Richard Pring

Philosophy of Education

Aims, Theory, Common Sense and Research

CONTINUUM STUDIES IN EDUCATION

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PHILOSOPHY OF EDUCATION

Aims, Theory, Common Sense and Research

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Part III Educational Research

To the loving memory of
Anna-Maria and Joseph Pring.

Introduction

When first appointed to the University of Oxford, I shared a conference platform at Wolfson College, and then dinner, with Lord Joseph, until recently the extremely influential and powerful Secretary of State for Education and Science. After the soup, he turned to me and asked if my name was Pring. This I found difficult to deny after nearly fifty years. The reason he gave for the subsequent reprimand was that I had been responsible for all the problems in our schools. I received this information with a mixture of horror and pride – horror, because I had done so much damage; pride, because, unknown to me, I really was having an impact. Asked to explain this, Keith Joseph asserted that it was me (and people like me) who had introduced teachers to the writings of the American philosopher, John Dewey

Dewey was seen as an evil influence – the guru of child-centred education which, then, was perceived to be responsible for the comparatively low standards in our schools. Indeed, during the early 1990s, there was a systematic attack on John Dewey in pamphlets from academic philosophy associated closely with the Conservative administration (see O'Hear, 1991), in books attacking the misleading theory espoused within university departments of educational studies (see Lawlor, 1990), and in the media. A freelance journalist from the *Daily Mail* visited me in Oxford to enquire whether we 'taught John Dewey'. Failing to draw me on that one, he then asked me if the prevailing philosophy within the department might be described as 'child-centred'. He finally went when I said that the last lecturer within the department who had a reputation for being child-centred was someone called Chris Woodhead – but Woodhead had left before I arrived. Then, I had a recorded BBC interview with Melanie Phillips, in which I was asked about my views on child-centredness in general and John Dewey in particular. It was as though there

was a concerted effort to tarnish university departments of education with a theoretical perspective which was seen, by powerful people in politics and in the media, to be both wrong and damaging.

The point of this reminiscence is twofold.

First, even those who accused university departments of 'too much theory' recognized the significance of theory in shaping how people see the world, understand events, evaluate outcomes, and prescribe aims and goals. Dewey was dangerous because those who took him seriously understood education in a different way. And that way was not welcome to those who thought differently and who wanted to change the educational processes and outcomes. People live in a world of ideas, and therefore the dominant ideas of their respective worlds will determine how they understand experience, value particular goals and assess achievement.

Second, although critical of theory, the critics themselves could not escape the adoption of a theoretical perspective – even if that went unrecognized. The primacy of subject-centred education, the espousal of teacher authority, the importance attached to certain modes of learning reflected a particular version of liberal education, excellently reflected in O'Hear's paper (1987), 'The Importance of Traditional Learning', which I published in the *British Journal of Educational Studies*, **35** (2). And in more recent years, the impatience with theory has, in the pursuit of efficiency and effectiveness, established its own, though unrecognized, theoretical position, viz. seeing education in 'business terms' with its own distinctive language of 'targets', 'inputs', 'outputs', 'performance indicators', 'efficiency gains' and 'audits'.

To recognize this is, one might say, the beginnings of 'doing' philosophy of education. One tries to make explicit the understandings, which underpin our often unreflective use of language, and to get at the meanings which are implicit in what we say and which shape our experience and our judgement. Only when they are made explicit are we then able to subject them to the critical scrutiny that is needed.

'Child-centredness', for example, had become a word of abuse. Lady Plowden was roundly attacked years after the publication of the Plowden Report (1967), for being responsible for the child-centred approached to primary education which her Report had advocated (see for example Walden's attack upon her in the *Sunday Telegraph*, 1991). But exactly what this term means was rarely examined. Such an examination requires a look at its use

within quite different educational traditions, each tradition providing a quite different perspective on human nature, the nature of learning and the aims of education. Indeed, by the end of the fish course, my conversation with Keith Joseph had entered an interesting phase, as he came to see the distinction between the so-called child-centredness of Dewey (dominated by a metaphor of social growth) and that of, say, Froebel or Pestalozzi, who adopted a distinctively biological metaphor. Furthermore, one needed to see Dewey in context – the context of an America whose public schools had to integrate children from many different ethnicities, religions and social backgrounds. That distinctive social context shaped what was to be understood by growing through the diverse experiences (the 'experiential continuum') in which the students were necessarily engaged. By the time we had reached dessert, I had received an invitation to continue the dialogue at the House of Lords.

The paper, 'Subject-Centred Versus Child-Centred Education – a False Dualism', which I gave to the Annual Conference of the Applied Philosophy Society in 1988, in a symposium shared with Anthony O'Hear, illustrates how that examination of what is meant within a particular tradition brings out the perennial concerns of philosophy. Dewey helps us to understand not only what is implicit in much practice but also the underlying theory of meaning and truth, the concept of being (and growing as) a person, the values which are seen to be worth pursuing. Furthermore, in locating positions, frequently held with conviction and passion, within this wider philosophical framework, one can also see their vulnerability – the insightful theory of meaning but accompanied by a questionable, pragmatic theory of truth; an attractive theory of value which, however, fails to accommodate certain moral objections.

The papers which are published here reflect these interrelated concerns: the importance of 'philosophical puzzling' about what too often is taken for granted by unreflective politicians, officials and professionals; the nature of that puzzling as one struggles to make sense of underlying understandings and beliefs; the relation of those understandings to the traditional problems in the philosophy of mind, epistemology, ethics and social philosophy; the exposure of questionable theoretical positions to critical scrutiny; the awareness of the 'bewitchment of intelligence' by language carelessly used.

Part II gives three papers which make this view of philosophy and theorizing more explicit. That requires my spelling out what

I mean by theory, but also my conviction that there is too much bad theory of the sort which assumes that theory has to be something different from the ordinary, commonsense way of seeing the world. Theory requires no arcane language. Indeed, it is partly the failure to recognize this which has given theoretical studies in education a bad name. Furthermore, it has created the problem of how to reconcile the language of the theorist with that of the teacher – raising questions about whether they are really talking about the same world. Hence, the paper on 'Common Sense and Education'. Too often, and wrongly, the language of ordinary usage, through which teachers and students make sense of experience, gives way to a more technical language of explanation, inaccessible to those outside the privileged theoretical circle – and, as I argue in 'The Language of Curriculum Analysis', a more impoverished account of educational reality than that to be found in the rich and subtle language of ordinary usage.

Part I, however, addresses the more substantial issues of the aims and purposes of education. It is a matter of surprise and concern that educational recommendations are made and policies pursued without significant reflection upon the aims and values of education. Such reflection is, of course, implicit in the commitment of so many teachers to the initiation of young people into what they believe to be worthwhile knowledge, understanding and activities – into a way of life, difficult to enter, which enriches them as human beings. But such reflection seems absent from government directives and recommendations. And one can see why. Thinking deeply about the aims of education is difficult. Furthermore, such thinking demonstrates lack of agreement in society on what values are worth pursuing – on what constitutes a worthwhile form of life. To think seriously about the aims of education (whether the thinker be teacher or student engaged with the teacher) is to confront some of the more intractable problems of ethics. But that can be no excuse for avoidance. To avoid them is itself to make a moral decision and to pursue a different form of life with its own implicit values and assumptions.

It is for that reason that the first paper, given in memory of the distinguished Harvard professor, Lawrence Kohlberg, to the American Association of Moral Education, puts the case for seeing 'education as a moral practice' – one in which these contentious ethical issues are at the heart of education, whether in the resources on which the teacher draws (in the arts, humanities, social and physical sciences) or whether in the interests of the students as they try to make sense of their respective worlds.

Indeed, as I argue, it is the role of the teacher to make connections between these different worlds – the *personal* world of the student and the *public* world of drama, literature, art, science and religion.

But that lack of reflection is shown, too, in the careless use of language or in the simple-minded oppositional use of key words, creating what Dewey referred to as 'false dualisms' which do not reflect the complexity of the world or the ordinary but rich way in which we have come to talk about it – the opposition so often assumed of 'academic' to 'vocational', the contrast sharply drawn between 'education' and 'training', the rigid distinction made between the 'theoretical' and the 'practical', the hostility created between qualitative and quantitative researchers. It is therefore the job of philosophy to remind the over-zealous theorist or politician, both of whom want to see things simply, of the complex way in which social reality is and has to be understood, and the network of interconnected concepts through which experience is sieved and made sense of.

However, at the same time, it is important to recognize that the language we employ and the concepts which that language embodies do not remain static. They are part of a changing framework of understanding which has to be appreciated within different traditions, thereby enabling us to understand usages against different assumptions about the nature of knowledge and the values to be pursued. 'Liberal education' is itself a 'contestable concept', and one person's understanding of it may well be not another's. Indeed, the Victor Cook lectures published here try to see the present rather impoverished discussions about liberal and vocational education against such a broader background of educational debate. At the centre of such a debate must be, but frequently isn't, an understanding (controversial though it is) of what it means to be and to grow as a person.

These papers have been written over a number of years. They refer to past events, institutions and government initiatives which may be quite unknown to some readers. Often it is as though modern educational thought and practice began in Britain with the introduction of the National Curriculum in 1988, what happened in the 1960s and 1970s being a sort of dark age which can be forgotten without loss. But that is nonsense. Those two decades saw, in both North America and the UK, a more vigorous debate about the aims and purposes of education and about the nature of the arts, sciences and humanities than we have witnessed since – a debate in which, in Britain, through Teachers' Centres and the Schools Council, teachers played a crucial role. And it is

interesting to see how many of the issues which troubled us thirty years ago remain to trouble us still. Therefore, references are made through endnotes to illuminate that historical context in which ideas developed and flourished.

Of much influence was Derek Morrell, for whom I 'devilled' as an Assistant Principal in the Ministry of Education in the 1960s when he was actively engaged in the establishment of the Schools Council. It was precisely because education is a contentious concept, reflecting lack of consensus in society over what constituted the values worth pursuing, that a forum was needed which would bring together what now would be referred to as the different 'stakeholders' to deliberate the aims of education as well as the ways through which those aims might be fulfilled. And the 'ends' of education were seen to be embodied in the 'means' – a failure to recognize which leads to the cruder forms of school effectiveness. Furthermore, that deliberation over the aims of education involved, as was so ably demonstrated in the US by the work of Jerome Bruner, the humanities and the social studies as the resources upon which the teacher should draw in helping the students to explore what it means to be human. There are no certainties to be handed down. There are, however, well-trodden paths along which the students might be enabled to travel.

The concerted criticism of educational theory in general and of child-centred theory in particular, which was prevalent in North America and Britain the 1980s and 1990s, has now shifted to educational research. Academics attack academics for the poor quality; government criticizes researchers for their irrelevance; qualitative researchers vie with quantitative (and vice versa) for ideological purity. But such criticism is by no means confined to the UK. As Goodlad argued

> Criticism of educational research and statements regarding its unworthiness are commonplace in the halls of power and commerce, in the public market place, and even among large numbers of educators who work in our schools. Indeed there is considerable advocacy for the elimination of the locus of most educational research – namely, schools, colleges and departments of education.
>
> (Berliner *et al.*, 1997: 13)

Of course there is poor research, here as in other areas of public life. And if you are a 'verificationist' you are sure to find proof of your favourite hypothesis. But philosophically that is an untenable position. The prevalence of much good research falsifies such generalizations.

However, rarely in either the criticism or the defence of educational research is there due recognition of the philosophical issues which lie at the heart of the debate. 'Evidence-based policy and practice' are demanded without analysis of what counts as evidence in different kinds of discourse. Certainty is sought where there is no option but to live in a world of uncertainties. Understanding is demanded without proper attention to the logical structure of that which is to be understood. Qualitative and quantitative methodologies are opposed to each other without recognition of how both can give an account of social reality. The 'postmodern embrace' subverts the very notions of 'truth', 'objectivity' and 'knowledge'. Above all, *educational* research rarely pays attention to what is distinctive about an *educational practice*. And thus rescue is attempted by the attachment of educational research, as a poor relation, to the social sciences. And, therefore, no doubt and deservedly, the same fate will befall university departments of education as befell the School of Education at the University of Chicago.

Part III aims to do a little to rescue the often acerbic debates about research from some of the untenable philosophical muddles which they have embraced.

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PART I

Aims, Values and Standards

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CHAPTER 1

Education as a moral practice

13th Lawrence Kohlberg Memorial Lecture, given at the 26th Annual Conference of the Association of Moral Education, University of Glasgow, July 2000.
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Introduction

It is 23 years since Lawrence Kohlberg addressed the conference at Leicester University, organized by MOSAIC (the Moral and Social Action Interdisciplinary Consortium). It had a profound influence on many who have regularly attended the conference ever since, and upon me in particular. The work of Kohlberg and his colleagues brought together a rigorous research agenda with a carefully thought out philosophical position within the area of moral development.[1] (see Kohlberg, 1981, 1983) Furthermore, it saw the close connection between the individual efforts of teachers (carefully informed by a research-based pedagogy) and the wider social context and ethos of the school. Hence, the research on, and the practice within, the 'Just Community School'. In an age where these connections are too frequently missing – where teachers are blamed for educational failings, as though the moral climate of school or system has no relevance or where 'effectiveness' is pursued in the absence of educational ideals or moral purposes – it is refreshing to recall an age when philosophy, psychology and sociology were brought together in an 'interdisciplinary colloquium' which the AME [the Association of Moral Education] so conscientiously tries to promote.

Of course, the Kohlberg enterprise has not been without its critics. But I take that as a compliment rather than as cause for rejection. Knowledge and understanding grow through criticism. What was articulated then (the stages of moral development, the identification of the 'logic' of the moral thinking which characterized the deliberations of young people at different ages, the painstaking attempts to find measurable indicators, the analysis of such key concepts as 'fairness' and 'universalizable principles', the location of moral development within a mainstream philosophical tradition,[2] the interlinking of rational deliberation with dispositions to appropriate action, the need to embody the values of individual morality into the morality of the school) remain the touchstones of further theorizing, research and practical development. All knowledge is provisional, but it is a sign of the strength of the foundation studies that they need constantly to be returned to for further inspiration.

It is within that spirit, therefore, that I write this lecture. The main theme is this. The aims and practice of moral education, as inspired by Kohlberg and his colleagues, should not be confined to a section of the curriculum – as though but one of the fragments which makes up the total mosaic. Rather are such aims and practice central to what I would regard as an 'educational practice'. Indeed, I shall argue that education itself is a moral practice, part of the 'humane studies' or humanities rather than the social sciences. Ideally the 'practice' should be in the hands of moral educators (who themselves should manifest the signs of moral development) rather than in the hands of managers, trainers, or 'deliverers' of a curriculum. The fact that increasingly (as I shall illustrate) the language of education is one of 'managing', 'training' and 'delivering' serves to emphazise the urgency of my thesis.

The danger of not recognizing this is twofold.

First, the actual practice of education (the rituals of daily schooling, the assemblies and classes, the rules and regulations, the purposes served, the sponsorships sought, the acceptance of outside pressures and instructions) becomes detached from a moral perspective. There remains no driving and unifying ideal, no coherent set of values from which to engage morally and critically with the powerful agencies which seek to *use* 'education' for their own material or political ends.

Second, and closely connected with the above point, a clear logical distinction is created between the ends of education and the means of achieving those ends. This is amply illustrated in so much literature about, and research into, the 'effective school'.

Severing educational from moral discourse results in a theory of effectiveness which ignores the question 'Effective for what?' But *moral* activities require no justification beyond themselves. 'Justice' may be adopted or carefully engineered, as the most effective way of winning support, but it no longer is (though no doubt resembling) the virtue of justice. 'Educational practice' brings together a wide range of activities which *embody* the values and the moral aims which they are intended to promote. The ends, as it were, are inseparable from the means of attaining them. The enhancement of 'rationality' as a distinctively human quality (or of justice and fairness) is embodied in the very procedures and subject matter of teaching.

In pursuing this thesis, I divide the paper into four section. I start with two examples of teaching. I then draw from these two examples the moral characteristics of the activity of teaching. The significance of this is then illustrated through the current impoverishment of the concept of teaching, and through the interest now being shown in citizenship education. Finally, by way of conclusion, I shall point to the need to preserve 'teaching as a moral practice'.

Two examples of teaching

In the ancient synagogue of Prague, now a museum to the victims of the Holocaust, there are some remarkable examples of poetry and of paintings of children aged 10 to 16, very few of whom were to survive. The children had been deported to Terezina, a garrison town about 50 kilometres from Prague. The conditions were appalling; and there was a daily coming and going of prisoners – to destinations which could only be guessed at.

A teacher, Fiedl Brandejs, somehow managed to keep these children together in a makeshift schoolroom. She was a brilliant art teacher and she insisted upon high standards of technique, perspective, use of colour even within these conditions. Art, as anything else, had its standards, and these had to be rigidly applied. Activities, after all, are characterized by the standards of truth, correctness, validity, appropriateness without which there would be no struggle to improve, no searching for the most precise account, no refinement of one's feelings as they are embodied in one's best endeavours.

These children saw what the adults did not see – butterflies outside the window, rainbows in the sky, green fields beyond the gates, merry-go-rounds on which children played, dinner tables for family and friends, autumn leaves blown by the wind. On the

other hand, their poetry gave a different picture – fear, sadness, unbelief at the inhumanity of their conditions.

The Butterfly

The last, the very last,
So richly, brightly, dazzlingly yellow.
Perhaps if the sun's tears would sing
against a white stone . . .

Such, such a yellow
Is carried lightly way up high.
It went away I'm sure because it wished
to kiss the world goodbye.

For seven weeks I've lived in here,
Penned up inside this ghetto
But I have found my people here.
The dandelions call to me
And the white chestnut candles in the court.
Only I never saw another butterfly.

That butterfly was the last one.
Butterflies don't live in here,
In the ghetto.

Pavel Friedmann, b. 7 January 1921; d. 29 September 1944

Nonetheless, the human spirit in one sense grew, not as a result of their poetry and painting, but through and in it. The arts were, to use Susan Langer's phrase, 'embodied meaning'. And that embodiment of meaning, that struggle to make sense was made possible by an inspired teacher. But in one sense that teacher was not seeing herself to be doing anything exceptional. She was, through the arts, enabling those young people to make sense, to refine their feelings, to embody the human emotions of hope and sadness, love and fear. She remained an *educator* to the end.

However, we must note one key feature of this educational task, namely, the transaction that took place between each of those children and herself who, as it were, matched the particular situation of the young people (their feelings and aspirations) to those cultural resources which she, the teacher, was able to make accessible. In the absence of language, one cannot make sense, and the arts are a kind of language which makes that possible (see Frankova and Povolna, 1993).

The second example is as follows. In England in the early 1970s, the school leaving age was raised from 15 to 16. Great was the anxiety among teachers and the community. Reluctant learners, disillusioned adolescents, alienated young people would hardly welcome yet more of what they had clearly failed at. One proposed solution was the provision of vocational courses – learning the skills of plumbing and decorating would (it was thought) be seen to be more relevant to their future and thus more motivating.

It was, however, the vision of Lawrence Stenhouse[3] and, indeed, of a very fine civil servant, Derek Morrell[4], that, properly taught, the humanities and the arts were as relevant to such young people, and could be perceived as such by them, as any vocational studies. The concerns of young people, as they seriously reflect and argue about the present and future are the very stuff of literature, drama, history and the arts – the use of violence, the prevalence of injustice and poverty, the relations between the sexes, the imposition of authority, the prevalence of racism, the fear of war, the consequences of jealousy or revenge or ambition, the pursuit of nationalism. Furthermore, the complex values which permeate the discussion and understanding of such issues divide society. There is little consensus. And it is a test of the maturity of a society or a social group that they can address such issues openly, with passion certainly but with a respect for those who have different views.

The Humanities Curriculum Project[3] sought to provide the means whereby the humanities, the arts and the social studies might provide the resources and the evidence upon which the young people might explore those matters of deep personal concern on which, however, there was often disagreement between them and their parents, friends and acquaintances. The essence of the curriculum lay in this exploration, seeking answers even when there were not certain conclusions, and testing out those tentative conclusions against evidence (see Stenhouse, 1983).

The classroom, therefore, was the arena in which the teachers were able to share their common humanity with the pupils and their common uncertainty in the face of significant and personal problems. Hence, the teacher's main task was to mediate to the young people the products of what others had said and achieved through the humanities, social studies and the arts – the different 'voices in the conversation of mankind'. Crucial to such mediation was the carefully structured discussion of issues in which differences of opinion would be respected, minority views

protected, rationality promoted, and discussants helped to defend their arguments in the light of evidence.

Central to the justification of the humanities and the arts is their relevance to the young people's understanding of their humanity and in particular of the values through which that humanity is defined. And that understanding leads to a recognition of the way in which values permeate not only the provisional conclusions reached but also the procedures through which they are always open to scrutiny, criticism, and further development.

In these two examples the teacher was helping the young people to make sense, to develop a serious and authentic response to the real, sometimes threatening and practical situations in which they found themselves. This 'making sense' is not something which can be 'imparted'; it requires deliberation, reflection, reconciliation of conflicting views, solutions to value conflicts. Nor is it the preserve of the academically able, for I am not talking of anything esoteric. The humanities, not skills training or vocational courses, are in this respect central to the education of all young people as they are seriously deliberating about decisions and issues which concern them deeply.

Teaching as a moral practice

To teach is to engage intentionally in those activities which bring about learning. Thus, I can teach by example, by instruction, by explaining, by structuring experience, by writing a suitable text. All sorts of activities can count as teaching. What they have in common is (a) the intention that learning occurs, (b) some connection between what the teacher says and does and that which the student is intended to learn, and (c) some connection between what the teachers says and does and the mental state of the learner. Thus, a person could not be said to be teaching if the lecture on nuclear physics made no connection with the level of understanding of the young audience or if the content of the lecture made no logical connection with the intended learning outcomes.

But this is a rather desiccated definition of a 'teaching act'. Teachers are members of a profession. As such they have been initiated into a social practice with its own principles of conduct and values. These are frequently implicit. But they embody a commitment to helping young people to learn those things which are judged to be worthwhile. Of course, views differ over what is worthwhile, or over what sort of books or activities is more worthwhile than others. Teaching, then, reflects the very moral

divisions of the wider society – and teachers, in making choices about the content of learning or about the ways of promoting learning, are inevitably caught up in the moral debate.

Although the social activity of teaching inevitably reflects the moral divisions within society, that activity is concerned with the learning of those concepts, ideas, principles, understandings which enables the young person to make sense of the world. There may be many other worthwhile things to do in life. But the values that teaching is centrally concerned with are those of understanding or making intelligible the experiences one has and of making accessible yet further understanding and experiences.

Such 'making sense' has, of course, many dimensions – those of the physical world made intelligible through the basic concepts of science, those of the social world, those of the aesthetic world, and those of the moral – the values and ideals through which certain actions and styles of life are evaluated and seen to be worthwhile.

Such valuing would take seriously the understandings, perceptions, valuings of others – whether through literature, drama, history, theology or whatever. These are embedded within the traditions we have inherited, constantly refined through criticism and new experiences. The profession of teaching is the custodian of such traditions – not in a clear or inert sense (not as archivists or librarians) but in the sense of critical engagement. The teacher, in helping the learner to make sense, both respects what is inherited and at the same time helps the learner to engage critically with such a tradition.

Jacob Neusmer in his book *Conservative, American and Jewish* (1993) expresses admirably the essential nature of those moral traditions and the custodial role of educators in relation to them.

> Civilization hangs suspended, from generation to generation, by the gossamer strand of memory. If only one cohort of mothers and fathers fails to convey to its children what it has learned from its parents, then the great chain of learning and wisdom snaps. If the guardians of human knowledge stumble only one time, in their fall collapses the whole edifice of knowledge and understanding. (quoted by Sacks, 1997: 173)

Teaching, therefore, is more than a set of specific actions in which a particular person is helped to learn this or that. It is an activity in which the teacher is sharing in a moral enterprise, namely, the initiation of (usually) young people into a worthwhile

way of seeing the world, of experiencing it, of relating to others in a more human and understanding way. In so doing, it is a transaction between the *impersonal* world of ideas embodied within particular texts and artefacts and the *personal* world of the young person as he or she struggles to make sense, searches for value, engages in discovery, finds ideals worth striving for, encounters ideas. That transaction between the impersonal and the personal is conducted through the interpersonal relation of teacher with learner. Whatever the temptation of government to manage learning (thinking 'in business terms'), there can be no avoidance of that transaction – of that essentially moral judgement of the teacher over what is worth learning and what are the worthwhile ways of pursuing it.

The impoverishment of teaching

How we see and understand the world depends on the concepts through which experience is organized. And those concepts are 'embodied' within the words, language and metaphors which we have inherited and use. Change that language and you change the way of conceiving things; you change the evaluations as well as the descriptions, the relationship which you enter into as well as goals which you are seeking.

In its attempts to transform the teaching profession in the United Kingdom into a more efficient and effective force, the government sought advice from Allen Odden whose book (with Kelly) *Paying Teachers for What They Know and Do* provides the basis for doing this. Odden and Kelly (1997) argue that the traditional way of paying and rewarding teachers is outdated. Management and compensation in other employments reflect much more what the employees can do and have achieved in terms of devolved responsibility and remuneration. Teaching should be rather like that: greater recognition, through an appropriate funding mechanism and through the devolving of management responsibility, of what teachers can do and have achieved. There is, in their view, an urgency to move in that direction because

> the tax-paying public, the business community, and policy-makers still pressure the education system to produce results and to link pay – even school finance structures, more broadly – to performance. (p. 11)

The pressure arises from the felt need to raise standards, to improve 'productivity' in relation to these standards, and to hold teachers accountable (both positively where they have succeeded

and negatively where they have failed) for their professional work. To enable this to happen, there needs to be much greater precision in what teachers are expected to achieve – productivity targets. But this in turn requires the setting of *reasonable* targets – the clear statement of what good teachers of subject X and level Y should be able to achieve. There should be professional development to enable teachers achieve these targets. To help with that, the British government imported further advice from the USA. This time the firm Hay/McBer was paid £4 million (or $6 million) to spell out what were the characteristics of a good teacher, thereby enabling appropriate teaching targets to be set (Hay/McBer, 2000).

Odden and Kelly's argument has been influential both within and outside the United States. Certainly it has had a profound effect upon the British government which, with the advice of Odden, is now swiftly introducing 'performance-related pay' to schools in England and Wales. The government Green Paper, *Teachers: Meeting the Challenge of Change* (DfEE, 1998), followed by a 'technical consultation document' on pay and performance management, spells out a new pay and reward structure, connected positively with a 'new vision of the profession', including professional development.

The performance-based management of education takes on a distinctive language through which to describe, assess and evaluate an 'educational practice' and thus the professional engagement within it. It draws upon new metaphors, and through these metaphors the concept of the profession of teaching changes. Teachers and 'their managers' perceive what they are doing differently. Hence, according to the civil servant responsible for implementing these changes, we must 'think in business terms' – and thus draw upon the language and practices of the business world. That means that we look at the changes for the improvement of standards as a 'quality circle' in which one defines the product, identifies the means for producing that product, empowers the deliverer, measures the quality, empowers the client, and develops partnership between the clients, the deliverers and the managers of the system such that there might be a continuous review of targets and means for achieving those targets. The 'product' is defined in terms of a detailed, outcomes-related curriculum. The 'process' (or 'means' for reaching the targets) is spelt out in terms of 'effectiveness' in the production of this 'product'. The changed management structures 'empower the deliverers' of the 'process' to satisfy the needs of the respective

'stakeholders'. The 'measurement of the quality' of the 'product' is provided through a detailed assessment (a 'testing against product specification'). 'The empowering of the clients' comes about through the creation of choice, which is achieved through the availability of public data on effectiveness and through competitiveness among the 'deliverers of the product' so that the clients can exercise choice. And 'partnerships' are created for 'stakeholders', 'deliverers' and 'clients' to work together in developing the 'effective processes' for producing the 'product' (which is generally defined by someone external to the 'process'). The management of the whole process is conducted by the cascading down from above of 'productivity targets'.

The language of education through which we are asked to 'think in business terms' – the language of inputs and outputs, of value-addedness, of performance indicators and audits, of products and productivity, of educational clients and curriculum deliverers – constitutes a new way of thinking about the relation of teacher and learner. It employs different metaphors, different ways of describing and evaluating educational activities. But, in so doing, it changes those activities into something else. It transforms the moral context in which education takes place and is judged successful or otherwise.

The effect of this new language is not a matter for empirical enquiry alone, for that which is to be enquired into has become a different thing. So mesmerized have we become with the importance of 'cost efficiency', 'value for money, 'productivity' and 'effectiveness' that we have failed to see that the very nature of the enterprise – of an 'educational practice' – has been redefined. Once the teacher 'delivers' someone else's curriculum with its precisely defined 'product', there is little room for that *transaction* in which the teacher, rooted in a particular cultural tradition, responds to the needs of the learner. When the learner becomes a 'client' or 'customer', lost is the traditional apprenticeship in which the students are initiated into the community of learners. When the 'product' is the measurable 'targets' on which 'performance' is 'audited', then little significance is attached to the 'struggle to make sense' which characterizes the learning of what is valuable.

Think, however, in terms of a different set of metaphors. Oakeshott (1962), in his essay, 'The voice of poetry in the conversation of mankind', speaks of education as the introduction of young people to a world of ideas which are embodied in the 'conversations between the generations of mankind'. Through that

introduction the young learner comes to learn and appreciate the voices of poetry, of philosophy, of history, of science. There is an engagement with ideas, a struggle to make sense, a search for value in what often appears dull and mundane, an excitement in intellectual and aesthetic discovery, an entry to a tradition of thinking and criticism. As in all good conversations (especially one where there is such an engagement with ideas and where the spirit of criticism prevails), one cannot define in advance what the end of that conversation or engagement will or should be. And, indeed, the end is but the starting point for further conversations.

Teaching, therefore, becomes a 'transaction' between the teacher and the learner in which the teacher, as in the case of Fiedl Brandejs, mediates the different voices of poetry and of art, to those who are seeking to take part. That conversation between the generations, embedded within literature, drama, oral traditions and narratives, artefacts, social practices, works of art, etc., speak to the needs and aspirations of the young people, but at different levels and in different ways. The art and skill of the teacher lie in making the connections between the *impersonal* world of what is bequeathed to us in libraries, etc. and the *personal* world of the young people, thereby creating an *interpersonal* world of informed and critical dialogue. The fruit of such efforts will be reflected in thoughts, beliefs and valuings which are diverse, unpredictable and sometimes slow to mature.

The problems are reflected in the latest attempts to bring citizenship onto the curriculum (Crick Report, 1998). At first glance, this seems eminently sensible. To live intelligently and responsibly in a democracy requires certain skills, qualities, attitudes and understandings. To participate in government requires an inclination to do so and some understanding of the issues. It requires, too, the ability to engage with other people, with whom one might disagree, in attempting to arrive at agreed solutions to problems. Citizenship would seem, therefore, to be the very sort of 'subject' which ought to be taught in schools. And so citizenship will soon be a compulsory part of the curriculum, and teachers are being trained specially to teach it.

According to Crick and Porter (1978), whose report provided the basis for this policy, 'citizenship' is 'the knowledge, skills and attitudes needed to make a man or woman informed about politics and able to participate in public life and groups of all kinds, both occupational and voluntary, and to recognise and tolerate diversities of political and social values'. The concepts which the

students of citizenship need to master are those of 'power', 'freedom', 'rights', 'justice' – what Crick earlier referred to as the key words of 'political literacy', without which one would simply not be able to understand the political life and context within which one lives. There needs also to be, of course, relevant knowledge about government, say. There are procedural skills, too, concerned with discussion and argument.

However, upon reflection, it would seem that the 'outcomes' of a citizenship course are the very skills, understandings and qualities which should arise from the study of the humanities and the social studies. In Bruner's (1966) 'Man: A Course of Study', learning was structured around three major questions: What makes us human? How did we become so? How might we become more so? Answers to these questions are, of course, the very stuff of the humanities, the social studies and the arts, as student and teacher explore together, albeit in the light of what others have said, what it is to be human. And such an exploration (seeking solutions to problems, listening to advice and even criticism, articulating one's views in the light of evidence) requires certain procedural skills and attitudes towards argument and evidence. It is difficult to disassociate such qualities and skills from what we pick out as an *educational* practice within the arts, humanities and social studies or from what we would recognize to be as a moral enterprise.

Picking out citizenship as a subject in its own right reflects a failure to recognize this. It is to accept a limited and impoverished understanding of teaching. It fails to see it as a 'practice' whereby young people (mainly) are introduced to the qualities and understandings which we have inherited (through literature, drama, history, the arts, etc.) and which prepare the next generation of young people to live a fully human life both as individuals and as citizens. It looks at the rest of the curriculum (now 'delivering targets' set by government) and finds that such a curriculum is not helping young people address the moral and social issues, questions of personal identity, matters of value on which society is divided but which need to be tackled. In other words, it fails to see that all teaching, when conceived as a moral practice concerned with values and conceptions of what it is to be human, necessarily is a preparation for citizenship broadly conceived.

Preserving teaching as a moral practice

Teaching can be very narrowly conceived as any intentional attempt to impart learning – the learning of specific skills or

particular facts. Not all teaching is, therefore, necessarily educational. But teachers are, generally speaking, members of a profession. They have a role within the wider society of helping young people to learn those things which society (whether the civil society or that of religions or social groups) believes to be worthwhile. The teaching of literature and the sciences, of drama and the arts, of history and social studies assume that these studies somehow enhance the quality of life. Such teaching draws upon the rich cultural resources with which they are familiar through their own education, training and experience and endeavours to make them accessible to the students for whom they are regarded as valuable.

In that sense there are two levels of narrative. There is the 'impersonal' level – the narratives within science or history or literature wherein ideas are preserved, developed, criticized within a public tradition. But there is the 'personal' level at which young people try to make sense of the world and the relationships around them and at which they find, or do not find, valuable forms of life to which they can give allegiance. This personal narrative is where young people seek to understand who and what they are, partly, of course, in relation to other people and to the wider society. Teaching, as illustrated in the work of Fiedl Brandejs or in the Humanities Curriculum Project or in Bruner's 'Man: A Course of Study', is where these two narratives are brought together, and it is the mark of the good and inspired teacher that this is enabled to happen. Teaching, then, enables that learning to take place in which the young person finds values in a range of activities, which are of human importance, and does so through being put in touch with what others have said, done and achieved. They become part of a wider learning community in which questions of value have been and continue to be explored. And they learn that there is no end to this exploration.

Teaching, therefore, requires the recognition that all young people, even though academically not very able, have the capacity for what can be described as 'moral seriousness': that is the capacity to think seriously about their relationships, about the kind of future (including jobs) they want to pursue, about loyalties and commitments. Both developing and supporting that sense of 'seriousness' seems to be a central task of the profession of teaching. It requires, on the one hand, roots within those traditions of thought and experience through which such questions have been posed and explored by others elsewhere. But it requires, too, a respect for the authentic voice and feelings of the young persons

as they struggle to make sense of their place within society. In making the connections between the two levels of narrative, the teacher provides the wider perspective, questions the (perhaps) rather limited vision of the student, points out other possibilities. In doing so, the teacher is, through the different elements within the overall curriculum, deliberating about the ends and purposes of education, not simply about the most effective means of attaining someone else's ends.

The danger is that, as we adopt a very different language of teaching – a language which for the sake of increased productivity and improved standards as conceived by those who think in business terms – this essentially moral purpose and character of teaching will be lost. The role of the humanities and the arts will be diminished. And teaching will become a purely technical matter of hitting targets.

During that brief period when I met Kohlberg at Harvard, I was advised to visit a school in outer Boston whose principal had been much influenced by Kohlberg's work. Moral education required a reappraisal of the moral practice of teaching, and this in turn required a reappraisal of the moral ethos of the school. The principal was reading poetry, which she had written at the age of 11 when parted from her mother and twin sister, to an attentive group of 17 year old high school students. Again, it was through poetry that they, seriously and attentively, were seeking to make sense of aspects of being human which too often can be swept on one side.

It was a large school, with therefore a sizeable intake of new teachers every year. To these teachers, the principal wrote the following letter.

> Dear Teacher,
> I am a survivor of a concentration camp. My eyes saw what no man should witness:
> Gas chambers built by learned engineers.
> Children poisoned by educated physicians.
> Infants killed by trained nurses.
> Women and babies shot and burned by high school and college graduates.
> So, I am suspicious of education.
> My request is: Help your students become human.
> Your efforts must never produce learned monsters, skilled psychopaths, educated Eichmans.
> Reading, writing, arithmetic are important only if they serve to make our children more human.

I wish to argue that what makes sense of the curriculum in educational terms is that it is the forum or the vehicle through which young people are enabled to explore seriously (in the light of evidence and argument) what it is to be human. And such an exploration has no end. That is why teaching should be regarded as a moral practice.

CHAPTER 2

Educating persons

Lecture given in the series 'Affirming the Comprehensive Ideal', University of Oxford Department of Educational Studies, 21 February 1996. Published in Pring, R. and Walford, G. (eds) *Affirming the Comprehensive Ideal*, London: Falmer, (1997) 83–96

Introduction

In the Foreword to a collection of essays entitled *Authority, Education and Emancipation* Lawrence Stenhouse wrote

> As a pupil at Manchester Grammar School I had been fortunate in my sixth form experience to meet three teachers . . . who had opened ideas to me in a way that emancipated me by enhancing my sense of my own powers. When I came to teach I discovered that, though the school system valued achievement narrowly defined, it did not for the most part value the emancipation of pupils through knowledge. Nor could I satisfactorily do within the system what had been done for me. (1983: i)

I start with the quotation from Stenhouse for three reasons. First, the comprehensive ideal is that all young people – irrespective of social class, economic circumstance, ethnic origin, intellectual power, geographic location – should be 'emancipated' by the enhancement of their own powers. Second, Stenhouse, through his innovative work within the humanities curriculum and under the aegis of the Schools Council[1], illustrated in a concrete way the kind of knowledge through which those powers

might be enhanced and emancipation achieved. Third, there was in these and similar innovations an idea of the educated person which challenged the view that a liberating education is possible only for some – those who have a certain level of intelligence or come from a culturally privileged background.

I shall try in this lecture to spell out that ideal. Comprehensive education must be about more than a common school which embraces pupils from a range of social classes and ability. It must, too, have built into it an idea of the educated person which accommodates, on the one hand, the best in that liberal tradition (which is often seen as the preserve of a privileged few), and, on the other, the quite different starting points and aspirations of young people.

In doing this I shall make the following points. First, I say something very generally about education. Second, I indicate how the idea of education has evolved in the pursuit of equality and community through a comprehensive system. Third, I return to the theme 'emancipation through knowledge', in particular the respect for that which is worth knowing and for the learner who is transformed through it. Fourth, I focus upon one aspect of such learning, namely, the achievement of 'moral seriousness' – the search, irrespective of class or religion or measured intelligence, for authenticity in a very complex social world. Finally, I return to the links between this and the community through which learning and sense of authenticity are to be achieved – an educated community of teachers and learners which I believe can be achieved only within a comprehensive system.

Education

'Emancipation' is a useful metaphor, for education is to be contrasted with the kind of enslavement associated with ignorance and with the lack of those mental powers, without which one is so easily duped and deceived. To be educated, therefore, is at least this – to be in possession of those understandings, knowledge, skills and dispositions whereby one makes sense of the world around one: the physical world to be understood through the sciences and mathematics, the social and political world within which one's life is too often shaped by others, the moral world of ideals and responsibilities, and the aesthetic world of beauty and style through which one finds pleasure and delight. But entry into those different worlds is more than a *making sense of* that which is inherited from others. It gives access to the ideas, and thus the tools, through which the learner's own distinctive personal development might actively take place.

This then is the main theme of my lecture – and the most important challenge for the comprehensive ideal: how might links be made between, on the one hand, the public meanings we have inherited (and which are embodied within the subjects of physics, mathematics, history and literature) and, on the other, the personal strivings of each and everyone to make sense of experience and to find his or her own identity within it? Put in other words, how might one render *personally* significant to each that which comes in an *impersonal* form to all – the inheritance of previous generations, refined by previous argument, scholarship and criticism, and to be found in textbooks and artefacts of various kinds? How can *all* young people – not just those who are privileged with superior intelligence (howsoever measured) or a culturally favourable background – find value in a culture which so often has been accessible to only the few?

Too much emphasis upon the first – the body of publicly acknowledged meanings as they are embodied in the various subjects – results in Harold Wilson's comprehensive ideal, namely, a 'grammar school education for all', which, inappropriate for many, resulted in so much alienation from formal education. On the other hand, too much emphasis upon *relevance* for the intellectually less able, or the culturally deprived, results in the two-track system envisaged by Crowther Report (1957), and endorsed by the Dearing Report (1994), namely, an academic education for some and a more useful, practical and vocational preparation for others – and, thus, selection *between* schools which specialize in either academic or vocational studies, or *within* school. Education, as Peters (1965) argued, is the initiation of young people into those worthwhile forms of knowledge which, when *not* narrowly conceived, illuminate experience in its different manifestations and forms. And that is relevant to all young people, not just a selected few.

The comprehensive ideal, therefore, is to extend to all young people the opportunity to participate seriously in the dialogue between the subjective concerns of each and the objective world of meanings which are accessible to all, albeit in different ways and no doubt at different levels, and which at their best illuminate those concerns. It is to recognize the importance in such a dialogue, not simply of the logical structure of the subject matter to be learnt, but also the variety of experience to be shared and made sense of. And to educate is to enable those young people to enter into that dialogue irrespective of measured intelligence or social background.

Equality and the evolution of the comprehensive ideal

The pursuit of equality in the opportunity to engage in that dialogue has been the hallmark of comprehensive education over the last 40 or so years. But egalitarians seem presently in retreat as equality is seen to be antithetical to freedom of choice and to the enhancement of the individual's powers which Stenhouse referred to.

We need however to think carefully about what is meant by equality. Certainly it should not be identified with strict egalitarianism – the treatment of every one in exactly the same way irrespective of individual or cultural differences. The struggle against inequality has rarely been motivated by a desire to treat everyone the same. Rather has it been directed, negatively, against specific injustices, and positively towards the *common* interests of individuals, not what keeps them apart. Let me deal with each of these in turn.

Negative principle of equality

The principle might be expressed thus in the words of one influential book:

> What we really demand, when we say that all men are equal is that none shall be held to have a claim to better treatment than another, in advance of good grounds being produced. (Benn and Peters, 1959)

Differences of treatment there might justifiably be, but the onus of proof lies with those who insist upon the differences. The early developments of the comprehensive system aimed at the removal of those differences of provision and treatment which could not be justified – which arose from factors *un*related to the educational purposes of schooling, such as wealth or class or status. It was the application of the same principle which, a generation earlier, had been the moral basis for a *differentiated* educational system. The achievement of secondary education for all, following the 1944 Education Act and the scholarship system, whereby anyone of *ability* could achieve a grammar school education, were steps in the direction of a more equal society in this sense. The appeal to equality was really an attempt to remove those discriminations that denied to deserving individuals access to an appropriate education. Intelligence, not wealth or social class, was the relevant base for educational opportunities, and thus measures of intelligence became the appropriate criteria for discriminating between children.

However, the very concerns for equality of opportunity, which gave rise to these social reforms, came to be directed at the reforms themselves – namely, the discrimination against individuals on grounds which became increasingly questionable. In making distinctions, two types of question need be asked. First, are these distinctions the relevant ones, given the overall purpose of the activity? Second, given that they are the right ones, are the measuring instruments, by which they are made, valid and reliable? If the distinctions are not relevant – if the distinction between two classes of learners, the intelligent and the unintelligent, or if the ways of selecting the learners for each category, are flawed, then there is unjust discrimination. People are not being treated equally. And, indeed, with a broader range of educational aims (concerned with more than abstract and theoretical pursuits), and with a more generous notion of intelligence as something (in the words of Sir Edward Boyle in the preface to the Plowden Report, 1967)) to be acquired through learning, distinctions made on the basis of fixed and inherited intelligence (rather than, say, on motivation or need or want) came to be questioned. Furthermore, evidence was accumulating (from Professor Vernon, 1955, and others) against the validity and reliability of intelligence tests. Therefore, what previously were regarded as relevant grounds for dividing children were now, because of changing views of education and of intelligence, no longer acceptable. In that way the comprehensive school was a response to a particular kind of appeal to equality – not treating people differently in matters that profoundly affect their life chances, unless good reasons can be given for doing so. The onus of proof lies on the shoulders of those who wish to discriminate and make different provision.

Such a principle of equality is procedural. It advances no positive reasons for the comprehensive school, only negative ones. It is saying that given the many different aims of education and given the margin of error exhibited in any attempt to select, then one has no grounds to make different provision.

Positive principle of equality

The more positive meaning of equality was referred to by Daunt (1975), at the onset of comprehensive education, in his book *Comprehensive Values*, namely, 'equality of respect'. That is, whatever the differences in intelligence or aptitude or social class, each learner should be *respected* equally. Each is, and thus should be treated as, equally important.

Hence, the argument went, the respect given to individuals reflects the respect given to the groups to which they belong –

and thus the respect given to the institutions which particular groups attend. Therefore, it was most important that the three types of school to which children were sent at 11+ should, as the Norwood Report (1943) argued, have 'parity of esteem' – otherwise those attending them would not receive equality of respect.

However, it was shown by Banks (1955) and others that no such parity of esteem was achieved. And this inequality of esteem for different institutions was reflected in the inequality of respect for persons in them (to be a grammar school boy was more respectable than to be a secondary modern boy) and the consequent lowering of self-respect among those who attended the less respectable institutions. It was as though 'their common humanity' was accorded less importance in ascription of respect than the quality of intelligence that divided them.

It is in this sense that Professor Halsey, in his 1978 Reith lectures, addressed himself to the neglected 'social principle of fraternity' as a solution to growing social conflict. Fraternity does not entail intimate and loving feelings for others. The relevant attitude is that of respect based upon the recognition, firstly, of one's partial dependence on others and, secondly, of others as persons. Such respect would be fostered by an increased awareness of what was shared by way of human feelings, needs, aspirations, and by the gradual extension of those areas of agreed understanding. A schooling, which divided people physically, would militate against the ideal of fraternity, prevent the face-to-face contact that is a necessary condition of mutual respect, remove the common learning experience that would be a basis for shared understanding.

Three things should be noted about society as it is depicted here. First, it is rooted in an idea of mutual respect and cooperation. Second, it sees a necessary, though by no means a sufficient, condition of this to be the development of a face-to-face relationship. Third, it is increased by an increase of the area of shared understandings and experience.

This aspiration is referred to by Professor Halsey in his sixth lecture as follows:

> We have still to provide a common experience of citizenship in childhood and old age, in work and play, and in health and sickness. We have still in short to develop a common culture to replace the divided culture of class and status. (Halsey, 1978)

In this he echoed the words of Tawney (1938), so influential in the comprehensive movement, that, in addition to getting rid of gross inequalities of wealth,

> What a community requires, as the word itself suggests, is a common culture, because, without it, it is not a community at all.

Learning

There is an obvious objection to what has been said so far. It is argued that the pursuit of equality in schools has caused a decline in standards in the work of the more able pupils – especially in mathematics and the sciences, but also in literacy and the modern languages. There are many international comparisons which seem to demonstrate that the products of the comprehensive system do not do as well as their counterparts in the more selective systems elsewhere. One pursues equality at the expense of individual quality.

These criticisms should not be dismissed lightly. But they require closer examination of what we mean by standards and how they are to be defined. Standards are benchmarks; they are the criteria whereby one assesses or evaluates the quality of a particular activity or process. Strictly speaking there are as many standards as there are activities and there are as many activities as there are intentions and values which drive people on. There are standards peculiar to mathematics, to philosophical argument, to writing sonnets, to giving lectures, to formulating research proposals. Moreover, just as our values and purposes change, so do standards whereby we assess those activities. As mathematics educators reflect on the nature and educational value of mathematical education (practical problem-solving rather than theoretical insight) or as modern linguists agree that the importance of studying languages is to converse with the natives rather than to read their literature, so do the standards whereby we judge mathematical or language performance change. Performance against standards does not go up or down; standards simply change, because what we think to be important changes.

This provides a key to understanding events which have happened in the last few years. The Technical and Vocational Education Initiative, or TVEI[2], was important, not, as is often supposed, in providing a different and more relevant curriculum for the less able, but in challenging the standards by which young people should be judged. It was a challenge to our educational

aims and values. In assessing the cooperative contribution of students to group or team activities, or in promoting social and economic awareness, or in encouraging technological problem-solving, or in respecting community service sensitively engaged in, so it implicitly declared that standards previously dominant are not as relevant as often supposed to what ought to be valued educationally. Hence, the quite angry discussions at the time with examining boards which wished to apply traditional standards to non-traditional activities.

That is important, because the comprehensive system must be judged against the standards within the comprehensive ideal. And these might be different in important respects from what had prevailed before. But there are limits to how far one might innovate or change the standards according to which educational activities might be judged. Mathematical problem-solving or scientific enquiry or historical investigation takes place within a particular discipline of thinking which has a logical structure with its own distinctive concepts or ideas, its own distinctive way of testing the truth of what is said, its own distinctive way of explaining things or finding things out. Such logical structures of that which is to be learnt may evolve over time – there are, for instance, radical changes in the disciplines of social and psychological sciences as new theories evolve and supersede each other, but such innovations tend to emerge from within the community of scholars and researchers, albeit with reference to the wider social purposes.

This respect for the logical structure of the separate disciplines of knowledge has frequently been seen as an argument for a differentiated schooling – one kind for those who can understand the logical structures of the subject matter, and another for those who require a more practical curriculum. However, this, as Jerome Bruner (1960) so effectively demonstrated, shows a complete misunderstanding of the connection between the theoretical and the practical, and between the logical structure of that which is to be learnt and the structure of thinking which the young people bring with them to school. The curriculum should do two things: first, identify those key ideas – those principles and concepts without which (to use Stenhouse's words) one cannot be emancipated through knowledge; and, second, represent those to the learner in a manner which is comprehensible. Such a manner – such a mode of representation as Bruner calls it – may often be a very practical understanding, as when the young child implicitly grasps the principles of mechanics through successful manipulation

of the see-saw or implicitly grasps certain theological understandings through practical participation in a worshipping community. The curriculum should be a constant return to these central ideas whether expressed practically or through images or through the symbolic system of more theoretical studies.

Central to one's personal development through education must be a grasp of those key ideas through which is made possible an understanding of what it is to be human. Therefore, Bruner's course 'Man: A Course of Study' focused on three major questions: (1) What is human about man? (2) How did he become so? (3) How can he become more so? (Bruner, 1966) The course was structured around five distinctive ideas of being human – prolonged child-rearing, the use of tools, language acquizition and use, social organization and myth-making. These key ideas could be explored at different levels of understanding, drawing upon both personal experience, systematic enquiry and theoretical studies in anthropology and other academic disciplines. In keeping with the importance of active enquiry and shared exploration, the course devised a series of games, simulation exercises and activities, so that the young learners – from diverse backgrounds and measured intelligence – could work together and make their separate contributions to an ever tentative understanding of what it was that made them human.

It was within a similar vein that Lawrence Stenhouse sought, within the terms of the Schools Council (1965) Working Paper No. 2, to tackle the problems arising from the raising of the school-leaving age. *Remember* that, in raising the age of compulsory schooling to 16, there was much fear of what the consequences would be – a large number of disillusioned young people, resistant to learning, incapable of the literary and scientific studies with which education was associated, alienated from the educational purposes of the school system.

The problem to be addressed was this. How can we address the aspiration of secondary education for *all*, irrespective of age, ability and aptitude, where we are deeply rooted in a tradition of liberal education which seems accessible only to an academic few? How could literature, the arts, history, science, be seen to be relevant to those who, often alienated young people, were to be satisfied only with 'doing' and 'making' rather than with 'thinking', with vocational preparation rather than with the disinterested pursuit of the truth, with the practical rather than with the academic?

However, the Working Paper referred to, whose main author was that visionary Civil Servant, Derek Morrell, far from seeing the solution to these anxieties to lie in a vocational alternative, stated not just the central importance of the humanities to the education of all, but also the essential nature of an education *in* the humanities – contrasting that essence not only with the narrowness of vocational training but with the too often narrow and impoverished treatment of the humanities within an academic tradition.

The humanities, to quote that Working Paper, was the area of the curriculum in which teachers emphasized their common humanity with the pupils and their common uncertainty in the face of significant and personal problems. But they did so in the light of what others had said through dance, art, literature, poetry, myth or history. And they examined these together – the *objective* grounds for *intersubjective* exploration leading to *personal* resolution. The humanities – the poetry, the novels, the dance, the media presentation, the arts, the historical accounts, the social interpretation, the theological analysis – were, as it were, the text or the objects around and through which emerged the transaction between teacher and learner, and between the different learners from different backgrounds, as they explored those issues of supreme personal and subjective importance: sexual relations, social justice, use of violence, respect for authority, racism, and so on. The humanities could and should be seen as the public recordings of the best of conversations about those very matters which concern all young people and thus the resources upon which the learner might draw. In that way the curriculum was a making personal to each and everyone that which comes, and is too often transmitted, in an impersonal form.

There is not the opportunity here to enter into the details of these attempts to render into programmes of learning the moral principles which lay at the basis of the comprehensive ideal. But they might be summarized as follows:

- they involve the exploration of values in the concrete situation of practical living
- they require a shift from a dependence upon the authority of the teacher to a dependence upon the authority of evidence and reason
- they therefore require the promotion of certain procedural values which enhance the capacity to reason, reflect and deliberate

- they respect the experiences each learner brings to the exploration of these human situations – the value of which experiences relates more to the diversity of backgrounds and seriousness of reflection than it does to measured intelligence
- they attach importance to the dynamics of the group through which the exploration takes place, wider experience revealed, evidence pointed to, ideas tested out, further enquiries sponsored
- they define the role of the teacher to be that of promoting the procedural skills and virtues and that of mediating the various cultural resources upon which that exploration should draw, as the learners come to understand themselves and the social situation in which they live
- such moral principles, therefore, insist upon academic integrity by referring personal enquiry to the key ideas drawn from recognized intellectual disciplines within the humanities and social sciences.

I have for some years been interested in the curriculum practice of certain American schools which are part of the Coalition of Essential Schools – in particular one called the Urban Academy in New York. Recently I spent three days in the school observing and working with teachers and students alike. Let me describe what I saw.

The school building is vast, indeed built in 1927 to house 2,500 girls. In the 1960s it went mixed, and in recent years it was seen as a 'failing school', the solution to which was to phase it out, all pupils being transferred elsewhere.

The building has now been split into six high schools, each independent of each other – together with an infant and toddler club and a health clinic. None of the six schools must have more than 300 students. The Urban Academy is one of these with 110 students aged 14 to 20 and 9 teachers. There is no differentiation in terms of ability or age or background. The school functions as a community with group exploration and individual enquiry at the heart of the learning process. Progress is closely monitored, written assignments frequent and structured, personal guidance abundant. As a result of school-based research into some apathy for reading, each day now starts with mixed reading groups which include the teachers as together they come to understand and discuss arange of novels carefully selected – Salinger, Márquez, Austen (Jane), Bellow, Updike, Toni Morrison, Lawrence. Each

semester begins with a school project – this semester on 'Children Growing Up', in which the school divides itself into various task-oriented groups enquiring into parenting, street crime, employment possibilities, etc. Systematic enquiry, written assignments, reports of personal experience, reference to published evidence, cross-examination of expert witnesses – all enter into the small group (and then larger group) deliberations which ensue. Links with external agencies and institutions – for example, with the local university – ensure that particular talent (in mathematics, say, or in the sciences) is never neglected as credit is obtained elsewhere and transferred.

