wanted to happen;
- a description of a possible solution (or solutions) to the problems identified;
- an account of what happened when I tried to put my solution(s) into action;
- an evaluation of how successful my solution(s) has been, in the light of the evidence I had collected;



- a modification of my understanding as a result of this process, and a restatement of my ideas and actions to enable me to continue the process of improving my practice.

I learned from this stage that:

- the five-part cycle help me to maintain the detailed case-study element of my research, while giving shape and clarity to the context-rich data which emerge from classroom action and reflection;
- the five-part cycle, as part of its form, made it necessary for me to clarify my developing understanding of what I was doing and why I was doing it;
- the cycle, as part of its form, made it necessary to take action in order to improve my teaching, and to redefine and replan problems, solutions and actions in the light of the action taken.

Thus, I realised how the form could have a direct effect on my classroom, and could lead to a continual and methodical process of improving practice and understanding. Again, though, I could not have reached this point on my own; the support of the local authority was essential in terms of funding for fees and remitted time; the English adviser was continually supportive in terms of positive criticism of the work I was doing; the university gave support through Jack Whitehead's attempts to get me to see how I might present my research using the five-part cycle; Andy Larter provided me with an example of an action-researcher who got there well before I did, and showed me how to do it.

### *Stage Three: The School Research Group*

Once I had grasped the power of the five-part cycle of action and reflection, I was able to begin supporting other researchers. After a break following my M.Phil., I had started some further research at Bath University, and I became aware that there were other teachers in the school who were also involved in research at the university. Four of us formed the nucleus of a research group, which was intended to provide mutual support by circulating relevant reading material and through meetings to discuss drafts and future directions.

The others, apart from myself, were the deputy head, who was writing a dissertation as part of his M. Ed. studies; a teacher from the design faculty who was carrying out an M.Phil. by action research, and a teacher from the English faculty, who was working as part of a cross-phase group towards an Advanced Diploma in Educational Studies at Bath University. Jack Whitehead was the supervisor for both Paul Hayward, the design teacher, and Daniela De Cet, the English teacher. He also gave his time willingly to advise Chris Kirkland, the deputy head. The kind of work produced by the group is illustrated by publications such as 'How can we improve professionalism in education through collaborative action research?'<sup>3</sup>

I learned from this stage that:

- a group of researchers in a school could support each other effectively;
- this mutual support created a climate in which members of the group felt able to discuss their research and their teaching openly and honestly;
- the presence of an experienced action researcher was valuable, since I could advise on problems similar to those I had already encountered myself.

We were supported by:

- the English Adviser, who provided supply cover for Daniela on an occasional basis so that she could attend meetings at the university, or spend some time writing up research reports;
- the local authority, who provided help with fees and remitted time for the other three members of the group;
- the university, through Jack Whitehead;
- the recently-appointed headmaster of Wootton Bassett School, who was strongly supportive of the individual and collaborative work done in the group.

#### *Stage Four: Action research in the English faculty*

If action research is to do the things I claimed for it earlier in the paper, it's got to be more than just a way of working for a few privileged academic researchers. In June and July 1989, therefore, the English faculty tried using an action-research approach to evaluating its policy on reviewing and profiling, taking advantage of the time created by the departure of our examination groups. (Each teacher was kept free of exam investigation for four consecutive forty-five minute periods, to help with writing his/her report.)

We produced a case-study, based on our evaluation, which was presented at a one-day conference on action research attended by Wootton Bassett School's heads of faculties and senior management. In the case-study, I tried to demonstrate how our evaluation worked, using an action-planner which the conference was considering.

The evaluation demonstrates, I think, the five-part cycle in action:

- We had a concern (to find out how our policy was working) which we wanted to investigate.
- We worked out a way of doing it, by clarifying once more the principles and intentions of our policy. At the same time, we decided how we were going to collect the information.
- We took action by looking at pupils' written work and their review sheets, and by carrying out interviews.
- We wrote our reports and reflected on what we had learnt about the operation of our policy.
- We planned changes to our practice which we felt were needed to bring it into line with our principles and intentions.

I learned from this stage that:

- action research was useful in clarifying our ideas about what we were doing, and by following the five-part cycle we were able to plan and carry out improvements in our practice;
- it was collaborative, and involved the whole faculty;
- time needed to be made available for teachers to write their reports, as you can't ask teachers to do it on top of all the work they have to do normally.

The headmaster was fully supportive of what we were trying to do, and all members of the faculty found it a worthwhile exercise.

### *Stage Five: Action research in the whole school*

As a result of the experience gained in the first four stages described above, the headmaster decided that an action-research approach to implementing and evaluating the National Curriculum would best serve our purposes. This decision was reinforced by the publication of 'Planning for school development' (DES, December, 1989).

So far, the following steps and decisions have been taken:

- A one-day conference for heads of faculties and senior management was held in Feb. 1990, to discuss the principles of action research, and the experiences of the research group and the English faculty; to formulate preliminary concerns for investigation by faculties; to consider practical ways of making action-research work as a normal part of curriculum development and evaluation.
- The research group is being enlarged. One member of each faculty will receive 0.05 FTE remitted time per week to work as the faculty's 'designated researcher'. He/she will investigate his/her own practice within contexts decided by the faculty as a whole, using the five-part action reflection cycle. He/she will be registered at Bath University for an advanced diploma, with fees paid by the LEA, and will contribute his/her growing experience of action research to the faculty's understanding and practice as a whole.
- The present system for curriculum development, consisting of standing committees and development groups, is to be dismantled. Co-ordinators for each area (e.g., information technology, assessment, active learning) will have 0.1 FTE remitted time per week to work with faculties, to plan and review action reflection cycles with them.
- Two of the five teacher-development days per year are to be given over to producing and discussing action-research accounts of practice within faculties.
- Time needs to be found to enable teachers who are not members of the research group to examine aspects of their practice using the five-part action reflection cycle. This will come from a combination of teacher-development days; individual supply days built into each faculty's allocation; time freed

by examination classes leaving; curriculum co-ordinators and/or 'designated researchers' taking over individual teachers' timetables for a morning or an afternoon.

At this stage, support from the headmaster is fundamental; nothing can move without it. The LEA is also providing financial support, and Bath University will support members of the research group. Teachers will be able to support each other, though, in these first steps towards making real the collaborative, methodical professionalism that teaching needs.

### Conclusion

I hope that this account of my own development as an action researcher has clarified some possible methods of supporting and encouraging action research within schools. Ways need to be found to enable teachers to use the five-part action reflection cycle; to circulate and use the accounts produced; to work collaboratively; to be aware of, and use within their practice, already published educational theory. If we can do it, we will have evolved a powerful form for improving and understanding our practice, which will have immense significance for the professionalism of all teachers, not just the ones in our own schools.

### NOTES

- 1 For example, in references in Martin, N., *Mostly about writing* (Heinemann, 1983) and Protherough, R., *Encouraging writing* (Methuen, 1983).
- 2 For example, the work of James Britton, Frank Smith, Donald Graves, Donald Murray, Nancy Martin, Janet Emig, Ann Berthoff, etc.
- 3 Eames, K. (ed.) 'How can we improve professionalism in education through collaborative action research?', Bassett Action Research Group, Wootton Bassett School, Swindon, Wilts.

And...

I met Margaret Hine, a teacher in a school in Bristol, who told about her delightful approach to introducing Action Research to colleagues. Here is her strategy.

When I was asked to be a Staff Development Tutor and realised that this meant talking to colleagues about improving practice through action research, I was anxious not to present this in a negative way. I didn't want staff to start feeling inadequate, when so many new ideas are already taxing their time, energy and confidence.

