David Bridges

Philosophy in Educational Research

Epistemology, Ethics, Politics and Quality

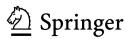Springer

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To our grandchildren:
Louis, Lily, and Albert
(and anyone who may follow)

Acknowledgements

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About the Author

David Bridges has been a leading contributor to philosophy of education for several decades. He served as Chair of the Philosophy of Education Society of Great Britain and was subsequently elected as an Honorary Vice President. In his efforts to build bridges to the mainstream educational research communities he co-founded and for several years convened the philosophy of education network of the European Education Research Association and the philosophy of education Special Interest Group of the British Education Research Association. He has published extensively in philosophical journals including the *Journal of Philosophy of Education*, *Educational Theory*, and *Ethics and Education*.

In parallel with this philosophical work, he has developed a substantial programme of empirical and multidisciplinary research, has directed or codirected some 28 research and/or evaluation projects over the last thirty years, including several international collaborations and was most recently Director of Research (Kazakhstan and Mongolia) in the University of Cambridge Faculty of Education. He sat for 6 years as a Council member of both the British and the European Education Research Associations, was elected as a Fellow of the UK Academy of Social Sciences and an overseas Fellow of the Lithuanian Academy of Science, and was awarded an Honorary D.Univ. of the Open University. He served on the Education Panel for the UK Research Assessment Exercise in 2001 and again in 2008. He is an Emeritus Professor of the University of East Anglia, where he was Pro Vice Chancellor, and an Emeritus Fellow of both St. Edmund's College Cambridge, (where he directed the multidisciplinary Von Hügel Institute), and Homerton College Cambridge.

Chapter 1
Educational Research and Philosophy in 'Interesting Times'

Abstract This chapter locates the book in the context of debates and developments in educational research over the last twenty turbulent years, in which time it has expanded in both scale and diversity and provoked debates about its nature and intellectual resources, its relationship with policy and practice, its situatedness in relation to politics, power and social justice and its claims to authority and quality. The chapter provides a summary and commentary on the contents of the main sections of the book which will provide a useful guide for those seeking to dip into sections that relate most closely to their own interests.

Educational research has become the focus for mass academic attention, with some 15,000 researchers gathering each year for the annual conference of the American Educational Research Association, rapidly rising numbers (recently around 2000) at the annual conference of the European Education Research Association, now with over 30 national member associations and thriving regional and national associations, as well as cross-cutting thematic conferences such as the European Association for Research on Learning and Instruction (EARLI) and the Comparative and International Education Society. At the same time 'international' educational research journals have proliferated (Taylor and Francis alone list over 200 of them) and their contents have expanded, flooding over into online publications. It is an expansion that has been driven in part by the 'universitification' of teacher education across many parts of the world, and the consequent expectation that teacher educators should not only teach but also prove themselves as researchers, and in part by increasing subscription in many parts of the world to a form of academic accountability that requires academics more than ever before to justify their appointment, their tenure, and their promotion on the basis of quantity as well as quality of research publications (see Chap. 23). So educational research is massive.

Partly as a consequence of this growth in scale and the recruitment of university staff from a variety of academic as well as professional backgrounds, the forms that educational research takes have become increasingly diverse, drawing for its

methods and methodologies on every part of the academy (as well as other spheres of social and professional practice). As in other academic fields, it has become increasingly difficult for any individual to encompass the whole scope of the diverse subject; the educational research community has become increasingly Balkanised; and the terrain increasingly contested within the academic research community itself (see Chap. 2).

Not only this, but education has also become a site contested between academic researchers and educational professionals, teachers for the most part, who have been disappointed by the lack of relevance of much research to their own situation; frustrated by the hegemonic pretensions of academic researchers over the teachers' own experience, understanding, and educational thinking; and in some cases ambitious to re-possess the arena of educational research for themselves (see Chap. 5). This has challenged researchers to think hard about the relationship between their research and practice.

The contestability extends to relations between educational researchers and policymakers (Chap. 6). Educational researchers have been frustrated by the failure of policymakers to pay attention to their research; and policymakers have regarded the products of educational research as irrelevant, unhelpful, or of poor quality. One response by policymakers has been to reaffirm their commitment to 'evidence-based policy', but at the same time to define in their own terms the kind of research they want conducted and what they will recognise as evidence or appropriate methods, as well as demanding fuller control over both the conduct and publication of such research—practices with which some in the academy have been eager to collude and which others have been equally eager to oppose (see Chap. 19).

Thus, educational research is not only a massive field, but also a hotly contested one inside and outside the research community, to the extent that Furlong can take the rather sombre view that 'The discipline of education as a whole is in crisis' (Furlong 2013: 181).

There is, then, a lot for a philosophically minded researcher to engage with. As I have indicated by my cross-references, the themes and issues that I have outlined provide the stimulus and the focus for the chapters that follow. These chapters are for the most part derived from papers that I have published over the last 20 turbulent years, though all of these papers have been updated, some have been heavily edited, and there is substantial additional material. Through the editing I have tried to give some coherence to the collection of papers, but I would not wish to pretend that the book was written as a consecutive textbook for educational researchers. Rather, it is I hope a wide-ranging resource that readers will dip into to explore issues that they encounter in their own academic and professional lives.

The book is organised under six main parts, and I shall indicate here the scope of each part. Each individual chapter includes a synopsis that I hope also serves both to locate it in the wider context of the book and to provide a short introduction to the chapter that follows.

1.1   Part I: Education Research and Its Intellectual Resources

In the first part of this book I try to set out two particular perspectives on educational research. First I argue that in terms of methods and methodology, or the interpretive frameworks that can be brought to educational inquiry, there is nothing *sui generis*. Rather, educational research draws on the methods, methodologies, and conceptual framing offered by disciplined forms of inquiry found elsewhere in the academy and these are applied to the *field* of education. (rather as they might be to the fields of policing, public health or business practice). In the 1970s these *disciplines* were largely defined in terms of psychology, philosophy, sociology, and history of education, but I describe in Chap. 2 how these disciplines have become segmented, diversified, and recombined in a plethora of 'systematic and sustained' forms of inquiry. This 'pluralistic' view of the sources and multidisciplinary nature of educational research underpins much of the thinking in other chapters in the book. It also underpins my reluctance to give more than cursory attention to debates that focus on the very crude and uninformative dichotomy between 'qualitative' and 'quantitative' research, though these terms are so embedded in educational research discourse that it is almost impossible to avoid them (and I do not).

I go on to explore the 'paradigm wars' in slightly different terms. One of the starting points for Chap. 3 was the 50th anniversary of a lecture by C.P. Snow with the title 'The Two Cultures and the Scientific Revolution', in which Snow critiques what he sees as the damaging intellectual division between the arts and humanities on the one side and the sciences on the other. Fifty years later this problem continues to distort not only the life of the academy but also public perceptions of what counts as real research. Today, the problem tends to be reflected in talk of 'the crisis in the humanities' or 'the hegemony of science', or in a preoccupation with what can be counted or measured, with metrics. This is a preoccupation that not only pervades the education research community but also has a powerful impact on many aspects of education and the wider academy. My suggestion is that a very narrow view of what even counts as 'scientific' and what are variously referred to as '*quasi*', '*pseudo*', or '*faux*' scientific approaches threaten to swamp the educational research arena. I am not opposed to, for example, large population studies, surveys, or even randomised controlled trials, but I want to resist the idea that all or any of these should have privileged status. Chapters 3 and 4 challenge this supposition in different ways.

I need to offer a very important caution before entering this territory. In this section I get drawn into what some would present as a dichotomy, or even an opposition, between 'science' and 'the humanities' or, in Chap. 14, 'art', which, among other things, risks simply re-entering the qualitative/quantitative debate that I earlier eschewed in different terms. I hope that all three chapters make it clear that neither of these categories of knowledge and understanding is internally homogeneous. It is precisely my point that 'science' properly understood embraces some

very diverse approaches to inquiry. Unfortunately too much of the discourse around 'scientific' approaches to educational research assumes a very narrow account of what is 'scientific'. Similarly 'the humanities' is a poorly defined concept but includes (as the final section of Chap. 3 makes clear) some very different approaches to inquiry and their application in the field of education. I am anxious to reaffirm this diversity of resource. My criticism is against those who seek to impose a more restrictive view of what might count as proper research.

Other chapters in this book also make a case for thinking of research in terms of art and not (not just) as a science: Chap. 14 on case study; Chaps. 15 and 16 on the presentation of research as fiction; and Chap. 25, which suggests that research quality assessment itself is something closer to artistic connoisseurship than to measurement.

1.2   Part II: Education as Applied Research: Practice and Policy

The second feature of educational research to which I attach significance is that this is (for the most part anyway) research that is *applied* to the field of education: it is applied to educational policy (Chap. 6) and practice (Chap. 5). It can also of course contribute to educational theory, but I acknowledge a reluctance to accept that educational theory, any more than educational research, makes much sense if it is not in some way connected with educational policy or practice and offers at least some prospect of informing these. That this research is *educational* research and not just psychological, sociological, or philosophical research (i.e. not just applied social science) does however provide it with practices (such as 'teaching'), concepts (such as 'schooling' or 'curriculum'), and theory, including the belief systems of teachers and other professionals, that do help to distinguish it as a field from others examined through the social sciences.

Of course, the application of research to either policy or practice is not a straightforward one. Chapter 5 throws into question the 'applied social science' model of the relationship between educational research and practice and takes us into the domain of practitioner and action research, though it resists the idea that these can substitute entirely for what might be regarded as more 'academic' research. Chapter 6 focuses on research and policy, and examines what sort of knowledge is needed for the formation of policy—and its limitations.

Unsurprisingly perhaps, the historical record of what we have come to know and love as the 'impact' of research on either policy or practice (Chap. 23) is not over-impressive, but I would want to retain the view that educational research should in principle be applicable to policy and/or practice, even if it is beyond the powers of the researcher to ensure that it is in fact applied.

1.3   Part III: Philosophy and Educational Research

In Parts I and II, I set out some perspectives on educational research in general. In this part I look more particularly at the contributions that philosophy can make to this field. I begin (in Chap. 7) by looking at philosophising *about* educational research, philosophising *as* educational research, and a little later (in Chap. 10) philosophy *in* educational research working alongside other genres.

This leads me to three chapters that explore in rather different ways the role of philosophy—or 'the philosopher'—in three different contexts: in the classroom and in engagement with action research (Chap. 8); in the arena of policy (Chap. 9); and as part of a multidisciplinary research team (Chap. 10) Although these chapters are informed by philosophical work, they also take the form of reflection on practice (my own and that of others) in these three spheres.

Finally in this part (Chap. 11), I look at the philosopher in a more narrowly academic role, writing a paper destined initially for an educational research conference. This is not a prescription about how to go about such writing; nor is it a philosophical paper about the form or logic of such philosophical writing. Instead it is based on a reflective log that I maintained over a period of time while going through the process—not so much philosophising about research as researching the process of philosophising.

1.4   Part IV: Truth(s) in Educational Research

All the chapters in this part wrestle in different ways with issues to do with the epistemological standing of the outcomes of educational research, what sort of grounds or warrant they provide for belief, and in what sense (and I suggest that there are several different senses) they can claim 'authenticity', 'integrity', 'truth-fulness', or anything else that presupposes the meaningfulness of some notion of truth as an aim or guiding principle of research. Chapter 12 addresses this question head on. It was prompted by a recurring experience at a British Educational Research Association (BERA) conference in which researchers made the assumption (no doubt correct in many cases) that the audience would share their disavowal of truth, 'truth', or 'Truth with a big "T"' (as they would sometimes express it) as a meaningful consideration not only in their own research (which nevertheless made a myriad of claims to what is or should be the case) but in any research. Yet they seemed ignorant of the basic epistemology and of the variety of ways in which the notion of truth is used in philosophical writing, the variety of meanings that are attached to it, and the variety of proposals as to how the truth or falsity of a claim might be resolved. Were they dismissing all these?

Chapter 15 was provoked by two very challenging presentations at a BERA conference and at an invitation seminar organised by Morwenna Griffiths: a presentation by Peter Gough on how he extended research-based stories into fiction

and one by Melanie Walker in which the most dramatic and compelling focus was on an episode at a meeting of the Truth and Reconciliation Committee in South Africa. The following chapter (Chap. 16) is in a sense an extension of this. My question becomes: what, if anything, distinguishes history from fiction, or from the historical novel, and why or for what purposes might one prefer history to these sources—what does history do for us that fiction or the historical novel does not? And will the answer to this question shed light on the parallel issue in social scientific and educational research?

Among the theories of truth I discuss briefly in Chap. 13 is philosophical pragmatism. I link this discussion to the arguments around action research in educational settings, the case for which, I suggest, rests largely but not exclusively on a pragmatic theory of knowledge. The practice of action research has to address what are, of arguably some of the weaknesses of philosophical pragmatism, or at least of the way in which this has been interpreted in educational settings.

One of the most significant contrasts in educational research is that between research approaches that require some form of analysis of large numbers of objects of study and those that focus on a single case (or small number of cases) studied in depth. Chapter 14 examines the claims of the single case to contribute to our knowledge and understanding and, most challengingly, its capacity to contribute not just to understanding the case studied but also to wider understanding of the set of cases from which it is drawn ('To see a world in a grain of sand'?).

The final chapter in this section (Chap. 17) is less directly philosophical in character. It is drawn from a paper I wrote with colleagues from Nazarbayev University in Kazakhstan, Assel Kambatyrova and Kairat Kurakbayev, reflecting on our experience of analysing and interpreting evidence from our research on the international and intranational 'translation of educational policy and practice'. This was a contribution to the *International Handbook on the Role of Interpretation in Educational Research* (Smeyers et al. 2015), which assembled 64 cases from eight different genres of educational research in which researchers reflected on the role that 'interpretation' had played in a particular research project. The chapter illustrates some of the assortment of ways in which different sources enter the process of interpretation when we try to make sense of our research data.

1.5 Part V: Ethics and Educational Research

Ethical concerns and requirements play a major role in contemporary educational research. University-based researchers, in particular, have not only to cultivate their own principled ethical sensitivity but also to conform to the often quite stringent requirements of ethical codes policed by ethics committees. All major educational research associations have developed their own ethical codes (see Chap. 18). These have a great deal in common in terms of, for example, a requirement for informed consent and the protection of confidentiality, though they may also reflect important features of the local context. The New Zealand code, for example, makes a lot of

reference to the rights and entitlements of its indigenous peoples. So if you are engaged with educational research, you will almost inevitably need to address the ethical constraints and requirements that shape this research at every stage, from research design to publication.

Ethics is of course a major branch of philosophy in which philosophers have been extensively engaged since the earliest inception of the discipline, so it ought to have something to contribute to the ongoing debates about educational research ethics. Richard Peters' seminal work in the field was published under the title *Ethics and Education* (Peters 1966), and one of the leading contemporary journals in the field of philosophy of education, the journal of the International Network of Philosophers of Education, appears under the same title. But while philosophers have engaged extensively with the ethics of education in general, they have in my view rather neglected the territory of educational research ethics. Exceptions to this generalisation include Pring's (2001) work on intellectual virtue (a field more widely explored in mainstream philosophy) and the special issue of the *Journal of Philosophy of Education* (published by Blackwell in 2002 as *The Ethics of Educational Research* edited by Mike McNamee and myself).

I think this gap partly reflects the gap that exists between the academically purer or more rarefied field of philosophical ethics (sometimes referred to as meta-ethics) and what one might think of as situated moral problems which carry direct application to practice. Philosophical ethics is primarily concerned with questions such as: how (in general) can we know what is right or good? How are such assessments associated with reason, intuition, or emotion? What does it mean to describe something as morally right or wrong—what sort of a proposition is this? What is the relationship between the right and the good? What is the place of character or virtue in the cultivation of the moral being? All of these are important questions, but they are at some distance from the sort of issues that face educational researchers: how, if at all, can I use data that I acquired off the record from a Ministry official? Am I entitled to break my promise of confidentiality to a child I have interviewed if the interview gave me reason to think she might be being abused? Should I boycott fellow researchers from a regime that I judge to be seriously offending human rights? As I illustrate below—especially in Chap. 21—such questions involve not just reference to high-level principles, but a well-grounded understanding of the particular circumstances surrounding the issue under consideration and, notwithstanding my expressed reservation about consequentialist ethics, some anticipation of the likely consequences of doing this rather than that.

However to say this is to take the ethical arguments out of the exclusive regime of the philosopher into messier territory in which moral principles, philosophical underpinnings, empirical data, experience, and perhaps practical wisdom (*phronesis* in Aristotle's terms) are all engaged—which is perhaps why purer philosophers tend to avoid the specific issues of research ethics. But, as they say, 'fools rush in where angels fear to tread …'

This part of the book is not a general introduction to research ethics. Plenty of these are available. It provides three examples of a philosopher/researcher wrestling with such issues: with the use of ethical codes themselves (Chap. 18); with the

'commodification' of research and its subsequent loss to a democratic citizenry (Chap. 19); with the ethics of 'outsider' research (Chap. 20); and, by extension, with the issues raised by working in contexts in which governments have a poor record on human rights and democratic processes (Chap. 21).

In a final chapter it explores the relationship between ethical considerations underpinning research and epistemological principles, asking, more specifically, whether the first can ever substitute for the second.

1.6 Part VI: Research Quality and Its Assessment

Debates about the assessment of research quality crystallise discussion of many of the issues that I have touched on in previous chapters. Any view of research quality is predicated on a view of what might count as research at all and how inclusive one is prepared to be in terms of the range of genres acceptable as 'educational research'. If, as some would argue, the randomised controlled trial represents the 'gold standard' of educational research, where does that leave philosophy, history, discourse analysis, or a plethora of other disciplines? Similarly, if 'relevance' or 'impact' are to be seen as criteria of the quality of research (see Chap. 23), this assumes a particular orientation for research and a particular set of purposes. We shall see in Chap. 24 in this part how reference to the 'international' (e.g. publication in 'international' journals, meeting 'international' standards) distorts the research agenda and diminishes the significance of publication in a language other than English, but offers, too, a corrective perspective to one-sided and hegemonistic world views and 'epistemologies'.

The 'washback' effects of any research assessment system are all the more damaging because of the power and control such systems exercise over academic lives and academic communities. Your ability to contribute to research conferences, and to get published; your appointment, tenure, promotion; your ability to win funding for research projects—these are all dependant on assessments of the quality of your research. In many parts of the world the level of institutional funding for research is similarly determined by an assessment of the quality of its research 'outputs' (as the UK Research Excellence Framework refers to them). Unsurprisingly, then, a great deal of attention has been given to the means by which such research quality can be assessed. A major European project (European Educational Research Quality Indicators or EERQI)—discussed in Chap. 25 in this part—sought to bypass what is widely recognised as the unreliable system of peer review by identifying metrics that could be identified by computer software—and failed (for reasons that seemed to this participant to be blindingly obvious from the beginning!). But get the assessment system wrong and the scope for crippling the full range of imaginative and creative research is enormous.

1.7   Epilogue: Conversation in the Construction and Representation of Educational Research

Half a century ago I began my research career with a doctoral dissertation on the role of discussion in learning, teaching, and decision-making (Bridges 1979). This was mainly a philosophical work but included a piece I had written on the silent student in small group discussion, reporting on some action research focused on my own teaching, which arose out of a Nuffield sponsored project on Small Group Teaching in Higher Education directed by Jean Rudduck. Throughout my career in education I have benefitted enormously from discussion/conversation with academic friends and colleagues and I have been struck by the number of occasions on which reports of ground-breaking research refer, not (or not just) to their formal research methods and methodologies, but also to conversations with colleagues as the source of a vital breakthrough in their thinking. Famously, the Eagle pub in Cambridge now bears a plaque claiming that this was the real site of the discovery of DNA, and indeed James Watson's own account of the work he did with Francis Crick celebrates what he refers to as 'the conversational life' (Watson 1968: 47).

Such accounts—and there are many of them in the literature of scientific and other intellectual discovery—resonated both with my personal experience of academic life but also with a conception developed by Michael Oakeshott of 'the great conversations of mankind': poetry, history, science, and so on. I was intrigued by the idea of research as an ongoing conversation that people joined, participated in for a period, and left to continue without them, perhaps a tiny bit changed by what they had contributed, but something essentially ephemeral—and this seemed to be good point on which to end.

I have described the contents of this book in terms which illustrate, I hope, its direct inspiration from and engagement with many of the debates that have run through the educational research community and those it serves over the last twenty years. Engagement with these contemporary issues has, however, awakened a curiosity that has led me into less predictable territory, to sources that are distant in time or place from these contemporary debates, but which have, nevertheless, the capacity to illuminate and inform them, or which are simply intriguing in their own right: to codes of social obligation in contemporary Egypt and New Zealand (Chap. 18); to the South African Truth and Reconciliation hearings (Chap. 15); to campus protest in the US in the 1960s (Chap. 19); to experience of the 'Soviet' and the inspiration of the nineteenth-century philosopher, Abai, in Kazakhstan (Chap. 17); via Isaiah Berlin to eighteenth-century Italy, Giambattista Vico, and *la scienzia nuova* (Chap. 4); to seventeenth-century France, Pascal, and the disputes between Jesuits and Jansenites (Chap. 21); to 'educational magic' in traditional Ethiopia (Chap. 24); and where better to end than at a banquet with Socrates and dinner with wine and a conversation-loving Montaigne (Chap. 26)?[1] Of the many 'false dichotomies' represented and challenged

[1]I should acknowledge that many of these sources, and indeed some more recent ones employed sexist language that we would today find unacceptable. I have not sought to amend this or to note

in the context of educational research, perhaps one of the more distorting is that between 'policy relevant' and 'curiosity driven' research. In my own experience, curiosity takes me into policy, and an examination of policy provokes curiosity that takes me into all sorts of interesting places. I hope that readers will find something in this book to satisfy both appetites.

There is one final dichotomy that I would like to help dissolve, as I hope that the contents of this book will confirm—the dichotomy between philosophy and educational research. The original title that I gave to this book was *Philosophy* of *Educational Research*, but I became aware as I wrote that a significant proportion of the references that I have provided are to 'mainstream' educational research literature and not just philosophy. Several of the chapters are reflective rather than more narrowly philosophical thoughts on my own empirical research experience. More importantly, perhaps, I kept envisaging a readership that was not just made up of philosophers (though it included them) but also of researchers working across a wide range of research traditions and engaged with education in a wide variety of roles. I hope it reflects a picture not just of philosophy taking a spectatorial gaze over the educational research community but of philosophy as thoroughly and intimately engaged in and with that community—hence, *Philosophy* in *Educational Research*.

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(Footnote 1 continued)

every occasion on which it happens, but hope that this note will serve as a general apology and that the references will not give offence.

Part I
Educational Research and Its Intellectual Resources

Chapter 2
The Disciplines and Discipline of Educational Research

Abstract It is, I think, important to clarify from the beginning of this book my understanding of the nature of educational research and educational theory, for this carries implications for many of the chapters that follow. This chapter begins by reviewing the development of educational theory and research from a time (in the 1960s and 1970s) when it was still possible to talk of four 'foundation disciplines', to one characterised by the diversity, fragmentation, and hybridisation of the intellectual sources of educational research—one in which this research is described in terms of multidisciplinarity, interdisciplinarity, and, as some would have it, postdisciplinarity. The chapter welcomes the greater diversity and enrichment of the resources available to contemporary educational researchers and acknowledges the importance of being able to combine different disciplinary approaches in the exploration of educational theory, policy, and practice. It argues, however, that this should not be at the expense of discipline in educational inquiry, i.e. of the systematic procedures that provide a better warrant for the beliefs that are put forward, rather than inquiry that lacks such 'systematics' and in the sense of shared rule-governed procedures, 'which make a community of arguers possible' (Hunt in Consequences of theory. Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 1991: 104). In a final section, the chapter acknowledges and examines the perennial wrestling between, on the one hand, rules that operate to maintain particular hierarchies of power and control over what might count as credible belief and, on the other hand, rules that serve more narrowly epistemic functions related to the development of knowledge and understanding.

2.1 Sources of Knowledge About Education

This book is about research and its relationship with educational theory, practice, and policy. I need to make it clear from the beginning that I do not regard research as the only source of knowledge and understanding about education. Much of our

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The original version of this chapter was published in Bridges, D. (2003) *Fiction written under oath: Essays in philosophy and educational research*, Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers.

thinking has been shaped by our *experience*—as students, and perhaps as teachers, educational administrators, or whatever. Everyone draws some, or indeed most, of their understanding about education, their educational theory indeed, from this experience. The Dutch have a term for those whose expertise is thus based: 'In my native language, Dutch, the term "experiential expert" (*ervaringdeskundige*) is used for those people whose (self supposed) expertise derives from them having experienced the object of interest' (Muijs 2016: 12). We also derive many of our beliefs from *authorities*. Especially as new teachers, we rely extensively on the advice and cautions offered by senior teachers, and we may defer in our opinions to 'experts' and the views expressed in the media. Finally, (though this is not intended as an exclusive list) we may rely for our beliefs on *tradition*, which often conditions our taken-for-granted assumptions about how schools are organised, the role of the teacher, or what should be taught in schools.

So there is an important sense in which we do not need research as a source of knowledge and understanding about education. There are many communities for which research has simply not been available as a resource, and there are those who argue that we should honour what are sometimes put forward (misleadingly in my view) as 'alternative epistemologies' (see Chap. 24). This is, of course, a view that applies to any area of human experience, including healthcare, weather forecasting, and agricultural production, as well as to education.

If research is dispensable and, again as is sometimes argued, impositional (Chap. 21 again), what then is its place as a source of knowledge and understanding, and why, on the whole is it regarded as a source to be privileged in debates about policy and practice? I suggest that it brings two qualities to our thought and inquiry. The first is criticality and the second rigour.

Criticality is significant because it puts into question the beliefs derived from these other sources (as well as those derived from research itself). For any society that feels that it 'could do better' (in the terms that I recall from my school reports), whether this be in terms of levels of educational achievement or the just distribution of educational opportunities—in other words, any society of which some members are dissatisfied with their current stock of beliefs—such criticality is an essential first step towards new thinking, policy, or practice. Of course, it is precisely this function of research that brings it into collision with the other sources of belief to which I have referred and leads to both social and political discomfort. In Chaps. 5 and 13 I discuss the competing claims of research and experience; in Chap. 6 the relationship between research and legitimate political authority in the formation of policy; and in the final part of Chap. 17 the claims of traditional belief systems against those of internationalised research. But without a significant measure of criticality, as one constantly explains to students, the research is simply not research.

The second significant feature of research—and what primarily gives it its own authority—is the rigour with which it is conducted. This is a notion that I shall

consider in several different contexts in this book, but for the moment let me note that it carries implications of care, thoroughness, and commitment in the inquiry, and of an approach that has its own demanding procedures, its systematicity, its discipline. And it is this feature of research and its multiplicity of forms that is the focus of this chapter.

2.2 Education Is a Field of Research

First, however, I need to say something about 'education'. Does this signify one of those disciplined forms of inquiry with its own rules and systematics, or is it simply a field of human activity that might provide a focus for such inquiries?

In his classic 1966 paper, Hirst argued that educational research 'is not itself an autonomous "form" of knowledge or an autonomous discipline. It involves no conceptual structure unique in its logical features and no unique test for validity' (Hirst 1966: 55). From the same philosophical stable, Dearden mused somewhat provocatively: 'I do not know quite what an "educationist" is, or what sort of expert or authority he is supposed to be. I know what a philosopher of education is, or an educational psychologist or an educational sociologist, but I am not at all sure what a plain "educationist" would be' (Dearden 1970: 2).

Fifty years on, there is no overwhelming reason to revise the opinion that there is still no unified, distinctive discipline, methodology, or method that characterises 'educational' research. Rather it is a *field* of policy and practice to which we can apply a wide range of disciplines, methods, and forms of representation (far more than Dearden might have contemplated) drawn in particular from the humanities and social sciences. For Shulman— and I share this view—this feature of educational inquiry is a source of excitement rather than disappointment: 'A major reason why research methodology in education is such an exciting area is that education is not a discipline. Indeed education is a field of study, a locus containing phenomena, events, institutions, problems, persons, and processes, which themselves constitute the raw material for inquiries of many kinds' (Shulman 1999: 5).

In this chapter I shall develop the idea of education as a focus for inquiry, to which a number of disciplines rooted in the academy can contribute. In subsequent chapters, I shall consider the view of educational research as applied research that bears a particular relationship to educational practice and policy, and ask whether the application of these disciplined forms of inquiry and representation to and in the field of education is *all* that constitutes educational research, or whether, in practitioner research for example, there lie some clues to a radically different mode of educational inquiry.

2.3 The Passage from Foundation Disciplines to Postdisciplinarity

> Disciplines are essential structures for systematising, organizing, and embodying the social and institutional practices upon which both coherent discourse and legitimate exercise of power depend. (Lenoir 1993: 73)

> Now the question turns to just what it is that different forms of representation employed within the context of educational research might help us to grasp. Are there varieties of human understanding? What is distinctive about them? … Now is the time to search for seas that take us beyond the comforts of old ports. (Eisner 1993: 8)

The organisation of educational theory and research under the 'foundation' disciplines of the philosophy, sociology, psychology, and history of education dominated the functioning of teacher education and of the educational research community in the UK and in many other parts of the English-speaking world in the 1960s and through to the 1980s. Tibble (1966) provided both an historical perspective on the development of *The Study of Education* (as his book is called) and authoritative statements of the major constituents of educational theory in the form of chapters by Richard Peters (philosophy), Brian Simon (history), Ben Morris (psychology), and William Taylor (sociology). It was no accident that this book appeared as the study of education sought new academic respectability in the context of the process of the movement of teacher education into universities (a process that continued internationally over the next three decades) and the development of new professional degrees such as, in the UK, the Bachelor of Education.

I am conscious however of some rather different patterns of development reflecting the different historical and institutional sources and different constructions of educational studies in different countries. The development and institutionalisation of the so-called 'foundation disciplines' resonated with, and were to some extent informed by, parallel developments in the United States and elsewhere. In an intriguing history of education research in the United States, Lagemann describes how after the Second World War, first, curriculum development was mobilised by reformers drawn from the disciplines that made up the curriculum, and then, 'discipline based scholars developed new lines of research in psychology, school administration, and the so-called foundations of education, which included philosophy, history, and the social sciences' (Lagemann 1997: 11). Harvard built a new and outstanding reputation out of research conducted by scholars trained in and still affiliated with social science disciplines and this was widely noticed and emulated elsewhere (Powell 1980). Though educational theory took a somewhat different course in continental Europe including the Soviet sphere of influence (see Levering 2001; Depaepe 2001), the notion of a disciplined basis for educational inquiry (the French talk of '*les sciences de 'l'education*') and reference to philosophy, history, and social sciences was also widely shared.

Writing more specifically about the history of pedagogy as a 'scientific and separate discipline' Bengtsson suggests that 'The road … was not similar in all

Western countries and did not always follow the same pace, but I think that most countries have followed the same stages' (Bengtsson 2002: 7). His account of the establishment of pedagogy as a field of disciplined inquiry in Sweden describes how Bertil Hammer, the holder of the first chair in pedagogy in Sweden provided in his inaugural lecture in 1910 an account of pedagogy divided into three main branches, which will be remarkably familiar to later students. Hammer (1988) distinguished (in Bengtsson's own translation):

  (i)   trying to fix the goal of education in so far as the historical process of education (*bildningsgang*) displays it; this will be the task of *a philosophical or teleological pedagogy*;
 (ii)   studying the process of education (*uppfoostringsprocessen*) close at hand as it appears for the individual person; in other words to investigate the biological and psychological conditions that determine the child's development: *individual or psychological pedagogy*;
(iii)   studying education at large as a social phenomenon, of which the historical and social conditions are to be demonstrated: *social pedagogy* (*including historical pedagogy*).

   So, in spite of the embeddedness of 'pedagogy' in different academic and social traditions, it nevertheless reflects the key disciplines that constituted educational theory and inquiry in the UK and elsewhere for at least two decades.

   For a while these foundation disciplines appeared to offer: *differentiation* between different kinds of inquiry (R.S. Peters had recently complained of the current condition of educational theory as 'undifferentiated mush'); *coherence* in terms of the internal consistency of any one of these forms; and the '*systematic*' or rigour of inquiry, which raised such inquiry above the level of popular or received opinion—the discipline of the discipline.

   However, these foundation disciplines only ever provided provisional forms of coherence and temporary alliances between what were often radically different traditions. The sociology of education, for example, contained everything from traditional hard data survey people through ethnographers, neo-Marxists, and critical theorists, to postmodernists and social relativists. Psychology spanned neurophysiology, behaviourism, cognitivism, and constructivism through to psychoanalysis. The ideological and methodological differences within these communities of scholars were at least as great as anything they might have had in common. If philosophy of education retained for a while a slightly greater coherence in the UK around an analytic and Kantian tradition, this was at the price of a period of virtual exclusion of some of the alternatives available in continental Europe, which came from a different tradition. Increasingly through the 1980s and 1990s, these fault-lines in the foundation disciplines became more evident and new, more segmented intellectual communities and practices emerged. New alliances were formed as the links between some of these research practices were observed and built upon and new hybrids of research developed.

This diversification and hybridisation was encouraged too as the educational research community was enriched by people coming into it with a much wider repertoire of methodologies and informing theory drawn from literary and cultural studies, ethnography, feminist, and post-colonial theory, the humanities, and creative arts as well as the traditional stock in trade of the social sciences. The educational research community seems to have taken to heart Elliott Eisner's invitation to diversity in his 1993 address to the American Educational Research Association:

> If there are different ways to understand the world, and if there are different forms that make such understanding possible, then it would seem to follow that any comprehensive effort to understand the processes and outcomes of schooling would profit from a pluralistic rather than a monolithic approach to research. (Eisner 1993: 8)

In the field of educational research, the returns to the 2001 UK Research Assessment Exercise provided clear evidence of creativeness (or recklessness) in combining, crossing over, or perhaps 'transgressing' traditional disciplinary structures in a context of what some have described as 'postdisciplinarity'. Among, admittedly, the less conventional descriptions provided of the methodology of work submitted for assessment I noted: 'New Paradigm/heuristic/dialogic methods'; 'historical political sociology'; 'ideological history, curriculum and cultural theory'; 'social constructionism—socio-philosophical analysis'; and, my personal favourite, 'Narcissus myth and deconstruction'.

Not all of these developments necessarily challenge the idea that educational research is based on 'disciplined' inquiry. Commitment to a view of such inquiry as disciplined is entirely consistent with:

(i)   the desirability of drawing more fine-grained distinctions between e.g. different kinds of psychological inquiry into human cognition or between the wide variety of different practices taking place under the umbrella of 'sociology'—this is more accurately to respect the principle of differentiation;

(ii) the drawing of a wider variety of disciplinary resources into the field of educational inquiry (e.g. from anthropology, literary studies, and economic theory) whose relevance was previously neglected;

(iii) the combination of different disciplinary traditions in 'multidisciplinary' or 'interdisciplinary' inquiry to investigate a particular aspect of educational policy or practice.

These developments do indeed challenge the internal coherence of what were once presented as more or less monolithic disciplines; they challenge the exclusive role of the four foundation disciplines; and they challenge their individual sufficiency. They do not, however, thus far necessarily challenge the requirement for such research to be 'systematic and sustained'; to have its own means (methods?) to assist us in examining ideas which are put forward and judging what confidence to place in them—to be disciplined.

The literature on postdisciplinarity in the humanities and social sciences offers different messages on the place of disciplines or discipline in contemporary research. Some sources appear to use reference to multidisciplinarity,

interdisciplinarity, and postdisciplinarity interchangeably, although, as Menand rightly observes 'Interdisciplinarity is the institutional ratification of the logic of disciplinarity. The very term implies respect for the discrete perspectives of different disciplines. You can't have interdisciplinarity, or multidisciplinarity, unless you have disciplines … This is not the same phenomenon as postdisciplinarity' (Menand 2001: 11).

Other sources are at pains to insist that the discourse of postdisciplinarity is consistent with continuing respect for the discipline of the discipline. The project is rather to add to what discipline-based inquiry can offer than to replace it. In an editorial introducing the journal *Human Affairs: A Postdisciplinary Journal for Humanities and Social Sciences* Višňovskỳ and Bianchi explained: 'Postdisciplinarity in our understanding does not mean that traditional disciplines have disappeared or indeed should disappear, but rather that they are changing and should change in order to solve complex issues of human affairs. It is not sufficient to approach such complex issues from any single discipline' (Višňovskỳ and Bianchi 2002: 2). Giroux was at pains to stress that: 'At issue here is neither ignoring the boundaries of discipline based knowledge nor simply fusing different disciplines, but creating theoretical paradigms, questions and knowledge that cannot be taken up within the policed boundaries of the existing disciplines' (Giroux 1997: xii). Similarly, 'The problem … is how to construe and resituate the disciplines in a way that removes their effect as unnecessarily constraining foundational structures, while retaining the vitality of inquiry within them, so that the pursuit of knowledge is expanded, and the range of possibilities for what constitutes legitimate intellectual activity is broadened' (Mourad 1997: 86. See also Smith 2003).

Some, however, seem bent on the destruction of the disciplinary structure of academic life. When Michael Crow became President of Arizona State University he declared in his inaugural policy paper 'A New American University: The New Gold Standard' that: 'Knowledge does not fall within strict disciplinary categories … The New American University encourages teaching and research that is interdisciplinary, multidisciplinary, transdisciplinary and postdisciplinary, leading, where appropriate, to a convergence of the disciplines, an approach that might more accurately described as intellectual fusion' (Crow 2002: 2).

I do not have space in this context to examine this expanding body of literature in detail. At the risk of oversimplification it seems to have a number of targets for critique or attack, and there are a number of these that I would not seek to defend. I am happy to acknowledge, for example, that the organisation of academic institutions into strongly bounded discipline-based departments can be an obstacle to fluid and imaginative intellectual endeavour, though most of the organisational alternatives have their problems too. Even when a university such as the University of East Anglia is founded on an organisational principle of interdisciplinarity, the interdisciplinary units themselves tend to establish new barriers to academic collaboration (e.g. between historians in the School of English and American Studies and those in European Studies), as well as new opportunities for collaboration (e.g. between historians, literary scholars, and political theorists in European Studies).

I acknowledge, similarly, that the containment of research programmes within disciplinary boundaries, especially in fields such as education, which requires multiple approaches, is unhelpful. (Chapter 10 illustrates the role of the philosopher in interdisciplinary research environments.)

I agree that the view that any particular disciplinary structures are in some way 'essential' or ahistorical and unchanging is unsustainable. Any historical perspective on the evolution of human understanding can only confirm this evolutionary course. Phenix emphasised that:

> the concept of disciplines as species of knowledge is to be understood dynamically. The disciplines are not an array of fixed traditional ways of knowing that have been ordained at some special creation. They are structures of inquiry and understanding that emerge out of the continuous process of epistemic development. (Phenix 1964: 49)

The practice of one community of inquiry may become increasingly contested from within; distinctions within disciplinary frameworks become clearer and more significant; methods and methodologies more refined and new conversational communities established.

This view is also compatible with the idea that discipline- and rule-governed systems ay emerge from practices of inquiry in which they are by no means clearly defined—Schön's 'swampy lowland' of research and practice (Schön 1983: 42). Rule-governed systems emerge out of research practice as well as being brought to it—though one should not expect this to be something that happens overnight: it requires 'a community of arguers' (Hunt 1991: 194) of some extent, who share a common language and have refined agreed procedures. Appignanesi and Garratt describe, for example, their experience of 'working without rules in order to find out the rules of what you've done' (Appignanesi and Garratt 1995: 50). In *The Rise of the Network Society*, Manuel Castells writes of 'the self-organising character of nature and society' but adds: 'Not that there are no rules, but rules are created, and changed, in a relentless process of deliberate actions and unique interactions' (Castells 2000: 74). My only qualification to the literature that describes the evolutionary character of epistemic communities is to warn that one can underestimate the continuities in these communities as well as their capacity for change (see Toulmin 1972).

Finally, I share the view in some of the literature that to maintain that particular disciplinary structures are in some way reflections of the way reality is ordered is mistaken: rather they play a central role in the way in which we order our experience of reality or order reality itself.

It is not, however, the disciplines as forms of academic organisation that I want to protect (though such organisation just may prove contingently important), but the discipline that they provide to intellectual inquiry. The notion of postdisciplinarity in educational research worries me in so far as it suggests that educational research cannot any longer be thought of as having any discipline. It is worrying because the loss of 'discipline' has two huge consequences. The first is that it totally undermines the basis of the special claim of educational research on our or anyone else's

attention; the second is that it renders meaningful conversation within communities of arguers impossible. Let me explain these two consequences more fully.