What one observed was a community – embracing every conceivable ethnic and social class, religious grouping and measured intelligence – working together with a level of 'moral seriousness' that is rarely seen. Straightforward performance indicators, such as a 90 per cent attendance rate up to the achievement of High School Diploma, a decline in teenage pregnancies, the successful removal of electronic screening devices from the entrance, regular course work completed, would point to the success. And the secret would seem to be the fostering of a community, in which the continuum of experience between home and society, on the one hand, and formal learning, on the other, is promoted, respect for diversity of background and experience is cherished rather than regretted, enquiry is preferred (but not exclusively) to instruction, and the social life of the group (carefully nurtured) becomes the focus of each person's striving 'to make sense of' that which is thought important – for, as Stenhouse (1975) argued, 'the fundamental process of learning by taking our part in the social life of groups remains the most potent influence in our lives'.

Moral seriousness

Several ideas are, I hope, coming together as we seek to make sense of the comprehensive ideal without in any way sacrificing the very important concern for academic standards. Those ideas relate to the essentially moral purpose of education: helping each one to become more fully a person and to realize what is essentially human about themselves and others; the inseparable link between such personal development and membership of a community which respects each person; respect for the continuum of experiences between home and formal schooling; attaching central importance to social interaction between student and student, and student and teacher; drawing upon the intellectual resources

of the academic disciplines (the public meanings); and recognition of each person's authentic response to those explorations.

Central, therefore, to the qualities which such a schooling is intending to foster is what one might call 'moral seriousness'.

I am talking about the young person who stops to think about how he should live his life, who commits him or herself to certain people or causes, who refuses to treat others as mere pawns in his or her game, who takes seriously any criticism of standards in behaviour or work, who finds challenging the exploration of what is right or worthwhile in literature or art or science, who cares about the environment and other social and political issues, who does not run away from the deeper questions of meaning and value and purpose. Such a moral perspective is not confined to the most able or the most privileged. And it must not be confused with cleverness in argument. It is a matter of *seriousness* in thinking about what is worth living for, what is worth pursuing in the arts or the leisure time, what relationships are worth entering into, what kinds of activities should be avoided, what obligations are to be considered sacred. What is distinctive of being a person is this capacity for being serious about life, a capacity requiring the application of intelligence, of moral judgement, of reflection and of sensitivity, which is often fostered by teachers even when much in the commercial environment militates against it.

Such an emphasis is not foreign to teachers. As I have shown, there have been, apart from the individual efforts of teachers, the exciting innovations in geography, history, social studies and the humanities where teachers attempted to mediate the best within these different humane and intellectual traditions to the real and important questions that young people were asking.

They did so in the light of what others had said through dance, art, literature, poetry, myth or history. The humanities above all, when properly taught, provide the objective base for the transaction between teacher and learner, and between the different learners, as they explore those issues of supreme personal importance: sexual relations, social justice, the use of violence, racism, and so on.

Education is this constant interchange between what Charles Taylor (1992) refers to as the 'horizons of significance' of the learner, on the one hand, and the *public* meanings which are mediated by the teacher, on the other. And the comprehensive ideal is where that interaction is recognized and the seriousness of young people itself taken seriously. And such serious deliberation is not confined to the academically able.

Community

The comprehensive ideal has too often been associated with schools identified as comprehensive because they are not selective – either in ability or in social class. The hope was that a system of such schools would break down social barriers and open up educational opportunities to those who would otherwise have been denied them. The worry has remained, however, that, however laudable, these aims have not been achieved – greater equality (however defined) has not been achieved and many, far from grabbing the opportunities opened up to them, have become alienated from what for many became a grammar school for all.

Far, however, from abandoning the ideal, I believe that we should look a little more deeply at the moral purposes which lay behind it and the educational aims which it embodied. In this concluding section I want to complete the picture by reference to the sort of community within which the educational purposes and practices should be carried out.

I pointed out at the very beginning how the ideal of equality merged gradually with that of 'fraternity' or community, in which the equal respect for everyone required, too, a respect for what they are and for the social or religious or ethnic group from which they come – a point developed by Charles Taylor (1994) in what he refers to as 'the politics of recognition'.

Such a community will be manifest at different levels at the level of the classroom, where the group reflects upon the variety of experience of its members as each is encouraged to explore and to find value in what is worthwhile; at the level of the school, where teachers and students work together for common goals; and at the level of the political community, which recognizes that no one (certainly not politicians or civil servants) has the infallible expertise to say what is the life worth living.

I want briefly to say something of these last two levels – those of the school and of the wider political community.

The difficulty lies in recognizing, at one and the same time, education as an initiation into worthwhile activity while acknowledging the lack of consensus over what is of most worth. There is not, nor ever will there be, consensus over what literature is most worth reading or what period (and location) of history is most worth studying or which subjects most worth struggling with. But although consensus will never be achieved, argument is worth pursuing; teachers are as concerned with deliberating about the ends of education as they are about the means – indeed, 'means' and 'ends' are logically, not just contingently, related. Furthermore,

such disputed questions of value cannot be hidden from the students – as they seriously (and using the skills fostered by the schools) contend with the views of the teachers or with each other over the exercise of authority, the use of violence to pursue worthwhile ends, the control of the environment, the nurturing of parenting skills, the censureship of literature, or the promotion of certain art. In the absence of moral expertise, the exploration of what it is to be human is to be shared not only between student and student but also between student and teacher – at least if each student, in his or her exploration of value, is to be taken seriously.

For that reason, the staff work room of the Urban Academy was also the walk-through room of the students – the symbol of a community seriously engaged in the same enterprise.

The political level, too, has to recognize the joint responsibility for ensuring a system of education which includes *everyone*, and respects everyone, in the exploration of the values which enter into the ever-evolving educational ideal – for no one can say they know the answer for certain.

Indeed, it was for that reason that, in the 1960s, the Schools Council was established, bringing together teachers and dons, politicians and parents, civil servants and business people to find ways forward against a background of uncertainty. Morrell, who was the author of the Working Paper, 'Raising the School Leaving Age', and chief architect of the Council, pointed to the massive changes – economic, social and moral – which create a crisis of values. Old assumptions are challenged about the kind of knowledge which is worth teaching, the literature worth reading, the values worth pursuing.

And thus, he states,

> our educational crisis is fundamentally part of a general crisis of values. If education, and by implication the curriculum, is not thought of as contributing to a solution of this crisis of values, it can all too easily become an agent of the worst sort of conservatism. (Morrell, 1966: 32)

His answer lay in what he described as a 'cooperative attack' on the problems to be solved.

> Jointly, we need to define the characteristics of change. . . . Jointly, we need to sponsor the research and development work necessary to respond to change. Jointly, we must evaluate the results of such work. . . . Jointly, we need to recognise that freedom and order can no longer be reconciled

> through implicit acceptance of a broadly ranging and essentially static consensus on educational aims and methods. (ibid.: 33)

To do that the community

> must also be locally organised bringing together teachers, dons, administrators and others for the study of common problems, some local and others national in their implications. (ibid.: 33)

That striving for worthwhile goals, which are to be shared with a wider community by reason of our common humanity, and yet which are transformed in that very striving, will always remain the paradox of education but the ideal of comprehensive schools.

CHAPTER 3

The aim of education: liberal or vocational?

The Victor Cook Memorial Lecture, given at the Universities of St Andrews, Aberdeen and Cambridge, 1993. Published in Haldane, J. (ed) *Education, Values and the Human World*, Centre for Philosophy and Public Affairs, University of St Andrews, (1994) 1–18

Introduction

Edward Copleston, Provost of Oriel College, wrote in 1810 a reply to the calumnies of the *Edinburgh Review* which had been directed against the University of Oxford. The *Review* had argued that the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge should reform an outdated system and prepare their students more effectively for the pressures and problems of the nineteenth century. In his reply, the Provost of Oriel argued that the

> purpose of the University is to counter the effects upon the individual of gross materialism. . . . not to train directly for any specific profession but rather to develop an elevated tone and flexible habit of mind which would enable them to carry out with zeal and efficiency all the offices, both private and public, of peace and war. (Slee, 1986: 11)

It is comforting to discover that there is some stability in a world of rapid change, if only in the sense that the controversies, which divided people in the nineteenth century, continue to do so today. And the theme of these two lectures is the same as that

which was raised by the *Edinburgh Review*, namely, the conflict or the balance between a liberal education, on the one hand, and vocational preparation on the other. This debate was by no means unknown to the nineteenth century as Copleston's words would indicate. In his inaugural address in 1867, when installed as Rector of Aberdeen University, John Stuart Mill argued that universities should not be places of professional education or vocational preparation as

> their object is not to make skilful lawyers, or physicians, or engineers, but capable and cultivated human beings. (Mill, 1867: 133)

Universities, instead, were places where knowledge was pursued, where the intelligence was perfected, where that culture was acquired which

> each generation purposely gives to those who are to be its successors, in order to qualify them for at least keeping up, and if possible for raising, the level of improvement which has been attained. (ibid.: 133)

Education was about 'improvement' not about being useful. But it was also assumed that the educated and the cultivated person would *thereby* be useful. Mill argued that

> men are men before they are lawyers and if you make them capable and sensible men, they will make themselves capable and sensible lawyers . . . what professional men should carry away with them from an University is not professional knowledge, but that which should direct the use of their professional knowledge, and bring the light of general culture to illuminate the technicalities of a special pursuit. (ibid.: 134)

Mill, in this respect, reflected a tradition of liberal education which had been enunciated in 1810 by Copleston in his defence of the *status quo* at the University of Oxford and, in 1852, in the writings of another Oriel man, John Henry Newman, in *The Idea of a New University.* Furthermore, it is a tradition which is reflected in the first two of the Victor Cook lectures. Both Lord Quinton (1994) and Professor O'Hear (1994) would subscribe to the view that the values to be nurtured at university, and indeed through school, are primarily concerned with the intellectual excellence and with acquaintance with 'the best that has been thought and said' – or, in the adaptation of Lord Quinton, with that which 'has been best thought and said'. Neither quite argued that the

purpose of education was to 'counter the effects of gross materialism' or 'to develop an elevated tone'. But the aim of education was certainly that which was objectively good in the cultivation of the mind and in the development of virtue. Both would share with Mill the suspicion of universities as places for professional preparation; and one, Professor O'Hear (1991: 16–19 and 46), would clearly like to see university-based teacher training disappear altogether. The positive messages of those lectures (namely, that education is primarily concerned with the pursuit of excellence, particularly intellectual excellence as that is found within a selective tradition) is reinforced by the critical and negative comments on those developments which run counter to liberal sentiments so defined – the rejection of the 'Education for Capability Manifesto' and the dismissal of John Dewey. It was Dewey (1916) who challenged the dualisms between theory and practice, between thinking and doing, between intellectual and useful upon which a particular liberal tradition is founded, and who challenged also the crude identification of 'liberal education' with the academic.

The importance of these first two Victor Cook lectures (see also Chapter 4) is that they were a response to what they saw as a fresh challenge to that liberal tradition and to the values which it embodied. Certainly we live in a time of change and those changes affect (rightly or wrongly) the aims that educational institutions subscribe to, the values that they cherish and bequeath to the next generation, the content of the curriculum, the control of what is taught and the nature of the institutions themselves. It is a theme that I want to continue, but, in doing so, I argue that both Quinton and O'Hear have ignored the nature of the changes taking place and thus have been tilting at the wrong enemies – the cockshies of the education correspondent of the tabloid papers rather than the real philistines waiting at the gates.

Furthermore, in failing to identify and understand those changes, they too fall victim to the criticisms levelled against the University of Oxford nearly 200 years ago. There are two enemies that I have in mind in giving these lectures. The first are those who, in face of certain changes, retreat to a narrow concept of liberal education which leaves so many dispossessed of education. The other is those who, in trying to make education more relevant, betray the best that is preserved within the liberal tradition. The divide is, and no doubt always will be, between liberal education and vocational preparation. But it need not be, and I shall do my best to see how two quite different traditions might be reconciled.

In this lecture, therefore, I shall do the following:

First, I shall say something about the nature of those changes taking place to which educational institutions are obliged to respond; it will be brief and superficial, but it provides the context in which a debate about the aims of education might be conducted.

Second, I shall identify what are the key features of the liberal tradition which, I think, both Quinton and O'Hear subscribe to, and which has shaped the aims of education for both schools and universities.

Third, I shall outline the vocational alternative which is increasingly affecting how the changes referred to are met.

Fourth, I shall examine how the two traditions might be reconciled. But that will require a fresh look at the aim of education – in particular, what it means to be a person and to become one more abundantly.

Change

It is hardly necessary to rehearse the well-known accounts of the changes that are affecting our society, and thus indirectly the schools. But I shall remind you of some of them because they provide a necessary backcloth to the debate on liberal education.

We are warned by many, particularly those in industry, that the economic changes affecting our standard of living and the pattern of employment are unprecedented. This is obviously related to the massive developments in electronics and in technology. But it goes beyond that to the changing pattern of trade as other countries develop more sophisticated economies. People now talk with bated breath about 'the Pacific Rim'. The employment consequences are that, just as a million unskilled jobs have been taken out of the economy in the last ten years, a further reduction on a similar scale is predicted. Furthermore, there is a disproportionate increase of employment in the service industries, requiring different kinds of personal qualities and skills. The bank no longer replies to my pompous letters about errors in their favour with an equally pompous reply starting 'Dear Sir'. Rather does one receive a personal phone call from the friendly bank clerk, Marilyn, asking if she can be of any service.

The impact of all this on the educational system is manifold. First, so we are told, many more need to be educated. Second, such education should provide skills and knowledge which previously have been neglected – in information technology, economic awareness, communication skills, practical numeracy, for example. Thirdly, schools and universities need to form a

different, more favourable set of attitudes towards the industrial and commercial worlds; too often, and for too long, argue such as Wiener (1981), a liberal tradition of education has regarded with contempt the useful and the practical, the doing and the making.

It is impossible to make sense of so much that is happening in schools and universities without reference to the impact of these economic changes upon how those, who are in positions of power and influence, conceive the aims of education. This was reflected in the then Prime Minister Mr Callaghan's Ruskin Speech in 1977. There, in initiating the Great Debate in Education, he not only spoke of the importance of raising standards, but referred particularly to standards which related to economic performance. Subsequently, there was a shift of emphasis in the political and administrative sense of educational aim. Looking back on this period, one high-ranking Treasury official felt able to say:

> We took a strong view that education could play a much better role in improving industrial performance. The service is inefficient, rather unproductive and does not concentrate scarce resources in the areas that matter most. The economic climate and imperatives are clear; the task is to adjust education to them. (quoted in Ranson, 1984: 223)

Subsequently, efforts have been made to inject vocational skills and knowledge and the newly discovered virtues of enterprise and entrepreneurship into the curriculum of schools and universities – the Technical and Vocational Education Initiative[1] and the Enterprise in Higher Education initiatives being two examples.

The changes, however, go more deeply than purely economic ones. The number of young people continuing with their education beyond the compulsory school leaving age has risen quite dramatically. The percentage of 17 year olds in full-time education and training has risen in England and Wales from under 40 per cent to around 70 per cent in five years; in Scotland the percentage has always been higher than in England. This has forced teachers to reassess the aims of general education for those who traditionally would not have continued in education beyond the age of 16 or entered university. The word 'relevance', much despised by philosophers of liberal education but essential to those who teach rather than just talk about teaching, enters into the vocabulary of educational aims. Hence, the development of new qualifications and new routes into higher education. And universities look different, as polytechnics are transformed and as professorships

are created in subjects unheard of by a Newman, Copleston or Mill.

Furthermore, under the banner of 'relevance', especially vocational relevance, new styles of learning have been explored, embodying different assumptions about the purpose of learning and about the value of that which is learnt. There is an emphasis upon cooperative learning, upon problem-solving, upon relevant learning. Old standards, whereby performance is assessed, give way to new ones, as a new generation is taught within a different social and economic context and with different ends in view. All these changes, too often announced through a list of clichés, need to be questioned philosophically. That is, questions need to be asked about the kind of knowledge, about the nature of problem-solving, about the meaning of relevance, which underlie the advocacy of these changes. But changes they are and they undermine the erstwhile settled way in which schools and universities saw their aims and in which they served each other.

These changes reflect also deeper social worries. The society is different from what it was ten or twenty years ago. There are less certainties about what is right and wrong; less consensus over the values to be taught and learnt; greater stress upon autonomy (for example, freedom to make up one's own mind on controversial issues); a belief, ill-defined, that the schools should respond educationally to the increasing personal and social dislocations that pupils bring with them into the school; scepticism of the selective culture which once was unquestioned; perspectives introduced by people of different ethnic backgrounds – a minority in the country as a whole but often a majority in particular schools and localities.

At the same time, despite these differences and doubts, despite the scepticism over values and the rejection by many of liberal values, there is paradoxically a growing chorus of people who want schools, through their educational programmes, to counter anti-social forces, to help 'improve' society, indeed to make people good. Even responsibility for the 1993 football riots in Rotterdam was attributed by one newspaper to state schooling. Whereas liberal educators are primarily concerned with understanding behaviour, the teachers of 'relevance' want to change it.

The teachers in schools, colleges and universities have the job of reconciling the different forces – those, on the one hand, of traditional learning with its emphasis upon a readily understood map of learning, established texts and an agreed literary canon, consensus on what is worthwhile and a belief in traditional

standards, and those, on the other hand, of meeting the urgent needs of often disillusioned and alienated young people, of answering the call of society to produce the worthy and productive citizen and of doing all this against a background of uncertainty within society over the quality of life worth pursuing. The problem was identified by Derek Morrell, the architect of the Schools Council established in 1964, in his 1966 Joseph Payne Memorial Lectures. He asks

> why educators, in all parts of the world, are finding it necessary to organise a response to change on a scale, and in a manner, which has no precedent. . . . Why can't curriculum modification follow the simpler, and in many ways more comfortable pattern of partial and piecemeal change which we and other countries followed for so long? (Morrell, 1966: 6)

His answer is developed through the lectures but it might be summarized in the following words

> The many reasons . . . stem from the pace of change in modern society. Its rapidity, and the extraordinary difficulty which we face in defining its characteristics, and in communicating the implications of change throughout complex systems of human relationships, have destroyed or at least weakened the broad consensus on aims and methods which was taken for granted when our educational system took its present form (ibid.).

For Morrell, and for the Schools Council, teachers had to address the question of the aim of education anew, in conjunction certainly with those within universities whose voices from within their respective disciplines of philosophy and sociology, of psychology and history, had such an important contribution to make, but in partnership also with those in the wider community who were in tune with the economic and social context within which young people had to live – and make sense of living. The critique of the liberal ideal was that it prescribed the quality of the life worth living without reference to the social reality of those who had to live it. And it must be the teachers, rooted in a liberal tradition of worthwhile learning but seeking also to educate all children irrespective of background and motivation, who had to bridge the gap – explore both the moral base of the curriculum and its content. And that in turn raised the very questions which, in the *Edinburgh Review*, had angered the Provost of Oriel. Perhaps

we should examine more precisely the liberal ideal of which I speak.

Concept of liberal education

There are many versions of the liberal ideal. And indeed it is dangerous to assume that all versions were averse to some form of utility.

The arguments were rehearsed, and the different versions clearly exposed, in a nineteenth-century debate which tried to accommodate a liberal tradition to the different conditions of an industrial society. Not all the Victorian exponents of liberal education saw eye to eye with Copleston. As Ralph White (1986) points out in his paper 'The Anatomy of a Victorian Debate', there were variations in the degree to which the liberal ideal both could and needed to be justified by reference to some extrinsic goal. How far did the knowledge and understanding which characterized the educated person have to be useful knowledge? For Newman social benefit and virtue might be beneficial by-products of education; that would be a bonus, but not a defining characteristic or a reason for pursuing it (see Newman, 1852: 120). Mill, on the other hand, as we might deduce from his inaugural lecture, was much more aware of the social consequences and of the personal power that a liberal education bestowed – lawyers made more sensible lawyers through exposure to general culture. But he went further than that for, in examining the content of the university curriculum, he constantly referred to its relevance, indirect maybe, to social improvement. This reference to social improvement, not simply to intellectual excellence, and to those subjects which were relevant to that social improvement, was a constant theme in that nineteenth-century debate. For this reason, Huxley complained that

> modern geography, modern history, modern literature, the English language as a language; the whole circle of the sciences, physical, moral and social, are even more completely ignored in the higher than in the lower schools. (quoted in White, 1986: 57)

The variations in the argument about liberal education – between Newman, Mill, Huxley, Sidgwick and Arnold, all of whom endeavoured to define it – were essentially about the degree of social usefulness which should temper the pursuit of intellectual excellence. Consequently, the argument concerned the degree to which the ideal of liberal education needs constantly

to be renewed, as new knowledge, and new organizations of knowledge, transform our ideas of 'social usefulness'. But, whatever the variations, there remained the central significance given to the development of reason and to those studies which enhanced the capacity to know, to understand, to pursue the truth.

Such a liberal ideal might be characterized in the following way:

First, its chief aim is to develop the intellect – to improve the capacity to think and to understand, and indeed (in the area of the arts) to appreciate what is worthy of appreciation. 'Improvement' is the word, but the improvement concerns not the character or the behaviour, but the appreciation of what is true – or, indeed, 'the best that has been thought and said'.

Second, that intellectual development was based upon an organization of knowledge which was not merely practical or convenient but was philosophically sound. It was argued (for example, by Hirst, 1965) that there are different forms of knowledge and understanding. These are not arbitrary and not open to personal choice or arbitrary social reconstruction, whatever the sociologists of knowledge might say. Such forms of knowledge are characterized in various ways by their own distinctive ideas and concepts, by their own central axioms, by their key texts which are the touchstones of debate and argument. Thus, to think mathematically or historically one has to *learn* a way of thinking and to understand what are regarded as concepts and modes of enquiry which are central to these forms of understanding. Liberal education is an initiation into these forms, which underpin our different understandings of experience. Such initiation is normally undertaken in an organized fashion – systematically, through subjects, under the tutelage of a teacher.

Third, the value of acquiring these different forms of understanding requires, philosophically at least, no extrinsic justification (see, for example, Peters, 1965: Chapter 5). Education in this sense should not be seen as a means to an end. It would be like asking: 'why be educated?' or 'why should we cultivate the mind?' where the answer requires a statement of value, not of economic usefulness. Of course, the pupils, prevented from enjoying themselves by having to learn, might ask those questions, not seeing the intrinsic value of reading Virgil or understanding theoretical physics. But that is because they are not yet 'on the inside' of those forms of understanding or because they are not yet sophisticated enough to see the philosophical or ethical arguments for the value of understanding for its own sake. A very

real problem for liberal education lies in the failure of its proponents to communicate the values felt by the educators. But, then, the argument is not easily accessible, as is apparent from the first two Victor Cook Lectures – dependent more on the intuition of the privileged few who already have been initiated.

Fourth, the formation of the intellect is demanding. It cannot, in the main, happen incidentally. 'Learning from experience', or 'learning from interest', attractive though these pupil-centred phrases sound, will not provide the insights that intellectual excellence requires. Such excellence requires there to be teachers, people already acquainted with the best that has been thought and said. And they need to be free from the distractions of the immediate and the relevant. They need, in other words, schools and universities separated from the world of business and usefulness. Indeed, schools ideally should be like monasteries, rather than marketplaces.

Fifth, the responsibility for learning – its content, its assessment, its emphasis, its direction – must be in the hands of the experts, the authorities within the different intellectual disciplines. They, in turn, will derive their authority from their fellow scholars. They will have proved themselves in scholarship and in critical discussion. Such people work mainly in universities. But if schools are to address the problems of change within that liberal tradition – to relate intellectual excellence to social improvement – the school teachers too must be regarded as authorities within the development of liberal learning. That, surely, was the main rationale behind the Schools Council – teachers supported in their deliberation about ends, not simply about the means to ends decided by politicians and business people.

Liberal education so conceived has been likened by the philosopher, Michael Oakeshott (1962), to a transaction between teacher and learner, in which the learner is introduced to the conversation which takes place between the generations of mankind in which the learner listens to the voices of poetry, of history, of philosophy, of science. We live in a world of ideas. And education is the initiation into that world. It has no purpose other than to let people into that conversation and to enjoy it.

There have been, however, critics of this ideal of liberal education. It is under attack in a number of ways. And, since these attacks have political muscle and money behind them, they are undermining a liberal tradition and the values which it embodies. The vocational imperative goes beyond social improvement as that

was understood by Mill or Arnold. It questions the very rationale and content of the liberal tradition – but not in the way that Quinton and O'Hear have appreciated. Before, however, we turn to the vocational alternative, it is important to attend to the criticism of the liberal education of those who are seeking to change it.

First, the liberal tradition, in focusing upon the world of ideas, has ignored the world of practice – the world of industry, of commerce, of earning a living. It is claimed that there has been a disdain for the practical intelligence – indeed, for the technological and the useful. The great nineteenth-century engineer, Brunel, had his own sons educated at Harrow School so that, in concentrating upon the classics, they would not be corrupted by technology. A few years ago, the Royal Society of Arts, an ancient and much respected society which for 200 years has striven to bring together theory and practice, thinking and making, intellect and skill, produced its Manifesto for Capability, signed by distinguished scientists and philosophers, which stated

> There exists in its own right a culture which is concerned with doing and making and organising and the creative arts. This culture emphasises the day to day management of affairs, the formulation and solution of problems, and the design, manufacture and marketing of goods and services (RSA, 1980)

The notion of 'capability', though hard to define, is an important one, but is neglected by those who, in pursuit of liberal learning, ignore its significance for intelligent living. This, surely, is part of the divide between those who inhabit academe and those who dwell in the world of business.

The second criticism is that the tradition of liberal education which we have inherited writes off too many young people. They fail the initiation test. Their voices are not allowed into the conversation, and the voices they listen to are not considered to be among the 'best that has been thought and said'. It is as though the liberal education is but for the few – those in the *English* system who, until recently, were selected for the grammar school or who were able to afford an independent education. That cultivation of the majority as a basis of social integration, which is what Arnold aspired to, has not occurred, and the injunction 'try harder' seems misplaced. Perhaps the tradition itself needs to be re-examined. In the absence of such a re-examination, a more practical, useful and vocational training is recommended for the majority – one

which, despite political protestations to the contrary and whatever the Howie Report (1992) might argue to the contrary, has lower status and which is perceived as such by those who are selected for it. There are indications within the Dearing Report (1994) that that might be the solution to the criticisms of educational achievement from 14 to 18. Certainly they are contained in the Howie proposals for the two-track system leading to the SCOTBAC for the more able and to the SCOTCERT for the others. Many young people are thus 'written off' as *educational* failures, though able to benefit from vocational training, as if they did not have minds to be developed and human qualities to be nurtured.

Vocationalizing the liberal ideal

There are two curriculum responses to these criticisms. The first is that of having two curriculums, preserving the liberal ideal for the few, and offering a vocational alternative for the many. The second is to dilute the liberal education with a vocational emphasis. Before, however, I get to the detail, I need to spell out the contrast between the liberal ideal as I have portrayed it and the idea of vocational preparation.

The following seem to be the characteristics of vocational training, which, in varying degrees, affect the liberal ideal as it responds to the criticisms outlined above.

First, the aim is, not intellectual excellence for its own sake, but competence at work – or competence in the tasks which adults have to perform not only at work but also at home and in the community. Preparation for citizenship, or for parenting, are but extensions of vocational preparation. The dominant idea is that of 'competence'.

Second, the content of the education and training programme is not derived from the intellectual disciplines, or from the best that has been thought and said, but from an analysis of the work to be done. People in industry say what skills are needed to run a business or to be an electrical engineer or to supervise staff, and the training programme is geared to produce those skills. There is an emphasis upon the 'can do' statements, on practical competence, as an object to be achieved through learning. Thus, the National Vocational Qualifications[2] are based upon the basic elements of skill which the Industry Lead Bodies say are required for jobs to be done efficiently.

Third, the value of what is learnt is justified by reference not to intrinsic worth or, indeed, to social improvement, but to the

usefulness of it. This usefulness might apply to the economy as a whole or to the economic well-being of the learner or of the community at large. Consequently, a different set of virtues characterizes vocational preparation – enterprise rather than disinterested pursuit of the truth, entrepreneurship rather than love of ideas, efficiency rather than the display of imagination.

Fourth, the best place for this useful learning is not away from the busy world of commerce and industry, nor away from the practical problems that the young person will face after school and university. To prepare for adult life is best done through a kind of apprenticeship in which the young learner is engaged practically in the adult world, though of course under supervision and with a systematic introduction to the skills and competences required. No one doubts the need for systematic learning and thus for periods set apart. But those are dictated by the learning needs, not by some liberal ideal of separation from the distractions of the practical world of economic and industrial reality. Implicit in the vocational learning, therefore, is a view about how learning best takes place – practically, relevantly, with useful and specific goals in mind.

Fifth, such a view of learning – its aims, its content, its value and its location – cannot be left in the hands of the academics. After all, it is argued, they and their ideal of liberal education have been responsible for economic neglect and for the impoverished idea of education in which the majority is excluded and in which important areas of experience play no part. Therefore, education and training must be under wider control. 'Authorities' over what should be learnt, and over what counts as successful learning, must include those from industry who know best what learning is useful and what research should receive public support. They must include also those teachers who, whether or not they be academics, know the students, their motivation and their personal needs – and who, therefore, can provide the kind of learning experiences which will make the students competent citizens, parents and employees. They must include, finally, the government which has broader interests and purposes to serve, and which ultimately pays the bill.

Vocational preparation, therefore, uses the language of usefulness, fitness for purpose, effective means to an end. It cherishes different values. It respects different personal and social qualities. It requires a different process of control and accountability.

The effect of the vocational intent shows itself in many ways. Universities were promised a lot of money if they incorporated

the skills and virtue of enterprise in all their undergraduate courses, including Ancient Greek and Old Norse. 'Core skills', that are vocationally relevant, are incorporated into otherwise academic courses such as A Level. 'Economic awareness' becomes a cross-curriculum theme, supposedly giving a different dimension to the teaching of history or geography. 'Young enterprise' schemes find their way onto the curriculum so that students can have first-hand experience of running a business. The Technical and Vocational Education Initiative was introduced into schools in 1983 so that students would acquire the work-related skills and attitudes neglected in the liberal education which otherwise prevailed. Concern in schools over the alienation and under-achievement of so many children encouraged the schools to provide vocational alternatives – the City and Guilds courses and Business and Technical Education Council courses in particular.[3] The government insisted that all pupils have work experience and that 10 per cent of teachers each year have placements in industry. The Howie Report was concerned about the many who left school without a marketable qualification and pointed to the need for ladders of progression into employment as well as into higher education. The options in SCOTBAC will offer more vocationally oriented studies. Compacts between industry have been established in which jobs and training are guaranteed if agreed learning objectives are met. There is even a Burger King school in Tower Hamlets, based on a form of sponsorship in the USA where good behaviour is rewarded with vouchers which can be cashed at the local fast food store.

Such modifications of the liberal ideal – justification of educational activities in terms of extrinsic utility rather than intrinsic worth, educational content reflecting economic relevance rather than intellectual excellence, assessment and control in the hands of employers rather than academics, education in the workplace rather than in places set apart – are sometimes confined to the less able for whom training rather than continued education is deemed more appropriate. But increasingly it affects the idea of liberal education itself, challenging the values for which it stands. And this is best illustrated, first, by the changing language of education, and, second, by the emphasis upon preconceived and measurable objectives, often expressed in terms of competences.

First, then, the changing language: education is increasingly seen as a commodity to be bought or sold, rather than as a transaction; that transaction takes place between provider and customer, rather than between professional and client; value is defined by

popularity in the market rather than within a selective educational tradition; success is measured by external auditors against performance indicators rather than by the peer review of fellow academics; judgement of intellectual development is reduced to measurement against a few criteria. This changing language through which the education of young people is described and understood – the shift in metaphor from that of conversation to that of business audit – has received little philosophical attention, and yet it does more to undermine the liberal ideal than any innovation in content or emphasis upon relevance.

Second, and connected with this change in language, is the emphasis upon skills and competences. By competences is meant the 'can dos', the list of skills which a person well trained can employ in specific contexts. Such skills should ideally be related to an analysis of what is necessary to do the job effectively. To express, for example, the professionalism of teaching in terms of competences is to assume that the task of teaching can be reduced to a limited (i.e. what can be put on two sides of A4) range of context-specific skills. It ignores the wider cognitive capacities. The outcomes in terms of 'can dos' are logically separated from the processes by which they might be achieved. Syllabuses and periods of study and contact with a teacher are not essential, for, having clarified the specific outcomes and the limited list of competences, one starts with the assessment points not with the learning experiences. Courses on teaching are arranged as a sort of remedial response to the failure to measure up to these assessments. There is nothing wrong with untrained teachers – with a Mums' army – so long as their performance measures up to a finite list of behavioural indicators. Furthermore the assessments should be in the real situation of the workplace, not the unreal environment of the university.

The language of 'competence' is used rather elastically, likened to specific, measurable and context-bound skills for planning purposes, but then stretched to cover knowledge, judgement and understanding where that is convenient. The result is an impoverished concept of knowledge and understanding – one which results in the measurable behaviours specified by those who teach. Indeed, the distinction between education and training disappears as teaching is defined in terms of imparting specific content and behaviours. No longer is it a conversation, a meeting of minds, a seeking after goals, the nature of which is transformed in the very search. Indeed, the teaching is a means to an end logically disconnected from the process of teaching itself; it is no

longer that transaction in which the ends themselves are subject to examination and scrutiny. In the language of the former Youth Training Scheme, personal development becomes personal effectiveness.

Again, I repeat, this may be only for the less able, even though they might be the majority, leaving a wider chasm still between the education of some and the training of others. But this vocationalizing of education, as is reflected in the audits of universities (my department has been subject to six such audits in one year) and in the assessment of schools, now permeates the idea of liberal learning itself.

Re-examination of the liberal ideal

Following the last Victor Cook lectures, it may seem unwise of me to refer to John Dewey. In the eyes of many who defend the liberal ideal, Dewey is seen as the source of all our ills – the advocate of child-centred education, the promoter of 'collectivist egalitarianism' (whatever that means), the supporter of 'the classroom filled with pupil reaction and the scepticism of the not-yet-educated'. But Dewey it was who questioned the dualisms which seem to bedevil our thinking about education – the divide between the academic and the vocational, between the theoretical and the practical, between the intrinsically worthwhile and the useful, and indeed (a point lost on his detractors) between the subject-centred and child-centred education (see Chapter 5).

I want in this final section, and in anticipation of the second lecture (see Chapter 4), to make two major points about how this dichotomy between the liberal ideal and the vocational preparation might be challenged, and with it the mistaken solution to our educational problems of establishing two or three track systems.

First, there is a mistaken tendency to define education by contrasting it with what is seen to be opposite and incompatible. 'Liberal' is contrasted with vocational as if the vocational, *properly taught*, cannot itself be liberating – a way into those forms of knowledge through which a person is freed from ignorance, and opened to new imaginings, new possibilities: the craftsman who finds aesthetic delight in the object of his craft, the technician who sees the science behind the ~~artefact~~, ~~the~~ reflective teacher making theoretical sense of practice. Indeed, behind the liberal/vocational divide is another false dichotomy, namely, that between theory and practice. Theory is portrayed as the world of abstractions, of deep understanding, of the accumulated wisdom

set down in books, of liberation from the 'here and now'. Practice, on the other hand, is identified with 'doing' *rather* than 'thinking', with the acquisition of skills rather than knowledge, with low-level knowledge rather than with understanding. Intelligent 'knowing how' is ignored, the practical way to theoretical understanding dismissed, the wisdom behind intelligent doing unrecognized. I cannot understand why the practical science in BTEC Intermediate and Advanced courses is called vocational, unless it is because it is practical, which presumably much good science is. Because of the dichotomy of theory from practice, of thinking from doing, science teaching, rather than be contaminated with the label 'vocational', enters into a mode of symbolic representation which loses the vast majority of young people – cuts them off, at an early age, from an understanding of the physical world in which they live. Real science is for the able; craft is for the rest; the science within the craft goes unrecognized, and for that both the able and the less able suffer.

There is another false dichotomy which has permeated our educational system at every level. Certainly, the concepts of 'education' and 'training' do not mean the same – education indicates a relatively broad and critical understanding of things, whereas training suggests the preparation for a relatively specific task or job. But, despite the different meanings, one and the same activity could be both educational and training. Thus, one can be trained as a doctor, as an electrician, as a bus driver or as a pharmacist, but that training can be such that the experience is educational. For example, the student teacher can be trained to plan the lessons, to manage the class and to display the children's work. But the training can be so conducted that the student is educated *through* it – in becoming critical of what is happening, in understanding the activity and in coming to see it in a wider educational context. Competence as a goal might be limiting. But it need not be. Indeed, without a certain degree of competence in playing the piano, one might be denied the chance of appreciating the finer points of a musical score, or, without some competence as a politician, one's political theorizing might miss the mark. Furthermore, a critical stance requires very often the practical competence – as, for example, in the understanding of the use of technology. Skills training is not the opposite to understanding, but very often a precondition of it.

The first way of challenging the liberal/vocational divide lies in questioning the way in which certain distinctions are employed as though the same activity cannot be both educationally liberating

and vocationally useful, or both theoretically insightful and skilfully engaged in, or requiring both intelligence and practical training.

Secondly, however, this acknowledgement of false dichotomies goes only part-way to bridging the liberal /vocational divide. Once more we must return to the aim of education – aim in the sense not of something extrinsic to the process of education itself, but of the values which are picked out by evaluating any activity as educational. The liberal ideal picked out intellectual excellence, although we noted at the beginning of this lecture the link that Mill and Arnold tried to make between individual excellence and social improvement.

But much more needs to be said than that. For education is concerned with the development of the distinctively human qualities – those which make our children more human. That effort to make everyone more human must, of course, include the perfection of the intellect. After all, what is more distinctively human than the capacity to think and to act intelligently? And what is best that has been thought and said other than what cultivates the intellect in its many different manifestations, practical as well as theoretical? But being human, and becoming more so, is the privilege of everyone. Each person, whatever his or her individual capacities and talents, is engaged in thinking and doing, in feeling and appreciating, in forming relationships and in shaping the future. All this can be engaged in more or less intelligently, more or less sensitively, more or less imaginatively. So long as there are thoughts to be developed, relationships to be formed, activities to be engaged in, feelings to be refined, then there is room for education. But that is possible only if those thoughts, feelings, relationships and aspirations are taken seriously – not contemptuously rejected as of no concern to the tradition of liberal education. And that requires bringing the educational ideal to the vocational interests of the young people, educating them through their perception of relevance, helping them to make sense of their social and economic context, enabling them to be intelligent and questioning in their preparation for the world of work.

For any young person, assistance with how to live one's life, in which the sort of job one does plays such a significant part, is the most important of all educational experiences – clarifying the style of life judged worth living, identifying the training and work that will enable one to live that life, questioning the ends or values embodied within it, acquiring the necessary skills and competences.

Philosophy of education needs a more generous notion of what it is to be human than what has too often prevailed or been captured in the liberal ideal. Without such a notion, many young people have been dismissed as ineducable. A focus upon intellectual excellence has ignored the wider personal qualities, informed by thought, feeling and various forms of awareness, which need nurturing, even if this must be for many in the context of the practical and the useful.

The vocational alternative has, however, missed the point entirely, substituting a narrow form of training for a generous concept of education, transforming learning into an acquisition of measurable behaviours, reducing understanding and knowledge to a list of competences, turning educators into technicians.

The result is two or three-track systems – the SCOTBAC and SCOTCERT in Scotland, the A Level, the GNVQ and NVQ in England and Wales. Such systems ignore the intuitive sense of so many teachers that education, helping young people to become human, is not like that. Certainly that education must be rooted in an educational tradition as that is captured in literature, in history, in the human and physical sciences, in philosophy, in poetry – in the voices that make up the conversation between the generations of mankind. But that education must also establish a continuity of experience with the young people themselves as they sort out their future employment or establish the quality of life which *for them* is worth living.

CHAPTER 4

The context of education: monastery or marketplace?[1]

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Introduction

'Education is big business'. Those at least are the opening words of the fifth chapter of the National Commission on Education's[2] Report (1994), *Learning to Succeed*. And well they might say that. The total bill to the taxpayer for education last year was, we are told, £27 billion. At a time when the country has to do something about the £50 billion national debt, there is no escaping the importation of business metaphors and practices. Corporate providers of taxes ask about the ROI of education – the Return On Investment. The government questions its cost-effectiveness. It is the Institute for Economic Affairs which advises the government on educational policy. It is the Audit Commission which proposes how schools should be re-organized.

Furthermore, the main drive to expand education and to improve standards arises from a concern about economic competition from abroad. The National Commission sets the tone for its recommendations on 'learning to succeed' by pointing to the *economic* necessity of doing so – and in relating that success

to what is referred to as 'the knowledge industry' and in particular to the importance of training in information technology. Therefore, 27 pages are devoted to information technology, whereas the expressive arts (which include drama, music, art and physical education – clear distinctions are not made) get a mention on two pages only, and then only as a subject area to be included in the non-core part of the curriculum. What is lacking in a Report which incorporates a section called the Commission's Vision and which has a chapter called 'The Vision of the Future' is any *educational* vision – that is, following my previous lecture (Chapter 3), any picture of the quality of life, the life worth living, which is logically associated with the notion of a community of educated persons and embodied in the liberal ideal. The Report is an excellent example of how, even with liberally minded people, vocational preparation, necessary though it is, as I have argued, can pervert the idea of a liberal education. It, therefore, demonstrates the need to reconcile the two traditions – that of liberal education and that of vocational training – within the context of the system of education which it is the Commission's aim to reform.

In my previous lecture, I pointed out the essentially evaluative nature of any judgements about education. 'Education' picks out those activities which form the educated person, and our concept of the educated person, contestable though it is, refers to those qualities and accomplishments which we value highly in people. 'Educated' is a commendation, granted by virtue of certain achievements. But those achievements have a cognitive core; they entail some sort of learning and the development of understanding. However, the nature of that understanding, and the selection of the achievements thought worthwhile, depend on wider ethical questions concerning the kind of life worth living and the kind of society which we think is desirable to live in. Moreover, just as the economic base of society changes, so also changes the list of accomplishments, which we see the educated person to need if he or she is to live intelligently within that society and to make a significant contribution to it. The liberal ideal of education needs constantly to be re-examined as our moral ideas develop concerning what it is to be a person and, indeed, how that person might adapt intelligently to changing economic and social conditions. And the question that I have been addressing concerns the extent to which such an ideal needs to incorporate the idea of vocational preparation. One danger of its failing to do so is that the vocational tradition – its language, its dominant concern

for utility, its indifference to moral deliberation and to philosophical speculation, its reduction of successful learning to the efficient achievement of someone else's goals, its equation of personal development with personal effectiveness – nudges out the liberal ideal, impoverishing the aims of education.

In this lecture, I approach the issue from a different angle. It is a common mistake – and one encouraged by certain interpretations of the liberal ideal – to perceive the educated person on the basis of purely personal accomplishments without reference to the greater social good to which that person contributes (or from which he or she takes away). The intellectual excellence, to which Newman refers, needs, as Mill and Arnold argued, to be related also to social improvement. But that requires reference to the context of education within which the aims of education are to be achieved. It requires, too, reference to the kind of society which one believes to be appropriate for fulfilling those moral goals. Questions about the aims of education may be a matter of ethics, but they shade quickly into the area of social philosophy. One cannot dissociate the quality of life from broader questions about the institutional framework through which that quality is to be achieved.

In this lecture, therefore, I want to examine more closely the social context of the separation of the liberal and the vocational – the way in which this dualism (and its values) are maintained and how possibly the reconciliation might be achieved. In so doing, I shall ask the following questions. Where should education take place? How should education be described? Who should control education? Who should own education?

The place of learning: monastery or marketplace?

The monastery was a place where people could get away from the world of business and commerce and, through concentration upon salvation, ensure the safety of their own soul – and, through prayer rather than social interaction, help too with the salvation of others. Therefore, schools and universities have sometimes been likened to monasteries, places, like our major and prestigious private schools and like the old 'new' universities, set apart in a rural idyll, undistracted by the affairs of commerce and industry. There intellectual excellence might be pursued, and individual salvation found. And the people so educated would also be of value to others, since they would constitute the guardian class, the clerisy, as Coleridge argued, who would be the leaders of

society. For the philosopher, T.H. Green, this social benefit of liberal education was the best way of preparing his students in Oxford for the professions and public service (see Gordon and White, 1979).

To T.H. Green's educational idealism, the most famous of English civil servants concerned with education, Michael Sadler, and his successor as Permanent Secretary at the Board of Education, Robert Morant, architect of the 1902 Education Act, owed their initiation into a liberal ideal of education which was, and was seen to be, a preparation for public life – vocational preparation, if you like, but not explicitly so, much more the preparation arising from a well-trained mind and a moral formation.

Such an achievement, however, took place in a place set apart. As Oakeshott describes it in his essay 'Education: the Engagement and its Frustration',

> In short, 'School' is 'monastic' in respect of being a place apart where excellences may be heard because the din of worldly laxities and partialities is silenced or abated. (Oakeshott, 1972: 69)

And why does it have to be a world apart? Because, as he explains in another essay,

> Liberal learning is a difficult engagement. . . . It is a somewhat unexpected invitation to disentangle oneself from the here and now of current happenings and engagements, to detach oneself from the urgencies of the local and the contemporary, to explore and enjoy a release from having to consider *things* in terms of their contingent features, *beliefs* in terms of their applications to contingent situations and *persons* in terms of their contingent usefulness. (Oakeshott, 1975: 39, my italics)

For that reason, Oakeshott's school must be a place set apart, to be contrasted with the world of vocational preparation, that is, the world of the contingencies and the 'here and now' which are a distraction from the difficult engagement of learning. In a school, there is a need for order and silence, for recognition of the world of ideas which the learner is seeking to enter, for periods of undistracted attention. There is time to reflect and to imagine and to enter into realms which are forbidden in the practical world. There is opportunity for moral formation, for the personal development necessary prior to vocational choices and training.

The vocational tradition on the other hand is scathing of this aloofness. The real world of practical living, into which the products of our school and university system must enter, is, it is argued, the more appropriate arena for preparing young people. That world defines the problems which need to be tackled, and disciplines the thinking through the demands of relevance to the task in hand. Certainly there will be periods when there needs to be time and space set apart for undistracted learning, but these are largely determined by the nature of the problem. On the whole, people learn by 'doing', although preferably under critical supervision. Thus, the new pre-vocational courses (the BTEC and the GNVQ[3]) are practical though demanding, assignment-led rather than based on intellectual disciplines, drawing upon the resources of the community rather than remaining aloof.

The market, therefore, provides a different metaphor from that of the monastery. It points to a shift from the centrality of contemplation and reflection to the importance of intelligent practice and of getting things done. It conjures up the image of a busy world in which, less dependent on authority, people make choices, purchase what they need or want, and determine by their choice what is worthwhile selling.

It suggests, too, a different set of dispositions or virtues as desirable characteristics of the educated person. 'Enterprise' is the key word. Training and Enterprise Councils have assumed much of the funding for further education; an initiative called 'Enterprise in Higher Education' put millions of pounds into universities so long as they incorporated enterprise-generating activities into all their undergraduate programmes, including those of Ancient Greek and Medieval History; thousands of schools now have young enterprise schemes whereby pupils form companies and engage in business; the Training, Education and Enterprise Department of the Department of Employment provided millions of pounds for educational research and development projects so long as enterprise was firmly embodied in the proposal. Enterprise is the most distinctive virtue of the market-based educational system – the disposition most needed by the entrepreneur whom schools and colleges are now seeking to produce. Such a person, and such dispositions, had no place in that liberal tradition I have spoken about – for which reason that liberal tradition is criticized as too remote from the practical and economic world that young people must be prepared for.

And yet one of the ironies of the new dispensation is that it is so difficult to pin down what is meant by enterprise. Presumably

it refers to a certain readiness to take risks; a propensity to think laterally in problematic situations; an ability to think imaginatively where solutions are not readily available. It indicates, too, a certain practical energy, an unwillingness to give in to barriers where they are erected against one. And all this is said within the context of business and economic initiative. One rarely refers to the painstaking and scholarly ancient historian as enterprising – or, if one does, then it might be interpreted as a term of abuse. The *enterprising* historian would be the one who imaginatively thought of putting his or her historical knowledge to financial gain – tours of medieval Britain for the foreign tourist, for example.

Despite its vagueness (indeed, despite the very elasticity of the concept as it was stretched to cover an enormous range of activities, as the Department of Employment sought to disburden itself of money intended to promote it), 'enterprise' reflects the market-oriented understanding of both schools and universities, and of the curriculum which they try to develop. A new and different sort of values. Education in a different sort of place. The enterprising headteacher will be the one who finds alternative sources of money, and who creates thereby an atmosphere, much loathed by those within the liberal tradition, in which the competitive ethics of the market enter into the educational values of the school.

A place of learning set apart? Or a place immersed in the practical and busy world for which the young apprentice is being prepared? Certainly vocational training favours the latter. And, as liberal education becomes vocationalized, so too will that apprenticeship be linked with the world of work, be made relevant, be assessed in the practical world, and incorporate the core skills that adult life demands. Universities now credit assessment in the workplace; and the three or four-year course – a period of reflective learning in a place set apart – is under threat. Part-time study is seen not as a necessity for impoverished students, but as a virtuous opportunity for all students. The integration of the world of learning and the world of work is on the agenda.

The description of education

The market enters into, and indeed controls, our thinking about education in several important respects. First, it has changed our language – the moral language – through which we describe that transaction which takes place between teacher and learner. That, in turn, transforms the values we attribute to these activities; it negates the value of some activities (those concerned with doubt

and deliberation, with reflection and speculation), central to the liberal tradition, and it attaches importance to others which otherwise would be neglected (those concerned with practical business, with practical problem-solving, with enterprising and money-making activities). It also provides, as I shall demonstrate in my next section, a language of control, affecting that transaction in a deeper sense – indeed, affecting what we *mean* by learning as that is understood within the liberal tradition. In my final section, I shall show how the market, once a metaphor, becomes a reality in the organization of institutions – bringing them in line with the new language of learning and bestowing on them a different set of relationships.

The language of education, therefore, is changing dramatically, as new metaphors dominate the political scene. One can see how this happens. For example, my Department at the University of Oxford has been audited (not my word, but one I am now forced to use) six times in the last year. Such audits require the appraisal of what we do in a language which only a few years ago was quite foreign. Not to employ that language, requiring different criteria for evaluating success or achievement, would be financially fatal. The changes in language, and their significance, are summarized in a report in 1991 of Her Majesty's Inspectorate, a body, you must remember, first led by Matthew Arnold, author of *Culture and Anarchy*.

> As public interest in *managerial efficiency* and *institutional effectiveness* has increased, there has been a general acknowledgement of the need to use *performance indicators* to monitor the higher education system . . . some concrete information on the extent to which the *benefits expected from educational expenditure* are actually secured . . . [an] approach finding most favour in 1989 and 1990 is the classification of performance indicators within an *input, output, process model*. (HMI, 1991)

In searching for indicators 'which allow institutions to assess their own *fitness for purpose*', the report suggests a range of reference points which enable an 'assessment of *achievement against a defined objective* – cost-effective indicators', 'academic operations indicators' such as 'inputs' (e.g. application in relation to numbers or ratios per place), 'process' (e.g. value-added) and 'output' (e.g. employer satisfaction). There will be

> *enterprise audits* which evaluate teacher and learning styles and *annual school audits* where senior staff spend one day

> reviewing all aspects of a school's work. Many institutions are working to sharpen their quality assurance procedures by systematising the use of performance indicators and peer review.

Hence, my Department (and increasingly all university departments subject to the audits of the Quality Assurance Agency of the Higher Education Funding Agency) adopts the 'performance indicators' provided for us, however alien to a more defensible tradition of education. Measurements are made which are irrelevant to the richness of the relationship, to the quality of the conversation, which takes place between teacher and learner. The slow dawning of understanding, depth of insight, imaginative grasp of a problem, critical probing of a text – all of which emerge at different paces and in different ways for different learners – have little place in outcome measures that are imposed on all and that are administered at a preconceived time. The richness of that personal encounter with the ideas of a previous generation escapes the language of competence, of the observable 'can dos', and of the outputs measured against inputs, against which success can be assessed and value-addedness assigned – and the purchaser of a service assured that investment is worthwhile. In the audits we have undergone, check lists have been produced against which the myriad activities which take place have been judged; a course solidly based on research into trainee teachers' and mentors' learning is made to fit an impoverished framework created by civil servants, who do not know that research but who are trapped in a language of audit. Hence, teaching becomes the delivery of a curriculum, no longer an engagement with other minds; that curriculum becomes a commodity to be bought and sold, not a range of activities that are differently engaged in by pupils with their distinctive agendas; the value of that commodity lies in its popularity among independent purchasers, not in its access to ideas and imaginings; the controllers of the commodity are those who establish the outcomes or competences, not the teachers, the authorities within a selective culture – although (as the Secretary of State recently explained) education is also a business in which employers are *shareholders*; the achievements are audited against *performance indicators* from without, not judged by the authorities from within. There are, then, frameworks of *quality assurance* and *quality control* for ensuring the achievement of prespecified outcomes, all within a framework of TQM or Total Quality Management.

That is the language now of Her Majesty's Inspectorate, of vice-chancellors, of headteachers, as they conform to the managerialism of business and competitive commerce. Headteachers are redesignated *Chief Executives*, and their deputies *Directors of Human Resources*.

This changed language affects profoundly the nature of the activity as it is perceived, and the nature of the relationships between those who engage in the activity. Education shifts from being an evaluative word, picking out as valuable that formation of the mind through an encounter with the best that has been thought and said – the value of which can be judged only against broad and often barely articulated criteria. It becomes instead a description of a set of activities which lead to certain outcomes, those outcomes being worthwhile or not simply in so far as either the controller (the government, say) or the customer finds them so. The *judgement* of the teacher – the one already initiated into an educational tradition – is relegated to insignificance in a world of mechanical rationalism, captured within this superficial language. It is little wonder that ethics, and indeed philosophy generally, are no longer considered to be a worthy component in the professional preparation of teachers, or that Dewey has been placed on the index of forbidden books, for no longer are the teachers expected to engage in ethical considerations about the aims of education any more than a Kellogg's worker is expected to raise questions about the nutritional value of cornflakes, or the car worker the environmental consequences of car exhaust. Furthermore, the personal needs of the learner give way to the imperatives of ensuring certain outcomes – stuck on, perhaps, as with chewing gum or Sellotape, but outcomes nonetheless. Indeed, as the prevocational courses leading to General National Vocational Qualifications become standardized, so external tests are imposed upon the mandatory modules – tests that are increasingly conducted through massive item banks of multi-choice questions that can be machine-marked and that relieve teachers of any judgement of quality. An 80 per cent pass mark, essential in each of the eight units, guarantees a teaching to the test. But where then can there be that *significant learning*, that learning whereby the learner is changed in some important way, rather than the acquisition of a few facts for examination purposes?

The market, therefore, imports a language through which the relation of teacher and learner is perceived differently and through which questions of value are eliminated from serious professional consideration.

The control of learning: politicians or teachers?

Connected with the way in which business metaphors affect our description of education is the new scope for social control which these metaphors provide. The very comprehensive list of objectives or attainment targets through which the National Curriculum of England and Wales is defined are of course the peg on which to hang an assessment system. Through such an assessment system every pupil, and thereby every school, can be labelled in a standardized way. This is necessary within a system of education wherein the schools are seen as providing a commodity to be purchased, or chosen, by autonomous consumers. To make rational choices, consumers need to have the product, which they wish to purchase, labelled with all the ingredients explicitly stated. The future parent is able to see what has been achieved subject by subject within a school, and also to see where that school is placed in relation to others in a league table. The present parents are able, on the same measures, to see where their children are placed in relation to other children. These measures, therefore, become exceedingly important and would be justified in the need for a market system of schools wherein the marketable product is displayed for all to see, and can be rationally chosen or not in the light of the knowledge provided.