So I searched for a positive way to introduce the idea of staff development, and came up with the vision of our 'classroom' as a beautiful garden. As we look at that garden, it is not in any way displeasing, but there are always things which could be added to make it even more beautiful. I introduced the idea of planting

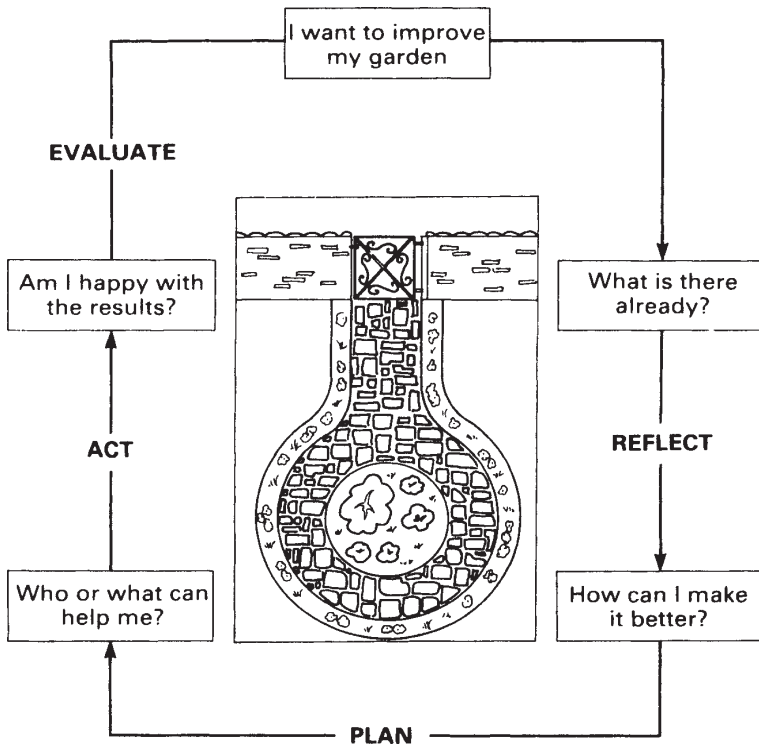
a magnolia tree in the middle of the lawn. We therefore began with the premise, 'I want to improve my garden', and went on to ask the questions:

- 1 What is there already?  
(A beautiful garden with a big lawn)
- 2 How can I make it better?  
(Buy a magnolia tree)
- 3 Who or what can help me?  
(Garden Centres, gardening books, tools, etc.)
- 4 Am I happy with the results?

We then looked at this in action research terms as:

- 1 Reflection
- 2 Planning
- 3 Action, and
- 4 Evaluation

The allegory was well received and I had some positive and enthusiastic reactions from staff members wanting to 'improve their garden'.



## PART IV I EVALUATE THE IMAGINED SOLUTIONS

### Chapter 9

## Evaluating Practice

In April 1990 I, along with some twenty colleagues, was invited to become a field tutor within the modular Bachelors and Masters degree programmes organised by Dorset LEA and Portsmouth Polytechnic. Several of the modules would be Practitioner Based Enquiry (PBE), in which individual teachers would follow through a particular educational interest, supported by the field tutor, with a view to producing a written report to contribute towards accreditation.

For some months now I have been working with six teachers on a one-to-one basis, and I have also arranged for them to meet as a group. These meetings have become support sessions, with colleagues helping each other decide on how best to take their enquiries forward. The teachers also act as validators of each other's claims about the improvements they believe they are bringing about in their practice.

My role varies according to expressed need. I offer a point of information or clarification; or suggest a different focus to a colleague's thinking; or draw out critical points from the discussion and reflect them back.

From the beginning, I decided to turn my work into a research project and I started keeping records of my own practice as a supporter.

My practice needs to be evaluated, as much as my colleagues need to evaluate theirs. The processes of those evaluations need to be made public, and the claims that we are making (that we have improved the quality of education for ourselves and for our clients) also need public substantiation.

I have undertaken in-service support in a number of forms over the years, often in a transmission mode. I have sometimes been left with a

vague feeling of emptiness, that my work has not significantly contributed to a deep understanding of the nature of improvement, either for myself or for the people I have been helping. I believe I have contributed to an improvement of educational situations, in terms of management and pedagogy; but I have never before been so intensely concerned to reach the people with whom I have been working, really to strive to establish a rich empathic relationship.

My colleagues and I held a validation meeting in July 1990. My four colleagues are:

*Beth*, a teacher of religious education, and personal and social education, in a secondary school. Beth is also head of year.

*Liz*, a newly appointed head teacher of an infants' school.

*Dee*, a newly appointed head teacher of a junior school.

*Susan*, a teacher who has been working with hearing-impaired children, and who has now left teaching to follow her own inclinations. She wants to take up some form of educational research.

Our conversation falls into two parts. In the first part, which constitutes this chapter, we concentrate on evaluating our practices. We take as a base line the issue of whether we have improved the quality of education within our immediate locations. In the second part, which constitutes Chapter 10, we focus on an evaluation of support, both in terms of my support to them, and of their support to colleagues in school and to each other within our research project. In Chapter 11 I record the transcript of the conversation I had with two Staff Development Officers (also field tutors), which looks at the fundamental values which guide us as teachers, and how and why these values are being realised through this form of teacher-education provision.

We pick up the conversation where we are discussing the notion of evaluation, and the popular view that it is to do with measurement, a characterisation which we feel is inappropriate to the ideas which our research is generating.

*Jean* Dee has been saying that, as part of her action plan—you used the word 'measure', and said it was inappropriate.

*Dee* I am looking at the change that has happened within school as a result—may be or not—of what I have changed myself. I wanted to change my practice in order to achieve certain things. I now want somehow to

‘measure’ the success of the change in my own practice by what has actually happened within my school.

*Beth* Would ‘prove’ be a better word? For example, I know what I’ve done, the mistakes I’ve made, and how, if I were doing it again, what I would do differently. I also know what I want to go on to do next. This seems to me to be the next logical step; I know what I’ve done, but I’ve now got to show it.

*Jean* How are you going to show it?

*Beth* In the piece of written work I’m going to do, where I shall be referring to the bits of evidence I have collected along the way. For example, the videos to show classroom practices. I’ve got the journals of the pupils, which we kept week by week. I’ve got my journal.

*Jean* Can you actually point to other people involved in the project and say that their practice has changed because of your practice? I’m thinking here of colleagues and pupils and parents...

*Beth* That particular group of pupils, definitely. I feel there have been spin-offs, but those would be more difficult to show.

*Jean* You are making a claim to say that you have improved the quality of the pupils’ education. How can you demonstrate this in practice?

*Beth* The interviews that I’ve got on tape, and from their journals.

*Jean* Can you give us specific instances of the action of improvement?

*Beth* Yes. My naughty boys. The ones that were really difficult and couldn’t be trusted. One of them was very naughty and disrupted the whole lesson, playing around. I’ve got it on the tape, him playing around. And then, very gradually, in some way or another—not altogether successfully—they’ve been won over. The best example is Sam who, for just one week out of a whole eight or so weeks, worked—but that was just a major achievement for him. I have his written piece of work that Sam has taken an interest. He’s thinking about what he’s doing—not taking the soft option.

*Jean* So we have concrete evidence to say that he believes that you have improved the quality of his life.

*Beth* Yes. This evidence backs up my claim.

*Dee* I don’t think I have the confidence to make that claim. It may be one of the major differences when you move out of the classroom where



you can see evidence of what you're doing fairly adequately. Certainly as a class teacher, I think I would often have felt able to make a claim that I had achieved something, that by what I had done, a child's education had improved. It's much more tenuous when you get to our level as heads. Would you agree, Liz?

*Liz* Absolutely.

*Dee* I like this expression, that you are making a claim. I am simply not sure that I can make that claim. That goes back to my need to 'measure', that I actually want to find out whether there's anything that I can claim, and I have to evaluate first of all.

*Liz* I don't think your research into your own practice as a headteacher is measurable. How do you judge it? Do you judge it by pupil performance? Do you judge it by improved relationships? It's so vast, and you're making tiny steps all the time. So in the end, because you're constantly striving, you'll never get there simply because you're constantly striving and moving on. You are developing all the time. You need to demonstrate that process of development—which you are doing here in your project.