2.4   'Systematic and Sustained Inquiry Made Public'

Why should we give attention to something claiming to be research? Why, more particularly should we perhaps give it special attention in comparison to, for example, popular belief, rumour, individual opinion, or the latest newspaper story? What are the features of research which merit particular credence? The answer has to lie in the particular features of some kinds of inquiry—ones which satisfy the conditions that earn it its status as 'research'—over others. Research is in this sense I think an honorific concept that incorporates certain normative features. Peters and White suggested that the term research in academic communities was used to refer to 'systematic and sustained inquiry carried out by people well versed in some form of thinking in order to answer some specific type of question' (Peters and White 1969: 2). They contrasted this with a broader definition employed by Mace who, in his *Psychology of Study*, maintained that 'research is, after all, just "search", looking for answers to questions and for solutions to problems' (quoted in Peters and White 1969: 2). Stenhouse took up two of Peters' and White's characteristics and added a third, so that research was defined as 'systematic and sustained inquiry made public' (Stenhouse 1980).

The requirement that research is *sustained* inquiry draws attention to its seriousness of commitment and has, incidentally, implications for the intellectual virtues of patience, industriousness, thoroughness, and care that it calls into service. But it is the requirement that research is *systematic* that is of particular relevance here. What might this mean? What is the 'system' in inquiry that deserves to be honoured as research?

First there is a fairly ordinary way in which we might talk about inquiry as systematic. Research can be contrasted with other forms of more casual inquiry that may make no demands on the inquirer to have concern for, for example the comprehensiveness or representativeness of the information collected; the orderliness with which information is collected or stored; the thoroughness of the search; or the care and accuracy with which information is translated, transferred, or transcribed. Research calls all of these principles into play.

But, secondly, 'systematic' carries suggestions of a system of inquiry, of rule-governed activity that embodies requirements about the relationship between evidence, analysis, and interpretation; about the way in which inferences are drawn; about the ways in which the results of new inquiry may or may not confirm or refute previous sets of beliefs; about the kinds of claims that particular kinds of evidence or argument can support; and about the level of confidence with which they entitle one to hold certain beliefs. Even in our personal systems of beliefs we dispense with such 'systems', such rules, at some peril; but the notion of research picks out inquiry in which respect for such rules and systems and the discipline that they

impose on the inquiry is a *sine qua non*. It is these that merit its honouring as research or, in the sense in which the French use the term, its claims to be '*scientifique*'.

As I indicated in the opening section of this chapter, one reason why we might give special attention to research—and urge others to do likewise—lies, in this view, in its claims: (i) to be based on sustained inquiry; (ii) to be inquiry characterised by the qualities of care and thoroughness contained in the everyday sense of the systematic; and (iii) in its claims to be systematic in this slightly more technical sense of a rule-governed system of inquiry. Such rule government constitutes the discipline of the form of inquiry—and when such discipline is sufficiently well-developed and differentiated it enables us to refer to the system as a discipline. Discipline may of course be applied more or less rigorously or vigorously. On the whole in academic circles, beliefs are seen to be more deserving of belief to the extent that they are derived from inquiries that have been conducted with greater rigour. So there is a connection between these considerations of inquiry as systematic, disciplined, and rigorous and considerations to do with the quality of the research (a connection that I develop in Chap. 21 on research assessment), although this does not mean that these are the only relevant criteria of quality or that they are all that is looked for in research.

The argument goes further however. For though research may require periods of isolated and individual study, it rests essentially on and in communities of inquirers, and such communities owe their identity to 'commonly understood norms of inquiry' (Shulman 1999: 164), a shared discourse, shared discipline, shared 'systematics'. As Hunt argues, 'the discipline of a discipline, by which I mean the rules of conduct governing argument within a discipline, does have a worthy function. Such rules make a community of arguers possible' (Hunt 1991: 104). The conditions for both the production and validation of research require communities of arguers, inquirers, and critics—and a condition for the possibility of such communities of arguers is their sharing in a common language and their shared recognition and reference to some common rules of (in this case) intellectual and creative behaviour. Popkewitz emphasises the importance of these rules, not only in allowing communication and argument but also in developing 'standards of inquiry': 'Research exists within communities of discourse which maintain and develop standards of inquiry … Scientific communities involve commitments to certain lines of reasoning and premises for certifying knowledge. Each scientific field has particular constellations of questions, methods and procedures. These constellations provide shared ways of "seeing" the world, of working, of testing each other's beliefs' (Popkewitz 1984: 2–3). McCarthy (1982) articulates a Habermasian view of both the epistemological and social conditions for such communities of arguers:

> Communication that is oriented towards reaching understanding inevitably involves reciprocal raising and recognition of validity claims. Claims to truth and rightness, if radically challenged, can be redeemed only through argumentative discourse leading to rationally motivated consensus. Universal-pragmatic analysis of the conditions of discourse and rational consensus show these to rest on the supposition of an 'ideal speech situation'

characterised by an effective equality of chances to assume dialogue roles. (McCarthy 1982: 255–256)

These considerations underpin my advocacy in the final chapter of this book of the centrality of conversation in research communities.

The rules to which I refer, and the intellectual, moral, and institutional props that maintain them, constitute the discipline of the discipline, of the tradition of thought and representation with which they are associated. It is in this sense that I suggest that discipline is a *sine qua non* of research. 'Disciplines,' argues Lenoir, with perhaps surprising lack of qualification in a sociological analysis, 'are *essential* structures for systematising, organizing, and embodying the social and institutional practices upon which both coherent discourse and legitimate exercise of power depend' (Lenoir 1993: 73; my italics).

2.5 Research as a Rule-Governed Activity

It is a common feature of human rule-governed practices that the rules are inexplicit, uncodified, tacitly understood. Notwithstanding the proliferation of textbooks on 'educational research methods', there is no real rule book, and if there was this would not necessarily be the best or only way to 'know how to go on', as Wittgenstein might put it (Wittgenstein 1953: para 155). Epistemologically functional rules (for example, governing the relationship between specific cases and general theories) may easily get blurred with social conventions attached to a discipline (for example, regarding the use or non-use of the first person in research reports). They tend to become more explicit when they are transgressed and critics point to the transgression. Eisner argued that: 'When research methods are stable and canonized, the rules of the game are relatively clear. With new games, new rules' (Eisner 1993: 8). I tend to think that it works almost the other way round. The more firmly established a discipline, the less explicit is people's awareness of its rules. It is in the formation and development of new patterns of inquiry that people are especially aware of what is distinctive about it. It goes with my acknowledgment of the diversity of the intellectual resources that are today brought to the field of educational research that there are some significantly different rule-governed systems in play. But let me at least illustrate the sort of rules that I have in mind—i.e. the kind of rules that shape the shared meaning and understanding that underpins research inquiry and its claims on our credibility:

(i) *Rules that link the methods appropriate to the research task or conclusion to particular ontologies and epistemologies and hence shape the character of the truth claims*—so, for example, someone who employed or offered three case studies as an attempt to answer a question about the *scale* of pupil disaffection in a given country would have made a kind of category mistake. Equally, someone offering a set of statistical tables in answer to a question

about students' *experience* of disaffection may (perhaps less obviously) have done the same.

(ii) *Rules that shape the way in which appropriate inferences can be drawn from the evidence or indicate the impossibility of such inferences.* Part of what defines a disciplined form of inquiry are the rules that govern the movement (or lack of it) between evidence/data and analysis, generalization, theory building. Examples include the level of probability one could extract from an analysis of statistical correlations or the kind of movement one might make (or not make) from an individual case study to, for example, grounded theory or general policy.

(iii) *Rules that indicate what are the analytic and explanatory concepts appropriate to the research task and evidence*—understanding (and reflecting in one's research) for example, an appropriate perspective on the ways in which questions to do with how certain educational goods are distributed; questions of whether or not such distribution is fair; questions to do with the role of capitalism in shaping this distribution and questions of God's will with respect to such distribution may or may not be distinguished and interrelated. This is not to suppose that these questions are simply resolved or resolvable: it is rather to make the point that part of the discipline of educational inquiry and part of what constitutes the shared understanding of different elements within that community consists in either having a view of this relationship or in sharing a language in which different views of this relationship can be intelligently explored.

Schwab drew these three types of rules together into what he referred to as the 'syntactical structure' of each discipline:

> There is, then, the problem of determining for each discipline what it does by way of discovery and proof, what criteria it uses for measuring the quality of its data, how strictly it can apply its canons of evidence, and, in general, to determine the pathway by which the discipline moves from its raw data to its conclusion. This cluster of problems I shall call the problem of the *syntactical structure* of each discipline. (Schwab 1964: 11)

It is the elements of this 'syntactical structure' that provide the rules or systematic nature—the discipline—of a discipline. In principle at least, it is the discipline in research that renders its outcomes especially worthy of our attention and credulity.

This last claim is especially important. The rules that go at least partly to constitute a discipline have a purpose, which is to contribute to the greater illumination and understanding of different aspects of our experience and our world. Phenix asks: 'How … can we be sure that the concept of a discipline is definite and significant enough to serve as a basis for the organization of knowledge? The answer', says Phenix, 'is empirical and pragmatic: disciplines prove themselves by their productiveness. They are the visible evidence of ways of thinking that have proven fruitful. They have arisen by the use of concepts and methods that have generative power' (Phenix 1964: 48). There is, perhaps, the risk either of a certain circularity in this position, or of an internal contradiction. If we can know the value

of beliefs (generated by the disciplines) 'empirically and pragmatically', then presumably we do not need the disciplines as means of discriminating the wheat from the chaff of belief. Alternatively, if it is through the disciplines (alone) that we can distinguish the wheat from the chaff of belief, then we cannot determine their value 'empirically and pragmatically'. Phenix, however, places the onus on the creative function of disciplines as generators of ideas, which could go some way to get round this problem.

Such rule-governed systems are not necessarily obstacles to innovation or creativity. Popkewitz stresses the paradoxical way in which these rule-governed systems provide the conditions for challenge, creativity, and dissent: 'Science exists in the preparedness of individuals to think up, explore and criticise new concepts, techniques of representation, and arguments … While it may seem paradoxical, the procedures, norms and interactions of the scientific community maintain a form of anarchy which encourages individual creativity' (Popkewitz 1984: 3 and 6). Such controversy sometimes confronts us with seemingly intractable problems of jurisdiction. Where are the rules or seats of adjudication that enable us to decide between contesting views? Meta-discourses such as philosophy and history provide a resource for such argumentation up to a point, but I do not claim that they can always offer a resolution—especially when they are themselves at the centre of the controversy. Writing with respect to controversy around the rules governing historical inquiry, Spitzer argues that, 'stories about the past will continue to command our assent when they proceed from shared assumptions as to relevant evidence, legitimate inference, and coherent logic. We cannot validate these standards by appealing to them, but there is no need to validate them if the parties to the conversation share them' (Spitzer 1996: 120–121). Spitzer adopts an interesting and persuasive approach to the question of veridicality in history by examining a number of case studies of debates around attempts at historical deception— and observes the standards to which all parties to these debates are appealing. He concludes 'this is to say not that we can stipulate the universal standards of historical truth but that we can identify the specific standards that are assumed to legitimate a given claim' (Spitzer 1996: 12).

All this movement is, nevertheless, movement around a notion in which the idea of a set of rule-governed practices in a community, with at least some basis of a shared discourse, is pivotal and indispensable. In this sense educational research may fruitfully and creatively reach out to the wealth of intellectual and representational resources available to it inside and outside the academy, but to do so is to grasp and to apply the particular discipline that characterises any of these traditions and whose rigorous application renders their products worthy of greater attention and more confident belief.

To address a possible criticism from a different standpoint, however, not any conversational community, nor even any rule-governed conversation, constitutes a discipline for the purposes of educational or any other kind of research. The conversation and the rules have to be constructed in some sense on the basis of their functionality in providing stronger rather than weaker warrant for belief (or disbelief). A conversation aimed at demonstrating mutual admiration or affection,

asserting dominance, or achieving reconciliation may be rule- governed at least in the anthropological sense or in terms of linguistic and interpersonal moves—it may in this sense be 'disciplined'—but it only becomes disciplined in the academic and epistemological sense of the term if it is constructed to serve this epistemological purpose. It may, as sociologists of knowledge often point out, serve other social functions ('privileging' particular individuals or communities, reinforcing particular social hierarchies) and the need may arise to address these social consequences, but these should not entirely distract attention from the matter of whether or not it does indeed serve its epistemological purpose.

2.6 Discipline as an Obstacle to Inquiry?

This pragmatic principle of whether or not particular rule-governed demands on a conversational community serve their epistemological purpose is a critical one. Rules, of course, both open up possibilities (for example, enabling the social processes that produce meaning) and close them down (for example, by disallowing discursive forms that do not conform but that may nevertheless have the potential to reveal something interesting). Foucault writes of discourse (not the same as a discipline but the point remains) as 'a stumbling block, a point of resistance and a starting point for an opposing strategy' (Foucault 1982: 101). Ball explains:

> Discourses constrain the possibilities of thought. They order and combine words in particular ways and exclude or displace other combinations. However, in so far as discourses are constituted by exclusions as well as inclusions, by what cannot be said as well as what can be said, they stand in antagonistic relations to other discourses, other possibilities of meaning, other claims, rights and positions. (Ball 1990: 2)

The notion of 'discourse' that is employed here is in many ways a more substantive one than 'discipline' as I am employing it. I have in mind a system that is primarily procedural and methodological, and that frames the form of an inquiry rather than its content. 'Discourse' usually indicates something more heavily ideological, characterised by theories and concepts that come to frame how people think about, for example educational practice—notions like 'educationally disadvantaged'; 'special needs'; 'giftedness'; 'marketisation'; 'inclusive education'; 'underachievement'; and their attendant ideological and theoretical baggage. In so far as it is part of the neo-Foucauldian project to examine critically the genealogy of these ideas, the power relations that they serve, and the subtle ways in which they support, for example, docility and self-policing compliance under particular regimes, then this presents no threat to the notion of discipline as I have articulated it. Indeed this critical activity might, I assume, require its own discipline if it is to be conducted rigorously and successfully. 'Discourse analysis' has its own place among the range of contemporary disciplined practices in social science and, more narrowly, educational research, but it occupies perhaps a special place in providing a common discipline to all such research in the form of a requirement for

self-critical alertness to the ways in which language is setting constraints on the possibilities of inquiry.

No-one imagines the disciplined pursuit of knowledge and understanding to be entirely free from entanglement with structures designed or developed to maintain and legitimate certain orders of power. This is precisely why its more sophisticated practitioners seek to operate under conditions that reduce these influences to a minimum, for example by defending the autonomy of their institutions against political interference or fighting off institutional attempts to suppress research that might be damaging to the interests of the institution itself; by submitting to ethical codes that govern their rights in relation to the powerful and their obligations in their relations with the weak; by submitting to methodological and epistemological requirements that force critique of their taken-for- granted assumptions, expose the ideological underpinnings of their work, and enable non-participants to challenge structural bias in the inquiry or in its conclusions. Again, part of the discipline that runs across all forms of educational inquiry is a commitment to these ethical and political requirements.

In his classic study of the interrelationships between the social and epistemological practices of 'academic tribes', Becher argues—and evidences on the basis of his empirical work—the claim that 'the ways in which particular groups of academics organise their professional lives are intimately related to the intellectual tasks on which they are engaged. In practice', he acknowledges, 'the two would seem to be inseparably intertwined; but in attempting to explore the characteristic features of the relationship it is necessary to separate the first analytically from the second' (Becher 1989: 1). Importantly he goes on to describe the way in which epistemological considerations come to drive social and cultural relationships rather than vice versa: 'It is crucial to my argument that, once such a field (of inquiry) becomes identified in terms of certain characteristics … a whole set of properties inherent in that identification come into play—properties which can profoundly affect the way of life of those engaged in the exploration of the field. *The cultural consequences in these instances have to be seen as closely derived from epistemological considerations*' (Becher 1989: 4; my italics).

One response to all this (and perhaps this is the Foucauldian response) is to say that any attempt to separate the epistemic from the political is in vain. Each attempt to escape from or find a position outside the power-knowledge nexus is doomed to fail. One, perhaps rather waspish, reply to this is to ask what, then, is the point of Foucault's own writing and the intellectual industry that this itself has spawned. Is this not in some sense contributing to our illumination of the conditions under which we engage in our different discourses and of the limitations and dangers which lie in them? Foucault himself would suggest that this is the case: 'Power-knowledge … is not for me the fundamental problem but an instrument allowing the analysis—in a way which seems to me to be the most exact—of the problem of the relationship between subject and games of truth' (from a 1988 interview cited by Marshall 1990: 23). More sympathetically, however, is the reply that the relationship between intellectual inquiry in its 'disciplined' forms and structures of power is an interminable wrestling match. We can observe over time

both: (i) challenge to our systems of inquiry by those observing the ways in which these become distorted by structures of power, and (ii) challenges to those systems of power and the constructions of the natural and social world they support by those vigorous in deploying forms of inquiry—inquiry that can illuminate both the operation of those 'knowledge-power' systems and the world over which they seek to exercise control. Of course, this last possibility could be a complete conceit, but it is a conceit that stands alongside the possibility that I am alone in the universe or that all my thoughts and actions are predetermined: it is equally intriguing but provides no basis for the way in which one might actually conduct one's life or that small part of it that is occupied with educational inquiry and research.

2.7 In Praise of Diversity with Maturity

As I have indicated, the last twenty-five years have seen a huge and bewildering enlargement in the intellectual resources from which educational researchers have drawn. In a sense we have seen the principle of differentiation taken to an extreme, the principle of coherence significantly eroded, and the systematic nature of inquiry that is honoured as research rendered more difficult to discern.

We have also seen a preoccupation with the diversification of method over the development of method in ways that might strengthen its capacity to contribute to the epistemological project which it serves. Developing and refining the discipline of any form of inquiry must surely be a central concern for any research community in so far as this is a project that has to do with: (i) understanding the credibility of the beliefs that issue from the research, and (ii) enhancing the credibility that we are entitled to attach to such beliefs. We must similarly have a concern for the cultivation among novices to such inquiry of the understanding, skill, and virtue that it demands.[1] For Kuhn (1977) intellectual progress requires a context in which there is relatively close agreement on theories, methods of inquiry, and the requirements for the initiation of newcomers into the discipline. Where there is the kind of pluralism and dissension that characterises science discourses and more specifically educational research, 'systematic advances in knowledge' as Becher puts it, 'must await the onset of maturity and the emergence of a developed paradigm' (Becher 1989: 10). In the last twenty-five years, the educational research community has taken on board a rich repertoire of forms of inquiry and representation. Perhaps in the next phase of the development of educational inquiry, we should focus on understanding and refining the conditions—the discipline—under which these are conducted.

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[1] The notion that initiation into a research community consists simply in training in methods and techniques seems to me to be a severely limited one. Underlying all this is the cultivation of, among other things, intellectual virtue.

There are new and urgent imperatives for the clarification, development, and reaffirmation of the disciplined character of the rich variety of intellectual traditions that are available to us as a resource for educational inquiry. In the United States, the powerful 'what works' movement has given state authority to a form of reductivism in which only a very narrow range of empirically based studies (essentially those based on a medical double-blind experimental model) count as research. In the UK, similarly, the practices of the National Institute for Clinical Excellence have been taken as a model for the work of the E-PPI Centre based at the London Institute of Education. This conducts 'systematic reviews' of research on educational policy issues. In doing this, it establishes explicit inclusion and exclusion criteria for the research that it will take into account. A review of 'The impact of the implementation of thinking skills programmes and approaches on teachers' (Baumfield et al. 2005) explicitly excludes by its criteria 'theoretical papers, philosophical papers' (Baumfield et al. 2005: 46)—this in a review of *research* and in a field in which the very construct of 'thinking skills' has been subject to extensive critique in the wider research community—critique that is apparently excluded by these criteria. A 'systematic review' of research on 'The impact of financial circumstances on access to post-16 learning in the Learning and Skills Sector' (Fletcher et al. 2005) explicitly restricts its scope to 'Empirical studies, other than (i) intervention descriptions, (ii) needs assessments, (iii) process evaluation and (iv) illustrative case studies' (Fletcher et al. 2005: 15). A 'systematic review' of 'The impact of citizenship education on student learning and achievement' (Deakin et al. 2005) clearly had no space for anything that might throw into serious question what might or might not constitute 'citizenship education' or indeed any case studies in an illuminative tradition. The exclusion/inclusion criteria state: 'A study that described and theorised about an aspect of citizenship education and its relationship to learning and achievement, without being based directly on empirical research, was not included. An empirical study was defined as one that reports on research and provides information about a specific research question, data collection and data analysis processes, and the findings that emerge from these' (Deakin et al. 2005: 75). Not much space for 'Narcissus myth deconstruction' here then!

At a time when the educational research community has extended the range and richness of the intellectual resources for educational inquiry, those who control the processes of so-called 'systematic review' of this research are adopting—systematically and across the board—an increasingly narrow and restrictive view of what they will recognise as educational research. They also display an antipathy to theory that must cast doubt on the seriousness of their own engagement with the issues under investigation and their understanding of the constituents of educational research itself. Perhaps they have reason to question the 'disciplined' character of some of this inquiry, though the exclusion of, for example, all philosophical (and, as far as I can see, historical) contributions to these debates would cast doubt on this interpretation. It may nevertheless assist the broader campaign against this kind of reductivism if we can more confidently lay claim to and demonstrate the discipline(s) that underpin(s) the variety of research traditions with which the educational research community is now engaged.

It is my attachment to this variety of genres of research and their legitimate place in the academy and in the arena of policy and practice that underlies my resistance to another dichotomy that pervades the educational research literature—that between so-called quantitative and qualitative research methods and methodologies.

2.8   The Quantitative/Qualitative Dichotomy: An Absence

It will probably be expected that a book about philosophy and educational research will give considerable attention to the interminable debates in educational research circles—'methodological wars' as Alexander calls them (Alexander 2007: 118)—about the distinction between and the priority to be given to 'quantitative' and 'qualitative' forms of research. For several reasons I shall not be doing this.

First, it will be clear from what I have argued in this chapter on the disciplines of educational research, that if there are to be distinctions drawn between one kind and another (and I think there are), then given the diversity of forms that such research takes, these distinctions really need to be much more finely drawn than is involved in lumping them together in just two categories. These categories are simply uninformative: if someone tells me that theirs is a 'qualitative' study, I have to ask, do you mean a piece of ethnography, a historical study, a piece of biography or autobiography, are you writing short stories, a piece of discourse analysis, or applying feminist theory, a piece of phenomenography, an artistic production or performance, philosophical work, etc., etc. …? If they tell me they are doing 'quantitative' research, do they mean that they are simply using numbers descriptively to present a picture of a particular population or the ethnic composition of a school, conducting a survey, carrying out experimental work or a randomised controlled test, analysing a large data set or population study, playing with correlations, doing some mathematical modelling of the demand for and supply of teachers …? So the categories are seriously uninformative. Second, the categories are not discrete. An ethnographic case study or 'thick description' (usually dubbed 'qualitative') may well call for quantitative data to describe, for example, the socioeconomic context of a school, or its own composition, or the life and work experience of teachers who are the focus of a study. Historians (again, 'qualitative'?) may well be interested in class size in the nineteenth century, the number of church schools, or the percentage of children progressing to higher education over a period of time. Similarly, a statistical analysis of school performance in relation to the socioeconomic standing of its pupils may well identify 'outliers' which buck the predicted trends in both directions, but to understand how or why they do that will require a rather different in-depth case study of the schools in question. Both *clusters* of research (I do not think either has sufficient coherence to describe it, as Pring does in the passage cited below, as a 'paradigm') share a common requirement for theoretical framing and methodological justification that takes them both into the domain of philosophy, which may also be contributing at the level of conceptual clarification in both cases. As Pring argues: 'The polarisation between the two paradigms which is typical of so much theoretical

writing on educational research bears little relation to the complexity of research practice, or, indeed to how we think about research at the intelligent common sense level' (Pring 2000: 57).

The US National Research Council Committee on Scientific Principles for Educational Research Report takes the view that:

> Because we see quantitative and qualitative scientific inquiry as being epistemologically quite similar … and as we recognize that both can be pursued rigorously, we do not distinguish between them as being different forms of inquiry. We believe the distinction is outmoded, and it does not map neatly in a one-to-one fashion onto any group or groupings of disciplines. (Shavelson and Towne 2002: 19)

I conclude, with the National Research Council, 'both categorizations are neither well defined nor constructive' and are probably best not employed (Shavelson and Towne 2002: 19). No doubt, however, I shall not be entirely successful in this endeavour myself in what follows, because the two concepts are so deeply embedded in education research discourse.

The words of the US National Research Council Committee on Scientific Principles for Educational Research Report do, however, remind us that the quantitative/qualitative debate gets entangled with notions of the 'scientific', and of what counts as 'scientific', and hence, by none too subtle elisions, 'real' or high-quality research offering the 'gold standard' against which other forms of research are (unfavourably) compared. The 'scientific' is itself used very tendentiously and without regard to the rich diversity of approaches and interpretative frameworks that are present in the real world of science (as distinct from the science that seems to be imagined by educational researchers) as well, of course, as in the arts and humanities. The next two chapters approach in different ways the ill-informed appropriation of reference to the scientific, which is a feature of some of the literature and the over-ambitious claims that are made for what it can illuminate. More constructively, they point to the different kinds of understanding of human experience, especially ones rooted in the humanities, which can and do illuminate educational policy and practice. This, I suppose, is my own contribution to the 'paradigm wars', but the pluralistic epistemological framework, as Siegel calls it (Siegel 2006) that I have set out in this chapter underpins my response to all these debates. Intelligent discussion of the methods and methodologies of educational research requires something rather more fine-grained as a descriptor than 'qualitative' or 'quantitative', but also something less oppositional. I begin with one of the early complaints against such opposition in the lecture given by the novelist and scientist, C.P. Snow, just over fifty years ago on 'The two cultures and the scientific revolution'.

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Chapter 3
'Two Cultures' Revisited: Science ('Scientism') and the Humanities in the Construction of Educational Understanding

Abstract In this chapter I challenge not science (which would be foolish in the extreme) but a very restricted notion of science associated with the 'scientific' aspirations of some in the educational research community, which I refer to as 'scientism'. Scientism privileges a very narrow empiricist view of science and, in particular, experimental methods which allow the measurement of physical and, by extension, human and social phenomena. The chapter illustrates a number of ways in which such scientism operates to marginalise social and educational inquiry and, in particular, alternative perspectives on experience rooted in the humanities. It challenges scientism in two ways. First, the chapter argues that this represents an impoverished view of science itself, which, properly understood, draws on a much wider range of methods and methodologies, some of which bring it much closer to humanistic forms of enquiry than the narrow empiricism that is popularly advanced as its defining characteristic. Then the chapter begins to illustrate, more positively, the sort of contributions to educational understanding that draw essentially from the academic traditions of the humanities. These include: (i) the exploration of human conscious experience and intentionality; (ii) narratives (including auto/biography); (iii) descriptive writing; (iv) normativity; (v) literary, perhaps even 'romantic', sensibility.

3.1 'Two Cultures' Revisited

On 7 May 1959, the British scientist and distinguished novelist C.P. Snow delivered the Rede Lecture in the Senate House of Cambridge University under the title 'The Two Cultures and the Scientific Revolution' (Snow 1959; see also Snow 1956, 1964). Snow's central thesis concerned what he saw as the deep divide between science and the humanities which had opened up in the academic community and, with this, the mutual incomprehension between the two camps.

The original version of this chapter was published as Bridges, D. (2011) 'From the scientist to the humanistic in the construction of the contemporary educational knowledge' in *European Educational Research Journal* 10(3), 322–334 with a response by Christiane Thompson.

> I believe the intellectual life of the whole of western society is increasingly being split into two polar groups: … literary intellectuals at one pole—at the other scientists, and as the most representative, the physical scientists. Between the two lies a gulf of mutual incomprehension—sometimes, especially among the young, hostility and dislike. They have a curious distorted image of each other. Their attitudes are so different that even on the level of emotion, they can't find much common ground. (Snow 1959: 3–4)

Snow's analysis of this phenomenon was neither profound nor really very well evidenced, but it struck a chord in contemporary society, not least among educators, because he placed a significant part of the blame for this polarisation on the English school system. At that time, and especially in the selective grammar schools, it was possible, and even required, for youngsters at the end of the second year of secondary school (i.e. at about the age of 13+) to decide whether to specialise either in the sciences or in what tended to be referred to at that time as the Arts,[1] adding either Greek or German to a range of other subjects which would include mathematics but not necessarily any science at all. At 15+ (in the case of the most able), or 16+ (for the second most able group), they would narrow their specialisation even further to their three or even two A-level subjects. In my own case, I ceased all study of science at the age of 13, and though, having read the 1956 version of Snow's paper in the *New Statesman*, I made a half-hearted attempt to combine Physics with History and French at A level, I was firmly advised by my school that this was quite impracticable. This autobiographical aberration might be thought to have some bearing on the concerns I express in this chapter.

So, Snow's primary concern was with the gulf which he believed had opened up between the worlds of literary intellectuals (he notes that the literatists seemed already to have claimed the role of 'intellectual' for themselves) and the scientists, and he saw the source of this gulf as lying in the rather specialised character of the English education system. He is fairly even-handed in pointing to what is thereby lost on both sides, though one has a sense that his primary concern is with the lack of scientific understanding among the literary intellectuals.

If Snow were writing today it is possible that he would have had even more cause for concern. On the one hand, postmodern extravagance has taken many areas of the humanities beyond the reach of many traditional historians and literatists, let alone their scientific counterparts; on the other hand, the vast expansion of scientific work, its increased specialization, and its own esoteric technical language

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[1]The language of 'the arts and humanities' is rather confusing. Sometimes the word 'arts' is used to include the humanities, sometimes it refers only to subjects like music, painting, and dance, i.e. the 'creative arts'. The UK Arts and Humanities Research Council (which channels government research funds through a competitive bidding process) does not offer a definition of either term, but lists approximately 30 main fields of study that fall under its scope. Group A includes History, Law, Philosophy and Theology, Divinity and Religious Studies; Group B a range of what might be fairly readily identified as creative and applied arts, including Visual Arts, Music, Drama and Theatre Studies, and Architecture; Group C a rather mixed assortment including Art History, Textiles, Dictionaries and data bases, Cultural Geography and Archaeology; and Group D a range of language and literature studies. The AHRC does not, however, attempt to indicate which of these are arts and which humanities (http://www.ahrc.ac.uk).

have made it even less accessible to the non-specialist than in Snow's day. Even within the scientific community, specialists in one area find it ever more difficult to make sense of, let alone to keep abreast of, what is happening in another. The UK Research Councils demand 'interdisciplinarity' in research projects in the hope of retaining some elements of coherence in what is an increasingly diversified and balkanised academic community.

The social sciences—including those employed in the field of education—can be thought of not so much as a third tradition or 'culture', to stay with Snow's terms, but rather as an arena in which the competing claims of the arts and sciences are matched against each other. Alexander, for example, writes of 'a quarter century of methodology wars' in the educational research community (Alexander 2007: 119). This would be one, albeit over-simple, reading of the qualitative/quantitative debate in educational research.

3.2 Scientism and Its Manifestations in the Discourses of Higher Education

A new problem has, however, been added to the problem of mutual incomprehension between the arts and humanities and science inside and outside the academic community. This is the squeezing out of the perspective(s) of the humanities from academic and, especially, wider political and policy discourses bearing on education, in favour of the scientific or, as I prefer to call it, the 'scientistic' perspective, since, as Phillips illustrates very well, the representations of scientific method are not even faithful to science, properly understood in all its diversity (Phillips 2007: 327). Lather has also drawn the distinction between science and scientism, declaring that: 'My interest over the past few years in books on the research/policy nexus—beginning with the National Academy's Scientific Research in Education report (National Research Council 2002) and moving through focuses on evidence, standards, and the relationship of research to policy—has been and continues to be based on my refusal to concede *science* to *scientism*' (Lather 2008: 361, and see also Lather 2007). Smith writes in similar terms of the 'faux-scientific' (Smith 2015: 747) and of the 'excessive respect for the image and tropes of science that renders more humane approaches and paradigms even more marginal' (Smith 2015: 750).

Briefly, in the contemporary political and policy arena (and not just in education) it is, by preference, what is observable, what is measurable, what is quantifiable, what is in this sense perceived as scientifically examinable that is sought as a basis for decisions: it is counting that counts. As BBC presenter Andrew Dilnot explained in his introduction to a BBC Radio 4 *Analysis* programme entitled '2 + 2 = 5':

> Waiting lists up by 40,000, Blair to spend .£6 billion on health, the PSBR down to .£1 billion, productivity up, fertility down to 1.7, Tory tax rises, a £1,000 Labour tax bombshell. Numbers on every politician's lips and every newspaper headline, and deemed all powerful… There's no doubting this sense that if you can't weigh it, price it and measure it, it hardly merits arguing about. (BBC Radio 4 2008: 3)

A famous warning attributed by Mark Twain to Disraeli, that 'there are lies, damned lies and statistics' seems to have been submerged by a faith in what can be precisely observed, measured, compared, and, of course, then ultimately controlled. It is not that this is an entirely new conviction; Smith traces much of this to Francis Bacon and *Novum organum* (Smith 2007). But it has surfaced with a vengeance in the contemporary policy arena and elsewhere (see and, hence, in the expectations that are laid upon educational research.

There are a number of interrelated elements in what I shall refer to as the discourse of 'scientism'. They include:

- a confidence in numbers and what can be measured as a firm and objective basis for decisions;
- a confidence that such quantification can be securely derived from observation —and especially if that observation can be conducted in accordance with the principles of randomised controlled experiments;
- a confidence, by extension, in the capacity of correlational studies to indicate a probabilistic relationship between inputs and outputs in any social as well as physical condition;
- a belief that these first three principles reflect a 'scientific' basis for educational and wider societal decision-making;
- a scepticism about the usefulness, or even the informativeness, of anything which does not match these 'scientific' expectations;
- a preference for supporting, funding, and promoting the scientific (thus understood) and excluding and/or marginalising the rest.

I should acknowledge that the term 'scientism' has come to have particular use in recent times as a term of abuse by Christians (in particular) against 'the New Atheism', of which the noted British evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins is a leading exponent (see Dawkins 2007, but also Dennett 2006). One of Dawkins's more polemical critics, David Aikman, writes, in a book entitled *The delusion of disbelief*, about why the new atheism is a threat to your life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness—of 'Dawkins' twenty-first century concoction: the deification of science in the form of "scientism" (Aikman 2008: 61). This is not, however, the cause I wish to espouse in this chapter. It is not the particular replacement of religious belief by science that I want to address, but rather a much wider substitution of the sort of understanding of human beings and human society provided by the arts and humanities by what I shall argue is in any case an atrophied view of science itself. This distinction is important, not least because it is part of my claim that the kind of understanding that is thus marginalised is not anything deeply mystical, but rather something very close to the more common-sense understanding that Aristotle celebrated as *phronesis*, or practical wisdom.

In the field of educational policy and practice there are many manifestations of scientism in the terms in which I have identified it, though I shall attempt here only to illustrate what I acknowledge might require more substantial demonstration.

It is manifest, first of all, in the pervasive discourse of performativity, within which performance is measured by reference to numerical targets (e.g. for the proportion of children achieving certain grades on national or international tests, for the number of days schooling lost through pupil absenteeism, for the proportion of entrants to higher education from 'non-traditional backgrounds' etc.) and compared through league tables of school performance or, in the case of the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA, sponsored by the OECD), Trends in Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) or in the Progress in Reading and Literacy (PIRL) tests, of whole educational systems. Thus the quality of educational institutions comes to lie not, for example, in descriptions of their ethos, trust, collegiality, care, enterprise, creativity, or responsibility, nor in narratives of the experience of students who might have learned through the institution, but rather in terms of scores on various tests. An Open Letter to the Director of PISA signed by over 80 academics from different countries (Meyer and Zahedi 2014) complained, among other things, that: 'by emphasizing a narrow range of measurable aspects of education, PISA takes away from the less measurable or immeasurable educational objectives'. Commenting on what he clearly saw as PISA's unsatisfactory response to this charge, Padraigh Hogan expands on this criticism:

> [There is not] any recognition on the part of the OECD that there may be some central benefits of education that, of their very nature lie beyond the reach of the most sophisticated test instruments. Examples here would be the enrichments of self- understanding and the enhancements in students' sense of self-identity that spring from resonant experiences of learning, for instance, being enabled to discover and cultivate something of the historian in oneself, or of the scientist, or of an aptitude for design and making, or of a literary sensibility. (Hogan 2015: 345)

Scientism, as I have described it, is manifest, too, in the sort of knowledge which is held to provide a reliable basis for educational decision-making—that is, in the discourses of evidence-based policy and practice. What might count as 'evidence' within this discourse? Again, the model is a (quasi-) scientific one, drawn in this case from medicine and, in the UK, from the particular model of the highly influential National Institute for Clinical Evidence (NICE). Most significantly, the 'standard' which is set for reliable research findings is that of the randomised controlled experiment.

In the United States the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 included over one hundred mentions of 'scientifically-based research' as the desirable basis for education in general and schooling in particular, and Article 37 of the Act defined such research as that which meets the attributes of rigour, systematicity, validity, and reliability, as warranted by the choice of method—empirical, experimental, and quantitative designs, with 'a preference for random- assignment experiments' (Oancea and Pring 2009: 14). This legislation set the tone for far- reaching developments in the United States. Howe (2008, 2009) describes how what he calls the 'new scientific orthodoxy' in education research became codified in the US National Research Council's (NRC) *Scientific research in education* (2002) and reinforced in its subsequent *Advancing scientific research in education* (2004), as well as in the American Educational Research Association's (AERA) *Standards for*

reporting on empirical social science research (AERA Publications 2006). All of this provoked extensive attention in the educational research literature, not least in a number of key educational research journals: a major section on scientific research in education appeared in *Educational Researcher* in 2002, 31(8) and again, in a discussion of Howe's authoritative philosophical treatment of the issues in 2009—*Educational Researcher* 38(6); an entire issue of *Qualitative Inquiry* (2004, 10(4)); a symposium on 'the education science question' in *Educational Theory* (2005, 55 (2)); and an issue of *Teachers College Record* (2005, 107(1)), devoted to the implications of scientific research in education for qualitative inquiry.

The same issues have also impacted on the UK and are increasingly reverberating through other parts of the world, carried and framed by the discourse of 'evidence-based practice', using a model which focuses on the empirical observation of 'what works' and which privileges experimental design interventions, in particular randomised controlled trials, quantitative measurement of outcomes, and synthetic reviews of this research evidence (i.e. what is perceived as a 'scientific' basis for decision-making). The European Education Research Association heard similar views expounded in a keynote by Robert Slavin at its 2007 conference, to which the author of this chapter made a reply (Slavin 2008; Bridges 2008).

The drive towards 'scientistic' approaches does not just come from outside the educational research community. Stephen Gorard, who has been a highly influential figure in the UK educational research community, sets out the 'ideal' of experimental research: 'the ideal experiment, by isolating cause and effect, can provide us with a universal template for the perfect piece of research which leads to safe knowledge' (Gorard 2001: 2). Hammersley points out, in response to this grandiose claim, firstly, that 'much work in philosophy of science over the past fifty years has denied that there is anything so specific we can identify as scientific method', and secondly, that 'what science can give us is a great deal more limited than quantitative researchers, including Gorard, assume … At best it can only tell us what is false, not true … And as soon as one takes into account the possibility of error in experimental evidence, it cannot even tell us what is false with absolute certainty' (Hammersley 2007: 253). With Hammersley, my concern is not to argue that experimental and other quantitative methods have no place in educational research, but only to resist their hegemonic claims to represent an ideal, let alone an exclusive methodology. Educational researchers do not need to succumb to what Phillips calls 'physics envy'! (Phillips 2007: 327).

On the basis of the prejudices and priorities that I have indicated, however, whole swathes of educational research rooted in particular in the theory and methods of inquiry from within the humanities tradition, along with critiques of the normative and ideological framing of policy and policymakers' assumptions about what might count as working, are 'systematically' excluded from the evidential base that is offered to policymakers, excluded from 'systematic' reviews of such evidence, excluded from major research indices (the Education Resources Information Centre, for example), and marginalised in the competition for research funding.

I do not propose to go further here in discussing the arguments which are presented extensively in the educational research literature (see, for example,

Davies et al. 2000; Elliott 2001; No Child Left Behind Act 2001; Gough and Elbourne 2002; Shavelson and Towne 2002; Slavin 2002, 2008; Smeyers and Depaepe 2006; Biesta 2007; Bridges 2008; Bridges et al. 2009—especially, in the last, the paper by Oancea and Pring). My purpose here is simply to illustrate one highly significant manifestation of what I claim to be a broader tendency—to privilege a rather narrow conception of the scientific as a basis for an understanding of educational practice and hence as a basis for making judgments about educational policy. This is perhaps associated too with a naive expectation of what any amount of 'evidence' of this kind can ever do for you. 'Nothing even in mathematical science can be more certain than that a collection of scientific facts are of themselves incapable of leading to discovery' warned Sir David Brewster—and this over 150 years ago (Brewster 1860: 328).