The importance of such measures gives unprecedented powers to those who establish the targets and the measures. They – the non-accountable bodies, such as the Schools Curriculum and Assessment Authority, and the Secretary of State who endorses the recommendations or not – are able to define what exactly should be learnt, what literature should be read, what music should be appreciated, indeed when history ends. Under the guise of the market in which there is a need for precise labelling of that which is to be chosen, there is an unprecedented political control of what is learnt. The language of competences and precise objectives, consequent upon the reconceptualization of education as a system of providers and purchasers within a market framework, is the language of control. It is not the language of a conversation within the liberal tradition, for the very essence of a good conversation lies in the unpredictability of the outcomes. The significant result of a serious engagement with a text lies in the effect upon the person, the contribution it makes to that growing enlightenment and involvement within a tradition of learning.

There are two aspects of this new language as a basis of social control which I wish to expand upon further. The first lies in the underlying concept of learning whereby the relationship between

teacher and learner is defined. The second lies in the role of the teacher in interpreting and defining the values which shape the task of teaching.

There is a distinction between 'education' and 'training'. 'Education' is an evaluative word. Education lays down broad criteria which any activity, which one claims to be educational, must conform to. Such activities must bring about learning; that learning must be significant – it transforms the understanding of the learner in a valuable way and is not simply stuck on superficially; the value of that learning lies in the deepening and broadening of understanding. To that extent any specific activity *might* be educational – might bring about the inner reflection, the stimulus to further thought, the insight into something significant. In fact, we know that certain activities are more likely to do this than others – obviously, because that broadening and deepening of the understanding is logically related to the different forms of knowledge or experience through which our thinking is logically structured. Many learning activities are, by their very nature, unlikely to do this. They close or limit or deaden the mind; they lead up cul-de-sacs which terminate the search for understanding; they result in boredom which for Dewey was the mortal sin of education. To educate, therefore, one needs to get the learner on the inside of these different forms of understanding whereby yet further questions can be asked and new enquiries embarked upon. It is to ensure the grasp of basic concepts and principles (in science, say, or in literature) through which experience is organized in a distinctive and fruitful way and through which new perceptions and imaginings are made possible. An understanding (which can be pitched at many different levels – we talk of the depth of understanding) of 'elasticity of supply and demand' in economics or of the nature of tragedy in *Othello* or of the principles of leverage in classical mechanics – provides more than the predictable output that can be machine-marked on a multi-choice examination paper. Rather does it provide the power to talk intelligently about a range of issues, which talk cannot be confined to behavioural outcomes but can be recognized as intelligent, valid, defensible by those who are authorities within that forum of understanding. The role of judgement cannot be replaced by assessment according to pre-ordained and observable outputs. To do so is to confuse the process of thinking with the specific behavioural outcomes of thinking, a position we are increasingly led to by the insistence upon performance indicators.

Training, on the other hand, may or may not be educational. One is trained to *do* something. Circuses train dogs and horses to

perform certain tricks, but we do not claim that these animals have been educated. People are trained to be plumbers and electricians. There are training courses for teachers. The implication is that there are specific skills – 'can dos' – which, following a course of training, these people can demonstrate in the place where these skills are applied. There is certainly learning, and there may be much understanding. To be trained as a plumber requires understanding – not only how to diagnose problems but also how to think imaginatively about solutions. A well-trained teacher is useful, but an educated one is better – one whose skills are informed and applied through a broader intellectual grasp of the issues of the nature of learning, of the social context of the child and of the values worth pursuing. Hence, one can be educated *through* training – that is, training conducted in a particular way, through the acquisition of critical reflection on what one is doing and through the wider perspective which places one's specific job within a wider context of values. The efficient joiner may have no aesthetic sense; he turns out furniture to order; on the other hand, he might be so trained as to see his work within an aesthetic dimension, appreciating the beauty of what is created and striving for standards beyond those of efficiently doing the job.

Behind this distinction lies different understandings of learning. On the one hand, it is an achievement, a change of consciousness which meets certain standards, those standards being defined by the nature of knowledge or of that which is to be learnt. That is why learning theory should not be (as it often is) divorced from the philosophical analysis of what it means to have understood a particular concept or a particular principle or a way of doing things. There is a logical structure to learning which defines the standards whereby success is assessed. On the other hand, learning is associated with changed behaviour, with whatever measurable outcomes that the trainer wishes to see. There is no claim to *understanding* in the successfully changed behaviour of the circus animals. And there is no need to refer to the processes of learning or to the depth of understanding or to the mode of seeing in the input/output model through which educational institutions are now to be audited.

The significance of this shift of language and of the conception of learning is yet to be acknowledged or indeed properly analysed. This lecture can only point to what is happening, hoping that others more able will see the issues worth exploring in greater depth. One consequence, however, is the severance of assessment from course or curriculum, for what now becomes

centre stage is not the quality of transaction between teacher and learner, reflected inadequately in a final examination system, but the quality of the assessment – the measurement of the 'can dos' within the context of the practical world – for which a course may or may not be thought necessary. The growth of item banking, of TAPs (Training Assessment Points), of accreditation of prior learning are instances of a shift of curriculum to assessment, as though the quality and significance of learning acquired through the curriculum are captured entirely in the outcome measures of the assessment. The liberal ideal of a place set apart where, *for a time*, the young learner can enjoy poetry and philosophy and science and where each, at his or her own pace, can become acquainted with a world of ideas, succumbs to the metaphor of the market in which the product is distinguished from the process and in which the product is what alone counts, a product assessed not in a place apart but in the context of the practical world into which the learner is entering.

The second aspect of the new language as a basis of social control lies in the changing understanding of teaching as a profession. Teachers are part of a social tradition of learning in which they are the mediators of what, within that tradition, is thought to be worth passing on to the next generation. Their position is held not by virtue of personal qualities (although certain personal qualities might be seen as a condition for successful teaching) but by virtue of their expertise within an area of learning. That expertise is of two kinds. There is the proven understanding of that area of knowledge and understanding into which the learner is to be initiated. Second, there is the expertise concerned with the nature of learning – how to represent that which is to be learnt in a mode which is intelligible to those who do not yet understand. The teacher teaches by virtue of being 'an authority' within an area of understanding and within the art of communicating that understanding.

That, at least, is a necessary condition of the claim to professional status. Of course, in practice this claim may often be difficult to sustain. Teachers may have a weak mastery of their subject and little opportunity is given for that mastery to be enhanced, improved, kept abreast with developments in the subject. Furthermore, their expertise in pedagogy might itself be practical and unreflective, rarely challenged, not responsive to critical enquiry. It was for that reason that in Scotland, but not in England, there has for 70 years been a close relationship between the Educational Institute of Scotland representing the

teachers and the Scottish Council for Research in Education. The Research Committee of the EIS, when that connection was established in 1928, exhorted its membership

> to justify our claim to professional status by showing a greater keenness in all that concerns the science and art of our profession. (Wake, 1988: 8)

Research, practical research, into the aim, context and methods of education was seen as essential to teaching as a profession – communicating that selective culture in a mode that would be intelligible and perceptibly relevant to the uninitiated learner.

But more needs to be said about that professional relationship between teacher and learner other than the distinctive expertise through which a service of a particular kind might be offered. Another feature of being a professional is the distinctive set of values which shape the relationship with the client. These values – the ethical code under which the provider of the service works and under which the client can expect a certain level of service – are reflected in the rules which govern and define the relationship. They set boundaries. They give grounds, too, for complaint and for disciplinary action where they are breached. In this respect, teaching is like medicine, or law, or social work – each having a set of values which shapes the relationship between professional and client and which, internalized, affects how the professional sees his or her task. The doctor aims to cure, the lawyer to defend, the social worker to counsel. Moreover, the practice of teaching, curing, defending or counselling is first and foremost in the interests of the receiver. The doctor, acting professionally, will recommend the medicine which is most beneficial to the patient, not the one which is most profitable to the doctor. The lawyer will defend the accused however personally obnoxious the accused may be and undeserving of acquittal. The social work counsellor sees his or her professional duty to listen to and to help the client to find an acceptable solution – not to be judgemental.

In teasing out the underlying rules and values which shape the relationship between teacher and learner within a tradition which we have inherited (but which is so easily vulnerable to an enterprise seen increasingly as a business subject to market forces), can one go much beyond the rather general statement that it is the interest of the learner which is uppermost? Such an acknowledgement, though in itself not taking us very far, would not itself be empty. After all, it is conceivable (and there is the

danger) that the system might serve solely or principally the interests of the economy, irrespective of the interests of the learner. For example, the government has, under the 1993 Trade Union Reform and Employment Rights Act, opened up the Careers Service to competitive tendering, giving it a market discipline which previously it lacked. The tenders will be judged on cheapness and on performance indicators which relate to employment targets. The danger is that, as a result, personal guidance, the responsibility to the client, will be neglected. People become potential fillers of job vacancies, not persons who need, as Dewey so well argued, to find personal fulfilment in a life worth living, of which an appropriate occupation is part.

Such professional values of the teacher must include a defence of the learners' interests against pressures to the contrary from government, parents or employers (and the rejection of Key Stage 3 testing in English was an example of such professional judgement), a defence, too, of a cultural heritage which it is their duty to communicate, a commitment to enquiry and to questioning, a respect for the confidentiality which is entrusted to one by the learner.

One could go on. But suffice to note the significance of professionalism – namely, a body of people who, by reason of distinctive expertise and values, are to be regarded with respect in what should be learnt, how it should be learnt, and what purposes that learning should serve. The importance for my purposes of such a concept of professional is that it denies the right of the marketplace to regulate what is worth learning or what is the appropriate relation between teacher and learner. These are set within an educational tradition of cultural transmission and of moral relationships, which cannot be reduced to the exchange and the values of the market.

And there is the rub. The inherited language of business and the market, providing an impoverished notion of learning and introducing thereby the mechanism for social control, undermines the independent authority and autonomous role of the teacher as an expert, as an interpreter of an educational tradition, as a defender of the learner against the encroachment of government or business, as the protector of values which may be economically irrelevant or indeed subversive. In that way, the liberal ideal is challenged and undermined.

The ownership of education: public or private?

The final way in which the market enters into our thinking about education lies in the changed relationship between institutions.

The White Paper *Choice and Diversity*, known popularly as Chaos and Perversity, extols the virtues of schools being different and, in being different, offering different kinds of services to the consumer. Thus, for example, in the interests of variety and choice, the Secretary of State has proposed to transform selected secondary schools into Technology Colleges – an educational culture which 'is scientific, technological and vocational', and as a further extension of consumer choice. The reason given why such colleges can be created only within the Grant Maintained or Voluntary Sectors (that is, outside the control of Local Education Authorities) is that only these are empowered by the 1993 Act to appoint governors from firms which have agreed to sponsor them. Employers will be rewarded for their sponsorship by places on the governing bodies so that they can influence staffing, curriculum policy and admissions. Thereby will be secured (to quote) 'a better trained and more motivated *local* pool of workers, all with some understanding of the sponsors' business'.

The competitive and diverse framework of schooling, therefore, reflects a shift in ownership, undermining the role of teachers as both public servants and as professional guardians of an educational tradition. Certainly there is, both in the example I have given, but so too in many other developments, a transfer of responsibility both for the content of the curriculum and for the purposes that the curriculum must serve, to people external to the educational tradition itself, namely, in this case, to business people whose interests lie in very different directions.

This is, however, but one aspect of that diversity, for choice must be between self-sustaining, autonomous institutions which are empowered, in response to the market, to offer and advertise different kinds of service. And they will sink or swim depending on the desirability of services offered and of the efficiency of their delivery. To make the market work the schools and the parents have to be treated autonomously. That is, the schools need to be in full control of their affairs (having, for example, almost all money devolved to them) and the parents need to have the right, in the light of the information provided, to select the school – or to transfer allegiance to another school if the one of their choice does not come up to scratch. As the Secretary of State said,

> Parents know best the needs of their children – certainly better than educational theorists or administrators, better even than our mostly excellent teachers (DES, 1993: 2)

Therefore, the system of education requires no buffer such as local authority between the central market regulator, namely, the

government, and the 25,000 providers, namely, the schools. Such providers are maintained, or not, by the choices of well-informed 'purchasers', and their standards are improved in the normal commercial way, namely, through competing for allegiance within a framework of choice.

The appropriateness of such a framework is a matter of argument. Certainly there are those who, like John Gray (1992), argue for a moral foundation of market institutions, albeit without explicit reference to educational establishments. One such argument is the epistemic one, namely, that there is a logical limit to the amount of knowledge that central planning institutions can know about the intentions and wants and values of the consumer. And those logical limits are due to the vast amount of intelligent but unarticulated or tacit knowledge which people have and which, by definition, cannot be in the hands of central bureaucrats. That tacit knowledge may be about local institutions or it may be about the kinds of things they want and the values they have which they cannot convey to others explicitly. But it is manifested in the choices they make and in the values which they recognize in the institutions they visit. The millions of decisions that people make based on such tacit knowledge must necessarily escape the planner. And, therefore, a system that values the wishes of the consumer, that believes that parents know best, is obliged to devolve that control to the parents.

And yet it is too often forgotten that markets themselves are artefacts. They are created by people, and can be so created that they serve the interests of the creator. The rules on which the competition is legitimized are the rules created not within an educational tradition pursuing a liberal ideal but within a training tradition concerned with economic advancement and social differentiation. On this let me make the following points.

In establishing the rules of the new market in education, the views of those who, by profession, guard an educational tradition, are ignored. The 1944 Education Act established a partnership between government, local authorities, the teachers and the Churches. In that partnership, the government played a back-seat minimalist role, seeing its main duty to be that of ensuring the proper resourcing of the system. Central Advisory Councils were established with representatives of all interested bodies, particularly the teachers, with the statutory right to be consulted on educational policy. Dr Marjorie Reeves, appointed to the Central Advisory Council in 1947, when she asked what the main duty was of a member of that Council, was told by the then

Permanent Secretary Sir Redcliffe Maude 'to die at the first ditch as soon as politicians try to get their hands on education'. There was nothing controversial in such a view. The job of government and politicians was to ensure the framework through which the transaction between teacher and learner might be achieved – not to influence the transaction itself. The government had no privileged position in determining what constituted an educated person.

The political philosophy which determined this limited role of the state reflected a tradition of liberal education which was the inheritance of those who framed the legislation and implemented it. Indeed, these people (especially the civil servants) were themselves the products of a liberal tradition of public service whose essential task was to facilitate, to make possible, rather than to provide. Schools, therefore, were not (and, strictly speaking, still are not) *state* schools; they are Church schools or local authority schools, though maintained by the state. However, in abolishing the Central Advisory Councils, in decimating Her Majesty's Inspectorate as an independent protector of educational standards established over 130 years ago, in getting rid of civil servants who offered impartial advice, in enfeebling the local authorities and in placing education and curriculum decision-making in the hands of government-appointed quangos, so the ownership of education has changed – away from the guardians of a liberal tradition, and into the control of the government in terms of its substance and mode of delivery, and into the control of parents, the consumers, in terms of the places where it shall be delivered.

Conclusion

In these two lectures, I have outlined two competing traditions of education and training – the liberal and the vocational. In the past, they have not competed for our allegiance because they have related to different sorts of people – a liberal education for a privileged minority and vocational training for the rest. The first Victor Cook lectures – those of Lord Quinton and Professor O'Hear – represented that liberal tradition (see Quinton, 1994, and O'Hear, 1994).

But now those different traditions are in competition, as the development of education and training is increasingly driven by economic need. Above all, we see that liberal ideal being vocationalized as the language of the market transforms our understanding of education – the values that shape the relation

between teacher and pupil, the concept of learning, the professionalism of the teacher, and the control and ownership of education. Paradoxically, the appeal to the market has increased the power of the state, as the regulator of that market.

On the other hand, the disdain of that liberal ideal for practical relevance and vocational concern has made it vulnerable to such an encroachment. The question that I asked in my first lecture was not a practical or a political one, namely, 'What might the protectors of that liberal ideal do to stave off the vocational predators?' Rather was it an ethical one concerning the aims of education, namely, 'Ought not education, liberally conceived, also include vocational relevance and preparation?'

Such a question, if pursued, raises further questions about what is worth learning and about the quality of life that learning prepares young people for. Such quality of life cannot ignore the kind of occupation or vocation to be pursued, the practical talents and intelligence acquired, the capability of engaging creatively and imaginatively in the practical world, an awareness of the social and economic context in which one acts and lives, the moral framework of the relationships which one enters into. Vocational preparation in that broader sense must surely be part of a re-examined idea of liberal education. Furthermore, such an idea must have appeal to everyone, not the privileged possession of the few. Everyone, in his or her different way, and no doubt at different levels, is capable of thinking intelligently and sensitively, of having hopes and aspirations, of entering into relationships and of having a sense of achievement and of personal worth. Teaching is first and foremost an attempt to achieve that in young people, and to do so through the mediation of a diverse and rich culture that we have inherited. But such a mediation must address those practical questions, concerning the preparation for the future, which are uppermost in the minds of the young, and which are not unrelated to the economic context which they are entering. In that sense, there is a need to vocationalize the liberal ideal – to question the dualisms between thinking and doing, between theory and practice, between the world of education and the world of work, between education and training, which for too long have impoverished the educational experience of many.

On the other hand, I have, in the lecture, pointed to the dangers of an impoverished tradition of vocational training transforming education into something which is educationally indefensible, importing inappropriate metaphors through which that transaction between teacher and learner is described, is valued, is controlled and is owned.

CHAPTER 5

Subject-centred versus child-centred education – a false dualism

Paper given at the Annual Conference of the Society for Applied Philosophy, 1988, in a symposium on child-centred education and published in the Society's *Journal of Applied Philosophy*, 6 (2), (1989) 181–94.

Introduction

The debate is an ancient one. And it would seem on the surface to have little direct relevance to the educational issues that today confront us – the increasingly utilitarian aims of education, the apparent conflict between vocational training and liberal education, the reconciliation of practical learning with theoretical understanding.

Some of the foremost issues might be summarized as follows. On the one hand, the British government is imposing, through the 1988 Education Act, a curriculum that is essentially an aggregate of subjects. Subjects are seen to embody academic standards, disciplined acquisition of valuable knowledge, initiation into selective aspects of our culture. They are, thus, the vehicles through which understanding, rationality and sensibility are gained, through which therefore the learner is able to transcend the immediate and the practical. The learner is thereby 'empowered' to think, to reason, to criticize more objectively. One defence (there are others) of this position is given by Anthony O'Hear (1987) in 'The importance of traditional learning'. On the other hand, there are quite different approaches, equally

encouraged by the government. One such initiative, the Technical and Vocational Education Initiative (announced in November 1982, and funded by the Manpower Services Commission) is currently being extended to all maintained secondary schools in the country. It is an example of what has come to be called 'pre-vocational education', and has proved to be very popular with schools. The planning of the pre-vocational curriculum starts, not with 'traditional subjects', but with considerations of usefulness (often in terms of preparation for the world of work), of personal development, of the 'psychological aspects' of learning (rather than the 'logical aspects' of that which is to be learnt), of the relationships that should ideally prevail between teacher and learner, and of the personal and social values that should be fostered.

Therefore, a dismissal of the debate between subject-centredness and child-centredness as of no more than historical interest would be a mistake because the current and conflicting demands upon schools have their pedigree within those different traditions (and within the many variations within them). In the case of the second example, *apparently* utilitarian interventions of the Manpower Services Commission have injected new life into the student-centred approaches to learning which, with their emphasis upon personal development and effectiveness, would make even Froebel feel at home, or which, with their stress upon the continuity of experience between school and community, would receive the approval of Dewey. Indeed, the Manpower Services Commission (now the Training Agency), the erstwhile scourge of liberal educationists, has, ironically, become the protector of liberalism against the ravages of *narrowly conceived* subject-centredness.

We do, however, find such developments incomprehensible so long as we remain fixed within a too simple understanding of 'subject-centredness' and 'child-centredness'. There are different traditions of child-centredness reflecting, at the philosophical level, different theories of value and of meaning – indeed, different theories of what might be understood by subjects and of how they relate to the enquiring child. Making sense of those theories and relating them to 1980s' issues are the major objectives of this paper. What does emerge is the inadequacy of any simple definition of either subject-centredness or child-centredness, and thus of the dichotomy between the two. I share with Dewey (1916) in *Democracy and Education* and, more popularly, in *Experience and Education* (1938), the dismay with which he viewed the 'false

dualisms' which distort our perception of the social world, including the world of education.

Child-centredness

If we examine closely what is often referred to as the child-centred philosophy of education, we do in fact detect many quite different traditions. Especially is it important to distinguish between that which was represented by such people as Froebel and Montessori, and that with which Dewey is associated. Put crudely, the distinction is between, on the one hand, those who emphasize the individual nature of growth – the gradual development of potential that is there waiting to be recognized, fertilized, watered, or just allowed to grow (the horticultural metaphor is powerful among the followers of Froebel and Pestalozzi) – and, on the other hand, those who stress the social context of development. In the former case, there has always been a strong idealist (in the case of Froebel, Hegelian) pedigree, as education was conceived as 'leading man, as a thinking intelligent being, growing into self-consciousness to a pure and unsullied, conscious and free representation of the inner law of Divine Unity, and in teaching him ways and means thereto' (Froebel, 1986: 2).

In the latter case, however, the social nature of this process of growth is emphasized. Growth is not an unfolding of what is already there. Rather is it a gradual expansion of one's experience and understanding through the interaction between a person (with a particular set of perceptions, beliefs, attitudes, values) and the social and cultural environment in which he finds himself. 'Experience', 'connectedness' and 'enquiry' are the key words, and education is concerned with the facilitation of that interaction – making possible that 'experiential continuum' which Dewey talks about. And that will include, as top priority, the establishment of links between the learner (the thinker, the enquirer) and those social understandings of experience that are embodied within different subjects. It is upon this more social understanding of child-centredness that I want to focus.

It embraces a set of ideas that could help us make sense of the current stress upon 'experience', 'community links', the 'process of learning', 'project work', 'integration', 'relevance' – which characterize various current pre-vocational innovations, but which are so often seen as undermining the liberal ideals represented by the subject-based curriculum.

To make sense of, and then to expand more philosophically upon, the view of education that I refer to, we need to identify

the key terms or ideas. There is much talk about growth – about how *significant* and *meaningful* experiences connect up, about *continuity* of experience, about the identification of a problem and the integration and internalization of experiences through the pursuit of that problem, and thus about relevance to the learner. To that extent a greater importance is attached to the understandings and to the initial valuings of the learner. He or she is *not* the object of curriculum planning, the ends of which are conceived (for the most part) by the teacher from a superior cultural vantage point (making concessions, possibly to the interests of the learner, but only for motivational purposes). Rather it is the case that the valuings and the understandings of the learner are ideally the starting point of the curriculum thinking and, *to some extent*, determine the nature and the direction of the subsequent educational experience. There is therefore both an ethical dimension (how to decide 'what is of most worth?', the question posed by Herbert Spencer) and a theory of meaning, which, in Dewey's case, had its roots in the pragmatism of C. S. Peirce and William James, and which, I think, most upsets the supporters of a subject-based curriculum.

I want, therefore, to press a little further on these two points – the underlying theories of value and of meaning.

Theory of value

Moral questions about what is valuable (and thus ethical questions about how we decide what is valuable) always lurk not too far below the surface in the deliberations of teachers. After all, the curriculum is a selection from a very wide range of things that could be taught. Some subjects are picked out from other possible subjects (French rather than Hindi, biology rather than astronomy, etc.) and themes and topics are selected from within subjects – all on the basis of some principles of value.

One characteristic of the child-centred tradition is its suspicion of a principle of valuing (and thus of selection) which does not appeal to the valuings of the learner. The learner may not immediately see the connections between what he or she values and what the teacher judges to be of value, but the connection could be made and the teacher (on this theory of value) should be prepared to make the connection – and, indeed, would see it as part of his teaching job to enable the learner to see it. This aspect of child-centredness presupposes the essential connectedness of all things and distrusts a theory of value in which objects or actions are judged to be valuable – objectively, absolutely

so – independently of whether or not people value them (have an inclination towards them, want them, feel approvingly about them). The criticism levelled against prevailing educational practice would be that certain activities, tasks, understandings, bits of knowledge are regarded as valuable in themselves quite independently of whether or not the people upon whom these values are imposed appreciate them. The child-centred critics would say that they simply cannot make sense of that concept of 'value'. Connections have to be made between the valuings of the learner and what the teachers see to be of value. Otherwise the teachers' values are simply stuck on as with glue or Sellotape – they in no way affect the learner *significantly*. The learner will adopt those values for the sake of an examination but will then carry on much as before.

Dewey, therefore, suspicious of a theory of value which assumed some criterion of value quite disconnected from what people *feel* to be valuable (and there are different degrees in which one can subscribe to Dewey's position) sought to characterize value through the formal characteristics of growth of experience itself. There was no external criterion to appeal to – or, if there was, no one had shown him what it was.

Growth then was seen as an end in itself in that to describe a process as one of growth was *thereby* to value it, irrespective of the substantive nature of that growth. And the point of growth (its value or justification) was simply further growth, for it had no terminal point.

More needs to be said of this formal characteristic. It was formal in that it excluded in advance no particular experience but only a *mode* of experiencing, namely, that mode which terminated further experience or seriously curbed it – that experience, in other words, that introduced disconnection into an otherwise integrated series of experiences. The value of experiences lay in the access they gave to more ways of experiencing, which themselves offered further possibilities, and so on. For Dewey, the worst thing that could happen educationally was boredom – the failure of the object of enquiry to provide connections, to modify the present state of experiencing, or to make possible yet further experience. Education was the gradual modification of a person's present state of experiencing, and any experience was educative in so far as it assisted this modification in such a way that further experience was made possible. What was wrong with traditional education – the traditional way of modifying the state of experiencing – was, firstly, that in imposing

the modifications 'from outside' it tacked them on 'artificially' to the existing state and left things as they were as far as further experience was possible (there was no 'integration' or organic connection); and, secondly, that it directed further experience (imposed values from outside), thereby ignoring the interest and the possible enquiry of the pupil and excluding other significant experiences. Growth, thus formally analysed, was a condition of experience; and, since experiencing was the characteristic life of the mind, then these formal characteristics of growth were the criteria for assessing or evaluating the quality of this life. The value of experience and thereby of education lay in the formal characteristics of growth, not in considerations disconnected from it. The direction of growth could not be determined by considerations which were logically disconnected from what it means to grow.

The most obvious difficulty in such a theory of value is that it does not exclude the growth which, on other grounds, we would wish to dismiss as grossly immoral. Thus the petty thief engages in experiences which open up the possibility of an interesting and varied life of crime. There would be growth in experience but, we would wish to maintain, the growth is in the wrong direction, wrongness being judged by criteria disconnected from the formal characteristics of growth itself. Dewey's reply to this was far from adequate. He said that growth in a particular direction of this sort retarded 'growth in general', because it 'sets up conditions that shut off the person . . . from the occasions, stimuli, and opportunities for continuing growth in new directions' (Dewey, 1938: 36). The same, however, can be said of any experience whatsoever, and thus Dewey did not find in his formal characterization of growth a principle by which he could exclude as non-valuable any particular, substantive experience. But in this he showed the difficulties of other philosophers who wish to rest substantive moral positions upon purely formal principles of morality.

If we leave aside that particular difficulty, which is crippling but maybe not fatal, we should address the further problem of what can possibly be meant by working from the 'valuings' of the learner. And a key concept here is that of 'interest'. The interest of the learner is that which in some way learning should start from, which should itself help direct the course of learning, and indeed which should itself be that which is educated.

Interests certainly are what one appeals to when the pupil is reluctant to learn; acknowledgement of interests would seem

necessary in order to motivate the pupils. There is nothing particularly controversial in that. But, upon analysis, the concept of interest does not lend itself easily to being used in quite this way. There are logical, not just practical, problems in identifying interests, let alone in *using* them to encourage learning that is otherwise uninteresting. Furthermore, the important issues at stake in the interest-based curriculum, and in a certain 'child-centred' philosophy of education that goes with it, are not in the main motivational. Reference to interests enters into the very conception of education. Interests are, not what are used, but what are educated.

It is with the interest-based curriculum in the sense of 'educating interests' that educational philosophers such as Dewey and Kilpatrick were associated, and it is within the context of a concern for the pupils' interests that the practical developments took place in school organization, methods of teaching and curriculum content, especially in America during the 1920s and 1930s. Thus Kilpatrick (1918) spoke of the children's interests *determining* curriculum content and structure, and of common learnings resulting from common interests. In introducing the account of 'An experiment with a project curriculum', he denied that the aims of the school were the 'conventional knowledge or skills'. The starting point was 'the actual present life of the boys and girls themselves, with all their interests and desires, good and bad'; the first step was 'to help guide these children to choose the most interesting and fruitful parts of this life as the content of their school activity'; and the consequent aims were 'first to help the boys and girls do better than they otherwise would the precise things they had chosen, and second, by means of the experience of choosing and through the experience of the more effectual activity, gradually to broaden the outlook of the boys and girls as to what they might further choose and then help them better effect these new choices' (Kilpatrick, 1923). Thus the child's interests rather than history or geography constitute the subject-matter of the curriculum. P. S. Wilson (1971) restated this position in his book *Interest and Discipline in Education:* 'a child's *education* (as opposed to schooling) can only proceed through the pursuit of his interests since it is only these which are of intrinsic value ... [and] whatever enables him to appreciate and understand his interest more fully and to pursue it more actively and effectively is educative' (p. 71).

This concern for the child's interests, therefore, is to be distinguished on the one hand from appealing to a child's interests

to get him to learn, and, on the other hand, from making the subject-matter interesting in order to make it learnable. Wilson distinguishes 'learning through interest' and 'learning from interest' and 'learning what is of interest'. 'Learning through interest' requires linking to the child's interests what is to be learnt and is therefore a trivializing of the child's interests – using them simply as a means. 'Learning from interest' indicates an attempt to make interesting what is to be learnt, thereby trivializing what is to be learnt in that it is not put forward as intrinsically interesting. Only 'learning what is of interest' indicates respect both for the child's interests and for the subject matter that the child is interested in. For Wilson, as for Kilpatrick and Dewey, to base a curriculum on the interests of the child for motivational reasons under the guise of being more enlightened or child-centred is to misunderstand the central thesis of the child-centred movement. The interests of the child are not motivational aids, but *the very 'things' which ought to be educated* – the subject matter of the curriculum.

There are, however, difficulties of a logical, not just a practical, kind in identifying the interests of children. First, one needs to distinguish between 'her interests' and 'her showing interest'. Thus to show interest in something is an episode and might not indicate what her interests are. Interests are what a person *tends* to show interest in; they indicate a disposition, and thus might be present even though there are no signs of interest (no interest shown) – when, for example, the right occasion for showing interest does not occur. Nonetheless, to have an interest would require showing interest on the right occasion, unless on any one occasion some further story might be given. Showing interest would be a criterion though not a sufficient one for a person being interested.

Secondly, however, even 'showing interest' is not always clear. It involves paying attention. But this is not sufficient. One could pay attention because, despite boredom, one was forced to or because it was expedient.

Thirdly, where there is 'an interest', it should be possible to characterize the features of the object which are being picked out as interesting (worthy of interest). To have interests therefore is to have a disposition or an inclination to show interest in (to attend willingly to) certain features of something which can be characterized. And these features, as the object of a person's interest, would enter into the description and identification of his interests, viz. the aspect under which he sees it.

Fourthly, it is necessary to bear in mind the wider classification of the objects of one's interest. Thus, one can show interest in

things (stamps) or in doing things (putting stamps in an album) or in achieving things (having the best stamp collection). For someone to be interested in an object implies not only that he gives his mind to it in a fairly spontaneous way, but also that the object captures attention 'in the sense of provoking hypotheses'. To quote Ryle, 'A connoisseur might find wine interesting; the ordinary diner might describe it as piquant or attractive or just nice'.

It should be clear therefore why it is sometimes difficult to identify and to characterize the child's interests for purposes of organizing the curriculum. Interests are not things that can be 'observed' either by teachers or by researchers; their identification and characterization depend on how the interested person sees the object of interest. Hence, *general* classifications would omit the particular features of the object which the child finds interesting. For instance, to say that children of a certain age, etc., are interested in stamps omits the particular features of stamps (their monetary value or their prettiness, order, colours) which interest the child. A further account is required, not of how children in general see, but how this particular child sees, is attracted by, spontaneously gives attention to, particular features of a situation. This requires knowledge not of children in general but of *this* particular child and of *his* point of view. And this can be achieved only after a period of time and often after a great deal of attention has been given to the many possible signs of interest from the child – for 'showing interest' is only a criterion of 'having an interest', and by no means a sufficient condition. Furthermore, given a correct identification of interest, there is no a priori reason why their pursuit should lead out into yet further interests in a sort of 'experiential continuum'. The more intense an interest, the less likely it may be to lead on to yet further considerations, for the mark of a well-developed interest is sometimes its total absorption and exclusiveness.

Hence, the recommendations for an interest-based curriculum give no conceptual guidelines for identifying the child's interests. Smith, Stanley and Shores (1957) in a major curriculum textbook of the 1950s and in attending to the prevailing child-centred tradition, said that 'certain interests do tend to appear at certain developmental stages', and these are elaborated into such interests as 'the home and immediate community' (p. 271). Frederick and Musselwhite (quoted in Shores *et al.*, 1957) attempt to identify 'centres of interest' for grades one to twelve which could become integrating elements on the curriculum; the list includes such interests as 'understanding the influence of the physical and social environment on life'. But whatever other purposes this classification serves, it is

not a classification of *interests*, because it in no way characterizes the features of a situation or object which particular individuals find interesting. A significant feature of many so-called interest-based curricula is that, in classifying in fairly general terms what the children's interests appear to be to the 'observing' adult, they are no longer concerned with actual interests of the particular child but with what the teacher thinks (from his acquaintance with development studies or theories of child development) the child ought to be interested in.

A different misunderstanding is made by those who, in attempting to structure the curriculum around the interests of the child, 'stimulate' or 'spark off' the child's interests. The child is apathetic or bored – qualities or moods that indicate lack of interest in things in general. Hence a 'battery' of stimulants is provided – films, colour schemes, noises, visitors. But the misunderstanding lies in being confused about the nature of interests. To have an interest is not to have an emotion; it is to have a disposition to attend to certain suggestive features of a thing, and this can be quite unemotional. To be absorbed in something is not the same as being excited by it – rather might excitement or being emotionally roused get in the way of one's interests. Stirring children up, if successful, would result in stirred-up children, not necessarily in interested children. For such stimulants have no intrinsic connection with the intended object of interest.

Interests therefore are neither what are to be *used* in the curriculum nor what can be classified, and placed on a syllabus. They are, in their infinite variety, in their subtle changes from child to child, in their different manifestations, and in their greater or lesser degrees of constancy, precisely what need to be educated. The teacher could not in preparation anticipate the interest; what he must do is to understand the child's activity from the individual child's point of view and help *that* child perform *that* activity more effectively. Dewey, in putting the interests of the child at the centre of education, would not talk of a curriculum based on general classification of children's interests, nor of stimulating their interests. 'Interests represent the moving force of objects . . . in any experience having purpose' (Dewey, 1916:130). Rather must the teacher respond to the different experiences of children and to the purposive activities with which they are associated.

It is clear what *practical* difficulties arise here. The need of the teacher to identify, as well as respect, the different interests of 30 to 40 children is daunting indeed. It would require not only considerable personal resources but extensive material resources

and facilities such that individual pupils could be directed towards whatsoever helps them pursue their interests more effectively.

But the appeal is to an approach to the curriculum which treats the learners' values seriously (not something to be used or manipulated for other ends) because, first, otherwise one is failing to respect the learner as a person; secondly, what is taught will fail to make any real impact upon what *really* grips the attention of the learner; and, finally, more controversially, there is no basis for values other than 'the finding value in' – the taking of interest in, the disposition towards, the sense of fulfilment in the very pursuit of that which one finds interesting.

Theory of meaning

The child-centred tradition that I am trying to outline encapsulates not simply a theory of value (still implicitly maintained by some teachers and some policy-makers alike) but also a theory of meaning. Put very crudely, just as things, activities, bodies of knowledge do not have value independently of people finding value in them, so too propositions, theories, arguments do not have meaning unless people find them meaningful – unless they connect with the learners' way of making sense of experience. Therefore, supreme importance is attached to active enquiry, as opposed to 'learning off' the propositions, theories, arguments that are the result of others' enquiries – and which might have made sense to them.

This is a very complex thesis and no doubt once again one can see the influence of pragmatism. Knowledge becomes 'warranted assertion' – it is a provisional (at the moment, the most adequate) way of making sense of the world. But it might always be superseded by a more adequate (more satisfying) way of making sense of things.

A key concept here is that of 'enquiry' – the kind of enquiry that is engaged in in pursuit of those ends that one finds interesting. And thus the curriculum should be centred upon the student's own enquiry, the active pursuit of his or her own interest.

There are some fairly daft defences of this view – philosophically inept as well as romantically dangerous, dismissing subjects and all that they stand for. But such was not Dewey's position. Subjects were important – crucially important. They represented the most fruitful modes of enquiry that man had achieved, and indeed it was the job of the teacher, in assisting the young learner to pursue his or her own enquiry, to link such enquiries to those of the historian, the geographer, the

mathematician and so on. Nonetheless, for those subject-specific enquiries to be meaningful they had to connect, as it were, with the individual's own specific interests and with his or her understandings. What comes 'from outside' has to be accommodated within the learner's own frame of reference; and that is an active one, tied up with his or her experience and pursuits of matters of interest. Of course, you can arouse or create interests – in certain sorts of music, say – and much of a teacher's time will be spent doing that. But even then, connections are made, and often the development of such interests by the teacher will depend on the shape and force of prior experiences (for example, prior understandings of and feelings about music).

Presupposed in the account given by Dewey is a theory of meaning and of truth. A statement only has meaning within the context of an enquiry, and to understand any part of the enquiry (a particular statement, say) is to see it related to the problem which gave rise and shape to the enquiry. The main features of enquiry are (i) the obstacle to action which is called a problem, (ii) the marshalling of ideas or plans of action which is the enquiry proper, (iii) the 'existential' transformation of the problematic situation which is symbolized in the final judgement or *warranted assertion*.

At all three stages action enters into the very meaning of what it is to think; a problem is a 'forked-road' situation where an 'organism's' habit of action is inhibited by some obstacle; hypothetical suggestions or ideas of alternative actions are formulated which would remove the obstacles to action; the final judgement is the existential transformation of the conditions such that the activity might proceed. Thinking is intellectualized action; it arises only when the habit of action is broken – when one has got stuck. The relation of thought to practical problems is logical, not contingent; the reference to practical problems must enter into any characterization of thought. Hence, there is no real distinction between the theoretical and the practical, the one being an offshoot of the other. And this is not just an evolutionary account of the *genesis* of thought, or of the *value* of practical thinking in preference to theoretical, but of what it *means* to think.

What then appears to be challenged is the *public* nature of the concepts we employ, the *interpersonal* standards to which enquiry must submit, the possibility of giving an *objective* (i.e. independent of personal puzzles, interests or preferences) account of reality, a notion of *truth* that is related to standards other than personal satisfaction and utility. An alternative theory of meaning is offered

in which standards of judgement are transient and relative to different enquiries, meanings of words and statements are different for different individuals, truth is what gives temporary rest and satisfaction in a constant state of discomfort brought on by 'forked-road' situations.

Two difficulties of a philosophical kind need to be examined in this theory of enquiry: first, the necessary relation of the meaning of a proposition to a problem (especially a practical problem); secondly, the relativist, even instrumentalist, conception of meaning.

I do not want to go into these philosophical difficulties here – they are tied up with a rather complex theory of meaning and of truth associated with the pragmatism of Peirce and of James. The important question for those who feel sympathetic to this child-centred conception of education is: how far can one proceed along this particular line of reasoning without taking on board the problems inherent within pragmatism? How far can one develop a theory of 'meaningfulness' without denying the *im*personal and *inter*subjective standards of meaningful discourse that are embedded within different intellectual, moral and aesthetic disciplines – that do not, in other words, depend upon Johnny or Mary *finding* them meaningful? How far might teachers feel justified in introducing the learners to (initiating them into) these different disciplines, irrespective of whether they connect up with the learners' current interests?

Two points we should consider seriously. The first is that for understanding to take place, there must be some adaptation of that which is to be understood to the frame of reference (the concepts, the attitudes, the values) through which the learner experiences the world. Either that or the frame of reference does itself shift and adapt to the new experience. There is an interaction – and a fresh way of seeing things. Of course, that itself will change as it is refined through further experiences and through further interactions with others, often critical people. Hence, a lot of so-called learning remains dead, inert ideas, because these connections are not made. We, as teachers, ignore at our peril the concepts and feelings and interests through which the would-be learner sieves the new experiences (the teacher's carefully planned lessons, say). Secondly, in most cases (though I resist saying in all cases), what is taught has to be seen as meaningful in this sense – i.e. seen to relate to what the learner finds of interest (what holds his or her attention). In many cases, those interests are wide-ranging and connections can be made. One could say, too, that

literature and the arts do at their best deal with perennial human problems that, properly taught, will link up with interests that most children have. Properly taught, connections can be made. Thirdly, this view, however, does point out that the meaning of a proposition or of a word cannot be isolated from the wider context in which such words or propositions are used. Granted that any one proposition *p* is true or false depending on whether it is in fact the case that *p*, nonetheless the rules for linking *p* with these and not other truth conditions must be grasped within the wider context of the language of which *p* is part. Furthermore, such a context will include the sort of extra-linguistic purposes for which that sort of language is employed. There is some connection between meaning and use, between 'language games' and extra-linguistic purposes which Dewey saw and which was worth emphasizing at a time when all too frequently 'bodies of knowledge' were taught without reference either to the wider context in which such knowledge had meaning or to the general point of the discourse. That does not however imply that the meaning of a word is its use or that words are only tools.

Nonetheless, all this must seem alien to those who see the curriculum as a series of subjects, because two aspects of the one child-centred tradition that I have picked out are:

1 a theory of value in which the interests, the valuings of the learner in some way determine what *is* valuable, what should be taught (hence, the idea of a more negotiated curriculum and greater student responsibility for their own learning) – whereas subject-centredness would presuppose the intrinsic worth of the kinds of knowledge and activities represented by the subjects, irrespective of whether the learner saw their value, and
2 a *theory of meaning* (or at least meaningfulness) in which what is learnt must connect up significantly with the current interests, experience, ways of understanding of the learner – whereas subject-centredness would not require that. Rather is the learner *initiated into* (a metaphor very common in the 1960s) different forms of knowledge, which may bear no relation to the commonsense level of interests enjoyed by the learner

Subject-centredness

It is common, in contrasting subject-centredness with child-centredness, to treat the idea of a subject as non-problematic. The

weight of argument lies on the shoulders of those who choose not to think in subject terms. The British Secretary of State, therefore, sees no need to explain what is meant by a subject when defining the National Curriculum in terms of subjects. He certainly sees no need to justify a curriculum conceived in that way – in terms, for example, of satisfying the pupils' interests. And yet another British government minister has, through the Technical and Vocational Education Initiative mentioned earlier, resurrected many of the features of the very child-centredness I have picked out. Indeed, over £1 billion has been spent on it, and yet this gets but a bare mention in the Consultation documents leading to the National Curriculum.

Subjects, as such, are convenient ways of organizing the process of learning. There is so much to be learnt, so much to know, that a convenient way of packaging it all and putting it into the timetable must be found. The fact that what has to be learnt is organized in one way rather than another is due to a whole range of factors – historical, for instance, or pressures from people in power to maintain the status quo (because professorships and other symbols of status depend on it). In this area, sociologists of knowledge have for a long time had a field day (see Young, 1971, but also my reply in Chapter 12 of this volume). And, indeed, one might ask what physical and human geographers have in common other than the fact that historical accident has brought them together. Those who reject as incoherent the organization of the curriculum in terms of 'areas of study' (media studies, for example) should look closely at the traditional subjects of the curriculum to see what coherence lies there. What have the 'back to the teaching of grammar' advocates in common with members of the National Association of the Teachers of English?

There would, of course, seem to be different kinds of subject matter or curriculum content in so far as there are logically different kinds of knowledge, different kinds of enquiry, each kind employing different concepts, explaining events in different ways, making things meaningful (and linking things together) in different senses.

It may seem plausible therefore to initiate pupils into this differentiated structure through those subjects, the logical organization of which reflect most closely the structures of these different kinds of knowledge. At least it is argued that the subject matter of these different modes of knowledge should provide the content of the curriculum.

However, the organization of knowledge for curriculum purposes is not a purely philosophical problem. The notion of a

'school subject' is not identical with that of a logically coherent subject matter, and the structure of a teaching activity is not determined by logical or epistemological considerations alone. It would be wrong to assume that the division of the curriculum could be deduced from a philosophical division of knowledge.

One might argue that within different subjects are forms of enquiry characterized by ways of proceeding (of sifting evidence, of testing the truth of what is said), and by ways of conceptualizing and making sense of experience. The biologist, as such, sees the field system differently from the medieval historian and will pursue different investigations in different ways. He is *interested* in different things. The results of the biologists' or the medieval historians' interested enquiries will no doubt be written down in books and articles, argued about by fellow scholars, made the basis of yet further enquiries, become the material or the resource from which teachers might draw in order to initiate students into similar ways of understanding the world and pursuing enquiries. The aim is to get the student onto the inside of what really is a socially developed activity that provides a fruitful but by no means finished way of understanding experience and of taking further, active interest in it. The danger, however, is to take the product of others' enquiries – the abstractions from a complex and difficult process – and to present them as propositions to be learnt, as inert ideas, dead because they have been disconnected from the form of enquiry to which they belong. This has long been recognized by curriculum reformers, and much more is being done now to enable a more practical, enquiry-based approach to learning – through new kinds of examination like the General Certificate of Secondary Education, for example, or (much earlier) through such innovations as Nuffield Science. Aspects of the child-centred tradition have entered our thinking about subjects.

There are, of course, many different problems that people have pursued in a disciplined way, developing a social tradition of enquiry which others can inherit and participate in. There have emerged different ways of conceptualizing and appreciating experience. Hence, there are different disciplines upon which one might draw in developing or in pursuing one's own interested enquiries. At their best, teachers get the pupils on the inside of these different disciplines and enable them to appreciate them, to find an interest in them, and to see the connection behind them and the world as the students see and understand it. The world from the train window is more than a funny-shaped field with a

lonely church in the middle – it is the remains of a medieval village with its early enclosure and field system. But, for this to be more than a set of inert ideas and disconnected facts, it must link with other interests and feelings and with certain dispositions to make sense of the environment, and it must, too, connect with a wider range of geographical and historical understandings. There must be some grasp of the logic of enquiry that gave rise to these understandings – the structure of that form of enquiry. But there is no logically uniform set of criteria for identifying or classifying enquiries.

Some subject matter (the results of others' enquiries, the current state of understanding upon which the curriculum might draw) are structured through the technical concepts and logically related propositions (as in the case of mathematics); some are structured by general principles of procedure or by recognized modes of criticism (as is the case with historians or with literary critics); yet others are structured by the kind of problem examined (environmental studies). But whatever the structure, the subject matter represents a given state of understanding which others can be introduced to and enabled to participate in. Subjects are the convenient organizations through which at their best learners are so introduced and enabled.

There is then a justification of subjects in terms of convenience – convenience in making accessible the many differently structured forms of enquiry that help us make sense of the world. But the relation of subject (in this organizational sense) and subject matter (in this logical sense) is often tenuous and needs to be established. The failure of the National Curriculum to do so is just one further example of the superficiality behind the establishment of foundation subjects.

There lies, however, a further defect, namely, the absence of any theory of value which enables us to see the importance of studying these subjects (however they are to be defined). Why indeed should children study them if they find no interest in them – if in no way do they connect up with their interests, with their valuings? Why should a child find value in knowledge about the medieval origins of the field I see from the train window? His interest in that field lies simply in its potential for playing football or for studying biology. The medieval dimension is one among many; we all have to be selective; and there is no intrinsic reason why one dimension is somehow superior to another. The weakness of the subject-based curriculum is that it seldom faces the questions of justification that the child-centredness of Dewey and Kilpatrick

took seriously. Possibly only John White (1973) in recent years has come near to giving a satisfactory answer – equipping young people with the understandings and skills that will extend their choice of interests and their capacity to engage satisfactorily in those interests – a position not too distant from that of the disciples of Dewey.

Reconciling the child-centred and subject-centred traditions

Child-centred education versus subject-centred education is an old debate, and it keeps emerging in different guises. The Secretary of State for Education is firmly committed to a subject-based curriculum – or was. Health education and economic awareness are now referred to as cross-curriculum themes. But no account is given of what is meant by 'subject' or how far subjects represent distinctive ways of understanding experience. Nor, in face of the evidence that many students (prior to the age of 16) find no interest in the subjects they will have to study, is there any justification of why they should – no argument for the value of those subjects when the learners find no value in them.

On the other hand, there have emerged through the Technical and Vocational Education Initiative and the pre-vocational courses quite different ways of organizing the curriculum, the principles of which concern both the personal development of each student and social utility (a different criterion of balance here). Characteristic of the pre-vocational curriculum are: first, a *shift in styles of learning* with much greater emphasis upon experience, practical intelligence, enquiry arising out of problems perceived; secondly, *greater student responsibility* for their own learning, with some negotiation of the direction and shape of their learning, and with resources and tutor support for greater autonomy in learning; thirdly, *a greater emphasis upon personal development and responsibility*, reflected in a more central place for guidance and counselling; fourthly, *closer links with the community* through the project work and enquiries, and through cooperative schemes of learning; fifthly, *shifting modes of assessment* whereby the process of development is reflected in profiles and whereby student achievement in many different spheres of activity is recorded; and, finally, *links with future training, education, or work* so that the students can see connections between present activities and future aspirations (vocationalism in this very broad sense was anticipated by Dewey in *Democracy and Education*).

Such pre-vocational developments are rooted in the very child-centred tradition that I have outlined – and yet announced under the guise of vocationalism. Perhaps that was intentional. The so-called fall in standards is often ascribed to the child-centred tradition encouraged within the Plowden (1967) and Newsom Reports (1963). Its future influence requires a different label, a different context, because it is radical in its challenge. It challenges the shape of the curriculum as we have come to accept it. It does so by questioning the ethical base for subjects that learners often find no value in. It does so by questioning the meaning and significance of content that has been abstracted from the context of enquiry from which it arose and that is not very meaningful for many of the learners. And such radicalism is dangerous, too, because it remains unrecognized for what it is. Under the guise of Enterprise in Higher Education (surely a Thatcherite innovation if ever there was one) we have in fact the most subversive threat ever to the departmental organization of teaching in higher education, associated with authoritative modes of teaching and assessing.

Perhaps, however, the fault lies in polarizing the two traditions and in failing to see that subjects at their best provide the resources, the inspirations, the forms of intellectual and aesthetic activity, which (when properly mediated by the teacher) illuminate and extend the valuings and the interests of the curious and active learner. Subjects, too, properly tamed can come into the broad church of child-centredness.

CHAPTER 6

Standards and quality in education

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In this paper I limit myself to the following points. First, I rehearse the political arguments about falling standards and about the need of the educational system to do something about them – and of the government, therefore, to do something about the educational system. Second, I then say a little about the consequence of this – the ways of putting this concern into operation, for, just as (in the words of the medieval schoolmen) *operatio sequitur esse*, so do the *ways* of testing and monitoring standards tell us a lot about the *nature* of standards as they are perceived by politicians, civil servants, examination boards and the like. Third, I move into the more theoretical and critical domain, and place the prevailing notion of standards within the wider context of different educational traditions. The arguments about standards cannot be divorced from a much larger ethical debate about the purpose and the control of education. Fourth, I reflect on all this in a more philosophical way, trying to clarify what by now (in the argument) appears more and more to be an 'essentially contestable' concept. Finally, I draw all these points together very inconclusively.

Political context

There has in the last fifteen years been a steady flow of warnings from government about 'declining standards'. The 1977 consultative document *Education in Schools* commented on

Callaghan's Ruskin[1] speech in the following way:

> [it] was made against a background of strongly critical comment in the press and elsewhere on education and educational standards. Children's standards of performance in their school work was said to have declined. The curriculum, it was argued, paid too little attention to the basic skills of reading, writing and arithmetic, and was overloaded with fringe subjects. (DES, 1977)

Already we see two kinds of decline in standards – poor performance in the basic skills (children not writing, reading, adding and subtracting as well as a similar cohort of children would have done in a previous age) and neglect of more traditional subjects as these were usurped by fringe subjects (no doubt peace studies and other forms of integrated studies). But the document goes on to mention poor discipline and behaviour and the neglect of economic relevance.

The consultative document was produced by a Labour government, but one which was reacting, *first*, to well-orchestrated populist appeals from the right and, *second*, to the concerns of commerce and industry which argued that the output of the educational system – yes, even those who came up to *traditional* standards – were ill-prepared for the economic world they were entering. Therefore, there were four areas of quality concern – basic skills, traditional learning, discipline and economic relevance. 'Quality' is reflected in the standards, explicit or implicit, to which reference is made when performance is judged. In that sense quality and standards are logically related concepts, and therefore the four areas of quality concern picked out in Callaghan's speech reflect four different kinds of standard – which kinds may not, as we shall see, always be compatible with each other.

'Standards' and 'quality' have been rallying calls to all political parties and government initiatives ever since. One will recall Sir Keith Joseph's (then Secretary of State) North of England Conference speech in January 1984, when, deeply concerned with the poor standards of many young people, he affirmed the aim of bringing 80–90 per cent of *all* pupils at least to the level which is now expected and achieved in the 16+ examination by pupils of average ability in individual subjects. In thus raising standards, Sir Keith first proposed the need to define the objectives of the 5 to 16 curriculum so that everyone would know the levels that should be achieved. And, following this line of reasoning, the Secretary of State argued for the change in 16+ examinations so

that they would measure 'absolute' rather than 'relative' performance. The same message was reiterated by the succeeding Secretary of State, Kenneth Baker, who argued for greater standardization and higher standards in anticipation of the 1987 Consultation Document which thus stated

> The Government has concluded that these advantages and consistent improvements in standards can be guaranteed only within a national framework for the secular curriculum. . . . The imaginative application of professional skills at all levels of the education service, within a statutory framework which sets clear objectives, will raise standards. (Baker, 1987)[2].

Let us pause to see where the argument is developing. There is wide concern about standards. Generally speaking these need to be higher. This concern, however, is about different sorts of standards – those relating to traditional learning, those relating to 'basic skills', those relating to behaviour and those relating to economic relevance. And presumably standards need to be higher in each of these independent areas. To raise standards requires expressing these standards quite explicitly – they thus become the clearly stated objectives (the absolute benchmarks) against which a pupil's performance might be judged. There might, within any one *area* of standards (let us say, within the area of the basic skill of reading or within the traditional learning area of history), be logically related standards pitched at different levels or in a hierarchy. In that sense one can talk of differentiated and higher standards. Thus, for example, Mr Tim Eggar (1991), in recently addressing the fifth annual conference of the Joint Council for the GCSE, said that 'many of the challenges which have to be faced have to do with standards. There is the need for adequate differentiation, particularly for more able pupils.' This requires the introduction of level 10 in National Assessment 'which is demonstrably more demanding than the existing Grade A of GCSE'. It is the job of schools, therefore, to make sure that the performance of pupils, in each of these general standards areas, improves in the sense of measuring up to standards further up the hierarchy. Thus presumably the standard expressed in 'can read fluently most words with four syllables' is higher than the standard expressed in 'can read fluently most words with three syllables' because the one would seem to subsume the other (but this is not necessarily true).

