

CHAPTER SIX

ACTION RESEARCH AS A FORM OF PROFESSIONAL KNOWLEDGE IN A WHOLE-SCHOOL SETTING

This chapter deals with another aspect of my practice as an action researcher, and moves beyond my own classroom to my work with colleagues at Wootton Bassett School. In contrast to the two preceding chapters, the focus has shifted back to my own practice, although at the time of writing, in the autumn of 1991, I had been seconded to work with the advisory service of Wiltshire LEA. The account I give here, therefore, is not concerned with the current advisory work in which I was involved, but with events which had taken place some time before.

In the preceding chapters, I have argued that an action-research-based, dialectical form of educational knowledge could constitute the valid form of professional knowledge which I believe teaching lacks. In Chapters Two and Three, I attempted to demonstrate a dialectical form of knowing and acting as it appeared in my own teaching. In Chapter Four I attempted to demonstrate the ways in which such a form of educational knowledge may be used by other educators. In Chapter Five, I reformulated my concept of dialectics, and attempted to demonstrate that the form was perceptible in the oral manifestations of educational knowledge generated by teachers in the dialogues examined in Chapters Four and Five, just as much as in the written manifestation discussed in Chapters Two and Three.

So far, I have looked at the form firstly on an individual basis, in my own practice, before looking at the way the educational knowledge thus generated is more widely shared, incorporated within the understandings and educational practices of the participants in the dialogues in Chapters Four and Five. However, if a dialectical form of action-research-based educational knowledge is appropriate as a form of professional knowledge, it must be applicable more widely than to an individual teacher, or to small groups of teachers in an localised 'dialogical community'.¹ To be a

¹ Bernstein, R. (1983) 'Beyond Objectivism and Relativism' London: Basil Blackwell, pp. 171 to 231.

fully effective form of professional knowledge, it must be moved beyond the classrooms of individual practitioners, and be woven into the fabric of educational institutions. In the first part of this chapter I will consider the extent to which an action-research-based, dialectical form of educational knowledge has become part of the fabric of one institution, Wootton Bassett School. I will give a narrative account of developments in the school under the following headings:

1. The Bassett Action-Research Group.
2. Action research in the English faculty.
3. Action research on a whole-school basis.

I have chosen to present this section as a narrative, because I feel that, in order to give a true picture of what happened at Wootton Bassett, it is essential to show how events grew from each other within a linear time-framework. After the narrative, in the second part of the chapter, I will consider how far the developments I have described represent one possible way of putting such a form of professional knowledge into action, by relating the developments described to current proposals for a General Teaching Council.

PART ONE

1. The Bassett Action Research Group

In this section, I should like to describe the origins of the action-research group, before drawing on my research journal to illustrate the way the group was constituted, and the way it developed and operated, in terms of the support which members supported each other, and of the group's publications. This early phase of the Bassett Action Research Group covers the period from January 1988 to October 1989, although its origins date back to early in 1986, when I was first discovering action

research, and acting as the co-ordinator of a cross-curricular collection of teachers, drawn from the faculties of maths, modern languages, science, English and humanities, who were interested in exploring ways of improving the learning of children in their classes. This 'Looking at Learning' group was informal and small-scale. It made explicit use of the five-part action/reflection cycle, and spent its weekly meetings considering the evidence of children's talking and writing which members of the group had brought along for discussion. In July 1986, the group published a report on its explorations.²

Between July 1986 and early 1988, things lay dormant. However, in January 1988, I first recorded in my journal the idea of bringing together into a group those teachers who were involved in some way with research for MEds or Diplomas in Further Professional Studies. I felt at that time (not entirely altruistically!) that an action-research group would be essential to the research I was planning, because it would offer:

...examples of other teachers, not just me, at work on their own concerns, within a collaborative framework, and (would) help to define the kind of educational knowledge that comes from ... practitioners working together.³

The action-research group actually came together for the first time in September, with strong support from Hylton Thomas, the head teacher at Wootton Bassett. The original members were: Chris Kirkland, one of the deputy heads, who was registered for an MEd at Bath University; Paul Hayward, a teacher of CDT, registered for an MPhil at Bath; Daniela De Cet, who has already appeared in Chapters Four and Five, and who was registered for a diploma; Pat White, the head of lower school, who intended to register for a diploma, and Roy Haskins, the head of history, who wanted to transfer his MEd studies from Exeter University to Bath. (He had recently moved

² Eames, K. (ed.) (1986) 'Looking at Learning: A Report On The Inter-Faculty Learning Group' Wootton Bassett School, Swindon, Wilts.

³ Journal entry 29.1.88.

to Wiltshire from Devon.) As I was already an experienced action-researcher, I offered to co-ordinate the group

Our first meeting (19.9.88) established a purpose for the group. In the agenda for the meeting, I attempted to define what we would do:

- * *We're a research group, looking at our own classroom practice.*
- * *We're stronger as a group than as individuals. We therefore need to develop strategies for supporting each other in our research.*
- * *The exact nature of these strategies will undoubtedly develop as we go along.*⁴

As part of the agenda circulated beforehand, I also suggested procedures for us to follow. We could, I suggested, support each other in the following ways:

- * *Meetings on a half-termly basis as a whole group.*
- * *Validation group meetings to take place on request from whichever group member wishes to submit a paper.*⁵

In another part of the agenda, I suggested that I might meet on an individual basis with members of the group:

- * *Additionally, I'd like, if I may, to meet once a half-term with each member of the group to discuss the progress of the research they are engaged in, and/or to tape an interview about issues arising from the research.*⁶

As a result of the discussion at the meeting, we agreed on the agenda points above.

We decided that we would support each other by:

- * *Regular meetings (which give deadlines for us to work to).*
- * *Sharing articles and other publications.*
- * *Discussing what we're doing with each other on an informal basis.*
- * *Going into each others' classrooms as a 'critical friend'.*

⁴ Agenda 19.9.88

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

- * *Looking at the journals which we agreed to keep, as well as at other writing which we would produce as part of our research.*
- * *Taking part in validation meetings.*⁷

By the end of the Autumn Term, 1988, the group had developed a nucleus of four researchers - Chris, Paul, Daniela and myself. Pat had decided against registration, in order to concentrate on a primary liaison project she was involved with, and Roy had to postpone his involvement in research, because of difficulties in moving house, and in transferring his registration from Exeter. I should like to illustrate two aspects of the group's work, involving the nucleus of four, between September 1988 and January 1990. First, there is the supportive interaction between the group members. Second, there are the group's publications.

The supportive interaction between group members followed, to some extent, the lines developed in the first meeting on 19.9.88. After that, whole-group meetings took place only rarely, and no-one asked for a validation meeting at which they could offer their work to scrutiny by the rest of the group. Rather, the other three drew individually on my interest in and experience of action research, as a supplement to the supervision they were receiving at Bath. For example, Paul invited me in to his classroom to talk to and observe pupils from the class which formed his research focus.⁸ I was also able to share books and articles with other members of the group, and Daniela, especially, contributed photocopied articles which she had found useful in her meetings with the Advanced Diploma group at Bath University.⁹ Here are two entries from my journal which illustrate the way in which the group functioned at that time. The first records a conversation with Daniela De Cet about the progress of her research. The second records interactions with all three members of the group.