Scientism is manifest, in the third instance, in the powerful practices which are involved in the contemporary discourse of research quality assessment. These are of particular significance because, as with 'evidence-based policy' in education, narrowly defined criteria of what is reliable or, in this case, what is of high quality, rapidly come to define what qualifies for the honorific title of 'research' and hence what sort of research there might be a place for at all. Briefly, what appears to be happening (at least in government circles) is a movement away from judging quality through peer reading of published work, in favour of some kind of metrics-based approach involving reference to, for example, numbers of citations or (this is widely used in continental Europe) the number of papers published in journals of a particular kind. The peer review is deemed time-consuming, expensive, and unreliable and the metrics approach both more efficient and more reliable—as well as being one which can in principle be conveniently managed by government without reference to academic communities (For a fuller discussion of this, see Chap. 25).

In France the Agence d'Evaluation de la Recherche et de l'Enseignement Superieur (AERES) [Agency for the Evaluation of Research and Teaching in Higher Education] has raised for French academics many of the issues already raised for UK academics by the UK-wide Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) or, more recently, the Research Evaluation Framework (REF). If I had hoped that the French might have a rather more orderly way of dealing with the discourse of the 'scientific' than the English, I was quickly disabused by an article presented by Bernard Daunay to a seminar on research evaluation organised by the Institut National de Recherche Pedagogique (INRP) in Lyon. Daunay offered a detailed analysis of the language used in a suite of AERES documents. He provides, first, the following account of the classification of knowledge in the AERES documents:

> First we should observe the regrouping that has taken place among the disciplines: it is interesting in this respect to think of the way in which the five major units of knowledge are constituted (Mathematics, Physics, Chemistry; Earth and Space Sciences; Engineering Science; Life Sciences; and Psychological and Social Sciences). Elsewhere, and in the course of certain other documents, other classifications appear; thus in the Visit Handbook, there is constructed an opposition between 'Hard Sciences and Life Sciences' on the one hand and 'Human and Social Sciences' on the other (in the Note on Reviews in the SHS these last are opposed to 'the exact sciences and life sciences'). Elsewhere one finds the

category 'Sciences of Life, Health and the Environment' (Criteria for the identification of researchers and 'publishing' research students), and 'science' is the term used in the assessment procedure. Besides this, in the Individual Notice of Activity there are ten rubrics, some of them employing the categories of the list above, but not all: they also distinguish here 'human sciences and the humanities' and 'social sciences'. (Daunay 2009: 5, my translation)

In a response to an earlier version of this chapter, Christiane Thompson (Thompson 2010) provided, as a further example of this phenomenon, an announcement that the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) issued in 2008 concerning PhD stipends in the context of 'empirical educational research':

In order to ensure and develop the quality of the educational system, scientifically researched foundations are necessary that allow for reliable assessments of the situation and perspectives in the educational system. Furthermore, the importance of empirically founded knowledge increases in the context of knowledge based and output oriented governance at all levels of the educational system, especially for decision personnel (in local school authorities, regional educational institutes, as headmaster, etc.). Moreover, the importance of empirical expertise rises within the teacher council within the singular school … (BMBF 2008, Thompson's translation)

The UK is clearly not alone in seeing the humanities pushed to the edges of the academy and suffering under the dominating discourse of the scientific, even though the nature of this scientificity is not really understood. (Daunay later goes on to write of 'une certain conception du scientifique ou, plus exactement, du scientifique valorisé' [a certain conception of the scientific, or, more exactly, of the science which is validated], Daunay 2009: 7).

Perhaps another—even more far-reaching—expression of scientism is in the increasing tendency on behalf of governments towards the redirection of the resources for higher education away from the arts, humanities, and social sciences and towards what are sometimes referred to as the STEM subjects (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics). This was a major policy thrust of the Higher Education Funding Council in the UK, which, in the wake of the 2008 Research Assessment Exercise, gave such preference to the STEM subjects that even the very best arts and humanities departments ended up receiving less funding than they had in previous years. In China and India, the bulk of the growth in publicly funded higher education has been in these areas, and Ethiopia, for example, is now following in their path with the so-called 3:1 principle—that is, the policy of reconstructing higher education so that three quarters of its students are in science and technology. There are indications that the privileging of science at the expense of the humanities is a wider European issue. Jurgen Mittelstrass introduced a recent conference of the Academia Europa by acknowledging that 'the Humanities… have been systematically neglected and under-appreciated in European policy' (Mittelstrass 2009: 464). The European Commission's 2011 green paper on educational research strategy was entirely dominated by the Commission's passion for business innovation, and hence for the kind of scientific and technological research which, it is supposed, would advance that agenda—a

priority which, I am pleased to say, the European Education Research Association and its national members actively challenged.

I am not going to go into greater detail on critiques of these five particular developments, which are extensively rehearsed elsewhere. These examples serve to illustrate a problem to which I wish to draw attention, which is the almost programmatic attempt to marginalise other forms of enquiry into human experience in favour of the all-engrossing power of (supposedly) 'scientific' method. A different sort of chapter would be needed to demonstrate convincingly the scale of the problem that I have only illustrated.

I am concerned here primarily with the impact of this tendency on education and the wider field of social practice, but it is worth noting that from time to time the view is expressed that even medicine itself suffers from, as it were, an overdose of scientism at the cost of the understanding that can be gained from autobiographical and phenomenographic accounts of experience with disease. Introducing Ivan Vaughan's extraordinary account of his experience of Parkinson's disease, Jonathan Miller (a neurologist among other things) wrote of how 'as medicine becomes more scientific, its official literature leaves less and less room for the subjective accounts provided by the patient, and as the discourse becomes denser and more impenetrable, it becomes harder and harder to hear the voices of those for whom the benefits are designed' (Vaughan 1986: xv).

The ambition of scientism seems indeed to have no limits. Richard Layard's book on *Happiness: Lessons from a new science* celebrates the fact that a Benthamite notion of happiness, which lost popularity in government circles as a result of philosophical scepticism about the possibility of agreeing when people were truly happy, can now be put back on the government agenda because it can now be measured thanks to advances in psychology and neuroscience (Layard 2005).

There are two ways to address the problem of the hegemony of scientism as I have described it. One is to attack, or at least qualify, the claims of scientism; the second is to reaffirm the claims of the arts and humanities to illuminate educational (among other) experience. Both are huge tasks, but let me at least sketch out some of the arguments which I think can be applied.

3.3   Qualifying the Claims of Scientism: Scientism Impoverishes Science

There is scope here for a detailed and perhaps rather technical attack on some of the particular claims of (quasi-) scientific methods—especially in so far as they claim to inform social, including educational, policy and practice. These might relate to the limitations on the controls which it is ever possible to introduce in the application of experimental methods in, for example, school classrooms, or to the invalidity of inferences from experiments which are conducted under laboratory conditions to real classrooms. They might relate to the inconclusiveness of correlational studies

and their lack of explanatory force. They might relate to the logical limitations of drawing conclusions about what to do in a particular setting from large-scale population studies. They might relate to the impact of the use of certain modes of measurement and assessment on people's behaviour—the 'washback' effects, as they are sometimes referred to (see e.g. Cheng et al. 2004)—and to the way in which people's responses to certain forms of measurement end up invalidating that form of measurement—cf. Goodhart's Law (Goodhart 1983).

Even more significant, because it brings science into closer proximity to the arts and humanities, is the acknowledgment that science itself is always framed by the scientist's interpretative framework. Howe describes the 'fundamental challenge' of philosophers such as Quine and Kuhn, and philosophical pragmatists such as James, to 'the general idea of isolating the empirical content of science from its humanly constructed conceptual content' and 'their rejection of a pristine empirical foundation for science, shorn of human interests goals and activity' (Howe 2009: 429). 'The trouble with the simple view of scientific method,' writes Polkinghorne (himself a distinguished scientist), 'is that it does not take into account the sophisticated web of interpretation and judgement involved in any experimental result of interest … Experiments are always theory laden. The dialogue between observation and comprehension is more subtle and mutually interactive than is represented by the simple confrontation of prediction and result' (Polkinghorne 1986: 8–9). The *International handbook of interpretation in educational research* offers eight reflections on the role of interpretation in each of eight genres of educational research, and had no difficulty in filling the examples from genre 7, 'Quantitative approaches' (Smeyers et al. 2015).

In short, then, there is a form of attack on scientism that challenges much of the technical authority which is claimed for 'scientific' method and measurement—not least when this is applied to the social, including the educational, sphere.

There is, however, a second form of attack which is in many ways more constructive, because it points towards a much richer view of what science as a field of inquiry has to offer and also helps to close what might otherwise be an exaggerated gap between science and the humanities. On this argument the accusation against scientism and against some of those who seek to reduce the scope of intellectual inquiry to what can be 'scientifically' determined is that they simply fail to represent the rich variety of intellectual engagement which is properly representative of science; they don't understand science. Howe writes of the way that what he calls 'the new scientific orthodoxy' is faltering under numerous attacks on 'the doctrine of "the unity of science" whereby physics served as the model for any endeavor that was to qualify as science' (Howe 2009: 429)—and even physics is not without its own diversity of forms. Science is not reducible—as some in the educational research community seem to think—to a few observational and experimental methods, measurements, and statistical manipulations, or indeed to empirical testing alone. This is an argument that Rowbottom and Aiston develop particularly persuasively in *The myth of "scientific method" in contemporary educational research*, in which they argue that 'such an [positivist] account is not only

unrealistic and irrelevant, but also divisive and detrimental to science' (Rowbottom and Aiston 2007: 11).

Let us note, first of all, that a great deal of science is based not so much on empirical observation but on conjecture, deduction, reasoning, and mathematical modelling, and that, as Poincare (1996) and Hadamard (1945) have long since pointed out, these are advanced and informed not just by careful logical argument from premises but by imagination. Einstein's theory of relativity may have been prompted by observation of some discrepancies in experience, but the theory which offered the possibility of resolving these discrepancies came from a brilliant imagination. The (theoretical) necessity for 'black holes' was established nearly one hundred years before anyone actually observed any. Einstein himself declared:

> The supreme task of the physicist is to arrive at those universal laws from which the cosmos can be built up by pure deduction. There is no logical path to these laws; only intuition, resting on sympathetic understanding of experience, can teach them. … In a certain sense, therefore, I hold it true that pure thought can grasp reality, as the ancients believed. (Einstein 1935: 125)

Famously, of course, Karl Popper turned upside down the traditional model of empirical science (the one which still dominates the approaches of those who seek to apply scientific method to educational research). He suggested that, rather than theory being derived inductively from a number of empirical observations, science proceeded first on the basis of imaginative conjecture and hypothesis building and then on the basis of attempts at refutation. Of course, one significant approach to such refutation would be empirical observation, but so also would be an examination of internal inconsistencies in the theory and/or its inconsistency with other theories which merited confidence, together with what Popper refers to as 'the one method of all *rational discussion*, and therefore of the natural sciences as well as philosophy … stating one's problem clearly and examining its various proposed solutions *critically*' (Popper 1959: 16, original emphasis). The degree of confidence which we can attach to any such solutions is, on this view, a function of the rigour, or, in Popper's term, the 'severity' of the attempts at their refutation. Further, part of the 'general method of rational discussion', according to Popper, 'consists, simply, in trying to find out what other people have thought and said about the problem in hand, why they have had to face it, how they formulated it and how they tried to solve it' (Popper 1959: 16)—a 'method' which I assume science and the humanities might share.

If we start to think of ways in which science resembles work in other parts of the academy, rather than what separates it from such work, it is not difficult to find examples. Charles Darwin was, of course, a great observer and collector of data, but, in the final chapter of *Origin of species* he writes 'This whole volume is one long argument' (Darwin 1859: 499). There is a sense in which his great scientific achievement was in constructing a narrative, a story, which wove together many apparently diverse and separate events and observations— of animal life, of violent eruptions in the earth's surface, of sedimentation and the chronology that it provides, of fossilised remains and of contemporary breeding techniques—in an

(ultimately) persuasive form. Without the *story*, all those boxes of samples and specimens would have remained as nothing more than a collection and an inventory —data in abundance, but no science. As Smith asks, 'How might things look different if … Darwin, rather than Newton, had been our image of the scientist?' (Smith 2009: 187).

Or take any small-scale ecological study, like an examination of the life of a village pond. Such a study would not have anything resembling the design of a random controlled experiment. Nor would it be preoccupied with the size of its sample (n = 1). The criteria for the assessment for the quality of such work in terms of its scientific quality would depend, I suspect, on the care and thoroughness of its observation (over time) and the description of what has been observed, and in particular, perhaps, the observation and explanation of the interdependence of the life observed. In these respects, this sort of 'scientific' work would resemble very closely the sort of 'thick description' required in educational circles for, for example, an ethnographic case study of a school or classroom.

Let me just recapitulate some of the language I have been drawn into using in these few paragraphs to reflect the activity of the scientific community: 'imagination'; 'the creative principle'; 'pure thought'; 'conjecture'; 'argumentation'; 'rational discussion'; 'criticality'; 'narrative'; 'story'; 'description'; 'intuition'; 'sympathetic understanding of experience'. If, as seems to be indicated, these are all parts of the process(es) of scientific work, then this is a very different picture from that which is commonly presented by people outside the educational research community as the model of scientific method or, indeed, from that which is offered by some within the educational research community to their colleagues.

Further, the language also suggests that the modes of thought that are called for in the production of science are not really so very different from those required in other parts of the academy—in the humanities and social sciences. Popper (again) writes of science as:

> among the creative arts [sic] perhaps the most human: full of human failings and short-sightedness, it shows those flashes of insight which open our eyes to the wonders of the world and of the human spirit. But this is not all. Science is the direct result of that most human of all endeavours—to liberate ourselves. It is part of our endeavour to see more clearly, to understand the world and ourselves, and to act as adult, responsible and enlightened beings. (Popper 1983: 259)

Bravo—but this is a far cry from the pedestrian preoccupations of evidence-based practice. So also is Mittelstrass's presidential address to Academia Europa, in which he describes how 'Science, beyond all the routine which it shares with other enterprises, represents ever new departures into the unknown, intelligent curiosity paired with an inexhaustible imagination and sober understanding, and a desire for the new' (Mittelstrass 2009: 465). If science is indeed as Popper or Mittelstrass present it, perhaps Snow's two cultures are not really so distinct after all.

But why is this elevated picture of science and the rich diversity of approaches in the natural sciences, together with the wide variety of intellectual resources and practices which they rely on, so often misrepresented in terms of an atrophied form

of a naive empiricism and evidence-based induction? Popper's answer to this question is especially illuminating:

> Two attitudes or tendencies that are at times found together foster a belief in induction. One is the wish for a super-human authority—the authority of science, far above human whims, and exemplified in the 'exact' science of mathematics, and in the natural sciences, so far as they are based firmly and squarely on fact: verified, confirmed fact. The other is the wish to see in science not the work of inspiration or revelation of the human spirit, but a more or less mechanical compilation which might be performed by machines. (For what else are we but machines?) At bottom, the two tendencies might be one: the tendency to debunk man … (Popper 1983: 258)

… not, of course, that Popper is entirely unsympathetic to the occasional bit of debunking![2]

3.4   Scientism Excludes Crucially Important Humanistic Understanding

So, I have attacked what I have called 'scientism' by arguing that it does less than justice to the rich and varied resources of science itself, properly understood. More constructively, perhaps, I want in this section to indicate something of what is important in the humanities and what they contribute to wider social and, more particularly, educational understanding— and hence what we risk losing by their marginalisation or exclusion.

3.4.1   Placing the Human at the Centre

First, if scientism—as distinct from science, properly understood—seeks 'to debunk man' (and woman), the humanities, almost by definition, seek to reaffirm their centrality.[3]

It is not just that the humanities place humankind at the centre of their substantive interest (in the sense, for example, that history is the story of humankind and not of the animal or physical world): they also acknowledge their centrality in the way in which human experience, human life, and, by extension, the natural

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[2]I am grateful to Professor Sir Brian Heap, Fellow of the Royal Society, for his reassurance that the picture of 'real' science I have presented in this section might be recognised by the scientific community and for pointing out the current use of 'scientism' as a term of abuse against 'the new atheism' of scientists such as Richard Dawkins. Any views expressed are, however, exclusively my own responsibility.

[3]I should acknowledge the huge volume of feminist critical writing which points out that it is indeed man rather than woman who has been rendered visible through the authorial voices of history, literary criticism, and philosophy.

world too are constructed, described, and narrated. Thus, in history, (i) historians treat evidence such as correspondence, newspaper reports, official documents, and diaries not as materials whose meaning is transparent but as sources which have to be interpreted by reference to what they know about contemporary politics, culture, and social practices and what they know about their authors, and so on. Then (ii) they treat in turn the historians' interpretative accounts—the histories—created out of this first-order scholarship as sources which themselves need to be interpreted in terms of features of the lives, times, and political and other prejudices which the scholar brought to the original work; and so, perhaps (iii) ad infinitum.

This interpretative tradition, which emphasises (variously) the personal and the socially constructed subjectivity of the observer, describer, narrator, and interpreter, is embraced in most parts of the humanities and the arts—and has made substantial contributions to educational understanding and inquiry. It may be irritating to some who look for simple solutions to problems (or even for simple explanations of what the problems are) to be faced with scholars from a tradition which will not permit such simplicity, but there is a very good reason for this denial, which is that this is 'simply' how things are when you start to engage with people as conscious beings whose consciousness has itself been framed by personal and social experience. This is how things are—and if you want even to begin to understand that conscious experiencing, you have to work with different tools and resources for inquiry and representation from those offered in particular by those who define the scientific in narrowly empirical terms.

3.4.2 Focusing on Human Intentionality, Experience, and Consciousness

If scientism seeks a behavioural/biomedical—even, as Charlotte Tulinius has put it, an 'anaesthesiological'—condition for the subjects of its interventions,[4] for the humanities, by contrast, it is precisely human dynamism, alertness, creativity, willfulness, and self-consciousness which is the source of endless fascination. They are interested in motives rather than causes; how things seemed to be, how they were perceived or experienced, rather than (or in addition to) how they actually were; in aspirations and purposes, and not just the direction of movement; in concepts like self-deceit, integrity, *mauvais foi*, grace, love, pride, *schadenfreude*, honour, guilt, and redemption—huge areas of human experience which simply do not translate into 'scientifically' observable, let alone measurable, terms.

Educational researchers will, however, more readily recognise the substantial body of work which goes on in educational research within the phenomenographic

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[4] I am grateful to Charlotte Tulinius for sharing with me a set of correspondence with the editors of a medical journal about their reluctance to publish work on medical education which did not comply with their expectations of medical research as such.

tradition which explicitly sets out to represent the individual's educational experiencing—the way in which school ethos, teaching style, or a particular educational intervention actually impinges on their consciousness. Such work seems to me especially pertinent in an educational setting. To begin with, constructivist psychology advises us that we would be wise to have some insight into what understanding students bring to their learning if we wish to build on that understanding in some way. But also, it is precisely that consciousness, the individual's ways of experiencing the world, and its development, which is the primary focus of education. We want people to see the world differently as a result of their new understanding of science, or their appreciation of a work of art, or their reading of its history. Education is essentially about consciousness and its expansion and enrichment, and any attempt to understand what is happening in educational terms must seek to understand changes in that consciousness—just as any attempt to understand what is happening in the interaction between teachers and learners must also include (even if it is not limited to) an understanding of how they see, understand, experience the actions of each other. For this purpose, the extended interview, the construction of personal narrative, the representation of experience in ideographic form—all tools of enquiry drawn from the arts and humanities—are essential forms of inquiry in support of educational understanding.

3.4.3   Narrative: The Importance of the Story Over Time

A second feature of educational experience is that it is essentially narrative in form. Although there may be moments in that narrative which have particular significance, it is the longer story which really gives that experience meaning—how one experience leads to or closes down others; how learning contributes to longer-term development; how what happens in school, for example, interrelates with what happens outside (or fails to do so), and vice versa. One of the limitations of attempts at random controlled experiments in education is that they import too simple a model of cause and effect. Narratives help us to understand the way in which a variety of (sometimes serendipitous) events collide and combine—perhaps 'chaotically'—to produce particular educational experiences and outcomes. They do not treat cause and effect in a mechanistic way, but nevertheless provide an understanding of how one set of events or experiences might have led to another. (For Kvernbekk 2003, for example, this notion of causal sequence is a necessary element of a narrative.)

Narratives also help us to see that examining such 'outcomes' at any particular point in time has a certain arbitrariness, because recognition of educational impact seems to occur unpredictably at many stages in an individual's life. It is rarely practical to research educational lives forward, so to speak, following individual cases through their lives, but one of the advantages of life history, for example, is that it allows us to look retrospectively and longitudinally at such narratives either biographically or autobiographically. Griffiths and McLeod (2009) offer a number of examples of studies which 'have at heart the question of what it feels like being

in … situations over time and what meanings people make of these experiences',
and they suggest that:

> these cannot be answered except through an auto/biographical approach … Longitudinal
> accounts of what it is like to live through or in a particular system utilise research that draws
> on the stories of individuals involved. (Griffiths and McLeod 2009: 131–132)

Finally, as Griffiths and McLeod go on to argue:

> Because of the ability of auto/biography to capture the individual experience in the wider
> social context, and to represent complex and nuanced situations, this approach has a
> contribution to make not simply to questions of 'what works?' but issues such as why,
> when and in what circumstances what works works, and why, when and where it does not.
> (Griffiths and McLeod 2009: 132)

Again we see the significance of scholarly approaches—biography, autobiography, narratives, stories—centrally located in the humanities.

3.4.4 Description

One of the distinguishing contributions of history and literature (and I include in this good travel writing) to human understanding is its capacity to transport you to a particular time and place and enable you to inhabit it, to be there, appreciating its sights and sounds and smells and having a sense of 'what it is like', of 'being there'—appreciating too how human figures are interacting with this environment and what it is like to live or work or play there. Anyone seeking an understanding of any educational environment needs precisely this sort of descriptive power. What is it really like to be in a school—a real and particular school— perhaps one which is struggling to cope with every form of social disadvantage and then deemed to be 'failing'? What does one see or hear? What is it like to be in another—real and particular—school which seems, in spite of the odds, to be tackling successfully many of the same problems? What is actually happening in this classroom, in which children seem to be so happy and productive—or in this college which seems to lose students as fast as it recruits them? And perhaps the description of the particular case (and we are, in educational enquiry, looking primarily at case study here) needs to be extended: can one make sense of what is happening inside a particular classroom without looking at the wider school environment; or in the school without looking at its physical and social setting? These are what Simons refers to as 'holistic portrayals' which 'strive to know and represent complex educational situations' (Simons 1980: 226).

It seems to me that it is dangerous to embark on any kind of educational practice or policymaking without the kind of understanding of what is happening in an institution or a system which is contained in such description—richly or, as it is sometimes described, 'thickly' (Stake 1994 and 1995) drawn. It is difficult to see how else one could capture either the complexity of educational settings or their essential individuality—hence the importance of being able to focus on the single case and not just

the generality. Equally, perhaps, it would be foolish to embark on more specifically focused (e.g. experimental) educational research without the sort of understanding of the situation and the context that such description can provide. Stake argues that such rich descriptions inform the reader not simply by offering formal propositional knowledge, but by providing an extension of their own experience:

> Certain descriptions and assertions are assimilated by readers into memory. When the researcher's narrative provides opportunity for vicarious experience, readers extend their memories of happenings. Naturalistic, ethnographic case materials, to some extent, parallel actual experience, feeding into the most fundamental processes of awareness and understanding. (Stake 1995: 240)

Again we are talking about a genre of engagement and writing which is characteristically rooted in the humanities, but it is one that 'transcends the boundary between art and science' (Elliott and Lukes 2009: 93). Simons claims that 'this form of knowing is not divorced from science nor is it to be seen as the antithesis of it' (Simons 1980: 266), and she cites MacDonald and Walker, who wrote:

> Case study is the way of the artist, who achieves greatness when, through the portrayal of an instant locked in time and circumstance, he communicates enduring truths about the human condition. For both the scientist and the artist, content and intent emerge in form. (MacDonald and Walker 1975: 3)

3.4.5 Normativity

> Education… has some particular characteristics that affect the role that research can play. It is a value laden activity, inextricably connected to our broader aspirations for society. (Levin 2004: 2)

> Education is at least partly about the overall aims that society has for itself and how these aims are realised in practice. It cannot, therefore, be a neutral technical exercise, but is invariably a deeply ethical, political and cultural one bound up with ideas about the good society and how life can be worthwhile. (Winch and Gingell 2004: preface)

'Scientism' is on the whole embarrassed by the tendency of normative questions or judgments to infiltrate educational inquiry and seeks as far as possible to avoid such matters, though of course it never can entirely. It was precisely the inability of natural science to address moral questions which led Socrates—perhaps the first sceptical voice with respect to scientism—to turn from natural science to philosophy (Phaedo, beginning at 96a, Williamson 1904). But, as Winch and Gingell (2004) indicate, educational policy and practice are totally saturated in normative considerations at every turn and this normativity cannot be ignored; nor should it be. We need to be able to recognise the values and principles which are at play in educational settings and implicit or explicit in any policy or practice; to understand their roots in wider ideological or philosophical positions; to examine their internal consistency and cohesion, and their consistency with proposed policy or practice; to

engage in at least what Phillips (2007) calls 'intelligent argumentation' about their reasonableness, justification, or at least appropriateness to, the proposed situation; to offer critique from different points of view and address such critique; and to estimate the democratic basis of any proposition founded on such principles.

That is a lot of work. None of it resides within the scope of science either narrowly or more widely construed. We need instead to look to the humanities—to history, to discourse analysis, to phenomenology, and in particular at what continues in the University of Cambridge to be referred to as the 'moral sciences'—that is, to philosophy, both for substantive resources to help us address such issues and for the analytic tools (see on this; Conroy et al. 2009). Without such resources, educational policy and practice is without purpose, without guiding principle—simply morally adrift.

3.4.6 Sensibility

In an article written under the somewhat cryptic title 'Proteus rising: Re-imagining educational research', Richard Smith makes what I think is a persuasive case for another contribution from the humanities tradition—more specifically perhaps from the Romantic literary tradition—to educational understanding. Smith asks:

> How might things look different if literary criticism, rather than physics, was our paradigm of knowledge? … If it is not a matter of knowing, grasping, we shall need new ways of being with, compre-, appre- hending. Dwelling with, abiding with, co-existing with … Glimpsing … Detecting. Listening (as if we knew what that meant). Shutting off the racket of evidence, data, research findings, the obvious, the replicable and of course the eminently fundable. Slow, hesitant, uncertain. *Diffident*. Making space for the indefinite. The ability to create a kind of silence. (Smith 2009: 187, original emphasis)

3.5 Where Does All This Leave Us?

I have attempted in a short space to indicate[5] some of the distinctive contributions that research and scholarly work in the humanities can make to informing our understanding of human experience, including our educational experience. I suggest that the kind of contributions I have indicated are central to educational understanding, and that this renders attempts to marginalise them in favour of a narrowly conceived scientism doubly jeopardous.

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[5]I am acutely conscious that a full argument in support of this case would require a great deal more argumentation and illustration than I can employ here, but hope at least to have made a prima facie case.

Further, in locating these contributions within the mainstream of academic life and work (i.e. in the framework of academic disciplines), I hope that I can also claim that the genres of inquiry I have referred to are susceptible to more as well as less rigorous execution—that is, that one can construct phenomenographic accounts of human experience, thick descriptions of educational settings, narratives of educational lives, and even (though this may look rather different) the sort of sensibility and responsiveness which Richard Smith describes, in a 'systematic and sustained' way (cf. the definitions of research discussed in Chap. 2), in a 'disciplined' way, perhaps, which would entitle us to claim it as scholarly inquiry, as 'research'—perhaps, even, in the more generic sense in which this term is used among '*les* sciences *de l'éducation*'.

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Chapter 4
'The Proper Study of Mankind …'?
In Defence of the Humanities Against
the Ambitions of 'Scientific' Psychology

Abstract One of the central claims or aspirations of modern psychology is to place the study of the human mind and behaviour on a properly scientific basis. This chapter proposes that while such scientific study of human beings might reveal all sorts of interesting things about them, 'the proper study of mankind' (in the terms used by Alexander Pope) requires a different intellectual and imaginative apparatus rooted in the humanities and the more humanistic end of the social sciences. The chapter pursues this argument via William James (often regarded as one of the founding figures of modern psychology and especially educational psychology) and via Isaiah Berlin to the early eighteenth-century philosopher, Giambattista Vico, whose reaction to Enlightenment science and mathematics led him to articulate a vision of a *scienza nuova*, or new science, essentially rooted in what today we might recognise as the humanities. Berlin's and Vico's work is joined in this chapter to Winch's advocacy of the centrality of philosophy to an understanding of human and social being. The result is to put a new emphasis on human self-consciousness and intentionality, on imagination or *fantasia*, on moral responsibility and self-questioning, on human experiencing of the natural and social world, and human understanding of the rules by which they live—as well as the cultural and historical framing of all these—in short, into the domain of the humanities.

> Know then thyself, presume not God to scan: The proper study of Mankind is Man. (Pope 1870: 225)It is concluded that the scientific model is simply not appropriate. There is a world of difference between the sort of enquiry appropriate for understanding physical reality and the sort of enquiry for understanding the mental life of individual persons. 'Man' is not 'a subject of science'. (Pring 2000: 32)

4.1   Introduction

This chapter develops in a different way some of the arguments laid out in the last. It contrasts in particular the ambitions of scientific psychology to illuminate human experience (and hence educational experience) with the insights provided by approaches rooted in the humanities—or what Giambattista Vico dubbed nearly 300 years ago '*la scienza nuova*'.

One of the central claims or aspirations of modern psychology is to place the study of the human mind and behaviour on a properly scientific basis. This chapter proposes that while such scientific study of human beings might reveal all sorts of interesting things about them, 'the proper study of mankind' (in the terms used by Alexander Pope) requires a different intellectual and imaginative apparatus rooted in the humanities and the more humanistic end of the social sciences.

The chapter pursues this argument via William James (often regarded as one of the founding figures of modern psychology and especially educational psychology) and via Isaiah Berlin to the early eighteenth-century philosopher, Giambattista Vico, whose reaction to Enlightenment science and mathematics led him to articulate a vision of a *scienza nuova*, or new science, essentially rooted in what today we might recognise as the humanities. Berlin's and Vico's work is joined in this chapter to Winch's advocacy of the centrality of philosophy to an understanding of human and social being. The result is to put a new emphasis on human self-consciousness and intentionality, on imagination or *fantasia*, on moral responsibility and self-questioning, on human experiencing of the natural and social world, and human understanding of the rules which they live by—as well as the cultural and historical framing of all these. In so far as these things are what constitute our humanity and in so far as these provide the very stuff of the disciplines we roughly group together as the humanities, then this provides a case for valuing the contribution of the humanities to 'the proper study of mankind' above the scientific pretensions of psychology.

4.2   Psychology as Science

Psychology is itself hardly a homogeneous discipline, either in its methods of inquiry or its theoretical framing. It extends from psychoanalysis through phenomenology and cognitive psychology to behavioural psychology and work which approximates to zoology, and to physiology, neuroscience, and genetics. It employs introspection, observation of patterns of behaviour, interviews, questionnaires, experimental studies, large population studies, and the technical apparatus of modern medical science. At the risk of being over legislative, however, I suggest that at its core is the ambition: (i) to understand the mental life and behaviour of individual human beings (including in this the relation between the two); (ii) to establish a *scientific* basis for such understanding, permitting (iii) generalisable

principles or laws and, hence, (iv) the ability to predict and perhaps control human behaviour. From this point of view, the 'attraction' of psychology lies in the dual promise of providing such understanding and doing so in a properly scientific manner.

The aspiration of psychology to the standing of science is well evidenced in many of the standard texts. Richard Gross's *Psychology* is subtitled *The science of mind and behaviour*, and this defines psychology as 'the scientific study of behaviour and cognitive processes' (Gross 1996: 19). Shaughnessy and Zechmeister's (1994) *Research methods in psychology* firmly locates these methods in the scientific field with an introduction organised under the following headings: 'Psychology as science … The scientific method … Scientific theory construction and testing… [and] Scientific integrity'. Like many similar sources this locates the beginnings of 'modern psychology' with the work of the German physiologist, Wilhelm Wundt, who established the first psychological laboratory in Leipzig in 1878 to explore what he conceived as 'physiological psychology' (Wundt 1874). While they acknowledge that psychology has taken many different forms since then, 'There is one way in which psychology has not changed … in the hundred years or so of its existence: the scientific method is still emphasised as the basis for investigation' (Shaughnessy and Zechmeister 1994: 6).

If this is right, then the standpoint invites a number of different kinds of critical responses. One such response might come in the form of a sociologically rooted critique of the aspiration to understand human thought and behaviour except through an appreciation of the social, cultural, and economic structures which shape any individual experience—a dimension perhaps inadequately reflected even in social psychology. To look to the individual psyche is, on such analysis to look in the wrong place for an understanding of human motivation and behaviour. Though it is not my main intention to advance this particular critique, I nevertheless get drawn inexorably towards the social character of human being and experience and hence the need to understand that experience in relation to its social and historical context.

A second response might be to critique the scientific pretensions of psychology—or at least many expressions of its practice. It might be claimed that it is not—perhaps cannot be—properly scientific on the model of the scientific investigation of the material world in physics or chemistry. The stuff of the human psyche is simply not amenable to the rigorous investigative procedures applicable to the material world. Psychology is at best a *quasi*-science.

The line of argument I want to develop in this chapter is a different one, however. I want to argue that it is precisely the 'scientific' pretensions or aspirations of psychology that are its limitation; that so far as psychology seeks to employ recognisably scientific methods and conceptual frameworks to investigate human thought and experience, it will only ever be able to provide a very partial understanding of the object of its scrutiny; and to the extent, therefore, that this 'scientific' understanding claims exclusivity or even privileged status in the interpretation of human being and behaviour, a distorted one.

Superior being, when of late they saw A mortal man unfold all Nature's law, Admir'd such wisdom in an earthly shape, And shew'd a NEWTON as we shew an Ape. Could he, whose rules the rapid Comet bind, Describe or fix one movement of his mind? (Pope 1870: 226)

I have already developed some critique of what I have called 'scientism' in the previous chapter, so, in case I should be thought to be dismissing the contributions that science can make to human understanding or the understanding of humans, let me quickly disavow this position. I heed Peter Winch's caution that 'philosophy … has no business to be anti-scientific: if it tries to be so it will succeed only in making itself look ridiculous … But equally … philosophy must be on its guard against the extra-scientific pretensions of science' (Winch 1958: 2)—and this is my concern.

More positively, at a time when the humanities are described as 'in crisis',[1] I shall seek to identify what these have to offer towards 'the proper study of mankind'—i.e. of 'man'—and I will be guided, in particular, in this endeavour by the writing of the philosopher and historian of ideas Isaiah Berlin, an anthology of whose essays was conveniently gathered by the editors Henry Hardy and Roger Hausheer in a volume itself entitled *The proper study of mankind* (Berlin 1997).

4.3 William James and the Beginnings of 'Scientific' Psychology

First, however, it is illuminating to go back to William James, the beginnings of scientific psychology, and, more particularly, its application to the study of teaching, because the writer frequently acknowledged as among the founders of modern psychology and, more particularly in this context, the founder of educational psychology, understood very well the necessary limits of the new discipline and the understanding it could offer.

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[1]Greteman argues that this 'crisis' is a more or less permanent condition for the humanities: 'Like a consumptive protagonist in a Victorian novel, the humanities have been dying for a very long time' (Greteman 2014: unpaginated). Greteman traces this extended demise to Robert Burton's complaint in his *The anatomy of melancholia* in 1621 that 'the muses are banished in this bastard age'. More recently, the distinguished historian J.H. Plumb produced a book in 1961 under the title *Crisis in the humanities.* In 1965 Gianturco was complaining in his introduction to Vico's *The study methods of our time*: 'In our milieu, so intensely penetrated on the one hand by mathematical intellectualism, by science worship, and on the other, by an exacting pragmatic utilitarianism, the inevitable outcome has been the downgrading of the humanistic disciplines' (in Vico 1709/1965: ix). Such concerns continue to appear (see, for example, Jay 2014), though some claim that the notion of a crisis is not supported by, for example, the continuing strength of student recruitment. The optimism/pessimism may depend on what you look at. As I wrote the original version of this chapter, *The Sunday Times* reported that under far reaching proposals currently under consideration by the UK government, ministers were considering plans to slash funding for teaching in universities by two thirds and 'remove state funding altogether for arts and humanities degrees' (Grimstobe 2010: 1).

James's classic *Principles of psychology* (1890) mapped the territory that is still central to the study of psychology to this day and provided us with the oft-quoted definition of the subject as 'the Science of Mental Life'. Such 'scientific' understanding was, however, never sufficient. In one of his talks to students entitled 'What makes life significant' he writes about a man's relationship with one he loves. He describes how:

> he struggles towards a union with her inner life, divining her feelings, anticipating her inner desires, understanding her limits as manfully as he can, and yet inadequately too; for he is also afflicted with some blindness, even here. … Where would any of us be, were there no one willing to know us as we really are or ready to repay us for our insight by making recognizant return. We ought, all of us, to realize each other in this intense, pathetic, and important way. (James 1899: 151)

James—the pragmatist after all—went to considerable lengths, even as he introduced psychology to his students, to affirm its limitations and the importance of bringing life experience and other resources of human understanding in seeking 'to reproduce sympathetically in their imagination, the mental life of their pupil as the sort of active unity which he himself feels it to be' (James 1899: 3). It is this sort of ambition which seems to me to point to the humanities rather than to natural science as the intellectual home of such understanding.

By the time that Berlin was writing in the mid-twentieth century, the 'scientific' study of human behaviour and the 'attraction of psychology' (Smeyers and Depaepe 2013) were of course very well established, and at the expense of other more humanistic forms of understanding:

> It is paradoxical that at a time of unprecedented moral and political confusion there should be an upsurge of interest in popular expositions of science, whose subject matter is fully comprehensible only to a handful of experts. Yet the very realm that matters to us most, and is accessible to all of us in virtue of our humanity, namely that of human studies, seems not to have captured the popular imagination to the same degree. (Hausheer in Berlin 1997: xxiii)

4.4 Berlin, Vico, and *La Scienza Nuova*

But what are these 'human studies' and what can they reveal about human experience that perhaps psychology does not touch? To answer this question I want to follow Berlin to the eighteenth-century philosopher Giambattista Vico and his S*cienzia nuova* (1725/2002). His work, on Berlin's interpretation, 'gave birth to the cardinal distinction between the sciences and the humanities' and the different kinds of understanding they bring. Vico stood out against what we might refer to as the technical rationality of the Enlightenment and especially of the mathematical preoccupations of Descartes. It was not that he wished to return to the scholasticism of the medieval age, though he did in particular admire the work of Roman philosophers such as Cicero. Rather he wished to advance against Enlightenment

rationalism and scientificity a '*scienza nuova*' of 'the reconstructive imagination' which we might recognise as rooted in the humanities. Vico's own work is notoriously rambling and discursive so I gratefully rely on extracts from Berlin's more succinct presentation of his key arguments:

 (i) 'that men's own efforts to understand the world in which they find themselves and to adapt to its needs, physical and spiritual, continuously transform their worlds and themselves' (Berlin 1976: xvi).

 (ii) 'that those who make or create something can understand it as mere observers cannot. Since men in some sense make their own history … men understand it as they do not understand the world of external nature, which, since it is not made, but only observed and interpreted by them, is not intelligible to them as their own experience and activity can be' (Berlin 1976: xvi).

 (iii) 'that, therefore, men's knowledge of the external world which we can observe, describe, classify, reflect upon, and of which we can record the regularities in time and space, differs in principle from their knowledge of the world that they themselves create, and which obeys rules that they themselves have imposed on creation', of which therefore they have a distinctive, and in Vico's terms, superior, 'insider' view. This would apply to language, to mathematics, to law, to human history, to art, philosophy, literature, and, I suggest to such social practices as education.

 (iv) 'that there is a pervasive pattern which characterises the activity of any given society … reflected in the thought, the arts, the social institutions, the language, the ways of life and action, of an entire society … a culture'. But this evolves over time, not as a result of any mechanical causes but 'due to the purposive activity of men, designed to satisfy needs, desires, ambitions'. It 'flows from elements in, and forms of life, explicable solely in terms of human goal-directed activity'. Importantly, however, 'this social process and its order are intelligible to other men, members of later societies, since they are engaged in a similar enterprise' (Berlin 1976: xvii and xviii).