Two questions therefore seem to be appropriate: why choose a particular objective of performance as *the* standard of

measurement? and why choose one level, in the hierarchy of levels, rather than another as the appropriate standard for a particular age group? The first question would itself seem to raise two subsidiary questions: why are these particular statements of objectives chosen out of an infinite number of possible statements (that is, is there anything in the nature of historical enquiry or economic relevance which makes these rather than those the appropriate standard bearers)? and who has the authority for deciding which, among many competitors, are to be the appropriate standards? The National Curriculum, and the subsequent reports on the Foundation Subjects, do not on the whole address these questions.

At the post-16 stage of education, ministers have identified a different sort of problem. They seem to be more satisfied with the standards that have been set by the General Certificate of Education A Level Boards, less satisfied with the number of those who 'measure up' to those standards (whereas a lot of ministerial anxiety about the compulsory period of schooling lay in the lack of standardization, the vagueness or non-existence of explicit standards, and, as a result of this, the low expectations of teachers with the consequence of low standards of performance). Thus, again and again, attempts to reform A level examinations have foundered on the confidence that those in power have placed in the A levels. Mark Carlisle, when Secretary of State for Education and Science, rejected reforms which had been proposed and argued for the retention of A levels as guarantees of high standards. They have been variously described by ministers subsequently as the 'gold standard', the 'flagship', and 'the jewel in the crown'.

There is something odd and inconsistent in this, because pre-16 standards of GCSE and of national assessment are the kinds of things which can be expressed in statements - or at least, that is what is intended in the GCSE and national assessment reform. They are the objectives against which performance can be measured; performance either does or does not meet these explicitly stated objectives. However, this is quite clearly not the case in A levels where such explicit objectives are rarely provided and where grades therefore refer not to 'absolutes' but to relative places within the overall distribution of marks.

Higher education has not escaped the concern over standards – not that standards are said to be declining (which institution would admit to that?) but that standards will inevitably decline if numbers are increased without a parallel increase in resources. The universities have firmly maintained that preserving the unit

of resource is a necessary condition of preserving standards. This has become an interesting issue. The government claim that expansion has occurred, particularly in the polytechnics and colleges of higher education, without jeopardizing standards. Proof lies in the increased number of degrees awarded and in particular the greater proportion of good honours degrees. And it is difficult for higher education to gainsay this without admitting to a lowering of standards – by which would be meant the award of the same degree for measurably worse performance.

Monitoring of standards

We have seen therefore that, in meeting the public concern over standards, the government has pursued several courses of action. It has established 'absolute standards', hierarchically related, in areas of traditional learning. It has reasserted the 'flagship role' of A levels. It has expressed confidence in the standards set by the degree awards of higher education, despite the decline in the unit of resource.

Nonetheless, it is one thing to assert these things. It is quite another to check that the assertions are correct – to monitor what is in fact the case. Monitoring standards in schools and in higher education has been of several different kinds.

First, this has been a central role of Her Majesty's Inspectorate (HMI) and of local advisers. It would be argued that the accumulation of experience, the corporate awareness of what is good work, the sense of judgement established through constant critical discussion in the context of widely observed practice – that such professional activity gives insight and judgement that escapes others. Wide experience enables them to have a comparative perspective. They are reluctant to be too specific in what they say about a school or a department, partly because of the political consequences of being so specific, but partly because of the difficulties in capturing the immensely complicated process of children's learning within a few well-chosen words.

Secondly, there are the results of public examinations. Thus, the examinations at GCSE or at A level are graded; grades are totted up or averaged; league tables are produced in the Good School Guides. Each year one knows school by school, or nationally, or regionally, whether there are more or less students achieving particular grades. These grades, then, become the test of quality. They set the standards, and evidently there are more young people now coming up to these standards. But the standards are set by the examiners: first, in their setting of questions and

agreeing of marking schemes, and, second, in the discussion of individual and marginal cases – guided (though not totally determined) by norms of grade distribution. It is a sophisticated system, but it is ultimately based on the judgement of experienced examiners, speaking with the authority of those who have been initiated into a particular tradition within a recognized area of learning. Indeed, becoming an A level examiner requires a kind of apprenticeship, with the forming, through criticism, of a sense of judgement which outstrips explicit criteria and which depends upon comparisons across candidates and over the years. Difficulties arise, of course, in the comparing of grades of different examination systems – in the calibration, for example, of CSE Grade 1[3] with GCE Grade C, or GCE Grade C with GCSE Grade C, or different modes of the same examination (e.g. Mode 1 with Mode 3 CSE in French), or different Examination Boards. But these difficulties were tackled with technical skills and statistical devices of, first, the Schools Examination Council and, then, of the Schools Examination and Assessment Council.

Thirdly, there have been, in the last fifteen years, the attempts by the Assessment of Performance Unit to provide longitudinal comparisons of performance across the curriculum and, on a very light sampling basis, across the country at different ages. The reports on languages, on science and on mathematics have provided us with the very best evidence available on what pupils can or cannot do. But it is impossible to draw from these reports simple conclusions of the kind, 'standards have gone down in mathematics', because, as was pointed out earlier, aims change over time and, thus, so do what are to count as appropriate standards. An attempt to provide a unitary and mathematical yardstick of comparison in the Rasch model was shown to be both conceptually and technically flawed. Nonetheless, the APU evidence on pupil performance in general terms provided valuable information on the basis of which any one school, by drawing upon the item bank, could look comparatively at its own achievement.[4]

Fourthly, the educational system has been monitored by the occasional evaluation study – the in-depth probe by researchers. By and large, however, quality has been ascertained through inspection and through examination of individual performance, and by the anecdotal account and the 'general impression' that the public and government receive through the media.

The major weakness in these ways of monitoring standards, pointed to by critics, is the lack of explicit and detailed criteria

by which judgements are made. Just as a knife is judged good or bad according to how well it cuts – and the criteria for cutting well can be established beforehand (does it slice through this tomato without the juice spitting out?) – so too might any performance be judged by its 'fitness for purpose'. That being so, then the purpose of the activity needs to be clearly spelt out, and the criteria for successfully achieving that purpose established. How can you know that a knife is good or bad unless you know whether it cuts and, then, in turn, know what is to count as good cutting? How can you know whether a person is good at maths unless you know what specific mathematical understandings and skills are worth learning, and, then, in turn, know what that person has to do to demonstrate that he or she has those understandings and those skills? What (the critics will say) is lacking from the judgements of HMI and from the gradings of examination boards are the 'performance criteria' or 'performance indicators' according to which judgements are made. GCSE was intended to shift the norm-guided judgements of GCE to the criterion-referenced judgements of GCSE, from the intuitive judgements of the one to the performance-related judgements of the other. Thus, whereas under GCE the possession of a GCE History Grade C gave little indication of what the possessor of the certificate could do or understand, under GCSE (so it was argued) one would be able to tell what a person so graded knew or could do.

Therefore, quality is now to be 'assured' through the application of 'performance indicators', and such indicators are to permeate the system of education at every level. Each institution should have such indicators. *One* performance indicator will be examination results, but these examination results in turn will arise from the application of performance indicators to the students. Furthermore, these performance indicators will be explicit and justified against the purposes that the institution or examined subject are trying to serve – and, hence, the importance of 'mission statements', a mixture of ethical judgements (about what is worthwhile) and specific goals, which pin that worthwhileness down to attainable objectives.

This quality assurance requires a system – a mechanism for establishing the purposes, for deciding upon the criteria which demonstrate the achievement of those purposes, and for checking whether those criteria have been applied. Such a mechanism is increasingly modelled on that of industry. Thus, distinctions are made between quality control and quality assurance. 'Quality' is

seen in terms of fitness for purpose, that purpose being established partly by the customers of the service but mainly by the government as the custodian of the interests of the customer. 'Quality control' refers to the particular procedures for ensuring that those purposes are established and that the performances conform to specifications (that, for example, x number of students obtain the grades in different subjects which indicate that the learning objectives have been met). 'Quality assurance' refers to the mechanism for ensuring that the 'quality control' techniques are carried out – the 'audit' of this second tier of performance (for example, the monitoring meetings and the external evaluation). Finally, the whole system should be geared to 'quality improvement' – getting institutions to set higher goals in their mission statements, to teach a greater proportion of students to achieve these goals, but above all to increase the 'value-addedness' of the teaching – to widen the gap, in other words, between what the learners can do or understand before teaching and what they can do afterwards. Quality control (and thus quality assurance) needs constantly to monitor the 'value-addedness' of the institution. There have to be measurements, and measurements of performance both before and afterwards (both at the input and at the output stages) should be provided under the quality control system. Quality requires therefore the adoption of business practice – and business language: fitness for purpose, quality control and assurance, mission statements and performance indicators, value-addedness and audits. And there is a competition between major political parties to put forward the most effective and credible scheme for ensuring this happens.

Different contexts

Academic

The contrast is frequently drawn between the academic and the vocational. This distinction over-simplifies reality but it nonetheless permeates our thinking about the aims of education – and thus about our conception of 'standards'. The academic tradition lays stress upon intellectual discipline and upon the high standards of thinking, arguing, enquiring, experimenting, speculating that are part and parcel of an intellectual discipline. Such disciplines are characterized by their own distinctive logical structures – by the concepts that must be mastered if one is to think in a disciplined way, by the exacting methods of enquiry, by the special demands of proof and of evidence. To learn to think in a disciplined way is to grasp certain rules of procedure, concepts,

ways of testing the truth or correctness of what is being said. It is to learn to experience the world from a particular perspective.

Such disciplined ways of thinking develop over time. They are sustained by social arrangements partly recognized in learned societies and professional associations, partly reflected in traditions of criticisms and in power structures and authorities recognized by people with similar interests. Academic disciplines therefore have both a logical and a social dimension. They are ways of identifying and of exploring problems which, through criticism and through the identification of new problems, are constantly evolving, establishing new standards, new criteria of good performance.

The acquisition of different academic disciplines is often seen as a hallmark of 'liberal education' – the liberation from ignorance, from mere common sense and from narrowness of vision. The liberally educated has come into what Oakeshott refers to as an inheritance – into the ideas, the imaginings, the agreed procedures of enquiry which free one from subjectivity. It is to be initiated into a conversation that goes on between the generations of mankind – a conversation in which there is to be heard the voices of poetry and of philosophy, of science and of history. And our job as teachers is both to participate in that conversation and to introduce the next generation to it. It is to open up not only the joys and stimulation of that conversation, but also the rigorous discipline required for participation in it.

Those already within the conversation are the authorities who ascertain its quality, evaluate the novel interjection, shape its direction. To do all this they must appeal to standards. That is, no sense could be given to evaluation or to shaping or to criticism, unless reference is made to standards of value or of appropriateness or of right and wrong. But these standards are implicit within the conversation as it has already evolved. And indeed that which is appealed to as the appropriate standard does itself become a point of argument. Newcomers to this conversation, and to the different voices within it, need to be initiated over a long period of time. They must serve an apprenticeship as they gradually come to see the more subtle aspects of their chosen discipline, as they acquire the appropriate style of argument, learn to detect flaws and errors and slovenliness. Understanding often comes slowly. There is no one episode that demonstrates understanding. The ha-ha feeling of discovery is often followed by an awareness that what one thought of as the end of the journey is really only the beginning.

Characteristic of this initiation is a lack of clarity about ends and standards, although there are recognized authorities who are

able to recognize high-standard work when they see it and who are able to show the apprentice (through example very often) what counts as meeting the standard. This might be shown though not stated – the manifestation of the universal in the particular. Moreover, the apprentice learner comes to see this for himself when he struggles to improve the style of an essay or to render more elegant a piece of poetry or to make more incisive an argument; such a struggle only has meaning in the context of implicit standards in reference to which one feels dissatisfied with one's efforts and motivated to do better.

To summarize, therefore, there is a dominant academic tradition which sees quality of intellectual endeavour (and the implicit standards of good or bad performance) to lie within specific traditions of disciplined enquiry. Such traditions are defined partly in terms of the relevant concepts, procedures, problems, tests of validity. And these concepts, etc., can be used more or less effectively, more or less correctly. Thus there *are* standards but these, though acknowledged in one's intellectual efforts, are more often than not unspoken. Though recognized in judgements made, they cannot often be anticipated. And the application of these standards does not entail the explicit formulation of them. Hence, the importance of the 'judgement' of those who are authorities within the subject (the HMI, the academics, the professional teachers). And, hence, the importance, too, of a period of initiation – the gradual recognition by the learner of the many standards which are acknowledged within the exercise of intellectual disciplines.

Vocational

By contrast, vocational learning has come to stress, not tradition, but job-relatedness. It requires the acquisition of those skills and understandings which are required for doing specific jobs. Successful learning signifies fitness for purpose; one first identifies the requirements of the job and then one specifies the 'can dos', the competences that enable one to do the job. The competences, revealed in the undertaking of standardized, job-related tasks, constitute the standards. They are tested out in 'on the job performances', which thus become the indicators that the person is competent and thus has met the explicitly stated standard. Performance indicators are not the same as standards – it is always logically possible that a particular performance might be a fluke and might not demonstrate the mastery of a particular competence. But, nonetheless, the description of the indicators,

of the competence and of the tasks on which the competence is to be demonstrated, must be sufficiently close for several successful performances to be conclusive evidence that the standard has been reached.

The development of national vocational qualifications presupposes this connection between standards, competences and performance indicators. Thus, an NVQ is defined as

> a statement of competence clearly relevant to work.... The statement of competence should incorporate specified standards in the ability to perform in a range of work-related activities; and the underpinning skills, knowledge and understanding required for performance in employment. (Jessup, 1990)

To be competent (i.e. fit for the specified purpose such as hairdressing or welding) can be broken down into various units which in turn can be analysed in terms of a coherent range of elements: thus, no doubt the competent hairdresser will be competent in several aspects (or 'units') – washing the hair, styling it, etc. And each of these units (styling, for example) can be analysed into interrelated but distinguishable elements (for example, cutting fringes, shaping the hair at the nape of the neck, covering bald patches). Competence in each element can be verified through performance, and overall competence at a defined level ascertained. Essential to the whole enterprise is the precision with which competences are stated and the performance indicators made explicit. Unlike the standards implicit within academic studies, the standards of vocational competence are quite explicit, and the performance criteria so clear that there can be little doubt about what the successful learner can do.

Unlike academic standards, vocational ones are not mysterious entities slowly internalized, requiring a gradual apprenticeship, possessed 'more or less' and in varying degrees. Rather, one either is or is not competent. One can either do the job as that is analysed in terms of a range of performances or (as performance indicators show) one cannot. The hairdresser can either shape the hair as requested at the nape of the neck or she cannot. In that sense, standards are absolute.

Moreover, the competence is demonstrated in the performance. Courses might or might not be necessary for the achievement of competence – the end is logically disconnected from the means. And therefore courses (where they exist) are assessment-led. They are but a means to an end. They, unlike the context of

academic standards, do not require, as intrinsically necessary, the apprenticeship, the participation in the very activities through which the standards come to be recognized.

It is the aim of the National Council for Vocational Qualifications[5] eventually to produce a list of competences relevant to all the jobs in every aspect of industry and commerce, and to mark these competences (or clusters of competences) with qualifications pitched at five different levels. According to Jessup, 'the specification of competence [in each of these 1000 or so qualifications] plus performance criteria provide the operational realisation of the new kind of standard' (Jessup, 1990: 17).

The apparent advantage of this conception is that it eliminates the subjectivity, the dependence on authority which is so often associated with judgement of quality within the academic tradition. For, in the case of vocational standards, these are the explicitly stated competences defined in terms of the observable performances which the competent person can be expected to do. They depend not on the authority of experts, but on the analysis of tasks. They reflect, quite objectively, a fitness for purpose.

This rather seductive vision of standards and explicitly stated competences can, so it is believed, so easily be transformed into a model for general and academic education, too. Cannot one analyse competent philosophizing into a range (a wide range, maybe) of sub-competences each with its performance indicators (for example, the ability to employ *modus ponens* in the presentation of an argument or the ability to rehearse the main tenets of logical positivism)? And, in so doing, might one not reduce the length of philosophy courses for some as one checks out beforehand (and regularly throughout a course) the number of competences that the potential philosopher already has and that he or she no longer needs to be introduced to? Performances, indicating competence, can be given in specially constructed workshops or in answer to multi-choice questions. One ought to be able to accredit prior learning, even among aspiring philosophers.

It was the ambition of Sir Keith Joseph, when Secretary of State, to have such 'absolute standards' spelt out within the core GCSE subjects – that is, precisely what children 'can do' as a result of obtaining Grade C in history or Grade B in mathematics. There are also moves in this direction in the development of precise attainment targets at ten different levels in the national curriculum. Therefore, frequent reference is made to equivalences between qualifications – between NVQs at level 2 (certified

competences on standardized tasks evidenced by predefined performance indicators) and GCSEs, between two A levels at Grade E and NVQs at level 3, between (in other words) competency based standards and standards enshrined within traditions of academic enquiry which are not spelt out in terms of competences. But that failure to spell out the competences is seen by the advocates of NVQ as a defect in the academic tradition – as a failure to unpick what one is trying to achieve, as an example of woolly thinking and conceptual confusion. For must not any rational activity have aims? And, in being very rational, cannot these aims be broken down into precise objectives? And cannot, therefore, the competences for achieving these objectives be spelt out fairly precisely, with the criteria of competence on standardized tasks marked out with their accompanying performance indicators? Quality signifies fitness for purpose, and the problem with the academic tradition is that it is reluctant to face up to the purposes they are intended to serve.

There are, however, difficulties. NCVQ has not felt able to reduce all competences to those which can be narrowly and unambiguously related to a limited set of performance indicators. There has recently been discovered the need for general competences (manifest in the newly invented GNVQs – or General National Vocational Qualifications). Moreover, a lot has been written about 'core skills' (of communication, problem solving, numeracy and personal effectiveness). Such core skills must be taught through the academic subjects and the vocationally oriented learning tasks.

Other difficulties there are, too, which those who wish to equate standards with criteria of competence or 'fitness for purpose' fail to recognize. In particular, there are the problems of 'absoluteness' which, for example, NVQs aim to reflect – either you can or you cannot turn a piece of wood at level 2. You either are or are not competent. There is no room for shades of competence – or at least, where there are such shades they are thought to be a defect in the analysis, not a reflection of things as they are. And yet quality is often reflected in such adverbial qualifications of competence (or 'can dos') as 'elegantly', 'gracefully', 'imaginatively', 'intelligently', 'creatively'. Such adverbs imply judgement which is irreducible to the application of preconceived performance indicators.

Learning to be capable

Disagreement is not simply between those within an academic tradition (who see standards to be logically tied to achievement

within distinctive disciplines of enquiry and of scholarship) and those who tie standards to 'fitness for purpose', where purpose is analysed into fairly specific job-related requirements. There is disillusion with both conceptions of education and training and with the perceived relationship between them, for (so it is argued and so it is reflected in such pre-vocational innovations as the Technical and Vocational Education Initiative, the Certificate of Pre-vocational Education, and the Business and Technical Education Council diplomas) there are capabilities or core skills or transferable qualities which are sufficiently general and generic as to apply to a wide range of often unpredictable situations. Such capabilities are seen to be more important than job-related competences (for these might soon be out of date as the economic climate changes) or than the concepts and understandings of particular academic disciplines (for these, without regular use, will soon be forgotten). The 'Education for Capability' movement has been well argued and criticized (Thompson, 1984; Ashton, 1986).

Responding to the market

In each of the three contexts outlined above, quality, and thereby the standards implicit within our assessment of quality, presupposes some objective basis for judgement – some base from which the achievement of the learner might be evaluated. Indeed, the very word 'achievement' has built into it the idea of standard, of good or bad performance, of *mastery* of something which is worthwhile, of improvement, and often of struggle as one feels dissatisfied with one's performance (in painting, say, or in playing a game). It is not clear what sense can be given to achievement, to improvement, to dissatisfaction, to struggle, to effort without the implicit recognition of standards against which one judges what one has done or produced. Part of being educated is to come to recognize these standards and to internalize them – to apply them to oneself. In that sense, standards imply an objectivity, a comparative dimension to one's own performance that cannot be simply the product of whim, of one's own wishes, of what lies in one's own self-interest. This may seem a rather exiguous sense of objectivity, but it is important. It indicates that the standards implicit in all judgement cannot simply be created at one's convenience. One's performance has to measure up to standards which are inseparable from the activity as one perceives it and these perceptions have themselves been internalized from participation in a form of life shared with others. The tennis player,

dissatisfied with her performance, is dissatisfied because she has internalized the rules and expectations of good tennis playing – not simply the rules of winning but also the rules, if you like, of playing elegantly, stylishly, with economy of effort, with aesthetic pleasure for both player and audience. Even though she wins, she may feel that, set against these expectations, she has not quite come up to scratch.

The academic, vocational and pre-vocational traditions agree on this general point about the objectivity of judgement – and *therefore* on the objectivity (in this sense) of standards.

There is, however, a competing tradition which seeks to place standards in a very different context – a context which embraces relativism as the only rational position to adopt on matters of value. Thus, it would be argued, there is no rational base for saying that one area of learning is more worthwhile than another, or that one activity is superior to another, or that one form of understanding is more valuable than another. In that case, there are no standards, objectively speaking, to be maintained by the masters of those standards, by those who are authorities within the educational world. In a strange and contradictory way, that seems to be partly the position of this government, despite its frequent concern for standards. Let me explain.

A government which has claimed that the improvement of standards is a priority is also the government which has proclaimed the superiority of market forces in determining what those standards should be. The general suspicion of the professional (in social work and in law, as well as in teaching and in higher education) is one and the same as a suspicion of 'authority' within areas of professional concern and within the areas of traditional learning. On such a view, the guardians of standards are really the guardians of self-interest; by an interesting twist of irony, the sociological theory associated with the left, which produced critiques of knowledge and its control, have been appropriated by the right. And thus, in the absence of authorities, in the absence of defensible values whereby those already initiated into the academic and vocational traditions can lay down and apply their standards, we are given market forces as both the definers and the maintainers of standards.

Frequent reference is now made to consumer choice as that which will ensure the raising of standards. It is assumed that, as the consumers hunt around for 'the best' service, so the competition for selling what is offered will result in greater efficiency, more effective teaching. But the corollary of market

forces operating in a world of moral scepticism is that market forces define as well as promote standards, for the consumer always knows best. Quality is that which pleases the consumer – whether it be the top ten in music or Harold Robbins in literature. There are no authorities of what is good in education; only competent technicians in delivering that which the consumer wants.

There is an ambivalence in political thinking on this issue. The explicit recognition of market forces as the definers of standards, does not come easy to Secretaries of State who have a sneaking suspicion that values are not simply what people choose to value – hence, a national curriculum with well-defined standards built into it. But, in suspecting the authority of those who traditionally have been guardians of those values (those on the inside of the conversation that has taken place between the generations of poets, of philosophers, of historians, of scientists – namely, the academics and the teachers who have been apprenticed to that conversation), there is little alternative to market forces other than the rather arbitrary political definition of standards. And this is apparent to those who have followed the debate concerned with the geography and history working parties' recommendations and over the slimming down of the attainment targets in science and in mathematics.

To conclude this section, I have placed the debate on standards, and thus on the quality of education, within the context of different traditions concerning the aims and values of education and training. Each tradition sees quality (and thereby standards) in a very different way, affecting how we conceive of teaching and of the institutional framework within which teaching should take place.

The academic tradition understands standards as the measures, certainly, of correctness, appropriateness, stylishness, validity, within distinctive disciplines of enquiry. But these measures, more often than not, are only implicit within these enquiries, teased out, not by politicians and civil servants, but by philosophers of science or of history as they reflect on the processes of science and the process of thinking historically. They can be applied without being explicitly acknowledged; they are acquired slowly over a period of time and always are only more or less understood; they are passed on to the next generation of students through example, through the correction of the particular, not through the definition of the universal.

The vocational tradition, which, when properly restricted, can sit happily alongside the academic tradition, is concerned with

'fitness for purpose' where those purposes are clear and specific. They are derived from an analysis of the economic task. Standards concern the competences which demonstrably are the means for achieving those purposes. In theory, there should be nothing controversial about such standards – or in ascertaining whether they have been reached, for they are spelt out in terms of performance indicators; and performances, on standardized tasks, can easily be observed.

However, this task has not proved to be easy, and there is a third and importantly different tradition which trades on the vocational but wants to expand into the academic, thereby transforming it into something different. This tradition speaks of more general competences – not those specific to plumbing or to hairdressing, but those specific to life in general. These are partly captured in the core skills of the Further Education Unit, partly in the General National Vocational Qualifications of the NCVQ, partly in the enterprise and entrepreneurial qualities of the Training Enterprise and Education Department, partly in the life skills of pre-vocational courses.[6] But, trading on the language of vocational competences, they are seeking assessment through performance indicators and these (for life competency, problem-solving and the like) are hard to come by.

Fourth, however, we see a more radical interpretation of standards, one still hovering in the wings, not daring to show itself too much, explicitly embraced only by those who have been marginalized within the political debate, but nonetheless implicit within so much that is said and within the distrust of the professional and of the much despised educational authorities. That interpretation ultimately is distrustful of standards – or at least of any values other than those which the consumer wishes to adopt. But does not the doctrine that the consumer is always right imply the ultimate apotheosis of educational standards?

Concept of standards

In this final section, I want briefly to pull together various strands of the argument, for, in pointing to these competing traditions, I have failed to say exactly what standards are or what is meant by standards. That, of course, must be the case because the meaning of any word is related logically to its use within a language or within a field of discourse, and the importance of locating 'standards' within different traditions is to show that any critique of standards must consider these different and wider discourses – including the dominant metaphors of each one.

Nonetheless, there are certain logical features of the word and certain philosophical considerations about human action which help us decide between different traditions – or at least the limitation of each.

First, there is something odd about standards going up or down. The *performance* of pupils, as measured by standards, go up or down, but not the standards themselves. If standards were to rise or fall, that rise or fall could only be judged to be so against a different type of standard – viz. those standards whereby one assesses the standard of standards, and thus one is into an infinite regress.

Second, however, one might see 'standards declining' as meaning that *performance* is not coming up to standard to the extent that it once did or that performance is coming up to a standard which is different from that which once it came up to – and different in the sense that it is less demanding than the other standards. Levels of standard, as in the national curriculum, must mean something of this kind – that is, the same kind of activity envisaged at various levels of difficulty and thus differentiated in some norm-referenced way. For example, one can see how long division presupposes a range of arithmetical activities, such that there is some logical progression from simple addition and subtraction to the more complex operation. Each level represents a different standard, but the standards are logically related in so far as success in one presupposes success in the others. In this way one has differentiated, hierarchically related standards.

Third, however, standards are benchmarks, they are criteria whereby one assesses or evaluates the quality of a particular activity or process. And that quality must depend upon the identification and the purpose of the activity – upon the values that are embodied within it. Strictly speaking, there are as many standards as there are activities; there are as many activities as there are intentions and purposes that drive people on. There are standards peculiar to house cleaning, painting landscapes, writing Shakespearian sonnets, appreciating the impact of science on the environment. Moreover, as purposes and values change, so too must the standards whereby we assess those activities. As mathematicians reflect on the nature of mathematics, as employers require different sorts of mathematics in order to meet a changing technological world, so does the value that we attach to mathematics change and so does the nature of the activity – and so too, therefore, do the standards whereby we judge achievement within mathematics. Similarly, just as society comes to value

different forms of life, just as we come to embrace different virtues (enterprise rather than modesty, autonomy rather than obedience), so do our moral purposes change, and so too do the standards whereby we assess moral worth. Standards have neither gone up nor come down. They have simply changed. Such considerations make nonsense of the aggregate of marks whereby we talk of *the* standard in mathematics or *the* standard of morals. And it makes it logically impossible to make sensible comparisons of standards across the generations – or, indeed, across cultures unless those cultures and those generations share a common set of values with regard to that activity.

Conclusion

The difficulty in talking about standards is that the concept is, like 'truth', or 'goodness', or 'beauty', both logically indispensable and yet impossible to define without considerable philosophical elaboration. That worries those with a narrow conception of rationalism who believe that all concepts can be operationally defined and their use made clear and unambiguous. Governments whether to the right or left who seek to control outcomes – to bureaucratize education and turn it into something else, to transform teachers into deliverers of a curriculum – will no doubt be seduced by this temptation. They will ignore the complexity of these notions and treat them as though they can be reduced to simple definitions.

But that is to abstract them from the wider social and educational traditions in which they have their meaning. I have simply articulated a little those different traditions. To ignore these differences can so easily distort what teachers have traditionally been about, namely, to introduce the next generation to those ideas and skills and beliefs that have survived critical scrutiny. And to be aware of this is important for, in failing to be aware, there are attempts to change our educational institutions out of all recognition.

Thus, dominated by such narrowly conceived understanding of standards as 'fit for purpose', it is argued that educational achievement after 16 should be reduced to a range of competences pitched at different levels (five levels of NVQ), that attainment targets of the national curriculum, core skills, BTECs, A levels, degrees, etc., should be defined in terms of these, that clear routes should be charted through these, that units of teaching (like colleges and universities) should become TAPs (or Training Access Points), that through regular assessment of prior learning (or

APLs) individual action plans should be charted and credits granted which make courses of pre-defined content and duration an anomaly. What room then for universities in a world dominated instead by independent assessment centres leading to training points, by performance indicators of competence and credit accumulations, by individualized programmes geared to credits delivered where the performance counts, namely, in the real world of the work place? Courses, like coats, will be cut and trimmed accordingly. Indeed, there will be little place for courses as these are traditionally seen.

But all this depends on the failure to understand that there is a broader educational vision, which cannot be analysed out in this way and which incorporates a quite different concept of standards – one which cannot be eliminated from an understanding of human activity.

CHAPTER 7

Political education: relevance of the humanities

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Introduction

'Education' is often seen as a tool for developing desirable attitudes, imparting essential knowledge, training in economically relevant skills, altering anti-social behaviours. At present, the government is worried about the consumption of drugs among young people; therefore, schools are being instructed to teach about their evil effects. In the 1980s, schools were obliged to introduce sex education into the curriculum with a view to curtailing teenage pregnancy and the spread of AIDS. Schools have taught parenting skills – on the understanding that the children would then become more effective parents. And more recently, in reaction to various manifestations of anti-social behaviour, there is strong pressure for schools 'to teach citizenship' (Crick Report, 1998).

In this paper, I wish to examine and to question the notion of the curriculum as a 'tool' to impart knowledge, skills, attitudes and behaviours, which the government or anyone in power believes to be important – especially in what is broadly conceived to be political education. Political education may be, as has been frequently argued (Crick, 1977; Crick and Porter, 1978; White, 1983), one of the most important areas of education to be encouraged – concerned with the knowledge, skills and attitudes which are fundamental to living a distinctively human form of

life. But there is always the danger that such attitudes, knowledge and skills might be reduced, by those who plan the curriculum, to specific outcomes which can be identified, targeted, controlled and assessed.

This view of curriculum planning and implementation has a long history but I believe it to be fundamentally mistaken and dangerous. It incorporates a political understanding of education which is rarely made explicit. Indeed, there is a connection, not previously addressed, between this political understanding of education and the teaching of politics. To address that connection is the major purpose of this paper, and I shall do so by drawing upon a longer, less explicit but more profound tradition of political education – one which is firmly rooted in the teaching of the humanities.

The paper is therefore divided as follows.

First, I give an account of the 'political understanding' of education – that is, of the relationships of power and authority between government, teachers and the recipients of education, namely, the pupils or their custodians.

Second, I refer to the recent history of political education, dealt with extensively by Davies, I. (1999), with a view to indicating the weakness of understanding it in too narrow a way.

Third, I point to a different, and less acknowledged, tradition of political education – rooted in the humanities.

Fourth, I return to the climate of 'managerialism', and the difficulty of seeing how this more generous understanding of political education can survive within it.

In talking about political education in these terms, I am, I believe, following the example of Crick (1977) who, for many years, has argued for political education and who conceives it as an initiation into a particular way of thinking and feeling about the distribution and exercise of power between the government and the governed.

Political understanding of education

Under pressure to 'raise standards' in schools and ensure the basic skills and knowledge for a more effective economy, those who manage, and teach in, schools are enjoined to think 'in business terms'.[1] Such business terms often refer to a 'quality circle'. There are six points in the circle.

First, successful businesses require a clear and precise definition of *product*. Second, and only then, is it possible to define the *process*

for attaining that *product* – and, indeed, following the guidance of appropriate empirical research, one should be able to say with confidence what *processes* produce the *product* efficiently and which do not. Third, it is necessary to empower the *stakeholders*, namely, all those who have a *stake* in the product, such as employers, parents, the community, and thus to give them a say in the constant redefinition of product and in the reappraisal of process. Fourth, it is important to *measure quality* – to see if the actual product comes up to its original specifications (*'checking against agreed benchmarks'*). Fifth, the *consumer* is to be empowered because (as the White Paper, declared (DES, 1993)), 'parents know best'. Finally, there is a need to ensure a partnership between those who define the product, those who deliver the process, those who have a stake in the product, those who measure quality and those who *buy the product* with a view to constant reappraisal of product and process.

Such 'thinking in business terms' is itself both a political agenda (a defining of the relationship between government and governed in an important area of public life) and a framework within which to embark upon a programme of political education. As a result of the 1988 Education Act, the government is now empowered, in a way that was not previously the case, to define the outcomes of a national curriculum in precise detail. Schools are statutorily obliged to cover the content which has been defined and to aim for the targets which relate to the 'standards' laid down by government. Furthermore, the government has thought it necessary not only to 'define the product' but also to 'define the processes' which will, in normal circumstances, produce that product. There is now a wealth of research and literature on 'the effective school' and 'the effective teacher'. Effectiveness here refers to the well-defined ways which will inevitably lead to the agreed product, should the school or the teacher follow them faithfully. Thus, there are literacy and numeracy hours, with detailed guidance on the activities which should be pursued in them. The government, presumably as a result of guidance received from the experts employed by the 'Standards and Effectiveness Unit' within the DfEE, has a view on how reading should be taught, how children should be grouped, and what literacy targets should be set for each local authority and school. The details are complex, but the general idea is simple. Government, no doubt after much consultation, knows what the outcomes or 'ends' of education should be – what counts, in this day and age, as an 'educated person' and what sort of personal qualities and social

skills need to be nurtured for the wider social, political and economic good. The educational researchers employed by the government, after investigations into the most appropriate teaching contexts and teaching methods, tell the government what are the most effective means for achieving those ends. That is an empirical matter. The local government role is increasingly reduced to the setting and monitoring of targets and to the provision of remedial support to schools and teachers who fail to meet their targets.

Therefore, much importance is attached to a thorough-going system of assessment and inspection for measuring quality and, with the resulting measurements, for informing and thus empowering the customers. If the 'parents know best', at least within the parameters of the list of products defined by government, then they need the information on which they can make rational choices. In the light of the publicized measurements and inspection reports, the parents can decide which schools most effectively reach the targets. They can then transfer their custom accordingly. Effective schools will prosper. Less effective ones will fail, since the resources necessary for effectiveness follow the customer. Of course, schools are very complex institutions, and the account to be given of them, to keep the information flow within accessible proportions, has to be quantified. Therefore, the attachment of a numerical unit grade to the performance of each child in each subject and, through a mean grade for all such numerical units, the ascription of a score to each school (thereby, producing the league tables), empowers the clients to make rational choices.

Finally, however, there is the need to bring all the participants in this process together, and the provision of 'Education Action Zones' is the most recent proposal for doing this. An EAZ will bring together the local authority, business and the community as partners in running the local system effectively. In some cases, local business might be the 'lead partner', and there is an interest shown in the Edison Project within the United States in which parts of the public system are being run for private profit.

There are two aspects of this development which I want to pick out for examination. First, there is a coherent set of ideas which are of a political nature and which transform not simply how education should be organized but also what we understand by education. Second, such a changed understanding will affect the purpose and understanding of specific programmes, in particular those of political education.

First, the new managerial and business-related language of education transforms our understanding of it and redescribes those processes and activities which are promoted through schools and universities. How the world is perceived depends on the concepts which are brought to bear on experience – especially the moral concepts through which the good and the bad, the valued and the trivial, are identified and recognized.

Furthermore, those concepts are embodied within a language which we have either inherited or had imposed upon us. To change that language is to change the way in which we conceive things and in which we pick out what is important and unimportant. The shift in the language of education – the changing metaphors and analogies – brings with it a shift in how we see the relationships between teacher and learner, and between teachers and those who organize the educational system – indeed, on how we perceive the political framework within which teachers are asked to relate to their pupils and to what are now referred to as stakeholders.

Teachers are now seen *to deliver the curriculum* – the curriculum being defined in terms of a content and a set of outcomes which are decided upon outside the context in which teachers engage with students in their attempt 'to make sense' or in their 'struggle to understand'. *Performance indicators* are identified with *outcomes*, and successful teaching lies in the *effectiveness* with which those outcomes are reached – after certain measurable *inputs* have been taken into account. Indeed, it is through a comparison of an agreed set of inputs with the prespecified outcomes that *value-addedness* is measured. The system of relating *means* to *ends*, *process* to *product*, *inputs* to *outcomes* needs to be regularly *audited*, and thus the increasingly complex system of *quality control and assurance* based on external inspections and audits. In delivering a curriculum according to detailed specifications, the teacher is accountable to the *customers* who might, if not satisfied, take their custom elsewhere. In fact, the teacher is promoting a product – or at least the *effective delivery* of that product, because the product itself has been decided by government.

Such a framework, within which to talk about education, is political in that it redefines the authority and power over learning between government and teacher and between teacher and learner. First, the definition of educational ends has been formally removed from the professional group of educators and placed in the hands of politicians. But this is much more significant than a shift of power. In separating the ends of education from the means of

reaching those ends, it has removed from educational discourse, and thus from those thinking professionally about educational matters, what has traditionally been at the very heart of education, namely, deliberation over the values worth pursuing, the sort of society we should be endeavouring to create, the personal qualities and understandings which should be developed. It is as though the aims of education are no longer the very stuff of educational and professional discourse, this latter being confined to the most appropriate means of achieving ends already decided upon.

Of course, it could be argued that, since any arrangement over the distribution of power is by definition a *political* arrangement, then the independence of teachers from government in the exercise of professional judgement is itself a political matter. Power over what should be learnt is simply in different hands. However, a distinction is to be made, particularly where we are concerned with political *education* (as opposed to 'training' or 'conditioning' or 'indoctrination') which is too frequently neglected. The distinction lies between, on the one hand, the authority over learning by people who exercise the power, which that authority brings, to achieve ends which *they* decide, perhaps for political reasons broadly conceived (for example, in the attainment of economic goals or in the inculcation of particular civic dispositions) and, on the other, the authority of an educational tradition, mediated through a literature and a culture. The initiation into such a tradition gives a certain political independence, the power to resist the persuasions and propaganda of those with political power. To that extent the liberal education, which is manifested in the teaching of the humanities at its best, is at the heart of a genuinely political education.

This distinction, and underlying understanding of the role of the humanities in the development of political education, is a crucial one, developed later in this paper. It is a question of who exercises power over the content and quality of learning – those who, though not participating in that 'conversation', have the power to define the aims of learning (its content, its form, its criteria of success) or those who, by reason of their participation in that tradition of scholarship and critical enquiry, are able to initiate young people into a way of thinking and arguing, the outcome of which is necessarily unpredictable. In the latter case, the authority is the *text* or whatever encapsulates that living tradition.

The important transformation of the language of education – reflecting (as it does) a shift in managerial power over *what*

should be taught and *how* it should be taught, and reflecting, too, a greater control over the values which might be explored – affects more specifically what is to count as political education. The managerial control over education in its widest sense must *a fortiori* affect the managerial approach to particular subjects where outcomes are precisely defined, where success lies in meeting such measurable outcomes or targets, and where the more open exploration of what is to be valued in society ill fits such well-ordered and effective schooling. The exploration of social and political values – of the sort of society worth striving for (concerning matters of justice and fairness, the distribution of wealth and the causes of poverty, the appropriate attitudes to gender and controversial sexual issues, the attitudes to various forms of authority and civic responsibilities, the question of ethnic divisions and racial harassment, the tolerance of conflicting and sometimes threatening political stances, the use of violence including nuclear in the pursuit of peace, the ways in which law and order might justifiably be protected, the espousal of 'family values') – is difficult to pursue in depth and with openness where the social and political values behind the curriculum cannot themselves be seriously questioned by those who teach, and where the curriculum is defined in terms of prespecified outcomes. Perhaps this might best be summed up by saying that, if political education is to include, as surely it must, an intellectually respectable exploration of the controversial issues which are central to political debate and resolution, then the school, college or university must itself be a 'learning community' where such matters are subject to debate, argument and intellectual exploration. It was, for example, for that reason that Kohlberg, in his pioneering research into the enhancement of students' understanding and application of principles of fairness in moral judgement, felt obliged to create 'a just community school' in which those principles were not just talked about but provided the radical framework for the participation of the students in deliberations about the aims of the school and the rules which reflected those aims.

> In summary, the current demand for moral education is a demand that our society becomes more of a just community. If our society is to become a more just community, it needs democratic schools. This was the demand and dream of John Dewey. (Kohlberg, 1982: 24; see also Wasserman and Garrod, 1983)

Understanding of political education

There is a fear of political education, namely, that it will be a 'tool' for teaching particular political beliefs in a society which is essentially pluralist – that is, a society which is open to a range of political positions. The teacher, so it is argued, has no right in such a society to use the classroom to promulgate one set of beliefs rather than another. Similar arguments are put forward against the teaching of particular religious beliefs. The 'common school' should not be a place for proselytizing in a society which welcomes many different religious faiths and which puts a premium upon the development of autonomy, whereby each person is enabled to make up his or her own mind, in the light of relevant evidence, in those matters which are controversial – where there is no agreed answer within society.

Political education, therefore, as such, has not had a central part in the curriculum, although what is often referred to as 'the hidden curriculum' could be argued to have contributed to a political education of sorts – shaping the attitudes of students towards authority and implicitly forming the values of the students in such politically important matters as social justice, racial and gender equality, or national loyalty. But such political formation would be implicit, and indeed the protesters in the 1970s against the exploration in classrooms of the rights and wrongs of nuclear warfare did not see that their own action enforced a particular political position as the legitimate one to be subscribed to by teachers. Nonetheless, anything named 'political education' has not generally been considered as the province of the school curriculum. The curriculum, seen as a 'tool' for promoting specific outcomes in terms of attitudes, skills, knowledge and beliefs, should remain free from politics.

'Political education', therefore, came in different and more timid forms. These have been well reviewed by Ian Davies (1999) and might be summarized, in roughly the chronological order in which they occurred, as: first, the optional courses leading to public examinations on such subjects as 'The British Constitution' or 'Government' in which the student would learn about the minutiae of government processes; second, relevant social and political skills within a broader framework of 'political literacy'; third, a more thematic dealing with issues of political significance such as education in the promotion of peace or in the defence of the environment or in race relations; and, finally, the promotion of citizenship. All these might be described as the deliberate effort to promote distinctively political knowledge, understanding,

skills and attitudes, and indeed, as such, could conceivably have the label of 'political education' put upon them in the timetable (though this rarely happened).

For that reason, however, the account given by Davies (1999) has some important gaps, sticking as it does to the literature and theory of 'political education' rather than to the practice (often imaginative and politically charged) adopted by some schools. It is difficult to estimate how extensive were such practical initiatives, influenced (particularly in the inner cities) by a few, highly publicized projects, partly because of the autonomy that teachers were able to exercise in the development of the kind of curriculum which they thought appropriate to the students under their care. Curriculum innovation, in the absence of a national framework and government directives, was much more a matter of ideas permeating the system and of practical adaptation of different projects through the interactions which took place in the many teachers' centres which now have been largely closed.

Three instances of well-publicized programmes and initiatives were the social education programmes of John Rennie (see Rennie *et al.*, 1974), the community education led by Eric Midwinter in Liverpool (Midwinter, 1975) and the publication of children's poetry, *Stepney Words*, by Chris Searle (see Searle, 1975). None of these came under the title 'political education' – it would have been unwise no doubt for that to have been the case – nor would they quite fit Davies' 'typology'. But these innovations were aimed at empowering young people to understand their social environment with a view to transforming it.

Rennie's social education project, developed through four schools, saw community involvement as a means ultimately of changing the community. In the case of Midwinter's Liverpool project, the argument was that, too often, the educational aim of schools in deprived areas had been to give a means of escape from the deprivation of the communities in which they lived, and a criterion of success lay in the degree to which this was made possible. Only the educational failures would be expected to stay where they had been born and brought up. But, to Midwinter, there was something fundamentally wrong in such a view of education. It was as though such a deficit model of whole communities and of the people within them was beyond the purview of education and that education gave only the knowledge and skills to escape from those communities, not to transform them. For Midwinter, by contrast, education was essentially political, focusing centrally upon the skills and understandings

and dispositions which would enable young people to rectify the disadvantages from which they suffered, not by giving them the personal skills to escape from them but by nurturing the social and political skills (backed by appropriate knowledge) to change the situation in which these disadvantages occurred. Hence, there was the stress upon engagement in community projects and politics (including researching the social problems, identifying the means to overcome them, campaigning for public support and acting to solve them).

Similarly motivated, Chris Searle, then a teacher in Hackney, taught disadvantaged students in a London school (many of them black) to express their feelings through their own creative writing, and to explore the conditions under which they lived. The teachers established a printing press and bookshop, and, together with the students, produced a journal, *Teaching London Kids*, as well as a book of their poetry, *Stepney Words*. *TLK* became the voice of disillusioned young people, profoundly political in its content and tone. It was seen by Searle as the vehicle by which these young people might become politically aware – 'have a voice' among those who decide their future (see Searle, 1975).

These are examples (much publicized at the time) of a deliberate attempt at political education which rarely receive a mention in the accounts given of political education. But that would be wrong on two counts. First, they (and the many similar, though rarely written up, school-based projects) were seen by the teachers themselves as political education, contrasted with the apolitical attempts at political education as described by Davies. The latter, as it were, left things as they are. Second, such examples are as important in what they teach us about the failure of such attempts to teach political education through active engagement in *real* issues concerning the distribution and exercise of power. Searle was sacked from Hackney Downs school for publishing the students' poetry in *TLK* – the authorities did not appreciate the political content and criticism. Midwinter's community projects were finally closed following the criticism that, by focusing upon the conditions of the local community, the schools were ill-preparing young people for the wider community which they might enter.

But there were deeper reasons. The kind of experiential learning, which so often has been advocated to motivate and to give relevance to what is learnt in other areas of the curriculum, especially among the more alienated groups within the community, caused not a little concern in the area of social and

political education. Ranson's contemporary research into the views and attitudes of top civil servants indicated that, in their view, the wider social context might require a social education geared more to helping students know their place than to developing social criticism and propensity to action – especially where there is social disadvantage. Spoken in the aftermath of the riots in Toxteth and Bristol, one civil servant said

> If we have a highly educated and idle population we may possibly anticipate more serious social conflict. People must be educated once more to know their place. (Ranson, 1984: 241)

There have been, then, conflicting views about how political understanding should be taught – indeed, what is to count as 'political education'. Politics, one might argue, is a practical pursuit, requiring the practical intelligence and 'know-how' which can only be acquired through relevant practice. It is concerned with the distribution and exercise of power, and thus with questions of justice and fairness, which can be appreciated only through involvement in real rather than simulated ethical issues. On the other hand, others argue that in education we should stand aside from conflict and learn how to weigh the balance between opposing arguments – grasping the basic concepts through which politics might be understood. As Stradling (1984) argued, teachers should present students with a balanced range of alternative positions on each issue.

How far are such positions reconcilable – the careful weighing of both sides of an argument, on the one hand, and the focus upon action, on the other? Porter, who worked with Crick on the development of the idea of 'political literacy', argued that

> political literacy would be limited to a solitary intellectual exercise; the politically literate person would merely be capable of well-informed observation and analysis. The ultimate test of effective political education lies in creating a proclivity to action. (Porter, 1979)

In conclusion, therefore, political education *as such* hardly got a foothold in the curriculum of British schools, apart from specific and local initiatives, despite the obvious importance of preparing young people for participating intelligently in a democracy. There are obvious reasons why that should be so – first and foremost because of the sensitivities of teaching a content within areas of social and political controversy and thus of the danger of the school

being used for promulgating specific political doctrines. The answer seemed to be the promotion of citizenship – something which on the surface seemed much less controversial and less politically sensitive. Who could possibly disagree with the importance of teaching people to act responsibly, of defending basic human rights and obligations, of having a sense of justice and fairness – so long as these concerns are confined to the classroom? And, indeed, such has been the thrust of the various reports and projects.

However, there are two major difficulties which need to be attended to. First, since politics necessarily involves dealing with sensitive and controversial political issues, there is the difficulty of these being handled in the curriculum without the teachers being accused of indoctrinating the pupils with specific political beliefs. How can one produce the balanced range of views on important issues, that Stradling talks about? And how might one do justice to Porter's 'proclivity to action'? Second, however, it is difficult to see how political education, even under the guise of 'citizenship', might prepare young people to participate in a democratic form of life where the prevailing and controlling management model of education militates against that form of life.

Controversial issues: political education and the humanities

It is constantly and persuasively argued (Crick, 1977; Crick and Porter, 1978; White, 1983) that there is something strange about the lack of education and training for one of the most important functions of any person within a democracy, namely, intelligent participation in the exercise of government. No doubt for that reason there have always been subjects available for a minority, usually on an optional basis, such as Civics or the British Constitution or Government, in which details of the machinery of government are given and explained. But such factual accounts, as Crick argued, hardly provide the preparation for an active participation in the processes of government within a democratic society. For that an *understanding* is required of those processes and so too are the relevant *skills* and *attitudes* for engaging in political deliberation (if not necessarily a 'proclivity for action').

In pursuing this line of argument, I wish to make two points. The first concerns the distinctive character of the *political* understanding of government (or 'political literacy') within a democratic society. The second addresses the skills and attitudes required in the exploration of politically controversial issues.

Political literacy

Crick (1977) introduced the notion of 'political literacy', namely, a grasp of those concepts or ideas without which one would not be able to understand things from a political point of view.

Such an approach is an extension of the view that education is an initiation into public forms of knowledge or understanding through which experience is made intelligible. A form of knowledge is a way of conceptualizing experience with its own distinctive concepts, modes of enquiring, and tests for the truth and falsity of what is being claimed or for the validity or invalidity of the arguments employed. The physicist, for example, has a logically interconnected set of concepts ('atom', 'electron', 'neutron', etc.) through which physical events are perceived and explained. Scientific knowledge and explanation progress through argument, experiment, refutation and corroboration. And it is the job of the science teacher to introduce the student to this 'language' of science and to the ways in which the world is seen through the concepts which that language embodies, and eventually to participate in the arguments which the scientists engage in as they pursue the truth. Indeed, as Bruner (1960) argued, the curriculum should identify those 'key ideas' in the physical and the social sciences which have proved to be most productive in making the physical and the social worlds intelligible, and it should aim to put those key ideas across to the learner in some intellectually respectable form.

To have acquired those ideas is not the same as having acquired a specific set of beliefs. Rather is it a case of acquiring the capacity to deliberate and argue about certain sorts of belief. It is, if you like, to have acquired the vocabulary, inherited from previous deliberations and embodied within a culture, which enables one to examine critically certain social practices. Furthermore, such key ideas or modes of understanding experience can be pitched at various levels or (to use Bruner's words) through different 'modes of representation'. Ideas of justice or fairness, of family or kinship, can be grasped by very young children in an 'enactive way' (through the tacit knowledge implicit within their actions or relationships), as a prelude to a much more sophisticated, even abstract and symbolic, discourse about what these relationships signify.

In 'Man: A Course of Study' (MACOS), Bruner illustrated in a detailed account of the curriculum what this might mean in practice – the development of key ideas or concepts, actively employed in solving problems, through which the distinctively

social nature might be understood of what it is to be human (Bruner, 1966: Chapter 4). MACOS focused on three major questions. What is human about human beings? How did they get that way? How can they be made more so? The course was structured around five great humanizing influences – prolonged child-rearing, use of tools, language, social organization, and myth making. Key questions about being human, about the evolution of humanity and about the possible future that human beings might create required exploration through these different humanizing influences. Such an exploration required the mastery of key ideas or concepts which became the organizing structure of the course. In keeping with the importance Bruner attached to enquiry methods and to discovery learning, the course devised a series of games, simulation exercises and activities so that the students could come to see, through practical engagement, the significance of these key characteristics.

With regard to social organization, it was important for children to be aware that there is structure in society, that such a structure can be changed, but that change in one part will affect changes throughout. To grasp such an idea, particularly of the human capacity to be active in changes leading to appropriate social structure, there was a need to organize one's enquiry through certain organizing concepts, embodied within our language, albeit open to interpretation. The key ideas or concepts, to be grasped at different levels and in different modes of sophistication, include that of 'role' (whereby we see that structures do not depend on particular individuals), of 'reciprocity' and 'exchange', of 'cooperation' and 'protection', of 'service' in exchange for 'fees', of 'legitimization' and 'sanctions' within a framework of 'laws'. The exploration of such key ideas required the cultural resources of the arts and social sciences, of history and anthropology, of linguistics and literary studies. It was a cross-disciplinary enquiry, addressing issues of supreme human importance.

To grasp what were seen to be key ideas, the course promoted active modes of learning through simulation of other and very different societies (for example, a people that depended on hunting) or through examination of contrasting societies such as that of the Netsilik Indians. The pedagogic principles did themselves embody principles of procedure which were relevant to political education, namely, the shift from a dependence upon the authority of the teacher to a dependence upon the authority of evidence.

This course, and the principles which it embodied, was promoted worldwide, and gained a considerable foothold in English schools.

Despite this, and despite the similarity of Bruner's 'key ideas' and the concepts of political literacy of Crick, the two never met. Crick's notion of political literacy required not only the grasp of certain concepts, but also the skills and abilities to employ them in certain kinds of social and political situations. That, in turn, required the development of certain propensities or dispositions, as well as of certain social skills and social concepts. Indeed he explained political literacy as

> the knowledge, skills and attitudes needed to make a man or woman informed about politics; able to participate in public life and groups of all kinds, both occupational and voluntary; and to recognise and tolerate diversities of political and social values. (Crick and Porter, 1978)

There are, therefore, three aspects of political education.

First, there has to be a general knowledge of society – a basic historical and geographical knowledge, a grasp of certain economic and political facts. One cannot say anything sensible politically without some understanding of the social and economic world in which policies are applied.

Second, however, and more importantly, is the need for the development of certain 'procedural values' – those values or virtues which pertain to the kind of political argument which is concerned with getting at the truth. Such procedural values are the pre-conditions of a distinctively political *education* – a *respect for reason*, and the *pursuit of truth*, wherever it leads; a *tolerance* of dissent and of unpopular views as challenges to orthodoxy; an acceptance of *freedom* of action and of opinion where harm is not done to others; a concern for *fairness* in the distribution of opportunity and of rewards where persons matter irrespective of views held. These procedural values need to be nurtured from the earliest years, and they need to become part of the very fabric of teaching and learning – not specific qualities to be acquired in times set apart.

