

**Educational Action Research within Teaching
as a Research-Based Profession**

The BERA Review: March 1999 - February 2000

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1 Foreword

My main concern throughout researching and writing this review has been to allow it to have an inner life of its own, to grow of its own accord, and to speak as much as possible with the voices of its contributors. The central focus of this text is action research. It is a form of educational research that I am sure you have frequently heard described as: “Research *with*, not research *on*”. In order to remain in keeping with the spirit of the genre, I do not intend to explicate the title given above solely by analysing an appropriate selection taken from the published literature. I hope you will understand that my intention for the process of this review is *collaboration*, as I extend an invitation to you to participate and to contribute.

You will come to see that the material which makes up the skeleton of this text came to my attention as the result of ‘one thing leading to another’. I have not attempted to supply an answer to the question: ‘What is the current state of research-based professionalism?’ or ‘What are the standards of judgement that may be employed to identify examples of good-quality educational research?’. Out of habit, I have turned at the very start to the question posed by Heidegger in 1955: *Was ist das - die Philosophie?* and to George Steiner’s distinctive English translation: ‘What is it to ask, what this thing - Philosophy - is?’ The question to which this text attempts a response becomes:

- What is it to ask, what this thing - ‘Research-based Professionalism’ - is?

With my review/research question posed in this form, I am obliged as the questioner to remain an integral part of the questioning. I must tread a path with others *inside* the subject of enquiry and give an account of how it is for us as we undertake that journey. It is not sufficient to stand *outside* the subject, to analyse it, and then to look for the construction of a definition. It is against my nature to follow directly the rather deterministic formula of Peter Foster and Martyn Hammersley (1998) who suggest:

“... two principles on the basis of which reviews could be constructed: so as to represent the current state of knowledge in a particular field of research or in order to provide resources designed to address a particular policy question.” (p.615)

I *shall* review the current literature and my intention *is* for the final text to act as a contribution that addresses a particular policy question, that of teaching as a research-based profession. However, the process by which I pursue the review is to me of equal importance to the final outcome. At the moment, my process is evolving and I think that it is important for you to understand the form of that evolution and the manner in which it culminates in the selection of material for inclusion in the review.

2 Introduction

(i) The review process

What do others have to say about the process of carrying out a review? Elizabeth Graue and Carl Grant (1999) describe past views of the scholarly literature as the construction of a wall and the review as an architectural examination of it. The wall as a whole embodies the notion of foundations and structure, an accumulation of evidence which allows us to build up a knowledge base that is concrete, identifiable, and definitive, and which is reviewable in those terms. However, they then point in the direction I wish to explore as they state:

“As the approaches to research in education have diversified, this image of the review might be reframed to explore how theoretical assumptions *provide a context for what a review might be.*” (p.1, my emphasis)

Teaching as a research-based profession has primary and secondary school teachers and their practice at its prime focus. Members of this group tend mainly to write accounts of their action research enquiries into their own personal practices. Members of the academy tend to write papers that comment on action research as a genre. The role of these, more theoretical, influences that come from the academy is to inform, guide, and nurture the research of school-based practitioners. If I am to develop and explicate my own process for this review, then I must look first to the writings of the academy to ‘provide a context for what *this* review might be’ (Graue and Grant, *ibid.*).

Grace Livingston (1999) shifts me away from the objectivising pick, shovel, and wheelbarrow school of reviewing and affirms my interest in process:

“The issue of the bringing together of texts and how they are brought together ... is a key established component of doing a review. ... A review must then be tempered by a sense of openness ... one that is framed by a new sense of rigor which puts pressure on the markers of more positivist renditions ...” (pp.15/16)

In order to review, I must select and selection involves a recasting of perspective and, by implication, of content. Following my own inclination for personal engagement and dialogue, the question I must ask in order to select is “How can I hear you?” and, more particularly “Who are you?” Livingston (1999, *ibid.*) marks out my intended perspective in envisaging:

“... a review as a recasting tool (that) can work to make the lived ... more proximate.” (p.10)

You should by now understand that I am ‘starting from scratch’ in this enterprise and with very few pre-conceptions about my role. I like to think that I am aware of those pre-conceptions (prejudices) that I do have. You will see the development of my understanding as this text unfolds as a historical document, presented largely in the sequence in which events happened. Patti Lather (1999) describes the sort of approach I intend taking when she says that a review can exemplify a non-mastery approach:

“... a learning that can tolerate its own failure of knowledge and the detour of not understanding.” (p.4)

I do not for one moment appeal to this stance as a means to shirking rigour. However, I am not ‘one who knows’ or an ‘expert in the field’; to paraphrase Lather I am a person whose knowing is more situated, partial, and perspectival, one who, while not knowing everything, does know something. She places me precisely when she says:

“I am particularly interested in the reviewer who uses the writing of the review as a way of knowing, the reviewer who writes himself or herself into what they both know and do not know by the end of the exercise. ... Laurel Richardson (1994) terms this “writing as a method of enquiry”, the process by which “we come to our knowing through our writing.” (p.4)

At this point, a thumbnail autobiography in terms of titles, labels, and excursions will help further to reveal the person with whom I hope you will engage in the process of furthering this review.

(ii) Your reviewer

Peter Mellett

Born 1946

BSc Chemistry Nottingham University 1965-68

DipEd Bath University 1970-71

Secondary science teacher 1971-89

Freelance writer/editor 1986-

Bearded white English male

MA in education 1989-94. Action research dissertation title:

- How can I undertake and understand my search for an enhanced comprehension of my own life through moving beyond forms of existence that are grounded in "mere formal rationality and instrumental reason"?

This enquiry was initiated by reflecting on a passage in Rick Roderick's (1986) *Habermas and the foundation of critical theory*:

".... the Enlightenment project of liberating humanity from myth and the unknown has, by becoming an end in itself, turned into its opposite - a new and more powerful force of domination. The old terror before the unknown becomes a new terror: the fear of anything that cannot be calculated, standardised, manipulated or instrumentalised. Enlightenment progress in scientific-technological knowledge (=power), while creating the objective possibility for a truly free society, leads to the domination of external nature, society and inner nature. What Lukacs analysed as the reification of consciousness was the price the potential subjects of liberation paid for the progressive overcoming of material necessity. Throughout the course of Western civilisation, the rationality of myth, as well as the Enlightenment which replaced it as reason only to become a myth itself, exposes Western reason as a destructive force. Reason abstracts, conceptualises, and seeks to reduce the concrete and the non-identical to identity, to destroy the otherness of the other. *Horkheimer and Adorno locate the irrationality of what Weber analysed as rationalisation at its deepest source - the identity logic which is the fundamental structure of Western reason. Human liberation could be conceived, if at all, only as a complete break with mere formal rationality and instrumental reason....*"

(p.40 my emphasis)

There I stood, a child of the Enlightenment who had earlier embarked on a taught master's course with the prime intention of improving the quality of his thinking. Now Horkheimer and Adorno were telling me that the real problem was the foundation of my reason (described by them as a 'destructive force'). I looked around me anew through the lens of their argument - and finally came to understand and accept the basis for their reasoning. More than six years later, I know that I cannot confront this challenge head-on; but it is now written large on the standard I hold above me as I go through life.

3 The March seminar

(i) My starting point

Work on the Bath contribution to the BERA review began in March 1999 with a seminar intended to clarify the perspective to be taken and to decide my terms of reference. Twenty delegates attended, including nine lecturers from seven universities, six teachers from five schools, and five other researchers (I was accounted under the last group).

I came to this opening seminar with just a few initial impressions in my mind. I understood that a significant part of the impetus for BERA commissioning the review had been provided by the publication of the Tooley Report (Tooley and Derby, 1998). On reading that report, I had particularly noted Tooley's persistent use of the phrase '*academic educational research*' (my italics). My attention was immediately grasped by the opening statement:

"... this report aims to provide some badly-needed evidence to inform the debate about the quality of educational research."

Reading further, I understood that Tooley and Derby had collected this "badly-needed evidence" by examining against a set of their own criteria a total of 41 articles from 5 journals. They later described this process as producing "vignettes". As I read further into the report, the tone of Tooley's voice in my head became more and more like the scornful carping of the Sun newspaper, speaking with the voice and values of its proprietor as it pursues one of its self-righteous campaigns (ostensibly on behalf of its readership). I saw the "feminist foucauldian post-structuralist researcher" set up as a target and duly knocked down. Action research as a research methodology appears only at pp.65/66 with just a very small input from practising teachers. Unpacking the adjective 'academic' in the term 'academic educational research' revealed to my mind a bilious scorn which seemed to regard that term as being almost oxymoronic. Bridget Somekh (1994) notes this tendency:

'... the word 'academic' is frequently used as a term of abuse by the media, politicians and the public to suggest out-dated ideas unrelated to the conditions of something called 'the real world'.' (p.360)

I also understood that, in turn, the Tooley report had been commissioned by HM Chief Inspector of Schools in response to David Hargreaves' (1996) annual TTA lecture 'Teaching as a Research-based Profession: possibilities and prospects'. I noted Hargreaves's challenging assertion that:

"...the gap between researchers and practitioners (is the) fatal flaw in educational research."

I knew that Hargreaves, in turn, was subsequently challenged by Martyn Hammersley (1997) who concluded *inter alia* that:

"Hargreaves' lecture is effectively an evaluation of educational research and, as with all evaluations, the conclusions are very sensitive to the standard of evaluation used."

Hammersley's appeal to what I term 'standards of judgement' seemed to me to be at the centre of the debate about identifying good-quality educational research. Hargreaves had made the distinction between 'researchers' and 'practitioners' and Tooley had reinforced this distinction by the use of the qualifier *academic* in his scrutiny of educational research.

To my mind, the fuss stirred up by Tooley obscures the challenge laid down to the academy by Hargreaves's address: that it identifies, develops, and fosters forms of educational research that are themselves educational. In his conference paper *Supporting Teacher Research: a case for partnership, some ways and means and issues arising*, Rob Halsall (1999) gives a positive response to Hargreaves:

"... We suggest that of all the possible developments that would support schools that are committed to teacher research for school development, the key one is the development of research partnerships. At present, there is much useful partnership activity but the examples of such are scattered and uncoordinated. It might make sense to explore further some of the ideas put forward by David Hargreaves regarding the funding of educational research in the UK. We agree with Day's (1997) analysis of this paper:

'... It is, Hargreaves suggests, often researchers, not practitioners, who determine the agenda of educational research ... it is true that much research by academics does not teach, does not influence, and is not valued by teachers in schools. ... There is much in David Hargreaves's paper to be critical of ... Nevertheless some of his criticisms do contain more than a grain of truth; and the stated purpose of his lecture - to find ways of increasing the impact of influence of educational research on the improvement of practice through new partnerships between researchers and practitioners - is very close to that of Lawrence Stenhouse (1978), who wrote of his own purposes: 'My trade is that of educational researcher and my principal obsession the relation of theory to practice and of researchers to teachers' ..."

However, in all this debate to and fro, I think it is important to consider the vocabulary used by the various parties and ensure that words have a common currency, particularly when using short quotations for the purposes of assisting reflection on a developing line of argument. David Hargreaves uses the word "research" and the phrase "evidence-based teaching". His own particular meanings are shown further in his 1997 paper *In Defence of Research for Evidence-based Teaching: a rejoinder to Martyn Hammersley*. I have no quarrel with his opening assertion that:

"The core of my original argument is simply stated. It is that educational research should and could have much more relevance for, an impact on, the professional practice of teachers than it now has." (p.405)

His original theme (Hargreaves, 1996) was strongly coloured by a comparison between doctors and teachers and the relationship between research and their respective professional practices. Hargreaves' view of what constitutes, or what should constitute, educational research is revealed when he says:

“... there is a poor infrastructure to the knowledge base of teachers compared to the natural sciences and biology for doctors. It was once thought that this could be created through psychological and sociological theory and research, from which general laws on learning and organisations might be applied to educational phenomena. The outcome so far has been disappointing, though *it may be that cognitive psychologists and neuroscientists will soon produce something finer.*” (p.410, my emphasis)

Here is a view of educational research that does not square with my own.
Furthermore:

“Teachers’ lack of a deep, scientific knowledge base for their professional practice is no bar against using scientific procedures to assess the effects of pedagogic practices and decisions. Such research can proceed even if the likelihood ... of discovering the scientific laws and the deep causal structures affecting classroom life is denied. Such research already exists in education: *my argument is that we need more of it of a higher quality.*” (p.411, my emphasis)

Hammersley (1997) noted that Hargreaves’ 1996 TTA lecture did not mention action research. Hargreaves’ response to this prompting is less than generous. He starts from the assertion that Kurt Lewin, “the father of action research” believed “that research has a double function - both to produce high quality social science and to generate applications for human betterment.” He then claims that action researchers associated with the name of Lawrence Stenhouse, whilst acknowledging Lewin’s influence, have largely abandoned the first element of his double function of research, partly through turning to Habermas and Schön as inspirational sources. Hargreaves claims to be a pluralist “believing that a diversity of research approaches is most likely to produce high quality applications *and* a scientific infrastructure.” I read his requirement for the latter as being his chief concern, a view reinforced by his implicit dismissal of the school of educational research to which I subscribe:

“Whilst this school [the heirs of Lawrence Stenhouse] has championed the ‘teacher as researcher’, and doubtless teachers have profited as individual ‘reflective practitioners’ from their studies, I have no evidence that, taken as a whole, teachers-as-researchers and their supervisors have generated a body of knowledge that Lewin envisaged or that the outcomes have been widely disseminated.” (p.412)

There seem to be two distinctly different understandings of the phrase ‘educational research’. The two camps are separately made up from ‘the heirs of Lawrence Stenhouse’ and those who look to scientific method to ‘produce something finer’. I believe that these two camps are divided by that ancient principle known as the autonomy of ethics, usually attributed to David Hume. This principle holds that statements of value and statements of fact form logically independent realms of discourse. I take those two logical realms to be respectively those of dialectical logic and of propositional logic.

I regard education as a value-laden activity. Hargreaves (1997, bid) states that the core of his interest is for educational research to have greater impact on the professional practice of teachers. Rather than looking to medicine for parallels in professional development, I prefer to consider carpentry. To my mind, a carpenter expects tool manufacturers to research and produce better quality steels for sharper

cutting edges, to develop whole new ranges of tools, and to suggest techniques for using them. The carpenter then selects new equipment from this array to add to the existing tool chest as he or she asks the questions of the sort: “How can I realise my inspiration more fully?” Remember that here I am speaking of the heirs of Chippendale and ‘Mousy’ Thomas, not of the producers of chipboard pack-flat kitchen units. To adapt Hargreaves’ phrase above, cognitive psychologists and neuroscientists *may* soon produce something finer. However, I look on these researchers ultimately as toolmakers, the results of whose generalised researches *I* shall consider for inclusion in *my* practice as *I* ask particularised questions of the sort: “How can *I* improve the quality of *this* educational practice that *I* have with *these* people *here* ?”

For my part, I have always assumed that action research, as an identifiable form of educational research, overcomes these distinctions between researcher and practitioner by involving school teachers in a heuristic that consists of two interwoven strands: teachers respond to their own questions of the sort: “How can I improve the quality of my practice?” while the academy works with them in a collaborative partnership that informs the evolving descriptions and explanations of the research. There is much published work that attests to this achievement (see Appendix A). The academy may also provide accreditation of research undertaken by teachers, by evaluating it against established standards of judgement. Bridget Somekh (1995), in an invited paper presented at the 1994 BERA conference, summed up the contribution of action research to development in social endeavours:

“Action research methodology bridges the divide between research and practice. It directly addresses the knotty problem of the persistent failure of research in the social sciences to make a difference in terms of bringing about actual improvements in practice.” (p.340)

Educational action research enquiries fade the distinction between ‘researcher’ and ‘practitioner’. There are practitioner-researchers in the academy and practitioner-researchers in schools. My own engagement with Action Research stems from a desire to improve through reflective enquiry some aspect of my practice. The affective side of me is attracted to the notions of, and involvement in, community, dialogue, and partnership as I pursue my enquiry. The cognitive part of me is attracted to the requirement for rigour and validity when making a claim to knowledge. The views expressed at the opening seminar, and in subsequent communications, lead me to believe that most participants share a similar overall outlook.