 (v) Vico then, quite remarkably for his time, extends the possibility of intercultural understanding to the world of 'primitive' people largely dismissed by his contemporaries and predecessors, but whose myths, fables, and rituals were 'so many natural ways of conveying a coherent view of the world as it was seen and interpreted by primitive men'. From this it followed that 'the way to understand such men and their worlds is by trying to enter their minds, by finding out what they are at, by learning the rules and significance of their methods of expression', by understanding 'what they live by' (Berlin 1976: xviii, xix).

 (vi) This led to the argument that works of art, and indeed all manifestations of culture, 'must be understood, interpreted and evaluated, not in terms of timeless principles and standards valid for all men everywhere, but by correct grasp of the purpose and therefore peculiar use of symbols, especially of language, which belong uniquely to their own time and place, their own

stage of social growth …' (Berlin 1976: xix)—and thence to the beginnings of comparative cultural history.

(vii) Thus Vico was led to add to the traditional categories of knowledge—the a priori-deductive and the a posteriori-empirical—a third category based not on revelation or perception but 'the reconstructive imagination'. It is the type of knowledge yielded 'by "entering" into the mental life of other cultures, into a variety of outlooks and ways of life which only the activity of *fantasia* —imagination—makes possible'.[2] It is this which renders them 'intelligible'. The nature of such imagination is complex and dynamic. '*Fantasia* is for Vico a way of conceiving the process of social change and growth by correlating it with, indeed viewing it as conveyed by, the parallel change or development of the symbolism by which men seek to express it; since the symbolic structures are themselves part and parcel of the reality which they symbolise, and alter with it. This method of discovery, which begins with understanding the means of expression, and seeks to reach the vision of reality which they presuppose and articulate, is a kind of transcendental deduction (in the Kantian sense) of historical truth' (Berlin 1976: xix and see also Verene 1981).

Before commenting on some of these ideas, let me pursue them a stage further into Berlin's own thought, which they clearly informed. Berlin too, according to his editor Henry Hardy, 'separates the human realm, where freedom, choice and self-conscious purposive action are central, from the world of impersonal forces' (Berlin 1997: xxvii). 'There are compelling reasons why humans cannot be studied just as natural objects exhaustively explainable by natural science' (Berlin 1997: xxviii) and these are rooted in Berlin's view (again with clear connections to Vico) of the role of human beings in creating their own destiny and the stories which history will have to tell, and his conviction that 'we are free beings in some absolutely non-deterministic sense' (Berlin 1997: xxviii). And Berlin has in particular adopted Vico's picture of the dynamically evolving character of society and culture (driven by human needs and ambitions) and the succession of ways in which human beings have interpreted themselves and their experience. These ways, or 'models' as Berlin refers to them, are, however, not just of antiquarian interest:

> No model can encompass the whole of human experience once and for all: each is exclusive and at best casts light on a portion of human life. But unlike superseded scientific theories, these models retain a permanent value, for each opens its own special doors of self-understanding; and it should be a central concern of historians of ideas in each generation to ask questions of these models and to evaluate their unique problems of their own day. (Berlin 1997: xxviii)

This was a task which, of course, Berlin himself undertook with enormous energy, commitment, and perspicacity.

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[2]Cf. James (cited above) seeking for teachers 'to *reproduce sympathetically in their imagination*, the mental life of their pupil as the sort of active unity which he himself feels it to be' (James 1899: 3).

Hausheer regards Berlin's work as, in an important sense, a summation of the project of Counter-Enlightenment thinkers, mainly of German origin, who offer a view of the rational study of man:

> not just as a physical animal viewed essentially from outside in naturalistic terms … but as a free, autonomous, unpredictably creative, self-interpreting and self transforming species, whose proper element is history, and whose nature is revealed, not timelessly once and for all, but in his most basic, all-informing, evolving—and sometimes violently transformed and clashing—concepts and categories. This makes the human studies as autonomous and rationally transparent as they can ever be made, and raises a large arena for human freedom and dignity clear of the destructive incursions of science and technology, and levelling universal principles generally. (Hausheer in Berlin 1997: xxxiv)

4.5 The Contribution of Philosophy to the Proper Understanding of Mankind

But the Vico/Berlin perspective also takes us into another sphere which is closely associated with the humanities—into philosophy and the view that 'the proper study of mankind' is essentially a philosophical endeavour. We are here, of course, in the territory developed by Peter Winch in *The idea of a social science*[3] (Winch 1958) and extended in *Understanding a primitive society* (Winch 1964). Winch seems to me to stand firmly in the tradition indicated by Vico, to whom he explicitly acknowledges a debt (Winch 1964: 322)—a tradition developed contemporaneously by Winch in the same university as Berlin.

Winch, like Vico and Berlin, emphasises the importance to human being of participating in communities of meaning with shared language and, by extension, shared rule-governed practices: 'men do not only live but have a conception of life' (Winch 1964: 322). Like Vico and Berlin he emphasises the dynamic nature of such communities and the roles of individuals in creating meaning; and he emphasises the variety of forms which these communities can take but also the possibility of developing understanding between these communities (even extending to 'primitive' communities) by virtue of certain fundamental points of reference or 'limiting notions[4] … [which] give shape to what we understand by human life' (Winch 1958: 322). Key to understanding people, therefore, is rendering intelligible and

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[3]I should acknowledge in this context that the main target of Winch's argument is against the scientific pretensions of sociology rather than psychology, but since, in Winch's argument as with Vico and Berlin, the individual's construction of meaning is inextricably implicated in the social construction of meaning, Winch's arguments carry important implications too for the limitations of scientific psychology.

[4]He offers as examples birth, death, and sexual relations.

understanding the rules (in the widest sense of this term[5]) they live by and the ways in which they construct their understanding of their world:

> The analysis of meaningful behaviour must allot a central role to the notion of a rule; … all behaviour which is meaningful (therefore all specifically human behaviour) is *ipso facto* rule governed. (Winch 1958: 58–59)

Winch writes of:

> the central role which understanding plays in the activities which are characteristic of human societies. In this way the discussion of what an understanding of reality consists in merges into the difference the possession may be expected to make to the life of man. (Winch 1958: 22)

To grasp the kind of understanding that Winch sees as central to understanding human beings, we have to invoke, as he does (Winch 1958: 45ff, 111), Max Weber's distinction between 'interpretive understanding' (*deutend Verstehen*) of the meaning (*Sinn*) of a piece of behaviour and providing a 'causal explanation' (*kausal Erklaren*) of what brought the behaviour about and what the consequences are (Weber 1922/1956). Weber was dismissive of claims to *Verstehen* which were not in some way validated by e.g. statistical data, but Winch rejects this requirement:

> 'Understanding' … is grasping the *point* or *meaning* of what is being done or said. This is a notion far removed from the world of statistics and causal laws and is closer to the realm of discourse and to the internal relations that link discourse. (Winch 1958: 115)

And later: 'men's mutual interaction "embodies ideas", suggesting that social interaction can more profitably be compared to the exchange of ideas in a conversation than to the interaction of forces in a physical system' (Winch 1958: 128). It is all of this that leads him to claim, famously, that 'any worthwhile study of society must be philosophical in character' but also that 'any worthwhile philosophy must be concerned with the nature of human society' (Winch 1964: 8).

I am left a little uncertain as to whether Winch makes the case for philosophy as such as the source of understanding of human constructs of meaning or whether he points rather (and more obviously in *Understanding a primitive society*) to what might be recognised as ethno- philosophy. A classic of this genre is Marcel Briaule's *Conversations with Ogotemmeli* (Griaule 1965), based on extensive study over a 25 year period of the Dogon people of the Upper Nile. This led eventually to the extraordinary opening up of the Dogon world to an outsider contained in a record of 30 successive days of conversation (each one reported to the people's Council of Elders) in which a tribal elder instructed Griaule in the 'deep

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[5]Winch is at pains to emphasise that he is not simply using rules here in the sense of laws and regulations, but rather in the sense of the underlying principles and values that shape a person's way of living. Thus: 'it is just as true to speak of the anarchist following rules in what he does as it is to say the same thing of a monk. The difference between these two kinds of men is not that one follows rules and the other does not; it lies in the diverse *kinds* of rule which each respectively follows' (Winch 1958: 52).

knowledge' of the Dogon people. Here is contained not just the anthropologist's external observations of the regularities in a people's behaviour but the whole world of cosmology, mythology, symbolism—the 'deep knowledge' as the Dogon elders recognised it themselves—which gives coherence, meaning, and significance to their lives. It is access to this that may render their practices intelligible and enable one to understand their practices in the terms which approximate to the meaning with which they themselves endow them. To engage with understanding in ethno-philosophy requires nevertheless a philosophical understanding, an ability to see why it would make a difference to start with one set of philosophical assumptions rather than another and what kind of a change of world-view would be implied, so perhaps Winch is right in describing such understanding as, straight-forwardly, a philosophical one.

4.6   The Humanities and 'The Proper Study of Mankind'

Let me pause to pull together what I think these sources have to contribute to our understanding of what are the elements of 'the proper study of mankind'. This includes, I think, at least these features:

  (i) It has to reckon with human agency, intentionality, and human self-determination and, hence, in research terms, to find some way of accessing this intentionality and representing it;

 (ii) By extension it has to reckon with human self-consciousness and human capacity for self-interpretation, and self-transformation, and hence to access an active and dynamic inner world of self-understanding;

(iii) It has to recognise the sociocultural locatedness of this experiencing, and this includes 'the rules they live by' as well as the big ideas, the models, the philosophical premises that shape that experiencing;

 (iv) By extension it has to recognise their historical locatedness and their historically evolving character;

  (v) Further, entering into the minds, the worlds, the language, the understandings of other people, rendering them intelligible requires an act of intelligent (Vico calls it 'reconstructive') *imagination* but also a philosophical reconstruction of their underlying discourse. These achievements are rendered possible by the fact that we too share in such worlds but challenging because we occupy different historical and cultural spaces.

If we were to grant that there is something important, something persuasive, in this sort of account of what is required for the proper study of mankind, where might we look for the systematic and developed forms of inquiry which might furnish the tools for such study. Clearly, for Vico and for Berlin this points to, or at least includes, history (or more particularly the history of ideas in Berlin's case). It also points to what today might be called cultural studies and to ethnography. For

Winch this is essentially a philosophical task.[6] But this is to keep the study at a social level—focused perhaps on communities rather than, as psychology might claim to be, on individuals. For more individual insights we perhaps need to turn to biography and autobiography, but also perhaps to literature, poetry, drama—sources which especially call upon that faculty of imagination or 'recreative imagination' as Hausheer interprets it (Hausheer in Berlin 1997: xxix), or what Vico calls '*fantasia*', to expand human sensibility, empathy, and understanding. The same line of inquiry might take us too to what contemporary social scientists might recognise as phenomenography, aimed at eliciting individual accounts of their own experience and experiencing natures. In all of this we are, of course, substantially in the domain which academic communities would identify as the humanities, though with important extensions into the forms of social scientific enquiry which most closely approximate to the humanities with their emphasis on rich description, narrative form, and entering the minds of the other.

4.7   The *Proper* Study of Mankind

I have gone some way to make a case, albeit an incomplete one, for the centrality of, broadly speaking, the humanities to a 'proper' understanding of human experience, of human being. But there are, of course, many competitors to this claim across a wide spectrum of academic disciplines—from neuroscience to genetics, from animal behaviourists to psychoanalysts, from political economists to experimental psychologists. There is an evident normativity in the notion of the 'proper' study of mankind. How then can one begin to distinguish between rival claims to importance or privilege in this contest?

Of course there is what one might regard as the weak argument that all these different disciplines have a place in illuminating human experience—or, by extension, that the question as to what form of inquiry you need to engage in depends on what you are interested in. For example, if you are interested in ways in which humans resemble their nearest neighbours in the evolutionary chain, then the sort of animal behaviour approach taken by Desmond Morris in *The naked ape* (1969) might be most illuminating; if you are interested in the impact of certain kinds of brain damage on human capacities, then you will probably need to draw upon some mixture of neuroscience and observational studies. But if you are interested in how human beings experience and deal with moral complexity, neither of these approaches is going to get you anywhere at all.

In an environment in which the humanities seem to be being pushed to the margins of the academy (and have barely a space left to occupy at all in the field of

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[6]Interestingly, Vico (like James) is anxious to protect common sense and 'eloquence' against an excess of philosophy in the curriculum, noting that 'there is a danger that instruction in advanced philosophical criticism may lead to an abnormal growth in abstract intellectualism' (Vico 1709/1965: 13).

educational enquiry), we might settle with some relief to an acknowledgment that they at least have a place at the table along with other disciplines and can appropriately assist us in answering some questions. But is there a basis for claiming anything stronger than that—even for claiming a pre-eminence for the humanities in their contribution to human understanding in the face, for example, of such works as *The selfish gene*, which claim pre-eminence for the study of genetics (Dawkins 1989)?

Harvey Siegel has provided, in a paper under the title 'Epistemological diversity in educational research: Much ado about nothing much' (Siegel 2006), an incisive, almost surgical, analysis of arguments about claims to different 'epistemologies' in educational research. He observes that those who claim different 'epistemologies' fail, on the whole, to distinguish between people having different values and beliefs and belief systems; different research questions; different methodologies and methods of inquiry; different communities of research practice. He finds none of these claims troubling (hence 'much ado about nothing much') in so far as they illustrate the diversity or pluralistic character of educational research, but he does not accept that this implies some sort of epistemological relativism. More particularly it is not a reason for anyone to be inhibited in examining critically the claims made by one such community of practice or to compare them favourably or unfavourably with another. This in indeed the very stuff of epistemology understood as a sub-discipline of philosophy, which is precisely why Siegel observes that: 'Understanding and criticizing epistemological and methodological positions takes time, effort, and expertise; the serious coming to grips with "alternative epistemologies" requires the serious inclusion of philosophy in the graduate education research curriculum' (Siegel 2006: 7).

By all means let us become familiar with the diverse forms of educational inquiry, but let us not be afraid to suggest that some forms might be more illuminating or more appropriately applied in general, or, more probably, in tackling particular kinds of research questions. Thus emboldened, I will proceed.

It seems to me, first, that any categorical claim to the particular significance of one form of inquiry into human beings over another has to rest on some ontological or metaphysical premises about the very nature of what it is one is dealing with in, to take one version, 'the crooked timber of humanity' (Kant 1784: proposition 6). It is difficult here to escape some form of essentialism, but if you view human beings as merely a set of conditioned responses to external stimuli (however incoherent such a view might be) then observing human behaviour and the conditions which shape it will be all that is required. The rich portrayals of moral complexity which characterise the world's great literature, for example, indeed the whole framework of moral discourse are reduced to elaborate and largely irrelevant cloaks for something which is *properly* understood in much simpler and more basic terms. If, as Ryle sought to argue, there is no 'ghost in the machine' (Ryle 1976), then there is no place for seeking to inquire into the mental life of human beings. If at the core of human being is a spirit which is enhanced or reduced by the way we live and/or which survives the death of our physical frame, then we need to draw not just on

history, literature, and philosophy but also on theology to interpret how human lives are lived and understood.

Thus the normatively laden question of what sort of inquiry is important to 'a proper understanding of mankind' is rooted in a metaphysical and ontological question of what it is to be human. By extension, perhaps, 'The highest form of knowledge is for the human knower to know what makes the human, human. What is the nature and meaning of humanity?' (Verene in Vico 1707/1993: 4).

Vico, Berlin, and Winch together (if with different emphasis) draw attention to some rather different features of what it is to be human, of the very stuff of humanity, from those favoured by the zoologist and geneticist referred to above, or to those that might be observed by the behaviourist psychologist or the neuroscientist—to human beings as:

- participants in shared and historically evolved languages and ways of life, and hence
- historically and culturally located;
- creators of meaning and bestowers of meaning;
- understanders and interpreters;
- self-conscious and intentional choosers exercising determination over their pathways through life;
- creatures in whom rationality and intellect are integrally combined with fantasy, passion, and emotion;
- responsible agents in a social and moral space.

Human beings do not just have sex, they make love (and worry about whether they are 'in love' or not); they don't just feed, they savour the nuances of the food's flavour and its aesthetic presentation, they exercise moral responsibility over its source and they treasure the companionable conversation which accompanies the meal; they don't just compete for power and ascendancy, they construct elaborate political edifices around preferred and principled ways of life; and in the end they don't just physically decay, they die at peace with the world, with remorse, or in joyful anticipation of the life to come. Not only this but they reflect on, argue about, and debate all of the above and their implications; they treat them to extended academic and scholarly inquiry; they represent or reflect them in great and lesser music, art, literature, and, of course, philosophy.

I want to say 'this is what it *is* to be human', but I do not really know how to answer the sceptic who insists that humanity is ontologically undistinguishable from any other physical or organic substance that occupies the universe or any other order of things around which the inquiries of the natural sciences are organised. The response to such scepticism can perhaps only be drawn through a dialogic process with such protagonists. For just as no-one actually seems to lead their lives as if everything was predetermined and out of their control, even if they defend some form of determinism as an intellectual position, nor does anyone live their lives as if the kind of features of human experience which I have highlighted here are insignificant. Our entire linguistic and cultural repertoire is saturated with these

sorts of assumptions, the abandonment of which would make life as we know it not only hugely uninteresting but unintelligible and impossible.

4.8 And Psychology?

I have made a case for the kind of understanding that is required for the proper study of mankind and indicated that this is provided pre-eminently by the humanities, including history, literature, auto/biography, philosophy, and (notwithstanding Alexander Pope's warning) theology, but also by certain forms of social science that fall, perhaps, closest to the humanities, notably cultural studies and ethnography. There is a case, too, for including in this category forms of psychology, notably phenomenographic approaches, which perhaps have the greatest proximity to the humanities.

This argument has the normative consequence of subordinating to the humanities those branches of psychology that seek in Weber's terms not interpretative understanding but causal explanation—on the grounds that these fail to engage with the very nature of the human. It is not, however, intended to exclude the contribution which psychology can and does make to education. Indeed Vico himself strongly underlined this contribution. Never mind William James,[7] 'Vico is the true forerunner of educational, and especially child educational, psychology' and 'the authentic precursor of Rousseau' claims Gianturco (in Vico 1709/1965: xxix). This claim rests on Vico's analysis of: 'the specific, non- interchangeable, "non-fungible" character of each of the stages of growth of the human mind'; 'the unique quality of the child's reaction to reality'; and the shift of attention in Vico 'from educator to pupil, from formalism in curricular content to modes of apperception and living assimilation' (Gianturco in Vico 1709/1965: xxviii, xxix).

4.9 And Education?

As this assessment suggests, Vico does in fact write extensively about education—especially in *On the study methods of our time* and *On humanistic education*. Vico is indeed credited with being a precursor of Rousseau in his educational thought. Gianturco observes, for example, the following common themes in their writing:

> the self-creativeness of human nature … the defence of the child's world against the oppression of the adult; the conscious certitude that the positive results of any educational method are dependent on the recognition of the functional autonomy of child-hood; the thesis of the predominantly non-rational nature of the child; the incongruity of a type of

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[7]The difference is perhaps that Vico might not have laid claim to the 'scientific' psychology which is attributed to James.

education that proposes the turning out of 'erudite adolescents and senile children'. (Gianturco in his introduction to Vico 1709/1965: xxviii)

In the sixth oration in *On humanistic education*, for example, Vico begins with an attack on parents who 'without exploring the inherent constitution of their children and without discerning their native talents, push the youth to study one or another of the arts or sciences, and often contrary to their inclination, on the grounds of their own desires or to satisfy family needs. Or if naturally inclined to these studies they are often pushed into them without adequate preparation in related studies' (Vico 1707/1993: 126)—two eminently sensible principles in a single opening paragraph.

This is a direction of inquiry which I hope to pursue, but in this chapter my focus is on the consequences of the broader defence of a humanistic education for educational policy and practice—and it is to these that I shall turn in conclusion.

The implications of the analysis of human or humanistic understanding for education can be stated briefly and boldly—and they are very far-reaching. Firstly, it follows that the humanities must be a key part of any school curriculum that aspires to be educational—their absence leaves not just a cognitive gap but an existential barrier to the entrance of a new generation to the human condition. Secondly, the humanities need to be part of the offer of any institution which claims to be a university and hence to represent the major traditions through which understanding of both the natural and the humanly constructed world are advanced. I have gestured towards rather than tightly defined what such 'humanistic' studies might consist of. Vico's own curriculum thinking was framed by the medieval Trivium (grammar, rhetoric, and logic) and Quadrivium (arithmetic, music, geometry, and astronomy), but more especially by the *Studia Humanitatis* which Renaissance humanists created by excluding logic from the Trivium and adding history, Greek, moral philosophy, and poetry to grammar and rhetoric (Verene in Vico 1707/1993). Today's framing of the humanities in terms of, centrally, history, literature (and language), and philosophy clearly owes much to the *Studia Humanitatis* tradition.

Thirdly, they need to be present in the resources (frameworks of understanding, bodies of literature, methods of inquiry) which are brought to bear on educational (or for that matter any other human or social) inquiry. Attempts to reduce such inquiry to only that which can lay claim to scientificity, or even more narrowly to elevate one form of scientific enquiry, the randomised controlled experiment, to privileged status as the 'gold standard' for educational enquiry (see Bridges et al. 2009 passim) is an intellectual offence against humanity. Those that continue to advance the case for e.g. history (including 'contemporary history'), philosophy, (auto)biography and narrativity, political theory, discourse analysis, and the contribution of literature (including fictional stories) to educational understanding (see again Bridges et al. (2009) passim for examples of most of these) are firmly based in the tradition of the *Scienza Nuova* which Giambattista Vico established. Such differentiation of different kinds of knowledge can be misleading, however, because for Vico these are all required to contribute to *paideia* (self-knowledge); to

sapientia (holistic understanding or wisdom); to *prudentia* (prudence—the Latin version of the more familiar Greek *phronesis* or practical wisdom); and, importantly, to *eloquentia*, i.e. the ability to put all of this into words with a view to explaining and persuading other people—'*sapienza che parla*' (wisdom that speaks), as Vico referred to it in his autobiography (Vico 1728/1963: 199).[8]

I suggest, then, that the humanities provide not only the fundamental categories and conceptual frameworks without which we cannot make sense of human experience, but also the literature which can prepare us for this task, furnish us with extended experience beyond our own lives and sensitise our imaginations. They can also provide us with the means to represent what we come to learn and understand, and communicate it to others—through rich description, through portrayal, but perhaps pre-eminently through narrative. As Bob Stake wrote in his contribution to the landmark publication *Beyond the numbers game*:

> We need a reporting procedure for facilitating vicarious experience. And it is available. Among the better evangelists, anthropologists and dramatists are those who have developed the art of storytelling. We need to portray complexity. We need to convey holistic impression, the mood, even the mystery of experience. (Stake 1977: 164)

For me, at least, this is a direction that has much more allure than the scientistic pretensions of psychology.

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[8]Vico's position at the University of Naples was indeed as Professor of Eloquence, in which role he gave a series of seven annual 'inaugural' orations, the first six of which are published in *Humanistic education* and the seventh in *On the study of methods of our time*. Perhaps Vico's emphasis not only on *sapientia* and *prudentia* but also *eloquentia* has something to offer to us at a time when there is constant complaint about researchers' inability to, or lack of success in, communicating their ideas to a wider public or having impact on policy or practice. Verene's account of *eloquentia is*, I think, worth highlighting as a set of qualities which deserve more consideration by educational and other researchers: Eloquence does not refer to the fine turns of phrase that may be used, although these are of considerable importance. It refers instead to the ability to speak about the whole of the subject. Eloquence is the quality a speech needs to be complete, to encompass all the dimensions of a subject, to connect up its smallest details and its largest dimensions and perspectives, to make a beginning and to speak through to an end that takes each listener through all the relevant aspects of the subject, including the digressions, but brings the listener always back to the point and brings the whole of the topic well into view (Verene in Vico 1707/1993: 7).

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Part II
Education as Applied Research: Practice and Policy

Chapter 5
Educational Research and Practice

Abstract In Chap. 2 I argued that 'education' did not itself constitute an academic discipline; rather it was a field of policy, practice, and theory to which different forms of disciplined inquiry could contribute—just as they might contribute to other fields of social practice such as policing, nursing, business, social work, or tourism. On this basis I began to explore the nature of such disciplined inquiry and some of the challenges to it in contemporary thought. There is, however, another characteristic of education as a field of inquiry that demands attention, and that is the significance for educational research as a form of *applied* research, its engagement with practitioners, and its connection with practice. For some, this requires the application to educational practice of theory and findings developed in the academy. This chapter examines some of the problems in a relationship conceived in these terms, and considers views that turn this presentation of the relationship on its head, arguing that practice and practitioners are not merely foci for the application of research derived from other sources; they are also generators of educational understanding and educational theory, and many educational practitioners are themselves engaged in educational research and scholarship. But does this mean that they leave 'the disciplines' behind?

> A remarkable shift has taken place in the rhetoric relating educational research to practice. We have moved beyond the mottos of the 20th century—from research to practice, doing translation science—to a new model that emphasizes the interconnections of research and practice rather than the gap between them. (Snow 2015: 1)

5.1 Educational Research as the Application of Discipline-Based Inquiry to Practice?

If, as I have done in this book, one starts off by emphasising the disciplinary or multidisciplinary character of educational research, then our question becomes one of whether and how we should see such research as 'applied' research—and this is

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the first formulation of the relationship that I want to discuss. This was very clearly articulated when Hirst claimed (in his early writing) that:

> educational principles are justified entirely by direct appeal to knowledge from a variety of forms, scientific, philosophical, historical, etc. Beyond these forms of knowledge it requires no theoretical status. (Hirst 1966: 55)

He continued:

> It is a necessary consequence of this characterization of the theory that its development depends crucially on the progress of scientific knowledge, philosophical work, etc., which is relevant to questions of educational practice. It is only by rigorous work within these forms, according to their own critical canons, that valid reasons can be brought to the formation of educational principles. If work or study in theory is to be anything but superficial it must readily be differentiated out into the serious and systematic treatment of the relevant philosophical, sociological or historical questions which are raised … To discern where, and precisely how, a given discipline contributes to the theory demands first a highly specialised knowledge of the discipline and the kind of problems with which it deals. It demands too the ability to see beneath the practical problems of education those underlying questions which this discipline alone can hope to answer. (Hirst 1966: 55–56)

There are, nevertheless certain important qualifications I would enter to this general position. First, Hirst presented at this time a picture of a one-way flow of intellectual traffic—from disciplines (history, philosophy, ethnography, psychology, sociology, etc.) rooted outside the field of education into the study of education itself. Viewed in these terms the question becomes one of the applied-ness (the capacity or suitability to be applied) or the application of discipline-sourced knowledge and understanding to practice—and this is not unproblematic.

It is obviously comforting or rhetorically helpful in some settings—e.g. in discussion with teachers, policymakers, or funders—to be able to represent education as applied research and education researchers as people willing and able to roll up their sleeves in the real world of educational practice—at least until the expectation is succeeded by frustration and disappointment that the research does not quite deliver what it promised. There are, however, at least four inherent problems in the notion that research might be thus 'applied'.

Firstly, there are all sorts of dimensions of the scale of applicability, which result in some very different levels of significance in the application. There are, for example:

- dimensions of *social scope*: application to my own practice; to another teacher's practice; to a whole school's practice; to a whole education system's practice; globally;
- dimensions of *immediacy of uptake*: application immediately; after some years; long after the researcher is dead;
- dimensions of *duration*: applied once; for a period of time; indefinitely into the future;
- dimensions of the *scale of influence*: minor amendment of practice through to major innovation;

- dimensions of *value*: however applicable or applied, was it a force for educational advance or decline, for good or for evil?

(Some of these points are of course relevant to the discussion of 'impact' as an indicator of research quality in Chap. 23). My point is that these dimensions generate some very different pictures of the application of research, with some very different value attached to them.

Secondly, we have to reckon with the difference between: (i) research which is intended to be applied, conceived as for application, but not in fact applied; (ii) research which is intended to be applied and actually is applied; and (iii) research which was not produced to be applied but was in fact applied. Inside the first of these distinctions is a further distinction to be drawn between research which was realistic in its hopes of being applied (whether or not these were finally realised) and what one might dub 'not-a-hope-in-hell-of-ever-being-applied' research. The applicability of research is, however, not just a function of whether or not it brings out its own clear implications for practice or policy, but also whether or not what is implied is likely to find classroom-, school-, or system-level political acceptance, whether the resource implications can be met, whether the people involved have the will or energy to accommodate to the required changes, and a dozen other facts which have little to do with the intentionality of the research or the applicability (in principle) of its findings. (See also on this, my discussion of research and policy in Chap. 6).

Thirdly, research can leave us with a greater or lesser amount of work to do in order to interpret its implications for practice. I recall a piece of action research which involved me researching my own leadership style in seminars, which revealed some unintended consequences of my style of questioning and which led me very directly to change my style of questioning in these groups. But if I read, for example, evidence and argument in support of a constructivist view of learning, I have got to do a lot of work to turn this into changes which I should make in my own teaching, and I may need to digest and reflect upon its implications over quite a period of time. But this does not in itself make it any the less applicable or applied, does it?

Fourthly, while there may be a considerable weight of opinion in favour of research which has greater rather than lesser application to education, in other words as to what sort of educational research is desirable under particular conditions, this does not amount to a definition of educational research. Nor should it be mistaken for a criterion of research quality as Gutierez and Penuel urge:

> … relevance to practice must be an explicit criterion for judging the quality of research proposals. For example, there should be documentation that the problem of focus is perceived by multiple stakeholders to be significant, persistent, and worthy of investigation. Standards must also require researchers to provide evidence that they have engaged in a process to surface and negotiate the focus of their joint work, and to document the ways participation in this process was structured to include district and school leaders, teachers, parents, community stakeholders, and, wherever possible, children and youth. (Gutiérez and Penuel 2014: 20)

That research is rigorous is a necessary condition for its quality but its relevance to practice, however desirable this requirement might be for other reasons, is not. (See Chap. 23 on generic criteria for quality assessment.) It is still educational research if it addresses and seeks to inform the development of educational theory, even if it does so at a relatively high level of abstraction and without drawing any particular implications for practice.

These and other complexities render problematic the very notion of 'applied research' and render both its 'applicability' and its 'applied-ness' contingent on factors that go beyond the capability or responsibility of the researcher. There is a definitional and perhaps tautologous sense in which something called 'educational research' has to be research applied to … education, however widely or narrowly this is defined (see Wilson 1972: 51; Popkewitz 1984: 25; Pring 2000 for different renderings of the scope of 'educational' research). Beyond this, perhaps the only fair application of the term is in terms of the intentions of the researchers, some of whom will set out in their research to affect educational practice and who will bring out in their research the implications which they see their work as having for that practice, and others who—out of uncertainty, disinterest, cynicism, or simply enthusiasm for the domain of theory—will not.

5.2 Limitations of the Discipline as Sources of Practice

I have already described (in Chap. 2) the way in which the dominance of the four disciplines was eroded in the 1970s and 1980s. But it is perhaps worth rehearsing three developments in this period which changed the relationship between discipline-based inquiry and practice.

The first development was the emergence of curriculum as, if not a new discipline in educational studies, then at least a powerful instrument for breaking down the barriers between the disciplines and demonstrating their capacity to inform in different and more integrated ways a rapidly developing field of educational development and practice—and one in which national policy and local practice had to be joined together in some way. The second was the development of classroom action research as, in Stenhouse's perception, a necessary condition of curriculum development, because curriculum could only ever be in his eyes a hypothesis to be tested against the realities of individual classrooms. The third development was the expansion of the repertoire of research methodologies in the interests of understanding and sharing different perceptions of classroom experience—a garnering of, in particular, ethnographic research methods and case study (Simons' edited collection 'The science of the singular', first published in 1980, remains an important resource—see Chap. 14), experiment with visual representation, the development by Stenhouse of 'contemporary history', and by MacDonald of 'democratic evaluation'. These developments gained international credibility through their association with parallel developments in the USA (involving Bob Stake, Lou Smith, Bob Ennis, and many others, and through the highly influential work of Donald Schön

on 'reflective practice') and in Australia (with, for example, their own brand of radical 'down under' action research at Deakin University). This last also resonated with an emerging German tradition of *Handlungsforschung*, which has been regarded as 'a cooperative research of academic researchers and teachers in order to promote "emancipatory" knowledge' (Posch 2003: 236).

Together, these developments had quite a transformative effect on the construction of educational research and, in particular, on its relationship with practice. Shortly before his death, Lawrence Stenhouse addressed an audience of academic researchers in these terms:

> Although research guided by the disciplines is likely to extend knowledge and the extension of knowledge is likely to affect—even in due course to revolutionise— practical action, there is a distinction to be drawn between the priorities of substantive action and the priorities of the advancement of knowledge … Nor do the conceptual frameworks of the so-called 'constituent disciplines' of educational research and study at present focus on educational action. That is to say, the hypotheses or conjectures to which they lead us are not by and large open to elaboration and testing by educational as opposed to research acts. (Stenhouse 1985: 264)

Similarly, in the third edition of the AERA *Handbook of Research on Teaching*, Fenstermacher argued:

> the benefit of educational research to educational practice is realized in the improvement of practical arguments, not in programmes of performance deduced from the findings of research … Research bears on practice as it alters the truth or falsity of beliefs that teachers have, as it changes the nature of these beliefs, and as it adds new beliefs. (Fenstermacher 1986: 43)

By 1983, Hirst himself was making much more limited claims on behalf of the disciplines than he had made two decades earlier, in a position surprisingly close to that of Stenhouse:

> The disciplines cannot tackle any given practical questions as such for each tackles questions which are peculiar to itself, those that can be raised only within its own distinctive conceptual apparatus … The disciplines each make their own limited abstractions from the complexities of practice. They tackle no problems of any kind and none of them is adequate to the proper determining of principles for educational practice. Indeed there seems an inevitable gap between the conceptual framework within which the issues of practice arise and the conceptual frameworks the distinct disciplines employ for their particular purposes … It is not just that at present the disciplines we have are too undeveloped and full of disputes for such a method of developing principles to be workable, true though that is. It is rather that the very character of the disciplines seems such that they must prove inadequate as a basis for practical principles. (Hirst 1983; and in 1993: 151–152)

For Pring, likewise, '(educational) research in its critical inquiry draws upon the social sciences, but … it cannot be reduced to them' (Pring 2000: 7). After all, there has to be some substantive field which constitutes education in order for the disciplines to be applied to it or in order for them to constitute a body of inquiry which it makes sense to call *educational* research or theory at all. Pring goes on to distinguish between 'research which is firmly embedded within the social sciences and which may very well be relevant to education, and research which arises from

distinctively educational concerns and which draws upon, but is not reduced to, the knowledge which has accumulated within those sciences' (Pring 2000: 9). Bengtsson makes this point with respect to the science of pedagogy: 'the supporting disciplines of pedagogy presuppose that pedagogy has an identity of its own that can be supported, otherwise it would not be possible to claim that the support is pedagogical' (Bengtsson 2002: 14).

The real problem comes if and when we expect educational research to tell us what we ought to do in practice—and in particular if we want it to tell us what to do in a particular context of practice: my classroom. Essentially discipline-based research can shed light on, help to explain, and develop our understanding of all kinds of aspects of educational policy and practice. It may help us to know and understand what has happened in the past and why. It may even offer the probability of what will happen if … But decisions about what to do in a given set of circumstances require more, including, for example:

- a weighing of the probability of likely outcomes in a particular situation;
- understanding of that particular situation, of the people involved and their likely response, and of the resources available;
- knowledge of oneself (and others who may be closely involved) and one's own strengths and weaknesses and capacity to carry out particular actions;
- an individual or institutional orientation of values and principles of conduct, including more specifically a set of educational values, principles, and aspirations;
- tacit as well as explicitly entertained knowledge about how to act in an educational setting;
- knowledge about educational institutions and practices;
- knowledge of the micro-politics of the local, institutional, or classroom setting and a realistic as well as principled view of how to respond to these.

Judgments at the broader level about educational policy and at the more local level about educational practice—judgments about *what to do*—have to be informed by, among other things this kind of knowledge and understanding. Moreover, as an OECD report on educational research and development pointed out (Centre for Educational Research and Innovation, CERI 1995), this is the sort of knowledge that practitioners and policymakers derive from sources other than educational research. It is the kind of knowledge and understanding which is taken for granted in the context of practitioner research: it is present in the mind of the researcher, who is already an actor in the situation to which the research has to apply. But the same cannot be said of more generally discipline-based research in which the research resource (the conceptual and informational base) and the researcher are more typically at a remove from the setting to which the research might be applied, and certainly not well placed to achieve the synthesis of individual situational understanding with systematic and sustained inquiry that is required for the successful application of the research.

   The discipline-based research can therefore inform, challenge, and refresh educational agents' understanding of educational practice, but it will rarely be sufficient to point to what they should do in a particular setting and at a particular time. The OECD report speaks of 'the inherent indeterminacy of educational R&D as a producer of operational solutions' (CERI 1995: 31)—not in this case as a complaint about the poor quality or inadequacy of educational research, but as an observation of its inherent limitations. 'Educational research cannot deliver the kind of independent, authoritative knowledge that directly suits the needs of educational policy makers and practitioners and decision makers and practitioners … It cannot decide normative issues, which severely limits its ability to procure a consensus on practical questions … It is the very nature of research to raise more questions than it can answer, or to seek to answer questions that have not been formulated yet. Thus, although research can expose a complex and contradictory set of issues, it is unable of itself to lend them operational reality' (CERI 1995: 30). Perhaps if this limitation was more widely accepted and recognised it would spare some of the frustration which arises from misplaced expectations of what educational research is or can provide.

   I have so far tended to look at the issue of the relationship between research and practice from the standpoint of a researcher and the researcher's relationship with practice. Let me turn things round for a moment and ask what learning about educational practice might look like from the standpoint of a practitioner.

5.3   Where Does the Practitioner's Understanding of Education Come from?

If we ask the most open-ended question, 'How do people come to have the understanding they do of educational practice?' the answers will no doubt be very diverse, but they are likely to include (as I began to indicate in the opening of Chap. 2): lessons learned from one's own good and bad experience as a student; the example of teachers one has admired (or hated); conversations one has had with teachers, parents, or children about their own educational experience; media coverage of educational issues; education and training one has received, perhaps, as a preparation for teaching; and, as a teacher, the example and advice of one's colleagues and, most profoundly, one's own teaching experience … oh, and perhaps an odd acquaintance with research? Such an account of how people might come to have the understanding they do of educational practice puts research in its place, and it is not a very prominent one.

   It is, however, not quite as marginal as might appear, because when you hear teachers talking about education in what they might think of as a commonsensical way based on their professional experience, you hear nevertheless the unselfconscious use of categories, concepts, and 'theories' that have become part of a professional language that has absorbed the fruits of past research—'positive

reinforcement'; 'low self-esteem'; 'student-centred learning'; 'gender stereotyping'; 'reproduction of social disadvantage'; 'leadership of learning', and so on. So, the language of education that issues from the field of practice and from the tongues of practitioners is not one that is totally separated from the language of research, albeit that it is a fertile source of educational thought that goes beyond what is typically represented by the products of the research community, and researchers do well to engage with it with curiosity and respect.

It follows, I think, from this account of the multiple sources of educational *understanding* that educational *theory* also has its roots in a much wider range of sources that simply educational research. Educational theory attempts to develop relatively wide-ranging propositions about education: about what educational principles and values should be applied in general; about what approaches have what outcomes in general (and not just in a particular case); and at a higher level it combines normative and empirical perspectives to generate a more systematic view of what does happen or what should happen in educational settings. Again, research may be one of the sources informing these processes, but it is clearly not the only one, and indeed it may be entirely invisible in the case of the experientially grounded theory of education that provides the basis for the professional practice of many teachers.

I will say more about this relationship in Chap. 8 on the philosopher in the classroom and in Chap. 13 on action research and pragmatism, but for the moment, since this book is about *research*, let me return to what I have so far portrayed as educational inquiry rooted in a wide range of disciplines of the academy. If, as I have acknowledged, this is not the only source of practitioners' professional knowledge and understanding, its rigour, range, criticality, and creativity ought to render it deserving of serious attention.

However, educational research and educational practice do not have to be presented as two separate spheres, nor does the flow of creative and critical thought need to be seen as unidirectional. One of what I see as the professionally enhancing developments of the last few years has been the increasing engagement of teachers (among others) with educational research, in collaboration with university-based researchers, in teacher-to-teacher collaborations or as individuals engaging in educational scholarship for its own sake (for example as philosophers) or seeking to improve their own classroom practice. And all this changes the picture of the relationship between research and practice.

5.4 Practitioner/Action Research and Discipline-Based Inquiry

Richardson (1994) drew a distinction (we shall probably also want to dissolve) between 'formal research' aimed primarily to contribute to knowledge and 'practical inquiry' aimed primarily at understanding and improving one's own practice.