Third, there is the need to acquire those concepts – initially, no doubt, at a very practical or 'enactive' level – which need to be employed in the attempt to understand political relations. Such 'primary concepts' of political literacy are at three levels, so Crick argues: those concerned with the external forces, the government, which determine in various degrees how we live; those concerned

with our own identity as 'the governed'; and those concerned with the relationship between the government and the governed. Of course, 'government' might be pitched at different levels: from that of the state to that of schools or voluntary organizations. The primary concepts or ideas for understanding these different levels are those of 'power', 'authority', and 'order'; of 'individuality', 'freedom', 'rights'; and of 'law', 'justice', 'representation', 'pressure'.

One may disagree with Crick's specific list of 'primary concepts', but surely he is right in arguing (and, in so doing, drawing upon the discipline of philosophical enquiry into the nature of political thinking) that, to engage in intelligent reflection and discussion, one needs to acquire the language (and thereby the concepts) which are relevant to it. Furthermore he is right in arguing further that, in acquiring such concepts, one is not thereby acquiring a specific set of political beliefs, but rather the capacity to examine them and to accept or reject them in the light of relevant reasons.

Such primary concepts and the procedural values which govern their development and application in exploration and discussion should be central to the humanities – to those studies which, in Bruner's words, enabled us to explore 'what it is to be human, how one became so and how one might be more so'. That is not to say that such values and concepts should be left to chance in the 'human studies'. Rather is it to say that, properly taught, these studies would require such understandings and would revisit such concepts again and again through the study, say, of literature and of history. There is no need for a 'subject set apart'.

Controversial issues

The concepts or key ideas which constitute political literacy are applied to questions which are essentially controversial. By 'controversial' is meant those issues which are important from the point of view of human welfare but which divide people within society. Such issues would include the distribution of limited resources and opportunities, the acceptance or otherwise of poverty, the exercise of power over groups or individuals, the use of violence in the pursuit of objectives (including morally justified objectives), the relations between people of different races and ethnicity, and relations between the sexes.

The humanities have traditionally dealt with precisely these issues – through literature and the arts, through the study of history and drama. Of course, it may not always have seemed like that as the school subjects of history and geography, social studies and

English covered the syllabuses required for external examinations. But such practice should not obscure the teaching of the humanities at their best, which, to paraphrase the words of the Schools Council's Working Paper No. 2, was the area of the curriculum in which teachers emphasized their common humanity with the pupils and their common uncertainty in the face of significant and personal problems (Schools Council, 1965).

In anticipation of the raising of the school leaving age to 16 in the early 1970s, there was much concern over the capacity and motivation of many young people to sustain educationally worthwhile studies for a further year. It was expected that many, wishing to leave school and to earn a living, albeit in unskilled jobs, would demonstrate their sense of alienation from an education suitable only for a minority. Hence, the temptation to introduce vocational studies and training for such young people. And it was one of the first jobs of the fledgling Schools Council to address this problem.[2]

The Schools Council's Working Paper No. 2, had a more positive approach. It argued

> The problem is to give every man some access to a complex cultural inheritance, some hold on his personal life and on his relationships with the various communities to which he belongs, some extension of his understanding of, and sensitivity towards, other human beings. The aim is to forward understanding, discrimination and judgement in the human field – it will involve reliable, factual knowledge, where this is appropriate, direct experience, imaginative experience, some appreciation of the dilemmas of the human condition, of the rough-hewn nature of many of our institutions, and some rational thought about them. (Schools Council, 1965: para. 6)

In the view of that Working Paper, the cultural resources of the different subjects within the humanities and the social sciences should be the means through which all children, not just the most able, could explore and make sense of those experiences and choices which are of deepest political concern to those who seek to participate in a democratic form of life. And it was, therefore, through the work of one of the Council's earliest projects that such ideas were to be tested out.

The aim of the Humanities Curriculum Project, under the direction of Lawrence Stenhouse, was to develop an understanding of social situations, human acts and the controversial value issues

which they raise. To do this, there was a need to identify the situations and value issues which are worth exploring. Such an identification required two things: first, a perceived relevance to the areas of practical living and decision-taking which shaped the quality of life within society either by us or for us; second, the cultural resources upon which such an understanding might draw. Such cultural resources might be from the more 'objective' studies of the social sciences or from those studies and practices within the humanities and the arts through which feelings are refined and made sense of. As the Working Paper explained, the task facing the schools in the teaching of the humanities is 'the bringing of the best traditional view of what constitutes a liberal education within the grasp of ordinary people' (Stenhouse, 1983: 90).

The humanities, therefore – the poetry, the novels, the dance, the media presentation, the arts, the historical accounts, the social interpretation, the theological analysis – were, as it were, the text, the touchstone, the objects through which emerged the transaction between teacher and learner, and between the learners themselves as they examined critically those issues of supreme personal, social and political importance: sexual relations, social justice, the use of violence, the respect (or disrespect) for authority, racism and so on.

Such areas of practical living, in which young people are invited to explore, in the light of evidence and argument, the values and institutional arrangements which govern the relationships between people, are informed by the arts, social studies and the humanities. They are the areas in which young people have to make decisions that affect profoundly their own lives and the lives of others. One might argue that it is no business of the teacher to say exactly how young people should live their lives; the teacher has no authority (and therefore should not exercise his or her potential power) over such matters. But it *is* the business of the teacher to mediate those aspects of our culture (dance, drama, art, literature, poetry, theology, myth or history) which, having survived critical scrutiny, inform the mind and shape the dispositions in such matters. For example, the nature and justification of war as a means of defending a nation's interest are complex issues, indeed. But in surveying this complexity, in understanding the issues and in forming the values and dispositions that enable the young person to adopt a defensible position, they might appeal to and draw upon a literature (poetry and novels), historical texts, art and drama, and a theological tradition on the 'just war'. The teacher's authority lies not in knowing the *right* answer, but in knowing the

intellectual and aesthetic resources upon which one might draw in reaching a *defensible* answer. Such resources are the very stuff of the humanities, and essential to the development of political understanding and judgement.

It was the magnificent achievement of the Humanities Curriculum Project that it embodied this distinctive role of the humanities, and did so within the context of what Stenhouse (1975), as indeed did Crick, referred to as the procedural values which governed the exploration of these areas of practical and political living. Such 'procedural values' were concerned with how the young people might proceed in argument, in offering and in receiving criticism, in relating tentative conclusions to evidence, in protecting the minority view, in respecting the unpopular position, and in not using power to displace reason. The subjects or intellectual and aesthetic disciplines associated with the humanities become the *objective* grounds (the text, the artefact) for the *intersubjective* exploration leading to *personal* resolution. In that respect, the humanities should be seen as the public recordings, ever developing, of the best of conversations about those matters which concern all young people – how they might live their lives and relate to others and how they might exercise responsibility against the social and political background in which they are to shape their futures.

To sum up, therefore, political education requires a growing understanding of the relations between the government and the governed, between those in authority and those subject to authority, between those who exercise power and those who are the victims of power. That understanding requires, in turn, a mastery of the relevant concepts and an application of these to areas of practical living which affect how young people live, the relationships they enter into, the control they exercise over their own lives. To develop that understanding, and to apply it to practical living, the young people must learn how to cope and live with matters of political and social controversy, drawing upon the deliberations and considerations which are embodied within the humanities at their best. The main criticism of the many attempts to introduce political education is that they have tended to divorce such education from the wider perspective of the humanities, upon which a mature understanding of the values which underpin political choices might be gained and examined critically.

The Humanities Curriculum Project no longer exists as a project, but its principles survived in other areas – in Geography

for the Young School Leaver, now enshrined within some GCSE examinations and A levels, in many attempts to introduce into schools the exploration of racial and ethnic prejudice (see Stenhouse, 1982). The centrality of discussion, through which contrary opinions are expressed and examined (but in the light of evidence), was taken up by many schools which sought ways of introducing political studies without incurring the accusation of politically indoctrinating.

There is an interesting connection between the proposals of Crick for political literacy and the almost contemporaneous development by Bruner of his 'Man: A Course of Study' and by Stenhouse of the Humanities Curriculum Project. What they had in common was, first, the importance of identifying the key organizing ideas through which human acts and social institutions might be understood; second, the importance of enquiry and critical exploration through discussion as a way to understanding; third, the centrality of values in the understanding of human affairs and the divisive controversies to which they give rise; fourth, the importance of discussion and of evidence in the pursuit of understanding; fifth, the open and tolerant ethos of the classroom and school so that diversity might be cherished, not abolished. But the Humanities Curriculum Project and the 'Man: A Course of Study' showed that it is through the humanities and the social sciences that students can address the values, the controversies, the use and distribution of power and the pervasiveness of injustice.

The management of political education

Politics concerns itself with ends as much as it does with means. By that, I mean that political deliberation and political activity are concerned with shaping the kind of life which is worth living, as much as it is with identifying the most effective institutional arrangements for realizing such a worthwhile form of life. Indeed, one might question the distinction. The most effective ways of proceeding embody many of the values worth striving for. Democracy is both a means of achieving certain values and a way of life which encapsulates those values. Political education, therefore, must nurture in young people not only the instrumental knowledge and skills by which they might achieve certain political ends, but also the understandings and capacities for deliberating about those ends themselves.

Those ends, concerning as they do the kind of society and its institutions which are worth maintaining, are what people think

constitute a worthwhile form of life. Because, however, there is no agreement in society on precisely what that form of life should be – what kind of institutional arrangements should be supported, what civic virtues should be nurtured, or what obligations and rights should be enforced – there is, and will remain, controversy in such matters. Indeed, to engage in such controversial matters and to come to workable solutions, while retaining the possibility of yet further argument and deliberation, is essential to democratic life within an open and pluralist society.

Therefore, political education requires such openness to alternative possibilities concerning what is worthwhile; it requires the skills and dispositions to engage in such deliberation; and it requires the context in which such openness, skills and dispositions might be nurtured. It requires, in other words, educational institutions which embody those very tentative understandings, that acceptance of uncertainty, those dispositions and values to which it is trying to introduce young people. Unless one can claim certainty about the precise aims of education, then those aims must themselves be subject to perennial and critical discussion. Without the certainties, one needs to build into the educational process that wider deliberation in what Morrell (1966) referred to as 'the democratisation of the process of problem-solving'.

Such a democratization of the process of problem-solving needs to be pitched at several levels.

First, the nature and purpose of education must itself be open to constant questioning and deliberation – the processes, if you like, which prepare young people for what is thought (implicitly, maybe) to be a worthwhile life. Since there is no agreement within society as to what exactly that worthwhile life should be, education becomes the vehicle through which such values are explored.

There is no more wisdom at the centre of politics than there is at the periphery, no more understanding in the Department of Education and Science of what is right or wrong than there is in the schools, no more authority in the political tradition of the government than there is in the educational tradition of the governed. Hence, the questions of values – at the very centre of educational aims in general and of political education in particular – must remain constantly open to deliberation by all those involved in its conduct. At no stage could anyone, least of all those with the muscle of government, be justified in claiming that they had the answer and that, therefore, the system can be managed 'in business terms' – with precisely defined products and empirically

determined processes. That is the language of management and control. As Morrell, explaining why such a model of educational governance was inappropriate, argued

> The many reasons . . . stem from the pace of change in modern society. Its rapidity, and the extraordinary difficulty which we face in defining its characteristics, and in communicating the implications of change throughout the complex systems of human relationships, have destroyed or at least weakened the broad consensus on aims and methods which was once taken for granted when our educational system took its present form. (Morrell, 1966: 6)

Morrell, as a civil servant, was, in effect, the architect of the Schools Council. He was personally and professionally concerned about the role of the 'neutral civil servant'. Such neutrality got in the way of the kind of committed and creative administration which he felt education needed. And that commitment was to an educational service which accepted the lack of consensus within society on matters of supreme human importance and which therefore needed to prepare young people not simply to tackle with equanimity the uncertainties and choices which faced them but also to play an active and informed part in shaping that future. Hence, the importance of the arts and the humanities in nurturing such qualities – in preparing young people for more intelligent and sensitive participation in the direction of human affairs.

Second, the lack of certainty about values combined (however, with the constant necessity of thinking about them and of making up one's mind) permeates not just the system but the schools and classrooms where pupils learn. And the humanities properly taught are the place where such questions of value, the study of and deliberation about them, are 'democratized' – that is made open to exploration in the light of the cultural resources upon which serious deliberation must draw. However, even the content of the humanities is disputed – the best literature, the most appropriate historical narrative or period, or the particular religious traditions. Classrooms are themselves the product of those deeper cultural uncertainties, and need to reflect them.

Such a view of educational deliberation, and the distinctive role of the humanities within it, where the ends of education are integrally linked to the means of realizing those ends, is essential to political education. Political education, as I have argued, provides the language and concepts through which people are

enabled to engage in those deliberations about an appropriate and worthwhile form of life, about the institutions which will enable that to happen, and about the relations of power and authority which such a life encompasses. And the classroom is where such deliberation takes place, guided by the teacher, drawing upon the resources of the humanities, but reaching no predefined end.

Such a view of political education is incompatible with the management of education 'in business terms' which is so obsessed with control and with targets determined by those who, seeing none of the crisis in educational values, believe that they know best. The school and the classroom, concerned with the coverage of syllabuses and determined to achieve specific outcomes on which they will be judged, can find little room for the explorations which challenge those certainties and which may not produce those outcomes.

Political education, therefore, even under the more palatable guise of 'citizenship', is in danger of being the victim of the wrong educational metaphors – not of 'the conversation between the generations of mankind' in which they are introduced to the 'voice of politics', but of business management in which processes are related to 'products', referred to sadly in Crick's interim report as 'tightly defined learning outcomes'.

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PART II

Common Sense and Educational Theory

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CHAPTER 8

Common sense and education

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The problem

The problems I am concerned with arise in two different areas: that of 'initiating' pupils into different disciplines and subjects, and that of 'initiating' teachers and trainee teachers into the theoretical knowledge which (supposedly) helps them to do their job with greater understanding. I shall draw my examples much more from the latter – the area of teacher education. But it must be remembered that the problem, if it is a genuine one, goes much further than that, and raises philosophical questions about the relation of ordinary, everyday common-sense knowledge to the more specialized bodies of knowledge into which we seek to initiate pupils and students.

The problem might best be approached through two examples of theorizing – one by Professor Bernstein who is seeking to explain in a theoretical and non-common-sense way the relationship of the curriculum to certain principles of social control, the other by Atkinson who put forward a theoretical and non-common-sense explanation of why people act in the way they do.

Bernstein's (1971) article on the classification and framing of knowledge aims to show

> how a society selects, classifies, distributes, transmits and evaluates the educational knowledge it considers to be public

reflects both the distribution of power and the principles of social control.

In pursuing this thesis Bernstein introduced a particular conception of *public* or *formal education knowledge*, viz. what is realized through three 'message systems' sanctioned by society's educational institutions – curriculum, pedagogy and evaluation (or what is regarded as valid knowledge content, valid ways of transmitting knowledge, and valid realization of this knowledge in the learner). Secondly, there are certain principles which 'shape' this public educational knowledge, called *educational knowledge codes*. Thirdly, there are *social principles* that determine the form of the educational knowledge code. The thesis might now be reworded. How a society comes to accept as valid ways of classifying, transmitting and evaluating knowledge ultimately is determined by certain social principles, and this can be demonstrated *theoretically*, i.e. through the theoretical constructs of educational codes.

Hence, to accept Bernstein's explanation we are asked to adopt the following constructs, or re-definitions, of the practical reality that, as teachers, we are already familiar with. Two types of curricula are stipulated, the 'collection' and the 'integrated'. This distinction might be explained as follows. Any curriculum can be divided up into so many units of time, and different contents assigned to these different units. A collection-type curriculum is (by definition) a curriculum where the contents stand in 'closed relationship' to one another; an integrated-type curriculum is (by definition) one where contents stand in 'open relation'. In turn 'closed relation' is defined in terms of the 'insulation', or of the 'clarity of boundaries', between units. The defining terms (viz. 'insulation' or 'clarity of boundaries') remain undefined. On the basis of this distinction, Bernstein introduces the terms 'strong and weak classification'. A strong classification of the collection code is where there is 'strong boundary maintenance' or 'good insulation' between different contents. Hence Bernstein has now reached the principle that gives the 'basic structure of the message system: curriculum' – the division of the curriculum into two broad types which are related by a series of stipulative definitions to terms which remain undefined and unexplained. (Parallel with the conceptual innovation for describing curriculum content is a further conceptual innovation to help describe the process of transmitting this content: the 'frame' of the form of the teacher/pupil relationship in which the curriculum content is transmitted.)

By way of interim conclusion Bernstein declares that

> from the perspective of this analysis, the basic structure of the message system 'curriculum' is given by variations in the strength of classification, and the basic message system 'pedagogy' is given by variations in the strength of frames.

However, so far there has been no analysis, only a *re-definition* of a practical reality which is picked out, described and accounted for in a highly complex, subtle and (for most purposes) adequate way by the language of ordinary, everyday English. We are being asked to abandon such ways and to adopt a new description of that reality which is highly simplified and far from ordinary and common-sense.

My problem initially is this. Why should one accept new ways of describing reality? How does one justify a 'new language' – that is, not only new words but new *systems* of words that in effect assume that we must draw our conceptual boundaries differently from how we ordinarily do? For that is what conceptual innovation, such as illustrated by Bernstein, requires. The same question, of course, might be asked of most theory, for what seems typical of theory is a new way of looking at things, reflected in new systems of words. The theoretician suggests that the world which is *ordinarily* described in terms of tables and chairs should be re-described in terms which are not *ordinarily* understood, viz. of molecules and particles, of atoms and electrons. And thereby problems arise about the justification of such new languages and about the relationship of the one to the other.

On the other hand, to recognize these *as problems* presupposes some distinction between such conceptual innovations and what I have called *ordinary* ways of conceiving, thinking about and describing things. It is in pursuing this distinction that I find it necessary to clarify what is meant by ordinary everyday discourse or the common-sense world which people 'ordinarily' inhabit.

I have in a recent article criticized those claims of Bernstein at some length (Pring, 1975). Among other things, I argued that there is no theoretical basis for the conceptual innovations – they are but re-definitions masquerading as theory. Consequently, in the absence of justification, we are better off with the non-theoretical but, for most purposes, quite adequate everyday descriptions of practical reality. It might, however, be justifiably argued that in pursuing this criticism, I need to mark out a distinct area of common-sense or ordinary, everyday thinking, which can be contrasted with theory, which theory supersedes for particular

purposes, and which might be seen as a measure of the genuine or spurious in theoretical innovation. However, let it suffice for the moment to say that, as in the case of Bernstein, one is frequently asked in educational theory to accept a new way of describing some aspect of reality that is not embedded in our ordinary way of seeing and talking about things. And let it further suffice simply to assert the quite legitimate puzzlement about why we should accept this new, non-common-sense way of describing in preference to how we ordinarily see and talk about things.

My problem might be further illustrated by the theory of motivation that many teachers are familiar with. In the first chapter of his book *An Introduction to Motivation*, Atkinson (1964) argues that psychology (especially in its understanding of motivation) has in its own evolution as an experimental science of behaviour moved from the 'fund of pre-scientific, intuitive wisdom we call common sense through several stages of increased sophistication in methods of study'. Part of that increased sophistication is a more suitable conceptual scheme. Hence, the aim of psychology is to develop a conceptual scheme or theory which will explain more adequately than conventional wisdom what accounts for 'the direction, vigour and persistence of an individual's action'. In pursuing this task, Atkinson finds such concepts as 'wants', 'wishes', 'desires', 'intentions' and 'purposes' unhelpful. They are imprecise and ultimately circular in definition. The development of psychology which Atkinson applauds is in the direction of more tightly defined theoretical languages such as those of psycho-analysis, neuro-physiology and behaviourism, all helped along by mathematics. These then become a substitute for how we ordinarily explain why people act as they do.

Atkinson, then, is saying that how we ordinarily account for motivation is inadequate and that such accounts need to be superseded by a new set of terms which draw the conceptual boundaries differently and which make different assumptions. Again, one might ask why one cannot rest content with ordinary ways of understanding things and why one has to re-define events in a quite different non-common-sense way.

In his attempts to do this, Atkinson runs into difficulties, and an examination of these difficulties is revealing. For the new, recommended language has to apply to something, and that something is the individual or group of individuals picked out within our common-sense discourse. The point of developing theories of motivation is to assist us in pursuing practical tasks

or solving practical problems that have been identified, more often than not, in the non-theoretical language of everyday living. Somehow the *solutions* posed in the language of neuro-psychology have to be connected with the *problems* posed in the language of 'wishes', 'wants', 'desires' and 'intentions', and to do this is to face the logical problem of relating a limited universe of discourse to that which ordinary language users are familiar with.

The problem, however, is not simply one of keeping in view the non-theoretical objects or events identified in common-sense to which the theory must relate. The common sense account of things determines what sort of theory is relevant. As Peters (1969) argues, against the sort of enterprise envisaged by Atkinson, 'the very identification of behaviours to be explained determines the sort of explanatory theory that is appropriate, for there is no clear distinction between the language of identification and that of explanation'. To identify a behaviour as someone's action (as opposed to a reflex or an involuntary act) is to see it within a framework of intentions, and of social rules that make those intentions intelligible. No adequate theoretical account can ignore this intentional and social dimension. If it did, what would it be explaining? When we talk about intentional behaviour, about rules and social norms, we are committed to a certain kind of explanation, and that kind of explanation would exclude others (e.g. neuro-physiological) if these were put forward as *complete* accounts of why people act the way they do.

Another attempt to tidy up our ordinary common-sense way of organizing things is the invention of poetic, expressive and transactional categories, employed for sorting written work in a richly funded Schools Council Project and for much of the theorizing in the Bullock Report (1975).[1] I have no opportunity here to go over that ground – it is excellently criticized by Williams, 1976 – but this is a further example of the substitution of new definitions for the descriptions embedded in ordinary everyday English. To the reflective person, such innovations raise questions about the theoretical base of such re-descriptions and about the superiority of the new conceptual scheme over how we ordinarily describe things.

In the examples I have given, teachers and teacher trainees are asked to adopt a new conceptual framework. This, of course, is what one is being asked to do whenever one learns a theory. But generally speaking theories postulate certain principles which make the conceptual innovations intelligible; they are suggestive of further hypotheses that might be put to the test; and they evolve

out of the inadequacy of previous theoretical attempts to explain and predict. In the absence of such postulates, predictive power and critical evolution, one might be justified in denying that there is an adequate theoretical base for the 're-definition of reality' that educational theory asks us to adopt. And one might then conclude that the only reasonable course is to resort to the common-sense beliefs, descriptions and judgements that are adequate for most practical purposes. But such a view makes it necessary to give some account of common sense, and this I hope at least to initiate.

The problems of common sense arise in a different way if we turn from the theory of education to the task of educating. On the one hand pupils bring with them to school a range of common-sense beliefs, understandings and judgements that serve them well for most practical purposes. They pick up such practical common sense in the attempt to practise and in acquiring language rather than in theoretical study. However, such attention to the common sense of pupils raises questions about the relation of disciplined modes of thinking (that we *initiate* them into) to the common-sense understanding that they already possess. 'Initiation' has now become a common way of characterizing educational processes. It is of course an imprecise and metaphorical term, but its general connotation is that of entering into a form of life which is in some way sharply disconnected from a previous state of being. Educational processes as *initiating*, where the word 'initiation' carries any weight at all, would seem to be contrasted with those processes that simply refine, extend, make more effective the powers and modes of understanding that characterize the common-sense world of the ordinary person.

A lot might hang on the acceptance of this distinction. There are currently, for example, different educational views about science education. For some it is simply a refinement of modes of thought already operating in the play activities and interested queries of the young child (see, for example, the published materials of the Schools Council Science 5-13 project). For others scientific thinking is quite different from that of common-sense, not only in its form and content, but also in the mental characteristics it requires. Indeed some would argue that to think scientifically goes against the habits of the ordinary modes of thinking. That there is an educational problem here, I feel quite certain. Listening to playground conversation, observing pupils' interests and leisure pursuits, attending to their judgements and opinions about people, things and events, one might justifiably

feel that what is taught at school is for the majority no more than 'stuck on' to their common-sense modes of thinking – leaving untouched how they really feel, think, talk and behave. And faced with such an educational problem, one may be tempted to argue that education for the majority should focus upon such common-sense modes of thinking and such common understandings, refining them, extending them and possibly transforming *them* into something more disciplined – that is, educating their common sense.

These problems were highlighted by Professor Elliott's (1975) paper 'Education and Human Being' and by Professor Hirst's (1975) reply. Elliott points out that, in 'Liberal education and the nature of knowledge', Hirst does indeed talk of a 'common area of everyday knowledge where the various disciplines can be seen in embryo and from which they branch out as distinct units'. But, Elliott continues, from subsequent writing it is clear that Hirst leaves no room for a separate

> common area of everyday knowledge. . . . The form 'science' (for Hirst) includes both common empirical experience, discourse and knowledge *and* the systematic sciences.

Elliott, on the other hand, distinguishes between 'common non-theoretical understanding' and 'understanding within the systematic discipline'. The distinction is important because any curriculum programme that aims to take pupils from the common understandings to the 'understandings within the systematic disciplines' cannot be justified as simply a transition from the less to the more developed, from an inadequate to a better version of the same. Being a transition to a different kind of understanding, it needs further educational justification.

I would add further that the importance of the distinction, if a valid one, lies in the characterization of the different disciplined modes of thinking that are promoted in school. The non-theoretical, common-sense ways of seeing things enters into some 'subjects' (for example, those of the humanities) more than in others; and where this happens there is a continuity between how we ordinarily think and speak and the subject matter we have to master, which is not the case in much of science. And this has important pedagogical implications.

Hirst, replying to Elliott, agrees there is a distinction between understanding at the level of everyday concerns and understanding as expressed in the systematic disciplines. But disciplined knowledge is seen simply as a progressive development of the

common understandings into its different forms. There is no 'radical divorce', no 'formal boundaries' to cross in the development, no 'necessary dichotomy' in moving from the one to the other.

> Rightly used . . . the disciplines can contribute to a continuous development and sophistication of understanding that therefore moves out of what can be loosely identified as common understanding.

Taking 'development' in a very general sense, Hirst must be right. The theories of the disciplines would be unintelligible if there were no connections with common understandings and if they were not tackling problems frequently identified in common sense. (Such is central to my criticism of, for example, Bernstein. In what ways do the proposed theories do better what is already explained in common understandings?) But what is philosophically interesting is the variety of ways in which this development might be understood – some ways requiring more radical departures from common understandings than others. It is a pity that, despite so much talk about initiation into forms of knowledge, philosophers of education have failed to chart the different logical paths of such development in any detail. For example, the development from a childish understanding of moral issues (a four-year-old has a good grasp of 'fairness') to a sophisticated discussion in moral philosophy is logically quite different from the transition from, say, everyday talk about food and drink to scientific analysis of carbohydrates, proteins and vitamins. Or, again, basic mathematical concepts do seem to be embedded in everyday language – everyone quantifies, recognizes spatial relations and engages in elementary measurement. But development of such concepts into ordinal and cardinal numbers, or into elementary properties of shapes is of a different order from the development (if that is the word to be used) into the theory of irrational numbers or into the significance of *pi r squared*. Some disciplined studies, but not all, do seem to take one into a way of seeing things that at first affronts common sense, and it is educationally important to distinguish between those areas where common understandings are roughly adequate and those where, for particular purposes, they need to be superseded by non-common-sense theory.

Indeed 'development' is a misleading way of describing the transformation of common sense, for to master a theory is to master a new set of conventions – conventions not only about how experience should be conceptualized but also about how to seek

out evidence, conduct argument, check results. And the acquisition of what is conventional cannot be the product of development as that is normally understood.

However, to talk of common understandings, common-sense beliefs and the ordinary language of the ordinary person, or to talk of practical common sense leaves more problems than it solves. It is not clear what this 'common sense' is that is thought desirable, let alone how it is related to the non-common-sense knowledge that we try to teach at such expense. The philosophical problems, therefore, are these. Can we identify a sufficiently distinctive area of thought that might roughly be called common-sense thinking? If so, what philosophical attitude should we adopt towards it – regarding it, on the one hand, as provisional and inadequate, or, on the other hand, as indispensable, the touchstone of what is real and true, something to be refined, even 'educated', certainly not to be disposed of? Finally, what is the relation of such common-sense thinking to the more disciplined modes of thinking that we try to develop in students? Clearly, all these questions interrelate and I have made no systematic attempt to separate them.

Common sense

An important use of common sense is when we refer to someone as 'having common sense'. It is an appraisal term, indicating an indefinable quality of judgement. A man of common sense comes up to certain standards in everyday and practical matters. This meaning of common sense is important educationally (how can we develop such judgement in pupils? what value is theory without the common sense to apply it?). But it is not my chief concern. Relevant to the problems posed in the last section are what I call common-sense beliefs and the associated common understandings and ordinary everyday modes of discourse.

Common sense here refers to statements and explanations. To say something is common sense acts as a stopper to further questioning. Not only is the statement or explanation true but it is *obviously* so. common sense is the range of unquestioned beliefs which groups of people share and which provide a basic view of the world. It provides the rules of thumb whereby each person is able to live and make decisions. And probably it works well when the physical and social environments are sufficiently stable for the continued success of unquestioned assumption.

However, a feature of such common sense is its changing content. What is common sense at one time may no longer be so at another; what is not known at one time might become part of

the unquestioned folklore later. Relating home environment to school performance is now part of teachers' common sense, although once upon a time this connection would not have seemed obvious. Research or disciplined treatment of a problem eventually percolates down to the unquestioned assumptions of everyday life, thereby extending or changing common sense. Furthermore one man's common sense may not be another's. The common-sense beliefs of the teacher may not be obvious to the pupil, so that the unquestioned assumptions of the one may be either incomprehensible or questionable to the other. Hence, in talking about the common-sense beliefs of particular groups, one has in mind the unquestioned assumptions of that group through which its members understand their relationships, tackle personal problems, pick out features of experience as significant – their 'reality of everyday life'. But what picks out such beliefs as common sense is the *manner* in which they are held – unquestioningly, commonly held to be obvious. In this sense the education of the student must be at odds with the common-sense beliefs he brings to school – not necessarily with the content of those beliefs (which may be true and significant) but with the common-sense, unquestioning manner with which they are held. In developing a non-common-sense attitude towards one's beliefs one is at the beginning of the disciplined, critical and reflective thinking that is the mark of educational progress. The 'education of common sense' here lies in the acquisition of certain mental habits and qualities – a questioning and critical approach to what was accepted uncritically, a refusal to accept as self-evident what is generally believed to be true, a reflective and analytic attitude towards the fund of wisdom passed on from parents, teachers and friends. But such superseding of common sense requires a start with the common-sense beliefs brought to school or college – the exposure to critical scrutiny of what is believed in an uncritical way.

On the other hand, such common sense includes certain beliefs about the world – that there is an external world, that there are other people, that one event causes another – which in a special sense seem undeniable. The characteristic feature of these more central common-sense beliefs is not simply the manner in which the beliefs are held but their peculiar status. They are in one sense unquestionable (although one might, as Moore (1924) pointed out, argue about their correct analysis) for they contain those presuppositions which seem basic to all our thought. They provide a skeletal framework of beliefs which incorporate fundamental

categories of thinking (viz. those of persons and of material objects, causally interrelated) which are not superseded by disciplined thinking. Indeed it was with the development of such presuppositions, embodying certain characteristic logical operations, that Piaget was so much concerned – the categoreal framework that both precedes and enters into the more reflective stages of disciplined thinking. The gradual development of categories of thought (of independent material objects, of cause/effect relationships, of persons as centres of feeling and consciousness) and of connected logical abilities (reversibility of mental operations, conservation of one variable despite changes in others) enters into every department of thought and thus provides an integrating basis to thought whether disciplined or not. The later, more differentiated thought would not contradict such a framework of experience. Rather would it (in the less formalized disciplines) incorporate the common-sense reference to objects and their qualities, and to persons and their motives, or (in the more formalized disciplines) construct for particular purposes new objects of references which, nonetheless, must be related back to the categoreal framework of common sense.

Such considerations indicate how one might begin to mark out the territory of common-sense discourse. Admittedly this is an elusive term, containing many levels of sophistication; but it might, whatever its sophistication, be contrasted with theoretical understanding.

On the other hand, it is impossible to give a uniform characterization of this contrast because theory itself is not all of a piece (and thus its 'development' from common sense must be charted in different ways). But contrast there is and, this being so, one might usefully distinguish between common understandings, on the one hand, and, on the other, more disciplined organizations of thought that, in different ways, transform such common sense.

Let us take various examples of theory. At one extreme it is in dissenting from such postulates of everyday discourse that theory is created and developed. The physicist creates a different universe of discourse from that of visible, tangible physical objects, and postulates instead non-sensible 'objects' like particles. Psychologists, like Atkinson, postulated contrary to fundamental common-sense beliefs, that man was not to be understood as an intentional agent with wishes and wants.

Less extreme is the kind of theory that does not assume a different universe from that of common sense. Nonetheless, it

abstracts from it for limited purposes and, within a more limited universe of discourse, postulates 'truths' which are not part of common sense, but which provide the basis for new conceptual distinctions. For example, Freud postulated (contrary to the common way of understanding some behaviour) that there is an unconscious life *with a dynamism of its own* (its own 'logic' or rules, as it were). It was forgetfulness not remembering, that needed to be explained. Connected with such postulates (and not to be understood without them) were a range of interconnected concepts – 'unconscious', 'libido', 'repression', 'resistance', 'transference', 'ego', 'superego', 'id' – which in a *systematic* way provided a coherent and new perspective upon a particular area of experience. Such a system was not common sense, not simply because it was neither obvious nor commonly held, but because it employed a range of concepts which could be properly understood and correctly applied only if one agreed with the underlying postulates which determined the theoretical framework.

Again, the world of economics is not fundamentally different from that of common sense – it assumes a world of persons with wants, wishes and intentions and makes certain assumptions (about the movement of prices, say) which the non-economist would immediately recognize from everyday experience. But what is not common sense is the tidying up of these beliefs in postulating, contrary to daily experiences, the 'rational man', in stipulating greater conceptual precision than is present in everyday discourse, and in quantifying the relationships between different factors (as, for example, in showing by graphs the elasticity of supply and demand). To postulate such individuals as the 'rational man', to stipulate precise definitions of key terms and to quantify relations between them is an invention rather than a development. It depends upon the acceptance of conventions that hang together as a system. As such it is not part of common sense, and its mastery, far from being a natural development, is an achievement, reached very often after much struggle.

Theoretical undertakings, however, sometimes neither postulate new non-common-sense individuals of reference (as particles in physics) nor require important shifts and innovations in our concepts. Philosophy and history are theoretical undertakings; they do not necessarily involve such non-common-sense frames of reference; and yet they are hardly common-sense activities. Here the connection between common sense and theory is of a different kind and the 'development' from one to the other needs to be

mapped in a different way. The historian or the philosopher may use only those words that are in common use, and may work with few general explanations. And yet he will have mastered ways of identifying and tackling problems that are not obvious or generally shared. Indeed the way to become a historian or philosopher might be by serving an apprenticeship in which, under the criticism of the initiated, one perceives dimly at first what counts as a problem and then gradually gains a practical knowledge of the *conventional* ways in which these are approached. Articulating the rules of the syllogism is not a natural development from arguing syllogistically – such reflective thinking requires training.

I am marking out an area of common-sense discourse by saying what it is not. It is not theory; nor is theory simply a development from or an extension of such pre-theoretical understandings. This admittedly does not leave us with any neat account of the pre-theoretical common sense. But such lack of neatness and consequent blurred boundaries between the category of common sense and what supersedes it does not affect the general issue, viz. that there is a mode of understanding permeated by certain features and superseded for certain purposes by other modes of thinking with which it might be contrasted and which is not simply a development from it.

That there is lack of neatness in the category of common sense and that the boundaries are blurred between it and theory is true enough. It has been pointed out above that common sense is very wide in its application – including both the rather concrete, crude and simplistic language and understanding of, say, the (very) popular press and the more sophisticated, highly discriminating and sensitive language and understanding of, say, 'quality' papers or a profound novel. There are differences not only in the size but also in the abstract nature of vocabulary. Its grammar includes not only the rules for forming plurals but those, too, for forming counter-factual conditionals, which might for some ordinary language users be more abstruse than a lot of theory. For particular purposes one may wish to elevate these distinctions within common sense to the level of theory; where one draws boundaries depends partly on the job one is trying to do. But none of these considerations affects the boundary I am drawing between the theoretical and the pre-theoretical, nor the educational issues that hang upon the distinction. On either side of the distinction are different 'styles' of thinking such that theory cannot be simply a development of common sense nor supersede it for many of the tasks identified and pursued within common sense.

The main difference, implicit in what I have said, lies partly in the distinct universe of discourse. Common sense presupposes a 'universe' of physical objects possessing a wide range of qualities and causally interconnected and of persons that have wants and feelings, follow rules and socially interrelate. That universe is rich in the qualities (frequently not measurable) that can be predicated. Typical of theory, on the other hand, is the explicit restriction of the field of discourse to what follows from accepting certain basic, though limiting, assumptions and particular kinds of entity. Such entities may be either theoretical constructs (such as 'particles' in physics) or artificially restricted definitions of common-sense objects (such as 'the rational man' in economics). Such 'individuals' are not the things, persons or events identified in common sense. 'Homo Skinnerius', like 'homo economicus', is an abstraction from the rather complex being we meet on the street or in literature.

Frequently connected with this limitation of the field of discourse is, as I have pointed out, a technical precision injected into the use of terms – as, for example, in equating 'force' with the quantifiable relation between 'mass' and the laws of motion. An ideal of the natural sciences would be the replacement of qualitative by quantitative descriptions wherever possible, as for instance in substituting precise standards of measurement for 'everyday judgements' of temperature. Such precision is demanded too in the social sciences, as when, for example, in psychology attitude tests are given, or deviations from the norm statistically expressed. Even where, as in non-scientific disciplines, quantification is clearly impossible, crucial terms are by definition rendered sufficiently precise that even these are marked off from their use (if they had one) in ordinary discourse. For example, in theology the development of doctrine lay in the gradual conciliar definitions of key doctrinal concepts such as 'trinity', 'incarnation', 'transubstantiation'.

Of course this distinction between theoretical and ordinary discourse cannot be made too sharply. There are many areas of ordinary discourse characterized by fairly general agreement on precise usage, and there are doubtless areas within the social and natural sciences where precision in meaning is lacking. And indeed to imagine otherwise would be strange, for there is endless interchange between ordinary language and theoretical languages and thus common sense is frequently affected by developments in theory. Many theoretical terms have their roots in ordinary usage (for example, such terms as 'force', 'the market', 'the unconscious', as opposed to theoretical innovations like 'id',

'gene', 'electron'). And common sense inherits much of what is developed at the theoretical level in, for example, talk about 3B's personality problems, inferiority complexes and inertia. Again, theory takes up the metaphorical descriptions of ordinary discourse, as when it explains human behaviour by various 'drives' or electrical phenomena by 'current' and in turn it enters into the stock of common-sense metaphor, as when we describe someone as electrifying.

Nonetheless, whatever the blurred boundaries between common discourse and theory, theoretical language offers an *alternative*, more precise and more explicitly defined way of seeing things. Such a proposed system may, as in much of the natural sciences, be radically different from ordinary usage, forming a closely knit framework resting on a different set of assumptions. It is often an abstraction from the common way of seeing things – ignoring qualities of experience that are not quantifiable or have no place within the proposed system. Alternatively the theoretical proposals may, as in much of the social sciences, not be so radically different – they touch common sense at various points giving the uninitiated more ready access to what the theoretician is trying to say. Even here however a new way of seeing things is proposed – a new description of social reality that aims to improve our ordinary descriptions *for particular purposes*. Unfortunately, as with Bernstein, it is often not clear why the alternative is an improvement or indeed what are the different assumptions which make plausible this theoretical innovation and new ways of conceiving things.

Educating common sense

Pupils bring to school (and students to courses) a wide range of common-sense understandings. These understandings – common sense to them and to those they mix with – form the student's view of the world and determine the many practical decisions he makes. These, then, are what above all need to be educated. To ignore such common-sense views would be to leave the student, in those matters which chiefly preoccupy his mind, very much where he is. And, if to find out what is this or that student's common-sense world requires a more flexible timetable and less time given to more specialized areas of activity, then such is a price worth paying, for otherwise the official programme will have little effect on how the student really feels, thinks and behaves. However, to respect such common sense does not require acceptance either of its content or of the unquestioning manner

with which beliefs are held. The first stage in educating these students will be to get them to reflect critically upon their beliefs and hidden assumptions. To do this will require the development of mental habits and capacities – of questioning, of seeking out evidence, of respecting the views and criticisms of others – which are not the exclusive possession of any one recognized subject area, although certain kinds of curriculum activity might be more successful than others in developing these habits and abilities and in forming a reflective attitude.

Where common sense therefore refers to the uncritical *manner* in which beliefs are held, it needs of course to be superseded. But in so far as such appraisal and further enquiry develops more theoretical precision in concepts and argument and sets limits to its universe of discourse, there arise important logical differences between the *discourse* of common sense and that of the theoretically developed disciplines, and common sense no longer refers simply to the uncritical manner in which beliefs are held. It refers to a certain structure of beliefs which, though to be contrasted with theory, seem to be in some sense more basic and for many purposes quite adequate.

On the other hand to recognize this distinction, both in manner and in structure, between common sense and theoretical thinking, is to identify the basis for criticizing those who see the development of knowledge to be no more than a refinement and development of common sense. On such a view what goes on in school and what goes on 'outside' are but differences of degree; there is no essential difference in content or indeed in method. Ideally the student learns by 'discovery' in pursuing some interest or strand of curiosity. He comes to school with a fund of practical and common-sense knowledge, and the school programme is but a development of this.

This *continuity* of common sense with theoretical or disciplined knowledge is a feature of what might crudely be called the progressive or child-centred movement in education. Thus, Kilpatrick (1918) spoke of science having 'its origin in common sense, the ordinary working of common experience', and thus in the practical and material affairs associated with common sense. Its primary difference lay in its greater care and precision; but there was no logical break between common-sense thinking and its more disciplined counterpart in science. common sense was more than the starting point of education; education lay in the refinement and the 'polishing' of such beliefs, language and ways of thinking. But common sense, in its 'broad outlines', remained intact.

This view has much to commend it. It is insisting upon a conceptual link between specialized and common-sense thinking, for without this link, specialized thinking, with its technically defined terms and its restricted subject-matter, would have no 'purchase' upon the questions we ordinarily ask. The teacher, for instance, caught in the complex practical world of the classroom, needs to see where the theoretical account latches on to his quite different universe of discourse. The onus of proof lies on those who, like Bernstein, propose an alternative and not easily intelligible perspective. The theorist needs to show where theory corrects or improves the common-sense beliefs that inform a teacher's practice.

The difficulty of this view however lies in its exaggeration. To talk of education as simply the development or the refinement of common sense, or as no more than a more disciplined approach to the problems posed by common sense, does not do justice to theoretical innovation and understanding, and thus (in some areas) to the justified 'initiation' of the pupil into new, alternative ways of seeing things. It is under the model of common sense that some educational philosophers have insisted misguidedly upon unbroken continuity in mental 'growth'.

However, the force of my argument has lain not simply on the contrast between common sense and the more disciplined and theoretical modes of thinking but also upon their interconnection. The language of everyday usage employs a range of concepts, principles, rules of inference with a multitude of overlapping purposes – a complex picture of the world within a framework of material objects and purposive, rule-following persons, of duties and rights and social interactions. And it is in this complex picture of the world that problems are first identified for theoretical treatment and that theory (often by concentrating upon the quantifiable aspects of experience) injects some precision, while at the same time being placed in perspective. The framework of ordinary language, together with the accompanying beliefs about the external world, other minds, etc., provides both the starting point and the point of application of theory, the bridge between different disciplines, the common ground of intelligibility that enables communication between different theoretical accounts. Some logical priority must therefore be given to what Ryle (1953) calls 'the everyday world' and 'the concepts of everyday discourse', for it would always be important to bear m mind 'how the world of physics is related to the everyday world', or how psychological explanations of behaviour are connected

with the language in which we normally ascribe motives and intentions, or how 'collection and integrated codes' or the 'framing of knowledge' relate to the many-sided picture teachers have of what and how they teach. To sever this link or to say that common sense could logically be superseded by theoretical thinking would be to believe that the technical language of the disciplines could do everything that at present is done by common-sense language, such that the latter would logically be dispensable. But that this is not logically possible arises from the restricted universe of discourse that in part defines a theoretical study. Theory runs parallel with ordinary language (and is therefore a substitute for it) only for particular purposes. The language of atoms and particles needs to be related to the language of tables and chairs.

This framework of common-sense language and belief can itself be developed both in the sense outlined by Piaget (for example, in the transition from concrete to formal operations) and in the sense of greater discrimination within the common-sense framework of sensibly perceived objects and of feeling, rule-following persons. This is of particular significance where disciplines largely employ the language of everyday usage – where in other words the contrast between theoretical and common-sense discourse lies more in rules of procedure than in language employed. Thus history is a distinct theoretical pursuit in a quite different sense from that of physics and chemistry, for what is typical of history and of the humanities generally is the degree to which they employ the language of everyday usage. The social studies and religion attempt their own theoretical constructions and their own restrictive definitions, but it is debatable how far they can become theoretical or specialist enterprises while serving their intended human purposes. And it is possibly for this reason that moves towards an integrated curriculum take place mainly within the humanities, for these all employ the complex language of ordinary usage for a vast range of interrelated and overlapping human purposes.

CHAPTER 9

The language of curriculum analysis

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The title of this lecture is 'The language of curriculum analysis'. And the first thing I would like to do is to change the title.

I do not apologize for this. I have constantly argued (despite Professor Hirst) against the possibility of pre-specifying exactly one's curriculum objectives, and yet that, in a sense, is what I was invited to do when asked to say what I would write about long before I had started writing. Genuine educational activities (and I would like to think this is one) are not like that. The outcome is not predictable and not pre-specifiable. (I suspect that Professor Bruner was struggling with similar difficulties last week.)

I mention this because the difficulty over stating curriculum objectives provides a minor theme through a lot of what I have to say, and certainly poses the problem that I am chiefly concerned and puzzled about this evening. That problem or concern might be stated as follows:

- How do the accounts given by curriculum theorists relate to curriculum practice?

or (put differently):

- How does the language of curriculum theory relate to the language of curriculum practice that the practitioners use?

or (put differently again):

- In what way is the growing body of curriculum knowledge, knowledge of curriculum reality?

The sort of puzzles that have stimulated me into writing this lecture, and which I shall try to make clear this evening, have not been solved, but only rendered more puzzling, by the preceding lectures in this series. Indeed, Professor Hirst's (1976) renewed defence of curriculum objectives has made the connection between the theory and practice for me even more incomprehensible, because on the one hand what he says is clear, logical, persuasive, and yet on the other it seems to leave curriculum practice where it is. How can such a lucid, logical and persuasive account of practice not really be about practice at all? And Michael Young (1971), although shedding considerable light upon such areas which (for me at any rate) were previously in darkness, spoke clearly, logically and persuasively about a practical reality, which did not seem like the practical reality with which I am familiar. How can such a clear and persuasive account of reality in general not be about my particular reality, as I engage in curriculum practice?

My concern, therefore, is that more and more people are talking *about* curriculum, not in the sense of how to teach particular things to particular children, but in the sense of saying what one is doing (or ought to be doing) in talking about how to teach particular things to particular children. Hirst, in prescribing curriculum objectives, is prescribing what is essential to *all* rational curriculum planning. Young, in distinguishing between curriculum as fact and curriculum as practice, is providing a very simple framework for *all* curriculum activities. Bruner, in defining his spiral curriculum, is providing a model for *all* curriculum programmes.

My puzzle, following this concern, is how to reconcile such simple theoretical categories or prescriptions on the one hand with the very rich variety of practical reality of curriculum on the other, to reconcile the language of those who talk and theorize about curriculum on the one hand with the language of those who 'do' it (intelligently, critically, reflectively) on the other. What is the validity of those theoretical activities that endeavour to capture and make sense of the wide range of curriculum practice, and that aim to make practitioners more intelligent about their practice (for that surely must be their aim)?

I shall proceed as follows. First, I shall try to define my problem a little more graphically, and to show its essentially philosophical

nature. Secondly, I shall try to make this problem more concrete through a critical look at three people who have theorized about curriculum reality, viz. Professor Hirst, Michael Young and Professor Bernstein. Thirdly, from this critical examination will emerge a more positive thesis about '*the language of curriculum practice*', which should really be the title of my paper.

The problem

I have a constantly recurring dream of a college or an institute of education, set in pleasant grounds and far removed from the pressures of the practical world, in which the members of that institution are encouraged to engage in the activity of thinking (unlike school teachers, they are given research days). Thinking, in so far as it both employs and comes to formulate concepts, is a social and joint enterprise. Hence, the importance attached to the gathering together in such pleasant surroundings of a group of like-minded people who will thereby be enabled to engage in this activity and who will at the same time be removed from the distractions of the practical world. Systematic thinking requires shared problems and purposes, as well as the removal of distractions (let us say, the distractions of the school).

In this dream, the social activity of thinking proceeds in the following way. One person will write a paper about a topic of educational interest (for example, the need for objectives in a rationally planned curriculum). A colleague will write a second paper, replying to the first, stating the case against the pre-specification of objectives. Yet a third will add to this growing literature by pointing out the half-truths in each argument, and the need to make distinctions. The participants in this social activity will now modify, and/or elaborate on, the original positions adopted. And then there will be further elaborations of the modifications, and further modifications of the elaborations.

The discussion at this stage becomes rather complex. New terms have been introduced, or old ones redefined in a new way – i.e. new concepts have been formed; theoretical models with accompanying flow charts have been constructed; instruments for measuring and evaluating what is proposed have been devised; glossaries of terms have been produced. And newcomers to this ongoing activity will thus have to be initiated (for initiation is required when situations are complex, there is a growing literature to be guided through, newly defined concepts need to be attained, theoretical models have to be grasped and new techniques of evaluation mastered). Such initiation makes it necessary to

establish courses to familiarize the initiates with this literature, these concepts and these theoretical models and to make possible further developments through theses and dissertations. Eventually all this social activity may get social recognition in a departmental structure with its own particular examinations and awards.

In this way is conceived and eventually born a new body of 'knowledge'.

What is particularly disconcerting about this constantly recurring dream is its undreamlike quality – or, rather, the close parallel with what in fact happens. Dr Terence Miller of the Polytechnic of North London recently suggested (*Times Higher Educational Supplement*, **173**, 7 February 1975) that one use that defunct colleges of education could be put to, partly because of the pleasant grounds they are frequently situated in, is educational research (so far lacking) into what happens in comprehensive schools. But what is the nature of this thinking about practice when it is removed from the practice and from the responsibilities about which it is thinking? And my puzzle here is in part a logical one because, removed from practice and the frustrating demands of practice, the most important restraint upon practical thinking disappears, and it is no longer practical thinking or theorizing about practice. It is simply theory.

This one sees in so many courses developed to meet the rising demand for new bodies of knowledge in higher education. At the Open University, in the pleasant grounds of an eighteenth-century mansion, the difficulties of urban education are analysed, AOSTMTEC (Aims, Objectives, Strategies, Tactics, Methods, Techniques, Evaluation, Consolidation) is produced as the saving instrument for all curriculum planners, the case against objectives (itself generated by an Open University consultant) is examined by means of objective-type tests, and a small body of people, in positions to legitimate what elsewhere would be regarded as highly problematic (to borrow a couple of phrases) 'knowledge', make set reading of their own writings.

There is always the possibility, in the institutional framework in which we all work, that my dream might come true.

I have pursued these points in this way because behind the nightmarish character of my dream and the dreamlike quality of some reality is a philosophical puzzle about the new bodies of knowledge which become the subject matter of courses at institutions of higher education, especially those concerned with education. But how do we tell the genuine from the spurious, a real theoretical advance in curriculum from the fashion of the

moment, a valid prescription from what is no more than the legitimation by a particular group that happens to be in control of curriculum knowledge? What is the touchstone, the test, whereby we accept or reject or even take seriously what is being proposed?

The answer to my puzzle is in one sense simple. Curriculum knowledge is ultimately about practical reality – a reality in which one is making decisions, choosing between alternatives, deliberating about courses of action, being motivated in the many ways picked out by our large list of motive concepts, etc. And curriculum theory therefore must be theorizing about this practical reality, put to the test or made to work in it, and validated by its practical consequences.

But the answer is not so simple as that, and my puzzle remains. For the language of the curriculum theorist, the distinctions he makes, the concepts he introduces or redefines, the arguments he produces, are not those of the ordinary (even the intelligent, critical and reflective) practitioner. And to test his theory in practice requires making some link *between* his theory and the ways in which we think about our practice – and thus with the language by which practice is ordinarily described.

I wish to argue that this they rarely do and that they thus produce theoretical accounts that are not really accounts of practice at all. They may, as in my dream, appear in reading lists, introduce new concepts and distinctions that have to be understood, learnt and examined on in BEd examinations – they may in this sense become new bodies of 'knowledge'. But they are not really bodies of knowledge, because they remain disconnected from the practical reality they are meant to be theory about or knowledge of.

In pursuing this line of argument I shall give three examples of the ways in which theory fails to be theory about practice. Each fails for different reasons, which I shall try to explain.

Critical examination of theory

Professor Hirst's rational curriculum planning

In the first lecture of this series Professor Hirst stated that, at present, curriculum theory is nothing short of chaos and that there is a need to look again at the logical demands of curriculum planning. The first feature of a rationally planned curriculum would be what he asserts to be the seemingly innocuous belief, namely, that 'like all other rational planning [it] must start with a clear grasp of the ends to be reached'. He then proceeds, while

retaining a sense of pre-specified objectives that are clear, specific and detailed, to disassociate himself from a behaviourist interpretation of this.

Hirst, then, in criticizing the view which reduced objectives to observable behaviours, has disassociated himself from one of the few genuine contenders for the status of curriculum theory – a theoretical position (with its postulates about the nature of the mind, its coherent model of the learning process, its theoretical consequences in terms of hypotheses that can be tested) that makes a practical difference. I personally accept Hirst's criticisms of this theoretical position, but fail to see what theory remains when this theoretical position is rejected. We are told that what remains is still the need to pre-specify clear and precise objectives, though the degree of clarity and the degree of precision depends upon the context.

The difficulty now, however, is that Hirst is either saying something trivially true or saying something non-trivial but false by discounting for practical curriculum purposes a particular kind of intelligent behaviour. What he is saying is trivially true if he makes the prescription to plan by objectives rest upon what it means to act rationally where acting rationally includes the infinite variety of activities that, as practitioners, we engage intelligently in. It would be true because true by definition – that is what we mean by acting rationally; it would be trivial because in accepting so wide a definition nothing of significance is excluded. It leaves practice as it is. It simply says you ought to do what you are already doing in so far as you are being intelligent and rational about it. And what teachers would deny they are being intelligent and rational? What would give substance to this prescription – what would make it no longer trivial – would be the sort of behaviourist position he rejects, for that certainly would make a practical difference.

Hirst can only avoid this accusation of triviality (triviality in the sense that, in including too much, his argument doesn't really say anything at all), if in the context of curriculum planning it is clear what activities intelligently pursued and engaged in by teachers, are to be excluded. What particular kind of intelligent teaching behaviour is being excluded for practical curriculum purposes? In one way Hirst cannot exclude any because in so far as they are intelligent teaching activities they must (by definition) have objectives. But the diversity of intelligent practice is not made more comprehensive by such a logical device. Curriculum theory developed in this way has nothing to say to curriculum practice.