*Jean* When we first discussed your project, Dee, you said that one of your ambitions was to introduce a new ethos, an ethos of care. You were very concerned to generate this feeling of care. From recent conversations, it sounds as if you're succeeding.

*Dee* I feel as though it is, and that's why I really want to have a look to see whether it really is. I need to involve other people in my evaluation. This will be the focus of my next enquiry. I have worked very hard to get across the idea of *preventing* unacceptable behaviour, and not only punishing it. Staff and children seem to be talking in those terms now. We need to find out if we all agree if that's the case.

*Jean* So now, at the end of this term, you're going to reflect on what you've been doing; and then next term you're going to start a new cycle of action reflection by involving colleagues.

*Dee* Yes. Obviously one talks to the staff about this all the time. If you have any sort of relationship with people, then your whole moral background must come out, nurture it. I genuinely try to understand my staff, and it is how much your staff are prepared to understand you that I think determines how successful you are.

*Liz* By your being more caring for them, they actually reflect that back by caring for the children.

*Dee* That's what we hope.

*Liz* Wouldn't it be hard to go and measure that, in a conventional sense?

*Susan* It would be impossible to go and quantify that.

*Liz* Because all the time you're inside it yourself, and you can't take yourself outside it because you're part of the change, and you're part of the ethos, aren't you. I did some evaluation once about something we were doing, and when I actually looked at it afterwards, because I knew what responses I wanted, and because I knew that I wanted certain changes to happen, the whole way I set the evaluation up was going to actually effect change. It wasn't going to actually evaluate what we were doing and where we were; but it did effect change, beautifully.

*Susan* If you're talking about measurement, you've got to have some sort of record whereby you can say, there is some of 20 per cent happening...

*Liz* But is that necessary? Is measurement necessary?

*Beth* Maybe only in the sense of giving proof.

*Dee* Yes, or even encouragement.

*Liz* To yourself.

*Dee* Yes. Beth said she wanted to prove to other people—to her audience—that...

*Beth* I think I've just really got to show that the enquiry has in some way moved things on. And there are a lot of things that I would have done very differently, especially in so far as collecting the evidence. I think the important thing about the enquiry is the difference it has made to me.

*Dee* I immediately see evaluation as the next step through, because presumably if you feel very strongly that the way that you've changed your practice is good for the children, then one of the things that you would want to see is other members of staff taking on board those changes. I can see that you want to offer proof, so that you can say to other members of staff, 'Look, this actually worked'.

*Beth* I think I will get the opportunity, because I've already been asked to help with some INSET to do with active learning and group work. Now I will actually be able to use the proof, the evidence, that I've collected. But I think the important thing about the enquiry now is this: I started off small with just one small group—and it has made me realise, inside the interviews, the honesty was really beginning to come through. The children weren't just saying, 'Oh, yes, it was really good and we really enjoyed that', as they tended to do at the beginning. They are being very honest, and they are saying, 'Yes, it's been really interesting, but could we try it this way?' So they are evaluating my practice, and we are negotiating together a shared practice. That's the way that my enquiry is moving us all forward at the moment.

# Chapter 10

## Evaluating Support Practices

We then went on to talk about the evaluation of our practice as supporters. We are all claiming to have improved our support practices: are those claims justified?

*Jean* What we're looking at is evaluating our own education. Now, when I say 'education', I mean the attempt to improve the quality of life for an individual. I have tried in my work as a field tutor to improve my practice by carrying out a systematic evaluation with yourselves. I've asked you to comment and reflect back to me so that I can modify my practice, and in turn you have done the same; so we have set up this dialogue, on a one-to-one basis, and also on a one-to-many basis, where we have all shared ideas to move forward our joint practice. Now, by the word 'evaluation', I suppose I mean 'Does it work?'—that is, has the quality of life been improved for me and for the other individuals in this group? From my point of view, it has been improved. I can point to the evidence to my own life, in that I feel I have helped you to improve your understanding of what you are doing, so that you have now been articulating the fact that you have assisted other people in improving their understanding. So my claim is that I have improved my own education, in that I've helped you. Am I correct in making that claim? Would you substantiate it?

*Everyone:* Yes

*Jean* In that case, what evidence can you show in your life to substantiate my claim?

*Beth* My journal shows how our discussions have helped me to clarify my thinking, to move on in the enquiry. And also about the first meeting we had as a group.

*Jean* What benefit did you get out of that?

*Beth* It helped me really to clarify my thinking, to narrow the focus of my enquiry. You made me go back to the beginning and say ‘What do I want to enquire into?’

*Dee* Yes, I think that’s exactly the same for me. After we met the first time, I was anxious to get things down on paper and start things off. I had all sorts of thoughts about where I would go then. And then when we met in a bigger group—it’s always helpful, isn’t it, to talk with others because conversation actually raises one’s own awareness: the thought processes one goes through oneself. You often hear somebody else reflecting, and airing what you are saying, even if you haven’t actually articulated it yourself.

*Jean* Have you noticed any difference in your thought processes?

*Dee* Just got slower and slower as the years have gone on!

*Liz* I feel much freer. I think after being on taught courses for so long, and the only research that I’ve ever looked into or known was a research with a definite outcome. Until now I have been totally strung up because there was nothing about what I really wanted to study that I thought could be measurable. Now, we’re back into our ‘measure’ again. And it was only after I’d talked to Jean after that first session that I started to think that whatever happens, I’m growing, the situation around me is growing—and I’m sure there will be a lot of things I can put down on paper—and I feel it would be a good enquiry. As to it being any use to anyone else, I’m not sure about that, but my enquiry certainly is effecting change in my school. And it’s only after speaking to you, Jean, that we talked about making an effecting of change the tangible part rather than more evidence about four-year-olds—the whole thing got into motion, and, as you say, Dee, after our discussions, I was quite prolific on paper. There is a lot coming through and I start putting down. It wasn’t till we’d had those individual meetings, though, sharing our own viewpoints, that I’ve got to that stage.

*Jean* Can we pick up this idea that, in fact, we have formed a support group? Now clearly you’re finding this small support group very valuable in terms of friendship, in terms of sharing anxieties and successes, sharing ideas...

*Dee* Yes, I think so. Liz talked about freedom. This is really freedom, because I feel instinctively that I can trust the members of the group. I

have large amounts of things that I cannot talk with anybody else about. I found that immensely valuable, that trust.

*Liz* It's the time factor involved as well, isn't it? In lectures, everything's tightly programmed. I feel, if necessary, we'd sit here, if somebody had got an urgent problem, we would sit here and listen.

*Dee* I felt that very much last time when we met with Anne. She was really struggling, wasn't she? I don't think either you or I spoke about what we were actually doing at all, Liz. I gained tremendously by just talking through with her about where she was going to go.

*Jean* Dee, you've just said, 'I gained tremendously by helping Anne'. In what way did you gain?

*Dee* I think by actually having to suggest ways in which she could sort out her own problems. One actually is drawing on one's own experience and in a sense solving one's own problems even if they haven't been mentioned at that time. You can always see a related incident.

*Jean* You were teaching her.

*Dee* Yes.

*Liz* I think it may be something to do with the fact that we're all practising at a high, rapid level, and I don't think we stop to rationalise our practice. You're involved as you are living it. But when someone else has a problem suddenly something in your mind says, 'Oh, I remember that in my situation, and I...' You then actually start to clarify what you actually did in that situation. You never stopped to clarify at the time...and that's what's really useful about the whole process, isn't it? It's a matter of reflecting on your actions as you do them.

*Jean* So you're learning through teaching, and teaching through learning.

*Liz* Yes. Things happen. And when you look back they've actually worked. I suppose it's a form of evaluation of our own practice, isn't it, when we actually go and help someone.

*Dee* When we advise.

*Jean* Someone said to me the other day about a 'cascade model', and I said, No, absolutely not, because a cascade model implies the drip feed...

*Dee* And the person at the top ends up with nothing. It's all going down, isn't it? But that doesn't happen with us.