⁷These points are taken from information sheet circulated after the meeting on 19.9.88.

⁸ Journal entry 6.12.88.

⁹ No evidence available from my journal is available on this point, but for Daniela's involvement with the Wiltshire English adviser's action-research group at Bath, please see Eames, K. (1990) 'Growing Your Own: The Development Of Action Researchers Within An Action-Research Approach To Whole-School Development', *British Journal of In-Service Education*, Vol 16, No 2, p. 124.

...Daniela wanted to know if there was anything she could look at. I thought that as she's working on using learning logs, she could look at the way in which the quality of the independent insights developed through learning logs is reflected/transformed in the final draft. This carries on from her present research paper.¹⁰

...Yesterday, Chris, Daniela and Paul all came to talk about their research, or to give me something they'd written. Chris wanted to talk over the interviews he'd been doing with probationers, and he wanted advice on presentation - how to use transcripts as evidence, and how to lay them out. Paul had a copy of his latest report, and Daniela wanted to talk over her future direction. They are now approaching me, rather than the other way round. ...Daniela ...wants to move now in the direction of poetry... (She said): 'I'd like to give the opportunity to develop a greater understanding of writing poetry, to see it as a 'legitimate' form. I'd like to link that with reflective writing, encouraging them to work on it themselves.' I suggested that she might try...(an) 'I-search' format, answering the question 'What is poetry?' It'll be the story of (their) search, with thoughts about other people's poems and at least two poems by themselves. The question they need to ask about the poems would be, 'What do these poems tell me about poetry?''¹¹

The way in which Daniela adapted my suggestions to develop (in her pupils) a greater understanding of the process of writing poetry is available in her Advanced Diploma,¹² as is her response to my first suggestion, in her second action-research cycle.¹³ This kind of one-to-one discussion was characteristic of the way in which the group operated at this time. Although it was productive in terms of its influence on individual researchers, there was no link with the official structures of the school. We were relatively isolated, having an effect in areas such as the induction of probationers (Chris), the teaching of CDT (Paul), and the teaching of English (Daniela and myself), without contributing to a school-wide development of action-research. One way of spreading our influence, however, was through the accounts of our research which we published.

¹⁰ Journal entry 6.1.89. Daniela's 'present research paper' is her first action-research account, which appears in her Advanced Diploma submission to Bath University, and in Eames, K. (ed) (1989a) 'How Can We Improve Professionalism In Education Through Collaborative Action Research?' Bassett Action Research Group, Wootton Bassett School, Swindon, Wilts., pp. 14 - 33.

¹¹ Journal entry 26.5.89.

¹² De Cet, D. (1991) 'How do I improve the quality of my pupils' writing?' Advanced Diploma in Professional Development in Education, Bath University.

¹³ Eames, K.(ed) (1989a) op. cit., pp. 23 to 33.

Apart from the completion of publications accredited by Bath University, such as Advanced Diplomas, MEds and MPhils, three members of the group published and circulated material from their research under the auspices of the Bassett Action Research Group. 'Personal Growth Through Students Reviewing Their Own Writing', which forms Chapter Two of the present study, was the first,¹⁴ and my account of how it was used by other educators, and the significance of that usage, is given in Chapters Four and Five. The second publication from the Bassett Action Research Group was 'How Can We Improve Professionalism In Education Through Collaborative Action Research?', published by the school with the support of the headteacher. Three members of the group contributed to this publication.¹⁵ Paul Hayward gave an account of how he improved the writing of needs and briefs with his GCSE design technology class;¹⁶ Daniela De Cet contributed reflections on the value of research for her professional development, before giving an account of her first two action-research cycles;¹⁷ I wrote the introduction,¹⁸ and contributed what is now Chapter Three in this present study.¹⁹ In addition, Jack Whitehead, who supervised Paul, Daniela and myself at Bath University, made the final contribution,²⁰ as well as giving advice on early drafts, and helping with word processing and reprographics.

'How Can We Improve Professionalism...?' attempted not only to set out the theoretical arguments for research-based professionalism, but to show how the theory might work in practice, through the accounts of three teachers reflecting on and trying to improve the educational processes in their classrooms. It has been circulated

¹⁴ Eames, K. (1989b) 'Personal Growth Through Students Reviewing Their Own Writing', Bassett Action Research Group, Wootton Bassett School, Swindon, Wilts.

¹⁵ Eames, K. (ed) (1989a) op. cit.

¹⁶ Eames, K. (ed) (1989a) op. cit. pp. 34 - 46.

¹⁷ Eames, K. (ed) (1989a) op. cit. pp. 10 - 34.

¹⁸ Eames, K. (ed) (1989a) op. cit. pp. 3 - 9.

¹⁹ Eames, K. (ed) (1989a) op. cit. pp. 47 - 63.

²⁰ Eames, K. (ed) (1989a) op. cit. pp. 64 - 76.

widely within Wiltshire and beyond, and has proved a useful resource to me in my present role, seconded to the Wiltshire Assessment Team.²¹ However, it was probably of greatest significance in its contribution to the next phase of the research group, which I will examine after giving an account of events in the English faculty at Wootton Bassett, concurrent with the developments described above.

Interim summary. I see the following points from this section as being significant:

- * The group was made up of researchers working for further qualifications at a single venue - Bath University.
- * As an experienced action researcher, I was able to support the group in school.
- * That support was on an individual basis, and made little use of whole-group meetings.
- * We could draw on advice from our supervisor at Bath University, as well as on the support we provided for each other.
- * We produced two publications, which proved to be of use to other teachers.
- * We had no influence on whole-school policy, although our research was influential in our own classrooms or/and faculties.
- * The head teacher was supportive of, and interested in, what we were doing.

2. Action Research in the English Department

In this section, I should like to illustrate the way in which an action-research approach to curriculum development and evaluation evolved in the English faculty. I will look at how my own research interest in pupils reviewing their own learning²² originally related to the concerns on the matter expressed by the faculty. I will then describe

²¹ For example, a colleague on the team who is carrying out further work at the National Primary Centre claims to have found it useful in clarifying the nature of action research.

²² See Chapter Two.

how the faculty used an action-research approach to evaluate the way pupils reviewed their learning. The period covered extends from September 1988 to July 1989.

While the first phase of the Bassett Action Research Group was developing, and I was working on the early stages of the research which now forms Chapter Two in this study, I recorded in my journal the questions raised by the faculty over our approach to reviewing learning, and noted the relation of their concerns to my own:

A couple of interesting things to note. First of all, the faculty is beginning to feel that they and the kids are getting overloaded by the profiling and reviewing process.²³ I'm not sure how much of this is the late half-term. That one week makes a hell of a difference. ...Jennie said that she didn't disagree with the principle of the reviewing process, but that she felt it was over-burdening her and the kids. ...Tim said that he insisted the kids should do it, but they didn't like it. He had to be really firm about it.