(ii) My terms of reference.

I came to the March seminar with the outlook described above and an otherwise open mind. Whilst I had my own perspective on educational research, I was aware that part of my role was to listen to the developing mood of the meeting and then to act as its agent, delegated to pursue the review within certain agreed parameters. Pam Lomax of Kingston University opened the day’s proceedings with an address entitled *Working Together for Educative Community Through Research*. Here lies the distaff side to David Hargreaves’ view of educational research and teacher professionalism. Setting the agenda for the day, Prof. Lomax outlined the contribution that action

research could have in engendering a new discipline of educational enquiry. The main thrust of this paper aimed directly at developing the idea of teaching as a research-based profession. The address (Lomax, 1999) was later published (in BERA Research Intelligence) as *The significance of action research and self-study for evidence-based professionalism and the development of community*. (I refer now to the contents of the published written paper rather than to the live address given on the day). The points raised by Prof. Lomax and the summary of intention reached by the seminar largely mark out the terms of reference under which I shall carry out this review.

Lomax (1999, *ibid.*) starts her argument for teaching as a research-based profession from two general observations that:

(i) “Collaborative energy for a partnership between teachers and teacher educators that would strengthen research-based professionalism has foundered due to the conflicting messages about the relative involvement of schools and teacher education departments in the education of teachers ... the professional framework for the continuing professional development of teachers supported by the Teacher Training Agency ... has sought to marginalise the contribution of teachers to higher education.” (p.11) and that:

(ii) “...Lawn and Ozga (1988) suggest that the teaching profession is undergoing a period of proletarianisation. ... a long term move to alter teachers’ consciousness about their work and deprofessionalise them. This is a real threat, but I believe that an evidence-based professionalism that includes action research and self study can resist the threat of proletarianisation.” (p.11)

If school teachers are to count themselves as members of a profession, then they should consider the classical idea of professionalism as a mode of life that is concerned with “the quality and character of people’s actions” (Hargreaves and Goodson, 1996) and which involves the development of a shared body of generalised and systematic knowledge. Lomax puts forward a view of professionalism as a process of negotiation rather than as a measurement against an ideal type, in which the idea of teachers’ continuing professional development is underpinned by an imperative to improve practice. She develops this point by observing that:

“There needs to be recognition that professionalism is a process with a dialectical rather than a consensual basis. [implying] both critique and collaboration. ... The basic epistemological unit must be the individual. ... There needs to be a self regulated, continuously validated, moral imperative underpinning educational action rather than a set of restrictive, off the shelf, technical solutions. ... These principles would allow for situational differences so that particular communities could work in ways best suited to themselves.” (p.12)

A notion of educative relationship is then introduced which is fundamental to the majority of action researchers today - a relationship in which:

“... each side is equally willing to teach and to learn, as opposed to a relation where one always teaches and the other always learns. It is a relation where differences between individuals, such as differences in perceived and actual authority and power, are overcome.” (p.13)

She summed up the action researcher's view of learning as:

"... the outcome of a dialectical process that leads to change ... an intra-subjective dialectic which occurs when we share our representation of our idea with others and their affirming or questioning response to our communicated meaning challenges us to see something else." (p.14)

This view leads directly to the identification of:

"... the two essential elements of a new discipline of educational enquiry for evidence based professionalism: personal development and critical community."

At this point, I must interject some comments to show how this text and address impinge on my own developing understanding and point of view. With Roderick's (1986, *ibid.*) summary of Horkheimer and Adorno railing against the foundations of Western reason at the back of my mind, I shall introduce the voice of Donald Schön (1995) and show how he works in tandem with Lomax to initiate a move away from 'formal rationality and instrumental reason'.

According to Lomax, "evidence-based professionalism that includes action research and self study can resist the threat of proletarianisation." (p.11) She goes on to develop this theme by stating:

"Respect for evidence is the corner stone of evidence based professionalism, but evidence does not necessarily imply an absolutist position. ... In the past, there has been a tendency to accept scientific evidence which appeals to rational criteria rather than other evidence that might appeal to moral, spiritual, political, aesthetic, emotional or affective criteria, or to the practical criteria that practitioners might employ. ... the most challenging aspect of a new evidence-based professionalism based on a value of respect for the integrity of our acts. ... A new discipline of educational enquiry." (p.13)

As Lomax appeals for the establishment of a new discipline of educational enquiry, Schön (1995) makes a call, as I understand it, to establish living standards of judgement (Laidlaw 1996; Whitehead 1989) that are internalised and which relate to a new epistemology.

In developing his notion of a new epistemology, Schön starts by describing the "new forms of scholarship" presented by Ernest Boyer in his *Scholarship reconsidered* (1990): a 'scholarship of discovery' that incorporates three new forms of scholarship: the scholarship of integration, the scholarship of application, and the scholarship of teaching. Thus a new epistemology arises that respectively is connected and contextualised, that is responsibly applied to consequential problems, and that transforms and extends knowledge as well as transmitting it.

Lomax (1999, *ibid.*) speaks of the current tendency to accept scientific/objectivised evidence which appeals to rational criteria rather than to subjectivised evidence that might appeal more to affective criteria.

In the same vein, Schön suggests:

“Perhaps there is an epistemology of practice that takes fuller account of the competencies practitioners sometimes display in situations of uncertainty, complexity, uniqueness and conflict. Perhaps there is a way of looking at problem setting and intuitive artistry that presents these activities as described and as susceptible to a kind of rigor that falls outside the boundaries of technical rationality. ... It seems right to say that our knowledge is *in* our action.” (p.29)

The ideas of Lomax and Schön seem to complement each other. In a focused and practical manner, Pam Lomax (1999, *ibid.*) outlines “... a new evidence based professionalism based on a value of respect for the integrity of our acts. ... A new discipline of educational enquiry ...” (p.13) that could act in an emancipatory manner within the practices of teachers and their educational relationships. Action research principles and practice are fundamental to this new form of evidence-based professionalism. For his part, Donald Schön (1995, *ibid.*) calls for a *new scholarship* that can provide an appropriate form of description and explanation of that *new discipline of educational enquiry*: He senses that the new scholarship: “ ... must imply a kind of action research with norms of its own, which will conflict with the norms of technical rationality - the prevailing epistemology built into the research universities.” (p.27) According to Lomax, these new norms will follow the style of what Andy Hargreaves (1994) has called ‘situational certainty’ as opposed to ‘scientific certainty’. In similar vein, John Elliott (1993) stresses the importance of ‘situational understanding’ in his model of ‘practical educational science’ (see also Dreyfus, 1981). This, in turn, requires building up communities of enquiry capable of criticising such research and fostering its development. I see these movements as running counter to David Hargreaves’ comments (1997, *ibid.*) quoted above, in which he asserts: “I have no evidence that ... teachers-as-researchers and their supervisors have generated a body of knowledge that Lewin envisaged or that the outcomes have been widely disseminated.” To repeat myself: we are seeing here two rather different views of that which constitutes knowledge and that which constitutes research.

.....

Under the sub-heading *Towards recasting what a review can be and do* Grace Livingston (1999, *ibid.*) says:

“... social junctures call out for historical and theoretical activity; for explanations and a sense of placement, regarding the meaning and possibilities of the times. Sometimes, in the midst of the genuine pressures and unfortunate rancour of the educational enterprise, we are prone to forget.” (p.14)

Indeed, we are *so* prone to forget. Few encounters between individuals have no educative content; I have always suspected that the form of the theories we make about each other as a result of these encounters is frequently faulty and, at bottom, lacks humanity. Within the context of formal educative relationships, I know from experience that such theories, when based on instrumental reason and technical rationality alone, do not help us to make claims that we understand our own educational development (Whitehead, 1993). Such theories of education are not educational. Moreover, we can end up treating each other according to these

theories; Western reason is employed to endorse imposed power relations and confirms itself as an essentially 'destructive force' (Adorno & Horkheimer, 1944/1989). Echoing Grace Livingston, my hope in respect of this current enterprise is that:

"... a review may help in recasting and bringing together differently our prescriptive categories ..." (p.14)

Pam Lomax (1999, *ibid.*) suggests that we embrace a new discipline of educational enquiry; Donald Schön (1995, *ibid.*) provides the outline for a new epistemology of practice to give that new discipline a voice with which it can express descriptions and explanations of its practice. The new discipline of educational enquiry and the new epistemology of practice may not constitute "a complete break with mere formal rationality and instrumental reason" (Roderick 1986, *ibid.*) but they certainly represent for me a step in the right direction. I wish to see all educational researchers, of any and all persuasions, committed to improving the quality of education (of life) experienced by children in schools (and by all people everywhere). As a contribution to this endeavour, I want this review both to exemplify and to engage contributors and readers in the two essential elements of a new discipline of educational enquiry for evidence based professionalism: personal development and critical community.

(iii) The invitation

Immediately following the March seminar, I circulated my own summary of the day's proceedings among the participants for comment. Having taken various observations into account, I then sent the following Email message to the participants and to a selection of BERA members.

From: Peter Mellett <pandjm@globalnet.co.uk>
Subject: BERA Review

Dear xxx

I have been commissioned to carry out the Bath contribution to the current BERA review into educational research. I am sure you are aware of the circumstances that initiated the review, together with its overall terms of reference. A seminar was held at Bath on March 20th to discuss the form and scope of our contribution.

The main points addressed were (quoting from the seminar papers):

- Which research should be included in the review?
- Well known centres involved in action research include Worcester, Kingston, East Anglia, Bath, Sheffield, Newcastle, SCRE, and CARN. How can we make the review as comprehensive as possible across the whole of UK action research?
- How should the research be reviewed?
- What makes educational action research distinctly educational?

The general conclusions of the seminar were that:

- (1) The title of the Bath contribution to the review shall be "Educational Action Research within Teaching as a Research-based Profession".
 - (2) The review process should start by loosely describing the various action research cultures practised by individuals, groups, and institutions.
 - (3) The review should have an inner life which both describes and demonstrates in action the forms of the various cultures and traditions of Action Research.
 - (4) The specific literature cited in the final review paper should emerge in the course of pursuing the review through an ongoing and extended dialogue between participants; the dialogue is to incorporate Action Research processes that show the meanings of standards of judgement emerging in practice over time.
- In order to help initiate our contribution to the review, could you please suggest titles of published articles etc. that you regard as representing examples of good practice in educational action research.
 - If you are able to sum up your own approach to action research (your 'culture') at this stage, then so much the better (earlier correspondents have cited one or more of their own publications).

Once I have a number of replies, I shall try to identify a range of action research 'cultures' in terms of the distinctive standards of judgements used by each. This process is to follow points (3) and (4) of the 'rules of engagement' agreed by the seminar.

The phrase 'ongoing and extended' is perhaps a little fanciful, but I hope you can find time to respond to the first or possibly both of the two questions above. Email responses of any length will be most welcome; otherwise, my postal address is:

16 Tutton Hill
Colerne
Chippenham
Wiltshire
SN14 8DN
Tel: 01225 742163

Thank you

Peter Mellett

4 From terms of reference to intentions for action

(i) The 'respectful editor'

The text of the Email appeal given above summarises the basis of my ‘terms of reference’ for undertaking and writing this review. I received a total of four extended responses (from Margaret Cox, Morwenna Griffiths, Pat D’Arcy, and Jenny Gubb - see Appendix B) that discussed each writer’s approach to educational research. Two contributors (Marion Dadds and Bridget Somekh) supplied copies of published papers that fulfilled the same function. Two others (John Elliott and Chris Day) supplied references. At that point, I had more than sufficient material to weave into a narrative form; I could construct an analysis concluding with a substantive set of standards of judgement that would claim comprehensively to describe the extent of the form of human enquiry known as ‘Educational Action Research’. Armed with these, I could enter the library and select from the literature items for inclusion in the review that exemplify teaching as a research-based profession.

However, my terms of reference cut directly across any intention to reveal standards of judgement through a straight analysis of the material. The ‘rules of engagement’ stipulated *inter alia* that:

- The review should have an inner life which both describes and demonstrates in action the forms of the various cultures and traditions of Action Research (item 3. above).
- The specific literature cited in the final review paper should emerge in the course of pursuing the review through an ongoing and extended dialogue between participants; the dialogue is to incorporate Action Research processes that show the meanings of standards of judgement emerging in practice over time (item 4. above).

My initial intention, therefore, was to incorporate all communications into an evolving running narrative that would arrive ultimately at a final negotiated text. In order to keep action research principles and practice at the centre of prosecuting the review, I envisaged the process to involve me in an author-editor relationship via correspondence in which I was largely to take the latter role. I outlined a number of appropriate action research cycles (McNiff, Lomax, & Whitehead, 1996). However, it soon became clear that allowing contributors to speak for themselves from within the body of their own extended contributions would result in a text of unwieldy form and unwelcome extent.

At that point, a possible way ahead became clear as I deconstructed the title ‘editor’. The key came from a paper by Robert Donmoyer (1996). While he speaks as the editor of a journal, I sense that the processes I am involved with in pursuing this review have a good deal in common with his role. We both have to:

“... figure out how to play the gatekeeper role at a time when there is little consensus in the field about what research is and what scholarly discourse should look like.” (p. 20)

He describes the two approaches to gate keeping that have worked against the encouragement of a humane and open-minded approach to educational research: the

Traditional Response (we talk sense; ‘they’ talk rubbish) and the Balkanization Response (leave ‘them’ to get on with their business while we get on with ours).

I identify two extreme forms of educational researcher. At the one extreme, there are those who look to cognitive psychologists and neuroscientists to ‘soon produce something finer’ and who express their ideas propositionally and in terms of concepts that have a direct connection to demonstrable phenomena and concrete particulars. At the other extreme, there are those who try to express the dialectical and relational art of their lives as literary works that are allusively couched in terms of story telling and metaphor. I suspect that the ‘objectivising-thinkers’ adopt the Traditional Response (we talk sense; ‘they’ talk rubbish) to the ‘subjectivising-feelers’; the reverse view is based on the Balkanization Response (leave ‘them’ to get on with their business while we get on with ours). There is no dialogue and no understanding, particularly from those who make the Traditional Response from their current position of political power within the educational establishment.

Donmoyer then describes a third way, quoting from the conclusions Richard Bernstein (1993) suggests should be drawn from the debates about incommensurability:

“ ... to listen carefully, to use ... linguistic, emotional, and cognitive imagination to grasp what is being expressed and said in ‘alien’ traditions ... [without] either facetiously assimilating what others are saying to our own categories and language ... or dismissing ... [it] as incoherent nonsense.” (p. 22)

The words of this ‘ethical imperative’ turn me back to revisit Pam Lomax’s contention that *respect* is the cornerstone of evidence-based professionalism - respect as understood by Jean Rudduck (1995) to inform the general principles that underpin good research i.e. respect for democratic values, respect for persons, respect for the integrity of our acts at every level of the professional enterprise, and respect for evidence. The concept of myself as a ‘respectful editor’ began to emerge.