*Jean* Right. I said that I was very much into developing networks. And I feel that that's what we've done because—perhaps the original impetus came from our original individual conversations, but now a real network has begun, in that this support group has developed, which in turn has generated further support groups, such as in the individual schools in which we're working. You've involved colleagues, children and parents, so it's anything but a cascade. It's very much networking.

*Liz* Yes, because we're taking—a cascade implies that you're giving out all the time, but we're actually taking all the time as well as giving out, aren't we?

*Jean* It's reciprocal. And you're doing this through setting up dialogue.

*Dee* And recognising need. That's what we do intuitively as teachers, isn't it? We have children in our care. And I think that's what we do as a small group. I suppose in a class situation it's more one way, whereas in our group each of us is demonstrating a need at different times, and others are moving in to offer that support. It's a constant exchanging of strengths and weaknesses and everything else.

*Jean* Beth is the only one of us who is working in a classroom situation as such and from what you've been observing recently, in fact that's happening in your classroom situation as well. We were talking about peer tutoring the other day, which is what we're doing here.

*Beth* Two things have just occurred to me really. First is the difference in my relationship with the particular group that I've been teaching in this different way. I've just been given my own office, and the children who are buzzing in and out are the children from this particular group.

*Liz* Now that's just what I was saying to Dee, that all these things are happening, and it's not until someone triggers off something and you start rationalising that you actually pick out key points and key issues.

*Beth* The other thing that occurred to me was the fact that in a way the best results for me have been occurring with other groups. It's as if the confidence that I'm getting as a result of my relationship with the one group is having an effect on other groups, because I've got the confidence to go in and do things slightly differently with other groups and to be far more effective: for example, the net curtain incident with another group when we were talking about the difficulties if you belong to another faith. Previously we've always done this towards the end of the second year; and

we've always read the chapter, made notes, done some drawing. I thought, 'We'll do it differently'. We didn't even read the chapter together—they read the chapter in groups, and they then had to present in some way to show the difficulties. They all chose a drama way. They really showed empathy with people of different religious faiths in this country, and some really good drama came out of that. As a result of that lesson, I thought, I'll try in that way with the other group. It's a knock-on effect, because the other group—I suppose it's because of my enthusiasm—were much more enthusiastic than the first group. When it actually came to showing their productions they all pulled out these net curtains and they swathed themselves in them because they were being Muslims—they really went to a lot of trouble. It made the point so much more—there couldn't have been a house on the estate that had any curtains! All these girls were swathed in net curtains from head to foot! Afterwards they sat down and talked about it. 'It's difficult to know—we felt so enclosed—what it must be like to be those girls!'

*Dee* Don't you think that absolutely illustrates—I think the first time we met as a group I was telling you that I had done the West Sussex maths course which was purely maths—it wasn't about anything else at all, but it completely changed my classroom practice. You're saying this kind of thing has a knock-on effect—if you start changing the whole outlook, then you can't say, 'I'm only going to do it with this group', because it changes *you*, doesn't it, and the way that you walk into the classroom. I think if you actually change something fundamental then everything changes. You can't put it into a compartment and say, 'For the rest of the day I'm going to be different.' I think that's something that's quite difficult to explain to staff who haven't actually experienced that themselves, because they think that they can do something here and something there quite differently. It's all to do with your basic philosophy, isn't it, and if you are feeling that the right way to talk with young people is to open it up—to allow them to experience—then you can't switch that on and off.

*Jean* So are you saying, Dee, that fundamentally you change you, and therefore you change your whole life? Are you saying that the fact that you've undertaken your personal enquiry has changed you?

*Liz* You can't actually become involved in anything without effecting some sort of change in yourself, can you really? Even if—perhaps this is a bit naive—even if it was something such as always shopping at the same



shop—if you make a decision to start shopping at the small shop instead of the large shop, that actually changes you. You become more talkative in the shop. There’s very little you can do in life, is there, that doesn’t actually change your being?

*Jean* So the research that you’ve undertaken is part of your life.

*Liz* It becomes very current in your thinking. All my technique is focused now, because the project has become such a major part in my thinking and it has a number of offshoots. I don’t think I have ever really concentrated like this till now.

*Jean* You’re constantly critical.

*Liz* Yes, that’s right. So from seeing this research as a problem a year ago, as to how to start looking at problems of receptions, coping, thinking ‘That’s not right, we’re not succeeding’, I’m beginning to get into such a heavy programme. I don’t think even at the end of this year it’s going to stop, even if I wanted to now; although I can’t say that the second sets we have now will be the same as the ones we have next year, because we don’t know what our staffing is going to be. From looking at Fours, looking at playgroups, we’ve gone into staff development in a different way—the staff are beginning to monitor it. They have suggested things—they’ve got time to start a base-line assessment of the Fours with the parents, which is something that’s been hanging around everywhere, but suddenly it’s central.

*Jean* So you’ve turned that into a collaborative research issue?

*Liz* Yes, even to the fact that last week I suddenly realised that we were in this position where we were a popular school and our planned admission limit is 30. This year there are going to be about 78 applicants for my 60 places, and so for the first time I found I had to say No. So I’ve actually been to the Appeals Court. I’ve spent the whole day at the Appeals Court fighting now for something which I’ve always known is an issue. I’ve always known that Fours shouldn’t be in large classes, but suddenly there’s so much thought being turned into action, I felt I had to do something about it, and I’m trying.

*Jean* Going back to the idea of our claim, our claim to educational knowledge—we have improved the quality of our lives in order to and because of our concern to improve the quality of other people’s lives. We have set up dialogue, we have generated networks of enquiring practitioners, we are describing a community ethic of enquiring minds.

Beth's classrooms are going in that direction. Dee's and Liz's schools are going in that direction, and we've set up this community of reflective practitioners because of our determination to do something about an unsatisfactory situation. We have individually found ourselves in an unsatisfactory situation. Our locations were quite different, to begin with, but we've engaged in a process of dialogue to share our views about the process of improvement that we have all deliberately undertaken, the action reflection which is helping us to improve the quality of education for ourselves, for the people within our locations; and we're doing this by sharing our views about the nature of those improvements that we're trying to bring about. Is that a fair assessment?

*Liz* Yes.

*Dee* I think the difference that I particularly noticed was, when we were talking to Anne, we were offering advice because we were seeing in what she was saying a reflection of things that had happened to us, but we had never thought about it. Perhaps the difference is that we're actually starting to think about things as they actually happen, rather than almost instinctively. When something occurs, we don't just react instinctively, but we actually reflect on it as we go along. And that might be the difference—instead of being on auto-pilot, we're being critical.

*Jean* You consciously reflect.

*Dee* Yes. Something that's always been fairly sub-conscious has been raised much more into consciousness now.

*Jean* We are making it explicit to ourselves and to others.

*Dee* And, I suppose, when I start to feel that I'm going under is when pressure becomes such that I go back into that auto-pilot mode which is no longer satisfactory.

*Jean* Can we summarise? I have made my personal claim that I have improved the quality of my own education by working with colleagues, and you have approved that claim. Are you prepared to make similar claims for yourselves—that you have improved the quality of education for yourselves?

*Dee* Yes, I think so, in those terms. I go back to what I said before—I'm not sure that I have the confidence yet to claim that I have improved for other people.

*Jean* You have for me, and for Liz, and for Beth, and we can all say the same, I think, of each other. It's this knock-on effect, the ripples in the pool. What I'm concerned to do in my project is to show the process of education as operating as a network for all of us, whereby I don't make social distinctions between teachers, supporters, pupils, learners, whatever role. Each one of us is improving the quality of her education with a view to improving the quality of other people's education.

*Liz* Really, Jean, what you're saying is what we very much are striving for in the classrooms. Not the didactic way—we learn together; and increasingly teaching in the classroom is going this way. Why shouldn't it go right the way through education?

*Susan* The better learners we are, the better teachers we are.