The kind of formal or disciplined educational research to which I have been referring so far has something like the following characteristics:[1]

- it is systematic, in the sense of operating within some rule-governed system (methodology and method) with requirements which impose a 'discipline' on the inquiry and provide criteria against which the quality of the inquiry can be assessed;
- the method and methodology are typically rendered explicit;[2]
- it is sustained—it has some extension over time—it is not a one-off event;
- it tests ideas against evidence and argument;
- it requires the rendering of ideas and understanding in explicit form (and traditionally in written form);
- it aspires to inform a readership other than the researcher and hence is made public in some way.

Teachers and other practitioners are among those that engage in this kind of research, sometimes as part of their engagement in a higher degree programme, sometimes as partners in a research project or programme, sometimes out of sheer curiosity. (A number of the teachers I have encountered on part-time graduate programmes have relished the opportunity to engage not with their daily practice but with exotic and exciting ideas in a different intellectual space.) It may be difficult for many of them to combine the demands of 'systematic and sustained inquiry' with the demands of systematic and sustained teaching (see Wong's 1995 discussion of the moral and logistical dimensions of this tension), but this is a problem which university staff complain of routinely too. But my point is that the notion of 'practitioner research' may be used simply to refer to the fact that people with other responsibilities relating to professional practice are among those who may engage in research of this 'formal' or academic kind.

The term practitioner researcher is, however, also used, more commonly, to pick out something different, a form of 'practical inquiry' in which:

- practitioners test ideas (their own, government policy requirements, or ideas derived from traditional research sources) against experience in their own classrooms;
- such testing informs and affects their practice; and
- it contributes to the continuing development of their own stock of educational thinking—their own educational theory.

Such research is not necessarily systematic or sustained: it may be occasional or intermittent. It does not necessarily follow a particular methodology or method, or render these explicit, though it may and often does. It does not necessarily or

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[1]These are of course in line with Stenhouse's definition of research to which I have already referred.

[2]This is a requirement of social science research, but one studiously eschewed by researchers in the humanities including, for example, history and philosophy.

usually require the rendering of the understanding which is gained explicit even to the practitioner/researcher himself or herself, who may hold it as tacit knowledge, though it may be rendered explicit and indeed published in international as well as local journals. It is such research which might issue in or inform what Whitehead calls 'a living educational theory' (Whitehead 1993 *passim*).

Such an account of practitioner research reveals sufficient distance between this and formal academic research (as previously characterised) to lead one to question whether this kind of practitioner research or practical inquiry is properly described as research at all. Does it not simply describe a process of learning through experience which is a characteristic of the development of all practice? Is it not better conceived of as a particularly rich form of professional development rather than as a form of educational research? Revealingly, perhaps, Whitehead describes how 'The demise of the disciplines approach to educational theory has seen a corresponding increase in the adoption of action research approaches *to professional development in teaching*' (Whitehead 1993: 98, my italics—see also McNiff 1992; McNiff et al. 1992). Does practitioner/action research offer what is in practice a form of professional development rather than a form of research? Surely, as Pring has argued, 'it is not enough in defending teacher research, to claim that practice had improved. It is necessary for there to be knowledge of why it improved' (Pring 2000: 137).

There are several responses which run contrary to these suggestions. The first can be expressed in terms of the limitations of academic research—or more particularly applied research in education—to prescribe practice or even inform practice in educational settings without finally being tested in those settings by those responsible for the learning which takes place in them. In this sense the research process is incomplete before it has entered this phase, and practitioner testing of the outcomes of research, or of hypotheses derived from other sources, might legitimately be included within the broad terms of research and as part of the research process.

A second response to the scepticism is by practitioners and others who point to forms of practitioner research which become more collaborative, more explicit, and more public—and thus start to resemble traditional research more closely while retaining their distinctive practitioner focus. In some contexts practitioner research develops into a practice which involves communities of practitioner researchers who make their experience and evolving educational theory accessible to each other, contribute to a more public community of discourse, and perhaps begin to publish the fruits of their practitioner research (see, for example, Somekh 1995; McLellan et al. 2011; Waterhouse et al. 2014). Indeed, research–practice partnerships (RPPs). are sometimes defined as 'long-term collaborations between practitioners and researchers that are organized to investigate problems of practice and solutions for improving schools and school districts' (Coburn and Penuel 2016: 1, and see Coburn et al. 2013). This looks close to what Snow set out in her 2014 Wallace Foundation Distinguished Lecture at the spring meeting of AERA as 'practice-embedded educational research' or PEER (Snow 2015). She is at pains to emphasise that such practitioner research need make no concessions to the rigour

demanded of academic research and that 'randomised controlled trials and systematic analysis of large data sets are entirely consistent with PEER principles' (Snow 2015: 465).

Note that on this last characterisation, practitioner research is aimed at informing the wider practice—of schools and school districts. Action research—which Snow is at pains to distinguish from PEER (Snow 2015: 461)—tends to bear a more direct relationship between the research and the practice of the researcher. It is a cyclical process; and its aim is better to align that teacher's practice with the educational values and principles which he or she aspires to realise. (For a fuller account see Chap. 8.) This said, Kurt Lewin (1948), generally recognised as one of the founding figures of action research, insisted in fact that this was a *group* commitment, though it frequently takes a more individualistic form. Certainly, one way in which action researchers have sought to contribute to wider educational understanding has been through such collaborations, which took early institutionalised form in the Collaborative Action Research Network (CARN) and its journal *Educational Action Research* (see Somekh 2010 for a review of 30 years of CARN).

Sometimes such collaborative activity is stimulated or facilitated by researchers from the academic community, who see such collaboration as, among other things, one way to access the tacit or craft knowledge of teachers, their constructs of educational practice, their educational theory. (See Bridges et al. 2015, for example.) But the rationale for engaging teachers as researchers is not (or certainly not just) to serve the interests of the academic research community. As Elliott explains: 'The rationale for involving teachers as researchers of their own practice is connected with an aspiration to give them control over what is to count as knowledge about practice. As action researchers, teachers are knowledge generators rather than appliers of knowledge generated by outsiders' (Elliott 1994: 133). In this way, the idea of academic, perhaps discipline-based, educational research being 'applied' to practice is turned on its head. Instead it is the practice and practitioner-based educational understanding that informs the educational thinking of the academy.

In these and other ways two very different sets of educational research practices—the one derived from the intellectual resources of the academy and the other from the reflective and researched experience of the practitioner—get joined up. What may, however, be distinctive of what is properly called 'educational' research is the way in which these two forms of inquiry are joined. In a paper under the title 'What is *educational* about educational research?' Kushner suggests that: 'A starting point for considering research to have a particular educational timbre is that it has a source in a discrete body of knowledge and theory—i.e. educational theory. … What may distinguish the educational researcher most from the applied social scientist is that the former would tend to use the classroom to explain theory and its shortcomings, the latter would tend to use theory to explain the classroom and its shortcomings'—though he adds, 'Is that a little harsh?' (Kushner 2002: 17). For Elliott, 'Action research … constitutes a resolution of the theory practice issue as it is perceived by teachers. Action research integrates teaching and teacher development, curriculum development and evaluation, research and philosophical reflection, into a unified conception of a reflective educational practice' (Elliott 1991: 53 and 54).

None of this means, however, that the kind of disciplined intellectual resources —methods, methodologies, conceptual and interpretative framing—that have been applied to other forms of educational research are superseded or have no place in practitioner inquiry. If practitioner/action research, for example, was really limited to a kind of intuitive trying out of tacitly held beliefs in a situation in which, for example, a negative experience resulted in a change of behaviour, I would indeed be very reluctant to dignify this with the name of research. As I have already indicated, this sort of thing looks to me to be better described as learning through experience, though at its most trivial it might simply be a process of classical conditioned response. For the most part, however, classroom action researchers are engaged to some degree or another with research practices which are patently drawn from the established educational research repertoire. They interview pupils, fellow teachers, and parents; they make audio tapes of lessons or of children working in groups and analyse the nature of the exchanges; they keep field logs of their experience over a period of time; they write professional life histories; they get colleagues into observe lessons and record features significant to their research task; they issue questionnaires; they produce iconographic inventories; they arrange for lessons to be photographed or videotaped in order that they can analyse selected features of their own or children's behaviour (drawing analytic categories from the research literature); they produce case studies of individual children; they meet with other teachers or research supervisors and explore the values which they are bringing to or seeking to realise in their educational practice. In short, they employ the standard repertoire of disciplined educational research methodology—or a selection from it judged appropriate to the relatively narrow focus of the research and (usually) the limited time and resources available to them.

Not only this, but, as I illustrated in the opening section of this chapter, they will employ in their commentary and explanation reference to a conceptual apparatus which, while it may in some cases have entered professional or public discourse sufficiently to be regarded as non-technical (and may in the process have lost much of its original meaning), nevertheless has its source again in the mainstreams of intellectual life that I want still to refer to as the disciplines. As Elliott suggests:

> action research does not privilege practice in relation to theory; rather it witnesses to the unity of theory and practice. [However] educational action research, as the practical inquiry dimension of a moral educational science, is not simply an activity that follows after the independent philosophical development of an educational theory. In testing a theoretical stance, by enacting it in particular circumstances, action research can reveal ambiguities in that stance and thereby problematise it in ways that prompt further theoretical reflection. (Elliott 2001: 96–97)

My argument, then, is that action research, no less than any other form of research, draws and must draw for its research methodology, for its conceptual apparatus, and for its analysis and explanation on the same disciplined traditions of intellectual thought and representation as any other kind of research. It may of course do so directly or indirectly, knowingly or unconsciously. Further, the quality of the observation, interpretation, and understanding which comes out of the action research process is at least in part a function of the quality and richness of the

conceptual apparatus which is brought to it—which argues for action research which is practised not in isolation from engagement with these disciplined forms of thought and still less on the basis of their exclusion, but rather in a context of rich immersion in them.

Whitehead (1993), as well as observing the 'demise' of the disciplines without much sign of regret, acknowledges, nevertheless their place in and alongside action research. He writes of 'a form of educational theory which can be generated from professional practice and which can integrate the different contributions'—and, later of 'a theory which has the capacity to allow the inclusion of the concepts from the disciplines of education whilst being itself irreducible to the form of any of the present disciplines of education' (Whitehead 1993: 57).

Certainly, action research brings something distinctive to the educational research arena in terms of: (i) the intimacy of the relationship between research and practice and between research and practitioner knowledge; (ii) its potent engagement of practitioners in the process of research; and (iii) its particular capacity to inform individual sites of action directly. All of this I applaud. But it would be unfortunate if these features of action research were seen as requiring either the demise of disciplined intellectual inquiry or its separation from such inquiry. The pioneers of action research in the UK have had the benefit in many cases of a background of training in one or more of the disciplines contributing to educational thought. It is not obvious that subsequent generations of action researchers will have the same resource to draw on.

Elliott (1991) has however warned against the 'terrorism' which academics engage in in their encounters with teachers' action research. 'Rather than playing the theoretical handmaiden of practitioners by helping them to clarify, text, develop and disseminate the ideas which underpin their practices, academics … take an idea which underpins teachers' practices, distort it through translation into "academic jargon" and thereby "hijack" it from its practical context and the web of inter-locking ideas which operate within that context'. He acknowledges that he too has 'colluded in acts of academic imperialism' (Elliott 1991: 14).

I accept the risk which Elliott indicates here, and probably deserve to share his guilt, but feel that it may be very difficult to separate out practices which invite the accusation of intellectual 'imperialism' from other processes which are part of a legitimate and indeed desirable interplay of ideas. First, we have to recognise that the process through which language and concepts in different communities are enlarged and informed by exchange and incorporation is a continual one. As I have already illustrated, the language which we recognise today as the ordinary and commonsensical professional language of teachers is riddled with ideas rooted deep in the theoretical discourses of the past—perhaps the consequence of past acts of conceptual imperialism, but why not simply part of the process by which seemingly useful categorisations, ideas, and distinctions get incorporated in people's language and thought because they serve their purposes. What has been healthy in recent educational research activities (and this is especially evident in the classroom action research movement) has been the disposition of at least some educational researchers to pay closer attention to the language and categories employed by

teachers (among others), in the belief that these may themselves provide a source of better understanding of professional practice. In these circumstances the interplay of language, ideas, and experience is multidirectional.

Apart from such natural exchange and interpenetration of discourse, we might, I propose, also accept that there is a legitimate pedagogic (and not necessarily imperialistic) process by which people's understanding is genuinely enlarged and informed through their grasp and utilisation of different ways of interpreting, categorising, and seeing their own or others' experience. Used discriminatingly, the theoretical and research literature offers and should offer a resource of different ways of interpreting, organising, communicating, and representing our experience. Teachers should not feel compelled to accept any of these, but the literature should be accessible to them to use as they find meaningful, and to help them, as Elliott puts it, 'to continuously reconstruct their concepts of value in ways which progressively illuminate practical problems and possibilities' (Elliott 1991: 51). Ensuring such access ought to remain a central responsibility in the continuing education of teachers; developing the wealth and quality of the resource is a central part of the business of research.

So, I have observed in this chapter ways in which educational theory and research might be conceived of as a field of applied research and also some of the limits to such applicability when the direction of movement is unilaterally from the academy to, for example, the school or classroom. I have looked at the claims of practitioner research and, more specifically, classroom action research to provide an alternative construction of educational research itself and, moreover, one which turns the relationship between educational theory developed in the academy and educational practice on its head, None of this argues, however, for anything other than the continuing importance, vitality, and rigour of research rooted in the disciplines that can contribute to educational understanding.

I have, however, tried to avoid presenting these two different approaches to educational research and practice as standing in opposition to each other, arguing both that, in particular, *collaborative* classroom action research has a contribution to make to more conventional forms of educational inquiry and also that classroom action research itself needs to draw on the methods and methodologies developed in the academic research community as well as some of the conceptual apparatus that is available in the wider arena of educational theory.

Chapter 13 will amplify some of the issues raised in this chapter by exploring some of the strengths and limitations of pragmatic theory of knowledge on which, arguably, a lot of the ideas which underpin classroom action research are based, and Chap. 10 will explore more specifically the idea of classroom action research as a *philosophical* enterprise.

However, having discussed the relationship between educational research and practice, here I shall turn first to the issue of the contribution of educational research to policy—an issue that appears to generate frustration among both policymakers and researchers.

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Chapter 6
Educational Research and Policy

Abstract This chapter touches on some of the issues discussed in Chap. 5 in the context of educational research and practice, but here it is concerned with the relationship between educational research and policy and, more specifically, with the sort of knowledge which can and should inform educational policy. The chapter treats this as an epistemological question and distinguishes it from the more extensively explored question of what sort of knowledge in what form policy-makers do in fact commonly take into account. The chapter examines the logical and rhetorical character of policy and the components of policy decisions, and argues that policy demands a much wider range of information than research typically provides. Either the research task or commission has to be substantially extended or the gap will be filled by information or thinking which is not derived from research. One of the gaps between research of an empirical kind and policy is the normative gap. The final section of this chapter points to the inescapably normative character of educational policy. Of course the values which inform policy can be investigated empirically or deconstructed through discourse analysis, but this kind of inquiry cannot tell us what we should do. There is, however, a role for research/scholarship and more, rather than less, intelligent and critical argumentation in addressing these normative questions, as well as the empirical questions which underpin policy. This chapter might be read alongside Chap. 9 on the role of the philosopher in policymaking.

6.1   Epistemological Considerations in the Relationship Between Educational Research and Policy

This chapter considers whether there is anything one can say in the form of relevant *epistemological* considerations: about the kind(s) of knowledge which might or ought to inform educational policy and about the way(s) in which educational policy may or may not be derived from the very diverse sorts of knowledge generated by the educational research community. It may be helpful to identify this question by separating it from some others with which are *not* the concern here, even if they are important questions in their own right.

Firstly, I am, of course, well aware of complaints from the policy arena about researchers' failure to provide the research which policymakers think they need (Hargreaves 1996, 1997; Hillage et al. 1998; Tooley and Darby 1998),[1] and complaints by educational researchers about the failure of policymakers to take research findings properly into account. These concerns have not been limited to the UK. In France (Prost 2001) and Australia (McGaw et al. 1992) there have been reviews similar to those referred to above. In the United States there have been substantial and sustained attacks on both the quality and relevance of educational research (Coalition for Evidence-Based Policy 2002). Levin (2004) refers to a website which he describes as closely linked to the US Department of Education (www.w-w-c.org/about.html) which observes in familiar terms:

> Our nation's failure to improve its schools is due in part to insufficient and flawed educational research. Even when rigorous research exists, solid evidence rarely makes it into the hands of practitioners, policymakers and others who need it to guide their decisions. (www.w-w-c.org/about.html, cited in Levin 2004: 3)

The then Secretary of State for Education in the UK, David Blunkett, offered both critique and opportunity to educational researchers when in 2000, he observed that: 'Too much social science research is inward-looking, too piecemeal rather than helping to build knowledge in a cumulative way' and that 'issues for research are too supplier-driven rather than focussing on the key issues of concern to policy-makers, practitioners and the public at large'. However, he went on to urge that 'we need researchers who can challenge fundamental assumptions and orthodoxies … If academics do not address it, then it is difficult to think of anyone else who will. We must recognise its importance' (Blunkett 2000).

These complaints tend to focus on issues of the quality of research and its relevance. However, notions of quality are often confused with (narrow)

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[1]Similar complaints have been made against a wider range of social science research—see, for example, the 2003 report of the UK's Commission on the Social Sciences, which speaks of 'significant problems with the exploitation of social science research in government, local government, commerce, the voluntary sector and the media' and observes that 'the caution of some academics towards close engagement with practitioners is a source of great disappointment to many users of social science research' (Commission on the Social Sciences 2003, Executive Summary).

expectations of what will count as research at all—as in the 'what works' movement discussed inter alia in Pring and Oancea's 2008 paper—and the criterion of 'relevance' is riddled with questions rather than answers concerning what might *properly* be regarded as relevant to whom, where, and when (see Chap. 23). In other words, the debate raises but has not satisfactorily answered questions about what sorts of research really are (or ought to be regarded as) relevant to policy and which have a contribution to make to its development.

Secondly, there is a good deal of interesting and important research that investigates what sources policymakers do in fact draw on to inform their policy decisions and suggests that they rely primarily on commissions, trusted experts, and think-tanks for ideas, and that academic research on social issues, including education, sits at the bottom of the list of resources drawn upon by policymakers and below the media, constituents, and consumers (see, for example, Edwards et al. 2007). Whitty's account of New Labour's relationship with educational research in the UK supports these observations and concludes that 'in reality, policy is driven by all sorts of considerations, of which the findings of educational research are likely on some occasions to be pretty low down' (Whitty 2006: 168, and see Whitty et al. 2016 for an updated version of the recent history). Hess's edited collection of papers under the title *When educational research matters: How scholarship influences educational policy* richly illustrates 'the tangled relationship' between research and policy (Hess 2008: 239) within contexts characterised by a litany of confounding factors, including: contested findings; varied advocacies; unanticipated implementation challenges; policy entrepreneurs; 'ideological priors' (Howell 2008: 147); the selective use of research; and loosely coupled systems. These are interesting findings in relation to the part that research *does* play in policy, but they open rather than answer the question: *should* research play such a minor role in the formulation of policy?

Thirdly, it may be the case, as some empirical research suggests, that research better translates into policy if it is put to policymakers without all the qualifications, if it is couched in non-technical language, if it can be summarised on one page of A4, if it happens to point in the direction which ministers have determined to be the right one, and if you know or get to know the right person in the minister's circle of close advisors (see on this Edwards et al. 2007). These are interesting findings, and when we know what research deserves communicating we may want to take heed of this advice on how to do so, but knowing how to communicate it still does not tell us what to communicate.

Finally, and more fundamentally, there is, of course, an intimate alignment of policy, politics, and power and of the need to interpret policy decisions as, on the one hand, a function of particular distributions and structures of power and, on the other hand, a way of maintaining or shifting the balance in these structures. These are interesting and important questions within the field of political science and in the sociology of policy. It must be acknowledged that 'the contribution of research is always mediated through broader social and political processes with all their attendant limitations' (Levin 2004: 1), and nothing in what follows is intended to set these considerations aside as unimportant.

These are not, however, the issues which concern me here. Hammersley has observed that some of the frustration in the debates about the relationship between research and policy are perhaps rooted in a failure to distinguish clearly between some different questions: 'factual questions about the roles that research has *actually* played, theoretical questions about the roles which it *can* play, and value questions about the roles that it *ought* to play' (Hammersley 2002: 1). I am concerned less with the question 'what, as a matter of fact, *does* lead policymakers to take notice of research in formulating policy?' and more with the questions 'what place can it *legitimately* occupy?' and 'what place *ought* research to occupy in the formulation of policy?'

The 'ought' here, which joins issues of moral responsibility with epistemology, is derived from a tradition of philosophical writing on 'the ethics of belief' illustrated by the following extract from William Clifford's essay with this title:

> Belief, that sacred faculty which prompts the decisions of our will, and knits into harmonious working all the compacted energies of our being, is ours, not for ourselves, but for humanity. It is rightly used on truths which have been established by long experience and waiting toil, and which have stood in the fierce light of free and fearless questioning. Then it helps to bind men together, and to strengthen and direct their common action. (Clifford 1879: 182–183, and see also James 1937; McCarthy 1986)

The argument is that, in particular where the beliefs we hold have consequences for the welfare of other people, ensuring that these beliefs are well-founded (which in Clifford's terms means that they have stood 'in the fierce light of free and fearless questioning', but we may have other requirements) is not just a functional requirement of a utilitarian character or an *epistemological* condition for claiming true belief: it is a *moral* duty. It is a matter of taking moral responsibility for our actions and, with this, for the quality of the judgments which underlie our actions. Such obligations have application in the private sphere, but have, surely, special significance in the context of national and other policymaking, where the consequences of carelessly or inappropriately arrived at opinion and misjudgment can be so far-reaching for good or ill.

In fairness, it should be acknowledged that the 'evidenced-based practice' movement has been motivated by much the same principles that are indicated here. Most obviously, it is calling for practice (and policy) to be based on *evidence* as opposed perhaps to whim, prejudice, or embedded custom. Secondly, the movement wants that evidence to be derived from rigorous or high-quality research. I have no disagreement with these first two principles, provided the criteria on the basis of which 'quality' is defined are not too restrictive (see Chap. 3). At the very least, such 'evidence' is not sufficient for policy formation, even if it is necessary. It is part of my argument that those who have drawn restrictive boundaries around the kind of research which ought to be taken into account in policy formation have themselves made a misjudgment that the ethics of belief requires us to challenge and them to correct. (See several contributions to Bridges et al. 2009 and Bridges' response to Robert Slavin at the 2007 conference of the European Conference on Education Research (Slavin 2008; Bridges 2008).

What I do have in common with the evidence-based practice movement, however, is a belief that there are some considerations which ought to count for more than others in the shaping of policy and practice. How can one begin to draw this distinction? There may be some relatively easy cases of considerations which we could agree should not have a place in the forming of policy, though as I write this I can immediately imagine someone leaping to challenge even these. We might feel that there was something wrong about education policy being based upon:

i.   the fact that a business, in which the policymaker had a significant interest, would profit if this policy was introduced;
ii. the fact that the policymaker had picked up a rumour about some flaw in the system;
iii. the fact that the policymaker's child had come home from school upset at what appeared to be some manifestation of current policy;
iv. the fact that some other country had introduced this policy;
v.   the fact that some friends in the policymaker's pub or club had urged this policy direction;
vi. the fact that the policymaker's boss had urged him/her to come up with something within 24 h to grab the newspaper headlines.

If these bases of policy seem inappropriate (albeit not beyond imagination), it is worth considering why. There seems to be a mixture of ethical and epistemological considerations. Some objections seem to be to do with the moral inappropriateness of acting on this basis (e.g. where there is a financial or other personal interest at stake). In some cases the concern might be with the insubstantial or unreliable character of the evidence which prompted the decision (a rumour, a single and unsubstantiated report, a pub conversation) though any of these might legitimately prompt some further enquiry. In the case of copying practice from some other country, the concern might be to do with the insufficiency of the reasoning: one would want some reassurance that very different sociocultural and historical circumstances had been taken into account. In the final example, one might reasonably judge the decision to be ill-considered. We might have debates about the ethical or epistemological legitimacy or otherwise of particular examples, but the intelligibility of such debates at least indicates the possibility and reasonableness of operating with both ethical and epistemological principles of the kind illustrated to discriminate between appropriate and inappropriate bases for policy formation.

One can acknowledge this and still recognise that there will be difficult cases where this distinction will be much less clear-cut. To take first the category of ethically unacceptable considerations, we might have a more difficult debate as to whether the following considerations provide an acceptable basis for policy formation or not:

vii. support for the policy would virtually guarantee that the member (of Parliament or the District Council) would lose his/her seat at the next election;

viii. evidence from focus groups and opinion polls suggests that this policy would win a lot of popular support;

ix. the policy would enhance the Minister's standing in contention for the party leadership.

Are we here looking at 'the real stuff of politics' stripped bare of ethical responsibility or at the legitimate working of a democratic political system and the ways in which a democratic citizenship properly exercises its influence in the system? To what extent, for example, is it right to take into account in policy formulation the popularity or unpopularity of a particular decision? Levin describes how:

> Organizations which are in the public eye—governments, of course, but also many other large organizations—are inevitably sensitive not only to the views of their internal participants but also to larger political currents. One of the rules of the political world is that what is true is far less important than what people believe to be true. A government may be in a position where it is caught between what it believes to be the best course of action and what it believes to be publicly acceptable. In a world where public acceptance is the key to survival it is easy to predict which interest will dominate. It is only when public beliefs shift that government will feel required or able to move. (Levin 2004: 6)

At one end we may decry as pusillanimous the leader who is unwilling to take a stand on a matter where there is unequivocal evidence of public benefit: at the other end we might decry as authoritarian the leader who has no regard for public opinion. There is presumably a role for such 'leadership' in seeking honestly to persuade public opinion of what the evidence indicates or what morality demands to be the right course of action. I would distinguish between, on the one hand, a kind of single-minded 'political expediency' linked to the desire for political survival whatever the policies that this might require, and on the other a perfectly sensible concern for the extent to which the public (or a particular sub-set of the public, e.g. teachers or parents) might be persuaded to accept a policy which research or other evidence indicated was the best. The latter might have a legitimate part in the determination of policy (politics being, after all, 'the art of the possible'); the former, while an understandable preoccupation for a political careerist, is a step too far in the direction of the corruption of the deliberative political process in the interests of personal ambition. In other words, political deliberation ought to leave at least some space for the consideration of reasons, evidence, and arguments for doing this rather than that—and is *not just* a matter of finding out how many people want this or that, even if this is part of what has to be considered.

I have already indicated that we might reject some grounds for policy which, for example, lacked substance or were unreliable, which were insufficient for the purpose for which they were being employed, which were not properly thought through (what would be the consequences of doing this? what would be the cost? what are the alternative possibilities?), or perhaps were irrelevant—in short, I would reject them on the basis of considerations of an epistemological character.

Again, decisions as to what evidence is sufficient, what might properly be counted as relevant, what would be a legitimate inference from a particular set of

information, or what place ideological considerations might legitimately play in policy are, of course, not always easily made. However, we do, we can, and we should make some such decisions in determining what ought to go into policy formation and, at least in part, these rest on epistemological considerations. The alternative is a kind of reductivism which sees policy formulation only in terms of warring interest groups (among them, perhaps, the research communities) in an arena in which 'evidence', 'research', and 'argument' may have residual rhetorical functions, but where even these have lost the legitimacy they might once have had through their association with sound logical considerations.

So, though the territory of policy formation is not unproblematic, there are conversations which we can have about what we might sensibly believe or do in the light of the evidence available and the argument which can be constructed around that evidence. My concern is with understanding the logic of the determination of policy and its relation with these conversations, this evidence, and this argument— and more particularly with when such conversations take their most rigorous form as academic research.

6.2   What is 'Policy'?

Firstly, it is worth noting that policy can operate at all sorts of levels in an educational system, as in any other public service: we can perfectly sensibly talk of national, regional, or local government policy; about the policy of particular institutions or interest groups, such as the UK Confederation of British Industry, the Church of England, Universities UK, or the National Union of Teachers; and about the policy of particular schools or their governing bodies. 'Policy research can be done within institutions or classrooms, as well as within local education authorities or government departments' (Ozga 2000: 2). It perhaps sounds a little strange to speak of the policy of a particular teacher, but only because the most common application of policy is in contexts of collective action.

This last observation is significant in terms of the relationship between research and policy formation. The complaints noted in the opening paragraphs of this chapter are most typically associated with the failures or difficulties in applying research to the macro context of national policymaking, in which research has to have maximal generalisability across diverse situations. The issue of applying research to much more local policymaking—e.g. at school level—is a rather different one. It is possible that small-scale local studies done at the level of the individual school more appropriately inform policy at this level than the larger scale studies which are more typically expected to inform national policy decisions, but the small-scale local study can also reveal something of the insecurity and untrustworthiness of larger scale prescriptions. Equally significantly, as Ozga suggests, engaging with policy at the local level in this way 'contributes to the democratic project in education' through the creation of an informed, active

citizenry (Ozga 2000: 2). These are issues which are explored more fully in papers by Elliott and Lukes (2009) and by Griffiths and McLeod (2009).

Secondly, it is worth asking: what is the status of 'policy' and how and where is it to be observed? If we take examples of policies such as those related to widening participation in higher education, developing nursery school provision for all, or bringing children with special needs into mainstream education, we can see that policy can be conceived of as a relatively systematic and sustained set of intentions or 'statements of prescriptive intent' as Kogan defined it (Kogan 1975: 55). McLaughlin captures the same elements when he describes educational policy as 'a detailed prescription for action aimed at the preservation or alteration of educational institutions or practices' (McLaughlin 2000: 442). In this sense, policy is intimately associated with human agency, albeit that it may be the agency of human beings operating collectively, for example as a political party, a local authority, a charitable organisation, or a school community. Like other forms of human intentionality, it is typically revealed in what people say and in what they do; and, as in other forms of human agency, there is not uncommonly a gap between the intentions revealed by what people say and those revealed by what they do. For the sake of simplicity, this chapter will focus on examples of policy expressed in what people say, i.e. in explicit statements of various kinds.

6.3   The Logical and Rhetorical Standing of Policy Statements

Different formulations of policy have different logical, rhetorical, and functional standing.[2]

For example, we might distinguish between the function of policy statements in:

  (i) Expressing collective intentions and providing aims, aspirations
      'My government will extend access to higher education to all those who have the ability to benefit from it independently of considerations of ethnicity, gender, or social background'
      'This school is committed to involving parents as partners in the education of their children'
 (ii) Making rhetorical rallying calls
      'No child left behind'
      'We must educate our masters'
      'Education without boundaries'

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[2]McLaughlin drew a different set of distinctions from those which we employ here when he wrote of the different 'languages' of policy debate, which he labelled roughly as official, professional, research, and popular (McLaughlin 1999: 37–38). The distinctions I have observed cut across these and can be drawn in each of these contexts in one way or another.

(iii)   Providing rules which others have to follow or describing behaviours that others have to perform

'Phonics methods of teaching reading will be employed in all schools at Key Stage 1'

'At least 60% of initial teacher training should take place in schools'

(iv)   Indicating outcomes which have to be achieved (while leaving it open as to how)

'Universal primary education by the year 2015'

'50% participation in higher education by 2010'

'90% with at least 5 GCSE passes'.

What is important in this context is that these different functions of policy make different demands on their evidence base. The first pair of statements are primarily normative in character, and while research into, for example, the economic importance of a large graduate workforce may underlie the first statement and research indicating the value of engaging parents as partners might well lie behind the second, neither actually requires research support (or, at least, research of an empirical kind), since they are both essentially affirmations of certain things as being of value or importance. Such normative judgments are, indeed, explicitly or implicitly central to all policy formation, and this feature of policy raises questions as to the extent to which policy can be informed by empirical research and questions of the kind of inquiry which can serve the intelligent formulation of policy thus conceived.

Similarly, it is difficult to see, for example, what empirical evidence might either confirm or upset the rhetoric of 'no child left behind' (though a bit of elementary conceptual examination might reveal its emptiness). These are essentially exhortations which have no real truth value and therefore are not open to scrutiny against an evidential base.

The third set of examples take the form of imperatives, which again have strictly no truth value, though it is easy to see how one might (and should) in each case ask 'why?' Indeed, it is in particular this kind of policy statement which one might expect to be supported by an evidence base that indicated the benefits which would accrue from—in these examples—using phonics to teach reading, though agreement on a policy to improve the literacy scores of 11 year-olds by 10% may require little more than a level of political determination, linked perhaps to evidence that this is not a totally unrealistic aspiration. Agreement to require that this should be achieved through the universal adoption of a particular practice would require a very different level and kind of evidence.

The fourth set of examples (expressed as goals or targets to be achieved) once again provides rather limited scope for research as to the rightness of the goals themselves (though there may be a case for some empirical investigation of their realism), although they invite research into how they might best be achieved. Faced with targets for widening participation in higher education in the UK, for example, the HEFCE-funded programme, AimHigher, launched a large programme of initiatives accompanied by packages of research and evaluation aimed at finding out

what sort of interventions make an impact on the participation of non-traditional entrants in higher education.

In short, then, we have to observe that there are different forms of expression of 'policy', some of which are largely or entirely expressions of values and others which may invite (though they do not necessarily rest entirely upon) empirical investigation of one kind or another. The chapter will return to look at elements of some of these policy decisions in more detail, but first let us turn briefly in the direction of the processes of policymaking.

6.4   The Process of Policymaking

There is a substantial literature which focuses on the actual processes of policy decision- making and which combines a certain amount of empirical research into how people make policy with a level of prescription about the logical—perhaps rational—pathways which such policymaking *should* follow. (See, for example, the contrasting approaches of Simon 1960; Lindblom 1968, 1959, 1979; Finch 1986; Stewart Howe 1986.) These processes range from, for example, a model which supposes that policy is expressed through a statement of 'mission' translated into objectives and thence into actions and outcomes (a model which has become almost *de rigueur* in public service institutions including universities) to a more pragmatic approach which sees policy as emanating from perceived problems in particular situated and ongoing sets of practice (see, for example, Pratt 1999, 2000).[3] This contrast is sometimes expressed in terms of 'rationalist' and 'incrementalist' models of policy formation (Lindblom 1968)—and these models clearly carry different implications for the way in which research-based knowledge might feed into the process, but this may not necessarily mean that they actually require different knowledge.

There is more to be said than I shall enter into here about the relationship between different conceptions of the nature of the judgment which is involved in policymaking and the nature of the knowledge which appropriately informs such judgment. I propose for the purposes of this discussion to bypass the issue of the actual *process* of decision-making as a description or prescription of the recommended steps or sequence, on the grounds that whichever process is employed there is still—at some stage[4]—a similar requirement both for normative orientation and

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[3]'By starting with the problems which policies are trying to solve, by testing policies as we would a hypothesis, by formulating alternative problems and alternative solutions, and by examining the outcomes, intended or not, a realist approach to policymaking and policy analysis can offer the hope of improvement' (Pratt 2000: 146).

[4]Furlong and White (2001), for example, describe a three-stage model which includes: (i) policy planning—putting issues on the agenda, helping policymakers recognise their current and future information requirements, and reviewing what is already known; (ii) policy development—piloting new initiatives, developing specialised policy instruments, and developing specialised curriculum materials; and (iii) evaluation—finding out what worked and what did not, and linking past experience to future planning.

empirical evidence. In all cases policy formulation is essentially a matter of deciding[5] what ought to be done. However one goes about making such a decision, whatever the preferred sequence, the epistemological requirements are constant, even if there will inevitably be debate about what these requirements are. The methods of decision-making follow from the epistemological requirements of the decision, not the other way round. Thus, if situational understanding (or under-standing of a particular situation) is a requirement for intelligent decision-making, then we need to find an approach to decision-making which can engage such understanding. If 'hard scientific evidence' is a requirement, then we need to find an approach which enables us to incorporate such evidence. This is the direction of the argument—and it is for this reason that this chapter focuses on the epistemological requirements—on the components of policy decisions themselves—before engag-ing in consideration of decision-making processes.

6.5   The Components of Policy Decisions

We need to look at the components of policy decisions themselves—not least because part of the disappointment of educational researchers with respect to the take-up of their research in policy circles is the result of researchers' underesti-mation of the things which (quite legitimately) count in such decisions; and part of the disappointment of the commissioners of research with the information they get from researchers is that they underestimate the of considerations which researchers need to investigate (and which need to be part of the commissioning process) if the research is to provide a solid basis for policy. One of the warnings to educational researchers emerging from a British Educational Research Association (BERA) colloquium on Educational Research and Policy Across the UK was that: 're-searchers need to recognise that policy is shaped by many often conflicting interests and pressures so that even the "hardest" evidence can only be part of the shaping. It cannot be expected that policy will be necessarily read off from even the most rigorously conducted research because political considerations in today's world are always powerful' (BERA 2002: 9). Of course, this is an important caution, but the problem of the insufficiency of research is not just about its failure to take into account more narrowly political considerations (if it does indeed omit these). The problem lies often in a research brief which simply does not extend to all the information that will be needed by someone who has to decide what to do.

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[5]Although I use the language of decision, I readily recognise that policy does not necessarily proceed on the basis of discrete and direction-making decisions. I am sympathetic to the incre-mentalist approach on this matter. As Finch explains: 'The incrementalist model emphasizes that there are seldom specific "decisions" taken by a clearly defined set of actors choosing between alternatives'. Rather 'change occurs cumulatively through a series of small scale decisions' (Finch 1986: 150).

Suppose, for example, a government minister received a research report that indicated persuasively that children learned a foreign language much more effectively through having intense programmes outside the normal school timetable than through the traditional extended timetabled course. Suppose, too, that systematic research reviews lent support to this conclusion. Is this a sufficient basis for it to become government policy to shift the teaching of languages into this sort of delivery system?

Clearly not. Among the many (arguably legitimate) considerations which would have to be taken into account before that conclusion could be reached are the following:[6]

- What would be the additional cost of such a change—and what analysis might be made of the cost/benefit relationship? Are there less complicated ways of achieving a similar or better cost-to-benefit ratio?
- How well equipped are teachers to reorientate themselves to this kind of approach? What resistance might there be from teachers—and what might be the political cost of dealing with such resistance?
- What would be the teacher-training requirements for such a change? What would these cost and how quickly could they be put in place?
- What are the plant utilisation implications of such a change? And the costs associated with these?
- What are the implications for parents—and especially for parents at work? How acceptable would such a change be to parents? What might be the political cost and benefit of carrying forward such a change?
- Are languages the only subject which might benefit from this approach? If not, then what are the arguments for treating languages in this way and not other subjects?
- The research compares two alternatives—are there other options which ought to be considered?

Add to all this the further set of problems identified by the US National Research Council:

> Rarely, if ever, does an education intervention—one important focus of study in the broader domain of education research—have only one main effect. Both positive and negative unintended consequences are often important … Education interventions have costs—in money, time, and effort: making a judgment on the effectiveness of a treatment is complex and requires taking account of myriad factors. (Shavelson and Towne 2002: 7)

The question that the original research addressed is, in this example, a relatively pragmatic one: do students learn a foreign language better under one organisational structure or another? The points above indicate that *either* the research needs to be

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[6]Saunders calls for more 'thick description' of what goes into the policymaking process (Saunders 2004). While welcoming such empirical investigation I am attempting something different here in suggesting the kinds of considerations which in a sense have to go into, or properly belong in, a considered determination of policy.

much more wide- ranging (more wide-ranging than educational research conventionally is) in order to provide a sufficient basis for policy *or* it will be insufficient to provide a sound basis for policy determination.

Unsurprisingly in these circumstances, those responsible for policy may well take a view which is different from the direction in which the research points. A good deal of writing about educational research and policy bemoans this gap between research and policy. It follows that the understanding which *should logically* inform policy depends appropriately on a considerably wider set of considerations than is conventionally covered by educational research, including matters to do with, for example, the level of political support for, or the political cost of, a particular policy. The fact that politicians draw upon such considerations is not necessarily a matter of political obduracy but of a proper understanding of the logical and epistemological considerations which need to inform political judgment.

There are three possible responses for educational researchers and research commissioners to this sort of analysis of the ingredients of educational policy-making decisions:

(i)   They could take the line that this demonstrates that many of these ingredients fall outside the scope of educational research and that educational research can only ever make a limited contribution to such policymaking. Policymakers will need to join the outcomes of educational research with other sources of intelligence provided, for example, by companies who conduct focus group sessions or public opinion surveys.

(ii) They could take the view that educational research and researchers need to be capable of engaging with all the elements of educational policymaking decisions and that, for example, the assessment of public opinion and the political costs and benefits of proceeding with a particular policy ought to be part of the competence required of educational policy researchers.