How do intend to be a ‘respectful editor’ as I approach these texts? Bridget Somekh (1994, *ibid.*) writes of a manner of approach to and engagement with a text:

“The trustworthiness [as distinct from validity] of practitioner action research knowledge can only be partially established by the text in which the research is reported. This kind of action research report requires a ‘writerly reader’ (Sumara and Luce-Kapler, 1993, building on Bruner’s concept of constructed realities), one who will approach the text with an expectation of collaborating with the author in the construction of knowledge. It appeals to the prior experience of the reader and to his or her passionate engagement with the issues it raises. ... the reader ... is required to engage with it *as if it were data* and construct further knowledge through a kind of action research with the text. ... The power of the writing [in a practitioner’s action research report] is destroyed when it is subjected to critical appraisal on the basis of the criteria normally applied to academic texts.” (p.372 - see also Roland Barthes 1970 volume entitled *S/Z* - the writerly text does not have a single closed meaning; the readerly text treats the reader as a passive consumer, with all those aspects of power relations thereby entailed).

Or, as Pierre Bourdieu (1990) puts it:

“There is a sort of incompatibility between our scholarly mode of thinking and this strange thing that practice is.” (p.382)

The education section in the library at Bath University is filled with papers that address the field of educational research. At some time in the future I must identify examples representing good quality action research enquiries that exemplify and foster teaching as a research based profession. However, I do not wish to attempt this exercise by interrogating or analysing texts in order to assemble a list of standards of judgement, this shopping list (as it were) then to be consulted as I shove my trolley along the aisles of the library-as-repository-of-knowledge-supermarket. How can I realise Schön’s (1995, *ibid.*) ‘new epistemology of practice’ in action? How can I use action research principles and practice in my selective engagement with the texts in the library?

The following section is my response to these questions. It explores and attempts to explicate in words the nature of the intuitive approach that I suspect I have always employed in the selection of texts. It is the result of just such a “kind of action research with the text” suggested by Bridget Somekh (1994, *ibid.*), being the latest product of a recursive loop of writing and reflection carried out either alone or in conversation with others.

(ii) The logic of question and answer

I have arrayed here in front of me the papers provided or referenced by the educational researchers who responded to my Email request, together with the accompanying private correspondences and other sources that I have collected over the past months. These texts are not action research reports produced by the teacher-researchers implicit in Bridget Somekh’s writing above, but are largely papers written by academics. However, for my current purposes, I am choosing to call this material my ‘data’.

In common with most of the writing that engages with the field of educational research, the exposition of the ideas contained my ‘data’ depends heavily on propositional forms of writing. Yet all the statements that constitute a piece of writing are effectively answers to questions; questions that the writer has posed or which the evolving subject matter of the paper has posed to the writer. R. G. Collingwood (1934, 1991) called this relationship ‘the logic of question and answer’. He wrote:

“... you cannot find out what a man (*sic*) means by simply studying his spoken or written statements, even though he has spoken or written with perfect command of language and perfectly truthful intention. In order to find out his meaning, you must also know what the question was (a question in his own mind and presumed to be in yours) to which the thing he has said or written was meant as an answer.” (p.31)

Twenty years later, Hans-Georg Gadamer (1960, 1989) reviewed Collingwood’s ideas and takes essentially the same point of view:

“... the meaning of a sentence is relative to the question to which it is a reply, i.e. it necessarily goes beyond what is said in it.” (p.333)

Gadamer observed *inter alia* that, despite Plato, we are not yet ready for a logic of question and answer. He then notes a further dimension to this questioning:

“Thus we come back to the point that the hermeneutic phenomenon also contains within itself the original meaning of conversation and the structure of question and answer. For an historical text to be made the object of interpretation means that it asks a question of the interpreter. ... To understand a text means to understand this question.” (p.333)

We must understand the question to which the text is an answer (Collingwood) and we must respond to the questions the text asks of us (Gadamer).

Bernstein (1993, *ibid.*) also draws on Gadamer to reinforce his view of the need for dialogical sensitivity when he says:

“Gadamer in his ontological version of hermeneutics has been arguing that our ontological condition, our very being-in-the-world, is to *be* dialogical *beings*.” (p.49, original emphasis) and “One of the primary lessons ... is that we engage in critique as second person *participants* and not as third person neutral observers.” (p.319, original emphasis)

(iii) An aesthetically engaged and appreciative response

The approach outlined above to engaging with a text through a double dialectic of question and answer has an intuitive and aesthetic quality, as described by Collingwood in his earlier writing (1924):

“...and those parts of the work of art which he could not in some sort have invented for himself will pass him by unseen. ‘How much, as one grows older, one finds in so-and-so,’ people say, ‘that one never saw before!’ For one never sees in anybody's work but what one brings to it. ...” (p.68)

Further discussion about bringing an aesthetically engaged and appreciative response to a text is provided by Pat D’Arcy (1999) who draws on the work of Louise Rosenblatt written over a period of more than fifty years. However, before looking at these ideas, I must first explain the reasons for my emphasis on the aesthetic qualities of a text. The obituary for John Wisdom in *The Independent* 15th December 1993 describes a person dedicated to what I consider to be the *humane* pursuit of enquiry:

“... his work [showed] that philosophy can advance and deepen our understanding, not in the ways with which we are familiar in logic and the sciences, but in a way that good literature does. ... He argues for the fundamental character of the particular case in all forms of reasoning ... He argues for the priority of 'mother's method' over 'father's', where the father resorts to general principles in his explanations. It is the mother who has to come to the rescue when the child asks for an explanation of the

father's general principles - what they mean and why the child should believe them. ... Wisdom's philosophy was neither the study of arcane facts, nor the pursuit of complex theories; rather, anyone who has reached a certain linguistic level has, he believed, the capacity both to raise central philosophical doubts and to take steps towards settling them.”

I am concentrating here on the aesthetic aspects of a piece of writing - or certainly on those aspects that are not amenable to a straight form of propositional analysis - because I maintain that these are the implicit elements that convey the main essence of Pam Lomax's *New Discipline of Educational Enquiry*, Donald Schön's *New Epistemology of Practice*, and Richard Bernstein's *Ethical Imperative*. The reviewing process that I am evolving here will particularly look for descriptions and explanations of education action research enquiries that are expressed in these terms. When an educational action researcher writes about an attempt to improve the quality of his or practice, that person is making a claim that they understand their own educational development (Whitehead 1989, 1999). Examples of action research enquiries that communicate the most strongly do indeed “advance and deepen our understanding ... in a way that good literature does” - but only to those that have an appropriately tuned ear.

By way of illustration, the works of Beethoven, Bach, and Schubert speak to me in ways that I can understand and that affect me in a life-affirming and life-enhancing manner. Bruckner makes me feel depressed and Mahler irritates me; I cannot penetrate the immediate surface of their styles; but would I or anyone else claim that these two latter composers, together with the atonality and serialism of Schönberg, warrant no space in our culture? It is a matter of taste and of attitude, two aspects of our selves that act as gatekeepers to our attention and receptivity. Perhaps those who occupy the more positivist paradigms would say that they are not troubled by such matters as taste and attitude, but I maintain that we are all prejudiced by these most fundamental of personal attributes. So far as taste is concerned, I would point you to Gadamer's (1989, *ibid*) discussion of *Taste* pp. 34 - 42 within the Chapter entitled *The significance of the Humanist Tradition*. In particular Gadamer speaks of:

“... the view that the sense of taste ... still contains the beginnings of the intellectual differentiation we make in judging things.” (p.35)

This observation refers to the writing of the 17th century Jesuit Balthazar Gracian who looked on taste as a ‘spiritualisation of animality’. Taste of the tongue “this most animal and inward of our senses” (Gadamer) leads to and co-exists with taste of the mind that prejudices the way that we make our judgements. Drawing on Kant, Gadamer observes that: “... the true sense of community .. is *taste*.” (p.34) In common with Catholics and Protestants, Sunnis and Shias, and the whole host of opposed human communities that insist on looking at the one thing from different entrenched positions, is the “Traditional Response” (Donmoyer, 1996 *ibid*.) to educational research simply a matter of taste? At the moment it seems to me that adherents to the dominant deterministic paradigm might not be as objective-rational in their judgements as they would like to think.

In respect of attitude, Rosenblatt (1985) draws a firm distinction between the two stances that a reader can take to a text - an efferent (i.e. markedly analytical) approach or an aesthetic (i.e. markedly affective) approach:

“In an efferent reading, the reader’s attention is ... focused mainly on what is to be taken away from the transaction ... In an aesthetic reading, the reader’s attention is focused on what he (*sic*) is living through during the reading event. He is attending both to what the verbal signs designate and to the qualitative overtones of the ideas, images, situations and characters that he is evoking under the guidance of the text.” (p.38)

Placing the nuances of the aesthetic approach itself to one side, I wonder, can we *choose* to take either an efferent or an aesthetic approach to a text? Pat D’Arcy (1999, *bid*) offers the view that logically, one would expect a reader to take an aesthetic stance to a work of literature and an efferent stance to non-literary writing; but this is not always necessarily the case. She cites Rosenblatt’s examples of the tendency for respondents to literature to take an efferent stance - whether they are literary critics and theorists, university students or pupils in school:

“The tendency is to turn away from the lived-through experience and to efferently apply a ready-made system of analysis to the reading.” (p.39)

Why do readers turn away from the subjectively-appreciated *smell* of the particular case and prefer to embrace a cognitively generated abstraction? Perhaps it is because the former requires an acknowledgement and an identification of the self that must enter into the transaction of the aesthetic reading. To repeat Collingwood (1924, *ibid.*): “For one never sees in anybody's work but what one brings to it. ...” It is through this transaction or interplay of reader/text that the evocation arises of what the reader ‘makes’ of the story being told by the text inside his or her head. This evocation (Rosenblatt, 1985 *ibid.*):

“... is also aesthetic in the sense that it becomes another story rising out of the transaction that is taking place. This version created by the reader from the words on the page, is variously referred to by theorists as the ‘virtual experience’ (Langer), the ‘literary work’ (Iser) or the ‘virtual text’ (Bruner).” (p.297)

These activities are all closely inter-related aesthetically speaking, leading as they do from choice of stance, through the act of reading, to the virtual text and finally to the reader’s recollection of that evocation. What the reader makes of the story lies at the heart of this whole sequence. It is the virtual text which is evoked as a result of the reader’s stance and transaction with the story, to which an aesthetic response can be made.

My assertion is, therefore, that I engage in a double dialectic with a text as I attempt to explicate and understand the questions answered by the text (Collingwood) and the questions that it asks of me (Gadamer). As I evoke my own virtual text (Rosenblatt) within such a form of question and answer, the text communicates with me by way of a sympathetic resonance. Engaged in the process of review I see myself as a ‘respectful editor’, listening carefully, using linguistic, emotional, and cognitive imagination to grasp what is being expressed and said in both ‘alien’ and

'sympathetic' traditions, without either facilely assimilating what others are saying to my own categories and language or dismissing it as incoherent nonsense (Bernstein in Donmoyer, 1996, bid). What am I trying to say here? It is simply that am convinced that coming into the presence of a text, as coming into the presence of another person, confronts me with that most basic of ontological questions that asks: "Who are you?" My response in general terms is that I am a person who holds certain distinct values relating to freedom, justice, and democracy, which I try to live out in my life. They denote my *attitude*. For me, the next stage of engagement is for me to ask the question of the text or of the person: "Who are you?" Do you espouse, explicate for me, and develop the values of mine in the descriptions and explanations you are giving of your own practice? If not, is there a negative dialectic that I must employ in order to understand educational action research in terms all the attributes that it does not possess? (A useful way of re-examining my certainties). Perhaps it is in this manner that I can attempt to ensure that "the specific literature cited in the final review paper ... emerge(s) in the course of pursuing the review through an ongoing and extended dialogue ... (that incorporates) action research processes that show the meanings of standards of judgement emerging in practice over time." (Terms of Reference).

(iv) Megalothymia

I maintain that the degree to which a text elicits an aesthetically engaged and appreciative response in a reader depends to a large extent on the tastes and attitudes of both writer and reader. Such differences lead to polarities that can exist, for example, between qualitative researchers and quantitative researchers. It is possible to be different and to respect difference without understanding the other's attitude, chosen stance, or standards of judgement. However, there are often baser motivations at work. I now wish to dig a little deeper into attitudes that are dismissive and that seem to pervade the writing of those who currently have the ear of educational policy makers. In this connection, I have always thought that the observations and opinions of Chris Woodhead mark him out as a person fulfilling with energy the important modern role of Socrates' 'gadfly'. But why does he have a need to sneer? Look again at the following passage from David Hargreaves (1997) referred to earlier . Compare the 'I' of Hargreaves with the 'I' of any teacher-as-researcher you know:

"Hammersley notes that in the lecture [Hargreaves, 1996] I ignored 'action research' in education and its potential here, and I should rectify the omission. The father of action research is Kurt Lewin, who ... believed that research has a double function - *both* to produce high quality social science *and* to generate applications for human betterment. Although some action researchers in education ... acknowledge Lewin's influence, they seem largely to have abandoned the first element of his double function of research, perhaps in part because they have turned to Habermas and Schön as inspirational sources. Whilst this school has championed the 'teacher as researcher' ... I have no evidence that, taken as a whole, teachers-as-researchers and their supervisors have generated the cumulative body of knowledge that Lewin envisaged or that the outcomes have been widely disseminated. I am, however, a pluralist ..."

Hold these words *and their tone* in your mind.

Action research is a value-driven activity (viz. Ghaye and Ghaye, 1998, pp. 49-58). As I walk past the shelves containing the literature chronicling the activities of educational researchers over the past five years, I wish to hear the values implicit in them calling out to mine. I am trying to reveal my values to you within this extended preamble so that you may see the process by which the final review selection contained in the *Bibliography* and *Appendix A* to this text has come about. I hope that you are able to affirm my values and my choices, even though these may not necessarily have much or even anything in common with your own. I have in mind the manner in which we may move forward through the agency of a “constrained disagreement” (Macintyre, 1990, p.231) that implies both collaboration and critique. I also have also in mind the manner of moving into the future by means of an “improvisatory self-realisation” described by Richard Winter (1998).

These contexts of affirmation, collaboration, critique, and projection of our selves into our possible futures stand in a state of weary puzzlement and hurt in the face of the sentiments expressed by Hargreaves above. I must ask: what is the intention of the writer of a paper? I turn to Francis Fukuyama’s (1992) discussion of *thymos* and of *megalothymia*, to try to gain a better understanding of who we are (in the broadest sense) as writers and as readers - as living beings who write and who read. Fukuyama develops his ideas from:

“... Hegel’s non-materialist account of history, based on the ‘struggle for recognition’.... human beings have natural needs and desires for ... food, drink, shelter ... Man ... in addition ... wants to be ‘recognised’ ... as a *human being*, that is, with a certain worth or dignity.” (p.xvi)

He continues:

“... The propensity to invest the self with a certain value, and to demand recognition for that value, is what ... we would call “self-esteem”. The propensity to feel self-esteem arises out of the part of the soul called *thymos*. [Plato, in the *Republic* noted that there were three parts to the human soul - a desiring part, a reasoning part, and a part he called *thymos*, or “spiritedness”.] It is like an innate human sense of justice. People believe that they have a certain worth, and when other people treat them as though they are worth less than that, they feel the emotion of *anger*. Conversely, when people fail to live up to their own sense of worth, they feel *shame*, and when they are evaluated correctly in proportion to their worth, they feel *pride*. The desire for recognition, and the accompanying emotions of anger, shame, and pride are parts of the human personality critical to political life. According to Hegel, they are what drives the whole historical process.” (p.xvii)

Within the context outlined above, I feel that questions of anger, shame, and pride should not arise. Any contribution made in an honest and heartfelt manner to improve the quality of an educational process should meet with the universally sought-after affirmation (but not necessarily, endorsement). Where the genesis of that affirmation comes about through an acknowledgement of Fukuyama’s *isothymia* (a desire to be evaluated as equal to others) within the aegis of a critical dialogical community, the person affirmed takes the care-full critique of their contribution as the substance of that affirmation. However, Fukuyama turns his attention solely to self-evaluation and

away from my idealised form of peer-appraisal as he introduces the concept of megalothymia.