This raises a number of questions:

- * Is the system valuable in terms of the insights we get into pupils' learning, and the insights it can give them into what they are doing and why?*
- * If so, can it be made more streamlined, or can we implement the system more effectively? Can we improve pupils' understanding of what the reviewing process is designed to do for us and for them?*
- * Is it valuable in terms of the influence we can bring to bear on their development?*

Interesting, this - it's a related issue to the research problem I'm investigating and has, perhaps altered my perception of where I want to go. I can't pin it down at the moment. ...How has it changed my thinking? ...I've become aware that my concern is not a detached interest, but is shared by other members of the faculty. It's made me return to fundamental values and principles and try to reassess their importance in the light of the present question. It's made me aware, too, of the precariousness of my educational practice, because this was one aspect of it which I assumed was accepted and firmly in place in the English curriculum at Bassett, (but it) is suddenly seen as causing trouble, and is not having the effect it is intended to have. The sands shift under your feet, when you least expect them to.²⁴

²³ See the section 'Reviewing in a School Context - Developments and Difficulties' in Chapter Two for an account of the background to our approach to reviewing at this time.

²⁴ Journal entry, 28.10.88.

What I learned in the action/reflection cycles described in Chapter Two was fed back into the faculty's approach to reviewing.²⁵ By the second half of the summer term 1989, we were ready to evaluate what we were doing, and our evaluation took place in June and July, taking advantage of the time created by the departure of our examination groups, and using an action-research approach. We discussed in a faculty meeting what we wanted to evaluate, and how we were going to gather evidence and present it. I summarised the proposals made during the meeting, typed the summary and submitted the proposals again to the whole faculty for final approval. Each teacher was kept free of exam invigilation for four forty-minute periods, to help with writing his or her evaluation report. The reports were circulated the weekend before the meeting, so that members of the faculty, and Hylton Thomas, the head teacher, could read all contributions and be prepared for the meeting itself, which took place on 3.7.89. I recorded my reactions to the evaluation in my journal after the meeting:

*A week ago yesterday (3.7.89), we had an evaluation of the English faculty's profiling and reviewing policy. We used an action-research approach, in that we formulated the questions we wanted to investigate, decided on how we were going to collect the information, collected it, and then wrote our reports. The reports answered the questions, and summarised, in the form: In what ways is reviewing working? In what ways is it not working? What proposals can we make to improve the areas in which it's not working? ...Interesting(ly) ...this format seems to be ideal for teachers to evaluate their own practice. As Jennie said, 'I like this way of doing it, because it's down-to-earth.'*²⁶

I then prepared an evaluation of what we had done for a meeting of the senior management team and the heads of faculties on 10.2.90, which was held at Blunsdon House Hotel to discuss action research in the whole school. I will describe what happened at that meeting, and its consequences, in the next section.

Interim summary. I see the following points from this section as being significant:

²⁵ I have no direct evidence of the process in action, but the results may be seen in Wiltshire County Council (1990) 'What's Going On, Here? Assessment in English, Maths and Science' Wiltshire LEA Advisory Services, Trowbridge, which describes the faculty's practice, with examples.

²⁶ Journal entry 11.7.89.

- * My own research concerns arose from practical problems which were shared by the faculty.
- * The action/reflection cycle was an appropriate and effective form of evaluating our common practices to show what seemed sound and what needed improving.
- * All teachers in the faculty took part in deciding what to evaluate and how to do it.
- * The faculty saw it as practical and useful.
- * Time was made available for teachers to meet, to plan the evaluation, and write their reports.
- * The story of action research in the faculty was incorporated in published accounts.
- * The head teacher supported us by sanctioning the use of time made available through pupils taking study leave, and by acting as a validator, to ensure that our approach was sufficiently rigorous and methodical.

3. Action Research on a Whole School Basis

In this section, I should like to look at what happened when the first moves were made towards institutionalising action research, drawing on what had been learnt through the action-research group, and through the use of action research in the English faculty. I will give an account of the Blunsdon House meeting and its immediate consequences. I will then give an account of the freshly-constituted action-research group which followed. The period covered extends from October 1989 to the time of writing (August 1991).

As a result of the work of the Bassett Action Research Group, the English faculty's use of action research, and the publication, in October 1989, of 'How Can We Improve Professionalism...?' the head teacher, Hylton Thomas, became interested in using action research as an approach to curriculum development and evaluation. His interest was especially sharpened, in the light of developments in the national

curriculum, and in requirements for schools to produce institutional development plans. After discussion, it was decided that Hylton should propose to the school curriculum panel²⁷ a one-day conference on the possibility of using action research in curriculum development and evaluation. His proposal was accepted, and the programme for the day - Saturday 10.2.90, at Blunsdon House Hotel, Swindon - was decided upon in discussions between Hylton, myself, and Peter Sheppard, the deputy head in charge of staff development. The objectives set for the day were:

1. To consider development plans with a view to completing the evaluation statement and process.
2. To examine the practical value of action research in this process.
3. To look at established practice in using action research for evaluation.
4. To draw up action plans incorporating statements of intent for faculties and for individuals within faculties.
5. To clarify the position of the research group in the school as a whole.

The notes I made in my journal the day after the meeting capture something of the excitement I felt at what had happened:

...I never thought I'd hear people at Bassett say the things they did. The most telling comment was Tony's,²⁸ when he said, 'If you want my gut reaction, I think we should dismantle all the standing committees and development groups that we've got, and move over completely to action research.' ...I looked down the long table to where Hylton was sitting, because he's going to have to answer such questions, and to a certain extent it means he will have to demolish or adapt the structures he set up last year. ...There was overwhelming enthusiasm for the changed style of curriculum development. ...What appealed seemed to be the practical nature of the form, its adaptability, its closeness, as Norman²⁹ said, to the shape of teachers' thinking - the way it's focused...on improving the quality of education. It was interesting, though, that when we were making action plans, Hylton reminded us that they were only provisional. We needed to take the plans back to our faculties and consult with them, because each teacher had to have a stake in the process. It can only be collaborative

²⁷ The senior management team and the heads of faculties.

²⁸ Senior teacher, and member of the senior management team.

²⁹ Head of performing arts.

*and democratic. It cannot be imposed, except in that the form is something for us to use, collaboratively and professionally. ...The main difficulties we had - and there is no guidance that we can draw on - were in deciding how to go about building in the action/reflection cycle to our evaluation of practice, so that everyone takes part at some level. ...*³⁰

As a result of this one-day conference, Hylton agreed to write a paper on the management of curriculum change, and present it to the school's curriculum panel. Here are two relevant sections from the paper, in which he proposed, among other measures, the setting up of a fresh action research group, to be run on the same lines as the previous one, but with a wider, whole-school brief:

...The basic tenet underlying the proposals is that we, as a staff, should assume a full professional responsibility for curriculum change involving planning, development, implementation and evaluation. In order to achieve this we need a coherent and agreed approach to manage change ourselves instead of being subject to external instructions...

...We are obliged to inform the DES through the LEA of developments with regard to the implementation of the national curriculum. There is also the need to monitor the intentions of faculties and departments to provide a holistic view of the curriculum and plan for the provision of resources and INSET. It is obvious that proving the effectiveness of plans requires some form of systematic evaluation.

