

Chapter nine

Conclusion

In this last chapter I want to explore my understanding of the claims I made for this work. I outlined these at the beginning of the thesis, and they were:

- that this thesis is an holistic representation of my work as a teacher in a comprehensive school.
- that this work is a contribution to present understanding of the use of values as appropriate standards of judgment which can be used to test the validity of a teacher's claim to know her own professional knowledge as she engages in enquiries of the kind "How do I improve my professional practice?"

and it is offered as a contribution to the debates on:

- professional development in the context of the Teacher Training Agency to develop teaching as a research- based profession.
- values in education and the community as outlined by the School Curriculum and Assessment Authority

I have tried to explore the work I do in education in an holistic way, weaving all the strands of my educational life into this account and I have used the framework of action- research in which to do it.

While there are many action research antecedents and models as outlined by J.

Hughes (1996) I admit to resisting the application of models such as the Kemmis

and McTaggart self - reflective spiral (1981) because such models didn't seem to

fit what I was doing. When I tried to use the plan/ act/ observe/ reflect cycle it

seemed too tidy and too limiting. For many of the situations in which I had to act I

had no time to plan. The action research cycle appeared to be more like a

journey to improvement than the kaleidoscope of understanding that I felt I

needed.

If you like, my methodology came after my practice and there is nothing wrong in

that as Gilbert Ryle wrote:

“ Efficient practice precedes the theory of it; methodologies presuppose the application of the methods, of the critical investigation of which they are the products... It is ...possible for people intelligently to perform some sorts of operations when they are not yet able to consider any propositions enjoining how they should be performed .” (Ryle, G. 1949)

I knew that what I was doing *was* action research. My commitment was to explore my experiences of my professional life in order to understand it better ; to try to improve my work in education and to represent those experiences and understandings to others. That commitment is recognised in the action research community as being what action research is about.

“ Action research is more a commitment than a set of techniques - a commitment to exploring - exploring the meanings of, and hence, the practical possibilities for, our professional lives. This exploration includes, of course, exploring how one might undertake such explorations (relationships and strategies) and how one might report them in such a way that others can find them of help in supporting their own explorations. And the explorations of action research always remain incomplete. So we can expect that action research will always exhibit variety, rather than an agreed orthodoxy. because orthodoxy means the end of exploration.’ (Day,C. Elliott, J. Somekh,B. Winter, R. (Eds) 1996)

While texts in action research were interesting and inspiring they did not describe the way I worked. Marion Dadds experienced the same feelings when working on her story of teacher action research:

“ The seemingly tidy and logical shapes of the action research process (Kemmis and McTaggart, 1981; Elliott, 1981) did not appear to match adequately the experience of the teachers with whom I was working, as they struggled, persisted

and endured from week to week on their research projects in schools. The teachers' descriptions and accounts of their work bore little resemblance to the tidiness of the action research models. Their research stopped, started, lurched forwards, regressed, travelled blind alleys, reached peaks. Good research planning sometimes failed. Serendipity prospered. The teachers fretted, declared, delighted, cried, argued with colleagues, suppressed frustrations with their word processors and caretakers, left their wives and husbands in pursuit of development and practical theories. Affective views of subjectivity were missing from my reading but not the teachers' experiences. Affective dimensions of the action research process were missing from the neat models but not from the teachers' untidy lived realities. I had a daily urge to lift the flaps and corners of the action research arrows, spirals and boxes; to take a closer look at the embroiled underworlds below the clean theoretical diagrams. I had a need of additional and different action research discourses. " (Dadds 1995)

I do not want to litter this chapter which deals with the conceptual background of my enquiry with what Michael Bassey has called "*genuflection : the ritualistic citing of the founding parents of theory*" (Bassey 1995) I recognise that the work of researchers like M. Bassey, J. Elliott, W. Carr, M. Griffiths S Kemmis, P. Lomas, J. McNiff, S. Rowland, J. Rudduck, T. Russell, D. Schon, G Weiner and R. Winter and the many other researchers that I have cited in this thesis have created a climate in which I can research and thrive.