(iii) They could take the view that this sort of analysis of the elements of educational policymaking indicates the need for more narrowly educational researchers to work in multidisciplinary teams with e.g. political scientists and people who run public opinion surveys, as well as experts on costing.

Each of these responses seems to be possible and coherent. Which is best depends in part on whom one considers best equipped to carry out the variety of tasks which, on this analysis, are involved in policy decisions. The problems in moving from research evidence to policy do not end there, however. Let us suppose that the research community has anticipated all the sorts of requirements indicated above and gathered all the necessary evidence. Can we or policymakers now confidently derive from this evidence a view of what they should do?

Hammersley (2002) notes a number of limits to what, even in these circumstances, research can supply. These are especially pertinent here because they relate to *epistemological* features of research in relation to practice. His warnings deserve more detailed attention, but in this context let us just note some of the main points (slightly reordered).

First, researchers themselves will recognise that there is an inherent fallibility to their findings. Natural science and *a fortiori* social science-based knowledge can only be accepted provisionally and pending further enquiry. There are always elements of uncertainty and corrigibility and the possibility of human error, which put such knowledge on a continuum with everyday opinion, not on an entirely different plane. 'Common sense' has a place in policy deliberation alongside academic research, and there may be entirely legitimate reasons for deferring to the former rather than the latter in particular circumstances.

This in turn reinforces a second point which is to do with the relationship between the level of evidence required and the risk attached to acting upon it—what Hammersley calls the 'acceptability threshold'. Simply, if research indicates a course of action that we can readily undertake with relatively little risk and which, perhaps, we can reverse quickly if things do not work out, then the level of evidence that we shall require will be less than we shall require if the recommendation is going to use up all our political and financial capital and if having taken the path suggested there is no going back. 'There will often be a mismatch between what the two groups [researchers and practitioners] treat as valid knowledge, *and with good reason'* (Hammersley 2002: 43, his italics).

Third—and this is illustrated by our example above—particular research studies tend to be focused on single issues, whereas practitioners (and *a fortiori* policy-makers) have to take a wider range of considerations into account in taking decisions. (One might hope, for example, that they are looking at the interaction and coherence of different policy decisions.) 'The perspectives of practitioners typically cover a broader range of considerations than the researcher focuses on, many of which will have to be taken into account in deciding how best to act on particular occasions … Researchers are not able to supply practitioners with a replacement perspective, nor able to recommend a ready-made solution to their problems solely on the basis of research' (Hammersley 2002: 44).

Fourth, 'knowledge produced by research is usually general in character, and inference from it to conclusions about the particular situations in which practitioners operate is problematic' (Hammersley 2002: 44). Of course it is precisely this consideration (among others) which led to the development of classroom action research conceived of as the testing within the particular classroom of hypotheses drawn either from the wider theoretical and research literature or from practitioners' own professional beliefs.

Fifth, the meaning and significance of any particular piece of research for policy or practice is not unequivocal:

> Even in factual terms every research report is open to multiple, more or less reasonable, interpretations and usually is interpreted in different ways by different people. It is not necessary to go to Derridean extremes about the 'dissemination' of meaning to recognise that there is a sense in which readers construct the meaning of any research report and may do so in diverse ways. (Hammersley 2002: 46)

There is a final point which Hammersley makes about the question of the insufficiency of research which I want to discuss more fully. He properly draws

attention to what one might call the normative gap between what empirical research can provide and what is required if one is required to decide what one ought to do, or, as he puts it, 'the relative autonomy of value conclusions from the factual knowledge that research provides' (Hammersley 2002: 45). I readily acknowledge this point, but feel there is more to be said than Hammersley allows here about the contribution which research, more broadly conceived, can contribute to bridging this gap. I shall explore this issue more fully in the next section.

6.6   The Normative Basis of Research and Policy

> Education … has some particular characteristics that affect the role that research can play. It is a value laden activity, inextricably connected to our broader aspirations for society. (Levin 2004: 2)

> Education is at least partly about the overall aims that society has for itself and how these aims are realised in practice. It cannot, therefore, be a neutral technical exercise, but is invariably a deeply ethical, political and cultural one bound up with ideas about the good society and how life can be worthwhile. (Winch and Gingell 2004: Preface)

Normative considerations are inseparable from educational choices, and educational policy: policy statements, even if they are no more than exhortations, are emphatically about either the sorts of ends which are desirable in themselves (in general or in a particular setting) or the sorts of actions which are likely to serve the ends which are desirable.

No-one needs to apologise for this: this is what policy is. These values may play some different roles in policy statements. For example:

- They may be expressed as the categorical endorsement of certain moral or social principles: 'our educational policy will be founded on the principle that all children will have access to a high-quality education till the age of 16 independently of considerations of race, gender, social class, or accidents of geography'; 'we shall acknowledge parents' inalienable right to bring up their children in accordance with the moral and religious beliefs of their community'.
- They may be expressed as slightly more specifically educational principles: 'we shall seek to encourage in our pupils' critical and independent thinking'.
- They may be expressed somewhat less explicitly, for example, in promoting practice which is explicitly or implicitly seen as advancing such principles: 'we shall use discussion rather than instruction as the primary form of teaching and learning in our classrooms'; 'we shall support the maintenance and development of faith schools'; 'we shall provide summer schools designed to enable children from ethnic minority communities to have some experience of higher education'.
- They may be almost totally concealed: 'all children will be subject to national tests on an annual basis' (where such a proposition is linked e.g. to a commitment to accountability to parents, to a belief that this is the way to raise the

performance of the least able, or to reduce gender differences in performance, or whatever); 'we shall reinstate *Peter and Jane* as the standard text for the teaching of reading in all schools' (where this is linked e.g. to a desire to restore traditional family values).

The first point to make here is that all educational propositions and policies have some normative—some might say ideological—framing or foundation. Kogan writes of policy as a matter of 'the authoritative allocation of values' (Kogan 1975: 55), and Ball notes that 'policies are the operational statements of values' (Ball 1990: 3). This normative framing may be discovered in the intentions of whoever promotes the policy; it may lie in an evaluation of the observable consequences of the policy; it may be discovered in the various readings of the policy which different stakeholders can provide. In other words, the 'normative framework' is open to interpretation, construction, and reconstruction.

Part of the problem is that politicians and policymakers tend to employ such norms rather crudely, even if they do so explicitly at all. Some of the time they employ them in a rather sloganistic way in the hope of signalling their ideological credentials ('roll back the power of the state'; 'no child left behind'); at other times, however, they try to present educational policies as if they were purely pragmatic, simply a matter of 'common sense' concerned with 'what works'. As Saunders explains, 'One of the ostensible virtues of evidence-based education is that it is free of ideology, of pre-determined positions' (Saunders 2004: 3)—but can any research live up to this claim? Saunders goes on to suggest that in the 'what works' discourse, 'value positions disappear from sight as if by sleight of hand' (Saunders 2004: 8). This is evident in a call for research proposals from no less a body than the US Institute of Education Sciences (IES 2013). The IES declares that:

> Education has always produced new ideas, new innovations, and new approaches, but only appropriate empirical evaluation can identify those that are in fact improvements. Taken together, work across the various goals [of the call for proposals] should not only yield information about the practical benefits and the effects of specific interventions on education outcomes but also contribute to the bigger picture of scientific knowledge and theory on learning, instruction, and education systems. (IES 2013: 11)

The idea that what might count as an 'improvement' in educational approaches or as 'benefits' can be settled only by 'empirical evaluation' (whatever that is) is an astonishing one from such a source.

Researchers, by contrast, have an irresistible urge to expose, critique, interpret, reinterpret, construct, and deconstruct the normative assumptions of policy—to ask what might count as working and not (just) to ask what works. It is surely appropriate, as Whitty has argued, that a research-based profession 'should be informed by research that questions prevailing assumptions—and considers such questions as whether an activity is a worthwhile endeavour in the first place and what constitutes socially just schooling' (Whitty 2006: 162).

The problem becomes more complex, however. Just as politicians and policymakers quite legitimately approach their business within a normative framework of values, many researchers would acknowledge that they inevitably do the same.

Minimally these may include ethical obligations to different kinds of participants in their research and to their colleagues in the research team; they will also extend to the kind of principles of truthfulness, honesty, reflexivity, and criticality which are a *sine qua non* of research endeavour. More strongly, where researchers embrace an explicit ethical, social, or political commitment, they may see themselves as having obligations to work for, for example, social justice or the empowerment of women through the very activity of their research—seeking to give voice to those who have not been heard in the conventional political processes; to democratise relationships in the organisational and political structures which they are entering; to challenge rather than to add legitimacy to the power structures over which the policymakers preside; 'to speak truth to power' (Griffiths 1998; Tierney 1994; Gitlin and Russell 1994). The ideological debates about educational policy become entangled with ideological debates about the character of educational research to the point that, as Levin observes, 'Many disagreements about educational research are actually differences over the substance of education policy' (Levin 2004: 2).

The educational research community might divide fairly sharply in terms of how it thinks it should deal with the actual or potential normative and political dimension of research engagement. Some might claim that normative and political engagement is inappropriate for a researcher—a crossing of a line delimiting properly empirical enquiry. A 2003 BERA symposium on research and policy described such a 'fine line', which researchers crossed at some peril. Munn explained that 'where research spills over into advocacy an important boundary has been crossed' and she warned against researchers 'arguing for the desirable' (Munn 2005: 24). Others, however, regard such engagement as both an appropriate and an inescapable feature of educational research (as significant when a researcher attempts to ignore it as when a researcher consciously seeks to adopt a political stance). Ozga is among those who argue for a very tight link between policy research and political intervention, defining educational policy research as 'an informed, independent contestation of policy by a research community of teachers and academics who have together developed capacities that allow them to speak with authority against a misguided, mistaken and unjust educational policy' (Ozga 2000: 1; see also Griffiths 1998 in her significantly entitled book *Educational research for social justice*).

Whichever position one adopts, educational research needs to be knitted together with the normative questions if it is to issue in policy. Even on a weaker analysis of the connection between research, normativity, and politics, there seems to be an epistemological requirement for a dialogue between researchers and policymakers around the normative issues rather than an attempt somehow to sanitise the research from such considerations. 'What works is a matter of discussion and debate, not simply of data; what works is a value statement not simply an empirical statement …' (Morrison 2001: 77).

Many researchers treat these normative considerations as matters which are open to portrayal or representation through research, but not as ones which research can help policymakers to resolve in any sense. Even though Munn suggests that 'we need to engage with values issues and with … the why questions as well as the what

questions in policy research' (Munn 2005: 23), her approach to such engagement is still an essentially descriptive one focused on understanding the underlying value assumptions, rather than one which can issue in anything to recommend (unless in conditional terms). The world of educational policy research is heavily dominated by people who bring a sociological perspective to their inquiry. The observation that an 'authoritative allocation of values' is at the centre of policy readily invites the questions: whose values? Whose interests are advanced and how? And these in turn draw attention to what Prunty has referred to as 'the centrality of power and control in the concept of policy' (Prunty 1985: 136). Nothing I go on to say is intended to diminish the importance of this perspective. However, empirical and analytic sociological work does not tell us what we *ought* to do. Critical sociology might point in this direction, but only in so far as it has a declared or assumed normative position. Ball, for example, is at pains to declare his normative position in his 'policy sociology' (Ball 1990) and this, along with his empirical data, provides a basis for something closer to policy prescription (at least by implication from the critique).

One can, of course, subject the normative elements of educational policy to all sorts of descriptive and analytic treatments, although again these all fall short of anything which might lead to prescription:

- historical analysis (how have these policies evolved over the years?)
- political analysis (what political interests do they serve? Through what power structures are they maintained?)
- discourse analysis (what is revealed about the underlying normative framework through an analysis of the language employed?)
- phenomenological inquiry (how are these or other values experienced by those whose lives they affect?)
- ethnographic enquiry (what can be revealed about these values by observation of the communities in which they are cultivated—by the rituals, symbols, behaviours, and practices of these communities?)

All of this is possible. However, in so far as one might wonder whether a policy is the *right* policy, none of this research would actually address the central normative question. Hammersley emphasises rightly 'the relative autonomy of value conclusions' from the factual knowledge which he says research provides, and he infers from this that research is severely limited in what it can contribute towards the solution of practical problems concerning what ought to be done. This is true so long as one regards research as providing only empirical evidence. However, as Davis points out, once one shifts the focus of one's enquiry from 'methods that work' to 'morally or educationally defensible principles', then 'these principles would not appeal to empirical evidence. They would rely instead on the reasoning peculiar to ethics, politics and educational philosophy' (Davis 1999: 400). It follows that if one embraces these disciplines within the portfolio of educational research, then additional possibilities are opened up to those that are offered by more restricted empirical enquiry.

Speaking about the way in which the Nuffield Review of 14–19 Education tackled these expressly normative questions, Pring described a process that was rooted in widespread opinion but which then exposed that opinion to a process of critique:

> In pursuing, therefore, an understanding of the overall aim of education in order to shape the review, the Review has solicited judgements, views or considered opinions very widely. The quality of those views does not matter. If they exist and are shaping practice then they deserve serious consideration. … The starting point (those judgements, views or opinions from many sources) is not what matters, but the process of criticism through which one progresses from those starting points. Such views have to be clearly articulated, opened to critical scrutiny, redrafted in the light of such criticism and challenged by evidence … (Pring 2006: 10)

What form might such critique take? It might be worth indicating in conclusion at least the following possibilities for the treatment of values and norms in educational policy.

Firstly, one might ask: are the normative principles underlying any particular policy actually rendered in explicit, or at least intelligible, form? Part of White's critique of the UK national curriculum, for example, was directed against its failure to explain the educational values or aims from which it was derived (White 2007).

Secondly, one might ask: are they in any sense justified? Is there a coherent rationale for them, which perhaps links them to a view of human nature, of societal good, or of human flourishing? Again White's (2007) *Impact* pamphlet, one of a series aimed precisely at demonstrating the contribution which philosophy can make to educational policy, is an illustration of the way in which a rationale can be developed that makes a reasoned connection between certain fundamental values and educational policy even if it cannot in the end demonstrate conclusively why one should subscribe to those values.

Thirdly, one can ask whether the normative principles that are acknowledged are internally consistent and coherent, what is the nature of any conflicts between these principles, and how conflicts between different *desiderata* are or can be resolved.

Fourthly, one can ask whether the acknowledged normative principles are consistent with the actions which are recommended or with those taken under the same policy framework. Arguably, these questions indicate what might be regarded as necessary conditions for the rationality of an educational policy even if they are not sufficient conditions for getting it entirely right. In other words if policy cannot pass these critical tests it is arguably ill-prepared, but even a policy that can pass them is not guaranteed by that criterion alone to be the right policy. Such criteria do indicate, however, some work of a philosophical and ethical nature which the research community might contribute to policy debate alongside its more traditional empirical and critical contributions. Good judgment and sound belief are supported not just by appropriate evidence: they also require attention to reasons and what Phillips (2007) refers to as 'intelligent argumentation'—and there is scope for this

around the normativity which is central to educational policy as well as the empirical evidence.[7]

6.7   The Use—and Abuse—of Educational Research

This chapter has so far broadly assumed policymaking to be a relatively honest process through which people of good will, albeit with legitimate political interests, are using research to make as nearly as possible the best-informed and wisest policy decisions. This is perhaps a little naïve, although I still think that it is worth setting out what this might involve. In a paper appropriately titled 'Education(al) research and education policy in an imperfect world', Whitty and Wisby (2016) describe a rather disturbing number of occasions in the UK when government has, to put it at its kindest, 'misread' research in a way that enabled the government to claim its support for their policies or ignored what undermined its claims to success. The occasions included research used to support government's introduction of specialist schools (Goldstein 2001); research challenging the claim that the introduction of school academies independent of local education authorities enhanced children's achievement (Gorard 2005); research that challenged government claims in relation to the evidence provided by the 2005 National Curriculum Key Stage 2 performance data (Mansell 2005); Ofsted's misleading presentation of inspection data on school-based teacher training (Maddern 2013); and the then Secretary of State Michael Gove's (and Ofsted's) 'less than robust use of international data to denigrate the performance of England's education system in comparison to that of other countries' (Whitty and Wisby 2016: 13)—a misuse that earned the Secretary of State a rebuke by the UK Statistics Authority. And so it goes on.

The simple fact is that educational research can be used to help develop intelligent, well-informed, carefully examined and evaluated policies; or it can be used to provide a spurious justification for policies that are none of these things. This is why we need a critically engaged research community, a high level of public scrutiny (bravo to the UK Statistics Agency and to the Parliamentary Select Committees) and an informed citizenry capable of distinguishing responsible use from irresponsible abuse of research.

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[7]Winch and Gingell's (2004) book *Philosophy and educational policy: A critical introduction* provides a good example of this sort of argumentation around a number of contemporary policy issues, although I am not assuming that such argumentation is the exclusive privilege of philosophers. See also, for example, Whitty (2002), *Making sense of education policy*, which draws more heavily on sociological studies but is by no means limited to the reporting of empirical evidence. 'The modesty of philosophy,' suggested McLaughlin 'must extend both to an acknowledgement that its contribution to educational policy is a partial one, and to its acceptance that its contribution must be offered in relation and dialogue with other reflective and critical resources and with the contingencies of circumstance and practice' (McLaughlin 2000: 443).

6.8 The Picture So Far

This chapter has offered a perspective on the relationship between educational research, widely interpreted, and policy from a philosophical—in this case primarily an epistemological—perspective. In this sense it is an example of philosophizing *about* educational research. But it also begins to identify substantive issues within education policy —especially concerning the norms and values that give direction to policy—that invite philosophical treatment. This moves us in the direction of philosophical work as in the mix of research which is engaging with policy, of philosophy *in* educational research.

In the next section of the book I take this second direction and focus more closely on the place of philosophy of education in the wider educational research community, and on ways in which philosophy of education engages with the practice of educational research.

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Part III
Philosophy and Educational Research

Chapter 7
Philosophising About, As, and in Educational Research

Abstract This part of the book moves from general consideration about educational research to the more specific contributions that philosophy of education can make to the research community. This particular chapter is organised around three different relationships between philosophy and educational research more generally. First it discusses philosophising about educational research, which one might regard as a subspecies of philosophy of social science. Philosophy has a major role in contributing to debates about the epistemological standing of different forms of inquiry, about methodological issues, and hence about methods. It provides an underpinning to debates about research ethics and about the social and political principles that should underpin educational research. Second, philosophical inquiry and philosophical scholarship are themselves among the constituents of educational research. Philosophising about education is itself a form of educational research. Third, I consider in a separate chapter (Chap. 10) the role of philosophy, or the philosopher, in an educational research team, in an interdisciplinary inquiry.

7.1 Introduction

As Chap. 2 has described, there was a period in the UK and elsewhere in which philosophy of education was clearly recognised as one of the foundation disciplines of education to which, for example, all students in teacher education programmes should be introduced. But that chapter also described some of the ways in which this structuring of educational thought and inquiry was eroded in the 1980s and into the 1990s. By the mid-1990s a gulf had developed between the philosophy of education community and the mainstream research community represented, for example, by those participating in the annual conference of the British Educational Research Association (BERA). Philosophers of education and philosophy of education were almost totally invisible at these events, and it was not surprising that

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This chapter draws on material from Bridges, D. (1997) Philosophy and educational research: A reconsideration of epistemological boundaries, *Cambridge Journal of Education*, 27(2), 177–189.

educational researchers assumed its early demise, even if it was simultaneously demonstrating some vigour in the separate conferences of the Philosophy of Education Society of Great Britain and elsewhere.

Observing this, in 1996 Wilf Carr, Morwenna Griffiths, and I (who were among rather few philosophers who also attended BERA at that time) convened a very well-attended symposium at BERA on the theme of Philosophy and Educational Research. This provided a platform for the establishment of a Philosophy of Education Special Interest Group in BERA, later followed by my convening with Dieter Lenzen of a philosophy of education network in the European Education Research Association and also by a special issue of the *Cambridge Journal of Education* (volume 27 number 2, 1997) on the same theme. The chapter that follows draws on an introductory paper I wrote for that special issue, which was the springboard for the sustained interest in the theme reflected throughout this book.

So, in this section we move from general considerations about educational research and theory, and their relationship with practice and policy, to different facets of the role of philosophy of education in this field. It is helpful, I think, to distinguish three sets of relationships between philosophy and educational research.

Firstly, there is the role of philosophy in addressing in particular the epistemological and ethical underpinnings of that research—*philosophising about educational research*. This is the traditional role which philosophy exercises in relation to other fields of enquiry, as in philosophy of science and philosophy of history, although, in practice, epistemological considerations about the nature of knowledge claims in these areas have tended to dominate the philosophical literature, whereas in educational research I would judge that the ethical issues have been at least as prominent.

Secondly, there is the sense in which philosophising about education itself (the products of which are to be found, for example, in the pages of the *Journal of Philosophy of Education* or *Educational Philosophy and Theory*) constitutes a form of educational research— *philosophising as educational research*.

Thirdly, there is the role of philosophy in the process of empirical research—*philosophising in educational research*, and in particular in the context of expressly interdisciplinary projects. This theme will be explored in Chap. 10.

7.2 Philosophising About Educational Research

Carr observed succinctly in a paper presented at a BERA/ECER conference roundtable in September 1995:

> Research … always conveys a commitment to philosophical beliefs even if this is unintended and even though it remains implicit and unacknowledged … [Researchers] cannot evade the responsibility for critically examining and justifying the philosophical ideas that their enquiries incorporate. It follows that philosophical reflection and argumentation are central features of the methods and procedures of educational research. (Carr 1995: 1)

Many researchers who would not necessarily identify themselves as philosophers are, of course, perfectly alert to these methodological issues and their philosophical underpinnings. Guba and Lincoln (1994), for example, construct their very notion of a research paradigm in terms of three areas—epistemology, ontology, and methodology—of which the first two are unequivocally philosophical. The growth of 'qualitative' research methodologies in educational research circles has, for example, itself rested on epistemological challenges to: the naive empiricism and behaviourism which has been applied to social research and human interaction; traditional notions of validity; positivistic constructs of reality; conventional views of the way in which inferences may be drawn between the particular and the general; and the perceived gendering of particular research styles. In the field of ethics, the same developments have represented challenges to conventional definitions of the relationship between researcher and researched and to conventional views about the ownership of research data and who is entitled to access to it or protection from its exposure.

This area of development alone offers an enormously fertile field for philosophical engagement—and the chapters in this book represent essays within this genre; the chapters are, for the most part, philosophical essays *about* research. In the past I have complained that too few of those who might be identified as philosophers of education have actually chosen to engage with these issues of relevance to the mainstream research community (Bridges 1995, 1998) and that some of those who have entered the field from an empirical research background have done less than justice to, for example, the subtle and complex history of philosophical writing in both ethics and epistemology.

I am concerned, too, that researchers who have clearly recognised the fundamental importance of the philosophical questions underlying education and educational research have not always recognised them *as* philosophical. Ranson, for example, in a report to the UK Economic and Social Research Council under the title 'The future of education research: Learning at the centre', argued that:

> The transformations of our time are altering the structure of experience and the powers and capacities needed to live in a post-modern world. The changes raise deep questions for education and for the polity in general about: what is it to be a person? … Is there such a thing as society and what is it? … What should be the nature of the polity? (Ranson 1996: 11)

While I can readily endorse the importance of the 'deep questions' which Ranson identifies, I have, too, to observe the oddity of the assumption that these questions are peculiarly the product of the postmodern world and the writer's apparent failure to observe 2000 years of philosophical literature dedicated to precisely such questions as these.

The failure of awareness and communication is, however a problem for which the philosophical or philosophy of education community has to accept its share of the blame. Philosophers of education have been slow to acknowledge and engage with the philosophical sophistication of some of the mainstream 'research' writing, particularly perhaps, that which draws from US pragmatism and constructivism and

that continental European tradition in which the Anglo-Saxon boundaries between sociology, politics, and philosophy are routinely transgressed. Too often, when philosophers do engage with issues to do with educational research, they do so with scant attention to the actual debates and dialogue which are going on within the educational research community itself. The Royal Institute of Philosophy sponsored conference and publication under the title *Philosophers Discuss Education* (Brown 1975) set the disappointing tone for a succession of subsequent essays in the field.

I am of course not the first to have bewailed the absence of mutual recognition between the educational philosophy and educational research communities. In a 1981 response to *Philosophy of Education, the Eightieth Yearbook of the NSSE* in the United States, Rist complained of the absence of any reference in this philosophical writing to research findings which were applicable to the concerns of the authors. 'Those who toil in the vineyard of educational philosophy,' he concluded, 'are unaware of those who are working in the fields of research.' But he hastened to add that 'the absence of familiarity and utilization is not simply one way. The same can be said for those in educational research with respect to their understandings of cogent philosophical issues … The single most important conclusion I come to in reflecting on the evident isolation of the philosophical enterprise from that of the research enterprise is that we are all diminished by the lack of a viable linkage' (Rist 1981: 27). My ambition in this book is to establish some of those linkages and to draw debates which have taken place in the educational research and philosophical communities more closely together.

7.3 Philosophising as Educational Research

There is clearly a political problem here and, I suggest, a more interesting philosophical problem about the nature of research. The political problem, though not perhaps an overwhelming one, is that in many universities, the paradigm of research which is best understood and most powerful is the scientific paradigm, with all its sociocultural baggage of expensive equipment, large scale funding, international teams, and half a page of collaborating authors in *Nature*, as well as its more intrinsic positivistic features of data gathering, hypothesis testing, and replicability. It is easy for research to become defined in terms of this paradigm in a way which makes the work of social scientists look like a poor imitation of 'proper' science and that of the arts faculties including philosophy something which may well be dignified and respected as 'scholarship', but which is a remove from research per se.

This problem has been compounded in the UK (and perhaps elsewhere) by the requirement for the audit of research productivity and the link which is made between research productivity and university finance. When research performance becomes measured by reference to the scale of funding attached to it, in a bizarre inversion of most financial management, subjects like philosophy, history, and literary studies and those who profess them, start to look like poor performers

because they are comparatively cheap! This puts the onus on academics to demonstrate that they are gainfully employed in *research* and to engage in their discipline in ways which generate auditable research products. This is one reason why philosophers of education have become alarmed when their discipline has appeared to be forgotten or rejected in the discourse of educational research. But they have problems too about incorporation in the culture of research audit. Martin McQuillan, head of a university School of Fine Art and Cultural Studies, has put the problem rather nicely:

> Thinking is not auditable. Thinking, the business of university, should be inimical to categorisation, measurement and commodification. Thought should disrupt and transform, opening up new directions in knowledge and experience. How could one audit the work of Socrates, Michelangelo, Blake, Kant or Heidegger? The moment that the articulation of thought is reclassified as 'research' (a 'product' that is auditable) then thought itself is compromised by the conditions under which it can emerge. (McQuillan 2002: 15)

There are two or three alternative moves for philosophers here, which are interesting not just as defensive political moves in a particular academic economy, but for what they reveal about the characteristics of different kinds of philosophical activity:

- to accept that the term 'research' is appropriately attached to the scientific or (in the case of social sciences quasi-scientific) paradigm indicated here and to find a different descriptor for the activities of philosophers (and historians and etc.);
- to advance a somewhat more inclusive but still restrictive definition of research which would include the *evidentially based* work characteristic of historical and literary scholarship and biography and hence a good deal of philosophical writing rooted in the history of ideas or, for example, the sort of philosophical biography that Monk produced of Wittgenstein (Monk 1990). This would, however, leave out most of more strictly philosophical writing;
- to advance an even wider definition of research which would encompass at least some philosophising. Stenhouse defined research as 'systematic and sustained inquiry made public' (Stenhouse 1980).[1] Now most philosophical work could probably meet the first two criteria—i.e. it is systematic (in the sense of being rule governed, for example) and sustained—and it readily satisfies the fourth criterion of being 'made public' through, for example, presentation at a seminar or conference. It is interesting however to consider how far philosophical work represents an 'enquiry'—a condition which I think is properly attached to the nature of research.

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[1]Peters and White employed a very similar account of the use of the term research in academic communities to refer to 'systematic and sustained enquiry carried out by people well versed in some form of thinking in order to answer some specific type of question' (Peters and White 1969: 2). They contrast this with a broader definition employed by Mace, who in his *Psychology of Study* maintained that 'research is, after all, just "search", looking for answers to questions and for solutions to problems' (Mace 1963).

The notion of enquiry—or, as I prefer in this context, inquiry—suggests some initial puzzlement or curiosity, a question which the individual seeks to clarify and answer. Is this something we should reasonably expect to be a characteristic of philosophical research? And if so, would all or only some philosophising qualify?

I realise as I pose this question that it is a difficult one to answer, because it supposes that one may know something at least about how a philosopher went about his or her work. In reports on scientific and social scientific inquiry we conventionally expect to find an account of, and defence of, the methods and methodology employed. We know, or at least have a report of, the approach taken, the research questions which were posed, and, in some conventions of, for example, ethnographic research, the relationship of the researcher to the research project. Some philosophical writing describes or represents a particular methodology—Socratic questioning, Cartesian doubting, or linguistic analysis, for example—but a great deal more leaves it implicit or even invisible. It is certainly not a standard requirement of philosophical writing (in contrast with social science) that the author explains and defends his or her methodology. Indeed, I suspect that many philosophical journal editors would probably wield a thick pen deleting such matter if an author dared to include it. Traditionally, scientific writing renders the researcher artificially invisible. Philosophical writing tends to take this a stage further and render even the research process invisible (although, as this book illustrates, it is accepting of the use of the first person in the presentation of argument). One curious consequence is that, of course, we have relatively little public evidence of the way in which philosophers go about their business; we have, rather, the fruits of that business (a consideration that prompted the reflective process described in Chap. 11).

Now the actual products of philosophical work provide a very mixed picture of the extent to which the producer was indeed engaged in an inquiry. Commonly they take the form either of a critical attack on a previous writer, or an attempt to advance and defend a point of view held by the author, or some combination of the two. Occasionally the author will place the question or point of curiosity in the centre, but this is by no means a requirement or expectation of philosophical writing, which in some of its more declamatory forms can come across as the product not of a humble inquirer after truth (or whatever passes as the alternative in a postmodern age) but of a somewhat arrogant holder of the truth, a knower rather than a seeker after knowledge. It is interesting, for example, to contrast the very assertive character of Wittgenstein's philosophical writing with the agonising picture of the process of its construction which can be gleaned from biographical accounts. For postmodern scholars any text is in any case a piece of polemic, so that for Foucault, for example, the goal is 'to incite us to listen to a different claim rather than to accept the findings of an argument … to excite in the reader the experience of discord between the social construction of normality and that which does not fit neatly within the frame of these constructs' (Connolly 1985: 368). The result can have at least the outward appearance of unargued, un-self-critical polemic, whatever its thought-provoking merits. By contrast, as Stenhouse argued, 'inquiry counts as research to the extent that it is systematic, but even more to the extent that it can claim to be conscientiously self-critical' (Stenhouse 1980: 9).

In terms of Stenhouse's initial definition of research, then, we are faced with a situation in which the conventions of philosophical writing would require us either to conclude that we can rarely know whether or not philosophers have been engaged in research, because their actual works give us few clues as to the nature of the processes—the methodology perhaps— which led to their production or, perhaps more sensibly, to give them all the benefit of the doubt and to suppose that anyone who has taken the trouble to produce a piece of philosophical writing, whatever its stylistic form, has thereby shown evidence of the sort of 'systematic, sustained enquiry made public' which characterises any research activity.

Thus far I have explored a role for philosophy as a kind of meta-discourse to educational research examining, for example, its epistemological foundations and guiding ethical principles Then I have discussed the sense in which or conditions under which philosophising might be thought of a form of educational research in its own right. I shall extend this discussion by considering next some of the ways in which philosophy makes a direct and, as it were, first order contribution to educational research in its own right. I shall explore this question under three headings: (i) conceptual clarification and educational research; (ii) the logic and the psychology of the development of theory; and (iii) dissolving the empirical/philosophical divide.

7.4 Conceptual Clarification and Educational Research

Philosophy of education in the UK and in many parts of the English-speaking world in the 1960s and early 1970s became almost exclusively associated with the school of linguistic analysis. Ivan Snook, for example, introduced his *Concepts of Indoctrination* (Snook 1972) by describing how the philosophy of education was taking on a new personality of its own shaped by the interest which 'analytic' philosophers were taking in educational concepts. He went on to write of analysis as 'a philosophical method' (a view comfortably and well expanded in a more recent paper by White and White 1997), which, when applied to educational concepts, 'has opened up a new and stimulating route into the perennial problems of education' (Snook 1972: 1). The whole collection of essays was focused (tediously in my view) on the meaning of the word 'indoctrination': 'The writers are interested in becoming clearer what we mean when we say that someone is indoctrinating' (Snook 1972: 2). For me the pretensions of linguistic philosophy reached their most preposterous apotheosis when I heard the most distinguished Oxford linguistic philosopher, R.M. Hare, propose quite seriously in Brian McGee's acclaimed television series *Men of Ideas* [sic—they were indeed all men!], that disputes between trades unions and management could be brought to an end if only we get clarity and agreement as to the meaning of the word 'fair'.

It was during the same period that the philosopher of education, John Wilson, helped to establish an interdisciplinary research project on moral education in which the role of the philosopher was to clarify the key concepts, thus providing a

framework for empirical researchers to research (Wilson et al. 1967—also discussed in Chap. 10 on the role of philosophy in interdisciplinary inquiry). As late as the 1994 BERA conference, Wilson was still defining philosophy in these narrow conceptual terms: 'That is all that "philosophy", in the sense in which I am using the word, requires: it is a practice, a discipline of thought, devoted to getting clear about words and concepts and the logical implications that they carry' (Wilson 1994: 4 his underlining). Philosophers were specialists in the task, who might act as consultants to researchers proper: 'There is no real alternative to educational researchers themselves taking on this task … of working out the meaning and concepts with which their research is concerned. Enough philosophers (not just me) are around to help them with this if required: there is certainly some professional expertise here, though most intelligent researchers can do a lot for themselves, once they get the hang of it' (Wilson 1994: 6). They were, no doubt, grateful for this reassurance.

I retain the view that a little more care and clarity in the use of language and concepts could benefit a lot of research writing (and indeed some philosophical writing). This continues to be one of the contributions that philosophers make both to contemporary debates about education and to those about educational research. For example, Hammersley argued in his paper on the contribution of philosophy to social science research in education that 'most research on educational inequalities does not make clear the particular interpretations of "equity", opportunity, and other concepts on which the value relevance of its focus has been determined. … Here then philosophy could play an important role in drawing the attention of educational researchers to the logical grammar of the various value laden concepts that can set the framework for their research, and the relationship of these to matters of fact (Hammersley 2007: 259) Pring (2000) devotes an entire chapter of his book on philosophy and educational research to 'Key concepts and recurring conflicts in educational research'.

I am sympathetic (as perhaps this book will illustrate) to the importance of philosophical work on the clarification of concepts; there is a woeful body of confusion in the discourses of education and educational research which cries out for such work. Later, in Chap. 25, I illustrate an example of a two-year EC-funded project in which huge resources were invested in an empirical inquiry into a proposal that could quickly be demonstrated on conceptual grounds to be logically impossible to achieve. Wilson's perhaps rather extreme elision of philosophical work with conceptual analysis does, however, seem to me to be really quite damagingly misleading. Briefly:

- it fails seriously to do justice to the richness of philosophical writing on moral, epistemological, and political issues, which is of a substantive kind which goes far beyond mere conceptual analysis;
- it remains patronising as to the capacity of people who do not define themselves as philosophers to be clear about language and concepts, in so far as they lend themselves to such clarification; and

- it ignores (without repudiating) all the literature about language and meaning which renders problematic the idea that there is a simple clarification of *the* meaning of a word which is to be had.

Replying to an earlier presentation of my criticisms (Bridges 1997), Wilson (1998) still seemed to assume that one could establish the meaning of a word without some implicit or explicit theory of meaning itself, or of the function of language in the conveyance (one theory) or construction (another theory) of meaning. I find it surprising that Wilson can propose that 'Anyone who takes this task (he refers to conceptual analysis) seriously will find himself/herself engaged in a practice which makes no "assumptions" and has no dealings with "theory" or ideology, or any "school of thought" (philosophical or other.)' (Wilson 1998: 130). Wilson himself seems peculiarly unsure about his approach to meaning, given the importance which he attaches to its clarification. At one moment he presents meaning as something to be recalled (quoting Wittgenstein's suggestion that we 'assemble reminders', Wilson 1998: 129); at the next, meaning is something to be decided, perhaps prescribed (130); and then later it looks as if meaning is something to be agreed with other people (130). The history of analytic philosophy of education reflects debate about whether conceptual analysis is to be seen as an essentially empirical investigation of ordinary language usage and the categories which people bring to their experience of the world or whether, as Dunlop asked of Peters some years ago, it involves reflecting on 'a distinction which is somehow forced upon us by the nature of the world' (Dunlop 1970. See also on some of the problems of deciding what is actually going on in conceptual analysis: Reddiford 1972; Earwaker 1973; Naish 1984; Walsh 1985). What is clear is, firstly, that Wilson cannot have it all ways and, secondly, whatever view he does hold comes heavily laden with theory. Nor does this theory come without its ideological baggage. The processes of *defining*, *prescribing, or negotiating* the meaning of terms themselves indicate three different kinds of power relations between the 'analyst' and other members of the linguistic community.

Further, the rhetorical and persuasive functions of language are so omnipresent and its connotative layers of meaning so deeply enmeshed with its denotative functions that it is impossible to argue for a particular meaning for a notion such as justice, education, or freedom without simultaneously advancing a position on the underlying ideological debates in which the notion is embedded. Unsurprisingly, then, it was one of the central criticisms of Richard Peters' work on the concept of education (Peters 1967) that what was presented as a 'neutral' analysis of the meaning of a word represented in practice, inevitably from this standpoint, an advocacy of a substantive and ideologically laden view of what ought to happen in the name of education. All these are in one sense observations which Wilson could argue it is the very function of conceptual or linguistic analysis to make, but my point is that this was not the kind of observation which accompanied most of the conceptual analysis which characterised philosophy of education in the heydays of conceptual analysis, nor is it compatible with Wilson's own sweeping disavowal of

theory or ideology: 'we do not need any kind of theory, and should resist the temptation to seek one' (Wilson 1998: 131).

Conceptual or linguistic analysis may have a role as a helpful preliminary or accompaniment to other forms of theoretically informed or ideologically laden enquiry into educational thought and practice; but it cannot be separated from such theory or such ideology since the analysis rests itself on the same framework of beliefs.

But there are, I think, more substantive roles for philosophy in educational research in informing, in a much more complex and integrated way, the work of empirical research.

7.5 The Wider Contribution of Philosophy as Educational Research

Few today would suggest that philosophy or philosophy of education was reducible to conceptual or linguistic analysis, even if these are tools that can be usefully employed. The pages of the *Journal of Philosophy of Education*, *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, *Educational Theory* and *Ethics and Education*, among others, are full of papers that draw upon the historical and contemporary canon of philosophy to illuminate or challenge the educational discourses of the day or, being philosophy, the enduring arguments about, for example, the kind of society for which education should prepare the next generation, what might be the constituents of a good life, how one can cultivate morality or citizenship, how one can justify the constraints of education and schooling within a framework of liberal values, and so on.

Philosophers of education are, however, faced with something of a dilemma, which different scholars resolve in different ways. The dilemma is created by a simultaneous demand to produce work which is a visible contribution to contemporary educational debate (and perhaps one that non-philosophers will find accessible) and to produce work of serious philosophical scholarship.

I wrote recently (Bridges 2015) a contribution to a *Festschrift* for John White, one of the most enduring figures in the recent history of philosophy of education. White is among those who, notwithstanding his considerable philosophical scholarship, has consistently engaged with contemporary educational issues. These have by and large provided the starting point for his writing. Some of this writing is in a sense procedural, for example arguing for almost a logical requirement for consideration to be given to aims as a condition of designing a (rational?) curriculum (in a long succession of publications running from White (1982) to White (2008)). Some, like his earliest attempt to argue for a compulsory curriculum, develops a substantive view of what should be the key elements of a compulsory curriculum from first principles about the terms on which any such intrusion into human freedom might be justified (White 1973). Other writing argues for policy

conclusions from more substantive social and political principles, for example about how democratic principles might bear upon the shaping of a national curriculum or about socialist principles and education (White 1980).

Such writing brings philosophical sources and argument close to contemporary policy debate. Strictly, however, it tends to generate often quite complex 'if … then …' equations: e.g. 'if you broadly endorse democratic principles … and if you interpret these to mean … and if you take these to apply to this particular sphere of human activity …, then you will probably conclude with me that …' But of course there are some quite big 'ifs' in such equations, and it is precisely disagreement on one or more of the conditionals that leads to argument and debate about the conclusion. The difficulty with engaging with philosophy of education in territory which is close to policy and practice is that one is always exposed to critique of some of the premises on which this engagement is inevitably based. At the other extreme, if one really insists on starting by establishing that, after all: (i) the author is not alone in a solipsistic universe; (ii) there are other people in the world; (iii) we can have at least some understanding of their minds and behaviour; and (iv) we can communicate with them in a meaningful way—all premises that philosophers can spend an entire academic career exploring—then we shall take a very long time to approach educational philosophy, let alone educational policy or practice.