“... there is no reason to think that all people will evaluate themselves as the *equals* of other people. Rather, they may seek to be recognised as *superior* to other people, possibly on the basis of true inner worth, but more likely out of an inflated and vain estimate of themselves. *megalothymia*.” (p.182)

What matters to me in the end is how we treat each other; what we do to children and how we engage their energies and aspirations in our schools; and how we treat each other as researchers in the wider contexts of our joined lives within the greater world. I maintain that megalothymia is the source of the sneer shaped by Chris Woodhead’s mouth, the dismissive tone of David Hargreaves, and the Sun-newspaper-syntax of James Tooley (the introduction to whose report was written by Woodhead). Fukuyama (and I) maintain that there is no room for megalothymia in a *just* society:

“Socrates enters into an extended discussion of *thymos* in the *Republic* because the thymotic part of the soul turns out to be crucial for the construction of his just city “in speech” ...” (p.183)

If our city of educational research and research-based professionalism is to be ‘just in speech’, then we must break down the barriers that exist between the various xenophobic views of that which constitutes valid educational research. There are insights to be gained from each others’ traditions that will help to inform our own ongoing enquiries; and there can be no room for megalothymia.

(v) Principles into practice

At this stage, I am now left wondering what the outcome might be of approaching a text with the *attitude* that I have attempted to explicate for myself above. My thoughts turn to Marion Dadds’ (1998) *Supporting Practitioner Research: a challenge*, a paper that has been at my elbow throughout writing this introductory text. Its title and abstract suggest that it is germane to the enterprise I am pursuing here. Will the text elicit in me an engaged and aesthetic response? Will the relationship between myself as reader and Marion Dadds as writer evolve within an isothymic form? What will be the nature of the virtual text induced in me and by me? The content of the paper derives from a conference held in 1996 “for those who support people doing practitioner research in a variety of contexts.” The key purpose of the conference “was to create a reflective space ... to put ourselves into reflective practitioner mode and to learn together.” (p.39)

As I read this paper I am aware of its writer asking questions that act as springs for individual and corporate action of the type “How can I improve?” For example, I suspect that Marion Dadds, as conference convenor, first located the following question to which the structure of the conference as a whole was the answer:

- How can I create a reflective space within the processes of this conference so that delegates can learn together through working in reflective practitioner mode?

A distinct point about this question is that it is a good quality action research question. The thought occurs to me that, if the questions implied and evoked by a text turn out to be the sort of good quality questions asked by action researchers as they each attempt to improve their practice, then I think I shall have discovered a key - to how it is that I shall listen to the texts in the library as I look for examples of work that support the notion of teachers as research based professionals. Remember that I am trying to locate texts, not by carrying out an analysis of papers using criteria in the manner of Tooley, but by deploying those aspects of my cognitive powers *informed by intuition* that I am trying to give a sense (not a description) of here. It's not so much that Tooley's criteria are wrong, as the very fact he had a list of criteria in the first place.

Marion Dadds' paper explicitly asks many questions, the answers to which have specific implications for each reader according to their circumstances. These answers must themselves evoke further practice-specific questions. However, she is addressing a conference of delegates who are talking *about* action research; she is not and they are not carrying out an action research enquiry *per se*. Yet, even if she did not ask the question above of herself, I am still left wondering what evidence the paper contains that some kind of learning has taken place and that the writer's efforts reported in the text have worked towards some kind of benefit and improvement. These aspects are not (quite understandably) overtly addressed through an action enquiry cycle of the sort described by Anthony and Kay Ghaye (1998, *ibid.*), that is:

- What is my concern ?
- Why am I concerned?
- What do I think I can do about it?
- What kind of 'evidence' can I collect to help me make some judgements about what is happening?
- How do I plan to collect such evidence?
- How shall I check that my judgement about what has happened is reasonably fair and accurate ?

However, the invitation is wholly isothymic and evokes a sense that the proceedings of the conference were underpinned by values to which I can subscribe:

“My thoughts were offered as a way of ‘getting the ball rolling’. Nor was there an expectation that my contribution should structure delegates’ conference experiences unless they wished it so. It was offered as a ‘take it or leave it’ starter, on the understanding that delegates’ own questions were more important to them than were mine.” (p.41)

With the circumstances of the conference and the specific characteristics of many of the individual delegates no doubt in mind, Dadds set to raising questions, issues, and perspectives around four key themes:

- 1 The pedagogical practices which should, and could, be adopted in supporting practitioner research;
- 2 Validation practices being employed for practitioner research in award-bearing contexts;
- 3 Cultural, political, and institutional issues which impede practitioner research;
- 4 Working in partnerships in practitioner research.

These themes and their subsequent working out certainly address the first three steps of Ghaye and Ghaye's action enquiry cycle. I see them as representing Dadds' attempt to engage delegate's attention with areas of activity that would foster a "reflective space" in which participants could "learn together".

The preamble to this keynote speech continues:

"Here is a personal perspective. In its broadest sense, I take practitioner research to refer to forms of enquiry which people undertake in their own working contexts ... The main purpose of the enquiry is to shed light on aspects of that work with a view to bringing about some benevolent change. At the heart of every practitioner research project there is a significant job of work to be done that will make a small contribution to the improvement of the human condition in that context. Good practitioner research, I believe, helps to develop life for others in caring, equitable, humanising ways ... studying practices carefully with their communities and coming to the wisest decisions they can about how to improve their situations. "Educational practice which includes research" writes Christine O'Hanlon (1994 p.288) is "practical philosophy with a focus in action. It is a 'science' which creates knowledge about how to promote the 'educational good' through morally right action." Practitioner researchers are required, with care and integrity, to develop sophisticated understandings of the contexts in which they seek to bring about good change." (pp.41-42)

I identify these words as representing some of the values I label as 'self', being values that determine and imply aspects of 'taste' and 'attitude' I discussed earlier. However, these words represent aspirations. Were I to be reading descriptions and explanations of a delegate's own educational practice, then I would hope to see evidence of these values being lived out in practice. This text continues to chime with my own sense of 'self' as it continues by asking general questions ("How can we ...? How do we ...?) that might readily be adapted to specific circumstances ("How can I ... with *this* person *here* ?):

- How do we support others, should they need it, in the identification of 'good' research questions? By good, I do not just mean well-focused, but, rather, questions which have a significance for the lives of the beneficiaries?
- How can we help those we support to connect their experiences to the broader concerns of others, whilst trying to avoid the ritualised genuflection in the direction of recognised authorities?
- How can we support the process of drawing positively on others' works whilst recognising that examined personal experience may be the greatest resource available for the growth of practical theory and wisdom?

- How can we supporting people through the turbulence ... caused by meeting the many human injustices and heartaches which practitioner research often reveals, as power structures and relationships are peeled away to examine people's lived experiences within them?
- How can we 'decentre' in a Piagetian sense from ... culturally entrenched perspectives that impede communication and the ability to support?
- How can we improve our pedagogy through the development of our "emotional intelligence" (Coleman 1996)?
- How do we 'feel' for, as well as 'think about', the perspectives of the practitioner researchers we support?
- How can we achieve "a balance between support and empowerment" (Frost, 1996)?

These questions and the manner of their asking raise key issues for the selection of papers for this review. Remember this paper was first delivered verbally to an audience. The beauty and the power of the text is, to me, the manner in which Marion Dadds asks questions of herself from within her own practice as she asks them verbally and rhetorically on behalf of her audience. Her total audience comprises each of the delegates at the conference and each of the readers of her text. Each audience member responds to her questioning from within their own personal understanding of their own practice. Each has to particularise and personalise their internal responses. Moreover, each of these questions could form the basis of an action research enquiry of the form: "How can I?" These are the questions she asks overtly and they are the questions to which the various parts of her later discourse are suggested answers. The whole enterprise is neither an account of an action enquiry nor a paper couched in general terms about action research practice and principles. The virtual text I create as I read Marion Dadds' words derives from a fusion of the two. My learning from this paper is a desire to locate accounts of educational action enquiries that might realise in practice its values and its aspirations, and thus complete the final three steps of the action research cycle described by Ghaye and Ghaye (1998, *ibid.*).

What is the nature and content of the virtual text I create from within these text-induced series of questions and answers? The written text is expressed in propositional forms and is logically and cogently argued in a manner that makes it internally consistent. It would be accepted by many (using appropriate objectively-stated standards of judgement) as expressing a valid claim to knowledge. In the course of reading Marion Dadds' paper, I occasionally stop with my eyes out of focus and my attention turned inwards to hear the echoes of this text - my virtual text. The echoes that come back from within, as the result of Rosenblatt's process of interaction-transaction-evocation-response, are, for me, to do with 'other' - the distaff side of 'self'. In common with many other texts deriving from the action research genre, this one implies a striving against barriers that have been set up by others. These implications offend my sense of justice, freedom, and democracy. The general question arises:

- What is the nature of the attitude that educational researchers have for each others' work? Is the way they treat each other conducive to making educational research a force for the good?"

Focused into an action research question, I ask:

- How can I explore, identify, and use the insights of others, whose value systems I do not share, to improve the sense of community and commonality of purpose among all people working within the field of educational research?

In the latter part of her paper and in relation to validation practices and practitioner research in award bearing contexts, Marion Dadds observes that the issues she addresses are "of general concern where dominant research cultures have tended to belittle the relevance and quality of practitioner research as a legitimate methodology." (p.44) I immediately ask: why do some critics have a need to "belittle"? I do not agree with the methodology or the conclusions contained in the Tooley report and yet, if I am honest about the matter, it helps me to reflect strongly on the meanings I make around the phrase "educational research". But how certain am I about my own meanings and practices? And how sure is James Tooley (a writer of readerly texts) about his own? Marion Dadds (here, a writer of a writerly text) speaks of a need for us to address our certainties:

"... do we work with old and stereotyped views of how we should teach, or are our practices in this under continuous review and critique? ... We have excellent accounts in print by Janet Miller (1990), Sandra Hollingsworth (1995), Peter Ovens (1991), and Stephen Rowland (1993), for example, of academic practitioner researchers undergoing profound transformations of understanding as a result of opening their practices to question. ... In addition, the published ideas of colleagues such as Richard Winter (1989) have offered us conceptual frameworks, questions and principles with which we can examine and develop our practices. ... We need to write our own examined work, for ourselves and others." (p.44)

I suspect that readerly writers look for certainties and are exasperated by the speculative nature that pervades many accounts of educational action research enquiries. While not arguing for cultural relativism, I am dismayed by the certainties described by writers who speak from a foundationalist position. Western reason may be said to rest on Aristotle's use of a model of pure mathematics to construct a process for scientific method through an objectivising praxis. David Bloor (1983) draws on the chapter "Positivism and Cultural Pessimism" in Oswald Spengler's *The Decline of the West* and seems to confront Aristotle:

"If we appreciate each culture in its individuality we will realise that the unshakeable truths and convictions of its members are but expressions of one specific existence and one only. Spengler was even prepared to apply this to mathematics. Mathematics is not a universal thing: there is not, and cannot be, number as such. There are different number worlds, and the character of a piece of mathematics depends wholly on the culture in which it is rooted, the sort of mankind it is that ponders it." (p.163)

Wittgenstein claimed that "Justification must come to an end somewhere" (Blue Book) but it does not end in a state of intellectual doubt or in the apprehension of self-

evident truths. It ends in an ungrounded way of acting. The difficult thing to grasp, we are told by Bloor, is the groundlessness of our beliefs:

“Language rests on consensus, but a consensus of action, not belief. We are introduced to this by training which rests on an innate trust by the child for adults and accepted authorities. The result is that we inherit a system of belief whose certainty derives from the fact that we belong to a community. ... So there we have it ... authority, faith, community - all woven together to show the priority of Life over Reason, Practice over Norms, and Being over Thought.” (p.162) [vide supr. John Wisdom and ‘Mother’s methods’ vs. ‘Father’s methods’; I do not take Bloor’s comments here as being part of the postmodernist excesses of the ‘strong programme in the sociology of science’ criticised by Sokal and Bricmont (1999) pp.79-85]

Returning to my earlier theme, I can hear megalothymic voices within the literature, particularly that which is antithetical to action research, and I can sense megalothymic values being expressed in action. How can I stop myself from branding the originators of them as ‘other’ as they do me, and come to integrate their insights into action that works for the common good? Everyone (come David Hargreaves and all) has their own unique contribution to make.

In this respect, my main hope echoes that of Patti Lather (1999) when she says:

“Finally, one might hope for reviews to help us break out of the sorts of theoretical and methodological competitiveness of “successor regimes” that has characterised social research of late.” (p.5)

(vi) Conclusion

Writers associated with the academy, educational action researchers, and those from other arenas who comment on their endeavours, are all making claims from within their writing to have knowledge. My own claim is that the writers of good-quality educational action research accounts are making a claim to know their own form of life: I am suggesting that, through our practices and our texts, we are making a claim to knowledge *and a claim to life*. We link their own lives with the lives of others in order to bring about an improvement that is life-enhancing and life-affirming. We are showing how we strive to live out our values of freedom, democracy, and justice in our shared lives.

There is an elemental transaction implied from within the process of reading a text (whether readerly or writerly). As I engage with the descriptions and explanations of the text through a dialectic of question and answer, I elicit a virtual text whose form derives from answers to the questions “Who am I?” and “Who are you?” (The positivist/efferent aspect of a reading - not to be abandoned - asks: “What is this?” and “How is this?”) The virtual text grows as I search for an isothymic dialogue which goes on to explore the questions: “Where am I?” and “Where are you?” Following this dialectical process to its conclusion, I suggest that texts which most fully explicate and affirm teaching as a research-based profession attempt to achieve a fusion with the reader that asks: “Where are we?” and looks for a linked response.

Within the field of the value-laden human activity called education, there are readerly writers and readerly readers who will not face up to these fundamental ontological questions. They do not wish to expose their own selves and the form of their own being in the world to public scrutiny. However, in the name of academic freedom, I acknowledge their right to conduct their lives and their research in the manner they choose. By the same token, I claim this right for all researchers and object in the strongest possible terms when adherents to one perspective attempt to bend the followers of another to their own methodology and values. As an area of endeavour free from megalothymic relationships, we should all feel able to address with profit some form of my question stated earlier e.g.

- How can *we* explore, identify, and use the insights of others, whose value systems *we* do not share, to improve the sense of community and commonality of purpose among all people working within the field of educational research?

In the name of educational action researchers and teachers who wish to conduct themselves as members of a research-based profession, I offer the series of questions developed throughout this text and the processes they imply for serious consideration - they guide the selection of the publications that will make up the following central section of this review.

“For one never sees in anybody's work but what one brings to it. ...”