It is proposed that:

- a) Heads of faculties, department and curriculum co-ordinators will produce annually three-year curriculum development plans.*
- b) These will be updated in March of each year for preliminary costing in terms of resources and staffing for the following academic year.*
- c) Final summative evaluation will occur towards the end of the summer term with amendments to plans and budgets being made as necessary.*
- d) Two teacher development days (March and June) will be designated for faculty use to include evaluation work.*
- e) Evaluation will be an ongoing part of the work of each curriculum team's development process using 'action research' methods.*
- f) Each faculty, and the 'consortium' of departments will have the option in 1990/91, at least, of nominating a member of the team to assist the group with*

³⁰ Journal entry 11.2.90.

its evaluation. This person will work on a topic selected by the group and have the opportunity to have 0.05 remitted time for the work, and join an 'action-research' group in school under the guidance of Bath University to study for further qualifications.

As a result of the acceptance of this paper by the school's curriculum panel, a freshly-constituted research group took shape in the summer term 1990. The members of the group - all volunteers - were: Jane Garwell (Maths), Deanne Harper (Design/Tech), Mary Johnson (Humanities), Val Kay (Science), and Paul Siebert (English). Daniela De Cet, from the previous research group, volunteered to attend group meetings, although she had recently completed her Advanced Diploma, and was preparing it for submission. Chris Kirkland had finished his MEd the previous year, and Paul Hayward had moved to another school. My own situation had altered, too, in that I was to start a two-year secondment from September 1990, to the Wiltshire Assessment Team. However, I was asked by Hylton Thomas to maintain my role as co-ordinator of the research group. Jack Whitehead was our contact with Bath University, and a regular attender at meetings. Wiltshire LEA agreed to fund the group's registration at Bath University for the Certificate and Diploma in Professional Development in Education. The school paid for the remitted time for each researcher from its own budget for in-service development.

The group met in school late June and early July 1990 to establish the role of the individual researcher in investigating or evaluating an area of interest or concern to the faculty. It had been agreed by the school's curriculum panel that the area of interest or concern would be decided by discussion among members of the faculty, and the researcher would explore this area on their behalf. We also discussed the action/reflection cycle, in the light of the copies of 'How Can We Improve Professionalism...?' which I had distributed. I then met each researcher on an individual basis, to formulate the faculty's concern, and to fill in the 'Outline Of Your Enquiry/Action Plan', on the application form for Bath University's Certificate and

Diploma in Professional Development in Education. Here are two illustrative examples:

1. What do you wish to investigate/improve?

I should like to investigate our assessment of the national curriculum in year 7 design technology. (Deanne)

How appropriate are the lower school humanities learning materials to the needs of below-average-ability pupils? (Mary)

2. Why are you concerned about this?

I want to ensure that the faculty is fulfilling the requirements of the National Curriculum, while developing a practical form of assessment which is beneficial to pupils' learning. (Deanne)

I am concerned that the material currently produced is unsuitable for the less able pupils within mixed ability groupings. (Mary)

3. What do you hope to do?

Develop a system of assessment which goes with the specific needs of the subject area, and try it out. (Deanne)

- (i) Look at current teaching of mixed-ability groups in year 7, to identify areas which need differentiated material, and to explain why I think this is so.*
- (ii) Produce differentiated material which I think will improve the learning of the lower-attaining pupils.*
- (iii) Try out the material with a year 7 group.*
- (iv) Evaluate how successfully the material has improved the learning of the lower-attaining pupils within the group. (Mary)*

4. What kind of evidence do you hope to collect to help you to make judgements about what is happening?

Pupils' review sheets/learning logs, pupils' artefacts (photographs?), pupil talk and writing, my own journal of thoughts and observations (tape recording/video?) (Deanne)

I intend to monitor the understanding, progress and behaviour of selected pupils before and after the implementation of differentiated material. (Mary)

5. How will you collect such evidence?

See 4 above (Deanne)

Use of journal to collect evidence from the following sources: consultation with other teachers of year 7; lesson observation; pupils' reactions; test results; examination of pupils' work re. tasks; consultation of pupil profile sheets; consultation with special needs staff; group-talk evaluation; use of tapes. (Mary)

From September 1990, the group met regularly - more or less every half term, with the date of the next meeting arranged at the current one. In contrast to the previous incarnation of the research group, these meetings were mainly given over to discussions of work in progress, or of finished research reports. Although I felt hampered by not being in the school to offer support on a day-to-day basis, I was able to make visits on request to discuss with individuals the progress of their research. I was also able to support through telephone conversations in the evening, through disseminating relevant articles and extracts from books, and through reading and commenting on journal entries, and on early drafts of research reports. Daniela, as an experienced action researcher, was generous in her commitment of time in distributing materials, in reminding group members about deadlines and meetings, in attending meetings, and in offering advice on a day-to-day basis. Jack Whitehead

attended the meetings, and offered valuable advice on how to satisfy the academic requirements of the university in the accounts of practice which were discussed.

On 9.5.91 an evaluation of the research group's work was held, as part of a wider evaluation of the school's development plan. Two of the local authority's general secondary advisers were present, as was the area education officer. The wider evaluation of the school's development plan was carried out using an adaptation of the five-part action-reflection cycle. Regarding the research group, I had previously prepared a paper for the evaluation, based on my own perceptions of the group's progress, and on the written reflections of four out of the five researchers registered. The fifth researcher, Mary Johnson, accompanied me to the evaluation meeting on 9.5.91, and gave her responses there in verbal form.

From the written reflections of the researchers, the work of the group was seen by them as having been useful for their faculties in the following ways:

- * In terms of the materials produced. (*e.g. 'I have developed a learning objectives sheet for year 7 to prompt log entries - distributed to faculty. I have produced a 'redrafting suggestions sheet' for key stage 3 - available to faculty in English office resources bank. I have produced a 'good authors' list (poster size) for every English room. I have prompted the purchase of reading materials for slow readers' - Paul. 'Having designed and produced learning logs applicable to design/technology, the rest of the staff now use these, so all of year 7 are familiar with them, and as time progresses, pupils' use of them has improved. It is envisaged that these should not only be useful, along with the folders, for assessment, but also help the pupils when they come to write their records of achievement' - Deanne.*)
- * In terms of generating purposeful discussion. (*e.g. 'I...have found the scheme very beneficial...to the others in the faculty, as I pass on information, experiences I have had etc.' - Deanne. 'The knowledge that this research is ongoing has also spurred my colleagues to be extremely supportive and full of suggestions. One aim is to produce a bank of mathematical tasks which are closely linked with our schemes of work in years 7 and 8, the national curriculum and the requirements of GCSE.' - Jane.*)

The group was also perceived by the researchers as having been useful to their own professional development in the following ways:

- * A wider professional understanding was detectable. (e.g. *'Other people's work is interesting and often full of useful and adaptable ideas. ...The fact that the group is cross-curricular I feel is important. From my own point of view, I find the 'non-scientific' approach helpful to me.'* - Val. *'During the meeting after school, with those involved from other faculties, the fact that we report to each other our progress, and help each other, is useful. I find it particularly useful to realise more fully what goes on throughout the school.'* - Deanne.)
- * The availability of time gave opportunity for reflection. (e.g. *'The fact that this form of research allows the teacher, me, the time to sit, reflect, write, prepare actions, has been extremely useful, bearing in mind that others in the faculty gain by this, too.'* - Deanne. *'The preparation for my research has involved reading journals, searching for relevant articles, and cataloguing mathematics activities which may come in useful. So even before starting my project in earnest, I feel I have achieved quite a lot.'* - Jane.)
- * The discussions in the meetings carried forward the thinking of researchers. (e.g. *'Other people's ideas and thoughts can be very useful in helping to see more clearly. It is very easy to get an idea fixed in your mind and become a little blinkered.'* - Val. *'There are some obvious advantages of an action research programme (as opposed to providing the remitted time only) to us as teachers: the guidance received..., the meetings where ideas are exchanged, and we can learn about each other's progress...'* - Jane.)
- * Engaging in collaborative research provided a disciplined and motivating framework. (e.g. *'Having meetings imposes deadlines which I find essential in getting me to put my work together in some sort of coherent form on a fairly regular basis.'* - Val. *'Perhaps the most important benefit is the...external stimulus to get on and do something systematically about the problems of current classroom practice. ...The knowledge that the discussions I have with colleagues will actually lead to something is a great motivator. I know that what I am doing has a definite purpose and that I will be able to continue with it for a year or more. How often do enthusiastic teachers embark on a pet project at the start of the year when they are feeling energetic and less harassed, only to shelve it as other duties build up?'* - Jane.)

In my own evaluation of the groups' progress I noted that there had been considerable benefits to the teachers and to the school, as detailed above. I also noted that the group had produced four written research reports by the time of the evaluation (May

1991), one of which had already been used in an LEA publication³¹ - a crucial element, in my view of how the professional knowledge generated through action-research can be used. However, although action research had been institutionalised to the extent that the group was drawn from the majority of faculties, and had developed practice and influenced thinking in the ways I have illustrated above, I felt that it was not as integrated with the life of the school as it might have been, because:

- * Nobody from the modern languages faculty had volunteered to take part in the research group.
- * The researcher from the faculty of expressive and performing arts had been unable to sustain his commitment to the group, and had decided against registration at Bath University.
- * Because of my secondment, there was no co-ordinator in school to support members of the group on a day-to-day basis, in the way I had been able to support the earlier manifestation of the Bassett Action Research Group, as described in the earlier part of this chapter.
- * The group needed to be integrated more fully with the school's staff development policy, especially when considering registrations for further professional qualifications.

I wrote in my contribution to the evaluation:

I'd argue that anyone registering for a higher degree should be directed towards a course that had at least one element of school-based research in it, which could be related to an aspect of the school's development plan; alternatively, the focus of the whole degree could be on researching and improving practice in school. Thus, the school would benefit directly from the work of those engaging in higher degrees. Membership of the research group should also be a condition of registration for higher degrees.

³¹ Wiltshire Assessment Team (1991) 'Assessment: The Window on Learning. Principles and Strategies for Differentiated Assessment' Trowbridge: Wiltshire LEA Advisory Services.

The evaluation led to the final manifestation of the research group - so far. As a result of the evaluation, Hylton Thomas decided to maintain the remitted time for the researchers, drawing funding from the school's devolved INSET budget. He also accepted the principle that membership of the research group should be a condition of registration for higher degrees, with the work of the researcher relating to the school development plan, or to other attempts to improve practice within the school. However, the evaluation brought to a head a problem which threatened the group's future development.

The existing researchers were safe enough. Their registration at Bath University was already secured until January 1992 - enough for a Certificate in Professional Development. Some members of the group (Paul, Mary, Jane), though, wanted to continue their work to Diploma level. Daniela, too, wanted to continue her research further, using the credits provided by her Diploma in working towards a modular MEd. Hylton, having accepted the principle that membership of the research group should be a condition of registration for higher degrees, also pointed out that more members of the school staff, intending to work towards an MEd, wanted to join the research group than could be accommodated at the time.³²

The problem in allowing the research group to develop and expand was money. While we were making our plans, the LEA's total INSET grant had been cut by £500,000, and the Long Course Budget had, accordingly, been reduced by half. The LEA, understandably, maintained the funding of second and third-year students whose courses had already been approved. That left just over £1000 to fund new applicants, such as Daniela, who was informed that no money was available for her to register at Bath University. The LEA was also unable to contribute to the funding of those members of the research group who wanted to develop their work to Diploma

³² Meeting between myself and Hylton Thomas at Wootton Bassett School, 11.6.91.

level, and, although £1200 was offered by the area's general secondary adviser, it was plain that the research group could not be sustained by the school alone, if registration at Bath University had to be funded, as well as remitted time found for the researchers.

Hylton put forward his solution to the problem in a meeting at Bath University on 27.6.91. Those present at the meeting were Hylton, Jack Whitehead, Ian Jamieson (one of the Professors of Education at Bath), and myself. Hylton proposed the following:

- * Wootton Bassett School should have a contract with Bath University for an amount to be decided - say, £1200 a year.
- * In return, Bath University would provide support and advice for the research group at Wootton Bassett.
- * All higher qualifications sought by teachers at Wootton Bassett would be taken through Bath University.
- * All higher qualifications sought by teachers at Wootton Bassett would be action-research-based, and achieved through work with the research group.
- * Individual researchers would opt-in to the research group, and the focus of their research would be related to improving practice within the school's development plan.
- * When modules were considered to be of sufficient quality, the school would pay for registration at Bath, and the researcher would receive accreditation for that module.
- * The school would only register modules when it was able to pay, and when the researcher was ready. Thus, it was anticipated that some form of queuing system would have to operate, from financial necessity.

- * The fee required by Bath University for registration would be reduced to, say, an examining fee, in the light of the regular financial commitment made by Wootton Bassett School.

As the meeting progressed, wider vistas of co-operation opened up. Some of the wider areas mentioned by participants at the meeting were:

- * Initial teacher training: Wootton Bassett School to take an increased number of students for teaching practice; students to work on development projects related to school development plan; courses on understanding and using the school system to be offered by Wootton Bassett; increased number of school staff to act as associate tutors at Bath.
- * Staff at School of Education: to use Wootton Bassett School as a familiar environment within which they can gain recent and relevant classroom experience; to exchange roles with staff at Wootton Bassett School on a temporary basis; to use the school for research into curriculum development and delivery.
- * Staff at Wootton Bassett: to gain further professional qualifications through the research group, supported by Bath University; to develop enhanced professional experiences through working as associate tutors, working alongside staff from the School of Education, exchanging roles with staff from School of Education; teaching at the School of Education on an occasional or part-time basis.
- * Wootton Bassett School to: support Bath University as sole provider of further professional qualifications; provide Bath University with annual development plans; identify projects for involvement of Bath University staff and students; offer Bath University first refusal on supplying INSET for identified training and advisory needs; extend open invitation to staff in School of Education to attend teacher development days at Wootton Bassett.

These details are based on notes written by Hylton as a result of the meeting, and bring the story, so far, to a conclusion. At the time of writing this account, the detailed contract between Wootton Bassett School and Bath University has yet to be written, but the outlines are discernible from the account I have given above.