My main quarrel with Hirst, therefore, is that he is attempting to say something useful about practice on the basis of a purely logical point. He is not really trying to make sense of practice in all its complexity. And yet this is what curriculum theory ought to be doing. But furthermore, in failing to look at practice, his logical point about rationality does not follow from any analysis of rational action or practical reason. For the concept of rationality picks out a wide range of mental processes that do not all conform to the same paradigm of taking a means to an end. For example, in an open-ended seminar or in any intelligent encounter with a child, my teaching activity may be characterized more by conformity to the rules of procedure (rules of logical argument, rules for showing respect to the student or child, rules connected with this or that sort of inquiry) than by taking specific means to arrive at specific ends. I can act rationally without knowing where my reason is leading me (as to some extent in writing this lecture); I can act rationally without even being conscious of the rules whereby my action is judged rational (as I hope is not the case in writing this lecture).

Hirst, then, exemplifies the error of those who philosophize about practice without examining practice, or even respecting the very complex logical structure of the language by which we do describe practice. The point is that Professor Hirst's 'simple philosophical truth about the nature of significant learning activities' is not a simple philosophical truth.

Michael Young's two kinds of curriculum

If Professor Hirst is an example of a curriculum theorist who, from a purely a priori or philosophical position, mistakenly attempts to say something about practice, Michael Young would seem to represent (at least in his contribution to this series) those who, in attempting to remain close to practice, are not being philosophical enough.

His opening statement was that the problems of education are generated by the experience of people in schools. To recognize this fact is to imply (as I think he was implying) that curriculum studies arise from, and must constantly refer back to, this practical experience. And, of course, to say this is to be critical of so much that passes for curriculum theory, as well as the ways in which the content of curriculum theory is transmitted to students. Michael Young is emphasizing, rightly in my opinion, the *practical* reality which provides the subject matter of curriculum studies, and the practical experience of so many teachers, especially in

inner city school, which provokes both a dissatisfaction with old categories by which that experience is described and an attempt to articulate, however inadequately at present, a more adequate set of concepts that will make sense of that experience.

Furthermore, he sees the development of theory (and I use this word very loosely at the moment) to lie in this critical examination of different conceptions of curriculum practice. If he means here what I think he means, then I am so far in agreement.

Thus (to enlarge on this point) curriculum practice is to engage in certain activities. To engage in an activity is to have conceptualized one's reality (here the reality of the school) in a particular way – the social context in which one is operating, the values attached to different kinds of activity, the structuring of those activities in a particular way. Furthermore, to engage in an activity is to assume certain facts about the situation – social facts about the aspirations and aptitudes of the children, about the suspicions or support of other members of staff, and technical facts about sheer physical possibilities within the school. To engage in any activity, therefore, makes it at least logically possible to lay bare, to make explicit, these underlying conceptions, assumptions and beliefs, and to examine them for what they are worth. In altering the conception of what people are doing (through critical analysis either of the conceptual framework in which they are operating or of the different beliefs and values they are assuming) one is engaged in what I, and I suspect Michael Young, would call curriculum theorizing. But it is theorizing that starts with, constantly refers back to, and attempts to make sense of, the rich, complex and puzzling world of practice. And to do that it must constantly take place in the practical situation.

However, to engage in this critical yet constructive examination of practice, one needs to respect the highly complex, highly subtle way in which, in our language, we have come to note differences within that practical reality – differences between kinds of motivation, differences in the ways we structure our thinking, differences in the types of problems we attempt to solve, differences in the educational aims and ideals. Not to respect those differences in one's critical examination is to produce an interesting theory, but not a theory about practice. And this, I fear, is what Michael Young is in danger of doing.

His examination of practice rests on the distinction between two contrasting conceptions of curriculum: curriculum as fact (or commodity view) and curriculum as practice. An example of the first would be the conception of the curriculum embodied, so we

are told, in much of what Hirst says – a 'structure of socially prescribed knowledge external to the learner to be mastered'. Doubtless Bruner's various spirals of curriculum would be further examples of this – for instance, the understandings to be mastered in his 'Man: A Course of Study'. An example of curriculum as practice would be, I suppose, the sort of open-ended interdisciplinary enquiry (IDE) envisaged by Charity James, formerly of the Goldsmiths' Curriculum Laboratory. In such a curriculum no meanings would be 'imposed'. All meaning is 'negotiated' between the collaborative, enabling teacher and the pupil who is trying to come to grips with his world.

The objections to curriculum as fact are that, through the division of knowledge into subjects (into distinct structures), we have come to treat as absolute and given, as a commodity, as an object to be studied and learnt, what is rather a social reality with a social history and with socio-historical determinants, that could have been, and could be otherwise. We have failed to see (on this view) that knowledge, as a way of inquiry produced by people in a particular social context, as a way in which particular social groups of people tried to make sense of their reality, has not a life of its own, disconnected from the musings, problems, struggles of particular people. Hence the mistake, on this view, of seeing the curriculum as an initiation into the *teacher's* form of knowledge – something external to the child's way of thinking.

My difficulty with Michael Young's critique lies in the over-simple way in which he is now attempting to describe practice. 'Curriculum as fact', we are told, 'reflects the prevailing assumptions of practitioners.' But does it? The prevailing assumptions of practitioners are very many and, although it is true that some treat different subject matters as unchanging 'things' to be learnt and memorized as such, many see subject learning to be an entry into a particular mode of inquiry, socially developed certainly, but not a matter of mere convention for all that.

But the difference between us here is not simply a matter of how for practical purposes should we describe curriculum reality. Young seems critical of those who seek to transmit this social developed knowledge. Of course, much depends on the meanings attributed to 'transmit'. But what is socially developed – the knowledge we seek to introduce to our pupils – incorporates standards which cannot logically be socially ignored, and there is a sense in which knowledge does have a life of its own, independently of the musings of any one set of individuals, and to which children have to be introduced. In learning a language

(even a specialist language that includes the word 'viscosity') a child is being introduced to a way of looking at things that (before he is introduced) is in some sense external to him but, when internalized, becomes a fruitful way of conceptualizing his experiences. And its fruitfulness, though resulting from the socio-historic situation that has enabled us to see things in this way, has got something to do with the world. We should, of course, always remain conscious of those social processes that have produced our concept, among others, of 'viscosity'. But we should also be conscious of the fact that this was socially possible because parts of the world happen to be viscous. And it would be wrong not to transmit a particular way of looking at the world, even if that way of looking at the world might first have been formed by others.

I welcome Michael Young's location of curriculum theorizing in curriculum practice. It is all the more disappointing, therefore, that he provides, in his initial distinction, such a narrow conceptualization of that highly varied practice.

Bernstein's classification and framing of knowledge

Neither Hirst nor Young has too formal or strict a notion of theory. My criticism of their theorizing about curriculum is for other reasons. However, there is a kind of theorizing about curriculum practice that attempts to develop a theory of practice. Such theories, far from shedding light on practice or helping the practitioner to practise better, tend to put the understanding of that practice into a theoretical straitjacket and to keep from sight the rich variety of practices that one ought to understand or look critically at.

Bernstein's (1971) article on the classification and framing of knowledge seems like such a theoretical position. Certainly it raises the critical questions posed in my introduction. How does this theoretical account relate to the complex practical reality in which teachers find themselves? How does the language of the new theoretical account relate to the language by which we ordinarily describe what is going on in schools? In what way can this be said to advance our knowledge of practical reality? In what way does this new theoretical account do better (in predicting or explaining) than what is normally done through the non-theoretical medium of everyday English? Unless answers can be given to these question – unless practitioners are assisted in their practice by this theory, or unless the new descriptions can be logically related to the old (which teachers employ in describing

their practice), unless the theoretical account can be shown to predict or to explain better than the non-theoretical account we are normally happy with, then I cannot see what the theory is a theory of.

Furthermore, unless satisfactory answers can be given, we have something suspiciously like the new bodies of knowledge in my dream (and *that* gives substance and plausibility to Michael Young's critique of curriculum as fact). For already the content of that article has become an educational fact (appealed to as a fact in countless BEd theory and practice papers), and has provided a new set of key curriculum concepts (and understanding of which is sought in countless curriculum theory courses), is set reading in Open University courses (it appears in the new curriculum reader as well as in appendices to old units), and has provided the framework for yet further theoretical speculation about school curricula in postgraduate theses and dissertations. Evaluators of school curricula declare to bewildered headmasters that they have strong classifications and weak frames. But what is the logical basis of all this? How does one distinguish between genuine theoretical development – new bodies of knowledge – and rather sophisticated theoretical games? How can one decide in this case whether the new 'theory' is a genuine extension of out understanding of practical reality?

The general thesis, for which the article attempts to find an adequate theoretical framework, has been outlined in Chapter 8, namely:

> How a society selects, classifies, distributes, transmits and evaluates the educational knowledge it considers to be public reflects both the distribution of power and the principles of social control.

And, as was explained in the previous chapter, the clarification of the thesis requires the construction of a theoretical framework. There is a *public educational knowledge*, which is found in three 'message systems'. These 'message systems' are legitimized by universities and schools. They are 'curriculum' (or what is regarded as a valid content of knowledge), 'pedagogy' (or what is regarded as a valid way of transmitting knowledge), and 'evaluation' (or what is regarded as valid realization of this knowledge in the learner). 'Educational knowledge codes' are the principles which 'shape' this educational knowledge. Finally, there are *social principles* that regulate the form of the educational knowledge code.

Hence the process of shaping (or regulating or determining) the way in which society comes to accept curriculum knowledge (what is regarded as valid) is as follows: there are certain social principles which shape certain educational codes which in turn shape certain educational knowledge. The persistent ambiguity in such words as 'shape', 'regulate' and 'reflect' does (like Hirst's use of 'objectives') open the subsequent theorizing up to wide interpretation.

Hence, we now have the following thesis, as explained in the previous chapter. How a society comes to accept, as valid, ways of classifying, transmitting and evaluating knowledge is determined (or shaped or regulated) by social principles and this can be demonstrated theoretically, i.e. through the theoretical constructs of educational codes.

The theoretical construct is then established as follows. There are two types of curriculum, namely, 'collection' and 'integrated'. This means that any school curriculum can be divided up into units of time; different contents might be assigned to these respective units. A collection-type curriculum is where the contents stand in closed relation to one another; an integrated-type curriculum is where contents stand in open relation. 'Closed relation' is defined in terms of the insulation between one unit and another or 'clarity of boundaries' between units. 'Open relations' are defined conversely. The defining terms (viz. 'insulation' or 'clarity of boundaries') do themselves remain undefined, despite the many complex relationships (picked out by our ordinary descriptions of practical reality) to be subsumed under them.

Bearing in mind this distinction Bernstein introduces theoretical terms, which describe the variation in openness or closedness of relations between contents, viz. 'strong and weak classification'. A strong classification of the collection code is where there is strong boundary maintenance or good insulation between different contents. Furthermore on the basis of these definitions, we now have one principle of the educational code, namely, the principle that gives us the 'basic structure of the message system: curriculum'. Thus we have now reached the present position: the basic structure of the curriculum is provided by its division into broad types related by a series of stipulative definitions to terms which remain undefined and unexplained, despite their essentially metaphorical use.

Alongside these new words to help describe the curriculum content is a further conceptual innovation to help describe the

process of transmitting this content. The 'frame' is the form of the teacher/pupil relationship in which the curriculum content is transmitted.

Therefore, Bernstein concludes that 'from the perspective of this analysis, the basic structure of the message system 'curriculum' is given by variations in the strength of classification, and the basic message system 'pedagogy' is given by variations in the strength of frames'.

But so far there has been no analysis – only a series of definitions. Furthermore, these definitions have two important defects. Firstly, they eventually lead back to undefined terms which are imprecise metaphors, viz. 'insulation' and 'boundaries between units'. Secondly, they rest upon the logical device of dividing a universe of discourse (viz. the curriculum of primary and secondary schools with all its variations) into two exhaustive but mutually exclusive categories. Such a logical procedure must assume that the differences within each category are less important than the differences between the categories. But this is an initial assumption that cannot go undefended, and the practitioner might well feel that so many different practices being lumped together under the same title 'integrated code' does not do justice to that complexity of practice which might be relevant to discovering the variety of social forces which have shaped the curriculum. Hence, Bernstein, far from engaging in any analysis as he has so far claimed, has merely created, by stipulative definition, a few more terms which nevertheless still remain unclear and have divided a highly complex practical reality into two types by a very questionable logical device.

There is, of course, much more to be said about this: for example, the extent to which this theory (as any theory must) generates useful and testable hypotheses or provides a more unifying framework for spelling out a wide variety of hunches we already have about the social forces that affect the curriculum. There is clearly no time here to develop such a critique. I have not found anything in the article that cannot be said (or has not been said) without the theoretical framework in which it is being said. On the contrary, for reasons which I have given, the theoretical framework, because of its restricting categorization of practice, simply generates new definition and prevents the generation of fruitful hypotheses. In fact it isn't a theory about curriculum reality at all.

To conclude this part, I have looked at the way in which curriculum *theory* (used in the loose sense) fails to be *curriculum*

theory – i.e. fails to be about curriculum reality. That reality is highly complex, and already engaged in intelligently, critically, reflectively by teachers; and the point of curriculum theory should be to help the practitioner to be more intelligent, more critical and respect this complex reality, already conceptualized in the rich and subtle language that an intelligent teacher has. The fault with so much curriculum theory (as in the three examples I have given) is that this language and the consequent understandings of the practitioner are not respected, and concepts, distinctions, categories, theoretical frameworks are imposed upon them that distort the practical reality they are trying to be more intelligent about.

Positive directions for curriculum studies

This section is to be brief partly because the position that I wish to argue has already emerged through the previous criticisms, and partly because I am not as sure as I thought I would be, when I started writing, how to articulate that position clearly.

My problem, as I stated it at the beginning, concerned the relationship of the accounts given by curriculum theorists (the language they employed, the knowledge they claimed) to the accounts, the language, the understanding of the curriculum reality of the practitioner. And this problem was sharpened by the ever-present possibility of new bodies of knowledge that had, as in my dream, an internal coherence certainly but didn't really connect up with anything – they weren't knowledge of anything. The problem then was how do we decide what is spurious, or what is mere theory (as the practical teacher says), and distinguish that from the genuine theoretical advance?

The general answer was that any theoretical position had to make sense of practical reality, and that this practical reality is already picked out, categorized in all sorts of subtle ways for countless different purposes, by ordinary everyday language we all share. Teachers are frequently criticized for not respecting, for not starting from, the common-sense language and understanding of the children. My criticism of curriculum theory is that it too frequently does not respect, does not start from, the common-sense language and understandings of the teacher, and the practical reality in which this language and these understandings apply.

The language of practice is rich, diverse and highly complex. Any body of knowledge that attempts to reduce this richness, diversity and complexity to a more simple theoretical account has a philosophical job to do of explaining the relationship of the

latter to the former, and of explaining the superiority of one over the other. On what grounds does Hirst ignore the range of mental activities picked out by the word 'rational' in attempting to make a logical point about acting rationally? Why should the range of curriculum practices be seen to fall into one of two categories provided by Young? Why should we accept the differences between codes for Bernstein's theoretical purpose?

Furthermore, because concerned with practical matters, curriculum theory needs to be tested out in the practical world. And by this I mean not simply 'does it work?' but 'does it help to make sense of the practical reality the teacher is working in?'

What is necessary for me to do at this stage if I am to develop a more positive thesis is to say a little more about what it is to be practical and thus what must be the touchstone of any theoretical attempts to help one be more intelligently practical. I want to say that there is no alternative but to practise. But that is so far just a statement, not an argument. What, however, lies behind this statement, even if I cannot argue for it very well at this stage?

There seem to be certain features of practical reasoning that should enter into our thinking about practice, and that would indicate (I cannot put it more strongly than that at present) involvement in practice as prerequisite to thinking intelligently (i.e. theoretically in the loose sense) about practice.

Firstly, practical reasoning is eclectic – involves judgements of logically different sorts. A curriculum problem becomes a focal point of many different kinds of theoretical considerations. It is the practical decision, it is facing the question 'what shall I do now, in this place, with these children?', that gives the criterion of relevance and of priority to the many different considerations that vie for attention. But to answer that question intelligently requires having a nose for these different sorts of consideration.

Secondly, the practical reality is unique and cannot be captured by any set (even a very large set) of theoretical considerations. An abstraction from it no longer is a practical situation. Hence the practitioner must acquire the arts of practice and the art of seeing the relevance of particular theoretical considerations to his particular practice. There is no theory for doing this. Hence the notion of deliberation – a rational way of thinking about the practical problem but not one that can be captured in any book of rules.

Thirdly, the arts of deliberating and of practising are usually acquired in practising. There is a good Civil Service tradition

(which I once upon a time failed to master) of learning to administer by administering (not by studying the theory of administration). I tend to feel Aristotle was right when he argues that one become virtuous by acting virtuously (not by courses on moral education). I do not think that our political life (even today) would improve too much by making members of Parliament take courses on political theory. And similarly there are severe limitations upon the value of curriculum theory that is not itself arising from the problems felt and formulated by practitioners and constantly tested out by practice.

Fourthly, a practical situation involves taking responsibility for one's conclusions. It is more than a psychological point to say that accepting responsibility for one's prescriptions sharpens up the theorizing no end. How different is moral philosophizing when there is a real moral problem, where one must accept responsibility for the consequences of one's decision.

All these are points that need to be developed much more systematically than I am capable of doing at present. I can only yet offer them as suggestions rather than as arguments.

But three consequences do follow for the development of systematic thinking about curriculum.

First, the distinction between those who practise and those who think about practice must go. And this requires a radical reappraisal of the institutional frameworks in which we all work – the institutional barriers that create separate forms of life, viz. that of practising and that of theorizing about practice.

Secondly, it is necessary to devise techniques whereby the classroom observation and reflection daily practised by the teacher might be made more systematic and more reflective, and subjected to the sort of critical appraisal that enables the teacher to develop theory. To quote Rob Walker (1974) in his article 'Classroom research: a view from safari',

> Our claim is that it is possible to envisage another form of educational research, a form which offers insight into the individual instance. This would start with, and remain close to, the common-sense knowledge of the practitioner, and constraints within which he works. It would aim to systematize and to build on practitioner lore rather than to supplant it.

Thirdly, it is necessary to devise ways of becoming more objective about practical problems without recourse to narrowing, prescriptive definitions that do not do justice to the practical

reality. Roughly, I see this to be a problem of presenting evidence upon which others can judge the value or accuracy of one's description or explanation of what is happening and what is desirable. I have in mind the lead, first given by Stenhouse's Humanities Curriculum Studies Project, and now being developed by Elliot and Adelman in the Ford Teaching Project, centred at the University of East Anglia.

Finally, it is necessary to respect the eclectic nature of curriculum studies. The focal point is the practical curriculum problem. To tackle this intelligently requires developing the arts of practice as well as mastering the complex way in which, through our language, we have come to conceptualize practical reality. But it also requires having a nose for those theoretical considerations which can be fed into the unique, concrete practical situation. Hence, I do not believe in curriculum theory in the strict sense. Nor do I believe in curriculum as a discipline. I do believe, however, that curriculum problems can be tackled in a disciplined way, and such a disciplined way must respect the theoretical considerations where they are relevant.

If in this lecture I have indicated a certain prejudice in favour of the prior claims of philosophical examination upon those who wish to think more systematically – in a more disciplined way – about curriculum, it is because of my particular view of philosophy. Philosophy is more an activity than a body of knowledge. It questions what very often goes unquestioned; it seeks justification where often people take the value for granted; it seeks clarity where often there is muddle. At a time when we witness a rapid growth in curriculum knowledge I think the philosophical spirit is more necessary than ever before. Possibly it isn't knowledge; let's have a look – where looking has already ceased. What the philosophical mind will often find in curriculum theory is the 'bewitchment of the intelligence by the use of words', and philosophy's job (according to Wittgenstein) is 'constantly to do battle' against just this.

CHAPTER 10

Knowledge out of control

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Institutions and professional bodies control access to their membership. Frequently they do this by setting tests in those matters which they agree to be important. At times, of course, the tests might, to the outsider, seem odd or indeed trivial. But in practice neither oddity nor triviality matters, because these tests and no other provide legitimate access (or 'legitimize' access) to the desired goals. And, in any case, by what standards are oddity or triviality to be judged?

It is a small, and sometimes tempting, step to extend this account to other areas of social activity, especially schooling. We are all familiar with the criticisms of examinations – whether these be the 11+ or O level or A level or university degrees. Some people somewhere say what is to be learnt in order for others to pass these examinations, and (society being what it is) those who have been schooled need to pass these examinations in order to graduate into a socially acceptable (and comfortable) position in life. Thus in the ultimate analysis achievement is determined by those who decide what is to count as achievement and who can reinforce their decisions through control of the examination system.

Familiar arguments such as these have their equally familiar counter-arguments. Thus it might be admitted that *in fact* schooling (and in particular the examinations towards which so much schooling leads) has taken on an institutional life of its own; that *in fact* achievement, in the different areas of approved learning, is that which is decided upon and reinforced by those who play

a commanding role in the institution; and that *in fact* the standards that are advocated, passed on and mastered in school have no validity other than that they are approved of by the teachers and their masters. But, whatever may *in fact* be the case in some or many schools and to a greater or lesser extent, there remains the belief (and the hope) that such schooling is open to evaluation by standards of appraisal which are 'above' and independent of the particular institutional framework through which one is schooled. Hence the familiar cry that the curriculum should not aim to satisfy an externally imposed set of examinations, but that the examinations themselves should measure what has been judged valuable independently and on educational grounds. Curriculum reform, so it is argued, is achieved through the perception of some educational ideal and the translation of this ideal into curriculum terms. The consequent map of learning is explicable by reference not simply to the biographical details of those who happen to be in power or to the inherited institutional traditions, but also to factors which arise from the necessary structure of knowledge, from standards of validity and criteria of meaning to which all should defer. Whatever might happen *in fact*, there remains the ideal of an education which arises from considerations quite disconnected from power politics and control mechanisms.

But is there such an educational ideal? May it be the case that, in ridding oneself of one form of control over what is to count as knowledge, as valid argument, as good writing, as moral behaviour, one simply falls under some other form of control – that, in the end, all standards are relative to the decisions or choices or even idiosyncracies of those who are placed in a position of judgement and influence? If this is the case, then the teacher is no longer the way from ignorance to enlightenment, the introduction to a wiser, more valuable way of life; rather is he or she the spokesperson for a particular way of life, the servant of a particular form of control. The reply of the discerning student to teachers' appreciation of a piece of literature or appraisal of some historical event or explanation of some social phenomenon or exposition of some religious doctrine is not to attend to the argument in detail, but to dismiss it from the onset as a rationalization of this or that way of life or of this or that power group within society.

The criticism might be extended further and the educational ideal become paler. For might it not be argued that the very way we have come to organize knowledge, to divide it up into recognizable disciplines and to train teachers within these

disciplines, is itself arbitrary, could have been otherwise and has little to commend it other than convenience and career prospects? Different subjects, so it is argued, have precisely those boundaries which fellow scholars agree among themselves that they should have. And disagreement among scholars is frequently more reminiscent of politics than of scholarship. Philosophers, sociologists, psychologists, etc., jealously guard their respective disciplines, *decide* what is to count as good philosophy, sociology and psychology and close their ranks when alternative proposals are made.

This view of knowledge, the removal of its autonomous and sacred character, and its suggested dependence upon social and historical determinants, would seem to gain immediate plausibility from a cursory glance at the development (or simply change?) that historically can be observed within the different forms of thought. Moral and religious beliefs have changed; so have the standards by which we appreciate art and literature; even basic concepts of self-knowledge and appraisal alter in tune with changing social conditions; people have come 'to see things differently', to highlight certain things as important and to relegate others to insignificance. Who then is to say that this belief or that value is preferable to, or more valid than, that one? The criticism is relentless, for not even the sciences and mathematics, not even logic itself, escape the accusation of social relativism. There are different schools of science, just as there are different schools of philosophy and of sociology. And ultimately one must *choose* the school of science (or the scientific paradigms); there is no meta-language through which one can debate the relative merits of rival schools or rival paradigms. And changes within science are revolutionary rather than continuous, and thus are to be explained by factors external to science rather than within it.

The social relativism of our thought, and its dependence upon those conditions which control our minds as well as our actions, are to be observed not only in historical development but also in comparative studies of other societies. Anthropologists give accounts of quite different ways of conceptualizing – of putting into meaningful order – the experiences even of everyday life. It is not, we are told, a better or a worse way of thinking about things. It is simply a different one. At most it is a more or less useful one. Pragmatism is the by-product of relativism.

Where then do we look for understanding in the differentiated structure of human thought? How are we to fathom the *real* explanation of why we hold these beliefs rather than those, or

conceptualize our experience in one way rather than another? Above all, what is the way of breaking the control of different systems or forms of thinking – or (more importantly) the control of those who *decide* what is to count as a valid way of thinking?

It may seem likely, if not inevitable, that some further, more accurate, understanding of the way we experience reality and organize that experience will be provided by sociological analysis. After all, if the concepts we employ are social constructs, and if the differentiated knowledge claims we make and standards we implicitly appeal to are relative to particular social conditions, what better for an understanding of these concepts, this knowledge and these standards than to observe their connection with, and determination by, the non-cognitive, non-mental conditions with which they are associated? What better, in other words, than to crown sociology, especially the sociology of knowledge, as the new queen of the sciences?

There are grounds for believing that *some* of the contributors to the recent symposium, *Knowledge and Control* (Young, 1971) are making such a claim and that, in the wake of their 'observations' about the social nature of meaning, the social relativity of beliefs and values, the unquestioned change in theoretical and conceptual frameworks through which we gain mastery over even our physical environment, they are throwing suspicion upon the standards of objectivity which teachers, in their respective disciplines, have implicitly believed in and which have sustained their belief in an educational ideal that transcends the institutional and political life in which they inevitably operate. And such a claim has immediate appeal to those students who can now see, in what is claimed to be an education, a sinister form of control by those who represent the system. Subject divisions, for instance, not only 'compartmentalize' and 'fragment' what is indivisible, not only reify what is elusive and mental, they also reflect and perpetuate power groups and systems of control. An integrated curriculum (or code), on the other hand, would reflect the more fluid, personal, unified, and relative nature of our thinking, and would disconnect or at least weaken the control by others, exercised through the accepted disciplines of thinking. At a time when the traditional curriculum in both schools and universities is being questioned, the sociological contribution to the analysis of knowledge has been particularly timely.

There is need, however, to pause a little and to examine more precisely what the thesis is that is being put forward. Stated too simply it contains too many paradoxes for easy assimilation.

Stated in all its complexity it does not appear quite so radical and devastating to the teacher's cherished ideal as all that. First of all, there is an important truth in the affirmed connection between agreed opinion and exercise of control and power. Sitting at the feet of the master is frequently a necessary prerequisite to donning the master's shoes; and all sorts of non-cognitive strategies can be observed for keeping the young disciple on the same cognitive path. Second, it is true that concepts are social constructs and would not exist, were it not for some form of social life in which they are 'created' and developed for particular purposes. (Whoever could think otherwise?) Third, there are doubtless important differences in the way different cultures and epochs come to conceptualize, reflect upon, explain, appraise and justify their experiences, and these differences are inevitably connected with different social conditions, interests, needs, etc. Fourth, it is undoubtedly the case that most areas of thinking are problematic in the sense that the possibility of further enquiry, further examination should not be ruled out *a priori*. But from such undisputed observations, what conclusions are being drawn by sociologists or what new perspective is being offered in our understanding of knowledge, its organization, and its control and management? What consequences should teachers draw if these conclusions and this perspective are correct? Would there, as a result of what is argued, be reason for questioning the contents of their teaching, for reappraising the standards or objectivity implicit within their teaching programmes and indeed for revising their very teaching role?

That something is being said about the nature of knowledge is clear enough, although the sociology of knowledge need not concern itself with these questions. Some sociologists (read, for example Gurvitch's recent book *The Social Frameworks of Knowledge*) make a clear distinction between the empirical and theoretical studies of sociology and the 'critical' and epistemological questions of philosophy. Gurvitch even goes on to warn that 'it is essential for the development of the sociology of knowledge that it learn to remain modest and renounce inordinate pretensions' (Gurvitch, 1971: 11). This is not an appeal for a strict division between philosophers and sociologists (each to their own trade, as it were) but rather for the recognition of the distinction between a philosophical and a sociological question. In pronouncing on the nature of knowledge the contributors to *Knowledge and Control* are of course raising and answering philosophical questions, but most fail to see what sort of questions they are raising, or what is involved in such procedures.

Bernstein, on the other, hand, does seem a little clearer. His hypothesis is: 'How a society selects, classifies, distributes, transmits and evaluates the educational knowledge it considers to be public, reflects both the distribution of power and the principles of social control' (Bernstein, 1971: 47). Bernstein does not raise questions about 'the intrinsic logic of the various forms of public thought' but about 'the forms of their transmission'. Whatever the difficulties raised by the introduction of yet more labels into curriculum discourse – 'collective and integrated codes', 'weak and strong frames' – these are not necessarily of an epistemological kind and it is these latter, epistemological difficulties, with which I am chiefly concerned.

The general thesis implicit within the book that seems to raise important philosophical questions is as follows:

1 Sociologists of education have *previously* been concerned with the social conditions in which learning takes place, and with the correlation between these conditions and the outcomes of learning; the learning processes themselves and the actual organization of knowledge have not previously been the province of sociologists.
2 This conception of sociology is too limited; sociology is able to explain either wholly or in part the actual processes of learning and the organization of knowledge that we have in the curriculum.
3 This explanation will be empirical, that is, it will be able to show how the organization of knowledge is determined by certain specifiable social conditions.
4 Such a theory about the sociology of knowledge has consequences for the conception we have of knowledge and its structure. In particular:
   (a) We do not 'know' the world as it really is, but only as mediated through the conceptual framework we have.
   (b) This framework is a human construction, could have been otherwise, and is relative to such contingencies as particular social structures.
   (c) The validity of arguments, the truth of statements and the correct application of concepts to experience, therefore, are to be accepted and explained by reference to the legitimizing authorities within a specifiable social group. Different groups could legitimize different standards

of validity, truth and correctness. These are causally determined and in no sense absolutely so.

(d) Therefore, the understanding or the explanation of the ways in which we structure our thought – the concepts we use, the types of argument we employ, the criteria of truth we refer to – lies solely in establishing the causal connections between these structures and certain social conditions. It would not be an objection to this thesis to say that there are *logical* as opposed to *causal* considerations in the explanation of these structures of thought, because what we accept as a logical connection is itself a structure of thought that can be empirically explained.

(e) As a further extension of this point, the distinction between being rational and being irrational is one that is relative to a particular social context, and therefore can be explained empirically. The 'rational' in our society is (to quote) 'the dominant legitimizing category' – a dogma which itself is open to enquiry.

(f) As a further extension of this point, the distinction between true and false is one that is relative to a particular social context. Thus the statement, 'You ought not to steal', is true given certain moral norms, which themselves are explicable in terms of social conditions. There is no rationality therefore in the sense of an appeal to a universal and impersonal standard of truth.

If I have correctly understood the general thesis of these and like-minded sociologists, two broad areas of questions need to be raised before the connection they seek between 'knowledge' and 'control' is in fact made and therefore before teachers, quaking before the prospect of 'socio-historical relativism', need forgo their educational ideal and their instructive role. The first broad area concerns crucial points of clarification. (There are, of course, many detailed difficulties of clarity.) The second area contains philosophical difficulties that the authors seem unaware of. I shall begin with the questions of clarification.

First, it is not clear how much is being subsumed under the sociological explanation given – whether it be the entire structure of knowledge or simply and in particular the normative or what

could be called 'ideological' superstructure. The examples used tend to be statements of a normative kind or descriptions of social processes. And Berger and Luckmann (1966) extended the determining influence of society to the content of 'human idealism, with the exception of mathematics and part of the natural science'. In other places, however (and on occasions quite explicitly so), the analysis is extended to mathematics and scientific statement. But what is meant by saying that these are human constructs? Are they human constructs in *the same sense* as the legal apparatus is a human construct? If not, what would be the difference between the two senses? This sort of distinction of course is crucial in clarifying what is meant by 'human construction', in determining the limits of man's constructive powers, and in understanding the various uses of 'objectivity'. But nowhere is it made.

The second point of clarification is whether such phrases as 'conditioned by', 'caused by', 'determined by', 'reflects' are intended to tell the whole story about the structure of knowledge or only part of it, albeit a major part. Thus, there is a trivial sense in which all concepts are social. That is, they embody rules for classifying and individuating experience, and to that extent are publicly accessible. Furthermore, the conceptual framework through which we think could have been different; the distinctions, which are embodied in our language, could have highlighted some features of experience which have been ignored, and ignored others which have been highlighted. One might say that there is no *a priori* limit to the *number* of ways in which we might organize our experience. But to say this is *not* to say that there are no limits to how we might organize our experience. Thus, firstly, any conceptualizing of experience would need to respect fairly basic rules of intelligibility – and one might see one major task of philosophy to be that of making these rules explicit. There is a point beyond which it would make no sense to ask if things could have been conceived otherwise – because one would not know what would count as an answer. For example, it would be inconceivable to organize experience outside a spatio-temporal framework of material objects. Identity and difference would seem necessarily to presuppose such a world. This is a line of argument that could be pressed much further. Secondly, the way in which we do come to discriminate must rest partly upon discriminable features of a relatively stable kind in our experience. Thus one may give a sociological account of why we come to make the distinctions we do; but there must be something about the

world which makes these distinctions possible. That we distinguish between cats and dogs may be due to certain social conditions; that we *can* so distinguish has something to do with cats and dogs. The point of clarification therefore concerns the scope of the thesis. From the rather trivial points that all concepts are social and that all reality is mediated through concepts, is it being argued that reality is *nothing but* a social construction, and that there are no other limiting features either in the nature of thought (picked out by philosophy), or in the nature of reality?

Third, there seems little doubt that in talking of the categories of thought being problematic and open to enquiry, these sociologists see the enquiry to be empirical, and the connection therefore between that which is to be explained (or is determined) and that which does the explaining (or determines) to be contingent. Given therefore that the structure of knowledge or consciousness is empirically explicable in terms of social conditions, difficulties arise about the nature of this explanation. What is to be explained is (in Schutz's words) 'social reality'. And the argument requires that, despite it being social reality rather than the world of nature that is being observed and generalized about, the essence of scientific theory is in no way affected, namely, the discovery of 'determinate relations between a set of variables, in terms of which . . . empirically ascertainable regularities can be explained'. There are serious difficulties here about the method of sociology, and the limitations of its pretension to be scientific in any way comparable with that of the natural sciences. In saying that x is determined by y, is it meant that there is a causal relation between x and y that can be quantified in some way, and that can be verified? If so, x, the social condition, will need to be so specified that it might constitute the data of empirical theory. If this is not the sort of explanation of x by y that is in mind, then the proponents of this view well need to say what sort of empirical explanation it is.

Fourth, the final point of clarification concerns the theoretical formulation of what is said about knowledge. Put briefly, it would seem that, if all knowledge is explicable in terms of the social conditions with which it is connected, then the claim that this is so might itself be determined by particular social conditions, namely, the institutional framework of certain sociologists with particular biographies from which it emanates. If so, one might ask, why should such a proposal be taken seriously by those who do not share (and on this account need not share) the criteria for valid argument accepted by these sociologists? Mannheim's

solution to this problem (to the scepticism to which social and historical 'conditioning' leads) lay in finding 'a formula for translating the results of one [social perspective] into those of the other and to discover a common denominator for these varying perspectivistic insights'. But to talk of such a formula is of course to beg the question. What sense could be made of such a formula, since it too would be socially and historically conditioned?

There are many detailed criticisms that could be raised against the strong claim of the sociologists, in which all knowledge is determined by social conditions and in which, therefore, the differentiation of knowledge is seen to be but a reflection of the social distribution of power – arising from a 'negotiation' between different interests in a sort of power struggle. The general line of argument here would be towards preserving a concept of knowledge that is raised above the level of 'bargaining', and a concept of reality that is not open to *any* sort of definition. I shall therefore introduce difficulties of a fairly general nature.

First, there are difficulties about the very conditions of intelligibility. In one obvious sense all concepts are social; the way in which we conceptualize things does change and is different in some degree from society to society; and to understand a language is to understand 'a form of life'. Acceptance, however, of these points about concepts does not provide an adequate basis for the conclusions that 'all knowledge is relative', or that truth and validity are 'derived through certain relevances and legitimacies', or that 'these criteria of validity and truth . . . are themselves, in their persistence and change, open to socio-historical relativization', or that the 'rules of the game change with a shift in interest', or that a critique of knowledge is necessarily a critique of producers of knowledge, or that the 'boundaries (between kinds of knowledge) are *only* [*sic*] human constructs and can, therefore, be broken'.

The reason I suggested earlier for denying such conclusions to follow from such premises was twofold, namely, that, first, in thinking at all there are general grounds of intelligibility which must be presupposed and that, second, however great the number of ways in which we *could* conceptualize reality, these will still be limited by the limited features of a finite world on the basis of which discriminations are made and, of course, the limiting features of the person making the discriminations. With reference to the first reason, I pointed out how at least certain general categories of thought connected with the material world must

be presupposed in order to raise significant questions. One might argue further that the categorial framework in which we address and argue with persons, attribute motives to them, detect their intentions, see them as having feelings, attribute thought and deliberation, interpret meanings (as opposed to observe behaviours) is one which is necessarily presupposed – however differently its conceptualization might vary. Certain criteria of intelligibility must be presupposed, for otherwise it would not be possible to recognize something as another's definition of reality. (Alternative definitions of reality presuppose some common understanding of 'reality'.)

Furthermore, where basic canons of rationality are treated as 'problematic' and 'open to enquiry', it is not possible to understand what such an enquiry might consist in. For example, if the principle of contradiction is 'problematic', it would not be possible to engage in an enquiry about it. Any enquiry presupposes that self-contradiction is unintelligible.

The criticism here, then, is that relativist theories, if not formulated in a careful and restricted manner, do raise serious logical problems, not least for the status of the theories themselves. It is necessary to keep distinct questions about the validity of human thought from questions about its genesis; otherwise thought itself becomes totally unintelligible.

To understand any particular state of consciousness in terms of the social context is to deny any explanation in terms of the logical connection between this state of consciousness and some prior state, that is it denies that there is any development of thought that might be understood in terms of the logic of the thought itself. For what seems to be a logical progression is itself to be empirically explained and thereby explained by factors extrinsic to the thought itself. Thus anyone who thinks hard about a problem and then reaches a conclusion would be in error if he believed that this conclusion resulted from the logic of this thinking; it would be explicable in relation to the social condition with which it might be empirically correlated.

On the wider level, progress in science would have to be understood not by the valid canons of scientific method which transcend the idiosyncrasies of particular individuals and social contexts, but by reference solely to its genesis and social conditions. There is of course a superficially plausible case to be made out for this – the particular direction science has taken bears some relation to the social condition (the consequence of the armaments or space race, for example) and the very scientific theories

propounded might bear some relation to non-scientific facts (as in the suppression of evidence). But such considerations in no way affect *the validity* of what is said in science and the possibility of having one's results validated by other scientists, irrespective of their social condition. Even Kuhn's revolutionary changes from paradigm to paradigm (referred to by Esland to illustrate the possibility of total reconstructions) do not stand up to too close an examination. After all, the followers of Newton and the followers of Einstein remained on speaking terms.

What then is to be concluded? It is true that the way we come to organize, select, value and transmit our knowledge is *to some extent* explicable by reference to those who do the organizing, selecting, valuing and transmitting. And *to that extent* there is a relationship between what and how we know and those who 'manage' and organize what and how we learn. Not only is it useful to be reminded of this; it would be even more useful to have this connection explored in all its detail and complexity. In such exploration uncomfortable doubts may be raised about the status and value of much that we believe. But the establishment of this connection, although it might stimulate important questions about knowledge, does not itself tell us what counts as knowledge or what constitutes a valid judgement or what is or is not meaningful – for those are not empirical questions. There are limits to what meanings can be negotiated or realities reconstructed, and there seems little ground for turning the classroom into either a marketplace or a building site.

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PART III

Educational Research

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CHAPTER 11

Evidence-based policy and practice

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Introduction

The idea of evidence-based health care, when it first came to be articulated, and indeed became the basis of a Master's course at the University of Oxford, struck me as odd to say the least. It came as a surprise to learn that decisions over the most appropriate form of medical treatment were not necessarily based on evidence – for that seemed to be the implication. Medical prognosis and treatment, I had taken for granted, would be based on scientific research. Indeed, to qualify as a doctor required a rigorous background in the relevant science.

However, the Cochrane Centre in Oxford, under the leadership of Sir Ian Chalmers, did not have such confidence. Much practice was, as it were, 'inherited wisdom'. Other practice, apparently based on evidence, competed with other practices based on other evidence. Any one who has sought medical help for back problems will know what I mean.

In many respects, this should not be surprising. A merely superficial acquaintance with the philosophy of science makes it clear that science grows from constant (and often successful) attempts to negate the current state of scientific knowledge. All such knowledge is, as it were, provisional – to be accepted until such time as it is refuted and replaced by more comprehensive

and better corroborated scientific propositions. But such development in science, such gradual 'approximation to the truth', depends on the application of rigorous scientific methods whereby error is to be eliminated. The Cochrane Centre believed that such rigorous methods were often lacking in the arrival at medical 'truths' which informed and shaped medical practice.

Such methods required strictly controlled experiments, with very large control and experimental groups, so that one might see clearly the difference which a particular intervention might make. But this in turn required extremely careful articulation of the hypotheses to be tested, and that in turn required a sophisticated process of refining the felt problem (felt as often as not by the patients as much as by the medical researchers) into a testable set of hypotheses. Furthermore, such large-scale experiments would have to take into account the research which others had conducted in similar areas. But that required putting together pieces of research which, more often than not, were based on different samples or which made slightly different assumptions. Hence, an important part of refining the evidence lay in the systematic review of existing research, rejecting that which did not meet rigorous experimental criteria, ignoring that where the data and method were less than clear, reconciling where possible the different bases for the samples, identifying where further research was needed to fill the gaps in our scientifically based knowledge. These systematic reviews and the subsequent meta-analyses of available research were difficult and time-consuming. They required cooperation across continents. They required an explicitness of, and openness to, the problem, the hypotheses, the sampling process and the data. They encouraged open and critical debate, and the constant refinement of the conclusions in the light of that critical debate and new data. Indeed, 'evidence-based', so conceived, had a thoroughly Popperian ring to it.

Such has been the success of the Cochrane Centre's work that people in other areas of the public services have looked for the lessons which can be learnt from it. The Campbell Collaboration, based in the United States, but with regional centres in Canada and Denmark, has extended the work to other areas of social life – for example, education and criminology. This is described very well by Davies, P. (1999 and 2004). Both the Secretary of State for Education and the Home Office saw the approach of Cochrane and Campbell to be what was required to improve the quality of research to inform both government policy and professional practice. And this was seen to be necessary because of the criticisms

of that research, certainly in education. The criticisms were several, but they might be summarized as saying that the research was: too fragmented (too little of the large-scale and 'bold' hypotheses thoroughly tested); based on different assumptions, samples and data; often less than rigorous in method; not unambiguously addressed to a specific question to which the policy-maker or the practitioner needs an answer.

The reaction to the transfer, to the field of education, of the evidence-based approach of Cochrane and Campbell has varied from the hostile to the welcoming. But the essence of the criticisms and of the differences between them is philosophical. It concerns the nature of research, and then in turn the nature of knowledge. What counts as evidence for a particular kind of knowledge claim? In this paper I shall briefly outline what I think are the key philosophical difficulties, not simply in the adoption of evidence-based policy and practice, but also in some of the criticisms of it.

These philosophical issues are: first, the nature of 'evidence'; second, the extension of the methods of the natural sciences to the understanding of human beings; third, the adoption of a means/end model of educational planning and decision-making.

Evidence

A lot depends on how one interprets the word 'evidence' There are many different kinds of evidence, depending on the type of claim being made. Evidence that water boils at 100 degrees centigrade at sea level would be very different from the evidence to indicate that a rock face is 100 million years old or that Caesar really did cross the Rubicon or that Saddam Hussein's regime was evil or that Freddie has been a good boy. There are different forms of discourse, each characterized by different ways of looking at the world, different kinds of truth claim, different ways of investigating the truth. What counts as evidence will depend upon the kind of discourse one is engaged in. Historical evidence is different from that in science, and even within science there are different sorts of discourse, each characterized by differences in what is deemed to constitute evidence. Hence, there is a danger of criticizing a piece of evidence because it does not meet the standards of evidence in a quite different form of discourse. Indeed, that is the cause of certain problems within the arguments 'for' and 'against' evidence-based policy and practice within education. Some, who advocate 'evidence-based', do so by blurring the boundaries between scientific and non-scientific forms of

discourse, thereby rejecting certain claims as without foundation. On the other hand, certain critics, by identifying evidence-based with only one sort of evidence, reject entirely the idea of 'evidence-based' as irrelevant to the complex problems of educational policy and professional practice.

Furthermore, 'evidence' must not be confused with proof. I have evidence that John told a lie, but I cannot prove it. One can gradually build up the evidence for a belief but gradually proving it seems a little odd. On the basis of evidence, it may be *probable* that something is the case – although there may be counter-evidence which is less persuasive.

These comments are by no means irrelevant to the educational debate. Often politicians seem to advocate an evidence-based policy as though one should only act when one can demonstrate that a particular course of action is *proven* to be the correct one. They feel let down when the research, on the basis of which a particular policy is adopted, turns out to be less than adequate. But all one can say, as a result of research, is that in the light of all the evidence, and balancing the evidence both 'for' and 'against', one course of action seems to be the most rational one to adopt. And, indeed, that may well be the case, until such time as contrary evidence is discovered. Furthermore, the evidence upon which one acts can be weak or strong, and, very often, one has no alternative but to act on weak evidence. The teacher, faced with a quick decision over the treatment of an offender, has no time to find conclusive evidence. 'Deliberation', followed by 'judgement', requires a quick survey of different kinds of often weak evidence before action is swiftly taken – proximity to the scene, previous record of similar behaviour, a *prima facie* motive. Indeed, evidence here is much more like the notion of evidence in a detective novel than it is in scientific research. And notions of 'deliberation' and 'practical judgement' (which goes beyond the available evidence) cannot be avoided.

Furthermore, educational discourse is eclectic. It draws upon different kinds of evidence – scientific certainly, but also personal insight, historical, psychological. What is to count as evidence in any one situation will depend on the particular educational judgements being made, and generalizations will always be negated by particular cases – a point which I shall develop in the next section. Thus, educational practice requires judgements about 'achievement' as well as about the 'ability to achieve' and about the 'capacity to have the ability to achieve'. It requires judgement about intention as well as motivation. But no amount of observed

behaviour, though logically related in normal circumstances to having certain intentions (for example, to complete one's homework) or to being motivated in a particular way (for example, to please one's parents), proves or means that such *is* the intention or the motive for action. There is always a logical gap between the conclusion and the evidence for the conclusion.

These preliminary remarks on the concept of evidence are an introduction to the more philosophical issues. For at the heart of the understandings of evidence-based policy and practice, and indeed of the arguments about the importance we should attach to it, are philosophical issues about the nature of evidence, of proof, of knowledge within the social sciences and of educational discourse and judgement.

Philosophical issues

I want to pick out three interconnected philosophical issues. These are:

1. the logical unpredictability of all the consequences of a particular course of action or a particular policy
2. the irreconcilability of scientific discourse (and thus the social sciences within a particular tradition) with that concerned with persons
3. the logical separation of educational 'ends' or 'goals' from the 'means' of achieving them

Unpredictability

The first issue concerns the difficulty in predicting what will happen if . . . in complex social situations. (It is an argument developed very effectively by Luntley, 2000, in connection with the proposal for performance-related pay.) Thus, the government, in the light of evidence, believes that a particular policy will have certain predictable results. And, indeed, from the government's point of view, research should be indicating what consequences will follow from certain policies. What practices are most effective in achieving the desired results? However, there are two senses in which this cannot be the case.

The first sense is that the agents, whose actions are being predicted by the adoption of such a policy, change the context in which the predictions are made once they are aware of what is being intended. Once the pupils are aware of the rationale for the emphasis upon literacy strategies (for example, raising the scores of the school and thus the position of the school in the

league table) so they are able, and might be willing, to subvert the policy. Such changed consciousness and its effects could not themselves be anticipated in the development of the strategy, however evidence-based that was in the light of previous practice.

The second, and connected sense, is this. According to Luntley (ibid.: 17),

> classrooms (and other educational units) share a common structural feature with other social and natural systems – namely, non-linearity. Ignore this and you get a faulty logic of understanding of the system at issue.

Within very complex systems of interacting elements, especially when those elements are endowed with intelligence and where the interactions are consciously engaged in, the full impact of all these millions of interactions cannot be predicted with accuracy. And the impossibility of so doing is not just a matter of size and complexity. Rather is it a logical matter, for one interaction changes the nature of the situation such that the effect of x upon y will not be the same the second time round. The many different elements in the situation are interacting with each other in a way that cannot be controlled from the centre, and they are thus changing the context which the centre wishes to control and influence. In economics, the countless interactions in the marketplace constantly change the context in which macro-economic management is meant to take place. The tax changes also 'tax' the imagination of those who seek new and unpredicted ways of dodging the taxes, thereby creating a different economic and social situation, which in turn makes unpredictable demands upon the economy and so on.

Given this necessary unpredictability of complex social situations, there is a limit to how far the accumulation of evidence can ensure certain consequences will follow from carefully considered interventions.

Explaining human behaviour

Educational policy and professional practice are ultimately about getting people (usually young people) to learn something – and something which is deemed to be of value. To educate is to develop the capacity to think, to value, to understand, to reason, to appreciate. These are states of mind, mental capacities, distinctively human qualities. One feature of such states of mind is that they constitute a different kind of 'reality' from that which is the subject matter of the natural sciences. I can observe tables

and chairs; I cannot observe in the same way intentions, motives and thoughts. The hand raised is seen by everyone, but may well be interpreted very differently – a wave to a friend, a request for attention, the signalling of a revolution, an expression of exasperation. The understanding of that behaviour depends on knowing the intention – and the motivation for so intending. Thus, the request for attention (the intention of raising the arm) could be motivated by boredom or by excitement at a discovery or by the wish to annoy. Explaining human actions requires reference to intentions and motives, not to causes (generally speaking).

Furthermore, those intentions and motives presuppose a social context of rules whereby the intended behaviours are going to be interpreted by others in a particular way. It is no good signalling a revolution if the fellow revolutionaries do not understand the gesture. To explain human actions requires a grasp of the social rules through which social intercourse is able to take place. Furthermore, such social rules will change from social group to social group – indeed, a social group is partly defined in terms of the social rules through which they engage with each other. There is a set of expectations among allotment owners which shapes their behaviours in a way which would not be fully understood by those who have never been apprenticed to this form of life. And no doubt these rules and expectations vary from one allotment to another as populations and economic circumstances change. (Candlelit dinner parties are held by some allotment holders on our patch, but none the less within a social context which inherits certain expectations from previous allotment holders.) Explanation, without reference to such social rules and context and without recognition of their variability according to different social and economic circumstances, is not an explanation of the *human* world we inhabit.

Certain consequences about evidence-based policy and practice are drawn from these considerations – some valid and some not so. First, the distinctive nature of human explanation must set logical limits to large-scale explanations of behaviour, whether educational or not. Such large-scale explanations cannot be sensitive to the complexity and variability of social rules and expectations through which decisions and actions are made intelligible. The significance of being numerate or literate, the value of higher education, the respect for the teacher, an interest in literature, and so on will be different from one social group to another – whether such groupings are determined by ethnicity, religious tradition, economic affiliation, social class, regional

history or family allegiance. What might 'work' in one context might not do so in another, and the reason might be partly explicable in terms of the social rules and the institutional framework (of family, of religious faith, of civic custom) within which the agents are making sense of the world, finding value in some activities rather than others or developing relationships of a particular kind. That is why evidence-based practice needs to look carefully at the particular contexts (the implicit rules and expectations which shape behaviour and which are sometimes embodied within the institutions the learners belong to) in which professional judgement and decisions are to be made.

However, a second consequence is often falsely drawn from these considerations. Such importance is attached to the intentional explanation of human behaviour and activity, and indeed to the variability of social context, that the large-scale explanation of educational practice is rejected entirely. A sharp contrast is drawn between the kind of evidence which pertains to the explanation of physical events (and included in that would be the successful intervention of drugs in the treatment of diseases) and the kind of evidence which pertains to the explanation of human behaviour. Favoured by the former, but not by the latter, would be the large-scale and carefully matched experimental and control groups, in which a particular intervention within the experimental group (all else being held equal) would demonstrate its causal significance. Certainly, such large-scale experiments are seen to be the way forward by some in advancing our knowledge of educational improvement. And there are examples of such interventions in research into early learning (see Sylva and Hurrell, 1995, into the effectiveness of Reading Recovery and the phonological training of children with reading problems). However, the critics point to the failure of such evidence to address the particularities of the social situations which are meant to be explained. And that failure is seen to be at base philosophical – the adoption of what is often referred to as *positivism* which has no place in our understanding of human beings and social institutions. 'Man' cannot be a 'subject for science' – the title of a paper by the once most prominent logical positivist, A. J. Ayer (1964).

This is surely a mistaken conclusion. It commits what I refer to as the 'uniqueness fallacy'. It is correct to point to the uniqueness of each individual, since he or she is defined partly in terms of the particular way in which the world is seen and appreciated (no one can have exactly my thoughts and feelings). Similarly, it

is correct to point to the uniqueness of each social group or society, reflected in the social rules and expectations which distinguish that group. But although each person or each society might be unique in some respect, it is not the case that each is unique in every respect. I am unique in that no one shares the same life history, but I am not unique as an Englishman, as a university professor, as a writer, as an allotment holder. And, in all these things, I can, within certain parameters, be predicted, under normal conditions, to behave in a certain way. Furthermore, what enables me to understand (if only to some extent) people within very different societies from my own is that all human beings, whatever their differences, have certain propensities, desires, needs and wants in common. There is such a thing as a recognizable human form of life which enables us to make predictions, even though in particular cases the predictions may be wrong – the person consciously bucks the trend. But even the exceptions can be understood in the light of further explanation that helps us to make sense of the situation. And 'explanations', by their very nature, put the unique case into a wider framework in which the uniqueness diminishes somewhat. A person fails to act as predicted because he was ambitious for a specific acknowledgement, but 'ambition' is a recognizable human motive. To say that someone acted out of ambition is to place his actions within a wider explanatory framework.

Therefore, to contrast so starkly the large-scale explanations of human behaviour, characterized by predictors of what will happen (having arrived at such a position through randomized control experiments), with the uniqueness of the individual human condition, which escapes any such pigeon-holing, is a false dualism. Much is predictable about human behaviour. And key interventions can be identified which, generally speaking, will lead to certain consequences. To draw different conclusions is to commit the uniqueness fallacy.

But of course one needs to be very careful in spelling out the conditions in which the intervention is likely to make a difference. Such conditions might refer to the particular kind of institution or social arrangement. An intervention in a highly selective system of schooling might have little effect in a non-selective system. The literacy hour might be effective in certain teaching environments and not in others. The Cochrane ideal was not to determine professional practice but to inform it. The teacher, aware of what generally speaking is likely to be the case, may well exercise professional judgement about the circumstances, which

are judged to be sufficiently different from the norm as to create an exception to the general rule.

Means and ends

The concern for evidence-based policy and practice arises within a climate of 'improvement', 'raising standards', 'making schools more effective'. Knowledge is required of 'what works'. To do this, so the argument goes, there is a need to set targets, as specific as possible. These are the goals to be aimed at, the ends to be striven for. It seems plausible to argue that you cannot be very effective until you know exactly where you are going. Only then can you focus your energy and effort on reaching your goals. Having established those targets, the school or the local authority or the government can then discover (by the most appropriate empirical enquiry) the way in which those targets can be met. Such investigation relies upon unambiguous and clear targets. And it requires rigorous research into the most effective means of hitting those targets.