This point marks the end of the introduction to the evolution of my review process. I stated at the outset that I expected this final text to be the result of one thing leading to another. I also stated that I did not intend objectively to identify a set of standards of judgement for use as a selecting tool during my search through the literature. I have been critically reading this text during its evolution as well as writing it. For me, bringing an engaged and aesthetic response to it generates a virtual text that itself implies *virtual standards of judgement* that I construe as being a representation of my own critical attitude and taste: that virtual text includes who I am in terms of the reflective ‘I’ of action research. As action researchers we each ground our epistemology in our own personal knowledge and theorize from that standpoint, each ‘I’ being conscious of having taken the decision to understand the world from his or her own point of view, as a person claiming originality and exercising personal judgement responsibly and with universal intent (Polanyi 1957). My dual aim in writing this text has been for it to be acceptable from the point of view of current accepted standards of scholarship whilst, at the same time, giving a flavour of where a new scholarship (Schön 1995, *ibid*) that embraces personal knowledge might lead. Those of my readers who arrive at a similar sort of comprehension through a dialectic of question and answer should understand how it is that this text and the selection of papers that follow reflect *what it is to ask, what this thing, research-based professionalism, is*.

Throughout the business of writing this text, I have been acutely aware of my future readership looking, as it were, over my shoulder. I have been in a constant sub-textual dialogue of question and answer with you as I have attempted to keep alive the notion of collaboration. In order to breathe real life into this review as an ongoing communal enquiry, I am now asking for your response. If you have read or even just skimmed this text, then it must have interacted in some way with the understanding

you have of your own practice in the field of educational research. However briefly stated, I shall welcome any impressions and thoughts you have time to record. Please respond in any way you feel is appropriate, bearing in mind that the aim decided at the outset for this review is to improve our understanding of educational action research within research-based professionalism. This text and a public forum for contributions and debate is located at:

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Two appendices follow. The first (Appendix A) contains my selection of papers with brief contextual comments, and the second (Appendix B) contains copies of relevant private correspondences exchanged during the past months.

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6 Appendix A: Selected texts

Educational Action Research within Teaching as a Research-Based Profession - a brief guided tour of the literature.

I had spent almost 9 months (April - December 1999) preparing the main text to this review and finally decided in January 2000 that it had reached as final a state as was likely. My final task was to determine how the review process I had evolved might inform an actual perusal of some of the relevant UK-originated literature published during the past 5 years. I am not an academic and I am no longer a practising teacher. I do not have a systematic grasp of the literature resulting from years of immersion in the field that the literature supports. As I advanced on the shelves containing the bound volumes, my chosen stance was to:

- 1 Approach texts with the intention of making an aesthetically engaged and appreciative response;
- 2 Employ a dialectic of question and answer to identify the questions each unfolding text is addressing and to listen for questions the text might be asking me;

- 3 Look for evidence that the text is bringing about some sort of improvement in practice;
- 4 Remember that the intention is to group selected texts under the four headings:
 - (i) Conceptual frameworks, questions, and principles which help us to examine and develop our practices - including abstract discussions about the constitution of action research as a research methodology.
 - (ii) Partnership in practice between academy and schools - accounts *about* action research enquiries, written from either perspective, or jointly.
 - (iii) Educational enquiries by teachers as members of a research-based profession - accounts of educational action research enquiries written from within the enquiry by the teacher researcher him or her self.
 - (iv) Other voices - being antithetical to the notion of (i) teaching as a research-based profession and/or (ii) action research as a suitable methodology through which to pursue educational research.

With the whole of the literature facing me, largely as a *terra incognita*, it seemed that my first task would be to sort the material loosely under the headings (i) to (iv) in 4 above. In this respect, I suppose that I was very much in the position of a school teacher about to engage in a 'review of the literature' at the start of a school-based academy-facilitated action research enquiry at Master's level into teaching as a research-based profession. Having thus 'narrowed the field', I could then switch from 'analytic' to 'dialectical-aesthetic' mode and seek material that fulfilled the criteria of 1 and 2 above (with my eye open all the time for examples of 3.). If this set of intentions sounds a little deterministic, please bear in mind that I saw myself engaging in a parallel process of review to that described by the writers of the Penguin Stereo Record Guide (1975), Edward Greenfield, Robert Layton, and Ivan March. The section that explains 'rosettes' is germane:

"To a very few records we have awarded a rosette: ⊗.

Unlike our general evaluation, where we have tried to be consistent, a rosette is quite an arbitrary compliment ... to a recorded performance which ... shows special illumination, a magic, or spiritual quality that places it in a very special class. The choice is essentially a personal one ... and in some cases it is applied ... where certain reservations must be mentioned in the text of the review. (The rosette) ... is quite small - we do not mean to imply an 'Academy award' but (as) a personal token of appreciation for something uniquely valuable. We hope that once the reader has discovered and perhaps acquired a 'rosette' record, its special qualities will soon become apparent." (p.xv)

In my case, a rosette would indicate that the text so marked had come out of the page towards me with the living voice of its author engaging with me in terms of the isothymic dialogue whose form I have evolved above.

Analytic mode

I reached first of all for the bound copies of *Educational Action Research*, the journal I expected to be the most likely to contain examples of partnership in practice between academy and schools (category 4 (ii) above) and educational enquiries by teachers as members of a research-based profession (category 4 (iii) above). To obtain a feel for the overall stance of this publication, I firstly read through all the editorials in sequence. The first, in Volume 1 Number 1 of 1993, set out the initial aim of this publication as being to include:

“... contributions that address the relationship between action research and the political context of practice ... accounts of fairly large-scale development programmes that were grounded in practitioners’ action research ... practitioners’ own accounts of action research they had carried out or generally participated in [and] ... papers that address major theoretical and methodological issues raised by the emergence of the action research movement as a paradigm of educational enquiry.” (p.5)

The observation was also included that, for me, marked the start of an ongoing and largely unresolved problem:

“... we are only too aware that those who facilitate action research are also engaged in a practice they can adopt an action research stance towards (sometimes called second order action research). When such a stance is adopted through the production of self-reflexive accounts of first order action research, we can also describe them as ‘practitioner accounts’ ... some of our referees argued that [these] reports ... should not be accepted for the journal.” (p.5)

The distinction between first order and second order action research casts a long shadow. The editorial that opened Volume 3 (1995) noted:

“... we are delighted with the quality of the articles we are receiving, although *we would welcome more accounts from practitioners of their own research.*” (p.7, my emphasis).

The theme recurs:

Volume 5 (1997) No.2: “*Finally, a plea to professional workers in contexts outside higher education institutions: please let us hear from you directly.* One of the originating themes of action research is the value and validity of knowledge created through the process of practical involvement, rather than those of distant ‘academic’ contemplation. Too high a proportion of contributions to the journal is still provided by higher education staff writing about, with or for staff in schools ... etc. The value of this work is undoubted, and expressive of a growing culture of partnership between universities and the social institutions they serve. However, the voices presenting the fruitful outcomes of this partnership are still to often located in the academy. *Let us hear more voices from outside the academy, describing your developmental work and reflecting on its significance.*” (pp.182-183, my emphasis).

Volume 5 (1997) No.3: “We have most difficulty in finding good papers that fit our top priority category - practitioners’ accounts of action research studies - except in cases where academics write about their own practice as teachers.” (p.358).

Volume 3 (1995) No.3 : “... one could argue that the problem for action research lies in the higher education context from which it is promoted. ... Academic advocates of action research, having established a ‘beach head’ in higher education, now find themselves confronted by the distancing effects of an unreconstructed academic culture.” (p.259)

... while the editorial to Volume 5 (1997) No.1 reminds readers of:

“... one editorial principle; namely, to include at least one example of practitioner research in each number as opposed to accounts of practitioner research constructed by academic facilitators.” (p.5)

On the strength of this perusal, I must admit to having not been able to find accounts that fit my understanding of the outline of a practitioner-based action enquiry. i.e. one that addresses the questions listed by Ghaye and Ghaye (1998, *ibid.*), namely:

- What is my concern ?
- Why am I concerned?
- What do I think I can do about it?
- What kind of 'evidence' can I collect to help me make some judgements about what is happening?
- How do I plan to collect such evidence?
- How shall I check that my judgement about what has happened is reasonably fair and accurate ?

None of the articles in Volume 6 (1998) No.1 met these criteria, despite the specific assertion in the editorial that:

“The articles in this issue are written by practitioners engaging in first order research into their own practice and trainers and academics supporting others in research whilst also conducting research into their own roles as facilitators.” (p.5)

The article by John McCormick and Phil Freeman (1998) is redolent with the authentic ‘smell’ of the classroom and of a practitioner accounting for his attempts to improve his practice. However, the account stops short of offering evidence for the claims that are made. In a similar vein, Ron Ritchie (1995) asks questions of the sort: “Is there evidence that ...?” and then makes reference to his unpublished (1993) Ph.D. thesis as being the repository of this evidence. Here, if anywhere, is support for the notion of publishing all such studies on the Internet, together with the development of a dedicated search engine to facilitate systematic retrieval.

There are many descriptions of ‘second order’ action research, for example, exploring the “labyrinth” of first and second order inquiry (Losito et al, 1998), in the context of professional development courses (Pedretti, 1996) and of “second-order action

research as a necessary condition for reconstructing academic culture with respect to treating teacher professional knowledge as credible public knowledge alongside the products of academic research and scholarship” (Ryan, also Green - an academic researching her practice with her students - 1997). With respect to the notion of scholarship, Cook (1998) discusses the ‘tyranny’ of methodology, while Bowen (1998) introduces the idea of using simple drawings to represent complex ideas as a way of facilitating self-study and action enquiries.

Much of the material seems to me to consist of discussions of situated themes. For example, a common focus for a large number of contributions is the dilemma faced by facilitators from the academy and teacher researchers in schools with respect to their own differing expectations of roles (e.g. Messner and Rauch, 1995). Haggarty and Postlethwaite (1995) describe the negotiation of an ethical contract in order to establish a critical community of teachers that included both academy and school. Further examples include school-university collaboration (Higgins and Goodhue-Pierce, 1996), the development of a critical friendship group consisting of teacher/researchers and an academic facilitator (Bennet et al, 1997), distinguishing ‘teacher - facilitator from the academy’ and ‘researcher - school teacher’ roles within a group (Lacey, 1996) and for an individual ‘teacher - researcher’ (Hausfather, 1997). Further developments of this theme include ethical issues that arise during collaboration between schools (Groundwater-Smith, 1998) and ethical issues in ‘insider’ action research which can be used as a heuristic (Zeni, 1998).

The frontispiece to Volume 4 (1996) lists a number of the different approaches to action research that have grown over the past few years and observes in conclusion that:

“Proponents of all these (approaches) share the common aim of ending the dislocation of research from practice ...” Articles that describe supporting practitioner research move this aim forward, concerning, for example, school principals (Moller, 1998), teachers (Dadds, 1998), and supporting the development of practitioners’ self-understanding (Day, 1998). There are several historical analyses of the action research tradition (e.g. Quicke, 1995; Gunz 1996).

The relationship between theory and practice is another area of continuing concern. Clark (1996) describes how theory arises from practice as soon as relationships are set up which enable the decisions which produced the experience to be challenged. Saez and Carretero (1996) discuss the relationship between scientific methodology and action research while Lee and Lawson (1996,) concern themselves with the relationship between theorising that emerges from practice and the theory that informs that practice. Cullen (1996) opens with a review of the relevant literature and then is straight to the point in discussing the importance of using theories from the literature to critique theories emerging from an action research study. Taking matters more into the realms of theoretical and methodological issues, Tickle (1995) discusses the validity of interpretation while Sumara and Davis (1997) undertake an exploration of the nature of knowledge by comparing and contrasting cognitivism and structuralism.

The whole area of validity and trustworthiness of accounts feeds into the exploration of power relations between awarding bodies and their students and then on to notions of the political dimension. This path is traced by Waterman, Webb, and Williams (1995) who work in a nursing environment and consider the problems surrounding

substantiating the trustworthiness of action research accounts to Hart (1995) who discusses methodological soundness and validity, and generalisability of outcomes. I found this paper to be of particular interest from the point of view of teachers' professionalism. The abstract notes: "This article takes a fresh look at the interpretative expertise of teaching and at the grounds or claiming this as a legitimate and sufficient resource for practitioner research ... (the conclusion being that it is) a procedure ... which is as rigorous and self-critical as the most exacting (traditional) research process."

Hughes et al (1998) show how the "university as warehouse" comes into conflict over issues of knowledge - and the role of theory - with a candidate for the award of Ph.D. I noted with interest that Winter (1998) asks where theory - which he defines as 'speculative play' - come from. In the political dimension, Walker (1996) shows that the nature of 'professionalism' does not allow for neutrality nor detachment from issues of social justice. Her aim is "To explore how we might articulate action research, professional development and the pursuit of social justice"; the role of action research in furthering the implementation of democratic educational reforms (in Namibia) is described by Zeichner et al (1998).

What do school teachers need in order to improve and realise the full potential of their professional lives through incorporating educational action research into their practices? I would say that they need to be enthused (Rowland, 1977) and informed. However, remember that, at this stage I am closely reading only the editorials, contents lists, and abstracts of one journal. The time constraints I have are similar to those of a teacher-researcher looking for action research texts that might be used to illuminate and affirm my practice as a member of a research based profession. In the light of the methodological thrust of this review, my brief analysis contributes little to either their enthusiasm or their information. I doubt that any teacher-researcher would find it easy to associate their own living 'I' with many of these texts and for their own practice to improve as a result. The assistance these texts offer is by way of allusion. The central question asked by a teacher-researcher: "What have people working in similar situations to my own done in the past?" remains largely unanswered by the literature I have perused so far.

Dialectical-aesthetic mode

I then returned to *Educational Action Research* and skim-read the articles in the five volumes, being alert for words and the images they support that might jump out at me from within a text and demand a closer engagement. I then proceeded to the bound volumes of other journals and carried out a similar exercise, looking for a sense of life within the words that spoke to the values and processes through which I live my own life and understand the meanings of the word 'education'. Texts that had this effect on me are identified in the following bibliography/references section, not by a rosette but, by an apple 🍏. Please bear in mind the significance of this symbol as being (to adapt the earlier passage quoted from the Penguin Guide): "a personal token of appreciation for something uniquely valuable. I hope that once the reader has discovered and perhaps acquired (an apple text), its special qualities will soon become apparent."

However, I soon came to understand that, with respect to the intention and focus of this review, the *Cambridge Journal of Education* and the *British Educational Research Journal* were the only two other publications that (irregularly) carry articles based on action research practice and principles. Such articles represent less than five per cent of the total editorial content of each. My rapid survey cannot claim to have been exhaustive, but the question remains: where are the texts that represent teachers, as members of a research-based profession, giving descriptions and explanations of their attempts to improve their practice?

My brief for this review was to restrict my attention to journals published during the past five years. I must widen the scope and refer readers to the communication I received from Morwenna Griffiths (Appendix B) and especially to the bibliography she attaches. I feel that books such as *In Fairness to Children* (a choice also endorsed by Marion Dadds) and the chapter *Action Research: grassroots practice or management tool?* are required reading. I must also include references to dissertations and theses held in university libraries. These are only freely available where they are published on the Internet. As a starting point, I refer you to Jack Whitehead's action research home page at <www.actionresearch.net>. Of particular relevance to this review is Moira Laidlaw's (1996) Ph.D. thesis in which she researches her practice as a teacher who invites her pupils to decide the standards of judgement by which they would wish their work to be assessed.

I have gone as far as I can: now, what is it for *you* to ask what this thing, research-based professionalism, is? Where are we congruent in our respective outlooks, where do we differ, and how might you contribute to an ongoing debate?

.....

References and further bibliography sorted under four headings

NB. Further possible texts for inclusion in category (i) may be obtained from the texts and their bibliographies included under (ii) and (iii).

(i) Conceptual frameworks, questions, and principles with which we can examine and develop our practices.