# Chapter 11

## Evaluating Provision for Continuing Teacher Education

I then spoke with two Staff Development Officers. I wanted to investigate with them the nature of the values they held that prompted them to initiate the courses that their LEA was running in conjunction with an Institute of Higher Education, and particularly when there was an increasing emphasis on Practitioner Based Enquiry (PBE).

Both Officers operate as field tutors, and the views that they have expressed in this chapter are their individual opinions as teachers who are engaged in examining their own support practices as well as administrators of teacher education provision. They are both involved in evaluating the impact of the scheme so far.

We pick up the conversation where I have just asked Steve to identify the educational values which place such emphasis on the PBE element within the scheme.

*Steve* Inasmuch as the initiative towards a scheme like this really rests upon a particular view of a teacher, as an independent, freestanding professional person. That's a basic value. A teacher isn't the deliverer of a National Curriculum which comes in a set of books or as a set of ring binders. This view of the teacher as the independent, freestanding professional goes back to a view which has been developed over many years. It isn't coincidence that we see it like that. That's the result of the approach to training teachers over the years, really. We are looking to strengthening the partnership between the LEA and the Higher Education institution. Any shortcomings we may feel that courses leading to higher degrees may have had in the past reflect really the extent to which they were prepackaged, delivered courses. In that respect they didn't match this notion of teachers as independent, freestanding professionals who were themselves involved in their own professional development, and who make choices about what they need to do, and who actually give coherence to

what they do on the basis of their own background and their current professional concerns.

*Pat* Our original intention was actually to accredit teachers for considered research efforts of their undertaking in terms of their teaching methods. The way in which it has developed, I think, is that we've got much more involved with empowering teachers to realise that the decisions they make are the crucial ones, more than the decisions they're asked to make via some authority.

*Steve* Some of the staff development that comes from the higher degree course is to raise their confidence to take that on. There are currently powerful forces which would press the teacher into becoming a narrower, more regimented individual, because of the nature of the developments that are coming along now. Teachers could be seen as the deliverers of the National Curriculum. They need considerable confidence and stature to be able to combat that. In a way it's always been difficult to try to develop that, but in teaching you've had a lot of independent people. The best teachers have always had that sort of distinctive element to them, haven't they—a very wide variety of individuals of all sorts who have all brought their individual contribution to what they are teaching. It's that that has produced quality in their work, very often. If you believe that it is still the practitioners who must make decisions on the basis of their own critical self-reflection about what and how to teach, then you are bound to plan along these lines.

*Pat* One problem we've had, I think, is that the medium is the message. If you're trying to say to teachers, 'The work that you're doing in the sense of your planning, your thinking, your management, your own classroom practice, deserves recognition and accreditation'—if you're managing that, then our INSET opportunities must grow on this experience and not on the tutor's experience. In our evaluation so far we've discovered that the way the field tutor system works very positively is that the field tutors are encouraging them to look very closely at their practice, more so than on a course in the traditional way.

*Steve* Yes, it is that the medium is the message, and that's why, if I'm operating as a field tutor, the overriding message that I have to say to the teachers is that they're not actually searching around for topics to study. Really they've got to look into their own practice. We want them looking inwards to what they're doing every day, and that again goes back to that original initiative. They are, in fact, dealing with lots of problems every day, at the moment more so than they ever have, I suppose, with implementing the National Curriculum, and so on.

*Pat* It's interesting, isn't it, as a field tutor, when you actually talk to the teachers involved, they seem to assume that there has to be some taught element before they can get on to their piece of research. That's why I think that the evaluation course mounted through the local university has gone well, because the teachers get three days' taught programme, and they feel very confident because academic university lecturers have delivered something to them, and they feel they can then get working from there. It's quite different, isn't it, really, on a one-to-one basis, to persuade them that they've got all the skills, they've got all the knowledge they need to go about their piece of action research.

*Jean* But you see that as the road to improving the quality of education in the classroom?

*Pat* Yes. I think that's our basic aim with this scheme. A lot of INSET that's delivered is really 'short stab' stuff—maybe six hours on one particular curriculum area, and I doubt that this experience affects practice. With an on-going programme like this, one looks at the change in classroom practice. It reflects the notion of the continuing professional development of teachers.

*Steve* That's right. I think that again shows strengths and weaknesses of types of in-service, doesn't it? Change is going to come about because teachers have greater confidence to examine what they're doing in depth and at the same time see that as a valuable exercise and have that message reinforced both by H.E. and by us. Because we're supporting it we get rid of this notion that undervalues the actual practice in the classroom, which is part of the problem. Part of helping teachers develop is that you do value their experience in the classroom, and you can't underrate that as part of their development. If you're continually giving the cues that you don't value the experience they're having in the classroom by looking always outwards—taking them out all the time—looking at other experiences all the time, detached from what they're doing in the classroom, you're continually reinforcing this notion of undervaluing the practice in the classroom. If you're going to show value for the practice in the classroom, which is what we feel is important, what goes on with children, what they do every day, and how that can be changed to improve it, then this has got to be the focus of what you're doing. That again is a most important message. That's why the scheme seems to be meeting a need which a lot of in-service doesn't.

*Pat* That's why we've converted a lot of our cash into advisory teachers, to work alongside the teacher in the classroom, and to enable the teachers

to feel much more confident and much more positive about the work they're doing.

*Steve* And in that respect, the role of the advisory support teacher may not be very different from the field tutor's role. If an advisory teacher sees himself as focusing on practice, then he is very much like the field tutor. And part of what he would want to be there for is to be promoting confidence in the teacher in looking at the development of practice. This is part of the whole philosophy of the school-based approach in the county, isn't it—linking training with follow-up supported by the advisory teacher which follows up the development in the classroom and throughout the school.

*Pat* That's one thing we need to talk about, is how to make this action research much more significant in the individual institution. It goes beyond classrooms, doesn't it?

*Steve* Inasmuch as you can do that, yes.

*Jean* Do you see that as part of your evolving programme?

*Pat* I see that part of my role as a field tutor is to initiate whole school involvement. Let's imagine someone in a school is researching, say, using IT in a particular way, and if they can, they facilitate other teachers in the school to work in a successful way. Now, if they just do a closed piece of research only to do with them and their own classroom, that's missing a golden opportunity. In some of our in-service courses, some of our projects, we do spend time on how to write for a particular audience, or how to present their ideas in that sort of positive role. That's a second stage we've got to get on to.

*Steve* I think if I understand it correctly, the development of a PBE—and action research more generally—has a gradation between looking at your own practice and then broadening it out to the extent to which that involves colleagues and involves the management of the school and so on. There is that development in the PBEs, and I think that's an important ingredient. It doesn't just come about. You've really got to structure it into what you're doing.

*Jean* Actually building up a community of enquirers.

*Steve* Yes. If you just take a single example: if you take developing a skill, say, in the IT way—there are definitely problems associated with that being taken on board by an individual teacher as a result of a piece of in-service and then going back into their classroom and practising that

and developing that—becoming more skilled themselves. There are definitely problems associated with that—but there are further problems associated with that individual actually passing that on to other colleagues and disseminating that with colleagues. That takes you into some quite significantly different problems which have to be systematically approached. In the past we just assumed that teachers would come out of the course, go back into school and somehow they would disseminate that to their colleagues; whereas it doesn't happen like that.

*Pat* We have trained staff development co-ordinators in schools now, and where they work effectively is where they reap the benefit of people doing various bits of in-service. They use documentation to do this. They say to people, 'You've been on this course, and now you need to think of what you're now doing in school. What do you need in terms of time—resources, help in school? Do you need to visit another school?' What we need to work on now is the individual teachers on our scheme who are working individually in the school, and who aren't being supported by an INSET co-ordinator in the school.

*Steve* So in terms of their development through their PBEs, it would be better if, in a later PBE, they were involved with a colleague or with groups of colleagues, as part of the structure which brings them into the whole set of problems which surrounds disseminating and working with colleagues. What I would like to see—and we've been trying to do this in all sorts of ways—is what we have on the evaluation course. It is structured in such a way that they have three days' taught course and five days' research based in their school. The notion there is that the project-based element is an activity in school. It will require that teacher to be talking to colleagues. They can't do it simply on their own. They've got to interact with everyone else.