Within such a climate, there has been in the last decade a massive expansion of research into school effectiveness – the characteristics of a school and its leadership which will ensure 'success'. Success is spelt out in terms of very precise targets (such as a given proportion of students attaining grades in public examinations). Similarly, effective teaching (clearly essential to the effective school) is defined in terms of pupil performance which can be precisely measured. With systematic gathering of evidence, one might develop a science of effective teaching (see, for example, Reynolds, 1998). Once the government or whoever is assured, on the basis of rigorously conducted experiments, of the right interventions to make, then it will put in place the right mechanisms for ensuring higher performance against the agreed standards. And, indeed, teachers will then receive payment which is performance-related.

It is within this climate that a major authority on evidence-based education policies (Slavin, 2002) confidently writes about 'transforming educational practice and research' and refers with approval to the various government initiatives which have adopted 'experimental-control comparisons on standards-based measures'. For example, the Bush administration's 'No Child Left Behind' mentions scientifically based research 110 times – 'rigorous, systematic and objective procedures to obtain valid knowledge . . . using experimental or quasi-experimental designs, preferably with random assignments'.

Within the now prevalent managerial discourse (a discourse of 'performance indicators' and 'audits', of 'curriculum delivery' and 'efficiency gains', of 'targets' and 'value-addedness', of 'clients' and 'stakeholders'), the means/end model of educational planning and engagement seems almost self-evidently correct. There is a logical separation of the 'ends' of education from the 'means' of achieving those ends. The connection is purely contingent, a matter solely of empirical investigation. And, in the educational encounter, the teacher is the expert (hopefully on the basis of the right evidence) in knowing what 'means' will most effectively attain those 'ends'. The teacher's expertise lies not in the deliberations over the 'ends' themselves.

Such a language, which lends itself to a particular understanding of evidence-based policy and practice, is superficially plausible, but is a quite impoverished way of talking about and understanding education, for the 'ends' are more often than not embedded within the 'means'. The way in which one analyses a poem is not assessed in terms of being the most effective way of attaining goals, logically distinct from the reading and the analysis of the poem. The goal, end or purpose shapes the way in which the teacher teaches – it is captured and 'shown' in the very act of teaching. Teaching is a transaction between the teacher and the learner, not the delivery of something to the learner. An *educational* practice embodies the aims and values; it is not something distinct from them. Indeed, to ask for the aims of such a transaction is to ask for the values which the transaction embodies. There may well be 'spin-offs' from teaching *Macbeth*, but the main educational purpose lies in the engagement with a valuable text. The language of 'engagement' with a text, of 'transaction between teacher and learner', of 'intrinsic value' of an activity, of 'struggle to understand', of 'personal enrichment' seems inimical to the language of targets and of standardized performance indicators or of generalized conclusions drawn from systematic interventions.

Conclusion

There are different levels at which one can examine and appraise evidence-based policy and practice in education. Educational policies, aiming to improve the quality of learning and to increase the number of people who successfully participate in education at different phases, need evidence to show that one policy rather than another will make things better. Teachers, in the myriad judgements they make every day, would be more professional in those judgements if these were based upon the accumulated

evidence from their own practice and from that of the profession as a whole. Of course, that is what they claim to do. Staff-room talk is as much about what has worked, or about advising others in the light of what has been seen to work, as it is about anything else. And so at one level there cannot be much dispute about the idea of evidence-based policy and practice. Teachers, ministers and civil servants give reasons for what they do and those reasons necessarily call upon evidence.

The advocates of evidence-based policy and practice, however, argue that the gathering and the application of evidence has not been rigorous enough. It lacks the systematic investigation, indeed the scientific rigour, which has transformed other areas of public life. Educationists are chastised for their failure to search for evidence systematically enough. Thus Slavin (ibid.: 16) states

> At the dawn of the twenty-first century, education is finally being dragged, kicking and screaming, into the twentieth century. The scientific revolution that utterly transformed medicine, agriculture, transportation, technology and other fields early in the twentieth century almost completely bypassed the field of education. If Rip Van Winkle had been a physician, a farmer, or an engineer, he would be unemployable if he awoke today. . . . It is not that we have not learnt anything since Rip Van Winkle's time. It is that applications of the findings of educational research remain haphazard, and that evidence is respected only occasionally, and only if it happens to correspond to current educational or political fashions.

The problems arise, therefore, not over the need for evidence in the adoption of policies or in the improvement of practice, but, first, over what is to count as evidence, second, over the extent to which the scientific rigour in some areas is equally applicable to educational policy and practice, and, third, over whether there is something so distinctive and peculiar about an 'educational practice' that there are strict limits to the relevance of the means/end model of educational improvement and effectiveness.

Thus, as I argued, evidence is of different kinds relative to the form of discourse through which a problem is being addressed. For some, such an admission leads to the sort of relativism which makes a nonsense of the evidence-based movement. But that does not follow. The different forms of discourse are not arbitrarily developed; they are the best window we have upon the world; and they have built into them the criteria of appropriate evidence

without which one would not be able to engage in any intelligible argument – including arguments about evidence-based policy and practice.

Given the range of possible discourses about education, then the danger lies in the imperialism of any one form of discourse, together with its distinctive notion of evidence. Two false consequences are frequently drawn from this. On the one hand, a narrow and thus too demanding a notion of evidence is adopted, thereby excluding, as irrelevant or as not rigorous or as arbitrary, certain deliberations about educational policy and practice. On the other hand, in recognizing the distinctively practical, context-bound and value-laden nature of educational deliberations, many will reject completely the large-scale experimental search for evidence. Thus is created the false dualism between the quantitative and qualitative approaches to research, which has caused so much damage (a point developed more thoroughly in Chapter 13).

There are three conclusions that need to be drawn from this as we look to the future.

The first is that evidence-based policy and practice need to look much more carefully at the different kinds of evidence which legitimately enter into educational deliberations at the policy and professional practice levels. Notions like deliberation, personal and craft knowledge, as well as the different kinds of evidence which enter into educational discourse should be examined critically. It is important to explore what 'systematic' means within these different kinds of appeal to evidence.

Second, despite the rather eclectic nature of educational discourse, there are lessons to be learnt from the insistence by the advocates of evidence-based policy and practice for the more rigorous search for evidence. These are the constant attempts to synthesize and reconcile the different research findings, the search for the logical connection between conclusions drawn from different kinds of research, the assessment of the degree of reliability of the research for future policy and practice, the evaluation of the conclusions in the light of the explicitly reported data and methodology, the reporting of the research in a clear and focused way.

Third, the political and often highly charged context of educational research needs to be recognized. It cannot be wished away. And that political context invades not only the policies and practices themselves, but also the different philosophical advocacies of different sorts of research. However pure and

systematic the research should ideally be, it never will be like that. Slavin acknowledges the way in which 'educational and political fashions' affect the research, preventing the scientific objectivity which he is so anxious to promote. But his own paper, in persuading us of his position, is not without its own political rhetoric to get the point across.

CHAPTER 12

Truth, knowledge and power

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Key concepts in educational research

Because of the importance of philosophy and the social sciences to an understanding of any social phenomenon or practice, educational research is necessarily caught up in the controversies which affect the nature and validity of the social sciences. These controversies reflect quite fundamental ways of conceptualizing our understanding of the world, especially the social world of people and institutions. These concepts or ideas provide the basic framework of intelligibility. And, therefore, the divisive controversies, which prevail in educational research, might best be approached through an examination of these key concepts. By referring to them as 'key concepts' I am pointing to their indispensability in our communication with other people and in our thinking about, and ordering of, our experience. Despite, however, their indispensability, the appropriate application is a matter of controversy, and where one positions oneself in these controversies affects one's views about the practice and the validity of research.

Some of these key and fundamental concepts which we need to consider are:

- *reality* and *objectivity*: what is the case independently of the researcher's personal or socially constructed ideas; and the procedures for understanding that reality
- *truth*: what is being claimed when we say something is true or when we assume or assert the truth of an explanation
- *fact*: what counts as fact as opposed to fiction or social construction, and the nature of the distinction made between 'fact' and 'value'
- *theory*: as opposed to common sense or practical understandings; and the validity or truth of theoretical explanations
- *knowledge*: what constitutes knowing (as opposed to merely 'believing' or 'having an opinion'), the growth of knowledge, and the links between 'knowledge', 'truth', 'certainty' and 'verification'

Of course, it is artificial to split key concepts up like this. Making sense of the one requires reference to the others. Theories of truth have implications for what we mean by the 'objectivity' of statements and enquiries. There is a 'logical geography' in which these different concepts have their interconnected places and provide an indispensable framework of intelligibility for research. And it is the aim of this paper to map out these interconnections.

Realism and objectivity

'Realism' is the view that there is a reality, a world, which exists independently of the researcher and which is to be discovered. Research is a matter of finding out about it. And the conclusions of the research are true or false, depending on whether they match up to that reality. This at least would seem to be the common-sense view.

But many, who theorize about research, would deny this to be the case. Confronted with difficulties about the meaning and nature of 'truth', and about the theory-dependent understanding of reality, they have, like Guba and Lincoln (1989), denied there to be any such reality. Rather is reality 'socially constructed' and there are as many realities or 'multiple realities' as there are social constructions – which could be an enormous number. Research, therefore, is often focused upon people's 'perceptions of reality' where one lot of perceptions is as good as another. Their truth or falsity does not and cannot come into it.

If we distinguish between the physical and the social worlds, then this anti-realism gains some plausibility. The social, if not

the physical, world would seem to be 'socially constructed'. Moreover, each person, in relationship to other persons and in negotiating with them the social reality which they might share, would be thought to *create* reality. Reality would not exist independently of individuals' personal creations against which they might assess or evaluate their perceptions.

It is interesting to note that the flip side of this position is the denial of any social reality at all – it has no existence other than what we choose to create. Hence, Mrs Thatcher would be correct in saying that there is no such thing as society, and (along with the politicians and advisors who followed and still follow her lead) in dismissing the kind of research which explains educational outcomes in terms of social facts.

The problem with this position, however, is that it fails to distinguish between the following. First, there are social forces and structures which we may not be conscious of but which none the less shape relationships; these are what social scientists seek to discover and to bring to our conscious understanding so that we can do something about them. Second, there are social understandings which we have inherited, which we are conscious of and which shape how we see the social world. Third, there are the processes through which we sometimes transform these understandings for our own purposes or as part of a much wider cultural change.

Let us take, for example, the 'social reality' of the family and the interconnected concepts of parent, sibling, extended relations including uncles, aunts, and so on. Connected with such interrelated concepts are others concerning rights and obligations (often legally embodied), loyalties and affections. These understandings, through which we understand what is happening independently of us, are not our creation, even though they have evolved over the millennia through intricate social interactions. Furthermore, one cannot by choice simply create another way of conceiving the social world because that world is constituted, is shaped already, by these inherited understandings. That is not to say that such understandings do not evolve. Quite clearly they do – but it is an evolution rather than a deliberate recreation, albeit hastened by a critical tradition to which individuals contribute. Furthermore, that critical tradition will be fuelled by *discoveries within*, or new understandings of, that social reality which we have inherited. Thus, for example, a feminist perspective may argue, in the light of facts which are uncovered, that the family is (or is often) an oppressive social force. Recognition of this may

lead to a reconceptualization of 'family'. But such a reconceptualization presupposes a social reality that exists independently of our choice or whim, even though that reality is constituted by social understandings which could have been otherwise. To quote Bhaskar (1989: 4) in his interestingly named book *Reclaiming Reality,*

> Society then is the ensemble of positioned practices and networked interrelationships which individuals never create but in their practical activity always presuppose, and in so doing everywhere reproduce or transform.

Indeed, it is precisely this transforming nature of how people conceive social activities, sometimes deliberately pursued, which is so important in understanding what is happening in education and how one might conceptualize that which is to be researched into. There is a systematic attempt by those who manage the system to conceive education in managerial and business terms. And the resistance to this must be that the social practice of education – real and independent of the whims of the managerial class – cannot in justice be so described. If only the self-styled radicals of educational research, who subscribe to the equal validity of each person's socially constructed reality, would realize the justification they are providing to the Orwellian managers who seek to transform our understanding of education to their own image and likeness.

The realism, however, which I argue for, must not be confused with the 'naive realism' which so many critics have in mind. 'Naive realism' is the view that there is a one-to-one relation between our description of reality and reality itself – that our language, as it were, mirrors reality. It is as though we see reality as it is, unmediated by the language and concepts we have inherited. That is not my view. Rather must one recognize that, however culturally specific any one description of reality is, such a description has to come up against the hard facts of reality. Different cultures might mark out different ways of conceptualizing reality. But the viability of those distinctions depends upon features of the world which makes them possible. New Labour in Britain is a clear example of 'social construction' of reality, and many people are employed to construct that reality to suit the purposes of the politicians. 'Illness', 'waiting lists', 'investment in health service', 'expansion of provision' are constantly being 'reconstructed'. But every so often a hard-nosed realist asks 'where are the extra beds' or points out that people have *really* died.

Realism in this sense provides the basis upon which one might distinguish between objective and subjective accounts. 'Objective' has a range of interconnected meanings. First, it signifies that what is said is in tune with the world as it really is; it is not the product of my (purely subjective) whim or wishes. Second, an enquiry is 'objective' in that it takes the necessary and appropriate steps to get at that objective state of affairs. That is, one sticks to the proper procedures, which are likely to arrive at the correct conclusions. Such objective approaches depend on the nature of the enquiry. But they include, for example, examination of the evidence, testing one's conclusions against experience, ensuring that the account is coherent and not self-contradictory, subjecting it to the critical scrutiny of others. To be objective is not the same as being correct. One could take all the steps which, in normal circumstances, would lead to the correct answer but still get it wrong. In the same way one might arrive at the right conclusions while being totally subjective. 'Objectivity' refers to the way one proceeds, given that it is possible to give an account of an objective state of affairs – that is, a state of affairs which *really* exists independently of my wishing it to be so.

Truth

The mention of 'truth' or 'true' is often accompanied by a strange waggle of the ears. It is as though it is a naughty word, which ought not to be used but which cannot be avoided. Hence, it is used on sufferance. This is reflected in the references I gave to Guba and Lincoln, who refer to a 'new construction' emerging through evaluation or research 'that is not better or truer'. And, indeed, the 'fourth generation of evaluation' finds any reference to 'truth' or 'true' exceedingly difficult to stomach. This reflects an anxiety which is widespread amongst educational researchers.

What then are the problems and the issues?

'True' is a predicate of a proposition or of several propositions, as in an argument. We say that it is *true* that the conditions in the school are not conducive to learning or that class size affects the quality of learning. By saying that these propositions are *true*, we indicate that, given the meanings of these words or symbols, then there is a state of affairs in the real word which they reflect accurately. There is some correspondence between the statements I utter and the world which exists independently of me. Traditionally this has been referred to as the 'correspondence theory of truth', and it is the nearest to what most people at the common-sense level would accept. Language in some sense

'mirrors' reality. There is an isomorphic relation between the words we use and what those words signify. Furthermore, we can test or verify whether the proposition is an accurate reflection of reality by going out and having a look.

There are some well-rehearsed objections to such a theory of truth. It rests on a theory of meaning, namely, that the meaning of a word is what it refers to. It is as though all nouns are really proper names. But that clearly is not the case. 'Cat' cannot *mean* this or that cat, because we come to refer to other creatures as cats not yet born. But, more importantly for educational research, how we in fact describe the world (for example, by using words like dogs and cats, puppies and kittens) could conceivably have been otherwise. There are many different ways in which we might have described or conceptualized what we see to be reality. This is why many want to say that such a description may be true for one person but not for another, or for one culture but not for another. Thus, it might be claimed by Mr Jones not to be true for him that class 5a is badly behaved; he would prefer to describe what class 5a do as 'lively' or 'high-spirited'.

There are other problems, too, with a correspondence theory of truth expressed in this way. How could you say that counterfactual conditional statements are true or false – that is, statements which say what would have happened if something had been the case (for example, 'if one had planned your lessons that way, then there would have been chaos')? What about mathematical statements, the truth or falsity of which depends on logical consistency rather than on correspondence with reality? Furthermore, what is the reality which would correspond to statements of value of the kind 'that was an elegantly delivered lesson' or 'it is wrong to beat children'? And yet we do argue about such statements; we do assume in everyday, common-sense discourse that such statements might be untrue and need justification.

There are, therefore, difficulties in saying what one means when one says that a statement is true, and yet it seems impossible to get away from the notion – even if one carefully avoids using that word. Thus, when someone asserts something (such as 'there is no such thing as truth' or that 'what is true for you is not necessarily true for me'), it always makes sense to argue with the statement. It would make sense to deny what has been said. But to do this is to concede that what was said might be wrong and that its negation would be correct. Otherwise, what is the point of disagreeing or arguing? Or what is the point of asserting a point

of view in the first place? In other words, one is back to the seemingly unavoidable position that statements are either true or false. To assert something, or to argue a point, is to assume that there are conditions ('truth conditions') which make that statement either true or false.

There might of course be very different kinds of truth conditions. They may be different for mathematical or purely logical statements than they are for statements about the physical world. They may be very different again for statements about morality or about religion or about persons. The point is that to enter into conversation is to assume that there are certain conditions which, if they prevail, make one's statements true – or make them false.

There are two common confusions, however, which need to be examined. The first is the confusion between verification and truth conditions. Thus, one may not be able to verify that a statement is true, but that does not prevent it from being true. By their very nature counterfactual conditionals cannot be verified. But, if certain conditions had prevailed, then it must be either true or false that certain consequences would have happened. Or one may not be able to verify the claim 'all children are inherently good', but, given agreement on what one means by these terms, then such a statement must be either true or false. Of course, disagreement may be so widespread about the meaning of these terms and about what would count as evidence for or against, that one would want to say that the words 'all children are inherently good' is simply meaningless. It is a set of words with all the grammatical properties of a meaningful proposition, but since no one knows what on earth follows from its being uttered, it makes no sense at all.

The second confusion mixes disagreement over appropriate description of reality with a rejection of the claim that statements are either true or false. The same situation can be described differently according to the purpose of the description. Thus, a particular incident in the class might equally validly be described as an intelligent or a rude response to the teacher. Indeed, both may be correct descriptions – one can be intelligently rude. On the other hand, one way of describing the incident, given what is generally meant by 'rude', may be quite inappropriate. Following further investigation into the motives of the student, etc., then one has to withdraw the claim that he was rude. Of course, describing social reality is much more complicated than that. But disagreement is not simply about whether a given claim is true

or false, but also about whether a particular way of describing reality is an appropriate one or not. And, indeed, that is the very stuff of educational argument, as one person or group tries to persuade others of a different way of seeing things in the light of further evidence. One might resist, for example, the description of people as intelligent or not in the light of the many ways in which people deal intelligently with different situations and problems.

Therefore, in rejecting a 'picture theory of meaning', in which a statement is true or false depending on whether it 'mirrors' accurately the real world, one still cannot get rid of the central element of the correspondence theory of truth. That central element is that the truth or falsity of what is said has something to do with a reality which is independent of the statements made about it. Such reality firmly resists certain descriptions of it. We might legitimately for different purposes describe the world in many different ways. But, for those descriptions and distinctions to stick, there must be feature of that world which enable them to be made. One cannot get away from reality – and thus from the truth or falsity of statements which give an account of it.

Bridges (1999) gives an excellent taxonomy of the different theories of truth which have an impact upon the conduct of educational research. He distinguishes between correspondence, coherence, pragmatic, consensus and warranted-belief theories of truth. But in setting out the various *pros* and *cons* of each, he fails to recognize the inevitable correspondence between what is said and what *is*, even if that correspondence is not of the simplistic kind outlined in 'picture theory of meaning'. Realism, accounts of reality and truth are inseparable, and failure to recognize that leads to strange and indefensible consequences in the theory and practice of research.

Facts

Perhaps another way of thinking about 'truth' is to think about what are 'facts', though this concept seems to be as elusive as 'truth'. And yet, certainly at the common-sense level, we talk quite happily about facts. When there has been a disturbance, the head teacher quite properly asks for the facts (as opposed to the fictitious accounts which some may be giving). General claims about school performance, say, need to be checked against the facts.

The difficulty lies in associating 'facts' with discrete events, which correspond to the discrete statements supposedly mirroring

or picturing them. Thus, a full description of Budleigh Salterton beach would, on this view, pick out all the facts – statements about the millions of multi-coloured pebbles which constitute that beach. But that cannot be acceptable. There are many different ways in which that beach could be described – each of which could be factually correct. Just as language about reality cannot be broken down into a finite set of basic statements, so reality is not made up of a large but finite set of facts to which these basic statements correspond. But that, as I have explained, does not entail that there are not features of that reality which enable us correctly to say certain sorts of things. 'Facts' refer to those features of reality, described in one way rather than another, which enable us truthfully to make certain statements.

Facts, therefore, are not the sorts of things which one observes independently of a particular way of describing the world. A different way of describing the world would appeal to different facts. But facts they remain, reflecting features of a real world which limit what could be an appropriate description.

There seems, therefore, no reason why one should not talk of *social* facts, that is, those features of the social world which make statements about that world either true or false. Thus, as I explained above, there are aspects of the personal and social worlds which are not of my personal creation, even though they are the result of social interactions and even though they might be transformed through further personal and social deliberations. I inherit a social world through which relationships are established and recognized. I, along with others, make discoveries within that social world. And, having discovered them, I can change that world – alter the facts, if you like.

Facts, therefore, do not stare you in the face, impressing themselves upon you. They are not the sort of *thing* which can be collected and added up. Rather are they identified within a particular way of describing the physical and social worlds. The head teacher, ascertaining the cause of the trouble, has already delineated what are to count as facts, namely, those events (those aspects of the real world, including social relationships) which help explain a particular sort of event. If you like, what constitutes 'the facts' is already 'theory-laden'. 'Facts', theory and descriptions of reality are interconnected concepts.

Partly because this has not been recognized, and thus partly because the facts are seen to be discrete and observable events or things in the real world, a clear distinction is made between fact and value. It is claimed that no amount of facts about the

real world entails how one ought to act within it. The radical distinction between fact and value receives its most forceful and famous expression in Hume's *Treatise of Human Nature*, where he argues that you cannot derive an 'ought' from an 'is'. No amount of factual statements entails what one ought to do. Statements of duty or right or goodness or value are quite separate from statements of what is the case. And for many philosophers, this separation of fact from value led to pure subjectivism as far as any evaluation was concerned or, indeed, to the reduction of evaluations (aesthetic, moral, political, etc.) to mere expressions of emotion (Ayer, 1936: ch. 6) – realism, certainly, but only in matters which can be empirically investigated, not in matters of value.

The radical separation of fact from value is difficult to maintain, especially since facts relate to the descriptions we give of the world and those descriptions incorporate evaluations. Take, for example, research into health. What constitutes a healthy person is not a straightforward empirical matter. It depends on the values one has. People will disagree over levels of fitness which constitutes a healthy person, and those differences will relate to more general beliefs about quality of life. This is clear where one has in mind mental health. But it applies, too, to physical health. And so systematic reviews of educational research into such matters as bullying would need to bear in mind that different researchers will start from different definitions of 'bullying' as they evaluate differently various incidents. Values permeate our descriptions of reality.

Theory

Secretaries of State, politicians, and the various lobby groups, which advise them, are against theory. The Secretary of State for Education in Britain, in response to the research of Farrow, Tymms and Henderson (1999), which demonstrated that assumptions about the value of homework should not automatically be grafted on to primary practice, said

> Some researchers are so obsessed with 'critique', so out of touch with reality that they churn out findings which no one with the slightest common sense could take seriously. (Blunkett, 1999)

And so theoretical work is called to account before the court of common sense. So too with the preparation of teachers. Theory is seen as a disease, which has to be eradicated and replaced by

professional judgement. This is gained from practical experience.

But it is rarely clear what people are against when they dismiss theory. It is important to distinguish between theory, in the sense of the assumptions which lie behind practice but which often go unacknowledged, and theory, in the sense of tightly organized systems of explanation which are contrasted with the common sense referred to by the Secretary of State.

It is common now to say that all observations are theory-laden. By that is meant that what we observe depends upon the concepts and beliefs which we bring to those observations. Those concepts and those beliefs, in the common-sense world Mr Blunkett refers to, are rarely made explicit. But they are there none the less – beliefs about children's motivation, about the righteousness and effectiveness of punishment, about the value of learning this rather than that, even about the nature and quality of educational research. Such a framework of ideas and beliefs is not in the world, as it were, waiting to be absorbed. It is what we bring to our observations of that world. It shapes the observations we make. To make these underlying assumptions explicit is to reveal a framework of beliefs and ideas which might or might not be called theory, depending upon its level of reflection and articulation. Furthermore, once articulated and subject to criticism, one's common-sense views may seem not to be common sense after all.

Therefore, to think of practice apart from theory (of some sort) is to create another false dualism. The dualism is created by the examination of theory as such and by asking how this or that theory relates to practice, as though practice were standing outside a theoretical framework. On the contrary, to look at practice, to see how it is always open to a further account of what is being practised and thus to the possibility of questions being raised which can be treated more theoretically, implies the logical inseparability of theory from practice.

Theory here, then, refers to the articulation of the framework of beliefs and understandings which are embedded in the practice we engage in. Such a theoretical position may be expressed in everyday, non-theoretical language. But, none the less, it is what we bring to our observation of the world and to the interpretation of those observations. It involves a more or less coherent account of the values and motivations, of human capacities and aspirations. And such an account, when articulated, is open to critical scrutiny.

In certain areas of observation, however, that framework of ideas and that critical scrutiny of received assumptions have taken

flight from common sense. The well established belief that the earth goes round the sun, not vice versa, went against common-sense beliefs. The theoretical language of science is not that of everyday discourse. It has to be learnt as a new language.

This connection between theory and common sense I shall examine in greater detail in the next section. It is important to get it right. We need to ask how far research should employ the more theoretical language of specialist disciplines, thereby distancing itself from the everyday discourse of the teacher, and how far it might remain within that discourse with all its imprecision and ambiguities. But the important thing to remember at this stage of the argument is that the much-despised theory, in the sense of a framework of concepts and beliefs, far from being quite separate from practice, is the articulation of what is implicit in practice. Those, who want researchers to cut the theory and simply to say 'what works', forget that what counts as 'working' makes many unquestioned assumptions which need to be examined.

Knowledge

A criticism of educational research is that it does not create a body of knowledge upon which policy-makers and professionals can rely. First, a lot of the research is small-scale and fragmented and there is no cumulative growth of such knowledge. Second, educational discourse seems to be full of people criticizing others' research such that there is nothing conclusively verified – no *knowledge*. Research conclusions seem more like transient beliefs than well-established knowledge.

One philosophical analysis of knowing that something is the case goes like this. 'x knows that p' (where p stands for any statement) if, and only if, (i) x believes that p, (ii) x is justified in believing that p, and (iii) p is true. (See for variations of this analysis Ayer, 1956; Scheffler, 1965; Woozley, 1949.) For example, a teacher's claim to know that a pupil would do well in examinations is refuted if (i) the teacher demonstrates lack of belief by giving basic remedial lessons, or (ii) the grounds for believing it were mistaken – he was confusing the student's work with someone else's, or (iii) the student eventually failed the examinations. The teacher had a tentative but mistaken belief; but he lacked knowledge.

To claim that I know something to be the case does imply that I could have been wrong but that, in the light of relevant evidence or argument, I have good reason for so believing. Furthermore, it

turns out that I was not wrong. The proposition 'p' was true. Thus, 'knowledge' would, on this analysis, be logically related to 'truth' and, indeed, to a 'reality' which makes my claim a true one and to a mode of enquiry and verification which constitutes, objectively speaking, a justification for that belief. Knowledge is not a description of a psychological state of mind – a strong belief. It depends on a publicly agreed framework of justification, refutation and verification.

Therefore, there is a slightly different, though obviously related, sense of knowledge. We talk of 'bodies of knowledge'. This takes the emphasis away from this or that person's state of mind. Indeed, one might refer to the accumulation of such knowledge in libraries or databases even though no one person is in possession of it – knowledge without a knower. One could imagine the almost total obliteration of the human race but not the knowledge which is stored away in filing cabinets and books, awaiting rediscovery by the few survivors. Popper (1972) refers to this as the 'third world' – the first being my mental state and beliefs and the second being the reality which exists independently of those mental states. The problems in failing to recognize this 'third world' are that, first, 'knowledge' comes to be associated with the private beliefs of each individual and, second, the justification of a knowledge claim would lie in linking these subjective states of mind to the objective reality. And that problem is reflected in Descartes' search for the indisputable proposition through the process of methodological doubt to what simply cannot be doubted.

These 'bodies of knowledge' are the theories, propositions and explanations which have accumulated through enquiry, criticism, argument and counter-argument. They are what have survived testing and criticism. They are, as it were, public property. And indeed their credential depends upon their being open to public challenge and refutation. Hence, any 'body of knowledge', though well corroborated, can only be provisional; it is open to further change through criticism. The link between 'knowledge' and 'certainty' is broken. The strength of one's belief and the sense of certainty are no guarantee of knowledge. Indeed, there can be no basis for certainty; it is always conceivable that what one believes might turn out to be wrong in the light of further experience and criticism.

It is the job of the teacher to enable the young learner to get a grasp of these publicly developed bodies of knowledge, thereby transforming their subjective representations of the world. By

'getting a grasp' of a form or body of knowledge I mean coming to understand the key ideas or concepts which are embodied within it, the modes of enquiry through which they are developed, the tests for truth and validity. And this, as Bruner (1960) so well argued, can begin in an intellectually respectable way at any age.

In failing to recognize this, one is in danger of undermining the authority and professional role of the teacher. The teacher is not paid to transmit his or her personal views and certainties. The teachers' authority lies in their mastery or grasp of the form or body of knowledge which they draw upon to enhance and form the judgement of the learner. The mathematician feels confident in her teaching because there is public testament to the fact that she has grasped the key elements in a distinctive body of knowledge. This is not a private game that she is playing. That is why the teaching of personal and social development is so difficult and unpopular. Where is the publicly agreed body of knowledge upon which the teacher can draw to inform the deliberations of the young learner? In parenthesis, it was for this reason that Stenhouse, in developing the Humanities Curriculum Project, insisted upon certain teaching strategies for the teaching of controversial issues of practical living (see Stenhouse, 1975).

The question for educational research, therefore, is whether there is or could be a body of knowledge with its distinctive ideas and concepts, its general principles and theories, its peculiar modes of enquiry, its agreed tests of truth, which has accumulated and grown through criticism, experiment, testing, reflection and so on and which one might draw upon with confidence as policy-maker or professional in making decisions about what one ought to do. Such bodies of knowledge could be fairly low-level and not very theoretical. They could contain generalizations on such matters as school effectiveness. They could, in borrowing from the social sciences, be theoretical in language and explanation.

But one criticism of educational research is that there do not seem to be such bodies of knowledge. There does not seem to be the long-term research programme in which new researchers build on the discoveries of the old. Who now reads Bruner or Peel? How far does present know-how build on the research of Piaget and Kohlberg? Have not the well-researched achievements of Stenhouse disappeared with his premature death – or will do with the death of his disciples? There is therefore an important question to be asked about the nature of professional judgement and the relation of that to the growth of knowledge through research.

The postmodern embrace

A challenge to this understanding of these key concepts of research, which its critics would like it to be, comes from the 'postmodern embrace'. The person most closely associated with this would be Jean-François Lyotard, whose book, *The Postmodern Condition: a Report on Knowledge* (1984), has had such a profound influence. Briefly, the book reflected upon major changes in society and the impact that such changes had and will continue to have upon what counts as knowledge and how it should be treated. The implications for education – for what counts as an educational practice and for how such practices should be understood and organized – are immense. At one level, the book might be seen as pointing to the breakdown of consensus in today's pluralist and multicultural society and to the implications of this. But, at a more profound level, it invites us to question what counts as knowledge and truth, and what sense can be attached to verifying what is claimed to be true.

It makes sense, in understanding what is meant by *post*modernism, to reflect on what it is being contrasted with, namely 'modernism'. 'Modernism' refers to a long and dominant cultural tradition, which has the following characteristics.

First, as is reflected in the positivist tradition, there is the ideal of a complete and scientific explanation of physical and social reality. Though this might not in practice be possible, it remains an intelligible ideal.

Second, in pursuit of this ideal, the progressive development of knowledge can be divided into its intellectual disciplines, based on their distinctive concepts, verification procedures and modes of enquiry. Through such diverse and disciplined study and research, bodies of knowledge are built up from indisputable premises.

Third, these bodies of knowledge provide the secure knowledge-base for social action and improvement.

Fourth, there is thus a 'grand narrative' to which we have subscribed, namely the 'enlightenment' view that reason, in the light of systematically researched evidence, will provide the solutions to the various problems with which we are confronted.

Fifth, the educational system is crucial to the initiation of young people into these different bodies of knowledge and forms of rationality. This is achieved by teachers who, through their education and training, have become 'authorities' within these different forms of knowledge.

What typifies the postmodern world is a questioning of each of these premises. Thus we live in a culturally diverse society which

makes us question the dominance of any one view of the world. There are different perspectives and what counts as reasonable is defined differently within each perspective. By different perspectives I mean a variety of different viewpoints – feminist, ethnic minority, religious and so on – which were previously ignored as though they were of no significance in our account of the world. Just as Kuhn argued in *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (1970) that scientific rationality was defined within a particular paradigm and that, therefore, the shift from one paradigm to another could not itself be a matter of scientific rationality, so too with rationality more generally within the postmodern world. Rival disputes about what is to count as a rational view of the world cannot be settled by appeal to reason. There is no 'meta-narrative' of rationality to which we can appeal and which will bring a certain unity to this diversity.

As a consequence there is a blurring of the boundaries between intellectual disciplines or subjects such that the self-contained nature of these subjects is questioned – both logically and organizationally. There is a questioning of whether the perspectives, which traditionally have been included within them, are the only perspectives. New subjects vie with the old ones for a place on the curriculum – women's studies, black studies, media studies, popular culture and many more. There is no grand narrative which legitimates one set of values rather than another or one way of organizing knowledge rather than another. Therefore, we need to come to terms with pluralism, not simply in recognizing that there is a diversity of culture, but also in recognizing the diverse modes of rationality and of perspective. Is not reason, too, a social construct?

Furthermore, if reason itself is a social construct (and there are many constructions of it) then certain consequences follow. First, what counts as rational depends on the agreement between people, and that agreement is reached through 'negotiation'. But, as we all know, negotiations can be skewed according to who wields most power. The shape of knowledge – the acceptable statements within it, the modes of verifying what is true, the valid modes of enquiry – are legitimated more often than not by those who are in positions to define what counts as knowledge. One has in mind the university professors, the editors of journals who decide what is to be published, the publishers and reviewers of books. Knowledge and rationality are controlled by those who are in positions of power. If, for example, they are men, then a feminist perspective will be neglected. Postmodernism, therefore, is

characterized culturally and intellectually by a revolt against this control and by an assertion of different modes of cultural expression. And, of course, the revolutionary developments in communications technology enable this to happen. It frees people from the restrictive practices which were pursued under the title of rationality. Educational debate – research and scholarship and argument – is as diverse in its outlets as it is in its appeal to legitimacy. And who, on this view, has any right to censor it?

A second consequence is the severance of the link between knowledge and certainty. It was part of the 'enlightenment project' to build, bit by bit, from basic and certain foundations, and by thorough verification of the interim conclusions, bodies of knowledge in which we could have complete confidence. But recognition, first, of the diversity of perspectives, second, of the theory-laden or perspective-influenced nature of basic observations, and, third, of the competing modes of rational procedure from premises to conclusion, undermines this sense of certainty. We live by hope, not faith.

'Foundationalism' seemed central to the 'enlightenment project', because if uncertainty existed in the premises of the search for knowledge then the whole structure would be unsound. Therefore, Descartes, in his *Discourse on the Method of Rightly Directing One's Reason and of Seeking Truth in the Sciences* (1637), tried through the systematic doubt of his beliefs to arrive at what simply could not be doubted. Such self-evidently true propositions would provide the certain foundation upon which to build a body of knowledge. But with the failure of such an enterprise we are left with what Wittgenstein referred to as a variety of language games, each with its own rule of discourse. There is no higher language game for instilling order into the variety.

The consequences for education of this postmodern critique are far-reaching. First, there is a questioning of the authority-based organization and delivery of 'knowledge', as though this is a 'given' legitimated by agreed rational procedures. Once this assumption is doubted, then the authority of educational establishments and their representatives is undermined. The authoritative exposition gives way to a transaction between teacher and pupil; 'conversation' and 'negotiation' are more appropriate metaphors than 'initiation' and 'instruction'. Second, the organization of teaching into traditional subjects is questioned. Are not the areas of intellectual and cultural interest outside or across these subject boundaries – media, environmental, cultural, feminist or European studies, for example? And there is a growing

disconnection between the subject organization of higher education and that of schools, as higher education increaaingly accepts the challenge to the hegemony of traditional ways of organizing knowledge. Third, the location of knowledge (its maintenance and transmission) in schools, colleges and universities, dedicated to that purpose, seems to many to be increasingly questioned. Communications technology opens up other avenues for engaging with others in the pursuit of knowledge. Other 'stakeholders' (businesses, public services, educational entrepreneurs without accreditation) provide alternative venues for learning and research. There is, therefore, a gradual undermining of the institutional creation and distribution of knowledge as we have known it. Fourth, there is a resistance to the one 'grand narrative' which is attempting to replace that of the 'enlightenment', namely that which Lyotard refers to as 'performativity'.

It is argued by Lyotard that the place of one 'grand narrative', as it is subverted by the spirit of postmodernism, is simply being replaced by another. We may have lost confidence in the dream of the enlightenment – the growth of knowledge, which is of value in itself. But we have replaced it with another kind of knowledge – that which serves economic growth and prosperity. Hence, the penetration of educational language by the new language of 'performativity'. It tries to become the 'grand narrative', penetrating the different forms of discourse. The dominant values which legitimate what is taught are concerned with effectiveness in achieving useful ends, not about the 'transcendental virtues' of truth, beauty and goodness. Hence, it drives out these other forms of discourse about education as of no significance.

I have much sympathy with this postmodern analysis. The cultural diversity, which we now experience, calls into question many of the certainties which previously were taken for granted. It points to the genesis and organization of knowledge as at least in part contingent upon social factors and exercise of control by those in powerful positions. It raises critical questions about the mode of learning (the transmission of knowledge) encouraged by the certainties of modernism. It points to the absence of the perspectives of those without a power base from which to teach. But some of the philosophical conclusions drawn from this cultural analysis seem to be mistaken.

This was illustrated in the much acclaimed book by Stronach and McLure *Educational Research Undone: the Postmodern Embrace* (1997). The general theme of the book was that so much

educational research has been, and remains, faulty because unenlightened by the insights of postmodernism, and resistant to its embrace. Such insights were essentially philosophical in their questioning of assumptions about the nature and organization of knowledge, the objectivity of what is said in different fields of discourse, the foundation of our knowledge claims and the verification of them. In effect, they engage in what might be referred to as 'descriptive metaphysics' – defining the central concepts through which we understand our capacity to think about experience. Concepts, which (under the influence of modernism) were previously thought to be indispensable such as 'reason' and 'truth', become dispensable. The distinctions between truth conditions and verification, between knowledge and certainty, between interpretation of reality and reality itself, between text and the understanding of text, between reasons and proof, are neglected.

But such a blurring of these distinctions is not entailed by the postmodern insights. The pursuit of truth makes sense without the guarantee of ever having attained it. The belief in rationality is compatible with the provisional and fallible nature of one's conclusions. The acceptance of a reality independent of the researcher does not contradict the possibility of many interpretations of that reality. As Carr (1997) pointed out in his inaugural lecture 'Professing Education in a Postmodern Age', a central tradition in philosophy has been to question received arguments and to seek the truth while knowing that the conclusions would always remain provisional, to respect those texts which encapsulate a well-argued position without regarding them as beyond criticism or improvement, to respect the giving of reasons while recognizing that the canons of good reasoning might evolve through criticism or vary according to type of discourse. Living with uncertainty is not the offshoot of postmodernism. It is the essence of the perennial philosophical tradition.

CHAPTER 13

The 'false dualism' of educational research

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Context

Educational research is heavily criticized both in the United States and in the United Kingdom. The reasons for the criticism are that the research: first, does not provide the answers to the questions that government and policy-makers ask; second, does not help professional practice; third, is fragmented into lots of small-scale case studies which so often extol their own uniqueness; and, fourth, is too often inaccessible in terms of publication and language (see Hillage *et al.*, 1998; Tooley and Darby, 1998; Hargreaves, 1996).

This same criticism is pursued in the United States. Carl Kaestle (1993) asked the question 'Why is the reputation of educational research so awful?', and in subsequent issues of *Educational Researcher* the problem was analysed and solutions offered. Goodlad put the problem as follows.

> Criticism of educational research and statements regarding its unworthiness are commonplace in the halls of power and commerce, in the public marketplace, and even among large numbers of educators who work in our schools. Indeed, there is considerable advocacy for the elimination of the locus of most educational research – namely, schools, colleges and departments of education. (Berliner *et al.*, 1997: 13)

The problems referred to arise partly from philosophical positions which need to be questioned. On the one hand, policy-makers are looking for a 'science of teaching' (Reynolds, 1998) or a 'science of school management' which will demonstrate exactly what needs to be done for standards to be raised. On the other hand, others argue that such an aspiration is based on false beliefs about what research can deliver. Such is the nature of educational transactions or encounters that they are not open to the kind of explanation which provides the basis for systematic intervention. Rather do we have to study the uniqueness of each situation to understand it as each transaction is constituted by the perceptions and interpretations of the participants; and those perceptions and interpretations, because of their uniqueness, cannot be subjected to the general explanatory accounts required by those who manage the system.

Such a clash of views might well be seen as the dichotomy between the quantitative methodology of research and the qualitative. The 'quantitative' requires precise and clear definition of terms, the generation of law-like hypotheses to be empirically tested, the application of mathematical and quantifiable precision. The 'qualitative' rejects this. One cannot add together or subtract what are essentially social or personal constructions, each intelligible within a unique and distinct life-story.

Countless texts and theses in educational research distinguish between quantitative and qualitative research – and demonstrate a loyalty to the one or to the other. 'Quantitative' and 'qualitative' are frequently seen in opposition. They invoke different 'paradigms', different 'epistemologies'. Furthermore, the former is frequently called 'positivistic' which, more often than not, is a word of disparagement. The division between the two has become quite sharp, reflected in their respective languages or in different logical configurations of otherwise familiar words – objectivity/subjectivity, reality/multiple realities, truth/consensus, knowledge/opinion, understanding/ perception, and so on.

It is as though the Cartesian dualism has returned in a more subtle form to entrap the unwary, even those who would so roundly condemn it in its original formulation. See, for example, Hodkinson's 1998 condemnation of Tooley's critical report on educational research – 'the deep ontological and epistemological problems that lie behind his essentially Cartesian approach' (p.17). Thus, the contrast is drawn between the objective world (out there independently of our thinking about it) and the subjective worlds (in our heads, as it were, and individually

constructed); between the public discourse and private meanings; between reality unconstructed by anyone and the 'multiple realities' constructed by each individual.

The tendency to dichotomize in this way is understandable but misleading. By emphasizing one particular distinction, it obscures or eliminates other, more subtle ones. By choosing one, exclusive way of describing the world, it cannot capture the richness which is present in that non-technical everyday understanding of experience which, no matter how hard we try to ignore for the purposes of science or theoretical sophistication, cannot dispense with what Ryle refers to as 'the world of real life' or 'the world of common sense' (Ryle, 1954: 68).

Educational research, therefore, reflected in or guided by those who theorize about it, has too often been seduced by those 'false dualisms' which Dewey so roundly condemned – the opposition to each other of

> body and mind, theoretical knowledge and practice, physical mechanisms and ideal purpose. Upon the philosophical side, these various dualisms culminate in a sharp demarcation of individual minds from the world, and hence from one another. (Dewey, 1916: 291)

In being so seduced, both the accounts of research given and the practice of research thus inspired, fly in the face of 'the world of real life' which, in practice, they cannot dispense with and by which they will be judged by policy-makers, professionals and sponsors.

I shall in this paper seek to develop this position in the following way. First, I shall illustrate the dichotomy referred to by reference to one influential text. Second, I shall examine critically the philosophical assumptions which lie behind it. Third, I shall raise briefly the moral and political implications of the argument. Finally, I shall re-examine the quantitative/ qualitative distinction which, falsely in my view, is so often assumed to be clear and fundamental.

The two paradigms

Guba and Lincoln's (1989) *Fourth Generation Evaluation* is a text which, although having a wider reference point than educational research, frequently focuses upon it, has had considerable influence upon educational researchers and articulates clearly a commonly held 'philosophical position'. In many respects, that position and the philosophical difficulties it brings with it, were anticipated

in Michael Young's edited book *Knowledge and Control* in 1971, and in subsequent publications on educational research which often go under the label 'postmodernism'. See, for example, Stronach and McLure's *Educational Research Undone. Fourth Generation Evaluation* has the virtue of stating clearly the sharp distinction between very different kinds of research, and the contrasting philosophical positions of each. Indeed, progress of educational research is seen as a shift from one, quite inadequate paradigm, to a philosophically superior one. Hence, it is not simply a matter of two contrasting paradigms where (as is often understood when different paradigms are spoken of) the choice between them is arbitrary. The 'fourth generation' is quite clearly seen to be an improvement on the third, and so on.

The contrast between the fourth generation and previous generations is that

> evaluation outcomes are not descriptions of the 'way things really are' or 'really work', or of some 'true' state of affairs, but instead represent meaningful constructions that individual actors or groups of actors form to 'make sense' of the situations in which they find themselves. The findings are not 'facts' in some ultimate sense but are, instead, literally *created* through an interactive process that *includes* the evaluator (so much for objectivity!) as well as the many stakeholders. . . . What emerges from this process is one or more *constructions* that *are* the realities of the case. (p. 8, their italics)

Furthermore, these 'constructions' are shaped by the values of the constructors – no research methodology is value-free, or free of the social and political context in which it is used. Of course, over a period of time, people in the same social and cultural context will reach general consensus over the values which shape the goals, methods and interpretations of the research. But such consensus says nothing about the ultimate validity of that research or the truth of the conclusions drawn. People in different social and cultural settings might 'negotiate' different dominant values and modes of proceeding – and thus (quite acceptably on this thesis) have reached very different conclusions and understandings.

Guba and Lincoln, then, demonstrate the sharp contrast between the two 'paradigms' at what they refer to as the 'ontological' and 'epistemological' levels – reminiscent of Hodkinson referred to above. Let us call them Paradigm A and Paradigm B.

In the past

> the methodology employed in evaluation has been almost exclusively scientific, grounded *ontologically* in the positivist assumption that there exists an objective reality driven by immutable natural laws, and *epistemologically* in the counterpart assumption of a duality between observer and observed that makes it possible for the observer to stand *outside* the arena of the observed. (p. 12)

The evaluator or researcher did thereby claim to have found 'the way things really are' and 'the way things really work'.

By contrast, in the 'fourth generation' of evaluation, 'realities' are not objectively 'out there' but 'constructed' by people as they attempt 'to make sense' of their surrounds (which surrounds do not exist independently of them anyway). The new paradigm

> exists in what we have come to call the constructivist paradigm (which) rests on a relativist rather than a realist ontology, and on a monistic, subjective rather than a dualistic, objective epistemology. (p. 13)

By 'dualistic, objective epistemology', Guba and Lincoln mean the belief that the evaluator or researcher is quite separate from that which is being evaluated or researched such that the beliefs, preconceptions, etc., of the researcher do not affect that which is being researched. It is assumed in such an epistemology that things as they really are can be apprehended and known. Rather is it the case, however, that, through the enquiry or research, that which is researched into is 'created' rather than discovered. Therefore, the product of the evaluation or research

> is not, in sharp contrast to conventional methodology, a set of conclusions, recommendations, or value judgements, but rather an *agenda for negotiation* of those claims, concerns and issues that have not been resolved [*sic*] in the hermeneutic dialectic exchanges. (p. 13)

The contrast, philosophically, can be spelt out as follows.

First, Paradigm A believes in 'an objective reality'; Paradigm B, denying this, says that reality is a 'social construction of the mind', with as many constructions and thus realities as there are individuals. Thus, since science itself must be, on this thesis, a social construct, there are no immutable laws of cause and effect to be discovered.

Second, Paradigm A believes in the separateness of researcher and researched; Paradigm B blurs the distinction – the research

'findings' being created (not discovered) through the interaction between researcher and that which is researched.

Third, therefore, whereas Paradigm A, in separating the researcher from the researched, has a notion of truth as correspondence between the research account and what is the case independently of the researcher, Paradigm B's 'truth' is a matter of 'consensus' among informed and sophisticated constructors. 'Fact' does not exist independently of how the researcher constructs reality; it is not, as in Paradigm A, that which makes true propositions true.

Finally, therefore, what is researched is to be understood only within the context with which, and through which, it has been 'constructed', thereby precluding generalizations. Neither problem nor its solution can be generalized from one setting to another.

Guba and Lincoln, in developing this contrast between paradigms, do (as they recognize) skate over distinctions within the qualitative paradigm which they support – the distinctions, for example, between 'constructivist', 'interpretive' and 'hermeneutic'. More seriously, they blur the distinction between individual and social construction. Indeed, they make a quick shift from the construction of as many realities as there are individuals to the reduction of those realities to a manageable number through the process of 'negotiation'. Nonetheless, whatever the more subtle distinctions within each paradigm, a general contrast between paradigms is drawn, characterized by the contrasting conceptions of 'truth', 'reality', and 'objectivity'. The consequences for research are immense – and one can see why those who look to research for help in formulating policy, or in recommending professional practice, are disillusioned with, and critical of, an activity which denies the possibility of generalizing 'from one setting to another'. Generalizations, however tentative, are what policy-makers need.

Critical examination of philosophical assumptions

It is always difficult to state a philosophical position of this kind without falling victim to the implications of the very position one is stating. Thus, if 'truth' lies in the consensus which is 'negotiated', then the 'truth' of the very position which Guba and Lincoln are arguing for must depend upon a consensus which, presumably, is still to be negotiated. And those who share a different paradigm (let us say, Paradigm A) might cheerfully state (using Paradigm B's language) that they have socially constructed things differently

– and happen to prefer the company of those who do believe there is a reality 'out there' and who do believe that an account of the world is either true or false (whether or not it can be verified for certain).

Indeed, although Guba and Lincoln must necessarily fight shy of claiming 'the truth' of what they argue, they are obliged to have recourse to words and phrases which, more obscurely, imply much the same. Thus,

> through a hermeneutic dialectic process, a new construction will emerge that is not 'better' or 'truer' than its predecessors, but simply more informed and sophisticated than either. (p. 17)

This takes place (note the extension of the metaphor of 'negotiation') in the 'academic marketplace of ideas'. Or, again, the hermeneutic/dialectic process 'creates a constructed reality that is as informed and sophisticated as it can be made at a particular point in time' (p. 44). Thus, not any kind of negotiation will do, only one which is informed (as opposed, presumably, to misinformed) and sophisticated (as opposed to naive or lacking in subtlety).

Guba and Lincoln are clearly aware of the problem because they keep returning to it. Thus, they say that the

> replacement of the certainty that appears to be invested in conventional methodology with the relativism characteristic of responsive constructivist evaluation does not lead to an 'anything goes' posture. (p. 47)

Comparison between different constructions is made (within Paradigm A) 'on the basis of which construction better approximates reality'. But that basis is no longer acceptable to those within Paradigm B. Therefore, the constant reconstruction, arising from negotiation as one compares competing constructions, is based on that which seems (not 'is') more *reasonable* and *appropriate* to those in the *best* position to make that judgement (p. 47).

As I said at the beginning of this section, it is always difficult to state a philosophical position at this level of abstraction without falling victim to the implications of that position. Thus, it was with the statement of the verificationist principle (see Ayer, 1936). And thus, it was with Russell's attempt to persuade Wittgenstein that he did not have to be silent after all (Russell, 1922). But there is something very peculiar about an argument

for the abolition of 'truth' (as that is implied in Paradigm B) and that is implicitly recognized, though explicitly denied, in the recourse to such words as 'better informed', 'more sophisticated', 'more reasonable', and 'more appropriate'. Furthermore, I want to argue that, in seeing the implications of this, one is forced to acknowledge 'reality' as something not entirely 'created' or 'constructed' or 'negotiated', but constraining and limiting – something which *is* independent of us and which shapes the standards of what we can *justifiably* say or think or the conclusions which can be *correctly* drawn from the evidence given.

Nonetheless, in so arguing this, I am not thereby placing myself in Paradigm A. The difficulties which Guba and Lincoln, and those whom they represent or foreshadow, create for themselves arise from the sharp dichotomy, the 'false dualism', the opposition established between the quantitative and the qualitative.

The premises of those within Paradigm B seem to be as follows:

(a) Each person lives in a 'world of ideas', and it is through those ideas that the world (physical and social) is constructed. There is no way (it would be unintelligible to assert) that one could step outside this world of ideas to check whether or not they accurately represent a world existing independently of the ideas themselves.
(b) Communication with other people, therefore, lies in a 'negotiation' of their respective worlds of ideas whereby, often for practical reasons (they need to live and work together), they come to share the same ideas. A consensus is reached.
(c) New situations arise and new people have to be accommodated with different ideas, so that negotiation never ceases and new consensuses have constantly to be reached.
(d) Such notions as 'truth', therefore, need to be eliminated, or redefined in terms of 'consensus', because, given (a) above, there can be no correspondence between our conceptions of reality and that reality itself.
(e) Furthermore, the distinctions between objective and subjective need to be redefined since there can be nothing 'objective' in the sense of that which exists independently of the world of ideas which either privately or, in consensus with others, has been constructed.
(f) Development of our thinking (e.g. about educational problems and their solutions) lies in the constant

> negotiation of meanings between people who only partly share each other's ideas but who, either in order to get on practically or in order to accommodate new ideas, create new agreements – new ways of conceiving reality. Since there is no sense in talking of reality independently of our conceiving it, therefore there are as many realities as there are conceptions of it – multiple realities.

In so arguing, the 'social constructionists' presuppose that, in resisting Paradigm A, one is inevitably forced to adopt paradigm B. That, however, is a mistake.

I wish, first, to agree that we do live in a world of ideas, and that how we see the world depends very much upon the ideas we have inherited. Furthermore, it is correct to say that different social groups do, in important respects, conceive the world differently. Thus, we do in fact distinguish between cats and dogs, but it is conceivable that we might not have done – distinguishing four-legged animals in terms of their colour or the shape of their ears. But the fact that we do so distinguish, although in a sense a social phenomenon, depends upon there being features of the world existing independently of me which makes such distinctions possible. The fact that there is an infinite number of ways in which we could divide up and classify the world does not entail that any kind of distinction is possible. This simple distinction was clearly recognized by the medieval schoolmen – *Objectivum quoad id quod concipitur, non autem quoad modum quo concipitur* – objective as far as that which is conceived, not objective as far as the way in which it is conceived.

Such a way of conceiving the world is embodied within a language and thus is inherited by those who learn that language. Far from individually constructing the world, we acquire those constructions which (although socially developed) are possible because of certain features of reality which make them possible. It is not that there are multiple realities. Rather are there different ways in which reality is conceived, and those differences may well reflect different practical interests and different traditions. Social constructionists in the sense of Paradigm B are rarely found at 30,000 feet. Of course, no social group has conceptualized the world in the same way as aeronautical engineers and scientists. But the possibility of so conceptualizing it is not itself a social construction – it is to do with certain conditions prevailing independently of our wishing them so. There are discoveries in

mathematics (and those discoveries made air flight possible) as well as constructions.