Here, though I would like to concentrate on those who have meant the most to me. If you like, it's where I got the spirit of action research from and why my account can be seen as original. The writers aren't all action researchers but people who try to give their work new directions, challenges and forms. I'm thinking here especially of Elliott Eisner, Michel Foucault and Jack Whitehead. But I also know that I learned a great deal by talking with, and reading the work of Pat D'Arcy, Kevin Eames, Moyra Evans, Moira Laidlaw, Andy Larter and Chris Walton, all of whom have given accounts of their educational lives in their dissertations, reports and books. I agree with Jean McNiff that "*Real people are the best theory: the most effective way of explaining ideas is to show what they mean in action*" (McNiff 1988)

I would like to think I worked in the spirit of Elliot Eisner who challenged the research community in his presidential address at the AERA in 1993 to find new forms of representation for their research. If representation is to be new then research methods also need to be revised. Eisner believed that:

" ... experience is the bedrock upon which meaning is constructed and that experience in significant degree depends on our ability to get in touch with the qualitative world we inhabit... Out of experience concepts are formed..."

Experience, however is private. For experience to become public, we must find some means to represent it “

Eisner recognised that the world was changing and educational research must change too:

“ When research methods are stable and canonised, the rules of the game are relatively clear. With new games, new rules. With new rules, competencies that were appropriate for some forms of research may not necessarily be relevant for others. Furthermore, the ability to make sense of a form of research depends upon one’s experience with that form and one’s conception of what counts as research.” (Eisner 1993).

Eisner urges new forms of research and new forms of representation for research and Dadds wants ‘ additional and different action research discourses’ that show ‘affective dimensions’ of teachers’ work. In that spirit I wrote this thesis. For me, action research has involved many methods of work: interviews with students and colleagues; taping of group discussions with students and colleagues; reading a range of material; listening to others; analysing school documents; making some video recordings of me teaching - some of which has proved useful and a great deal of which has been thrown away. The exploration

of ideas and experiences has been the important thing. The willingness to change

has been important too. It was the spirit of Foucault that challenged me here.

Foucault said :

“ For me intellectual work is related to what you could call aestheticism, meaning transforming yourself... I know that knowledge can transform us, the truth is not only a way of deciphering the world... but that if I know the truth, I will be changed... my problem is my own transformation. That’s the reason also why, when people say “ Well, you thought this a few years ago and now you say something else” my answer is (laughter) “ Well do you think I have worked like that all those years to say the same thing and not to be changed?” This transformation of one’s self by one’s own knowledge is, I think, something rather close to the aesthetic experience. Why should a painter work if he is not transformed by his own painting ?” (Foucault 1988)

The willingness to explore my own practice and to be changed by that exploration was not there from the start of my research. I began my work with this question “ *How can I improve the quality of group discussion in my classroom ?”* and I soon realised the limitation of the question. As I wrote on reflection, it “ *carried no implication, for me, of anything but the improvement of students’ discussion. I had not questioned my role as an active participant in my own classroom. I had not*

thought to ask “How can I improve the quality of my discussion with students ? “

That shift away from improving ‘them’ to looking at what I was doing was significant at that time. I wrote about that shift in 1990 but it took me until 1996 to understand the importance of ‘I’ in my enquiry. It is important to me now to realise how I developed through those years to understand how I engaged in living educational theory.

Foucault gave this answer when he was asked why there was no dominant philosophy in France -

“ So much the better for that! There is no dominant philosophy, it’s true, but a philosophy or rather philosophy in activity. The movement by which, not without effort and uncertainty, dreams and illusions, one detaches oneself from what is accepted as true and seeks other rules - that is philosophy. The displacement and transformation of frameworks of thinking, the changing of received values and all the work that has been done to think otherwise, to do something else, to become other than what one is - that too is philosophy “

The very life of philosophy for him was

“ the interaction between analysis, research, ‘ learned ‘ or ‘ theoretical ‘ criticism, and changes in behaviour, in people’s real conduct, their way of being, their relation to themselves and to others “ (Foucault 1980)

I hope that the processes of transforming myself by my own knowledge and the knowledge of others, and of transforming my educational knowledge through action and reflection have been communicated clearly in this account.

What has excited me about my work has been that flowing of ideas between different texts that I have read, work in the classroom, meetings in school, research group meetings, discussion and so on. It is the wholeness of that experience that I have tried to portray in this work.

It is in the spirit of the work of Jack Whitehead that I write with the confidence of someone who has come to understand her own educational development. He wrote :

“ In grounding my epistemology in Personal Knowledge I am conscious that I have taken a decision to understand the world from my own point of view, as a person claiming originality and exercising his personal judgment responsibility with universal intent. This commitment determines the nature of the unit of appraisal in my claim to knowledge. The unit is the individual’s claim to know his or her own educational development.” (Whitehead 1985)

Whitehead's research in which he contributes to a new view of educational knowledge and educational theory is the research that has sustained mine.