Bowen, R (1998) *Graphic Approaches to Describing Action Research Methodology* Educational Action Research Vol.6 No.3

Clark, S. (1996) *Finding Theory in Practice* Educational Action Research Vol.4 No.1

Convery, A. (1998) *A Teacher's Response to "Reflection-in-Action"* Cambridge Journal of Education Vol.28 No.2

🍏 Dadds, M. (1998) *Supporting Practitioner Research: a challenge.* Educational Action Research Vol.6 No.1

Goodson, I. (1999) *The Educational Researcher as Public Intellectual* British Educational Research Journal Vol.25 No.3

- Goodson, I. (1997) *“Trendy Theory” and Teacher Professionalism*. Cambridge Journal of Education Vol.27 No.1
- Hart, S. (1995) *Action-in-Reflection* Educational Action Research Vol.3 No.2
- Hughes, J., Denley, P. & Whitehead, J. (1998) *How Do We Make Sense of the Process of Legitimising an Educational Action Research Thesis for the Award of a PhD degree? A contribution to educational theory*. Educational Action Research Vol.6 No.3
- Lacey, P. (1996) *Improving Practice Through Reflective Enquiry: confessions of a first-time Action Researcher*. Educational Action Research Vol.4 No.3
- Lomax, P. & Parker, Z. (1995) *Accounting for Ourselves: the problematic of representing action research* Cambridge Journal of Education Vol.25 No.3
- Losito B., Pozzo G. & Somekh B. (1998) *Exploring the Labyrinth of First and Second Order Action Research* Educational Action Research Vol.6 No.2
- Maclure, M. (1996) *Telling Transitions: boundary work in narratives of becoming an action researcher* Vol.22 No.3
- Moller, J. (1998) *Action Research with Principles: gain, strain and dilemmas* Educational Action Research Vol.6 No.1
- Quicke, J. (1995) *Democracy and Democracy: towards an understanding of the politics of action research*. Educational Action Research Vol.3 No.1
- Ritchie, R. (1995) *Constructive Action Research: a perspective on the process of learning*. Educational Action Research Vol.3 No.3
- Rowland, S. (1997) *A Lover’s Guide to University Teaching?* Educational Action Research Vol.5 No.2
- Ryan, C. (1997) *Keeping it Complex: the power of support from a community of professionals* Educational Action Research Vol.5 No.1
- Saez, M. & Carretero, J. (1996) *From Action Research to the Classroom Case-study: the history of ANTEC* Educational Action Research Vol.4 No.1
- Smith, B. (1996) *Addressing the Delusion of relevance: struggles in connecting educational research and social justice*. Educational Action Research Vol.4 No.1
- Sumara, J. & Davis, B. (1997) *Enactivist Theory and Community Learning: towards a complexified understanding of action research*. Educational Action Research Vol.5 No.3
- Thomas, G. (1998) *The Myth of Rational Research* British Educational Research Journal Vol.24 No.2

Tickle, L. (1995) *Testing for Quality in Action Research: a terrifying taxonomy?* Educational Action Research Vol.3 No.2

Walker, M. (1996) *Subaltern Professionals: acting in pursuit of social justice* Educational Action Research Vol.4 No.3

Winter, R. (1998) *managers, Spectators and Citizens: where does 'theory' come from in action research?* Educational Action Research Vol.6 No.3

Zeni, J. (1998) *A Guide to Ethical Issues and Action Research* Educational Action Research Vol.6 No.1

(ii) Partnership in practice between academy and schools.

Cullen, J. (1996) *Appraising Teaching Quality: using action research to develop a new process.* Educational Action Research Vol.4 No.2

Day, C. (1998) *Working with the Different Selves: beyond comfortable collaboration* Educational Action Research Vol.6 No.2

Golby, M. & Appleby, R. (1995) *Reflective Practice Through Critical Friendship: some possibilities* Cambridge Journal of Education Vol.25 No.2

Groundwater-Smith, S. (1998) *Putting Teacher Professional Judgement to work* Educational Action Research Vol.6 No.1

Haggarty, L. & Postlethwaite, K. (1995) *Working as Consultants on School-based Teacher-identified Problems* Educational Action Research Vol.3 No.2

Higgins, K. & Goodhue-Price, L. (1996) *The Role of Stories in the Formation of a University/School Collaborative Identity.* Educational Action Research Vol.4 No.3

Messner, E. & Rauch, F. *Dilemmas of Facilitating Action Research.* Educational Action Research Vol.3 No.1

Pedretti, E. (1996) *Facilitating Action Research in Science, Technology and Society (STS) Education: an experience in reflective practice* Educational Action Research Vol.4 No.3

Zeichner, K., Amukushu, A. et al *Critical Practitioner Enquiry and the Transformation of Teacher Education in Namibia* Educational Action Research Vol.6 No.2

(iii) Educational enquiries by teachers as members of a research-based profession.

Hausfather, S. (1997) *A Case of Failed Resocialisation? Action Research and the Struggle to Redefine the Teacher Identity*. Educational Action Research Vol.5 No.3

🍏 Hutchinson, B. & Whitehouse, P. (1999) *The Impact of Action Research and Education Reform in Northern Ireland: education in democracy*. British Educational Research Journal, Vol.25 No.2

Lee, C. & Lawson, C. (1996) *Numeracy Through Literacy*. Educational Action Research Vol.4 No.1

🍏 McCormick, J. & Freman, P. (1998) “*If the Mountain Won’t Come to McCormick ...*” *Improving Pupils’ Classroom Performance: a practitioner’s case study* Educational Action Researcher Vol.6 No.2

See <www.actionresearch.net> for work by practising teachers describing and explaining their own practices.

(iv) Other voices.

Bennett, C., Chapman, A., Cliff, D. et al *Hearing Ourselves Learn: the development of a critical friendship group for professional development*. Vol.5 No.3

Hammersley, M. On the Teacher as Researcher *Educational Action Research* 1993 Vol.1 No.3

Hargreaves, D. (1999) Revitalising Educational Research: lessons from the past and proposals for the future *Cambridge Journal of Education* Vol.29 No.2

Including a review of ‘other voices’:

Lomax, P. (1999) *Working Together for Educative Community* British Educational Research Journal Vol.25 No.1

Miscellaneous

Cook, T (1998) *The Importance of Mess in Action Research* Educational Action Research Vo.6 No.1

Waterman, H., Webb, C. & Williams, A. (1995) *Changing Nursing and Nursing Change: a dialectical analysis of an action research project* Educational Action Research Vol.3 No.1

Green, K (1997) *What Counts as ‘Better’ Practice? Supporting Students in Improving Their practice by Drawing out the Value Dimensions*. Educational Action Research Educational Action Research Vol.5 No.1

Greenfield, E., Layton, R. & March, I. *Penguin Stereo Record Guide* Harmondsworth: Penguin Books.

* Important resource to be published in the Cambridge Journal of Education in November 2000: Moyra Evans, Pam Lomax and Helen Morgan *Closing the Circle: action research partnerships towards better learning and teaching in schools*. This paper addresses David Hargreaves' (1996) call for evidence-based practice. I refer you to the text and to the bibliography, which is a thumbnail review in its own right of the literature.

7 Appendix B: Private correspondences

NB. I have not integrated the extended replies into my main text. I felt they should speak for themselves without comment from me and stand as exemplars for future contributors; hopefully, public correspondences will develop out of them.

(i) Margaret Cox

From MJ.cox@kcl.ac.uk
Thu Apr 1 14:44:27 1999
Date: Wed, 31 Mar 1999 18:23:21 +0100
From: MJ.cox <MJ.cox@kcl.ac.uk>
To: edsajw@bath.ac.uk
Cc: Bridget Somekh <b.somekh@hud.ac.uk>
Subject: Mellett Review

Dear Peter Mellett
(& Bridget)

I don't usually respond to debates on Email as I have little chance of ever keeping up with too many commitments as it is, but I feel strongly about educational research so decided to respond.

My research is in the field of the Impact of Information Technology in Education so it embraces psychological and sociological perspectives, and qualitative and quantitative methods depending upon the research 'questions'/ investigations. My background is as a hard scientist having done post-graduate and doctoral work in experimental atomic physics, so I do draw upon that previous research approach when designing and conducting my own research studies.

I think I agree with the two aims below although I am not quite clear what is meant by "justice should be done."

>1 The review should incorporate Action Research processes that show
>the meanings of standards of judgement emerging in practice over time.

>

>2 Justice should be done and be seen to be done to the wide range of
>subjects, methodologies, and forms of expression found within Action
>Research.

>

I have tried to explain my own position, practice and principles following the example you provided

I have not really engaged in action research although many of my students and research staff on past projects are/have been involved in qualitative research working in the context of schools/classes/and In-set courses, where they sometimes participate in the teaching/learning process but are more often an observer with minimal participation in the action being researched.

In any qualitative investigation I am involved in, I would expect to engage in the following procedures:

Before going into an educational setting. To have a clear set of research queries/hypotheses/aims which might vary from very specific aims such as: What is the effect of using computer simulations on pupils modelling strategies? to more uncertain aims such as: what is the effect of the role of the IT coordinator in the school on the spread of IT use within different departments.

I would first need to have a wide knowledge of previous research which could include action research studies, more structured studies etc. What I expect to achieve is to assimilate the evidence from past studies Including relevant studies from other disciplines to help form a framework for the investigation taking into account factors identified as important from previous studies.

The research perspective would be influenced by the past and present evidence as it is collected, with the flexibility to respond to current evidence which might lead to particular foci or deviations from the original focus. In a qualitative investigation I would gather data from every possible relevant source, which might include teachers' curriculum plans, minutes of meetings, curriculum documents, interviews, observations, products of pupils/teachers, school policies and statistics and so on. This would be followed by a synthesis of all the evidence which is shared sometimes with the subjects (teachers/pupils) to explain the initial interpretations.

The next stage would be to analyse the results in relation to the past evidence collected, the aims of the study, the modifications due to the influence of ongoing evidence and feedback from the subjects. This evidence might include studies from other domains, sociological or psychological research as well as in the target domain itself.

The next stage would be to present the findings in a comprehensive and consistent way using theoretical models, previous approaches etc. to develop implications for other researchers and to propose some generic outcomes. What I find hard to accept is when qualitative research, including some action research stops short of this last stage and is limited to a descriptive account of the actions observed and recorded with no attempt to interpret these for the reader nor to build on past research and wisdom.

In the field of IT in Education, it is particularly difficult to develop a reliable basis for educational research because of the rapidly changing nature of the environment and the relative infancy of the research field. What does sometimes happen is that new researchers do not study the literature enough, or sometimes even at all to draw on past evidence and experience. This is partly due to the uncertainty of the field as a whole. So my principles are based on:

building research on a sound foundation which can be formed from a range of disciplines;

using previous evidence to contribute to the current research and methods (meta analysis of sorts)
interpreting the research from a theoretical as well as a practical perspective;
presenting the results in a form which can contribute to the body of wisdom and knowledge, and augment it.

An example of seriously flawed research was that of Tooley recently, who selected only four journals to review all of British educational research, ignoring other relevant journals such as the Journal of Curriculum Studies, the Journal for Computer Assisted Learning, The School Science Review, the International Journal of Science Education, and then analysing and criticising the limited range and content of educational research publications. This strategy was similar to investigating the range of food for sale in a supermarket and then only looking in the tinned soup section!

His second research flaw was to select public output sources (journals) and criticize them for not making the research accessible to the general practitioners, again basing his research on only partial and inappropriate evidence, failing to recognize that publications have a particular audience/readership, and that research findings for teachers, for example would be published in reports, or TES articles.

In fact Tooley's research was a perfect example of an investigation of partial and incomplete evidence. It is this kind of research that we need to discourage and which sometimes occurs in action research as in other educational research. However, there is also excellent action research in my field which does meet all my criteria, e.g. Somekh

I hope these comments are useful

Yours sincerely
Margaret.J. Cox

Professor of Information Technology in Education;
Chair of the National Association of Co-ordinators and Teachers of IT
School of Education, King's College London, Cornwall House, Waterloo Rd.,
London SE1 8WA. UK.

Tel: 44-(0)171-872-3126; Fax 44-(0)171-872-3182

Map showing the location of Cornwall House can be found at:
<http://www.kcl.ac.uk/kis/schools/education/hpages/mcox.html>

My reply

From: "Peter Mellett" <pandjm@globalnet.co.uk> (14.4.99.)
Subject: BERA Review MC1

Dear Margaret

Thank you for responding so fully (31.3.99) to my Email (29.3.99) headed BERA Review: Seminar at the University of Bath - Opening the Dialogue. I found the content of your letter most thought-provoking. I have attempted to respond to it by

first copying below its central core (from "My research ..." to "... I hope these comments are useful"), inserting my own responses to specific points, and successively editing and annotating as I go in an attempt to arrive at a coherent and self-contained whole.

You started by saying that your research is in the field of the Impact of Information Technology in Education and thus embraces psychological and sociological perspectives.

At first sight, it seems to me that we carry out our educational research through different (but possibly not incommensurable) research paradigms. You describe your background as that of a "hard scientist", having carried out post-graduate and doctoral work in experimental atomic physics. Whilst my first degree was in chemistry, I would not say (as you do) that I draw upon that previous (hard scientist) research approach when designing and conducting my own research studies. But then, as you say: "My research ... embraces ... qualitative and quantitative methods depending upon the research 'questions'/ investigations.

A stated and agreed prime focus for the review is that it should incorporate Action Research processes which show the meanings of standards of judgement emerging in practice over time. In other words, these processes should be demonstrable within the form and content of our correspondence, constituting as it does a facet or component of the review. I hope to post all correspondences on the Internet so that an evolving archive of inter-penetrating questions and answers and comments will grow out there in a public place. (Do I have your permission to make public this correspondence?)

I take it as understood that we both engage in research activities in order to improve something. I also assume that you hold, as I do, that educational research should itself be educational. If I am effectively to carry out this review through the processes of an Action Research study, then I must ask the question: "What am I trying to improve?" The impetus for BERA having commissioned the review itself seems to have come from the publishing of the Tooley Report (Educational Research - a Critique: Tooley J with Derby D. 1998 OFSTED). That report concludes in general that little educational research worthy of the name is taking place in the UK at the present. In the face of the Tooley Report, my concern is, under the aegis of the Bath contribution to the BERA review, to improve the understanding of the educational establishment of teaching as a research-based profession.

I agree entirely with your assertion that the Tooley report is an example of seriously flawed research, as it was based on a selection of only four journals to review the whole of British educational research and ignored other relevant journals, then analysing and criticising the limited range and content of educational research publications. To quote your own analogy and conclusions:

"... This strategy was similar to investigating the range of food for sale in a supermarket and then only looking in the tinned soup section! His second research flaw was to select public output sources (journals) and criticize them for not making the research accessible to the general practitioners, again basing his research on only partial and inappropriate evidence, failing to recognize that publications have a particular audience/readership, and that research findings for teachers, for example

would be published in reports, or TES articles. In fact Tooley's research was a perfect example of an investigation of partial and incomplete evidence. It is this kind of research that we need to discourage and which sometimes occurs in action research as in other educational research. However, there is also excellent action research in my field which does meet all my criteria, e.g. Somekh ..."

[In this connection, have you seen the piece by Jenny Gubb in the TES for April 9 1999 (page 18)? The headline is: "Researchers do deserve Woodhead's support" and the text responds to the chief inspector's latest criticism of the research community. She traces her evolution over the years from being a quantitative educational researcher, via qualitative research to her final incarnation as an action researcher].