That, it might be conceded, is true of the physical world – although that would be a big concession. One might, therefore, concede that there is a science of the physical world, but not one of the personal and social worlds. Our language of emotions and motives, of rights and obligations, of intentions and aspirations, of attitudes and feelings, of institutions (such as the teaching professions), would seem to be a social construction in a more thoroughgoing sense. Unlike the case of physical objects, there would seem to be no reality 'out there' independently of our creating it. Moreover, those creations are constantly reconstructed in the interactions between individuals. The moral words we use, the appraisals we make, the attributions of responsibility, the descriptions we give of motives and emotions have a history which, so it would seem, are located in particular social and cultural traditions, and evolve through the interaction between people within those traditions and between the traditions themselves. These constantly reconstructed ways of interpreting people and of relating to them, which have no reference outside the 'hermeneutic dialectic process' itself, cannot be true or false, objective or subjective as those terms are understood within Paradigm A.

Again, however, the conclusions do not follow from the premises. Those premises are that the ways in which we describe, appraise, attribute responsibility, etc., within the personal and social sphere are themselves social constructs and that the 'reality' is somehow created and recreated through the very act of construction. Hence, what it *means* to be a person (e.g. 'made to the image and likeness of God') is construed within particular groups and traditions. There is no *real* person independent of those constructions against which that account might be compared. There cannot, therefore, be a *true* account.

One needs, however, to attend to the intelligibility of making such a claim. The very possibility of the social interactions, through which social reality is construed, depends upon a shared understanding (howsoever vague and general) of what it is to be a person – a centre of consciousness capable of intentional action, rational behaviour and emotional response, and having the potential for assuming some level of responsibility. It is true that the conceptual framework through which we think about 'persons' could have been different; the way, for example, in which we differentiate the emotions, could have (as they no doubt do in

other traditions) highlighted some features rather than others. There is no a priori limit to the number of ways in which we might have conceptualized the social life. But that is not to say that there are *no* limits to how it might have been organized. The distinctions we make depend upon relatively stark features of human behaviour. How else could we have such concepts as 'fear' or 'jealousy'?

Just as the social construction of the physical world depends upon a real world, independent of that construction and constraining what construction is possible, so the social construction of the personal and social world presupposes the independent existence of objects (persons) which can be described in terms of consciousness, rationality, intentionality, responsibility and feeling. The very 'negotiation' of meanings can be conducted only within a framework of shared meanings, which meanings (in their most general state) are not open to negotiation. That is how the world is, independently of my construing it – and how it must be if I am to enter into negotiation with others. Otherwise how could such negotiation take place?

Such a view reintroduces the unavoidable concepts of 'truth' and 'objectivity', albeit not in the sense of the naive realism which is attributed to Paradigm A. By 'naive realism' I mean some sort of picture theory of truth in which the world is mirrored in the language through which we give an account of it. There is a one-to-one relation between the objects in the world and the nouns and pronouns which pick out those objects, between the nature of those objects and the descriptors within the language. But those who criticize Paradigm A wrongly attribute a correspondence theory of truth to any position other than that found in Paradigm B. It is wrongly concluded that, since 'naive realism' is unacceptable, one is obliged to adopt Paradigm B in which the notion of 'reality' is dispensed with along with 'naive realism'.

Bridges (1999) demonstrates the poverty of such a move. The concept of truth, as indeed the concept of reality, is both too complex and too indispensable to be so easily dismissed. My argument has been that, in the ways in which both physical and social realities are conceptualized, the very possibility of the negotiation of meanings presupposed the existence of things (including 'person things'). These things must have certain distinguishing features which make possible our different constructions of the world. It is always possible to refuse a construction which is imposed upon one, not simply from bloody-mindedness, not simply from lack of interest, but also from the

fact that such a construction is not possible – given that reality (physical and personal) is what it is.

Liberation or slavery: the political implications

Ironically, the moral imperative behind this enterprise – namely, a liberation of people (teachers, say) from the control of those who sponsor research and use its results in the interest of management – creates the very opposite of such a liberation. Of course, it is true, and worth pointing out vigorously, that educational arrangements are increasingly organized (and their description 'reconstructed') to serve economic and social interests as these are conceived by political leaders. In pursuing these ends, such leaders ask us to 'think in business terms' and to manage schools in the light of what research concludes to be the most 'effective' way of achieving these ends. It is equally true and worth pointing out that such research, in ignoring the complex transactions which take place between teacher and learner and which cannot be captured in the management, means/end language of that research, distorts those educational transactions, and 'disempowers' and 'disenfranchizes' (Guba and Lincoln's words) the teachers. It is as though the 'managers', aloof from the education process, seek general solutions to generalized conceptions of the problem, and then, in the light of the evidence, tell the teachers what to do. The result lies in a failure to recognize the peculiarities and complexity of the specific context, the ways in which the situation must be understood from the perspective of the participant, and the denial of professional responsibility to the teacher.

The acceptance of Paradigm B, in denying the intelligibility of such an understanding of research (the clear distinction between researcher and researched disappears in the 'negotiation' of meanings which takes place in the 'marketplace' of ideas), liberates the teacher from this management control. Each context is created through the 'hermeneutic dialectic process', as consensus is reached about an understanding of the situation and as the understanding of other people, external to the 'hermeneutic dialectic process', can be ignored as irrelevant.

It is clear from the previous section that I have some sympathy with aspects of this view. As we 'think in business terms' (adopting the language of the 'new managerialism'), so do the new, 'socially constructed' but alien metaphors distort and impoverish the educational transaction between teacher and learner. Indeed, as I pointed out, social events are partly constituted by the rules,

often implicit, through which those events and transactions are made intelligible. Therefore, that research which ignores the intentional nature of such rule-governed behaviour (focusing, instead, on behaviours, as though they were not intentions and not 'rule-governed') misses the mark. It is about something other than educational practice.

However, the shift to a paradigm where 'reality' (or the 'multiple realities') is (or are) totally created or constructed through the negotiation of meanings leaves the teacher vulnerable to a different sort of control. To stick briefly with the dubious metaphor of negotiation, there are strong and weak negotiators, those practised in the art and skill of negotiating, and those who are born losers. There is as much danger of the newly defined 'truths' or the 'reconstructed realities' reflecting the dominance of those in powerful negotiating positions as there is of the researchers in Paradigm A serving the interests of the educational managers. The links between knowledge, on the one hand, and power and control, on the other, are equally strong within both paradigms, albeit the nature of the connection is different.

But this problem arises, unforeseen by the advocates of Paradigm B, because of the severance of knowledge and understanding from some notion of reality independent of our creation or construction of it. The one guarantee of freedom is that there are constraints on our construction of reality and that it is always possible, as in the case of Galileo, to challenge ideas, constructions, agreed understanding, etc., in the light of what is the case.

As I explained in the last section, the links between the state of knowledge and the social conditions in which that knowledge is formulated are indeed complex, and also reflect positions of power and control. From that, however, it does not follow that what constitutes knowledge at any given time is but the creation of those who are in positions of power and control. That is not the whole story. And the adoption of Paradigm B simply transfers the nature of the control.

False dualism of the quantitative/qualitative distinction

There is the research which extends the methods of the social sciences to educational practice. It assumes that educational practices, being 'social facts', are amenable to empirical investigation, generalization, causal explanation and verification. The model of clinical randomized controlled trials is extended,

therefore, to education. This is reflected in the paper by Petrosino and others (1999) at a conference which paved the way to the establishment, by the Department for Education and Employment, of a centre for educational policy and practice. Social events and facts (and such are educational practices) can be explained in much the same way as physical events and facts can. The methods of the social sciences, with all their statistical sophistication, are brought to bear upon an understanding of education, and from the understandings gained those in charge of education, either at the policy or at the professional level, will know what interventions will make things work: the grouping within the class, the most effective size of the class, the style of teaching and so on. Indeed, any other approach to educational research will not provide the conclusions – the well-founded principles and prescriptions, accumulated knowledge – upon which policy-makers and practitioners can draw. Obviously those conclusions often have to be tentative. But the larger and the more controlled the trials or experiments, the more confident one might be.

Possibly one of the best philosophical accounts of this view was that of D. J. O'Connor (1957). Educational theory confused statements of aims (which were really expressions of feeling) and statements of the means for achieving those aims. Furthermore, the latter (the only ones capable of empirical justification) were usually expressed too vaguely for anyone to know what would count as evidence for or against this. Hence, educational theory, and thereby research, would gain respectability only when, following agreement on aims, there could be the kind of precision about means which would permit a proper educational science.

This position is what a very different tradition of educational research has argued strongly against, pointing to the uniqueness of educational situations, the 'subjective meanings' of the participants which 'define' the educational practice uniquely, and thus the redefinition (or even abandonment) of such terms as 'truth', 'objectivity', 'reality', 'knowledge'. Quantitative research is irrelevant. It is to be replaced by the qualitative research which celebrates this uniqueness.

Understandably, the politicians become impatient. Such focus upon the particular hardly provides the answers they want and need.

But the purpose of this paper has been to show the untenability of the philosophical positions which underpin both sides of the 'dualism'. The problem lies partly in the 'uniqueness fallacy'. The

uniqueness fallacy refers to the false entailment from every event being unique in *some* respect to every event being unique in *every* respect. It is true that each classroom is unique, and that its uniqueness lies partly in the 'definition' and 'interpretation' of the situation by the participants. There is, if you like, a 'negotiation of understanding'. Similarly a person's 'subjective meanings' (that is, the particular way in which each person perceives and feels about a situation) affect the situation itself. If I am angry (whether justifiably so or not), then my anger changes the relationship and thus an understanding of the situation to be explained.

However, unique in one respect does *not* entail uniqueness in every respect. The reactions of individuals – how they perceive situations – depend upon certain characteristics of what it is to be human (characteristic emotions or feelings of anger when wronged, fear when in danger), upon certain norms of appropriate behaviour internalized from participation in particular social groups or traditions, upon a shared description and interpretation of behaviour embedded within the language into which one has been initiated.

To understand an educational practice requires the careful analysis of the social situation – the underlying social rules, the interpretation of the participants, the values and aims embedded within the practice. Such 'qualitative research' is quite clearly necessary, and the absence of it leads to the gross generalizations and the misleading science of Paradigm A. On the other hand, such qualitative work, given what we know about human beings and about the social structures which constrain their activities, simply sets limits and gives greater refinement to the more general verifiable and (where possible) quantifiable claims which research should constantly be seeking. Of course, such claims are always open to falsification by those who, coming to understand them, can endeavour to show that they do not apply in their own particular case. Social reality is not static. It changes certainly as the participants in it become more aware of it.

My argument has been that an either/or position is mistaken. There is no justification in attributing 'naive realism' to those who espouse the more quantitative methodology. It is, of course, true that how we conceive the world as organized experience could be different and, indeed, is different from social group to social group. Such differences could be said to be 'social constructions'. Moreover, such social constructions will be constantly reconstructed as new experiences and new ideas force us to reshape how we have come to understand things. Hence, the need

for that interpretive tradition in which we seek to understand the world from the perspective of the participants, or to understand a set of ideas from within the evolving tradition of which they are part. However, such differences in organization of experience, such different conceptions of the world, such reconstructions of how we understand reality are possible because there are stable and enduring features of reality, independent of us, which make such distinctions possible. And this applies not simply to the physical world but also to the social and personal. However much the understanding of reality shapes the reality itself (for example, the aims and intentions of the teacher and learner help constitute what happens as an educational practice), there are features of what it is to be and to act as a person (normally having certain predictable emotions, capacities, tendencies, rationalities) which enable generalizations to be made. The qualitative investigation can clear the ground for the quantitative – and the quantitative be suggestive of differences to be explored in a more interpretive mode.

CHAPTER 14

The virtues and vices of an educational researcher

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Introduction

Educational researchers are becoming increasingly conscious of the ethical dimension of their research. Unlike medical and nursing researchers, they do not yet have their 'ethical committees' to check the acceptability of research proposals. But the British Educational Research Association (BERA) and the American Educational Research Association (AERA) have drawn up codes of conduct – principles and rules which should guide the research from an ethical point of view. Furthermore, it is now usually expected that research theses will explain what the ethical issues are in the conduct of the research and how the researchers ensured that appropriate standards of conduct are maintained.

This paper examines this ethical dimension and questions whether it is sufficient to think in terms of principles, codes and rules. It may be more important, from an ethical point of view, to consider much more carefully the virtues of the researcher than the principles he or she espouses. In so arguing, I first examine four examples and, in the light of these, reflect on the role of principles and virtues in the exercise of research.

Examples

The undercover bouncer

In the recent book, *Danger in the Field: Risk and Ethics in Social Research* (Lee-Treweek and Linkogle (eds), 2000), David Calvey described how, in his undercover research to explore the 'cultural practice, work culture and social organization' of club bouncers, he secretly tape-recorded conversations and recorded assaults, drug-taking and other crimes. His role as a researcher had to be disguised – discovery might literally have been fatal. Therefore, what he learnt (and then reported) was gained from confidential conversations and by the concealment both of his identity and of the purposes of the research. His justification (the moral argument, if you like) was that, first, he was contributing to an understanding of violence in society; second, the deceptive method adopted was the only way in which he could attain that worthwhile objective.

The toilet ethnographer (or 'undercover ethnographer', if you like)

Consider a second case. Some years ago an established researcher investigated the classroom ethos of three middle schools. Entry to those schools required gaining the confidence of the relevant teachers and the headteachers. He described the steps he took to maintain secrecy and unobtrusiveness – for example, always writing up his observations behind the locked door of the toilet. But the publication of the book, though steps had been taken to anonymize the schools and the teachers, greatly upset one of the teachers who recognized herself in reading the book and took offence at the implicit criticism of her teaching. The headteacher told me that, in consequence, he would allow no more researchers into his school.

The democratic researcher

A third example is that of a researcher who took seriously the feelings of those being researched and negotiated agreement of what was permissible data and what was a permissible analysis of that data, prior to publication, before they entered into the report. It was agreed that a significant portion of the data would not be made public (for example, what the teacher had said when interviewed) and therefore could not enter into the analysis. This meant, of course, gaps in the overall picture and distorted conclusions. But in one sense this did not matter, because the process of negotiating the evidence and the conclusions was so prolonged that no report was ever written. However, the researcher

justified the procedure of lengthy negotiation by reference to the benefit received by the school in going through the process, even though that process never reached any conclusions. (The researcher resisted one moral temptation, namely, to draw conclusions which were correct in the light of the evidence but which the sensitivities of the teachers had prevented from becoming public.)

The contract researcher

A fourth example is that of the researcher, desperate to win further major research contracts from the government sponsor. Here, as is often the case, short-term contract researchers depended on a successful proposal for their continuation in employment. As with most government-funded projects, there were no absolute criteria for evaluating the success of the overall project. Most major projects of this kind (Education Action Zones, Fast Track Teachers, etc.) have a mixture of outcomes. Nevertheless, the researcher knew that there was a limit to how much criticism would be acceptable to his sponsor and, in any case, there was a team of experienced spin doctors (called the Press Office) to gainsay the research if the need arose. Experienced contract researchers realize that, with regard to research into policy, they are operating within a political context with an ideologically driven programme. The researcher in this case, therefore, distinguished between private advice and public documentation – between that which would be private to the government and that which would be open to the public. The public document, therefore, blunted its criticisms and thereby failed to contribute to a truly balanced debate on the issues. But the researcher claimed that, first, he did influence policy (which could not have been the case had he been less pragmatic and subtle in presenting the conclusions); second, he did receive another large grant and his research officer continued to feed his young family.

Reflecting on the examples

Moral dilemmas which arise in research are often dealt with by appeal to certain general principles. These are then translated into codes of conduct of research. BERA has developed its code, so has the American Educational Research Association. And this is to be highly commended. It is impossible to conceive of a moral life without implicit reference to a set of principles which are embodied within the moral practice. But that does not mean that one can, as it were, read off from that code or those principles

what exactly one should do on any one occasion. There is no escaping moral deliberations – the complex judgements required for seeing, first, the relevance of particular principles or codes to this or that situation; second, the priority to be given to this or that principle when it is conflicting with another.

The examples above reflect the relevance of such moral deliberations or complex moral judgements. The person researching the culture of club bouncers (first example) was intentionally, yet secretly (and thus deceitfully), gathering information from unsuspecting bouncers. Indeed, it is likely that he engineered situations to get these accounts (gained their confidence, found safe places to talk, etc.). To be deceitful is, one might argue, a *prima facie* wrong. To engage in conversation with unsuspecting persons for ulterior motives which one takes care to hide (those motives being to publish what one hears and sees) would seem to be clearly wrong. But, then, had he revealed his purposes, first, he would not have got the information; second, he might have been seriously harmed. Well? Should he then not have engaged on the research? His argument was that the reasons were so important for the public good and for the general welfare that such deception was justified.

That, indeed, sounds plausible. But there is another dimension to the moral picture. As a result of the secrecy, there is no way in which the veracity of the conclusions could be checked. Remember that one general principle of good research is that conclusions are supported by evidence and that the relation of conclusion to evidence, and the evidence on which those conclusions are drawn, should be open to scrutiny – and might be considered acceptable only if they have withstood public criticism. Otherwise educational research, to a much greater extent than, say, scientific research, would be dependent on the trustworthiness of the researchers. Are they the sort of person we can trust? (Do they pass the moral test?)

The second example (that of the 'toilet ethnographer' or 'undercover ethnographer') is again one where moral judgement is required. The researcher needs to weigh up the importance to his research of concealment and the likely effect that the results of the research would have on those researched into. Is this another case of deception? And if so, then is it exactly the same as the previous case? In one sense it is, in another it is not. It is not the same in the sense that the first case, but not the second, was revealing information of utmost importance for society. Moreover, secrecy (and deception) were crucial to the safety

(indeed, continued existence) of the researcher. Same principles, but different context, requiring different deliberations about the application of principles. But could the second researcher have approached the research in a different way, recognizing the vulnerability of the persons researched into – and possibly respecting *their* interpretation of events (their conclusions from the data) which may not have been the same as the researcher's? Indeed, how far can we understand what is going on in classrooms without respecting the understanding of the main agents within those classrooms? But this is hardly possible without the teachers' views being solicited.

The third example (that of the 'democratic researcher') takes these moral anxieties seriously. Judgements are made such that those being researched into must be brought to the centre of the picture. The *moral* ground for this is that any other course would show disrespect for them as persons. To research them through deceptive methods (as in the first and second examples) would be to treat them as objects, things, not as persons worthy of respect. This 'respect for persons' (as in the sense of people not to be used for other people's ends) would seem to be the dominant principle. But more than that. The moral principle is also related to a view about the nature of knowledge – the tentativeness of any knowledge-claims, their openness to refinement and further criticism, the importance in reaching conclusions (even if temporary) which have withstood the widest range of possible criticism.

But there is a difficulty here. The importance of deliberation is recognized – indeed, espoused enthusiastically. And that deliberation takes place between the many people in the research – no longer divided between researcher and researched but united in a common partnership to discover the truth (which, of course, is often made elusive by the very complexity of the deliberations). A moral as well as a research bond is created, and the concept of negotiation (once intelligible in the world of business) takes on a moral force not recognized in the first two examples. But part of that moral force lies, too, in a view about the nature of knowledge – something which is seen to be constantly constructed and reconstructed.

The final example (that of the 'contract researcher') takes on yet a different dimension – different complexities in the moral debate. The researcher has two obligations which complicate the deliberation. The first obligation is to a long-term influencing of events in the light of research – which requires playing a political

game abhorrent to the moral purist. But such would seem to be inescapable to those who walk the corridors of power. One is surrounded by the spinners and manipulators of knowledge. These are the lobbyists who carefully select one aspect of the research, ignoring the overall and balanced picture. There is the long-term aim, achievable through carefully explored short-term measures. Politics transforms the context of moral judgement.

But there is the second obligation – the obligation to the long-term well-being of the research team, ensuring contracts, enhancing its reputation, promoting its trustworthiness. There is a social, as well as a political, context of research which, in its detail, escapes the direct application of high-level moral principles.

However, in all examples there seems an inescapable dependence on the trustworthiness of the researcher – to exercise judgement in as impartial a manner as is possible, to conclude only those things which can be justified in the light of the evidence, to be open to the critical scrutiny of others where that is possible (and, where impossible, to imagine what that criticism might be).

What should be clear from a cursory consideration of four examples is the unavoidability of moral deliberation in considering the ethical dimension of research. Such deliberation does inevitably call upon or embody certain principles, but can by no means be simply the application of those principles. Different principles can be evoked. But there is *judgement* required in deciding upon the overriding principle and in deciding what element in one's practice relates to what principle. The context, for example, affects the amount of harm which might be considered tolerable and indeed what might be said to constitute harm. The context also affects the significance of the research to the wider public good. The context affects the extent to which secrecy might be equated with deceit. And the context affects the degree to which this piece of research should be seen as but part of a wider, more significant programme of research such that moral imperfections might be allowed for the greater good of the whole.

It is necessary, therefore, to look more closely at the meaning and consequences of these considerations – first, at the role of principles in moral deliberations, but, second, at the moral requirement of research once one realizes that no set of principles (and thus no ethical code) can exhaustively shape the moral deliberation which inevitably researchers are caught in. The solution in my view lies in the return to 'moral virtue' appropriate

to research – not an easy recommendation since the natural humility and modesty of most researchers would normally lead to their denial of having such virtues. Moreover, it is less easy to assess virtue than it is to assess research competence – or to pronounce a list of principles. Canon lawyers have to be clever, indeed subtle; they don't necessarily have to be virtuous.

Principles

Moral deliberation is often characterized as a response to the question 'What ought I to do?' For much of the time, we do not have moral worries – getting up in the morning, preparing breakfast, choosing what to wear, etc. Of course, one can see the *possibility* of moral conflict even in such everyday practices; my favourite but food-stained tie upsets my wife over the breakfast muesli, and no doubt this state of affairs could and should provoke some moral deliberations. But although any activity or practice can pose the question 'What ought I to do?' (where the 'ought' refers to an ethically significant situation rather than to a merely practical one), few (thank goodness) actually do.

But why is that the case? For most of our lives, our daily actions and relationships spring from the sort of people we are, the forms of life to which we belong with all its built-in norms and values. By being brought up in a particular society or social group, one absorbs the social rules and the feelings and dispositions which go with them, which are recognized by that group and which are appropriate to its particular form of life. It is not the case that the majority of people live in a constant state of existentialist angst. The question I want to ask is why the life of an educational researcher cannot be just like that? Why is there a need to spell out or make explicit codes of conduct, rules of procedure, principles of proper behaviour? Why can't we simply employ virtuous people – with, of course, research skills?

The main reason is that the unreflecting but virtuous life is not sufficiently helpful when conflicts emerge – when underlying norms and values (previously only implicit) are challenged or eroded in the very social foundations of one's practice. It is then that the principles implicit in one's practice need to be more explicit. One then asks the question 'What ought I to do?', seeking genuine reasons.

One sort of answer to the questions might be purely prudential or practical, namely, what particular action is most likely to achieve a particular end. But the question may be as much about the ends to be pursued as about the means of achieving those

ends. The appropriate reasons for acting in one way rather than another, where those reasons focus on the values worth pursuing, are expressed in statements of principle. One appeals to principles in justifying an action. Moreover, principles by their nature reflect a universality of application. The *principle* of acting in this way rather than another does not depend upon my whims or wishes; anyone in like circumstances would be expected to act in a similar way. Thus, in asking the questions 'Why should I tell the interviewee the purpose of my research?' or 'Ought I to omit some of the more sensitive conclusions?', one would eventually appeal to some general principle such as 'One ought to act in this way because such people have a right to know' or 'One should always tell the truth' or 'One should so treat others as one would wish them to treat oneself'.

One needs to distinguish between 'principles' and 'rules'. 'Rules' are more specific and less open to interpretation. There are rules for driving safely such as 'Always drive on the left' or 'Never cross a double white line'. Thus, the government may lay down certain rules about the reporting of research which it has sponsored – let us say, the research should be sent confidentially to the Department of State and then, *only with the Department's permission*, might it be made accessible to the wider public. Such rules are of the kind 'In circumstances x, one must do y'. There is little ambiguity or openness to interpretation. But behind the rules for the conduct of research will be principles. Principles, related to the rules of safe driving, would be of the kind 'So drive as to minimize the chance of causing an accident'. The rules for the conduct of government-sponsored research might be justified by reference to prescriptions such as 'The research report ought to be treated as the property of the sponsor' or 'The research ought to take account of the possible harm it might do to those who are researched into', which is then translated into the rules for the actual conduct of the research.

Principles, then, have the logic of general rules, but they embody the values appealed to in the establishment of the rules or in the questioning of the appropriateness of the rules on this or that occasion. There is a temptation, in recognizing the moral and political dilemmas over the conduct and the dissemination of research, to establish specific rules of conduct. But that would be a mistake. Here, as in any moral conflict, there is no way in which rules can legislate for every conceivable situation as, indeed, is shown in some of the examples given earlier. What specific rules could have anticipated the unique features of research into the

criminal activity of club bouncers? Certainly it is necessary to clarify principles, but these then need to be reflected on in the particular situations – in the full knowledge that other principles might also be evoked which would lead to more complex moral deliberation.

Moreover, a moment's reflection shows how unclear are general principles when it comes to their application. Thus 'maintaining confidentiality' might be narrowed down to the formal agreement not to mention what was said without the prior consent of the interviewee. But what about the case of the researcher talking to the club bouncers? No such agreement was entered into, but there was a deliberate deception (namely, the pursuit of information for a specific purpose while preventing the source of that information from knowing those purposes). Does that constitute a breaking of confidence? And is the situation so very different where the researcher engages in conversation and only subsequently (in the light of these private revelations) decides to use them for purposes of research or scholarship?

One needs to distinguish between those principles which are concerned with the consequences of one's actions (consequentialist) and those which express some general rules of behaviour, irrespective of the consequences (deontological). So, acting as to make people happier would be of the former kind; telling the truth or keeping confidences would be of the latter. It requires no great reflection to see how these different sorts of principles often conflict. Telling the truth can bring harm to others. Respect for individuals might entail a watering down of the research conclusions. The utilitarians wanted to judge the morality of all actions by reference to the extent to which those actions led to a greater sum of happiness than would otherwise be the case – even if that could be achieved only by the occasional lies or concealment of truth. Of course, it is not easy to calculate the total effect of any one action, and therefore the utilitarians would argue a *prima facie* case for truth-telling and fairness as principles which generally speaking lead to a happier state of affairs. But the clash of consequentialist and deontological ethical positions is clearly apparent in educational research. Calvey (2000) deceived his bouncers for the sake of the greater good to society, spelled out (no doubt) in terms of greater happiness as a result of lower levels of violence, drug trafficking, etc. The researcher into middle schools put telling the truth (as he saw it) above the happiness of the individual teachers.

Such a *possible* conflict of irreconcilable principles can be resolved in one of four ways. First, the researcher simply does not

recognize this to be a problem and pursues the research in a kind of moral vacuum. Research is cut off from moral life generally – it is put into an insulated occupational, amoral slot. Second, the researcher declares him or herself to be a deontologist or a consequentialist – and is always led by such principles to the exclusion of others (for example, one tells the truth whatever the consequences). Third, the researcher looks in vain for higher-level principles to resolve the conflict. Fourth, however, the researcher recognizes that there is no solution other than, in most moral situations, through deliberation in which the different principles are pondered over within the particular context of the research. One situation is relevantly different from the next. Nonetheless, the researcher should be aware of what the key principles are which enter into that deliberation, namely, first, principles concerned with the respect for other persons (maintaining confidentiality when promised, preserving their sense of dignity, treating them as having a valuable point of view); second, principles concerned with maximizing the happiness not only of the people immediately involved but also of the wider community (balancing that happiness created against the unhappiness which might be caused); third, principles concerned with the proper conduct of affairs irrespective of consequences (acting justly, keeping of promises, telling of the truth).

Let us look at these principles in greater detail. The principle which directs research would seem to be that of 'pursuing and telling the truth'. The purpose of undertaking research is, generally speaking, the generation of knowledge. The reasons for needing to know the truth concern improvement of practice, development of policy, accountability of those in public and professional positions and of course the solution of problems raised by previous research. The production of knowledge requires access to data. Research, therefore, provides a *prima facie* case for the researchers to have the right to such access. At the same time, there is a need for wider public access to that data and to the conclusions which researchers draw from them. One ought not to feel confident in the outcomes of research without this wider critical debate. Growth of knowledge comes through criticism.

The 'right to know' applies particularly where matters of public interest are concerned – for example, where there are large-scale interventions which purport to improve standards or deal with a social evil. One can see why those in positions of power may wish to resist research or its conclusions. Research seeks to get at the truth where the truth might hurt. Research exposes the secrecy

which too often permeates the conduct of affairs by public institutions such as schools, local authorities, government departments and committees. And researchers need a certain amount of courage to resist such powerful influences. However, policy-makers (unless they have absolute trust in their spin doctors) should be keen to ensure that their decisions are informed by the most up-to-date knowledge and understanding and that the institutions are properly accountable. There would seem to be, therefore, a *prima facie* case for claiming the 'right to know'. Such research should remain independent of those who might benefit from or be disadvantaged by it, lest the conclusions drawn reflect the interests of the sponsors rather than the pursuit of the truth wherever that leads. Such is the importance of this right and this principle (namely, the 'right to know' and the principle that one should pursue and tell the truth) that they might be considered to be overriding, even when the research and its revelations damage the people and the institutions enquired into.

The justification for the principle of the right to know is implicit in John Stuart Mill's argument in his essay *On Liberty* for preserving and extending freedom of discussion.

> ... the peculiar evil of silencing the expression of an opinion is, that it is robbing the human race; posterity as well as the present generation; those who dissent from the opinion, still more than those who hold it. If the opinion is right, they are deprived of the opportunity of exchanging error for truth; if wrong, they lose, what is almost as great a benefit, the clearer perception and livelier impression of truth, produced by its collision with error. (Mill, 1859: 142)

Accessibility of information is a precondition of a proper discussion of any opinion, policy or practice. Therefore, there is, on Mill's argument, a prima facie case for establishing the right to know as a basic one in any society, where the eradication of error or the greater clarity of the truth is valued, and thus the right, indeed, the obligation to support and encourage independent research. There are no absolute certainties, and thus, faced with the continual possibility of self-deception or of mistaken conclusions, any government or authority should welcome rather than spurn the well-researched criticism or proposal.

Therefore, the case for the right to know and the principle of pursuing the truth openly and independently (the ethical right and principle which should override all others and which should be supported through thick and thin) seems overwhelming. But

those who have been engaged in research might well harbour some doubts.

First, the principle of constantly pursuing the truth (and supporting the connected right to know) is a principle, paradoxically, partly based on the premise that there are few areas where we can claim certainty. The growth of knowledge and understanding has constantly been at the expense of so-called certainties – bodies of 'knowledge' which were regarded as unquestionable. And the errors could be discovered only by constant vigilance – constant questioning of accepted truths. But the moral consequence of that lies in the appropriateness of modesty in the arrival at and promotion of the conclusions from research. All research and scholarship are littered with the corpses of authorities, of 'the last word' articles, of the definitive text which proved not to be definitive after all. Even in being guided by principles, the rational person needs to have the exercise of those principles softened by the virtues of modesty. The researcher might be wrong. If no researchers can ever provide the definitive word, then they must weigh the important but tentative nature of their research against the consequences of publishing it. What if they were wrong, and the consequences of their error were to cause harm to others? What if, given the political climate (with respect to, for example, effective schooling), they believed that the tentativeness of research findings would escape the less subtle politicians who quite clearly seek any scrap of evidence to support their policies? The researchers can, of course, put health warnings on their packets of research, but these (as we know from smoking) have little effect.

Second, there is the obvious tension between telling the truth and estimating the consequences of so telling. The insight into the school might harm the young teacher embarking on his or her career, or it might destroy the credibility of the school, thereby exacerbating the very problem revealed in the research. How much respect should be accorded to those who are most vulnerable in the light of the research? The obvious reply is 'It all depends . . .' – on the seriousness to the public good of the truth being revealed, on the degree of vulnerability of the potential victims and of their positions in the pecking order of power (presumably the much bigger salaries of headteachers are partly due to their greater responsibilities and accountability).

My third reservation lies in the role of confidentiality in the obtaining of data and in the interpretation of that data. As in the first example of Calvey (2000), the crucial evidence for the

research would not have been obtainable had he observed the principle of voluntary informed consent. A certain deception was required. But then the purposes of the research were significant for the general good – the exposure of serious criminal activity. But cannot a similar argument be made for the significance of much educational research – the exposure of poor teaching, say, or the revelation of managerial incompetence at national or local levels? Where confidentiality is formally agreed, then the moral position is easier to resolve, but many aspects of the relationship between researcher and research are based on trust, not upon formal agreement. Virtues of loyalty, frankness, honesty, justice would be appealed to by the wronged person who was the object of the research.

How far, then, can one establish a set of principles for the conduct of research, bearing in mind the difficulties in translating these into a set of rules, and bearing in mind, too, the unavoidability of moral deliberation in reconciling conflicting principles or in seeing the applicability of this or that principle to this context?

There is a prima facie case for the right of access to whatever evidence will enable the researcher to get at the truth. But such a right should only be conceded where there are good reasons for conducting the research – and where there are grounds for believing that the research will be conducted honourably. (That is, there needs to be a trust in the researcher which can never be reduced to the faithful adherence to agreed principles and rules.) Hence, there would seem to be some very *general* rules which follow from the above analysis.

First, the researcher should set out clearly the *kinds* of knowledge required. Those being researched would have a right to know beforehand what in general terms the researchers would be looking for and for what purpose (with, however, already the exception to this principle in that research which needs to be conducted for the public good but which would not be possible were anyone to know its purpose). There would be the continuing opportunity to renegotiate the terms of the research contract as the research revealed new avenues for enquiry.

Second, the researcher would give access both to the data and to the conclusions drawn from that data, such that both might be questioned in the light of other data or of other possible conclusions. That is, there is the general principle that all should be done to enable and encourage public criticism of the conduct and conclusions of the research.

Third, the research should provide opportunity for the right to reply from those who have participated in the research but

who may believe that alternative conclusions could be supported by the data. The researcher, therefore, should be open to cross-examination by those at the receiving end of the research – the main purposes and objectives, the research methods, the political implications of the research, the data collected and the interpretations being put upon that data. Such obligations arise from the ill-conceived nature of some research, and from the fact that all knowledge is both tentative and selective. There may be other perspectives and other interpretations of the data which should be considered.

Fourth, in terms of 'consequential principles' the researcher should take into account the possible ways in which research findings may be used. Research often appears in highly charged political contexts in which the findings are picked out selectively to support different sides of the political spectrum. Or the research may cause much harm and unhappiness to individuals or to the institution. One rule which is often derived from such a principle is that one should make the institutions or the individuals within them anonymous. But such a rule may be impossible to apply where the significance of the research may be related to the distinctive context.

The gap between high-level principles on the one hand and action on the other depends, as I have explained, on moral deliberation. But how one deliberates – what features of the situation one picks out as relevant, for example – depends on the general dispositions which incline one this way or that. A courageous person sees danger in a different way from the coward; the kind person will recognize redeeming features which the uncharitable fails to see; the loyal friend will focus on ways to help that mere companions will not detect. So, too, the ways in which researchers engage in moral deliberations depend on the sort of persons they are – the dispositions they have to act or respond in one way rather than another.

Virtues

There has been a tendency in moral philosophy, as in the conduct of research, to address what should be the principles of right action rather than the dispositions of the actor. And yet, as I have indicated in the previous section, it is not possible to proceed far without reference to such dispositions. On the whole, we act from character or from our dispositions to see, value and act in a certain way. Moral education, it might be argued, should concentrate more upon the nurturing of the virtues than upon the development of

moral reasoning. By 'virtue' I mean the *disposition* to act appropriately in a particular situation. There are moral virtues and intellectual virtues. Moral virtues are dispositions like courage, kindness, generosity of spirit, honesty, concern for justice.

Similarly with regard to the ethical dimension of research. Educational situations are too complex to fall easily under this principle or that, or to be anticipated in every detail. Moreover, not every detail of the researcher's work can be checked. There is a need for the researcher to be trusted – and thus to be trustworthy.

The moral virtues would be those concerned with the resistance to the blandishments or attractions which tempt one from the research, even where the intellectual virtues press one to go on: courage to proceed when the research is tough or unpopular; honesty when the consequences of telling the truth are uncomfortable; concern for the well-being of those who are being researched and who, if treated insensitively, might suffer harm; modesty about the merits of the research and its conclusions; humility in the face of justified criticism and the readiness to take such criticisms seriously.

This can be illustrated in the importance attached to 'trust'. Clear cases of betrayal of trust are where a promise is broken. There is, of course, something peculiar about the *obligation* to keep promises. Where that obligation is not recognized the very meaning of 'making a promise' disintegrates. Little value can be attached to promises where it is understood that the promises can be broken when convenient. Keeping promises would seem to be a *prima facie* duty or principle. However, the trust which is built up between researcher and researched, on the basis of which information is given and intelligence gained, is rarely made explicit in actual promises. It is more a matter of implicit trusting with information, putting oneself in a vulnerable position. This respect for others as vulnerable puts real constraints upon the sensitive evaluator or researcher, however much public importance he or she attaches to the information that has been obtained. It is not possible to say what should be done without examination of the particular case. But the virtuous researcher will be aware of difficulties that others would not be; such a researcher would bring factors into the deliberations which others would omit.

Intellectual virtues would refer to concern to search for the truth and not to cook the books, openness to criticism, an interest in clarity of communication, a concern for evidence. Truth is not always kind and the rewards for its pursuit may be small. Self-

interest might suggest cutting corners or being economic with the truth. But genuine researchers would feel ill-at-ease with such behaviours. They would go against the deep-down *feeling* concerning how they ought to act.

The deliberations, therefore, which are inevitable in the complexity of practical situations and the clash of principles which I have spoken of, will be greatly determined by the dispositions or virtues of the researcher. Indeed, even 'telling the truth' might be twisted to a partisan cause if one does not have the right virtues. Was it not William Blake who observed 'A truth that's told with bad intent is worth all the lies you can invent'? The point is that clever people, knowing the conclusions they want, can, if so disposed (i.e. in the absence of the appropriate virtues), find the data and the arguments to justify those conclusions – and yet, despite the fact that no untruth has been told, be dishonest. Research, therefore, as has been argued, requires very special sorts of virtue, both moral and intellectual.

The virtuous research community

Virtues are fostered – and indeed related to – particular social contexts and without that social support personal virtues so often weaken. A military society will foster a sense of chivalry and honour, and thus the dispositions to act in particular ways. Humility is a distinctively Christian virtue (though too infrequently observed) requiring an institutional support. Kohlberg came to realize that, without 'just communities', the fostering of the capacity to reason about justice would not translate into dispositions to act justly (Kohlberg, 1982). Therefore, if we are wanting virtuous researchers, then we must have 'virtuous research communities', communities which embody the very virtues which one requires of the members of those communities.

What then are the virtues to be fostered of such communities, which can in turn nurture the virtues of their members? Research is primarily concerned with the search for knowledge and the elimination of error. That in turn requires the spirit of criticism. Given the tentativeness and provisional nature of most conclusions (for example, that literacy is best improved through the literacy hour or that standards are best improved through naming and shaming), then criticism should be welcomed rather than discouraged. But that goes against the grain. Our natural tendency is to defend rather than criticize our most cherished views. Knowledge might grow through criticism, but knowledge often remains fairly static because the acceptance of such criticism goes

against one's natural inclination. Hence, the importance of nurturing in researchers the spirit of self-criticism and the openness to the criticism of others. A research community – in schools, in universities and elsewhere – would provide the forum or the context in which such criticism would be invited and welcomed and become part of the normal life of the institution. But such an invitation is risky. It could open up a range of criticism difficult to sustain. Therefore, the embodiment of such intellectual virtues within the life of a community requires the moral virtue of courage.

But more needs to be said about the community's values in relation to the nature of knowledge claims. The third example, which I gave at the beginning, pointed to the need for negotiation of the research procedures and indeed of its findings. This presupposes a particular respect for the teachers in the school – their distinctive perspective, their insights into the situation, their critical appraisal of the provisional findings. Such respect, reflected in the negotiation of procedures and outcomes, implies a more democratic approach to the conduct of research – an approach based on certain principles but requiring shared dispositions if it is to be carried out. And it is quite clear that few institutions have such 'dispositions', especially when educational programmes are increasingly directed to ends which are external to the deliberations of those communities and have not had to withstand scrutiny within them. By saying the institutions do not have such 'dispositions' I mean that they have not incorporated those norms which influence their members to behave in certain ways. Increasingly, for example, the management of universities excludes the corporate or collegial deliberations over academic aims and values; few schools provide the forum in which teachers might question the educational priorities so often determined by pressures from outside the school. Democratic values (and the social and personal virtues which are associated with them) are difficult to sustain where policy and practice are increasingly controlled by government.

Conclusion

There has been much criticism recently of educational research. Such criticism focuses upon the fragmentation of that research, the irrelevance of that research to the questions which teachers and policy-makers are asking, the tendentiousness of some research, the poor quality of the methods adopted. But these criticism do not address what are possibly the most important

questions – namely, those concerned with the qualities (in particular, the virtues) of those carrying out the research. Is there a disposition to find out and to tell the truth as it is and not as one would like it to be? Is there respect for the schools and teachers who are the objects of the research? Have researchers the courage to resist the opposition of powerful persons when the conclusions are critical? Have they the modesty to recognize the tentativeness of their conclusions? Are they sufficiently trustworthy for us to accept both data and conclusions drawn from those data? Furthermore, are they members of a community where such virtues are respected and fostered – are they allowed to fail?

In beginning to spell out the virtues, I come to recognize my own vices. But that is why I am not a researcher. But perhaps many others should not be either.

CHAPTER 15

The future of educational research

Paper given at British Educational Research Association (BERA), 2002, published in a revised form in the *Times Higher Educational Supplement*, October 2002

Introduction

Research is a systematic search for evidence in order to answer certain questions. However, rarely is such a search a straightforward empirical matter. The important questions are usually, if not always, controversial – not only politically and morally, but also conceptually. What counts as evidence depends very much upon how one understands education, what it means to be and become better as a person, what the connection is between an educated person and a just and healthy community, what counts as 'having learnt' in its different forms and modes.

Therefore, research must be characterized by a critical debate, by an openness to argument and counter-evidence, by an interdisciplinary conversation, by philosophical analysis and critique.

Therefore, also, research goes against the grain both personally and politically, for it is the natural tendency of individuals and of politicians to defend cherished views, to dodge criticism or to dismiss it through the dismissal of those who are giving it.

Three things in general follow from these introductory remarks. First, the creation and maintenance of strong research *communities* are crucial to the conduct, criticism and validation of research. Second, such communities must be so created organizationally

and financially as to be independent of political influence and requirements (albeit ever alert to the professional and political needs for research). Third, such communities must be interdisciplinary – and thus large enough for contributions to the critical debates and to the search for evidence to find room for the voices of the different disciplines.

The purpose of my contribution is to indicate some of the organizational and financial consequences of this. In so doing, I wish to make five propositions – the first three setting out the context, the last two looking at a possible way forward.

Context

Proposition 1 The government and its agencies are not interested, generally speaking, in research or in 'evidence-based' – despite claims to the contrary. This has implications for the scope, funding and value of educational research

Such a proposition was implicit within the Hillage Report (1998). The government, however, reacted to that by its investment in evidence-based or evidence-informed policy and practice, referring to the model established in medicine and health by the Cochrane Centre.

However, examples abound where expensive policies have been initiated without any reference to relevant research or without subjecting the proposals to critical debate. Examples would be:

- the establishment of the Academy for Gifted and Talented Youth
- the development of a Fast Track route into teaching (and its selection procedures)
- the establishment of City Academies
- performance-related pay for teachers

Where evidence has been sought (e.g. in the case of the Hay/McBer Report (2000) on what makes a good teacher), that evidence has been sought outside the research community and not fully accessible to critical analysis, presumably because of the commercial contract.

On the other hand, one can see some examples of where research has entered into the political frame and the shaping of decisions. Examples would be:

- the influence of Professor Kathy Sylva's and others' (Sylva *et al.*, 2002) work on early years upon the government programme, Sure Start
- the effect of Paul Black, Dylan Wiliam and others at King's College London on policy and practice in assessment (see Black, 2000)

Hence, my original proposition needs refining, and the political process (through which research and critical analysis are allowed to play a part) better understood – bearing in mind my introductory remarks about criticism going against the political grain.

Proposition 2 There is too much fragmented and low-level research to serve as useful a purpose as it might, either professionally or in policy terms

This, too, was a criticism of Hillage. It could be exemplified in so much of the contributions to BERA. For example, the important work at London Metropolitan University on the retention of teachers (and on the changing nature and use of supply teachers) must remain, because of funding, small-scale, without the proper coordination with similar work going on elsewhere (e.g. Cambridge) and without the large-scale longitudinal studies which would be so valuable.

Because of the necessarily fragmented way in which research is institutionalized under present organizational and funding arrangements, there are very few places that can orchestrate research on a large scale, within interdisciplinary, well-funded communities. Too often, therefore, the big questions (within which small-scale but vital case studies take on a more universal significance) do not get asked on, say,

- the funding and governance of initial teacher training and of the many, poorly conceptualized low-impact initiatives of the Teacher Training Agency
- the embracing by government of public–private initiatives in the creation and running of schools and educational services
- even the Research Council's (ESRC) Teaching and Learning Programme, which launched several expensive projects without any overarching conceptual framework

Proposition 3 The changing shape of higher education will inevitably lead to a hierarchy of institutions in

terms of research funding, academic status and research students

Such a hierarchy was anticipated in the Green Paper of Shirley Williams (when Secretary of State) of a quarter of a century ago, which proposed three types of university – research-based, research and teaching, teaching. The hostile outcry at the time meant that such a Treasury-led view would need to await a more propitious moment, and the rapid expansion of universities without a commensurate expansion of funding is surely such a propitious moment. And this is reflected in:

- a Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) which, as in football's Premier Division with its TV-led funding arrangement, will allow only little mobility between differently funded institutions
- a free market in student places with the removal of the MASN (Maximum Student Number)
- a division of Universities UK into three groups, each with its own secretariat and distinctive mission

Response

Proposition 4 To respond to this situation, there is a need to review the institutional and financial basis of research

The current funding encourages competition rather than collaboration, an anal-retentive attitude towards one's research rather than the openness to cooperation and to criticism which are essential. This is particularly the case where institutions tend to be small, without the interdisciplinary forums essential for good research and often lacking in the wide range of essential expertise.

Hence, I make four recommendations:

1 There should be a few powerful, well-funded, regionally based centres of research.
2 Such centres, although certainly located in specific universities with excellent facilities and resources, would be accessible to all research-active staff within the region. Such staff would (where relevant) be members of and, indeed, leaders of research teams and projects. The reason for this is, quite simply, that outside a small handful of institutions there is not the size or the range of expertise to conduct the large-scale, interdisciplinary

research which is needed – there is not the vibrant community of independent researchers into which universities can plug. Furthermore, funding for research should increasingly follow research teams at such centres, which teams will be drawn from across institutions – and which (as is well argued in Gibbons *et al.*, 1994) will come together and separate as the research agenda evolves. And training for future researchers will increasingly be focused on such teams, where greater specialization and research apprenticeships will be secured as members of research teams.

3 Such powerful, interdisciplinary, large-scale, cooperative and accessible university centres should be so funded and so organized as to preserve an independent critical tradition which is always in danger of being eroded.

4 There should be maintained a close professional and research connection between such centres and schools and colleges, which would benefit from the network of expertise and research made possible.

Proposition 5 At the same time, there needs to be a review of the quality assurance arrangements for the research, in particular the peer reviewing of key journals, to ensure professional, academic and political confidence in the reporting of research

One of the side consequences of the Research Assessment Exercise has been the proliferation of journals to meet the proliferation of articles which academics need to publish. This cannot be good for the reporting of educational research, if only because it must cast doubt upon the quality of peer reviewing. Peer reviewing, if conducted well, is a time-consuming and demanding task. But it receives no brownie points. RAE grades are in no way affected by the expertise and time devoted to that – and yet the health of any research community depends on it. There is a need for journals (if they are to have standing in any future RAE) to ensure they have the very strictest of standards, to declare what these are and to reveal their reviewers. There is a need, also, for the panel to take such an activity into account in its evaluation of the research ethos and vibrancy of the respective communities.

Conclusion

In my view, there is much excellent research within BERA-affiliated institutions. But it could be more powerful and effective if the institutional and funding arrangements, which support it, were radically reviewed. Otherwise it is likely that much research will remain too small-scale, too fragmented, too narrowly focused – and the voice of the researcher unheard in the political debate. In recent years, the quality of BERA has been reflected in the quality of its journal and of the vigorous discussions in *Research Intelligence*.

However, there is a danger that the RAE, and the importance of obtaining high grades for funding purposes, will drive certain institutions to abandon initial teacher training. This would be disastrous both for teacher training and for educational research. We must find a funding mechanism which does not drive institutions in that direction. But also, in terms of their own self-interest and self-preservation, might I suggest they remember Chicago.

Notes

Chapter 1

1 Lawrence Kohlberg was Professor of Education at Harvard University and director of the Center for Moral Development. He had a profound effect upon the theory of, and research into, moral development and education through the longitudinal studies he conducted into the different stages of moral judgement (see Kohlberg, 1981 and 1983).

2 That philosophical tradition is represented in the work of Hare (1981) and Rawls (1972), to whom reference was frequently made, and of course Immanuel Kant.

3 Lawrence Stenhouse established the Centre for Applied Research in Education (CARE) at the University of East Anglia, following his directing of the highly innovative Humanities Curriculum Project or HCP (1967-72). His book *An Introduction to Curriculum Research and Development* (1975) embodies the theory of curriculum development which underpinned HCP as well as this philosophical position developed in *Culture and Education* (1967).

4 Derek Morrell, a career civil servant, was appointed joint director of the Curriculum Steering Group within the Ministry of Education in 1962. This quickly gave way in 1964 to the Schools Council, which was very much his brain-child, and of which he became Joint Secretary. His lectures to the College of Preceptors in 1966, *Education and Change*, are a clear and inspiring account of the vision which lay behind his founding of the Schools Council (see Morrell, 1966).

Chapter 2

1 The Schools Council was established in 1964 and was closed in 1984. Its members were very largely teachers together with representatives of employers, parents, the community and the Department of Education and Science. Its aim was to support teachers through curriculum research and development, not to dictate what should be taught.

2 The Technical and Vocational Education Initiative was announced in 1982 by the Prime Minister in order to encourage a more practical

and vocationally oriented education for young people. It was funded through the Department of Employment (and its agency the Manpower Services Commission). Local authorities and their schools were initially sceptical of the initiative because it seemed to be introducing a much more utilitarian view of education. Soon, however, it became popular because it encouraged quite innovative approaches to learning, especially through experimental and more practical modes of learning.

Chapter 3

1 The Technical and Vocational Education Initiative is described in Chapter 2, note 2. Following this (though slightly overlapping) the government tried to initiate a similar project in universities. 'Enterprise in Higher Education' put money unto universities if they could show that their different degree courses incorporated the skills, knowledge and attitudes which related more closely to the need of employers.

2 In the 1980s the National Council for Vocational Qualifications (NCVQ) was established to standardize qualifications at five different levels for a very wide range of employment-related skills and competencies. These were called National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs). However, there was also a 'prevocational tradition', reflected in TVEI already referred to, in which more vocationally oriented courses were seen as a vehicle for a general education rather than vocationally specific skills. Hence, parallel with NVQ, were established General National Vocational Qualifications (GNVQ) at three levels – Foundation, Intermediate and Advanced. The consequence was a three-track system – academic (GCSE and GCE A Levels), general vocational (GNVQ) and vocational (NVQ).

3 Both the City and Guilds of London Institution (CGLI) and the Business and Technical Educational Council (BTEC) were examining boards – the former (founded over a century ago) mainly for courses at the lower skills level (operative and craft), the latter at a higher level (technician). Both were adept at producing qualifications which had national recognition but which were valid reflections of practical achievements and competencies. Both CGLI and BTEC have now been incorporated in the so-called 'academic' examination boards – GCLI in AQA, BTEC in Edexcel – reflecting, I suppose, the effort to bring together the academic and the vocational.

Chapter 4

1 The title derives from an unpublished essay by my colleague, Stephen Carney.

2 The National Commission for Education was established with private funding by Sir Claus Moser following his presidential address to the British Association in 1990. He had argued that, such were the problems facing education at every level, a Royal Commission was

needed. After this proposal was rejected by government he set up his own Commission chaired by Lord Walton.

3 See Chapter 3, notes 2 and 3.

Chapter 6

1 Mr Jim Callaghan was the Labour Government's Prime Minister from 1976 to 1979. The speech he gave at Ruskin College, Oxford, in 1976, was the first time that a Prime Minister had devoted a speech to education – the reversal of a long tradition in which the content of education was seen to be a local and professional responsibility.

2 Mr Kenneth Baker was the Secretary of State for Education and Science who introduced, in 1988, the Education Act which prescribed both a National Curriculum and a national system of assessment linked to the National Curriculum. The National Curriculum consisted of ten subjects (of which three – mathematics, English and sciences – were 'foundation subjects') and the standards to be achieved in these subjects were made explicit at ten levels, with the normal level of achievement for students prescribed for different ages or 'key stages'.

3 The General Certificate of Education (GCE) was introduced in 1951. There were two levels – Ordinary (O) and Advanced (A). These were normally taken at the ages of 16 and 18 respectively by the minority of students attending grammar schools or independent schools. In 1963 a parallel examination system was established mainly for those at secondary modern schools – the Certificate of Secondary Education (CSE). There were three modes: Mode I, where the examinations were externally set and marked; Mode II, where the examinations were internally set but externally marked; and Mode III, where the examinations were internally set and marked but externally moderated. Efforts were then made to establish equivalence between GCE 'O' Level and CSE Grade I. In 1985, CSE and GCE 'O' Level were combined into a unified examination, the General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE).

4 The Assessment of Performance Unit (APU) was established in the 1970s to provide longitudinal data which could enable policy-makers to find out whether performance against standards was rising or declining – and, indeed, which would enable schools to compare their performance with that of the national profile. Such comparisons required: (a) a curriculum model (six areas of experience), (b) light sampling so that the assessment did not interfere with the curriculum, and (c) a yardstick whereby comparisons could be made over time despite changes in the curriculum. Much was achieved by the APU. But comparisons over time proved technically very difficult. Much optimism was placed in the Rasch mathematical model, but that eventually proved to be inadequate for the task.

5 See Chapter 3, note 2.

6 The Further Education Unit (FEU) was established within the DES

in the late 1970s with a view to supporting curriculum development and assessment within Further Education. The first problem it addressed was that of an increasing number of students staying on in education after 16, who had no specific vocational purpose. Its early papers, 'A Basis for Choice' and 'Vocational Preparation', provided a basis for a pre-vocational curriculum which influenced the development of a range of general vocational qualifications.

Chapter 7

1 These points were made by the then Permanent Secretary of the DES to a World Bank Soros Conference in Oxford in July 1997.
2 See Chapter 2, note 1, and Chapter 1, note 4, on the origin and purpose of the Schools Council.

Chapter 8

1 The Bullock Report, *A Language for Life,* resulted from a Royal Commission established to examine the teaching of English. The centrality of language to everything else in the curriculum was argued for and policies and practices followed in all schools in 'language across the curriculum'.

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