Whitehead claimed that this new form of knowledge:

“ ... embodies a new form of rationality which has emerged from the dialectical tradition. I am thinking of a tradition which stresses educative conversations and processes of question and answer. This is a tradition which embraces contradictions and engages with the social relations within which the knowledge is being produced and legitimated. It is also a form of moral enquiry which engages critically with its own justification in an aesthetics of existence . “

(Whitehead 1993)

Jack Whitehead was the first to ask me what were my educational values ; how did I live them out in practice and how did I intend to improve the quality of education 'here' ? In 1990 I could not answer those questions. This thesis gives him my answers.

In responding to Jack Whitehead about my values I also claim to make a contribution to the debate on values in education and the community outlined by the School Curriculum and Assessment Authority (1996). SCAA is consulting a wide range of organisations, parents, governors and schools about its document which states the values that school should promote and the role of schools in

promoting the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils. The consultative document outlines the values and principles for action within the headings of Society; Relationships; the Self and the Environment and urges those interested to show how these principles can be translated into practice.

Here's an example of the values and principles in the document: For '

Relationships' the values are stated thus "*We value others for themselves, not for what they have or what they can do for us, and we value these relationships as fundamental to our development and the good of the community*". The

Principles for Action stated follow as "*On the basis of these values, within our relationships we should: respect the dignity of all people; tell others they are valued; earn loyalty, trust and confidence; work cooperatively with others ; be mutually supportive; respect the beliefs, life, privacy and property of others; try to resolve disputes peacefully.*"

Surely such value- statements and the principles for action of the SCAA document need to be explored, not as linguistic statements, but as I have explored my values - embodying them as motivators of my practice in, for example, my educative relationships with pupils. When Jack Whitehead asked me what were my educational values and I began to tell him he would always

interrupt and say “ show me”. He was not interested in my rhetoric but in my practice as I attempted to give those values a living meaning. In the House of Lords debate on “ Society’s Moral and Spiritual Well- being “ Lord Morris said of the SCAA initiative:

“... the danger is that the SCAA will simply come up with the lowest common denominator of moral categories. Shared values means the lowest standards on which we can all agree. What we need is not to be told that to tell the truth is good, and the bullying is bad, but to learn how parents and teachers together can raise and maintain moral standards in their own communities. Not “ what” but ‘how’, my Lords. “ (Morris, Lord. 1996)

I welcome the SCAA document and the Lords debate on values and the responsibilities of schools but they are only a beginning. The real work is to translate the ‘what’ into practice and to share that practice through publishing accounts, like this, of what it is to try to live out those values in the context of our relationships and school.

In making sense of my experiences and in the writing of them I have communicated the very values that underpin my work. In constructing my narrative my spirit and values have emerged over time and have created meaning. There are more meanings to be made. I can now be confident that I

am able to do so in my own way and communicate them in my own voice. Such is the power of action research that places ' I ' at the centre of the enquiry.

And it is because that research has been so powerful for me that I claim that this work is a contribution to the current debate on professional development.

The Teacher Training Agency has recently set up pilot projects and consultation exercises on Headteacher, subject leader and expert teacher qualifications.

These new qualifications are seen as a focus of pedagogic and professional development in teaching. The Agency is committed to promoting teaching as a research- based profession. The Agency's paper " Teaching as a Research- based Profession - promoting Excellence in Teaching " states:

" The TTA believes that teaching can and should be informed by high quality research in order to extend pupil achievements and that teachers have an essential part to play in making this happen. To date, the TTA has been able to identify only a small, if significant body of research findings directly focused on classroom practice and enhancing it; more is needed. " (TTA 1996)

The paper recognises that too few research projects focus on classroom teaching; the meanings generated by much research stop short of making

meaning for day to day practice and that traditional ways of reporting research do

not match the needs of practitioners. The TTA believes there is a need to:

i. increase the amount of classroom- based educational research relevant to improving the quality of teaching and learning;

ii. raise awareness of what high quality research can contribute to teaching;

iii. make research findings more accessible to teachers;

iv. develop teachers' skills in conducting, interpreting and using research designed to foster improved classroom practice. (TTA 1996)

I welcome any debate on continuing professional development for teachers. After

all, the formal training of teachers in Britain has a very short history: the first B.Ed

began in 1965 and teaching training for teachers of maths and science in

secondary schools only became compulsory in 1982. As Geert Kelchtermans

writes:

“ Terminating the teacher education programme and receiving a teacher certificate doesn't mean the end of the training process and the achievement of competence. The further development of professional behaviour during a career is called ' professional development'. The notion is used in a descriptive as well as prescriptive way. In the descriptive sense, professional development refers to the way the teacher's' evolution takes place during a career. The prescriptive meaning refers to interventions and training to direct the evolution in the professional behaviour in a more desirable way “. (Kelchtermans, G. 1993)

Until I began this research work I'd always had mixed feelings about so-called professional development. In all the schools I've taught in it's been something of a hit and miss affair, of notices of courses put up on the staff room noticeboard that I've seen after they happened; the deputy in charge of staffing telling me of a course I should / will go on; the same deputy telling me there's no funding for a course I've found and so on. I've attended such courses as "The tutor as a learning manager", "Effective schools", "Women in management" and the like but I'm not clear how they've affected my practice and the quality of education for my students. Many courses have been valuable not for the input from the paid 'expert' who I'm always tempted to dismiss with - 'OK, you do it then, show us how it's done' - but because of the discussions with other teachers on the course about their concerns and work.

As an introduction to his thesis, Andy Larter wrote:

"Since coming into the profession, I believe that the best professional help I have had is in talking. Quite often the most support I have been offered or have offered to others has been over a pint of bitter, in a car, in a staffroom or anywhere else where two or more people can meet and discuss issues which have emerged from some problem or concern that in turn has arisen from the day to day practice of teaching and learning." (Larter, A. 1987)

Professional development needs to be re-defined for teaching and I believe we can learn something from how other professions are going about it. David Hargreaves, in the Teacher Training Agency Annual Lecture 1996, compared the teaching profession with the medical profession:

“ In education there is simply not enough evidence on the effects and effectiveness of what teachers do in classrooms to provide an evidence- based corpus of knowledge. The failure of educational researchers, with a few exceptions, to create a substantial body of knowledge equivalent to evidence- based medicine means that teaching is not - and never will be - a research based profession unless there is major change in the kind of research that is done in education.” (Hargreaves, D. 1996)

Hargreaves quotes from a journal concerned with medicine:

“ The practice of evidence- based medicine is a process of life- long, problem- based learning in which caring for our patients creates the need for evidence about diagnosis, prognosis, therapy and other clinical and health- care issues. In the evidence- based medicine process we

- convert these information needs into answerable questions*
- track down with maximum efficiency the best evidence with which to answer them...*
- critically appraise the evidence for its validity... and usefulness...*
- apply the results of this appraisal to our clinical practice, and*
- evaluate our performance (Sackett, D L and Haynes, R B 1995)*

Hargreaves asks “ *Can any of you say that a parallel approach in teaching, compatible as it is with the notion of the teacher as a reflective practitioner, would not be powerfully beneficial ?* “

Tony Ghaye bridges the gap between the professions of education and medicine in an interesting way - he is Reader in Education at Worcester College of Higher Education and works with health care professionals on the development of critical reflective practice for health care professionals. In his series of books ‘ *Self Supported Learning Experiences for Health Care Professionals* ‘ (1996) he characterises what a professional health care worker is, what a cycle of professional behaviour looks like and gives criteria for professional training. He writes:

“... courses of professional training need to address much more than the transmission of knowledge and skills... The whole education or training process must identify, introduce, develop and reward the required professional attitudes and values”. He argues that designers of professional courses need to ask the question ‘ *How can we produce a person who acts like this ?*’ rather than ‘*How can we transmit this knowledge and these skills ?*’

And that is the challenge for the professional development of teachers - how can teachers be challenged to be critical of their own practices and to improve them in the process of professional development ? If the way forward is to make teaching

a research- based profession then we must take up Eisner's challenge of finding new ways to research and to represent that research.

My research has enabled me to look critically at my work and re-examine my values and the way they can be lived so as to improve the quality of education for my students. My professional development has retained a direct relationship to my learning, and that of my students and a colleague.

As Ardra Cole (1996) asks:

"How do we, as a community of researchers committed to self-study both in theory and in practice, create a legitimate space for ourselves and our work both within our own institutions and within the broader educational and academic community?" (Trapedo-Dworsky and Cole, 1996)

At the end of this thesis I return again to that most important question: " How do we / I improve the quality of education here ? "

At the beginning of my research I confronted the question, as time went on I accepted the question, now I can embrace the question and accept my responsibility as an educator to improve my practice. That is the key to my

professional development . Knowing the power of ‘ I ’ I can now act as a responsible professional in a developing, research-based profession in order to transform my professional life. I am able to let go of the kite- line I wrote of in Chapter four because I no longer feel constrained by my work but liberated by it. Inevitably, having reached the end of this thesis I see only a beginning.