*Pat* Part of the three days' training basically is who do you aim your report or your feedback at—do you actually ask for time in a governors' meeting to talk about it, or do you go to a senior management meeting, or do you talk to a year team? How can you make this piece of research active in changing things in a school?

*Steve* A number of the management courses that we've been running have been structured in such a way that after each session we have two or three weeks when the teacher is required to pursue a piece of project work which again involves them in going back into school and working with colleagues. That is a deliberate attempt to get into the school context. We



are trying to do that in all sorts of ways. This approach to action research is another way really; and this gives credit to that, because we regard it as important. It is as important an element of the staff development programme as the course itself. And perhaps it hasn't been sufficiently valued in the past as a part of the course. If you take the course requiring a year's secondment, often it didn't bring very much back to the school at all. It operated at really considerable expense, and, at the end of it, the individual obtained the credit for it in terms of a higher degree, but it wasn't really paying off very highly in terms of them going back into their institution to do things within the institution.

*Pat* Often they'd do research about the school they'd left and because they'd have the year out they'd have time to look through the *'Times Ed'* and apply for posts, and they wouldn't go back to that particular school. One particular example of us as co-ordinating this scheme—a positive thing—is that we've both been concerned about the isolation of some of the teachers on it. It's important that they know what other people are doing; so what we have been doing in the last couple of weeks is getting a list of all the first PBEs that will be circulated to all of them, so that they may well find that there are other groups that are looking at, say, special needs in a small group in a classroom, and will try and set up a facility whereby they can work together. So we are encouraging the field tutors to set up support groups with the teachers they are working with, with a view to networking at a wider level.

*Steve* I don't think it always can happen. I think it depends on where they are and how they're situated, and how the field tutor can operate and so on—but I think that's the beginning of networking—something perhaps which is very difficult to sustain although we can get tremendous spin-offs from it. I think we are hard pressed to compete with the sort of community provision that the university as an institution can provide to resident students. I think that's part of the difficulty with teachers anyway, isn't it? If you look at the isolation of some of the teachers in the county in terms of professional development, it's quite difficult to combat—again this is what we want this scheme to be partly overcoming, really—to provide the basis for networking.

# PART V I MODIFY MY IDEAS AND MY PRACTICE IN THE LIGHT OF THE EVALUATION

## Chapter 12

### Perspectives on Practice

We have seen that a critical reflection on practice may bring about significant transformations in individual and community practices, both on personal and professional levels. I now want to consider some implications for our educational systems if we (a) accept the need for a paradigm of on-going critical reflection on practice, that is, research-based approaches to teacher education, and (b) acknowledge the fact that, once we do fully accept this paradigm, we will critically set about changing our educational systems, that is, we will not only work intentionally to change our practices, but aim also intentionally to change ourselves.

I will look at some of the implications from the perspectives of personal, professional and political practices.

#### Personal

I have said throughout that teachers' conscious understanding should be placed at the heart of educational explanations. Without understanding, practice is meaningless.

This may seem a very bold statement to make. Let me clarify my meaning by drawing an analogy with another current vigorous debate: that is, the extent to which artificially intelligent machines may be said to think. Much of this debate centres on a definition of 'think'. It is proposed that there is 'weak AI', where a programme is designed to imitate, or replicate, the possible ways in which humans think; and 'strong AI', where the computer

itself is supposed to think (McCorduck, 1979; Newell, 1983). The argument goes that, if we are prepared to judge the level of human intelligence by the behaviour that the human exhibits, then we may do the same with a machine. The operations that the machine may perform will indicate the degree of 'thinking power' that the machine possesses, and its parity with human capabilities.

John Searle, among others, has attacked the 'strong view' of AI (Searle, 1980, cited in Gardner, 1985), by his 'Chinese Room' conundrum. Put very simply, Searle's compelling argument runs as follows.

Suppose that I, a native English speaker who does not know any Chinese, am locked away and given a large amount of Chinese writing. I am then given another batch, and rules in English on how to correlate the first batch with the second. I am systematically given more and more Chinese writing and English rules which will teach me to correlate one set of formal symbols with another set.

Over time, I am able to decipher the writing, and, indeed, to use it correctly as answers to given questions. Would I then be said to 'understand' Chinese? Searle thinks not, for I am here following specific rules to help me produce answers by 'manipulating uninterpreted formal symbols. As far as the Chinese is concerned, I simply behave like a computer. I perform computational operations on formally specific elements.' (Searle, 1980)

Let me refer again to the work of Michael Polanyi (see also Chapter 2). In my view, Polanyi's formulation of primary and secondary knowledge is an answer to the problem of whether machines (and persons) are 'thinking'. The comparison between AI and human intelligence may hold as long as we are talking about information processing; indeed, computers are often far superior to humans in terms of the speed and quantity of information they are able to process. Under no circumstances, however, can a machine know that it knows. No machine can be aware of its own knowledge, can have a consciousness that lets it critique its own thought. No machine possesses the tacit knowledge of its values, this tacit knowledge allowing it to generate the explicit knowledge of its information. Humans do.

My argument is intended to highlight the shaky premise that is the current foundation of the dominant teacher-education paradigm: that teacher education is a matter of information processing. So long as this situation persists, it is difficult to see how teachers may be encouraged to regard themselves as reflective practitioners. The basis of good professional practice, says Schön (1983), is that practitioners understand what they are doing, and use their cognitions intentionally to improve their practice. In

my view, traditional 'line management' approaches to professional development actively discourage teachers from taking on the responsibility of thinking for themselves.

Parts III and IV of this book have indicated the tremendous advantages to be gained by individuals who are given the personal freedom to think for themselves, to explore the novelty of their practice. It is not only a case of transforming practice: it is also a transformation of self. Part IV encapsulates in practice the arguments of Part II: a society is more than a group. It is a collection of individuals; and when each of those individuals is consciously aware of what he/she is doing, their individual practices actively transform the society which they constitute. A critical concentration on personal practice moves the individual beyond his/her own self; it actively serves as the catalyst whereby community practices are transformed.

## **Professional**

John Elliott (1989) has referenced the work of Maxwell (1984) in what he calls 'the philosophy of knowledge' and 'the philosophy of wisdom'. I shall draw on these ideas here.

Elliott criticises the form of educational research that regards theory as superior to practical actions. This form, he says, assumes that, 'the primary concern of the teacher educator should be to help the student or teacher utilize specialised knowledge, helping him or her to apply it to real educational problems and issues. There will always be a point...when some element of dissociation, from the practical topic in hand, is necessary for depth of understanding.' He has a problem with this view, which he places within the 'philosophy of knowledge', and leans rather towards 'the philosophy of wisdom'. Here, he surmises, the focus is that of *practical enquiry*, 'precisely the philosophical perspective which has informed the growth of educational action-research as a form of educational enquiry (see Elliott, 1987). Educational inquiry is not a separate process from the practice of education. It is a form of reflexive practice. Teaching can be construed as a form of educational research rather than its object.'

I will return now to the notion I aired in Chapter 2, that educational theory is not an object consisting of relations so much as a means of establishing relations. It seems to me that a philosophy of knowledge stresses the need for educational research to be an accessible structure, an 'end product', which may be defined in terms of specific significant features.

This view, critiqued so pungently by Elliott, allows the notions of education and educational research to be broken down into constituent disciplines, each with its own set of theories. The form in which this knowledge is communicated is through instruction. Educational research becomes a way of applying the theories in which the student teacher is instructed. On the other hand, a philosophy of wisdom stresses the value of practical knowledge, gained through first-hand experience of strategic action, and reflections on that action.