Interim summary. I see the following points from this section as being significant:

- * The research group was registered for further professional qualifications at Bath University.
- * Members of the group worked on aspects of the school development plan identified by their faculties.
- * The group was set up, and the areas for research identified, through a process of discussion and consultation at differing levels - senior management, heads of faculties, and faculties.
- * Support was provided by myself as an experienced action researcher, and by Jack Whitehead from Bath University.
- * Support was provided on an individual basis when it was asked for, but whole-group meetings, at which research reports and work in progress were presented and discussed, were held regularly and provided the main form of support.
- * Remitted time was provided for each researcher.
- * The research group was seen by participants as being useful both in terms of practical contributions made to developing the area previously identified by the faculty, and in terms of their professional development.
- * The support of the head teacher was essential in setting up the group on a school-wide basis, and in overcoming the financial challenge to the group's existence by proposing a broad professional partnership with Bath University.

PART II

In the second part of this chapter, I should like to summarise the characteristics of an action-research-based form of educational knowledge, as manifested in the narrative which I have given. I will then relate these developments at Wootton Bassett School to current proposals for a General Teaching Council.

1. What are the significant characteristics of the action research now taking place at Wootton Bassett School?

From the interim summaries I have already made in Part I of this chapter, I would select as significant the following characteristics:

- * **The constitution of the current research group.** There was a designated group of action researchers. They met regularly, and presented their research reports, or their work in progress, to each other for criticism and advice. There was also the possibility of support on an individual basis from more experienced action researchers in the school, and from Bath University.
- * **The link with higher education.** Members of the group were registered for further qualifications at Bath University, and the group was seen as the means by which further qualifications were to be gained. In order to preserve the research group in straitened economic circumstances a variety of links with Bath University was suggested.
- * **The practical focus.** There was a specific focus on improving, or evaluating practice in the work of the group's researchers. This practicality was echoed in the way in which the English faculty used the action-research form for evaluation.
- * **The democratic process.** The areas to be researched were decided by discussion within faculties, with consideration given to any external demands which needed to be satisfied. The research group itself was set up by a process of consultation between senior management, heads of faculties, and teachers. The role of the head teacher in encouraging and facilitating this process was crucial.

- * **The research group's publications.** The research reports produced by members of the group were circulated and used, not only within the school, but beyond it as well.
- * **The integration of the group within the institution.** The head teacher was a central figure in ensuring that the work of the research group became built into the school's management structures. Apart from his proposals which carried forward the relationship between Wootton Bassett School and Bath University, he ensured that researchers received remitted time, and that faculties were given time on two teacher development days per year to evaluate their practice, using an action-research approach and drawing on the work of their researcher. It was on the head's advice, too, that topics for research were decided upon collectively, within faculties. Lastly, his acceptance of the principle that further qualifications should be obtained through working with the research group ensured that this level of staff development was focused on practice, and was consistent in form, using an action-research-based approach.

2. How does the action research at Wootton Bassett relate to proposals for a General Teaching Council?

If teaching is to become a profession along the lines of, say, the medical profession, a regulatory body is needed to establish and maintain consistency of quality in the work of individual teachers. In this section, I should like to explore the ways in which the action-research-based form of educational knowledge, in its manifestation at Wootton Bassett School, would appropriately put into practice certain essential functions of a General Teaching Council. I do not intend to refer to the Scottish General Teaching Council, for the proposals in England and Wales go beyond the present remit of the Scottish Council, which is focused largely on regulating entry into teaching, with little influence, at the moment, on 'the oversight of in-service training and

development'³³ which I consider to be an important function of a professional body. I shall, instead, look firstly at the discussion document 'Towards the General Teaching Council',³⁴ issued as a contribution to the initiative taken by the Forum of Associations with the Universities Council for the Accreditation of Teachers.³⁵ I shall then look at the views and proposals for a General Education Council advanced by Burgess in the Times Educational Supplement of 21.6.91.³⁶

In 'Towards the General Teaching Council', Sayer defines his view of what a profession is.

(It) may be seen as:

- a) a body which performs an essential public service;*
- b) exercising a high degree of responsibility in the way it fulfils the objectives formed by the community of which it is part;*
- c) its work being founded upon a systematic body of knowledge and research;*
- d) its members governed by a code of conduct and professional training;*
- e) its required lengthy period of initial training being complemented by in-service growth and development.*

The ways in which the action-research-based form of educational knowledge has been integrated within the structure of Wootton Bassett School offer a demonstration of how elements of Sayer's view might work in practice - particularly b), c) and e). I shall examine these three elements in turn.

When he says that a profession 'exercises a high degree of responsibility in the way it fulfils the objectives formed by the community of which it is part', I consider that the practical focus of the action research at Wootton Bassett demonstrates this

³³ The General Teaching Council for Scotland (1991) 'What is the General Teaching Council for Scotland?' 5 Royal Terrace, Edinburgh, and The General Teaching Council for Scotland (1990) 'Handbook - Fifth Edition', 5 Royal Terrace, Edinburgh.

³⁴ Sayer J. (1989) 'Towards the General Teaching Council' Education Management Unit, University of London Institute.

³⁵ The Forum of Associations is a group of 'key bodies' (Sayer, J. (1989) op. cit.) working towards the formation of a General Teaching Council.

³⁶ Burgess, T. (1991) 'Hallmark of a Profession' Times Educational Supplement, 21.6.91.

responsibility. On the one hand, there is a concern to improve the quality of education for the 'composite' consumer - the parents and the pupils, in Tomlinson's definition,³⁷ through the ameliorative function of action research, with faculties and researchers evaluating their practice and considering ways in which it might be improved. (For example, the outlines of their enquiries/action plans produced by Deanne and Mary earlier in this chapter demonstrate a concern to improve pupils' learning.) On the other hand, there was a specific focus on evaluating through action research aspects of the school's development plan - particularly the ways in which the national curriculum was being introduced or prepared for, or other objectives set by the LEA, the DES, or the Secretary of State - all representatives of the 'community of which (the school) is part' , or, to a certain extent, of what Tomlinson calls the 'customer'.³⁸

The use of action research as an appropriate form of evaluation for the school's development plan is, in fact, in accord with the advice given by the DES - part of the wider community - in its publication 'Planning for School Development'.³⁹ As an example of this manifestation of professionalism, and the role in it of action research, I would refer to the way in which the English faculty used the action-research form for evaluating its practice in encouraging pupils to review their own learning, as part of its contribution to TVEI initiatives within the school. Another illustration is provided by the head's decision to 'make evaluation an ongoing part of the work of each curriculum team's development process using 'action research' methods', and to suggest that 'Two teacher development days (March and June) will be designated for faculty use to include evaluation work.'⁴⁰

³⁷ Tomlinson, J. (1991) 'Why a General Teaching Council?' Opening address to the meeting of the Extended Forum for a General Teaching Council, Warwick University, 1.7.91, p. 3.

³⁸ Tomlinson, J. (1991) *op. cit.*, p. 2.

³⁹ Department of Education and Science (1989) 'Planning for School Development' London: DES.