Reading the Tooley report gave a sense of affront to both my intellect and my values. However, I should dearly like to engage with him in an open dialogue aimed at improving our understanding of what constitutes good-quality educational research. Until we agree our standards of judgement across the whole field of interested parties, we shall remain in our bunkers making claims that one form of research is useful and valid, and other forms are not. Within the confines of this correspondence (as one facet of the whole) I shall therefore begin by asking an Action Research question that focuses on your and my own separate practices:

- How can I help Margaret Cox and myself to come to understand and realise in practice the value of each other's forms of research paradigm?

As a start, I understand from your Email that, with respect to your own position, practice, and principles, your research position is as follows. To avoid confusion with the personal pronoun 'I', I have (as above) paraphrased your remarks:

I understand that you have not really engaged in action research although many of your students and research staff on past projects are/have been involved in qualitative research working in the context of schools/classes/and In-set courses; in these settings, they sometimes participate in the teaching/learning process but are more often an observer with minimal participation in the action being researched.

Before going into an educational setting to carry out a qualitative investigation you wish to have a clear set of research queries/hypotheses/aims; these might vary from very specific aims such as: "What is the effect of using computer simulations on pupils modelling strategies?" to more uncertain aims such as: "What is the effect of the role of the IT co-ordinator in the school on the spread of IT use within different departments".

You also need to have a wide knowledge of previous research which could include action research studies, more structured studies etc. You expect to assimilate the evidence from past studies, including relevant studies from other disciplines to help form a framework for the investigation taking into account factors identified as important from previous studies. You also say that your research perspective would be influenced by the past and present evidence as it is collected, with the flexibility to respond to current evidence which might lead to particular foci or deviations from the original focus. In a qualitative investigation you gather data from every possible relevant source, which might include teachers' curriculum plans, minutes of meetings,

curriculum documents, interviews, observations, products of pupils/teachers, school policies and statistics and so on. This data gathering exercise would be followed by a synthesis of all the evidence which is shared sometimes with the subjects (teachers/pupils) to explain the initial interpretations.

I understand that your next stage would be to analyse the results in relation to the past evidence collected, the aims of the study, the modifications due to the influence of ongoing evidence and feedback from the subjects. This evidence might include studies from other domains, sociological or psychological research as well as in the target domain itself. The next stage would be to present the findings in a comprehensive and consistent way using theoretical models, previous approaches etc. to develop implications for other researchers and to propose some generic outcomes.

You conclude by saying that: "What I find hard to accept is when qualitative research, including some action research stops short of this last stage and is limited to a descriptive account of the actions observed and recorded with no attempt to interpret these for the reader nor to build on past research and wisdom. I suspect that we are here confronted again with the business of standards of judgement and their application in validating a piece of qualitative research. Jean McNiff (1992) characterizes Action Research as a way of working that:

- is practitioner generated;
- is workplace oriented;
- seeks to improve something;
- starts from a particular situation;
- adopts a flexible trial and error approach;
- accepts that there are no final answers;
- aims to validate any claims it makes by rigorous justification processes.

(Creating a Good Social Order through Action Research: McNiff, J. et al 1992 Hyde Publications UK. p.3).

I understand your concern to stem from the failure of some researchers to engage fully with her final step.

For my own part, I hold to Jean McNiff's outline within my own research perspective that is described by McTaggart (1992) as follows:

Action research claims to be an emancipatory activity: "...a form of self-reflective enquiry undertaken by participants in social situations in order to improve the rationality, justice, coherence, and satisfactoriness of (a) their own social practices, (b) their understanding of these practices, and (c) the institutions and programs and ultimately the society in which these practices are carried out. Action research has an individual aspect - action researchers change themselves, and a collective aspect - action researchers work with others to achieve change and understand what it means to change."

(McTaggart, R. (1992) Reductionism and action research: technology versus convivial forms of life Transforming tomorrow today Proc. second world congress on action learning: Australia - drawing on Carr and Kemmis 1986)

The most common context for action research seems to involve teachers who engage in enquiries which relate to their own practice with their own pupils, as they address questions of the general form:

"How can I improve the quality of my practice?"

Within my own circumstances, including those as a magistrate, I have no problems with asking this self-same question and attempting to respond to it through Action Research processes. I can understand your overall aims when you express a commitment to building research "... on a sound foundation which can be formed from a range of disciplines; using previous evidence to contribute to the current research and methods (meta analysis of sorts); interpreting the research from a theoretical as well as a practical perspective; and presenting the results in a form which can contribute to the body of wisdom and knowledge, and augment it."

However, I have difficulties with the contextual meanings I sense in your use of the words 'disciplines' and 'evidence'. It seems to me that the fundamental (if crudely-put) difference between our two perspectives is that I carry out 'research with' and you carry out 'research on'. For example, you say that it is particularly difficult to develop a reliable basis for educational research because of the rapidly changing nature of the environment and the relative infancy of the research field. My perspective holds that the reliability and generalizability of Action Research enquiries is engendered over time as each contribution is examined within a dialogical community of practitioners. Early contributions are not superseded; they contribute to an organically-growing form of living educational theory. (See the Bath Action Research home page at <www.actionresearch.net> alternatively <<http://www.bath.ac.uk/~edsajw>>).

You also say that new researchers sometimes do not study the literature enough (or sometimes even at all) to draw on past evidence and experience, this being partly due (as you hold) to the uncertainty of the field as a whole. If I am (following Michael Polanyi) to have a commitment to personal knowledge, expressing an intention to understand the world from my own point of view, claiming originality, and exercising my judgement with universal intent, then I use the literature to inform my evolving understanding rather than as a mould within whose system of categories I express that understanding.

The intention of any account that I write under these auspices is for it to be educational, in that it may give clues for others to follow towards a fuller understanding of their own educational development. In other words, the Action Research culture to which I subscribe generates a form of educational theory that is founded in an individual's claim that he or she understand their own educational development. I see that living form of educational theory growing as contributions to it are accepted by the critical dialogical community it informs. Polanyi raised the question of the validity of any such contribution when he spoke of truth:

"... It is the act of commitment in its full structure that saves personal knowledge from being purely subjective. ... Whether or not it is the truth can be hazarded only by another, equally responsible commitment."

David Hopkins (Teacher research: back to basics. Classroom Action Research Bulletin 1984:6 pp. 94-99) suggests to me that 'another, equally responsible commitment' would have to apply distinct criteria to any account I might offer as a contribution:

"... criteria such as validity, reliability and generalisability are necessary if we are to escape the sentimental anecdote that often replaces statistical research designs in education ..."

I suggest that you and I both have an equally low opinion of sentimental anecdote making claims beyond its station.

I am so glad that there seems to be such a distinct set of differences between our two understandings of the practical expression of educational research. I hope you do not think I have mis-represented your research culture as I have incorporated the content of your Email into the above writing. We have both been speaking in rather general terms. To confront the particular, I think that the next stage (if you can find the time) would be for us each to put forward examples of pieces of research that we hold to be of good quality. For the purposes of the review and in order to start to engage with my Action Research question stated above, it will be necessary for us each to say why we hold each of these examples to be examples of good quality. In this way, our correspondence will start to contribute to the review, incorporating Action Research processes that show the meanings of standards of judgement emerging in practice over time.

Peter Mellett

14 April 1999

.....

(ii) Bridget Somekh

From: Bridget Somekh <b.somekh@hud.ac.uk> (21.4.99)
Subject: RE: BERA Review BS1

Dear Peter

Thanks for forwarding to me your reply to Margaret Cox.

My own ideas about action research are set out in a paper I wrote for BERJ (The Contribution of Action Research to Development in Social Endeavours, 1995, vol 21, no 3, pp 339-356). I have thought deeply about it for many years and it forms the foundation for all my research and evaluation work - albeit that I am often working to contracts where I incorporate elements of action-research-like activity into the design, rather than carrying out 'pure' action research. I am now interested in ways in which action research might contribute to the development of policy and practice within the new labour agenda. I'd be please to meet you sometime or talk to you on the

phone if that would be useful.

Best wishes

Bridget Somekh

From: Bridget Somekh <b.somekh@hud.ac.uk> (28.4.99)

Subject: RE: BERA Review BS2

Dear Peter

Thanks for this very full response.

You should find my article useful because, for the only time in my career, I have incorporated in this article a very full review of the work of John Elliott, who was for years my inspiration. It also sets out some of the ways in which my own work is rather different from John's.

Thanks for your address. I may be in Bristol in the next two weeks and will contact you if I have time (a bit doubtful).

Best wishes with the work. I look forward to seeing the outcome.

Bridget

.....

(iii) Morwenna Griffiths

(Letter dated 12 May received through post in response to BERA Email)

Dear Peter

Here are some responses:

Responding to ideas and sentiments in the letter:

I find, now that I have finally cleared some time to respond, that I don't know how much time I should have cleared. That is, the ideas and sentiments - indeed the overall questions - are such big ones that they deserve a paper in response. Or a book. Now clearly:-

- I am not going to write that much;
- You would not want me to. Would you?
- I have already written papers that explore these kinds of issues, but I can't expect that you have read them!

On the other hand:-

I really approve of this interactive way of proceeding, even if I am saying how hard it is. And even if it turns out to be just a kind of pilot bit before the main trawl. I am guessing here that most people, like me, have found it hard to respond because of various pressures and difficulties.

That said, I'll have a go.

Approach to action research

I am not sure what 'approach' means here so I'll begin with 'where am I coming from?' and hope that answers it! As you did with being a magistrate, Peter. So, to use the fashionable term, I offer a kind of personal genealogy: I began Higher Education as a scientist, getting a BSc in physics. I left this behind very rapidly once I had the degree, but it certainly left a lasting influence on my understanding of research, method, science, and knowledge. A direction I went in as I left Physics was towards **philosophy**: like physics, it attempts to answer the big questions! At the same time I was going in the direction of **primary education**, enthusiastically becoming a class teacher of 9-10 year olds. Later on this all ended up in an MEd and then a PhD in philosophy of education on the themes of language and emotions. The latter introduced me (belatedly!) to issues in **gender and feminism** - picking up no doubt in a long-standing interest in **race and class** issues in education. My engagement with **feminist philosophy** grew out of all this. So did my engagement with **action research**. When I began working in Oxford poly (as it was) I found myself among an intellectually lively group including: Sarah Tann, Kate Ashcroft, John Isaacs, Simon Catling, and others. We were engaged in constructing reflective, action research based teacher education courses, which were very innovative and exciting. The influence of **Zeichner**, and the **Deakin School** became mixed in with my other interests. The philosophical underpinnings of action research, especially **Dewey** (rather than Habermas) and its links with issues of justice (especially gender) were added into my professional practices. From initial scepticism I became an enthusiast for action research when underpinned by a commitment to **educative practice, rigorous philosophy, attention to justice**, and to a **continuing engagement with new theory and everyday practice**. This has underpinned my work over the last decade: including my work at primary schools in Maine and in Nottingham. (For the latter, see *In Fairness to Children* written with Carol Davies): my philosophical development (See *Feminisms and the Self*); and my understanding of educational research (See *Getting off the Fence*). So I am an action researcher but not only an action researcher. Also my commitment to it depends on epistemological, ethical, political, and educational underpinnings.

I notice that the way I have presented this genealogy is chronological. While this was easy to do, I think it might have been better if I had put it another way, less time-dependent, less cumulative. This would have been even less technical-rational in its implications, I suppose, since it would not imply that my progress can be described as getting better and better in terms of knowledge or ethics, but rather that there are gains and losses with different stages of the genealogy and also that the perspective is seen as more complex, and always moving rather than a fixed different stage or construction. A metaphor I find useful here has been used by two feminist philosophers recently: it is of movement and fluidity rather than fixation. This metaphor is of a wave momentarily defined and then all the forces and materials

moving to become another wave. This metaphor is to be found in Christine Battersby's new book *The Phenomenal Woman* and in Emma Kate Martin's recent PhD thesis (University of Manchester), *Silence, Violence, Sex and Laughter*.

It is time to move on from genealogy and discuss approach from other perspectives: first methodology and then expression. These are examples of momentarily defined waves in my thinking, I suppose.

Methodology

Methodology is driven by the particular circumstances and the associated opportunities, by ethical and political commitments, by epistemological considerations, and by the social, political context in which the research must be done.

In summary:

1 Action research is just one kind of research worth doing, but it is certainly one which fits my overall view of what research should be (I have written about this in *Off the Fence*) I also note that it is one way of doing research which is hard to fund: research related to justice and equality are always and necessarily hard to fund, since they benefit the poorer and less powerful and funds come from the richer and more powerful. So among ways of doing research it must always have a place.

2 Action research is worth doing because it allows the following to be included in research - and is worth while insofar as it actually does include them:

- An overriding concern for the benefit of the process for children and students;
- Attention to the voices of everyone involved;
- Critical reflection;
- Awareness of large scale political structures such as class and gender;
- The self of the researcher herself as engaged in the process and liable to change as part of the process;
- Concern with the details and complexities of a particular situation;
- Concern with the theoretical resources that can be brought to bear on understanding and dealing with a situation.

I discuss this kind of thing in *Getting off the Fence* and try to do some of it in the various publications related to my work with Carol Davies: note the different voices in which my work in a Nottingham primary school has been presented (1995a, 1995c, 1994a, 1993b, a single-Authored paper by Carol Davies in *Education 3 - 13*, and various oral presentations by each or both of us). These themes are also to be found in earlier work, particularly the importance of voices and selves (1995b, 1995c, 1994, 1993a, 1990) attention to theories in the layered spiral (1992, 1991a), the influences of theories of autobiography, feminist philosophy and post modernism (1995c, 1994a).

Kindred spirits whose action research work I admire (even when I do not agree with their conclusions and presentations and even though some of them disagree greatly with each other!) include figures as diverse as John Elliott, Debbie Epstein, Andrew Gitlin, Jennifer Gore, Stephen Kemmis, Moira Laidlaw, Robin McTaggart, Claudia Mitchell & Sandra Weber, Iram Siraj-Blatchford, Bridget Somekh, Melanie Walker, Gaby Weiner, and Richard Winter, who all do this kind of thing albeit drawing on

very different theoretical resources and ways of dealing with voice, benefit, etc. (This list was produced very quickly and is not exhaustive!)

3 Action research relies on its ethical and political underpinnings. It is predicated on the ineradicable element in education which is the selves of teachers and students, and the reiteration that education is about the getting of wisdom and living good lives as well as improving 'life chances'. That is, education is by and for people in all their full, imperfect, lovely humanity. Education is always more than technicist, so educational research too is personal, and for wisdom and good lives as well as for technical improvements. Inspirations here are drawn from self-styled action researchers but not only from them. Apart from the names mentioned above, Jack Whitehead's emphasis on educative relationships and the uses of specifically educational theory is an influence. So is Pam Lomax's attention to collaborative relationships and partnerships. So is Carr's emphasis on the self of the researcher and the ethics of other-directed research. Among the non- action researchers, the self-study SIG of the AERA is one source. Groups of researchers interested in narrative, personal narrative, fiction are others. Equally, inspiration can be found from any researchers pursuing a principled path of justice in educational research even when they are far removed from action research and its methods. They are too numerous to mention here!

4 Action research requires the personal involvement of the researcher. Thus the role of the researcher can be in the role of critical friend or as researcher into her own practice. My own writing and practice reflects this. (e.g. 1995b, 1994b, 1989). Sometimes I am one and sometimes the other. Not surprisingly collaboration and partnership are a continuing theme in action research for me given the way that I undertake either of these roles.

I am aware that this way of delineating action research is one which is not within the usual schools (the 'Great Men of Action Research' schools, as we said at the March meeting in Bath) but which cuts across them.