In Part III of this book we have seen how a transformation of professional practices may be generated by operating within the framework of a philosophy of wisdom. We have seen how professional teacher educators have deliberately and systematically transferred the responsibility of educational theorising from themselves to their student colleagues. This transference has not resulted in an abdication of responsibility; rather it has allowed teachers to be prepared to learn, rather than be prepared to be taught. From a paradigm of instruction, this community has moved to a paradigm of education. From regarding educational knowledge as resting with outsiders, the community has come to regard educational knowledge to be created by individual practitioners. The whole has become a community exercise, in the sense of individuals working together in each other's best interests. One example of where this approach is being developed is in the review and developmental process of Greendown School, Swindon, Wiltshire. In their report of this process, Andy Larter and Erica Holley (1990) make explicit how they support each other and colleagues in the school in their separate and joint enquiries.

Happily, this pattern of teacher education is being acknowledged more and more by LEAs and other advisory bodies. The movement needs to gather momentum, not only initiated by teacher educators, but by teachers themselves. This brings me to the third section—the politics that influence the dissemination of educational knowledge.

## Political

I have stated my belief throughout that education is not only something that teachers wish to bring about in their learners, but also something which they hope to bring about in themselves. To this end, I have said, education should not only be the aim of enquiries, but also be the process of the enquiry. Teachers need to be open to learning about themselves in their efforts to learn about others.

In this book I have pointed to certain efforts, both on a personal and professional plane, to effect this educational revolution. Yet this is only the beginning. The problem is how most effectively to persuade funding bodies and policy makers of the value of this approach.

I believe that the efficiency of our educational system today is judged in terms of the normative-analytic type: a certain percentage success rate within an identifiable skill. This framework is applied to children in schools—how many pass national examinations, for example; to teachers in institutions—how many pass institutionalised, standardised tests; and to teacher educators—how many get how many of their teachers through the examinations. I have said throughout that such a system is far from educational, and is not concerned with assessing the quality of education. What it is concerned with is measuring the amount of information-processing ability individuals have developed, and how efficient institutions are in producing operators capable of processing information.

Systems are kept going by dominant interest groups within the system. Systems are changed because groups holding alternative views become bolder in challenging the current state of the art. The challenge is given direction and strengthened by vocal members within the emergent group. Directors of the dominant system needs must heed the voice, for their existence depends on it; in democratic systems, politicians are elected by the people, and, if the people begin to think differently, politicians have to listen to the emergent opinions, or fall from popularity.

What is needed is people power, and, in terms of this book, teacher power. I will repeat that teachers are teachers at all levels—classroom, home, institution, academy: we are all teachers in our own way and in our own location. What is needed is for more and more people to stand up and speak their mind. This process of making explicit needs to go on in as many locations as possible, and through as many media: in schools and colleges, in professional discourse, in printed documents, on radio and TV, in the home. It is not enough to talk about education, although this is a first step; we also have to engage in educational talk—to engage in a dialogue of question and answer that will help us move our individual and collective understanding forward.

What is also needed is for such talk, such enquiry, to receive some form of public recognition or accreditation. A growing number of institutions and authorities are making research diplomas and other forms of accreditation available to teachers involved in classroom research. Current shrinking funding for academy-based research is throwing schools more and more on their own resources. This presents an opportunity for political

initiative. Long has there been pressure for a national scheme for institution-based teacher research, for the establishment of a General Teaching Council (Whitehead 1989). Such an apolitical council could set up and monitor accreditation, the standards of judgement for such accreditation to be agreed by peers. By this I mean that classroom excellence should be judged in terms of strategic action; that the focus of educational enquiry should be the development of personal insight that will generate such strategic action in an effort to improve the quality of education; and that the success of that action—that is, an identifiable improvement in the quality of education—should be validated through the intersubjective agreements of individuals who are sympathetic to the efforts of the enquiring practitioner.

All this may seem like a vision. If so, then I am a practical visionary. It can be done. But it cannot be done alone. It can be done by teachers who are prepared to make their views public. No revolution ever succeeded because the revolutionaries were quiet. Nor am I suggesting a noisy, combative process of effecting this revolution. I am requiring my fellow teachers to accept the dignity of the responsibility of their own professionalism. I require them to stand up with confidence and claim that they understand, and to be prepared to back up that claim with the justification of evidence. This is the way to effect the revolution, a revolution that is not about defining education in behavioural terms, but that is in itself educational for all the individuals in the community of enquirers.

## Chapter 13

# Education and the Society of Tomorrow

In this chapter I want to explore an idea that the way in which the values which move education forward may provide insights into the nature of social evolution.

I believe, like Habermas (1981), that the development of society is grounded in the collective understandings of individuals as they strive to enhance the quality of life for themselves and for each other. I do not believe that the development of society lies in individuals' practices being directed by 'knowing' others, any more than I believe that teachers' practices develop through being directed by external agents.

Let me review some ideas that I have put forward. The process of education, I have said, is the process of an individual's development as she engages strategically in the expansion of her own consciousness.

Education, I have said, is something that is implicit in the way that the individual conducts her life. While we recognise that we are, to a certain extent, restricted by role, social situation and status, it is possible for us constantly to engage in the process of living our values more fully in our practice. Some individuals find themselves in the role of learners, as children in classrooms or teachers on degree courses; some find themselves in the role of teachers, as in classrooms, or institutes of education. Some are in schools and in other institutions where the process of education is accelerated by the conscious and willing involvement of other committed individuals. Some are institution-unbound.

The values that move education forward are those of our own and others' best interest. Best interest involves the willingness by one to allow the other to be free to develop as and how her potential leads her, while she in turn still acts in the others' best interest.



This may seem like a circular argument, and indeed it is, for social intercourse is both reciprocal and recursive. Let me explain more fully.

I, an individual, am engaged in education—that is, improving the process of the development of an individual's rationality. So, in the first instance, I am concerned to develop this individual, myself.

I am a teacher. As such, my business is education, and my job is to educate. So I facilitate the process whereby another person engages in the process of developing herself.

My education (trying more fully to realise my values in my practice) is concerned with developing my ability to facilitate the development of another person (trying more fully to realise her values in her practice).

I can undertake this exercise on a one-to-one basis, or I can extend it to one-to-many.

My values are always those of the other's best interest, where I am concerned to develop the latent potential in each and every one of my clients. We live in a pluralist society, and I must ensure that each person maintains her integrity to develop according to her own individual potential—always with the provision that she will act in the other's best interest.

Let me now move forward from one-to-one, and develop a network, whereby I help someone to help someone else.

It may be said that I am fostering peer tutoring, and indeed I am; and I need now to examine the nature of the values that underpin collective practices such as teaching for peer tutoring.

Best interest implies generosity and care. I am prepared to care for you. In turn, your 'I' is prepared to care for mine—you act in my best interest. We aim to share, both values and intentions. We are prepared to love each other, in word and deed.

I may formalise this by saying that the development of collective awareness is based on individuals' own conscious awareness. The situation in which individuals share their awareness comes about through a process of intersubjective agreement, where individuals air their values with a view to sharing them with others as a potential way of life.

I believe that individuals' critical awareness is encouraged to emerge because of the practices of caring, wise others: the evolution of society may be said to be grounded in the morality of an educational epistemology of practice. It is not enough to aim for the realisation of our educational values as the objectives of our practices; it is essential to engage in the present realisation of our educational values in and through our practices.

In this way, I believe that what goes on in classrooms and workplaces may be seen as the living out of the educational values of the reflective practitioners who constitute those communities as they engage in their own educational development in an attempt to improve the quality of the process of education for the people they care about. The evolution of a caring rational society has its base in the evolutionary educational practices of self-reflexive practitioners.

I am drawing a parallel here between two systems, and I am suggesting that one system is embedded within the other. I am talking about the development of society and the professional development of teachers. It is my firm belief that the future rests in the hands of teachers, and that the title 'teacher' may be applied not only to those who have a formal teaching accreditation, but to anyone who is involved in the business of helping others to develop, provided they are prepared to develop themselves. 'Teacher' is not a licence to instruct; it is a licence that proclaims the status of a professional learner.