If this seems a rather far-fetched train of argument, the literature of philosophy of education quickly illustrates the way in which even what on the face of it are more substantive principles can lead to very different conclusions about educational policy. Different readings of the principle of equality can be invoked in favour of a highly interventionist state seeking to use educational provision as a means to rectify underlying social injustice, but also in favour of non-intervention and open meritocratic competition. It can be used in support of racially integrated comprehensive schools and in favour of 'free schools' which any minority group can run on their own terms. Swift argues, similarly: 'You won't find a single politician who is against equality of opportunity. So all politicians agree about something? No. The same words stand for a range of different things. There may be a common concept, but there are very different conceptions of it. The concept is contested' (Swift 2001: 42). Swift goes on to point out that even Rawls had to acknowledge that his elucidation of the principle of justice still left it 'indeterminate between capitalist and socialist ways of organising the economy' (Swift 2001: 43). 'Liberal democratic' principles, similarly, can be invoked in support of parents' rights to bring up children in their own beliefs and the state's obligation to protect those same children from indoctrination. Of course, even cursory analysis will quickly reveal that these arguments are rooted not only in different uses of the same word, but in different traditions of thought and social theory.

This indicates a caution about policy-close philosophy of education: even if the starting point for 'near policy' philosophy of education is not way back in the metaphysics but in more widely recognisable domains of ethics or social political principles, the work has to start at places that other philosophers have come to, perhaps not uncontroversially, after they have done a lot of other work. This is one reason why some philosophers of education construct a volume of writing on the

back of other philosophers' 'mainstream' philosophical work—for example Michael Fielding's use of MacMurray, Carr's use of Aristotle, Pring's recurrent referencing of Dewey, and the use by almost everyone who has written about justice in the last 25 years of Rawls. Life is really not long enough to do all the fundamental work *and* to work out all the educational applications, and certainly few readers in the policy or practice *fora*—or even academia—will have time to wade through both.

Even this brief discussion highlights four of the problems for philosophers seeking to engage in and make a *substantive* contribution to what we might think of as publicly accessible *fora* of debate about educational policy and practice.

  (i) If they start in places too deeply embedded in philosophical argument they may never reach their educational destinations. (I recall when I was conference programme chair for the Philosophy of Education Society of Great Britain many submitted papers that failed on this count.)

 (ii) Even if they start with ethical and social principles more visible in educational argument (like autonomy, democracy, equality, parents' rights, etc.), they will be forced to acknowledge not only the multiplicity of policy directions which any one such principle might support but also the additional complication of seeking to reconcile more than one such principle.

(iii) If they short circuit some of this complexity in the interests of, for example, producing some realisable policy recommendations, they expose themselves very visibly to charges of over-simplification and of failure to recognise the contested nature of their premises.

   But also:

(iv) If they try to short circuit some of these issues by relying on a particular philosophical source for the philosophical groundwork, they are faced with the challenge that I recall Richard Peters addressing to one hapless student after he had repeatedly invoked Aristotle in response to question after question: 'Yes, but was Aristotle right?'

That philosophers of education grapple with these dilemmas in different ways is, however, part of the explanation for the richness and diversity of their contributions to educational research.

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Chapter 8
Philosophy and Practice: A Philosopher in the Classroom?

Abstract As I argued in Chap. 5, action research has some claim to be a form of research that brings research and practice into the most intimate relationship. It is easy to see or to represent action research as something standing in contrast with, or, more strongly, in opposition to, more theoretical or philosophical approaches to, for example, classroom practice. However, it will be my contention that this would be a serious error. Not only does action research itself depend on all sorts of philosophical premises for its own rationale, but, properly conceived it also requires its practitioners to reflect on their own educational philosophies, as well as to inquire empirically into the consequences of their actions. The chapter is structured by the distinction that I drew in Chap. 7 between (i) philosophy *of* research and (ii) philosophy *in* research. Philosophy of research refers to the ideas, rooted perhaps in epistemology, ethics, and social philosophy, which might underlie the idea and practice of action research, but of which action researchers themselves do not necessarily have to be aware. Philosophy in research refers to the ways in which, arguably at least, action researchers (among others) need to engage more self-consciously with philosophical questions. In developing this second argument, I shall draw extensively on the work of John Elliott, a philosopher who played a central role in the development of action research and someone who always regarded the two fields of educational inquiry as mutually dependent.

> Philosophical reflection … itself modifies conceptions of ends in ways which change one's understanding of what constitutes good data about practice. So one cannot improve the methodology of action research independently of philosophical reflection. (Elliott 1991: 51–52)

This chapter draws on Bridges, D. (2003) A philosopher in the classroom, *Educational Action Research Journal*, 11(2) 181–196.

8.1   Introduction

As I argued in Chap. 5, action research has some claim to be a form of research that brings research and practice into the most intimate relationship. It is easy to see or to represent action research as something standing in contrast with, or, more strongly, in opposition to, more theoretical or philosophical approaches to, for example, classroom practice. However, it will be my contention that this would be a serious error. Not only does action research itself depend on all sorts of philosophical premises for its own rationale, but, properly conceived it also requires its practitioners to reflect on their own educational philosophies, as well as to enquire empirically into the consequences of their actions. John Elliott is, as the 2003 special edition of *Educational Action Research* devoted to his work indicates, one of the people who defined educational action research in many parts of the world in what is usually regarded as the second phase of its development in the 1970s. His roots were in curriculum development but also philosophy, and he consistently sought to draw on one to inform the other. He is 'a philosopher in the classroom', and action research requires at least some engagement in the same role.

I have already (Chap. 7) indicated a distinction between (i) philosophy *of* research and (ii) philosophy *in* research. Philosophy of research refers to the ideas rooted perhaps in epistemology, ethics, and social philosophy which might underlie the idea and practice of action research, but of which action researchers themselves do not necessarily have to be aware. Philosophy in research refers to the ways in which, arguably at least, action researchers (among others) need to engage more self-consciously with philosophical questions. I shall apply this distinction to the field of action research to structure the two main parts of this chapter.

My discussion of action research and its philosophical roots anticipates further argument in Chap. 13, in which I look at the association between action research and philosophical pragmatism.

8.2   Philosophy of Action Research

As a form of practice, action research can appear to have a disarming philosophical innocence. A teacher initiates a new approach to her handling of some disruptive pupils, monitors the effects, and revises her approach in the light of what she observes. A medical general practice experiments with a new triage system for dealing with its patients and involves them in its systematic evaluation and revision. A nurse tutor monitors and evaluates her conversational style in supervising her students with a view to encouraging them in a more questioning stance. Each of these has, perhaps, the potential for some quite radical change in these professional settings, but none of them really requires any great philosophical baggage as a condition for understanding what is going on.

But there are features of even these modest initiatives that carry wider significance. It may be observed:

(i) how the three practitioners are developing their understanding of their professional practice—not by reference to any externally generated theory or generalised principles but by reference to their experience tested in their own environment, so there are some *epistemological* principles at work here;

(ii) that the three practitioners are themselves taking responsibility for developing their practice, rather than being directed in this development by some outside agency, so there are some principles to do with power and agency involved here, some *social/political* principles;

(iii) that the inquiry, the research, is being conducted here by an insider researcher in the context of his or her own working environment, so there are some *ethical* principles invoked both, perhaps, in the preference for the insider researcher over the outsider researcher and in the obligations and rights at stake in the relationship between researcher and researched.

Let me at least outline some of the philosophical thinking which is linked to these three sets of principles.

8.2.1   The Epistemology of Action Research

First, there is no escaping the fact that educational action research has represented a distinctive view of the nature and development of professional knowledge. It is a view which stands in some contrast to the idea of educational theory as applied social science, as a body of ideas which can be developed and gain validation independently of practice and can then be handed down, for example to teachers, to be implemented. Even in the days of the Humanities Curriculum Project, the hypotheses that were to be tested in the classroom were nevertheless developed out of a body of theoretical consideration outside the classroom. Rapidly, however, Stenhouse and Elliott were taking a more radical stance. Educational theory was seen not as something developed by social scientists but by practitioners. It was the evolving body of professional knowledge, often held tacitly, which informed day-to-day professional work and was constantly informed by it. Elliott writes of teachers' 'professional culture which defines teaching competence as a matter of intuitive craft knowledge, tacitly acquired through experience' (Elliott 1991: 46).

MacLure suggests that it is a distinctive feature of action research that it appears to privilege experience over theory and ascribe a special epistemological status to experience 'with connotations of authenticity, directness, naturalness, immediacy, relevance, life-as-it-is- lived', and counterpoises this against the 'remoteness and abstraction of research/theory/policy/positivism' (MacLure 1995: 111).

In these and other respects there were and remain in the educational action research literature, strong resonances of Dewey's—and more broadly pragmatic—writing about knowledge and experience.

For the pragmatist and for the action researcher, the test for the truth or validity of a belief is whether it 'works' in practice and the best way to find out what works is to try it out. But for the pragmatist and for the action researcher, the need to try out a new approach/idea/hypothesis also arises out of practice. Writing about children's learning, Dewey explained:

> the child has *a question of his own*, and is actively engaged in seeking and selecting relevant material with which to answer it, considering the bearings and relations of this material—the kind of solution it calls for. The problem is one's own; hence also the training secured is one's own—it is discipline, or gain in power of control; that is a *habit* of considering problems … (Dewey 1915: 151, his italics)

For Dewey and for the action researcher, there is an almost physical relationship between learning (and by extension the development of a lived theory) and experience:

> When we experience something we act upon it, we do something with it; then we suffer or undergo the consequence. We do something to the thing and then it does something to us in return … The connection of these two phases of experience measure the fruitfulness or value of the experience … When an activity is continued into the undergoing of consequences, when the change made by the action is reflected back into a change made in us, the mere flux is loaded with significance. (Dewey 1916: 163)

Of course, in so far as action research relies on a pragmatic, or more narrowly Deweyite, epistemology, it also shares in some of the problems of such epistemology. Ideas about 'what works' easily beg important questions. A particular pesticide 'works' in ridding a crop of a pest, but what is its impact on the wider environment? A particular teaching approach 'works' in maintaining order in the classroom, but what is its impact on the children's learning, on their attitudes towards the subject, on their moral, social, and political education? The notion of something 'working' itself requires interrogation and reflection of a kind which requires a wider conceptual apparatus than is necessarily provided by immediate experience.

Similarly, experiencing itself requires what Bagehot (1905) has called 'an experiencing nature', i.e. both a disposition of curiosity, openness, and willingness to learn, and a capacity to experience. If, as it is sometimes expressed, 'all seeing is seeing as', then the capacity to experience is significantly the function of the conceptual apparatus that the agents brings to their experiencing. As Eisner argued in his presidential address to the American Educational Research Association, 'humans do not simply have experience; they have a hand in its creation, and the quality of their creation depends on the way they employ their minds' (Eisner 1993: 5). By extension I would suggest that the way in which they employ their minds is a function not just of their experiencing (except in the wider sense in which everything might count as an experience) but in the way in which they have been taught, their reading, and even the academic theory with which they have engaged.

I do not propose to engage with them in any more detail here (see Chap. 13 for an elaboration of these arguments). My purpose in this context is simply to illustrate the point that action research is a set of practices inevitably grounded in a body of philosophical theory to do with the nature of knowledge and its development, i.e. in epistemology. One source of this theory is undoubtedly in philosophical pragmatism, although of course neither this nor action research itself represents a single coherent body of thought.

8.2.2 The Social Philosophy of Action Research

> The rationale for involving teachers as researchers of their own practice is connected to an aspiration to give them control over what is to count as knowledge about practice. As action researchers, teachers are knowledge generators rather than appliers of knowledge generated by outsiders. (Elliott 1994: 133)

In general a shift in the distribution of the production and validation of knowledge might itself be held to constitute a shift in the distribution of power, and it is clear from this statement of Elliott's and many other references that such redistribution is central to the action research project.[1] By extension, any systematic attempt to achieve such redistribution must itself constitute some kind of social/political programme. Action research involves a redistribution of the honorific role of 'researcher' from the academy to the workplace. It also requires a different and more favourable evaluation of practitioners' experience, experiential knowledge, and theory vis-à-vis the academy's theory, or indeed the policymakers' broad prescriptions. All of this has implications for practitioners' autonomy, integrity, and professionalism (see Bridges 2001). Not surprisingly, then, Adelman's account of the origins of action research in the work of Kurt Lewin (Adelman 1993) places emphasis on the 'democratic' character of action research, and Howe refers to action research's link with participatory democracy as 'one of its primary theoretical justifications' (Howe 1995: 347).

However, Carr and Kemmis (1986) made a distinction between 'practical' and 'emancipatory' action research and this is reflected, perhaps, in criticism of the way in which action research has become domesticated as a tool offered to teachers for the purpose of realising government policy intentions. Elliott himself warned in 1991 that 'there are signs that action research has become hi-jacked in the service of technical rationality. Teachers are being encouraged to view action research as an inquiry into how to control pupil learning to produce pre-defined curriculum objectives or targets without any consideration of the ethical dimension of teaching and learning' (Elliott 1991: 52). In the United States, Anderson and Herr conclude their discussion of practitioner research by warning:

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[1]Compare Rudduck: 'There is an urgent need to analyse the structures that govern the production and distribution of research knowledge and the right to engage in research acts. Teacher research is, at one level, a means of countering the hegemony of academic research which teachers are often distanced by' (Rudduck 1987: 5).

School districts seem less concerned about practitioner research as research: they are just appropriating it as a professional development and in-service model. It would be a shame if practitioner research was coopted into the often mind-numbing in-service sessions that many school districts call professional development. This would lead to its bureaucratisation and a blunting of any critical force it has to transform educational practices and institutions. (Anderson and Herr 1999: 20)

Reporting on their study of the impact of action research in the context of educational reform in Northern Ireland, Hutchinson and Whitehouse (1999) wrote:

The evidence suggests that most of them use some form of action research to accommodate themselves to, and make more efficient, the operations of the organisation in which they work. This means that their work is circumscribed by the market values embedded in the Education Reform Order (Northern Ireland). (Hutchinson and Whitehouse 1999: 141)

Elliott argued (1991) that there was the possibility of critical reflexive practices arising through the very processes of practitioners' struggle with their action research and attempts at self-understandings, and—especially where they had ownership of the issue under investigation—the processes of inquiry and action and, in some cases at least, the publication of the outcomes.[2] For what Clements has dubbed 'Down-under action research' associated with Deakin University, however, action research lacked real political bite unless it was linked to 'critical social science'. For these Down-under social radicals, Clements explains, action research was:

A form of self-reflective enquiry undertaken by participants in social situations in order to improve the rationality and justice of their own social or educational practices, as well as their understanding of their practices, and the situations in which those practices are carried out. (Henry and Kemmis 1985: 67)

To qualify for inclusion as action research at Deakin, a research project had to be:

- *participatory* (where the researched were the researchers);
- *first person* ('we do' in order to change ourselves);
- *emancipatory* (designed to free participants by helping them to think differently);
- *socially critical* (so that what normally went unquestioned was questioned);
- *collaborative* (research the members of an action team did together);
- *committed* and *conducted according to ethical procedures*;
- *risky* (in a way which would make life uncomfortable). (Henry 1995: 7)

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[2]Indeed, in an earlier (1987) paper Elliott invoked Gadamer's support in challenging the idea that an interpretative understanding of the context of the practical might fail to incorporate the possibility of a critical perspective. He added: 'I have always been puzzled by those critics who have attacked CARE's work with teachers on the grounds that it didn't encourage them to critique power relations in which their reflection and practice are situated. I have never experienced it that way. My experience has always been that teachers tend to develop critiques of the macro context of their practices during the process of reflectively developing and testing their practical theories' (Elliott 1987: 167).

It seems to me that this kind of approach to action research meets some of the criticisms which have been made of it (my own included; see Bridges 1995) in terms of its relatively narrowly bounded perspective on the broader social and economic structures which bear upon life in a classroom or other centres of professional practice. It presents a picture of an enriched form of action research which has an explicit and powerful social/political agenda for change. What is interesting, however, is that this social/political agenda is not something extrinsic to the action research. It is the process of action research itself, and the principles which are made integral to it, which are the drivers for change. It is a practice or set of practices in which a whole set of social and political principles, and by extension an educational philosophy, are embedded.

8.2.3 The Ethics of Action Research

Ethical issues and imperatives are present in almost every aspect of action research. Firstly and most obviously, ethics enters action research as a set of principles governing the way in which action research itself is conducted. In the passage quoted above, the Deakin action researchers referred directly to the requirement that research projects were 'committed and conducted according to ethical principles'. What precisely these principles are is of course a further question, but one might expect them to focus in particular on the protection of the rights of children and their parents as well as perhaps the obligations of teachers to each other. Elliott refers, for example, to 'The dilemma … for the teacher which arises from a conflict between the value of critical openness to pupils and respect for the professional expertise of colleagues and their right to exercise authority within the confines of their own classroom' (Elliott 1991: 59).

Secondly, at least part of the case for action research, or more widely, practitioner research, is to do with an ethically grounded resistance to 'outsider' research. I discuss this issue more fully in Chap. 20, but let me briefly rehearse the most relevant part of the argument here. The objections to 'outsider' research are several, and they have become more vocally and powerfully expressed in the context of the assertion by various groups that define themselves as disempowered of their ownership of their own experience (and the benefits which arise from researching it). 'Nothing about us without us!' is the slogan which has come out of the disability camp (see Charlton 1998), while in New Zealand there is a body of Maori researchers whose motto might be expressed as 'by Maori, in Maori, for Maori' (Marshall and Martin 2000). The arguments which have been mounted in defence of such exclusiveness have included arguments about the right to benefit from one's own knowledge; the complaint that outsiders bring into their research damaging assumptions and frames of reference; and (cf. the previous section) perceptions of the disempowering effects of having others research and publish your experience.

Thirdly, there is a sense in which engagement in action research can itself be presented as an ethical obligation. It was indeed a point of ethics made forcibly by

Elliott in the context of debate about the neutral teacher that first persuaded me of the real significance of action research. There were those among us who wanted teachers in the context of classroom discussion of controversial issues to adopt a role of rational impartiality, teaching students how to handle reasons, evidence, and argument. We were certainly not defending or seeking indoctrination or the authoritarian imposition of belief, but nor, we argued, should teachers be 'neutral' with respect to positions where reasons, evidence, and argument seemed to point to one view rather than another (see Bailey 1972, 1975). Elliott's counter-argument took us into the epistemology of value propositions, but, more significant to this present discussion was his observation that: 'A teacher is not only responsible for the purity of his intentions. He is also responsible for the effects of his behaviour on students' (Elliott 1975: 115). Of course, he was right, though the philosophical literature does warn about the problems of, for example, determining at what point on a long stream of diverse consequences this responsibility might end. Is the butterfly that flapped its wings in the Amazonian jungle 'responsible' for the hurricane in Eastern Australia, even if some theory of chaos can show an extended causal chain? In the context of professional work, one has a level of responsibility for anticipating the consequences of one's actions, for making at least some effort to observe or find out what they are, and, by extension, to modify one's actions in the light of that observation. On this view, something which is already getting quite close to action research becomes not just a technique which professionals may or may not use, but a moral obligation, a requirement of responsible professional conduct.

8.3   Philosophy in Action Research

This last observation brings us to perhaps a more integral relationship between philosophy and action research. For in action research the professional practitioner is asked not merely to observe the consequences of his or her action but to take responsibility for them. To take responsibility for them requires that one knows what they are and how they result from one's actions—i.e. the empirical part of the enquiry. But this is not enough. In addition one has to be satisfied that they satisfy the educational principles, the values, which are one's own measure of the worth of one's educational practice—i.e. the evaluative and philosophical part of the enquiry.

This is why Elliott has consistently spoken of action research as a 'moral science' or a 'moral/practical science' (Elliott 1980, 1983, 1987, 1989a, b, 1991, 1996, 2000) and Carr of 'practical philosophy' (Carr 2007: 150ff.). In a paper revealingly entitled 'Doing action research: Doing practical philosophy', Elliott sets out the characteristics of educational action research in terms which repeatedly reveal the intimacy of the relationship between action research and moral and ethical evaluation rooted in a considered philosophy of education:

- its major purpose is to realise an educationally worthwhile process of teaching and learning.

- what counts as educationally worthwhile activity should be defined in terms of value-concepts e.g. 'autonomous learning', 'learning with understanding', 'critical thinking', 'learning through discovery or inquiry'. Such value concepts define the educational ends of worthwhile teaching-learning activities, and are not to be confused with specifications of specific, concrete, and tangible learning objectives or targets, e.g. the acquisition of particular facts or skills.
- … an activity should be evaluated as educationally worthwhile, not by virtue of its instrumentality for effecting certain results but by virtue of the extent to which it embodies in itself criteria and standards which are implicit in the educational ends to which it is directed.
- … enquiry into how to realise educational values in the practices of teaching and learning (enquiries into means) cannot be separated from philosophical enquiry into what these values mean and their implications for practice (enquiries into ends). It cannot be reduced to studies of the instrumental effectiveness of particular teaching and learning methods in the light of fixed, unambiguous and tangible/measurable ends.
- When it is so reduced, we get a version of action research which amounts to a form of instrumental/technical problem solving. Conceived as moral enquiry, educational action research involves doing moral philosophy. (Elliott 2000: 82–83)

This is a position that, as Elliott acknowledges, echoes something of Carr's argument that:

> The educational character of any practice can only be made intelligible by reference to an ethical disposition to proceed according to some more or less tacit understanding of what it is to act educationally. (Carr 1987: 166)

Let us note that on these accounts the development and application of an educational philosophy, a moral philosophy, is an integral part of the process of action research. Action research is indeed a process engaged in for the purpose of realising one's educational values, though it will also be a process which constantly throws those values into question and makes us reconsider them. Are we really committed to children's freedom when we see the consequences of allowing it? Do we really want to discard our role in social or epistemological authority if the consequence is that it is assumed by an oppressive form of classroom groupthink? Do I really value parent power so highly when parents demand policies which undermine other values which I desperately want to protect. We probably do not even fully understand our educational values until we have seen them implemented or seen the conflicts which arise in practice between different principles to which we subscribe in general abstract terms. We can come to understand our philosophical principles differently by seeing them realised in practice, and hence experience can come to change the principles we hold as well as being informed by them. We can evaluate our experience by reference to our principles, and we can re-evaluate our principles by reference to our experience of their realisation in practice.

But if action research involves doing moral philosophy and a continuous process of practitioner reflection in and on practice, whence is this moral philosophy and the tools

for this reflection derived? 'Reflection,' argues Clarke, 'must be performed with as well as upon something, and … professional teachers need to be equipped with sophisticated competence in whatever it is that reflection is with' (Clarke 1994: 69). Here, I think, if I do not entirely part company with Elliott, I place nevertheless a different emphasis on the importance of theory and even of the traditional disciplines of thought. The irony is that Elliott clearly values these too—certainly if you take the evidence of his own points of reference and resources. His paper on 'Doing action research: Doing practical philosophy' (Elliott 2000) draws heavily on MacIntyre's 'Three rival versions of moral theory'. 'The curriculum experiment' (Elliott 1998) is peppered with references to Dewey, Giddens, Habermas, Lyotard, Nozick, Popper, Rorty, and so on. Here is a man who clearly values the theoretical insights of the academy, employs them in his own thinking, and indeed contributes to them through his teaching and writing.

But when it comes to providing an account of the way in which teachers do or should develop their practice, Elliott seems to apply a different view of theory and practice. As O'Hanlon observes: 'He makes it clear in the relationship between theoretical abstraction and practical reflection (leading to practical wisdom) that practical wisdom is superior to theoretical reflection' (O'Hanlon 1994: 287). In Elliott's own words: 'Within … educational inquiry, theoretical abstraction plays a subordinate role in the development of a practical wisdom grounded in reflective experiences of concrete cases' (Elliott 1991: 53).

The terms of this proposition are, however, rather loaded. Theory has been pushed to the margins by being linked with abstraction, while experience has been given added legitimation by becoming 'reflective'. Surely any claim as to what sort of knowledge is of most value has to be related to the precise nature of the educational inquiry in which one is engaged? It is not obvious that an inquiry into the aims of education privileges quite the same knowledge as an inquiry into the consequences in the classroom of a particular form of teacher intervention.

In any case, my own view is that Elliott is at his strongest when he seeks to dissolve the theory/practice divide rather than reinforcing it in arguments about what is subordinate to what. Academic philosophy of education needs to engage with teachers' professional knowledge (with perhaps the ethno-philosophy of teachers) if it is really to engage with education at all; and teachers' professional knowledge will be restricting and enclosed if it is not informed at least in some measure by the wider intellectual currents of the society within which they practice. Elliott himself suggested in one piece of writing that:

> Action research leaves a role for the educational theorist in the university as a supplier of theoretical resources for teachers to use in reflecting about and developing their practice, but it establishes the teacher as the ultimate arbiter over what is to count as useful knowledge. (Elliott 1994: 140)

I have no problem with the idea that the teacher is the ultimate arbiter of what is useful (at least useful to him or her—there are other users of educational knowledge

around[3])—and I suppose I should be grateful for the role of educational theorist in the university as 'a supplier of theoretical resources for teachers'. I feel however that this does less than justice to Elliott's own richer view of this relationship. His own writing and experience, as well as mine, illustrates all sorts of ways in which the exchange, even in terms of theoretical resources, is a much more reciprocal one.[4] Our best teachers include many who are intellectuals in their own right, if by this we mean that they enjoy ideas, read about them, explore them, and develop them. When university academics engage with teachers in processes of action research they do not just find their 'abstract' ideas brought down to earth in the concrete instances of teachers' lived experience. They find new ideas germinating out of conversations with teachers which move between theory and practice, and out of the excitement of the imagination which lies in the interaction between the two: in the challenges to accepted notions of knowledge; in the ethical issues which are constantly raised in the context of the classroom and classroom research; in the politics of educational research and educational innovation.

For action research is not just about solving problems but about generating new problems (cf. Winter 1987, 1989): about seeing classrooms differently; developing new awareness of the educational values that you want to realise and then having to re-examine them because experience has presented unexpected challenges to them; constructing, testing, re-examining, and then reconstructing one's repertoire of professional knowledge and skills—and all of this seems to me to be very close to what in its more systematic forms one might recognise as philosophy of education. Elliott has pioneered many of the practices which support such activity in professional settings as diverse as hospital wards, school classrooms, and police stations. In so doing he has helped to give new status and standing to the lived experience and the practical wisdom of these professional groups. But he has also shown that the cultivation of that practical wisdom and the advance of their professionalism rests, among other things, on their willingness and ability to engage in what are essentially philosophical processes of reflection and re-evaluation.

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[3]Walsh, for example, has pointed out that: 'Education is also public, and teachers owning their own practice is not teachers owning education. In addition to the question of student ownership, there is the (partial) articulation of the public interest in a network of management, advisory, inspectoral, examination, curriculum-monitoring and teacher education practices surrounding the practice of teachers in classrooms and defining themselves in relation to that practice' (Walsh 1993: 190).

[4]In 1993, for example, Elliott wrote of the way in which 'Most of the things I have learned from working with teachers on school-based action research projects raise fundamental issues about the relationship between the classroom practices of teachers and the school as a social system' (Elliott 1993: 175).

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Chapter 9
A Philosopher at Court? A Reflection on an Education Researcher's Engagement with Policymakers

Abstract In Chap. 6, I approached the issue of the relationship between research and policy through an examination of the kind of knowledge that is required for the formation of policy, i.e. through an epistemological lens. Since writing this I have been involved simultaneously in a collaborative research programme with colleagues in Nazarbayev University, focused on the process of educational reform in Kazakhstan, and also in a role as a member of a small group (referred to as the 'Roadmap Group') advising the Deputy Prime Minister and the Minister of Education on Kazakhstan's Education Reform Strategy for 2016–2020. What follows is a reflection on my experience of combining these research and policy roles and, more particularly the ways in which philosophical thought entered the process. The chapter reflects on the issues of normativity that arise in the context of policy formation and the extent to which an outsider can and should engage with such issues; the conceptual problems that insiders and outsiders faced in coming to terms with cross-cultural thinking embedded in different histories; and the mixture of experience, research, common sense—*phronesis* perhaps—that one drew on in formulating proposals.

9.1 The Background

> Till philosophers become kings or those now named kings and rulers give themselves truly and rightly, and these two things—political power and philosophic thought—come together … states will have no rest from their troubles, dear Glaucon, and if I am right, man will have none. (Plato's Republic, Book V, trans. Richards 1966: 97).

Let me quickly disavow any aspiration to be a philosopher king, let alone any experience in the role, but this reflection arises out of a privileged experience of work in Kazakhstan which took me as close as I have ever been to the seat of policymaking: a philosopher at court, perhaps, if somewhat removed from the

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throne. This has provided me with a rather different lens through which to observe the relationship between research and policy than the epistemological lens through which I examined this relationship in Chap. X.

For four years I was involved simultaneously in a collaborative research programme with colleagues in Nazarbayev University, Graduate School of Education focused on the process of educational reform in Kazakhstan, and also, for most of this time, in a role as a member of a small group (referred to as the 'Roadmap Group') advising the Deputy Prime Minister and the Minister of Education on Kazakhstan's Education Reform Strategy for 2016–2020. What follows is a reflection on my experience of combining these research and policy roles. There are two strands to the work on which I want to reflect in this chapter.

First, we had a team of six education researchers drawn from Cambridge University Faculty of Education (including one from Belarus and one from Ukraine) and up to ten researchers from Nazarbayev University (NU), including one French Canadian, one Spaniard, and one colleague from Kyrgyzstan, as well as a number of mainly early career researchers from Kazakhstan itself—some of them from a separate organisation, Nazarbayev Intellectual Schools. There was a third party to the collaboration in the form of the University of Pennsylvania Graduate School of Education, though the agreed division of labour meant that they focused on higher education while the Cambridge/NU partnership focused on school- level reform. This collaboration is, at the time of writing in 2016, in its fifth year. The research has been sponsored by the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan.

Second, we had a small team of four local and (at different times) six international educators—including myself—who were invited to advise on the development of the 2016–2020 education strategy for Kazakhstan. We reported directly to the Deputy Prime Minister who had overall responsibility for Health, Education, and Social Care. The leader of the project in Kazakhstan, Aslan Sarinzhipov, who brought the international team together, was appointed part-way through the planning process as Minister of Education. The scope of the plan extended from the provision of school toilets and drinking water to broadband connectivity; from pre-school to university entrance; from curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment to school inspections; from the structure of teachers' pay to the introduction of more equitable finance for rural schools; from inclusive education for children with special needs and disabilities to the role of Olympiads in measuring school and student achievement; from the implementation of trilingualism to citizenship education. The report on the first phase of this advisory work was produced in 2013 and made publicly available by the Ministry through Nazarbayev University Graduate School of Education in (2014).

Papers developed out of the first two years of the research, as well as contributions from key players in the reform process (including the one who was to become Minister), are included in *Educational Reform and Internationalisation: The case of Kazakhstan* (Bridges 2014).

So, there was a lot of policy in and around the strategic planning, and a fairly substantial research project to draw on too, but how, if at all, did educational research, let alone educational philosophy, contribute to its development? How, if at all, can and does research enter into the multilayered processes of policy formation? Reflection on my experience in this environment prompts the following observations about philosophy and policy.

9.2 The Roles of Philosophy

Underpinning the whole reform agenda were really quite different philosophies (in the sense of world, or at least educational, views) derived from Kazakh tradition, in which the nineteenth-century philosopher and poet Abai plays an iconic role (Abai 2005); Russian Imperial and Soviet traditions; and the discourses of 'the global educational space', themselves on closer inspection by no means as homogeneous as is sometimes supposed (see Bridges 2014). Part of the policy challenge is to find a way to play to the strengths of all three, and this calls for at least some measure of sensitive understanding of the different traditions.

Conroy et al. captured rather nicely a role which we can recognise from our own experience working across cultural divides that we nevertheless sought to respect. They suggest that though the philosopher of education might be tempted to step back from normative prescription, it might nevertheless be that:

> it is precisely here that a philosophical disposition may come into its own … in the form of an ethical engagement the effect of which is to subject intended prescriptions to an interrogation that receives its authority from an acquaintance with, and understanding of a country's ethical traditions and its vision of 'a good society' … (Conroy et al. 2009: 173).

And then:

> the philosophic attitude can critically reacquaint policy makers with the resources of their own ethical tradition and in doing so enable them to test proposed prescriptions against those traditions. (Conroy et al. 2009: 173).

In the case of our work in Kazakhstan it was precisely this kind of thinking that led us to make a case for the protection of the element of schooling referred to as 'upbringing' (elements of a Russified *bildung* combined with good old-fashioned Kazakh personal and social values) against the incursions of an education couched in much narrower academic and performative terms.

Educational and more broadly social values—mainly around issues of equity and inclusion, but also intellectual capacities and the scope for school-level initiative and creativity—were central, and we ensured that they remained so. In some cases, however, they were not deeply problematic at an ethical level, as in the requirement under a principle of *equity* to close the gap in funding between relatively poor rural schools and richer urban ones—a situation arising because the schools were supported mainly out of local taxation. In other cases, such as arguments for greater

'*school autonomy*' there was some wisdom at this particular historical moment in not pressing too far the distinction between schools' ability to raise money from non-government sources and their ability to enjoy other freedoms from government control. Those who experienced life in the Soviet period learned to exploit ambivalences in language to create space for their own preferences, and this remains a highly developed form of policy game playing. My colleague Olena Fimyar writes not just of trilingual policy but of 'policy trilingualism', whereby people exploit the gaps in the translation of terms between Russian, Kazakh, and English to present one picture of what they are doing to an international audience while presenting another to different local audiences (Fimyar 2014).

Over and over again in this and other work in Kazakhstan we (and our UK-educated Kazakhstani colleagues) encountered what were in a sense conceptual issues. 'They just don't get it', wailed one Kazakhstani colleague after trying to explain to a group of teachers and head teachers (and later a group of parliamentarians) the principles of collaborative action research. We began to unpick the presuppositions that they would have to grasp in order to 'get it': 'research', which they were used to having done to them by academics from the university; 'collaboration', in an environment in which teachers had to compete with each other to show their innovative contributions in return for higher salaries; 'teacher professionalism', in a context in which teachers received all their instructions from on high and even fairly innocuous questions about educational policy and practice elicited the response, 'that is above my wage packet'. Similarly another UK colleague, working on pre- school education, struggled to convey a view of 'childhood' as something to be valued and protected for its own sake, and of 'children as self-actuating learners' in any environment that provided them with the stimulus and opportunity to be so. A third colleague struggled to insert a belief in the capabilities of children with special educational needs and disabilities, who in Kazakhstan are defined by reference to their incapacities by what is known in the Soviet tradition as 'defectology'. You do not need great familiarity with the philosophical canon to observe or grapple with these educationally significant distinctions, but in a sense they are about different philosophies of education, and a philosophical training gives you some useful tools with which to analyse and tease apart different understandings and misunderstandings and to appreciate the interdependence of some of these central educational concepts.

9.3   Mixing with Politics

But clearly a philosophical understanding or orientation or direction is not enough. In our policy work we were required not only to diagnose problems and make high-level recommendations but also to develop an action plan for achieving change—a plan with timelines; to identify those tasked to see the actions through; to identify stakeholders who might need to be brought on board; to identify risks and how these might be mitigated; and of course to work out costs (though we did

not attempt to do more than indicate the scale of these); i.e. many of the sorts of things that I identified in Chap. 6 as key elements of policy. Not only this, but we also had to take into account non-negotiable directives from the President and an assessment of the chances of securing support among parliamentarians for some key proposals.

But what does an educational researcher or philosopher draw on in trying to develop policy recommendations in this more complex territory and with the rather awesome realisation that here, at least, they might actually issue in some action affecting hundreds of thousands of children? I am tempted to answer 'common sense', but perhaps *phronesis* or practical wisdom would be more philosophically acceptable and more accurate. In settings such as the one I have described, philosophical reflection; research experience and reading; experience of classrooms and teachers' conferences; some travel and conversations with different sections of Kazakhstan's own community; experience of educational reform in other countries; critical reflection on all or any of the above—these things did not sit as separate points of reference but were joined together, assimilated into what provides the framework of understanding you bring to the policymaking task and in an important sense makes you who you are. Philosophy is in the mix in its various forms: a somewhat disjointed world view; some social and ethical principles and values; some epistemological beliefs; some educational concepts and principles; some analytic and argumentative tools—and these are important. We just have to acknowledge that while these may be necessary, they are not sufficient.

Of course, there is another and appealing role for philosophy which avoids the complexities that come with direct engagement with policy. It is a more detached, slower moving role captured in the phrase that Richard Smith borrowed from Galbraith in the introduction to the special issue of the *Journal of Philosophy of Education* on 'Philosophy and Educational Policy', where he writes about it being the function of philosophy 'to keep open the flow of thought and widen the sphere of admissible debate' (Smith 2012: vi). This echoes an earlier suggestion by McLaughlin that the role of philosophy in relation to educational policy was 'to illuminate complexities, sharpen dilemmas, undermine grounds for practical compromise and encourage further discussion and argument rather than decision' (McLaughlin 2000: 451)—all nice work, but can anyone really be surprised if this is not on the whole what a politician is going to be seeking with the clock ticking away on their brief time in office (on average about three years in Kazakhstan). Still less will there be any enthusiasm for encouraging further discussion and argument '*rather than decision*', or undermining practical compromise in a country in a hurry, a country such as Kazakhstan, mindful of the old Kazakh proverb: 'Yesterday was too soon; tomorrow is too late!'

The trouble is that in Kazakhstan and elsewhere there is no shortage of those—reminiscent of the snake-oil salesmen of the Wild West—offering answers and quick-fix solutions while philosophers pursue their reflective discussions: 'outcomes-based education'; 'payment by results'; 'hand it over to the private sector'; 'target setting'; etc., etc. Can philosophers offer no more than critique of such proposals, or are there embedded in the grounds for such critique at least the

beginnings of an argument for alternative policies? Lawrence Stenhouse used to irritate teachers' conferences by claiming 'I have nothing to recommend'. He did have something to recommend, of course, but the point that he was making was that whatever he might recommend had to be treated as a hypothesis to be tested against teachers' own experience in the classroom (and hence classroom action research). I suggest that, provided they can speak with the same humility, it is a proper contribution of philosophy and philosophers to advance well-argued views about how we might go on in education, even while they remain open to debate about whether these views are right.

I believe that 'well-argued views' made some headway in this context. The Minister had recently completed a Doctorate at the University of Pennsylvania and the Deputy Prime Minister, a humane and highly sophisticated man, actually read some of the books on education passed to him by one of the Kazakhstani members of the group, who was simultaneously studying for a PhD programme in Cambridge. I found myself doing field research in village schools one week and talking to the Deputy Prime Minister about what I had observed the next—certainly a unique experience in my career! At other times, however, we had to accept a requirement to reduce the key points arising from our research and consultative meetings to six bullet points, which rather reduces the opportunity for nuanced argument or even much in the way of evidence.

But even where we managed to persuade those to whom we were directly reporting of the wisdom of a particular course of action, other political and financial considerations might still sway the final decision—just as I argued in Chap. 6. It made sense to redistribute funding for education between wealthier and poorer regions in the interests of equity but it was clear that regional representatives of the richer regions would block any such direct redistributive proposal in parliament. Then there were all sorts of plans for improving educational infrastructure and teachers' pay, but, though some of these were protected in a changing economic environment, the collapse of oil prices and almost 50% devaluation of the *tenge* in one year made many of these unrealistic. Even when finance was not an issue, political imperatives from the President could override advice. It made sense to slow down the introduction of the teaching of STEM subjects through the medium of English in (initially) 700 schools—simply because there were very few teachers who combined the science with a reasonable level of fluency in English, but the political imperatives were for greater urgency. Research and philosophical reflection *did* play a part in the process we were engaged in at a policy level but we were constantly made aware that there were more powerful forces at work in shaping the educational destiny of Kazakhstan.

Such political forces can of course be fairly uncomfortable to live with— bruising, brutal even. In our own roles we were almost entirely protected from them: it was the role of others to defend their actions before the *Mazhilis* (Parliament) or to explain the lack of progress to the President. Nor did we develop any particular appetite for the fray: we were content to leave it thus. So perhaps I should end where I began with Plato's acknowledgement that although good order

in society might invite the leadership of 'philosopher kings', he was not entirely convinced that these were going to be forthcoming from the community of philosophers:

> A philosopher is like a man coming among violent beasts unwilling to take part in their ill-doings and unable by himself to make head against these. (Plato, trans. Richards 1966: 110).