⁴⁰ From a paper presented by Hylton Thomas to the School Management Group after the Blunsdon House meeting.

When Sayer puts forward the view that the work of a profession is 'founded upon a systematic body of knowledge and research', I consider that the work of the Bassett Action Research Group - and, potentially, the evaluations carried out by faculties - demonstrate these attributes. I have argued in earlier chapters that the educational knowledge generated by action research has an identifiable logical form, and is produced through systematic enquiry. I have argued, also, that the resulting written accounts of research can be circulated to other teachers and can influence their practice. Apart from the way in which 'Personal Growth....' illustrated the process, as I documented in earlier chapters, two specific examples can be drawn from the work of the Bassett Action Research Group, in both its former and its present incarnations. These examples demonstrate how the educational knowledge generated through action research and circulated, within and beyond the school, in published accounts, can influence other practitioners.

The first example, from the earlier incarnation of the Bassett Action Research Group, is 'How Can We Improve Professionalism...?'⁴¹ Within the school, it was used as a focus for discussion at the Blunsdon House meeting of senior management and heads of faculties, which was described in the first part of this chapter, and which recommended that the present role of action research should be adopted. The publication, therefore, may be seen as having had some influence on practice in this context. It has also been circulated within the county and beyond - for example, within the LEA's Assessment Team, to support three members of the team who were engaged in action research with the National Primary Centre at Bristol Polytechnic. In the case of this wider circulation, however, concrete examples of influence on practice are more difficult to discern, although one member of the Assessment Team claimed that the publication gave her a clearer understanding of action research.

⁴¹ Eames, K. (ed) (1989a) op. cit.

The second example, from the present research group, is Mary Johnson's research report on her attempts to improve access to the humanities curriculum for lower attaining pupils in year seven. Her report was discussed and adopted by the humanities faculty within the school, demonstrating an influence on practice. The report has also been circulated beyond the school, as part of an LEA publication.⁴² Again, the practical influence of the research report within the school is plain; concrete examples of ways in which the report, as part of the LEA publication, may have influenced teachers' practices are not available.

There are other examples of the ways in which the work of the action research group has been used in the school. In addition to the accounts of practice already cited, the English faculty's evaluation of its approach to reviewing learning resulted in a written account which was circulated as part of the materials for discussion at the Blunsdon House conference. This account also formed part of an LEA publication,⁴³ and has been used as part of a training programme on action research in a neighbouring LEA, Avon. Again, this provides an example of action-research-based educational knowledge being circulated and used, although it arose from a faculty evaluation, rather than a specific action-research enquiry.

However, although the kind of educational knowledge generated in this manner at Wootton Bassett School may be systematic and research-based, fulfilling one of Sayer's requirements for a profession, and although it communicates to and influences other practitioners, which I consider to be an essential function for professional knowledge, it is not yet at the stage where it can be called 'a body of knowledge and research'.⁴⁴ It is too localised, depending for its currency on personal interest and contact, rather than contributing to and drawing from some kind of national forum or

⁴² Wiltshire County Council (1991) *op. cit.*

⁴³ Eames K. (1990) *op. cit.*

⁴⁴ Sayer, J. (1989) *op. cit.*

data bank - the kind of facility a General Teaching Council should set up as a priority, given the effectiveness, as demonstrated at Wootton Bassett, of the action-research-based form of educational knowledge in improving practice, and the possibilities for communicating accounts of such improvements to a wider audience. Sayer's pamphlet suggests that such a facility might be set up by the proposed General Teaching Council itself, or by developing 'a close relationship with the National Foundation for Educational Research',⁴⁵ in order to store and disseminate, nationally, research-based educational knowledge. Were there to be such a facility, it would be an invaluable resource for communicating within the profession, and beyond - to, as Sayer suggests, 'provide a source of sound judgement and accurate information to correct distortions, misconceptions, and unbalanced newsworthy sensationalism from any quarter.'⁴⁶ The emphasis which Sayer lays upon teachers as researchers and contributors to the body of knowledge is significant, for he argues that, 'Enquiry into improved practice can and should involve and engage all teachers and be seen to be their concern.' I consider that the work of the action-research group at Wootton Bassett stands as an example of the kind of research-based professionalism Sayer is describing here - but to be fully effective, it needs the legitimacy which a national network, based on an agreed form of knowledge, would confer.

When Sayer sees a profession's 'required lengthy period of initial training being complemented by in-service growth and development', I consider that the work undertaken at Wootton Bassett School demonstrates practically how such in-service growth and development can be carried out in a school, using action research, and suggests, too, possibilities for using the form in initial teacher education.

The potential for using action research in initial teacher education has been touched on in the parts of Chapters Four and Five which refer to Chris Knight and his use of

⁴⁵ Sayer, J. (1989) op. cit.

⁴⁶ Sayer, J. (1989) op. cit.

'Personal Growth...' during and after his teaching practice. These chapters provide an example of a student making use of and adapting action-research-based educational knowledge, incorporating it within his own growing understanding of theory and practice in teaching. Another link with initial teacher education is provided by the Bassett Action Research Group, which, in its latest manifestation, has also been attended regularly by two students from Bath University during their teaching practice, with one of the students presenting to the group a report on an action enquiry undertaken as part of her second teaching practice.⁴⁷ Although contributing to initial teacher education was not a prime focus of the research group, and has not, as a consequence, been mentioned previously in this chapter, the example demonstrates how a student may reflect on her own practice, as part of her professional responsibilities, and may receive in return the views of experienced teachers as part of the dialectical development of her educational understanding. Thus, the action-research form is, potentially, as appropriate to professional development in the initial phase of teacher education as it is to later, in-service education.

Regarding the in-service education of practising teachers, Tomlinson points to the 'fundamental question' of 'promoting the professional development of teachers throughout their service'.⁴⁸ Sayer argues for the importance to 'the future health of the education service (of) the quality of in-service education and training (INSET)'.⁴⁹ Adams and Burgess, however, are cautious about the effectiveness of in-service education in bringing about improvements in the quality of teaching. ('There is little to suggest that in-service training has had any direct effect on what happens in schools').⁵⁰ They contend that, in the past, measures to increase quality in teaching

⁴⁷ Blofeld, A.F. (1991) 'How can I ensure that I give an equal amount of my time, where appropriate, to both sexes in my year 9 class?' Unpublished paper presented to the Bassett Action Research Group, 30.4.91.

⁴⁸ Tomlinson, J. (1991) *op. cit.*, p. 5.