I am also suggesting that the nature of the professional development of teachers influences the nature of the development of society. Democratic forms of teacher education will encourage like forms of client education. Democratic forms of client education will go far towards establishing a moral epistemology of practice as the foundation of society, and as the basis of the on-going actions of that society.

This is not just so much wishful thinking. I came to these ideas through my own research. In my teaching in school I moved away from a situation in which I implemented a programme of care within the lesson, through conducting a programme of personal and social education with the children, towards a situation in which I cared enough to implement a programme of community sharing, through being critical of my own practices and encouraging the children to do the same (McNiff, 1989).

Education, and particularly teacher education, is not concerned with finding laws so much as meanings. Educational theory is not a static body of knowledge that constitutes a description of teachers' ideal practices so much as a creative story, always transforming, always expanding, that reflects the critical awareness that teachers develop of their work. Educational research is not a standard procedure whereby findings are put into practice, but the process of testing out tentative theories that provide a basis for the living out of values.

I think this view is becoming accepted today. There are many trends that show the shift away from E-enquiries to I-enquiries. What I am trying

to do in this book is give a firm philosophical and epistemological foundation to the educational revolution. I am saying that, as a profession, we need to make explicit the need for such a turn, and make equally explicit the processes and procedures involved. In making our knowledge explicit, we need to make an impassioned commitment to the pursuit of teachers' intellectual freedom, not just by talking about it, but by doing it.

# Appendix

Sometimes I cannot find the right words to express my ideas. This happened when I came to write Chapter 10. At the time, instead of struggling to articulate the thoughts in analytic form, I relaxed and wrote a poem.

I have decided to include the poem as an appendix, for two reasons:

- 1 I feel the poem speaks more directly for me. However, the form of poetry in a book like this might seem inappropriate, so it is not in the main text.
- 2 I believe teaching, like poetry, is an art form. I believe that teachers should be encouraged to express their intuitive thoughts in a diversity of ways, in order to help them more fully understand the workings of their own minds. Teachers' creativity needs to be nurtured throughout all aspects of the educational enterprise. Creative, non-transactional writing is just one mode to be explored in our efforts to help teachers realise the potential of their creative lives. Painting, dance, music are other aspects of the creative arts which, I feel, should be more widely available as part of programmes of professional and personal development.

The publication of this poem is the realisation of the values I am expressing. It is an important part of the book, not only in the sense that it communicates my inner thoughts, but also in the sense that the publication of this form of communication will strengthen the view of education as a generative enterprise, and the movement toward the development of the professional creativity of teachers.

# Stars

Tell me, teacher, tell me—  
Why am I here, within these barren walls?  
What do you know, that you ask me to learn?  
What do you care?

For I am a child of dreams,  
I am a child of light,  
Who lives and yearns for light.  
I was born from infinity into infinity;  
Mine is the power of the universe.

Tell me, teacher, tell me—  
Do you seek to trammel me with books,  
Bind up my knowledge into swaddling clothes?  
Do you hanker after trophies? Notch your pen,  
And stab red darts into the soul of my invention?

Tell me, teacher, tell me—  
For I fear your power, I fear your mighty power,  
Omnipotent, omniscient, teacher only knows.  
Where will you lead me? Will you force me in,  
In to your world of dark inverted stars?  
Will you take my life of dreams? Will you chain me down,  
Bind my mind to yours with countless facts,  
Each fact a nail, each nail a crucifixion?

Tell me, teacher, tell me,  
For I need to know, I need to know.

My life depends on my knowing.

Hush, my child, hush. Be still.  
Be brave. Be of good cheer.  
I cannot do you harm, for I know no harm to do.  
Let me walk with you, for I, too, am a traveller.  
I, too, am a harvester of life;  
I taste the sweetness of a thousand mornings.  
Let me find with you the jewels of the earth,  
And share with you the song of crystal springs,  
And seek the secrets of the magic mountains  
That we but glimpse within these concrete walls.

Have no fear. You are a child of light,  
As I am a child of light, and dreams, and laughter.  
Let us grow together, each on our separate path,  
Yet sharing the same journey.  
Let us play among the ageless stars,  
But let us play to win, and not to conquer.

Peace, my child, be still.  
I will give you courage. I am here.  
I will not fail you. I will help you grow,  
As you will me.  
I am your friend in need, as you are mine.  
Let us explore together. Let us taste the joy, and share,  
Each with the other, the loveliness of our new tomorrows.



Good morning, Mr Smith. I see you there  
With checklists out and big guns standing by.  
I see the heavy judgement suit you wear,  
The cold glint of appraisal in your eye.  
What will you do to me, when you see my class?  
Will you consult your book, and let me pass?

Have mercy, please, I cannot know it all.  
The more I try, the more there is to know.  
I've read your book. I've rallied to your call.  
I'm still quite new. I still have far to go.  
What will you do to me, when you see me teach?  
Should I assume success is out of reach?

I'm just a teacher, just a human being;  
I have my weaknesses, I have my strengths.  
Your trouble is, believing lies in seeing,  
Your observation lists go to great lengths.  
What will you do to me, when you see I'm worried?  
Will you ignore me, just because you're hurried?

Please help me, Mr Smith. I need a friend,  
Not an evaluator, not a judge.  
I'm trying to understand the means, the end.  
Will you accommodate me? Will you budge?  
What will you do to me, if I'm not like you?  
I wanted to be a teacher. Will I do?



Welcome, my friend, to the land of tomorrow.  
Look for the answers within your own mind.  
Drink of the cup of your joy and your sorrow.  
Seek, and be open to what you might find.  
You, more than I, are aware of your living—  
Yours for the asking, and yours for the giving.

See how you stand on the edge of decision,  
See how you act, and consider, and plan;  
See how your practice is honed to precision,  
See how you weigh what you can't and you can.  
You, more than I, may judge your own ability,  
How to turn chaos to easy stability.

You have the questions to some of my answers,  
I have the questions to some of your own.  
Consciously tuned dialectical dancers,  
We are the knowers of that which is known.  
Yours is the key to your own education.  
Open your mind to the power of creation.

\* \* \*



Hustle, bustle, quick, quick, quick!  
Get me the results! I need them!  
Here's the battery, take your pick!  
Mark the tests, don't stop to read them.

Time is money, every second,  
Get statistics, crunch the numbers.  
Dream-time's over, ready-reckoned,  
Wake the princess from her slumbers.

Gone the sweetness, gone the passion,  
In the matrix, in the grids.  
Measured thought is out of fashion—  
Only measurement of kids.

Where's commitment? Where's endeavour?  
Where's my soul? I had it once.  
Who is average? Who is clever?  
Who is an abandoned dunce?

Free me from this structured jungle!  
Loose my strictured intellect!  
Let me fumble, let me bungle,  
Think, creatively reflect.

Let me learn from each mistake;  
Let me turn the bad to good.  
Free me! Let me make the break!  
Let me lead the life I should.

Leave my spirit of enquiry unfettered.  
Leave my sense of awe and wonder free.  
I as individual cannot be bettered.  
Politician, let me be the person that I want to be.



This office is the centre of the Universe  
In terms of power, status, money and career.  
I keep a watchful eye upon the public purse,  
And say which economic course we ought to steer.  
I am a politician; I decide. The fact is,  
I alone dictate what you do in your practice.

Mine is the awesome task to tell you what to do;  
Yours is to implement in practice what I say.  
Do not think to question what I'm telling you.  
I do not question, either, in my loyal way.  
Let's work for standardised agreement, all of us,  
Obedient to the system without any fuss.

I am a father figure. I have a lovely child.  
I have a social conscience. I have been seen to try.  
Why do you rise against me, militant and wild,  
Reforming zealots, why the impassioned battle cry?

Are you the crazy people who would teach my son?  
Not likely. He's in private education, out of reach.  
I am well pleased with how the schools are being run;  
Thank you for your opinion. Now please get on and teach.

\* \* \*

Come dance with me among the dancing stars,  
Centre to glittering centre, ray to ray.  
Infinite power, infinite love is ours.  
Infinite time in timelessness. Come and play.

\* \* \*

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