Expression

I like to play with different forms of expression, but this playfulness has a serious side to it. I want to speak for the importance of using the full resources of language rather than just one mode, be that academic writing, or staff-room talk, for instance. Thus the expression of action research should include different registers and appropriate forms for different audiences. I have talked about this in various places (1999a, 1997a, 1994c). My own work is also intended to be in appropriate registers and sensitive to audiences. (e.g. the different modes in 1995a, 1995c, 1997b). Of course a lot of expression is oral: teaching is still very much an oral culture. So my work in Maine and in Nottingham did not speak its academic name while I did it and while it was described to participants, but nonetheless it was action research.

References - my publications mentioned above

'Aiming for a fair education: what use is philosophy?' in Roger Marples (ED) *Aims of education* Routledge (in press) 1999a

'Playing at / as being authentic' in Jackie Swift (Ed) *Art education discourses: leaf and seed* Birmingham: ARTicle Press 199b

Educational research for social justice: getting off the fence Buckingham, Open University Press 1998

Why teachers and philosophers need each other: philosophy and educational research Cambridge Journal of Education vol.27, No.2 1997a

Philosophic attitude: how Hegel's theories helped solve a problem of bullying Times Educational Supplement 31 January, 1997b

In fairness to children: working for social justice in the primary school (with Carol Davies) David Fulton 1995

Feminism and the self: the web of identity Routledge 1995a

Making the difference: feminism, post modernism and the methodology of educational research BERJ vol.21, No.2, 1995b

Autobiography, feminism and the practice of action-research International Journal of Action Research Vol.2, No.1 1994a

'International consultancy about action research: questions of methodology and ethics' (with C Akwesi and M Parker-Jenkins) in Lomax, P and Whitehead, A J (Eds) in *Accounting for ourselves: action learning, action research and process management* University of Bath 1994b

The dream of a common language (or is it a nightmare?): dialogue between professionals engaged in action research Keynote address at the World Congress for Action Research, Bath, July 1994c

Educational change and the self British Journal of Educational Studies Vol41, No2, 1993a

Learning to learn: action research from an equal opportunities point of view in a junior school (with Carol Davies) BERJ Vol.19, No.1 1993b

Using reflective practice to link personal and public theories (with Sarah Tann) Journal of Education for Teaching Vol.18, No.1 1992

'Ripples in the reflection' (with Sarah Tann) in Lomax, P (Ed) *Managing better schools and colleges: an action research approach* Clevedon: Multilingual Matters 1991a

'Action research in teacher education' (with Kate Ashcroft) in Zuber-Skerrit, O (Ed) *Action research in higher education* Brisbane: Griffith University, 1991b

'Action research: grassroots practice or management tool?' in Lomax, P (Ed) *Managing staff development in schools* Clevedon: Multilingual Matters 1990

Reflective teachers and reflective tutors: school experience in an initial teacher education course (with Kate Ashcroft) *Journal of Education for Teaching* Vol.15, No.1, 1989

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From: "Griffiths, Morwenna" <morwenna.griffiths@ntu.ac.uk>
Subject: RE: BERA Review MG1

Thanks Peter,

As you see I have copied the correspondence to Peter Ovens who is intending to respond (though like everyone else he's hard pressed at this time of the academic year and RAE cycle!).

Off the top of my head - and Peter may think of others:

Melanie Walker, Ian Stronach, Maggie MacLure, Iram Siraj-Blatchford, Gaby Weiner have all 'done' and 'theorised' action research from a social justice perspective.

There's the usual attenders at CARN: This list comes from the last CARN circulated minutes:

Marion Dadds, Peter Ovens, Jack Whitehead, Barbara Zamorski, Angie Titchen, Zoe Parker, Terry Phillips, Charly Ryan, Pam Lomax, Pat D'Arcy, Zoe-Jane Playdon, Richard Winter (Chair), John Elliott, David Frost, Gary Holden, Margaret Follows, Andy Convery, Kath Green, Stephen Rowland, Lucila Recart

John Bastiani used to be a regular on the CARN committee and has supervised loads of A-R theses in Nottingham. (He's free-lance now, but semi connected to Nottingham Trent.)

There's Christine O'Hanlon who edited the BERJ 21(3) special issue on Teacher Research in 1995 a lot of which was action research.

I used to work closely with Kate Ashcroft now at UWE on action-research/reflective practice.

I hope this is helpful,

Mo

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(iv) Marion Dadds

From: "Dadds, Marion" <m.dadds@ucsm.ac.uk> (28.4.99.)
Subject: RE: BERA Review MD2

The second question looks quicker to respond to right now with 10 minutes to go to MA teaching (and borrowing Bridget's approach). So, I think my ideas are summarised best in two articles

1. 1997, Continuing professional development : nurturing the expert within' in British Journal of In-service Education, vol.23 no. 1. Not specifically about AR but carries a deeply held belief in the power of knowledge constructed through self-managed processes - outsider knowledge rather than insider. This, for me, is highly relevant to action research for growth, knowledge and improvement.

2. Supporting practitioner research : a challenge in Educational Action research, Vol. 6, no.1 1998

Let me know if you want me to send you copies and give me a snail-mail address

First thoughts about the other question (books) :

Morwenna Griffiths 'In Fairness to Children'

Sandra Hollingsworth 'Teacher research and Urban Literacy' (Teachers' College Press)

Marion Dadds, 'Passionate enquiry and school development: a story about teacher action research'

For articles. I'll need more time. There have been an abundance in Education Action research - too many for me to recall and privilege one over the other.

Hope these thoughts are useful so far.

In great haste

Marion

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(v) Jenny Gubb

From: "Peter Mellett" <pandjm@globalnet.co.uk> (14.4.99.)

Subject: BERA Review

Dear Jenny Gubb

I have been waiting for years to read a piece such as you wrote for the TES dated April 9 ("Researchers do deserve Woodhead's support"). It seems to stake a claim for Action Research to be taken seriously in its own right and to stress that education is a value-laden and practical activity, attempts at whose improvement are not best served by research carried out by detached observers relying on scientific methodology.

(You should find interesting the Bath Action Research Website at <www.actionresearch.net> or alternatively at <http://www.bath.ac.uk/~edsajw>). I

have just started work on the Bath contribution to the BERA Review of recent UK educational research. We held an opening seminar here on March 20th to determine the specific focus for this contribution (there are seven centres in total with funding from BERA). At bottom, I understand the whole exercise to be a co-ordinated attempt to respond to the findings and intimations contained in the Tooley Report. At the end of the seminar, I circulated a letter to the participants that summed up my understanding of our conclusions. After taking replies, I then circulated the BERA/CARN membership with the following invitation. You may well not have seen a copy: the content of your article made me think that I would value your response. I hope you can find the time.

Yours sincerely

Peter Mellett

From: jeag2@hermes.cam.ac.uk (11.6.99.)
Subject: Re: BERA Review JG1

Dear Peter

I will give you some of my thoughts and observations on the action research I have had first hand experience of as a research associate.

I think that the term 'action research' is an inexact term which has a wide interpretation from the original Lewin approach, through Kemmis to the kinds of work done for masters degrees here in Cambridge.

The kind of educational action research I've seen in operation has several positive features associated with teacher development (although thus far the effect on pupils is less easy to describe) - it focuses the minds of participants, kindles interest in wider issues around the philosophy of education and research, makes teaching a more self-conscious process, challenges long held common sense assumptions and seems to give teachers extra confidence in themselves. The teachers all express great enthusiasm for the research, especially once it is complete (!) and all the ones I have been involved with have carried on teaching in 'a spirit of enquiry' even when the original action research is ended.

On the negative side, the conduct of the research in the two projects I've worked on raise some difficult issues. Schools and university have different agendas. Schools want practical, fast, easily absorbed and easily propagated developments directly relevant to teacher/pupil learning, universities want measured, detailed, evidence based, written reports suitable for supporting the kind of writing that finds its way into research papers that can be scrutinised by peer review panels. The danger lies in the fact that the money given for action research gets into schools through the university - money raised by the university is channelled into the schools and is under the university's control. This results in an inequitable management situation and leaves the way open for exploitation.

Particular difficulties can arise, for example

- using teachers as indirect data collectors for career academics
- adopting an insensitive and even colonial approach to schools
- overburdening teachers with demands for written accounts/evidence

Another area of concern lies in the 'duty of care' owed by the university towards the teachers who are involved at classroom level in the action research. Particular points which might serve as examples are

- too little induction of teachers in research methods at the outset
- not enough support during the project
- not enough guidance for teachers about similar work that is going on elsewhere
- not enough given back to schools in the form of usable information / accreditation

Other difficulties are associated with the necessary conditions for educational action research such as collaboration, time for reflection and time for collective evaluation. Time and space are in short supply in schools. It is very important that teachers who engage in this work - the keen, dedicated and conscientious - don't suffer burn out from adding yet more responsibilities to their already overstretched lives.

In terms of the empirical / non-empirical approaches to research, I have observed that there is a strong tendency to want to use a quantifiable approach even when this may not be appropriate. There is a desire to measure effects and outcomes. This may not be the most useful way forward in something which is as flowing and dynamic as a learning situation.

I think the way forward is school-based/academic-informed research, rather like the research and development model used in industrial technology - a problem or goal is identified and a team of practitioners and theoreticians works together on possible best fits for a solution.

I have been struggling towards this model in my capacity as governor at a local community college where the status problems between university and school do not arise because there is no funding and we are only accountable to our own constituency of teachers, pupils, parents and other governors - we are trying out various strategies on improving learning for under-achievers. There is very little paper generated but there is a lot of enthusiasm, thought and excitement and I think that is rather important in itself!

Hope this is useful.

Jenny Gubb

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(vi) Chris Day

From: "WENDY JAMES" <Wendy.James@nottingham.ac.uk> (17.5.99.)
Subject: BERA Review CD1

From: Professor C W Day

Dear Peter

Here are my responses to your recent email.

1. Titles of Articles

Almost any of those appearing in the Educational Action Research Journal.

2. Approach to Action Research

I regard action research as a distinctive approach to learning because it is the only approach specifically concerned with change. Its focus upon 'practice' is broader than evaluating activity, since 'practice' is about personal, social, cultural and policy contexts in which activities occur. So there are different dimensions involved in reflecting in, on, about and for action e.g.. technical, dialogical, social justice, rationalist and emotional. Action research, then, embodies a variety of approaches to learning about self, others, situations: narrative, (auto) biographical, observation, evaluation etc. etc. See the following for examples of my own first and second order action research theory and practice

i) Professional Learning and Researcher Intervention: an action research perspective
BJER Vol.11, No.2 1985

ii) Working with the Different Selves of Teachers: beyond comfortable collaboration
EARJ Vol.6, No.2 1998

iii) Chapter 2 in Day, C (1999), Developing Teachers: the Challenges of Lifelong Learning (London, Falmer)

Incidentally, we have strong action research based programmes here too!

C W Day

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(vii) Pat D'Arcy

From: Pat D'Arcy <patdarcy@clara.co.uk>
Subject: Trying to sum up my own approach to Action Research

I can't remember where I first came across the term 'action research',

maybe through the work of Laurence Stenhouse and John Elliott. I remember Elliot's accounts of the 'Ford T Project' being published during the time (73-76) that I was working for the 'Writing across the Curriculum Project' and thinking that the two had much in common, working closely as both projects were with teachers and with their reflections on their own practice.

I also remember a conference that Stephen Rowlands organised in Leicestershire a year or two later, which invited participants to consider the nature of action research in relation to its academic standing. I argued even then that teachers were perfectly capable of organising and implementing their own research into their own practice without having to rely on university academics telling them what to do, how to do it, and whether it was worth anything once it was done. Interestingly, these are still issues that have some relevance thirty years on.

So - I have until quite recently associated action research with the teaching profession and I joined CARN in the 80s, or the 'Classroom-based Action Research Network' because what happened in classrooms appeared to be central to the Association's concerns. I was happy, however, to extend this perspective, by changing 'Classroom' to 'Collaborative' so that it could include practitioner researchers from other professions such as nurses and social workers. Indeed, I was the member who suggested that particular change in wording when we were all invited to offer suggestions.

For me, 'collaborative' is another keynote word which suggests partnership rather than hierarchy and which for research which is active, suggests the need to share ideas through working with others, whether these others are pupils, patients, clients or colleagues. Because action research is collaborative it is also dynamic in the sense that it develops, sometimes unpredictably, over time as participants share a variety of experiences and insights which do not always agree. In this respect action research is interpretative, growing out of an on-going dialectic between whoever is involved in the exploratory process.

What else? Action research has always appealed to me because it is applied research - setting out to do something and to effect change. As Whitehead, Winter and others have pointed out, a piece of action research frequently starts with this desire for change ('How can I improve my practice?') which might be seen as a problem such as the failure to grab the interest and enthusiasm of a particular group - as Jackie Williams saw it when she set out to change both the content and the approach of her Y9 RE syllabus - or the need to develop a set of teaching strategies in more detail - as Daniella de Cet saw it when she set out to use Learning Logs more effectively with her Y10s.

Personally, I prefer the verb 'develop' to the word 'improve' as to me, improvement tends to suggest failure or at least not doing something very well, whereas the concept of development is absolutely central for any reflective practitioner. Similarly, I prefer to think of starting with a

sense of challenge rather than with a problem, although challenge can certainly be problematic!

Now I come to the issue of how theory relates to practice in action research. I find it unhelpful to dichotomise the two, allotting work on theory to the universities and work on practice to the classroom as Hammersley did [Ed.Action Research, Vol.1, No.3 1993] and as I disputed [Ed.Action Research, Vol.2, No.2, 1994]. This is why I particularly like Schon's phrase 'reflective practitioner' and Whitehead's notion of 'living educational theory' which perceives the reflective practitioner's changing perspectives as embedded in and inseparable from her classroom experiences. Eames [1995] has argued cogently for this position in his examination of what constitutes professional knowledge.

I do have a problem, however, in too narrow or too literal an interpretation of 'practice'. As an English Adviser for 13 years, I neither had a classroom of my own, nor a base in a university. Rather, I had a foot in each camp as I worked alongside teachers in schools and helped to co-tutor those who were keen to become action researchers themselves as they worked for a higher qualification. When I chose to embark on my own doctoral research in 1994, I argued strongly that it qualified as action research even though I could not relate it to my own practice in the classroom, because a) I was seeking to develop my own perceptions about the nature of meaningful responses to pupils' writing and b) I had every hope that my exploration might ultimately be useful in helping other teachers to develop their own practice.

My thesis was also presented in the form of a narrative which acknowledged that as an educational researcher, I was also a learner. The narrative form enabled me to map shifts in my perceptions as I encountered views that differed from my own and to trace how my ideas gradually clarified into a clear pattern as I read other authors and talked to teachers, pupils and not least, Jack Whitehead who had the doubtful privilege of acting as my supervisor.

Presenting my on-going thoughts (and feelings!) in this way made me conscious of the extent to which my thesis was a self-study as well as a study of meaningful responses. I needed to ask myself why the making of meaning was so important to me as an educator, for myself, for the teachers with whom I had worked and for the pupils with whom they worked. This led me back into an examination of my own life experiences from childhood, through university and my subsequent career which was quite revelatory. I am now an enthusiast, therefore, for at least an element of self-study as an acknowledged strand of educational action research.

One last point, as I am running out of time. Shortly after retiring from my job as an Adviser, I wrote a paper which drew connections in an educational context, between pupil focused assessment, curriculum focused action research and teacher focused appraisal. In regarding all three as inter-related strands, I felt that a strong case could be made for action

research as the most appropriate form of staff development, relating to classroom practice on the one hand and the teacher's informed reflection on that practice on the other.

Pat

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P E Mellett 25 March 2000