⁴⁹ Sayer, J. (1989) *op. cit.*

⁵⁰ Adams, E. and Burgess, T. (1989) 'Teachers' Own Records: A system promoting professional quality' NFER-Nelson, p. 91.

have failed, because they neglected 'the major resource for improvement, which is the capacity and responsibility of the individual teacher.'⁵¹

The action research group at Wootton Bassett School provides, I believe, an example of in-service education which has achieved demonstrable improvements in the quality of education by drawing on the capabilities of individual teachers, within the context of faculty and school needs. To illustrate the point, I would refer to the improvements in practice claimed by Deanne Harper and Mary Johnson, and to the materials produced by Paul Siebert for the English faculty, which I discussed in Part I of this chapter. Additionally, there are the other improvements noted in the earlier part of this chapter, where the researchers commented on the role of the research group in generating purposeful discussion, in developing a wider professional understanding, in carrying forward the thinking of the researchers involved, and in providing a disciplined and motivating framework for investigations. From these illustrations, I feel that the research group at Wootton Bassett shows how in-service education might take place within a professional structure, as envisaged by Sayer, and by Tomlinson. It also satisfies the requirement of Adams and Burgess, that in-service education should lead to sustained improvement in the quality of teaching, and it does so by giving teachers the opportunity to 'regularly and explicitly formulate the problems of their position, collaborate with their colleagues in finding solutions, and record their growing capacity as demonstrated by their achievement'.⁵² The 'record', in the case of the teachers at Wootton Bassett, is in the form of research reports, rather than in the form of the Teachers' Own Records suggested by Adams and Burgess, but the process, and the underlying professionalism, is of similar nature to the one they advocate.

⁵¹ Adams, E. and Burgess, T. (1989) *op. cit.*, p. 80.

⁵² Adams, E. and Burgess, T. (1989) *op. cit.*, p. 93.

Burgess's own recent argument for the formation of a 'General Education Council with all the attributes of a professional body'⁵³ defines professionalism in broadly similar terms to Sayer's, although he lays his emphasis 'not (on) the idea of a profession or a professional body, but (on) professional persons'. When Burgess says that professional persons 'maintain a relationship with a client in which the interests of the client are paramount', he is, I think, making fundamentally the same point as Sayer in commenting that 'a profession...may be seen as...exercising a high degree of responsibility in the way it fulfils the objectives formed by the community of which it is part.' Likewise, Burgess sees that professional persons need to be 'in possession of a body of knowledge, expertise and experience, which they place at the client's service, exercising judgement in solving the client's problems.' Burgess does not specify, though, as Sayer does, the need for that professional knowledge to be systematic. Neither does he specify the role of research in creating that body of knowledge, as, once again, Sayer does. Both these aspects of a professional body of knowledge are essential if that knowledge is to be deployed effectively, and inform the practice of classroom teachers within and across institutions. However, Burgess is in accord with Sayer when he points out the centrality of in-service education, which he describes as 'develop(ing)...competence, monitor(ing)...quality, and keep(ing)...knowledge and skill up to date.'

What Burgess adds to Sayer's view of professionalism is, first, the notion of academic qualifications and, second, that of self-management. I should like to illustrate these extra perspectives, by reference to the action research taking place at Wootton Bassett School.

Burgess says⁵⁴ that professional persons 'hold recognised qualifications, the result of both academic examination and supervised practice.' This statement, I think, refers

⁵³ Burgess, T. (1991) op. cit.

⁵⁴ Burgess, T. (1991) op. cit.

primarily to the entry requirements into a profession. However, it is not clear whether it applies also to the kinds of qualifications which should, I believe, be available within a profession to mark the kind of enhanced expertise that comes from informed reflection upon attempts to improve practice. I believe that it should, even though Adams and Burgess⁵⁵ doubt that studying for further qualifications, on a traditional part-time, or full-time course, will necessarily lead to improved quality in teaching (although such study may lead to enhanced career opportunities). They argue that traditional courses leading to further qualifications may not be directly concerned with the classroom, and even if they are, their usefulness is limited by the lack of an agreed structure for sharing the insights gained by the individual teachers who released to attend the courses.

I share the doubts of Adams and Burgess about the efficacy of traditional study for further qualifications, and the lack of evidence for improvement in the quality of teaching as a result of such courses of study. However, in contrast to the pessimistic picture which they paint, I feel that the experience of action research at Wootton Bassett School answers their criticisms in a number of ways. First, the subject of study of the researchers at Wootton Bassett is the educational process within each researcher's own classroom. They are therefore generating specifically educational knowledge, rather than subject-based knowledge, or knowledge located within the 'disciplines' paradigm. Second, the researchers are specifically looking for ways in which the quality of education in their classroom may be developed or improved. Third, the researchers' improved understandings, and the materials and accounts they produce, are shared within their faculties, and are incorporated into the practice of that faculty, as part of evaluating the school's development plan. Fourth, the research group forms the avenue by which teachers will have access to further qualifications, from Advanced Certificates and Diplomas to MEds, MPhils, and PhDs. Thus, further

⁵⁵ Adams, E. and Burgess, T. (1989) *op. cit.*, pp. 84 - 85.

qualifications are available within a systematic structure which makes the individual teacher's attempts to improve practice the focus of the accounts for which qualifications are awarded. I consider such a structure of further qualifications essential to a profession which is concerned to develop its practice and expertise. A future General Teaching Council, or General Education Council should, I feel, address itself to the issue of professional qualifications, and their relationship to a research-based body of knowledge.

The other aspect of professionalism which Burgess touches upon is the issue of self-management. He says that professional persons 'value the concept and attitudes of self-management'. In this, he does not mean an independence which might grow into the conspiracy against the laity which George Bernard Shaw held professions to be (the 'less desirable potentialities' of professional associations.)⁵⁶ Nor does he mean a complete freedom from the demands of consumer and customer.⁵⁷ A profession has an ethical responsibility to those it serves, and operates within limits defined 'by the community of which it is part'.⁵⁸ Within those limits, however, practitioners are able to choose, individually or collectively, in the light of their knowledge and experience, an appropriate path for their particular circumstances. Such self-management is illustrated by the action research taking place at Wootton Bassett. The school, in carrying out its 'essential public service',⁵⁹ has to be aware of the demands made upon it by, for example, by the necessity to develop its teaching of the national curriculum, and by the need to evaluate its development plan. Bearing these limits in mind, faculties decide, collectively, upon the aspect of the development plan they wish their designated action researcher to focus on. The researcher, with the support of the faculty and the research group, then takes responsibility for working on that aspect in his or her own classroom, formulating strategies for improvement and development,

⁵⁶ Burgess, T. (1991) *op. cit.*

⁵⁷ Tomlinson, J. (1991) *op. cit.*, pp. 2 and 3.

⁵⁸ Sayer, J. (1989) *op. cit.*

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

and monitoring what happens. The whole process, as far as possible, is democratically based upon consultation and discussion.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I have looked at two attempts to define the characteristics of a professional body, which teaching at present lacks. I have tried to demonstrate that the requirements of a professional body are fulfilled by the action-research-based, dialectical form of educational knowledge which is already integrated into the institutional structure of Wootton Bassett School, and its links with Bath University. If my demonstration is convincing, we have an example of how the abstract requirements of a professional body can work in practice. What we need now is the political will to bring into being a body which can agree on a systematic, shared form of research-focused, practitioner-centred professionalism, with an ethical code of conduct which all members will follow. Whether it will come from a change of government, or from the kind of 'bottom up' initiative proposed by Burgess⁶⁰ is not yet apparent. However, Burgess is right; the development of a professional body is urgent. I would add, though, that it needs to be based on a clear view of what constitutes educational knowledge, and how, practically, that form of knowledge can be organised in schools.

⁶⁰ Burgess, T. (1991) *op. cit*