It is so much easier simply to content oneself with one's conference paper.

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Chapter 10
The Roles of 'The Philosopher' in an Interdisciplinary Research Group

Abstract I have argued for the importance of the 'disciplines' as a resource for educational inquiry, providing methods and methodologies, conceptual and interpretive framing, standards of rigour and conversational communities of scholars with a shared language. None of this, however, runs contrary to the idea of multidisciplinary or interdisciplinary inquiry. Indeed, in describing education as a field of research (rather than itself a homogeneous 'discipline'), I have already indicated an expectation that many educational issues will require just such multidisciplinary attention. But the question that I pose in this chapter is how does philosophy, or, to personalise the issue, a 'philosopher', participate in such multidisciplinary teams of researchers. In this chapter I answer this question by describing different approaches to the philosopher's role in six multidisciplinary research groupings—four of them around specific research projects, one in a research centre, and one in an international research collaboration. The chapter concludes by drawing out some of the lessons offered and issues raised by these different experiences.

10.1 Introduction

In previous chapters I have tried to present a picture of education as a field of inquiry to which an increasing number of disciplines of the academy can and are making a contribution. In both Chap. 5 on research and practice and Chap. 6 on research and policy, I have illustrated the inescapable interaction of different modes of inquiry with each other and with relevant experience, and the constructs that have been shaped by that experience. Educational research—in particular if this is

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understood as applied research—requires multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary approaches (where the second term suggests perhaps a closer integration of the different perspectives than the first). An enthusiasm for multidisciplinary research has become a feature of research funding strategies among the UK Research Councils, the European Union, and elsewhere—not only with respect to educational research but across the board. The Higher Education Funding Council for England declares that: 'Research in education is multi-disciplinary and is closely related to a range of other disciplines with which it shares common interests, methods and approaches …' (HEFCE 2012: par 26).

In practical terms, therefore, if philosophers are to engage successfully with substantive issues of educational policy and practice (I acknowledge that these might not be the preferred focus of their inquiry), they need to work with researchers from other disciplines in a collaborative environment and not (not just) as isolated voices or as philosophers talking only to fellow philosophers. But what does this mean in practice?

In the field of research we refer to research teams, research groups, and research centres. These have in common the features of: (i) bringing together a number of researchers in some formation; (ii) around some common task or set of tasks; and, perhaps (iii) with some shared principles, values, or interests. They differ perhaps in terms of their relative stability or permanence (research teams being perhaps the least permanent and research centres the most) and in terms of their institutional-isation and possibly their organisational infrastructure. The things which they have in common seem to me to be more significant and interesting than the things which differentiate them, and this is my excuse for largely ignoring the differences and for illustrating this discussion from examples of research groupings that include temporary teams, more longstanding groups, and, in one instance, a long-established research centre. In the main part of this chapter I shall explore my own observation of and experience in six such groupings and reflect on the different roles which 'the philosopher' has played in their work.

10.2   The Farmington Trust Moral Education Project

My first example is an old one (in which I played no part), but it is interesting in so far as it reflects very clearly the way educational research was constructed at the time. This project was established in the late 1960s, by which time educational theory was pretty firmly defined in the UK and elsewhere in terms of the foundation disciplines of philosophy, sociology, psychology, and history of education (see Chap. 2). At a time when each of these was emphatically defining itself in terms of its difference and their academic storm-troopers were fiercely defending their territorial boundaries, it was quite adventurous to set up an educational research and development project which was structurally interdisciplinary. Wilson (the philosopher), Williams (the psychologist), and Sugarman (the sociologist) had to establish a *modus operandi* as a research group and in the absence of many very

clear precedents. I do not want to get drawn into too much detail about the project here. What is especially pertinent is the role taken by the philosopher. Wilson saw his job (and this was apparently acquiesced to by the others) as being to provide the conceptual mapping of the territory, or, to borrow a different metaphor, the conceptual architecture of moral education. Moral education, in his view, could only be articulated upon some understanding of what it was to be moral, and of the knowledge and understanding which were the components of moral choice and moral action. So his primary task in the group was to analyse these components (Wilson et al. 1967).

But this conception of the role of the philosopher as conceptual architect did not just remain an historical curiosity. As I observe in Chap. 7, in the 1994 BERA conference Wilson was still defining philosophy in these narrow conceptual terms: 'That is all that "philosophy", in the sense in which I am using the word, requires: it is a practice, a discipline of thought, devoted to getting clear about words and concepts and the logical implications that they carry' (Wilson 1994: 4, his underlining).

Wilson's view of the role of the philosopher in a multidisciplinary research project was of its time, but would probably not be very acceptable to many philosophers, let alone educational researchers, today. Philosophers of education would probably see his emphasis on conceptual analysis as a rather restricted view of what philosophers do or can contribute. Empirical researchers might well imagine that they are perfectly capable, thank you, of doing such conceptual work as is needed themselves (see on all this Chap. 7).

But if I am not happy with Wilson's view of the role of the philosopher in the context of educational research, and more particularly the philosopher's contribution to multidisciplinary research, what are the alternatives?

10.3   The Social Science Research Council School Accountability Project

Between 1979 and 1981 I was a member of a research team working on a research project directed by John Elliott on school accountability. It was constructed around the idea of a self-accounting school, which at the time seemed to offer an alternative model of accountability to the more bureaucratic and centrally driven models which were on the political horizon and which rapidly, of course, came to dominate the political and educational agenda. There were five of us in the team: John Elliott, who had some background in philosophy of education, but was at that time building a significant reputation as one of the main driving forces in the field of action research; Dave Ebbutt, who was also extensively involved by then in action research; Rex Gibson, a sociologist; Jennifer Nias, a social psychologist; and myself, a philosopher with—usefully as it turned out—a previous incarnation as a historian.

The project was, however, unequivocally founded on empirical work, on case studies of six schools (Dave Ebbutt would produce two of these) conducted over an eighteen-month period. We would be looking at the way in which these schools, all of which presented themselves as wishing to be accountable to their communities, communicated with and related to parents, governors, local employers, the local press, and any other sections of their communities. This would require analysis of documentary evidence, observation of events, participant observation in some events, and a wide range of interviews. We each produced substantial case studies based on the material this generated and, out of these, a collection of analytic papers addressing issues raised from reading across the case studies (Elliott et al. 1981).

In one sense my training and my identity as a philosopher was entirely submerged in my role in this group as an apprentice ethnographer. It helped a bit that the head of the school to which I was attached had been a student of mine on a Diploma of Philosophy course, but though this may have given some of our conversations a particular complexion, this was mostly significant in terms of the personal relationship which we had already established. Given that I had very little previous experience and no training in this kind of work, I was largely preoccupied with the social processes involved in ethnographic research. My most useful resource was my earlier historical training, and the comfort of Lawrence Stenhouse's notion of research as 'contemporary history'. I realised that what I was collecting were, or would become, (e.g. in the form of transcripts of interviews) a large set of textual or documentary evidence of people's perceptions of events and relationships. As an historian, I had some idea how to handle such material, though was it as a philosopher that I recognised this sort of epistemological congruity?

But no empirical research, least of all this kind of ethnographic research, is theoretically or ideologically neutral; nor did we set out to purge it of such 'impurities'. On the contrary, the field research was conducted in a context of intense political and educational debate about school accountability—debates which were explicit in the schools in which we were working, all of which were seeking to develop a notion of the 'self-accounting' school against the threat of more centrally directed and performance-based forms of accountability (that were, of course, eventually to triumph). In regular meetings in the research teams, too, we were constantly discussing the issues which were arising out of our individual cases and issues which we might agree to explore more closely in our own studies (i.e. we allowed ourselves progressive focusing). Inevitably, of course, these discussions in the schools and in the project team were informed by the theoretical and analytic frameworks which each of us brought to the work. We did not necessarily label these with our particular disciplines; nor did we observe rigidly disciplinary boundaries in the ideas and material we referenced (after all, each of us drew from quite wide educational training and experience); but inevitably the thinking and analysis were shaped by the theoretical and conceptual frameworks which we could each bring and were, I think, the richer for it.

In the analytic papers which came out of the project (Elliott et al. 1981), we could indulge our particular interests more freely. I wrote three of them: '"It's the ones who never turn up that you really want to see": The "problem" of the

non-attending parent'; 'Teachers and "the world of work"'; and 'Accountability, communication and control'. Re-reading these some years later (and I had clean forgotten about one of them) I recognise a distinctive philosophical flavour interwoven with the evidential reporting: in the attention given to contrasting views of the purpose of education; in the reference to the moral obligations of teachers to their children; in the interrogation of the discourse about, for example, an 'adaptable' workforce and 'the world of work'; in the analysis of the relationship between accountability, communication, and control; in my discussion of 'the rational professional and professional autonomy'; and in my problematising of the 'problem' of the non-attending parent. I might, of course, have arrived at all of this through sociological critique or social psychology rather than philosophy—and I had no difficulty in finding common cause with colleagues from these disciplines, but in practice it was my philosophical training that kicked in when faced with these issues.

These reflections lead me to two observations with which I shall conclude this section. Firstly, and not for the first time (see Bridges 1997, 1999), I am driven to observe that biographical stories about the forms of enquiry through which people come to particular ideas or hypotheses are not necessarily congruent with the logical stories which we are obliged to construct to provide the 'proper' epistemological foundation for such ideas or hypotheses. What I might think or write because of my philosophical background might be something which (in some cases at least) someone else might as easily arrive at from, for example, their sociological background.

Secondly, and by extension, there are a whole variety of intellectual habits, dispositions, and indeed virtues which are shared across the academy; there is, especially across the social sciences, an abundance of common literary reference; there are at least overlapping methods and methodologies; and any social science programme worth its salt will take students at least some way into the epistemological and ethical problems underlying its practice and the broader philosophical considerations which inform its continuing evolution. In the course of the study of any one of these disciplines, one is likely to encounter a substantial body of literature and thought which is also addressed in another discipline. To identify myself as 'a philosopher' may say something about the social route through which I have encountered and developed whatever academic ideas and attributes I have, but it does not necessarily mean that they are *sui generis* to that subject. Identity as 'a philosopher' or 'a sociologist' is something which, for many of us working in education is something imposed on us or selected from a range of possibilities, rather than something which reflects the heterogeneity of our intellectual roots and resources. This may, however, be a feature of academic lives outside continental Europe, where such distinctions between philosopher, historian, and sociologist, for example, are less closely observed (Which was Foucault?).

It seems to me to follow from this that we have to question the idea that there is someone present in a research group who can satisfactorily be categorised as 'the philosopher': 'the philosopher' will want to resist such a narrowly defined role. A successful research group (and I regard the Accountability Project as one such)

draws in people who import a wide range of experience and thought, and who 'muck in' with all that they have and borrow freely from each other.

I suspect that I may be obliged to qualify this position, but I shall leave it there for the moment as a picture which stands in vivid contrast to the kind of compartmentalised, discipline-based, collaborative research illustrated by the Moral Education Project.

Maggie MacLure's response to this discussion is, I think, illuminating:

> Your reflections helped me think about the nature of interdisciplinarity. For me, there's (crudely) a 'good' and a 'bad' version. The bad one (and the one promoted, I think, by our UK funding bodies) thinks of interdisciplinary research as a coming together of a bunch of 'characters' with very distinct (and intact) disciplinary identities—a sociologist, a psychologist, a philosopher, etc. The assumption seems to be that new knowledge will emerge as a kind of accumulation (or fusion perhaps) of the perspectives of each individual. But I suspect that when interdisciplinarity does 'work', it does so for the reasons that you point to in your discussion of the Cambridge Accountability project. That is, new knowledge emerges when people lose some part of their discrete professional/occupational identities, in the process of working on some common purpose. (Maggie MacLure)

I concur.

10.4   A Multidisciplinary Project on Classroom Discussion

This project brought together a group of some 20 educational researchers at one stage or another in a five-year programme of work directed by Jim Dillon of the University of California, Riverside. It culminated in a book published under the title *Questioning and discussion: A multi-disciplinary study* (Dillon 1988). The idea was an intriguing one. Dillon produced six transcripts of discussion in American High School classrooms; provided a little (for some, predictably, far too little) information about the context of the discussion; and invited a team of scholars from different disciplinary backgrounds to provide analyses from the perspective of their particular disciplinary or sub-disciplinary orientation. Philosophical perspectives of slightly different kinds were provided by C.J.B. Macmillan, William Knitter, and myself, and Dennis O'Brien also contributed to our discussions, which extended into meta-analysis of the difference between our approaches and of the process of multidisciplinary inquiry itself.

This example raises again for me the question of what a philosopher can do, faced with empirical data—in this case a set of transcripts. The (philosophical) task, of course, gets easier as soon as we get commentaries from different perspectives upon the data. We can begin to unpick the methodological or epistemological assumptions underlying the different accounts and interpretations. Of course, to return to my earlier observation, so can people who are not philosophers: the discourse analysts, the sociologists of knowledge, the psychodynamicists, and so on. But how does a philosopher deal with the primary data? Maggie MacLure again:

How does a philosopher deal with the primary data?' you ask. Why is there a problem? I detect an old, unchallenged binary opposition here. Is it that transcripts and speech seem 'spontaneous', 'raw', un-wrought, un-thought—i.e. self-evident, and therefore (somehow) impervious to philosophical interventions? You write that the analytic task became 'easier' once there were commentaries on those transcripts, which then offered up assumptions that could be 'unpicked'. But isn't the 'primary' data textual too? Can't it be philosophically 'unpicked' to disclose interpretative strategies, or 'epistemological' assumptions, or identity claims on the part of the speakers? Or would I be speaking like/as a discourse analyst in making such a suggestion? (Maggie MacLure)

My own response to the challenge reflected perhaps the over-confidence of we philosophers at that time. Drawing on work on classroom discussion I had done for my doctoral thesis (published in Bridges 1979, 1988), Dillon's book opened with my chapter, which began: 'This chapter sets out to offer some qualitative criteria by reference to which one might judge whether a classroom discussion had been a good one—and then to apply them to the five examples of classroom discussion offered in James Dillon's transcripts' (Dillon 1988: 15). I derived (or claimed to derive) the criteria of quality from an analysis of the functions of discussion in the refinement and enrichment of understanding. In one sense the philosophical work was fairly quickly despatched as I went on to explore the way in which the features of discussion that I had identified were or were not exhibited in the evidence.

Macmillan had a slightly more subtle approach, but was essentially engaged in the same task of examining the transcripts against certain criteria. He had developed with Jim Garrison what they called an erotetic concept of teaching (Macmillan and Garrison 1983), which asserts that 'when a teacher is teaching what he (sic) is doing is attempting to answer the students' questions about the subject matter' (Macmillan 1988: 90). Knitter had the philosophically more obvious task of providing a meta-analysis of the other analyses (Knitter 1988).

Macmillan's and my own responses to the task set suggest that philosophers may be bolder than some in addressing the quality issues. Our territory includes, after all, a long history in which scholars have advanced not only substantive views of what merits value or quality in fundamental spheres of human experience, but also arguments about the ways in which such views may or may not be derived, of the connection between one set of premises and another set of conclusions, and so on. Equally, of course, philosophers will be savage in their critique of any views of this kind which fail to avoid the perils of arbitrariness, subjectivity, or social relativism. Nor will they be alone is such critique. A plethora of intellectual traditions joins in the postmodern rush to deconstruct (i.e. substantially to undermine) any ambition for knowledge of the good.

What this example illustrates is something about the way in which someone bringing some of the conceptual apparatus drawn from philosophy can begin to engage not just at a meta-level offering God-like commentary on the work of toilers in the field, but also in the primary analysis of a set of empirical data—and bring something distinctive to such analysis because he or she draws on distinctive sources of understanding and questioning.

10.5   The Centre for Applied Research in Education at the University of East Anglia

All the cases I have illustrated so far are cases of research groups formed *temporarily* in connection with particular projects, though in all the cases with which I have been concerned these teams have been drawn from, or gone on to constitute, much more long-standing networks of professional friends and colleagues. This next illustration is of a different order. The Centre for Applied Research in Education (CARE) at the University of East Anglia (UEA) was, until its effective demise, one of the longest-established educational research centres in the UK, having been established in 1970 by Lawrence Stenhouse on the basis of the team which had been responsible for the development and evaluation of the Humanities Curriculum Project. It established its reputation as the driving force in the UK for the development of action research; for its sophistication of approaches to educational evaluation, notably through MacDonald's work in 'democratic evaluation'; through its development and teaching of qualitative methods of enquiry, and engagement with methodological issues in educational research. My own association with the Centre goes back to its very early days, though it was not until my appointment to a Chair at UEA in 1990 that I became routinely involved in its work.

There is an awful lot which could be said about CARE as a research group whose intense sense of having a unique tradition and identity which set it apart existed side by side with constant division and debate about what that identity consisted in. But I want to refer to this example to make a single point. None of the staff whom I joined in CARE would have identified themselves as philosophers with the exception of John Elliott, who would, I think, have said something else about himself first. And yet I have rarely encountered a centre in which there was a greater fervent of, and enthusiasm for, what I would identify as philosophical ideas. It was not that the standard references in philosophy of education were constantly (or ever) on their lips, though Stenhouse always acknowledged a debt to the work of Richard Peters, and the European continental sources that inform a lot of contemporary debate about postmodernism, as well as older sources in critical theory, phenomenology, feminist theory, and hermeneutics found an early embrace in the Centre. Rather it was the constant wrestling with, and questioning of, the status of research knowledge and of professional knowledge; with problems of inference and generalisability; with what Helen Simons dubbed 'the science of the singular' (Simons 1980); with the ethical issues associated with insider and outsider research; with the politics of contract research and issues to do with intellectual property; with the ontology of classrooms and with the very nature of education and educational processes.

Maggie MacLure, a member of CARE for many years, made the following comment in response to my observations:

> Philosophically-animated research groups (and CARE's just one of many) do such things as: question the status of the knowledge and evidence that they produce; reflect on the nature of the 'self' and its implication (i.e. folded-in-ness) in the generation of research

knowledge; explore relationships between language (or discourse) and reality; interrogate notions of ethics, democracy, authenticity, authority, experience, generalisation, etc. And importantly, they do it routinely, as part of whatever else it is that they also do.

I think that, in some respects, the prospects for this kind of philosophically—animated educational research are better now than ever. After all, social and educational research is already 'infected' with philosophical ideas. The poststructural or postmodern 'turn', as you mention, has involved a blurring of the boundaries between disciplines that previously considered themselves intact and 'pure'—literature, philosophy, anthropology, education, psychoanalysis, etc. And philosophy has been central to this dissemination (in Derrida's sense) of ideas and practices that formerly were (or tried to be) more 'disciplined'. As you point out, Continental philosophical traditions—hermenuetics, phenomenology, critical theory, existentialism, etc.—have made a huge contribution to the development of post-paradigmatic 'Theory'. But this has been at the expense of the former 'purity' of those individual traditions.

Not everybody thinks this is a good thing, of course. There is continued resistance to the spread of this philosophical/literary/psychoanalytic/linguistic virus, from those who want to stay more emphatically within the old disciplinary categories. (Maggie MacLure)

My comments are not intended as a nostalgic eulogy to CARE, though I do indeed feel considerable indebtedness to its stimulus (and this is evident in many chapters in this book). There is no harm in reminding oneself, however, of the importance of philosophical sources and a philosophical mind-set to a centre defined in terms of 'applied' research in education. The reason I present the description in these terms is that it requires a different construction of the idea of 'the role of the philosopher' in an educational research group. In one sense it renders 'the philosopher' redundant for the best possible reason—because serious and informed engagement with the philosophical issues in educational research is part and parcel of the professional practice of the entire research group. (Though are we prepared to live with this loss of identity?) But as I have argued in other contexts (Bridges 1997), the sad thing has been that this community of discourse, focused on empirical research of one kind or another, has not been adequately joined (in the UK anyway) to that other community of discourse populated by people who identify themselves as philosophers of education. They have occupied different journals, attended different conferences, read and referred to different books, and only rarely joined in common debate which I believe could only enrich both parties. Maggie MacLure again:

The kind of inter- (or post-) disciplinary provocation we are both interested in can probably only work amongst members of a discourse community—i.e. people who, as you suggest, are bound together by ties of history, purpose, custom, loyalty, obligation and a sense of difference and who are also bound together by the kinds of texts they produce, consume and value. As you note, the differences between the putative communities of qualitative researchers and philosophers of education are also, in a fundamental way, textual. Their respective members 'have occupied different journals, attended different conferences, read and referred to different books, and only rarely joined in common debate'. This allegiance to particular genres and fora is pretty close to John Swales' classic definition of discourse communities:

Discourse communities are socio-rhetorical networks that form in order to work towards sets of common goals. One of the characteristics that established members of these discourse communities possess is familiarity with the particular genres that are used in the

communicative furtherance of those sets of goals. In consequence, genres are the properties of discourse communities; that is to say, genres belong to discourse communities, not to individuals, other kinds of grouping or to wider speech communities. (Swales 1990: 9)

A key question, for this present forum, then, would be whether it can establish goals that are sufficiently inclusive to allow for the opening up of a new discursive 'space' for productive engagements of research/philosophy/education. I am not sure how general those shared goals would need to be in order to allow everyone to be counted in. Personally, I would be comfortable within a discourse community whose philosophical (and indeed educational) intentions inclined towards scepticism, critique, provocation and resistance to simplification. I would be less sure about joining a community whose philosophical inclinations were to arbitrate, discriminate, evaluate, settle educational questions, or offer 'masterful' interpretations (Maggie MacLure).

10.6 The Cambridge/Nazarbayev University Collaborative Research Project

I introduced briefly in Chap. 9 the work of a multidisciplinary research collaboration between the University of Cambridge Faculty of Education and the Nazarbayev University Graduate School of Education (NUGSE) in Kazakhstan, which I co-directed with Kairat Kurakbayev for four years from 2012 to 2015 (and it is ongoing). There were several features of this collaboration that shaped the interdisciplinary inquiry in particular.

Part of the rationale for this collaboration was to build research capacity among early career researchers in NUGSE, though some of these already had doctorates from Kazakhstani universities or master's level qualifications from outside Kazakhstan. We decided at an early stage that we would not provide 'research training' as such, but would build capacity (on both sides perhaps) by working together each year through the whole process of research—from identifying the research theme and questions to presentation of the research at a research conference. (The European Education Research Association became the main home for these presentations, and the newly established Kazakhstan Education Research Association became a member of EERA in 2014.) But partly because the plan was to build research capacity and partly because of the different interests of different participating members, we made a conscious decision to employ and practice a variety of research approaches in the course of our work.

The team from the Cambridge end included two (social) psychologists; a policy sociologist with a disposition towards discourse analysis; two others who were broadly qualitative researchers (one with a particular interest in practitioner research) in the field of school leadership; and a philosopher, albeit one who by this time had extensive experience in ethnographic case study research. Our Kazakhstani colleagues included an ethnographer; a quantitative researcher with a

particular interest in talented and gifted children; a micro-economist; and a number of others who contributed a number of skills, from interviewing and classroom observation, through survey instruments to documentary analysis. So this was very much an interdisciplinary team.

Despite this diversity we had in each year to come to a view about the primary focus of our research within the overall framing of school—and more particularly curriculum—reform.

In year one we focused on the centre, the Ministry of Education and Science and other government quangos, and the process of reform. We looked at the recent history of education reform since independence in 1991 and current aspirations and policies as viewed from the centre. This involved primarily document analysis and interviews, to which all members of the team contributed, whatever their discipline.

In year two we looked at perceptions of educational reform from the periphery of the system (through the eyes of teachers and local administrators) and formed three teams, each of which produced two fairly rough cut case studies, one from an urban school and one from a rural school. These provided the basis for cross-site analysis of a number of emergent themes, such as the role of school directors in educational reform and issues to do with the communication of the reform agenda, the 'translation' of practice internationally and intranationally, and teacher identity. For the fieldwork we all 'mucked in' and disciplinary identities were largely submerged (see Maggie MacLure's comments above) by the common purpose of assembling a grounded picture of how things were experienced and perceived at the grass roots of the education system. However, when it came to the cross-site analysis—where colleagues were free to pursue whatever interested them most, disciplinary identities began to come through. Among others, our social psychologists, for example, were particularly interested in issues of teacher identity, and these also took the inquiry into a sustained examination of issues concerning student assessment in Kazakhstan (Winter et al. 2014); other colleagues focused on their field of school leadership (Frost et al. 2014; Yakovets et al. 2015; Yakovets 2016); our policy sociologist looked at the construction and influence of 'the Soviet' in contemporary educational discourse (Fimyar 2014; Fimyar and Kurakbayev 2016), and later turned to an ethnographic study of ethnic minorities' access to higher education (Fimyar and Ahn 2015; Fimyar et al. 2016); and the philosopher joined with other Kazakhstani colleagues in examining the concept of 'translation' in contemporary educational discourse, drawing not so much on philosophical sources as such, as on literary theory (see Chap. 17), and provided an analytic component of a paper on school autonomy that also included a section on the legal and policy framework for school autonomy in Kazakhstan and evidence on understandings of school autonomy drawn from interviews. I realised in retrospect that in this phase of the research I had reproduced something very close to the pattern of working of the Cambridge Accountability Project (see above) thirty years earlier.

I shall not detail the whole progress of the programme of research (see Chaps. 9 and 17 for further description and discussion), but what is relevant here perhaps is that by year three a number of colleagues were anxious to deploy their disciplinary tools at the stage of defining the methods of inquiry and not just at the analytic

stage. This year and the next saw the employment of some fairly serious survey instruments (and the struggles to get significant numbers of returns).

By this stage, however, we had established a very substantial base of data (accessible to all members of the research team) and a grounded understanding of the context in which we were working.

This short account illustrates three slightly different versions of multidisciplinary research: (i) one in which there is developed a common base of data and shared understandings that are not significantly differentiated by discipline; (ii) one in which disciplinary identities are lost as researchers make common cause in the gathering of data, but emerge at the stage of analysis of the data; and (iii) one where people from different disciplines address a shared theme or topic, but employ from the start their own approaches to gathering data as well as analysing it. We had experience of all three approaches, but in every case we developed a commonly agreed set of research questions and in every case we agreed that all data collected would be accessible to all members of the research team, each of whom could individually or jointly produce their research papers from it (with due acknowledgment to the rest of the team).

10.7   Summary and Conclusion

It might be helpful in conclusion just to pull out some of the issues raised in this chapter which might provide a focus for discussion. These have included:

 (i) questions to do with the role of 'the philosopher' in an interdisciplinary or multidisciplinary research group and how the 'philosophical' contribution is understood;

 (ii) questions to do with the problematisation of that identity: of 'non-philosophers' who seem to be doing philosophical work and of 'philosophers' (most and perhaps all of them) whose intellectual role and resources cannot be reduced to the philosophical;

(iii) questions to do with what anyone *qua* philosopher can make of empirical data;

(iv) questions to do with how philosophers and those in the educational research community who would not define themselves in these terms can engage more effectively together; does this require us to subordinate our disciplinary identities?

 (v) questions to do with the conditions which 'make a community of arguers possible' within a research group and, more problematically, within looser educational research groupings/networks which cross all sorts of linguistic and cultural, as well as epistemic, frontiers.

The examples provided in this chapter illustrate some—but by no means a comprehensive set of—answers to these questions.

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Chapter 11
From Philosophising About Research to Researching Philosophy: Reflections on a Reflective Log

Abstract Throughout this book I bring, primarily, a philosophical perspective to bear on (broadly) empirical research in education. In this chapter I want to reverse this process and to offer an empirical and educational perspective on the business of doing philosophy. This chapter is a study of the process of writing a philosophical research paper for a conference. It was prompted by an invitation to write something about the method or methodology of philosophy of education. Normally such an invitation elicits a rather formal account of an approach associated with a particular philosopher or school of philosophy and a perhaps idealised account of how to proceed. I chose rather to describe a process of reflection, reading, conversation, and thought with all the discontinuities, periods of inactivity, reversals, and serendipity that reflect certainly my own experience of academic work. So, this is not a prescription for how to proceed; rather, perhaps, a source of consolation to others for whom things do not always proceed as planned.

> So books breed books, writing breeds writing. The writer starts out as reader in order to become the new writer. In this fashion one book can actually become the author of a new one. (Malcolm Bradbury, quoted in a tribute by Rosenthal 2001)

11.1 Introduction

An invitation to write something about the method or methodology of philosophy of education came at a time when I was starting to write about the relationship between philosophy and educational research (Bridges 1997) and observing among other things: (i) how rarely philosophers were explicit about their method(s), unlike many other research writers in the social sciences, who feel an obligation to render this very explicitly; (ii) how few accounts we have available of the process of this sort of intellectual inquiry; and (iii) how in practice from such clues as we have of

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such processes, they rarely follow a straightforwardly logical path, but wind and stumble through an admixture of experience and reflection, idleness and panic, systematic process and serendipity.

Whatever formal a priori account might be provided of 'philosophical method' (see Heyting et al. 2002 for a number of different approaches), it is unlikely to represent the actual process of the development of a piece of philosophical work as engaged with and experienced by the writer. Even in the relatively well established methodological terrain of the natural sciences, leading scientists have long recognised the stylised form of research reporting as offering 'a totally misleading narrative' (Medawar 1963: 378), a misrepresentation of the complexities of a practice in which method is seldom pristine, impersonal, and fully logical, but resembles, rather, a series of insightful choices exercised with greater or lesser effect. Medawar was prompted by his observation of the gap between the formal statement of method employed and the actuality of the conduct of the investigation to ask 'Is the scientific paper a fraud?' (Medawar 1963). Philosophers are on the whole protected from this accusation by their practice of saying nothing by way of preface to their writing about the method which they have employed in its derivation and construction.

On this basis I determined that, rather than attempting to impose some sort of idealised method or logic on the process of tackling a philosophical issue, I would attempt a kind of phenomenological description of my own experience. I would record my experience in a 'reflective log', in which I would try to record episodes in the process of constructing a paper that I had committed myself to writing for the 1997 British Education Research Association (BERA) conference. This was a paper entitled 'Research for sale: Moral market or moral maze', which I offered at both the British and European Education Research Conferences in September 1997, which was eventually to be published in the *British Educational Research Journal* (*BERJ*) in the autumn of 1998 (Bridges 1998), and which is in this book in a revised and extended form (see Chap. 19). The log would contain partly simple narrative, and partly reflections on the process.

In conventional qualitative research terms, the case I have studied is a case of the construction of a piece of writing in philosophy of education. The reflective log, which runs to 7950 words and covers the period January to October 1997 (though it was actually compiled between May and October), constitutes my case data and is available for inspection by bona fide researchers. The analytic account which I base on the data—this account—is the case study.

It is possible to pick out from the log four intertwining narratives describing different but interrelated dimensions of the process of writing. These dimensions include:

- writing as part of a personal story;
- writing as a set of social practices;
- writing as a literary activity; and
- writing as an attempt to satisfy methodological requirements.

I shall organise my reflections on the reflective log under these headings below. Unless attributed otherwise, all quotations are from the log.

11.2   Writing as Part of a Personal Story

11.2.1   Personal and Professional Distractions

The personal story includes aspects of my private life and of my professional life, and my attempts to insert some priority for the business of writing among a number of competing claims: I had recently been appointed Pro Vice Chancellor at the University of East Anglia (UEA). This entry reflected on both sides of this problem:

> There is a load of work to do at UEA generated by a combination of our need to be proactive over the summer in response to the spiralling deficits which the university … is facing and the need to develop a coherent university response or set of responses to the publication last week of the 1700 page report of the Dearing Committee. I also have … the prospect of some hectic activity on the home front if my daughter does not get the A Level grade she needs for admission to university. It does not exactly feel like the contemplative life! (29 July)

Reassuringly, however, the other demands on one's time did not always operate against the interests of the process of writing. It was, after all, the professional business, i.e. my wider role in the university, which brought me into contact with a Professor of Law at UEA and to the realisation that there might be some useful distinctions and arguments in the legal context which I could draw upon—and the log illustrates the compatibility of family holiday and productive thinking time:

> I found myself thinking about the paper … as we tramped across the limestone plateaux and boggy moorland of northern England. (29 July)

11.2.2   Continuity and Antecedents

What is firmly evidenced in the log is the point that a paper like this is part of a longer personal professional journey: it starts to take shape a long time before it begins to be written. It draws on ideas, experience, conversations, and reading collected and sometimes half-forgotten years before. Several specific references go back at least eight or nine years, and the formative ideas articulated in MacDonald's paper on 'democratic evaluation' a good deal longer. Oddly, I had forgotten when I started that in 1988 I had co-authored a paper on 'What constitutes a fair research agreement?' for a BERA symposium on Sponsor Control in Educational Research (Bridges et al. 1988). This contained the seeds of a number of the points which I would make in the new paper—as indeed did some of my recent writing on education and the market place (Bridges and McLaughlin 1994, and Bridges and

Husbands 1995). So the ideas that go into this paper are assembled from a personal history, are part of an evolving inquiry which uncovers old thoughts as often as, perhaps more often than, it uncovers new ones—or perhaps more accurately it re-combines old ideas in ways which have some semblance of novelty.

11.2.3   Inactivity and the Unconscious

If the log had been a daily log then it would have consisted for all but a tiny percentage of the record of total inactivity as far as the task of writing the paper was concerned. Indeed at one point I reflected:

> I was thinking that one of the risks of maintaining a log of what you actually DO when doing some research is that you fail to acknowledge all the parts which are FAILING TO DO ANYTHING! So let me place it on record that for some weeks I have failed to advance my thinking on this subject at all, but have been overwhelmed by other responsibilities crowding in on me from early in the morning till late at night … (29 May)

What is very difficult to understand, however, are the ways in which a certain level of thinking continues even through such periods. I had a sense of an unconscious process going on which would occasionally 'surface' in a quite unsolicited way. Moustakas writes about the researcher deliberately retreating from the data so as to introduce a period of incubation which will 'allow the inner workings of the tacit dimension and intuition to continue to clarify and extend understanding on levels outside the immediate awareness' (Moustakas 1990: 29, and see also Garratt 1997)—and this was my experience. In the second half of July I took a two-week holiday. At the end of this I recorded:

> The holiday seemed to provide a space for ideas to start forming. On two occasions while I lay on my bunk in a youth hostel … I found myself thinking about the paper … The only trouble is that I can't quite remember what these thoughts were (!) but I feel reasonably confident that they will 're-surface' … (29 July)

I nevertheless proceeded to make a note of what I recalled. It was an interesting feature of writing the log that it came to serve as a note of ideas that had occurred to me and thence a resource for the paper itself. To this extent the research into the process of writing became part of the writing and thus modified the process which was the object of study.

The matter of the unconscious processing of ideas is an intriguing one. In response to an earlier draft of this paper (which I offered to interested readers of my *BERJ* paper), John Nesbitt drew my attention to A.E. Housman's lecture, 'The name and nature of poetry', (Housman 1933) in which he describes how poems 'flow into my mind' or 'bubble up' when he is 'thinking of nothing in particular', especially after a pint of beer at luncheon. Nesbitt conjectured in slightly less poetic mode that it might have something to do with the hypothalamus, which converts immediate memory into long-term memory while we are unaware. This bit of the brain does the restructuring at times when it is not overloaded.

The active period of writing the paper was concentrated in one short burst of about three hours (resulting in 1794 words I noted on 5 August, compared with the 4850 words I had by the same time contributed to the log!), and then a longer burst over the bank holiday weekend which took it up to 8300 words and 'a version of the paper which I could at a pinch take to a conference' (25 August). After that it was the nice bit of writing, which is the polishing, tinkering, honing, and so on. The point is, however, that this writing was largely done out of my head on the basis of ideas and patterns which had taken shape specifically over the last few months but also, as already indicated, over a number of years. What I feel incapable of describing is that process of gestation, except that I know that the prompts and stimulation of conversation and the occasional time when 'busy' work is not totally dominating one's consciousness are important ingredients. The distractions can, however, complement the period of concentration and even enhance it. I recorded:

> There is almost increased motivation in snatching periods at the keyboard in between periods of domestic chores and stresses. (5 August)

11.3 Writing as a Social Practice

11.3.1 Networking and Intellectual Community

> So my first step … was to email a number of colleagues to tell them of my project and to ask them to suggest anything that might be useful. (15 May)

One of the things that the log illustrates very clearly is the extent of the interaction with other people that this writing task involved. It had its moments of concentrated isolation, but was also significantly social. Klemp (1977) describes how it is a feature of the way in which professionals exercising higher order professional skills operate that they draw extensively on their professional networks for assistance and support. They cannot necessarily do everything themselves, but they know someone else who can and they are willing and able to draw upon their expertise.

The log provides considerable evidence of this process of work in the preparation of this paper:

- an initial appeal to colleagues in the Centre for Applied Research in Education (CARE) at UEA to point me in the way of relevant material (15 May);
- conversations with Terry Prime (Professor of Law at UEA) about legal dimensions of the issues (29 July, 1 August, 1 October);
- a lunchtime discussion with Nigel Norris, a UEA colleague who had also written on this theme with particular reference to educational evaluation (12 August).

There were other links that did not lead anywhere.

The university served in fact as universities are supposed to—as a resource of ideas, and as a community of conversation within and across disciplines of study. I noted when I came to read some of the papers written by my colleagues in CARE on related themes to mine:

> A lot of the ideas in these papers resonated very closely with the material I had written. Of course it did—it was the stuff of many conversations over many years, but the written articulation of some of these perspectives helped to crystallise the basis of the arguments which people like Barry (MacDonald) and Saville (Kushner) had been representing. (26 August)

On this evidence, then, writing philosophy is a temporary rendering at a point in time of a continuing conversation. For a short period it diverts a social activity of conversation into an individual activity of representation, but even in that activity the writer continues to reach out to the sources of the conversation for help.

And, of course, the presentation of the paper at a conference ensures a more formal and perhaps ritualised re-entry of the writer's thoughts into the social and (hopefully) interactive arena.

11.3.2 Inquiry Made Public

I referred in my paper, as I have at several points in this book, to Stenhouse's definition of research as 'systematic and sustained inquiry made public' (Stenhouse 1980). This draws attention to, among other things, the public/peer scrutiny of research as a condition of, and as part of the process of, its gaining credence. The exposure of the form and substance of the research to critical gaze is, on this view, an essential part of the research process. Indeed in my paper (and so also in Chap. 19 here) I use this argument as an important objection to the reservation of sponsored research from this kind of public scrutiny.

The process which my own reflective log describes includes the exposure of my own paper to this kind of critical scrutiny at three conferences: the annual conference of the British Educational Research Association; the annual conference of the Cambridge Branch of the Philosophy of Education Society of Great Britain and the European Conference on Educational Research (ECER) held in September 1997 in Frankfurt. How did these function in practice?

My log does not reveal much evidence of them providing the kind of rigorous critical scrutiny that theory suggests they should. In a sense one is too busy on these occasions presenting one's paper, making sense of questions whose relevance is quite obscure, and explaining or defending what one has written to take on board really seriously the seeds of genuine criticism. I did however record that:

> At BERA Ian Stronach asked whether I had not fallen for the seductive image of researcher as hero—and I realised that I had allowed this to come through rather strongly. (21 September)

In fact this contribution was quite significant in leading me to give extra emphasis to the moral complexities, to add a point questioning researchers' claims vis-à-vis politicians' claims to represent the demos and to offer the re-structuring which emerged in the ECER version of the paper.

The Philosophy of Education Conference raised one or two interesting points—e.g. about the ontological confusion which underlies treating knowledge as property—which however did not lead me to alter anything of significance.[1]

The European Educational Research Association conference that year served mainly to reinforce my argument rather than to undermine it:

> I returned from a really interesting set of discussions at ECER in Frankfurt last week. My own paper linked well with something that Anne Pirie of SCRE presented on contract research, which focused on the problems of short term contracts especially as perceived from the perspective of contract researchers. It supported a lot of the concerns I was expressing about the quality of research under this regime. (1 October)

Part of the problem is that at both BERA and ECER the papers are distributed after the discussion. The presentation is a mere 15- or 20-min summary of the paper and only 10–20 min is allowed for discussion. These conditions almost never permit rigorous examination of philosophical argument of the kind which my paper actually supposes to be essential to the validation of research products.

The Philosophy of Education Conference was better designed for this purpose, with papers distributed in advance (though how often are they read?), 10 min or so for presentation, and then up to about an hour for discussion—much better for its purpose, though perhaps there were too few people present on this occasion who were really engaged with the kind of research issues I was discussing.

More effective as critical response really was the detailed annotation which John Brind (Contracts Administrator at UEA) gave me on a reading of the paper and subsequent annotations and thoughts from referees who commented on the paper, again in considerable detail, for the *British Educational Research Journal*.

So perhaps one needs to distinguish between the more public and official form of scrutiny (through research conferences etc.) and the more closely targeted scrutiny of people who have a real interest in the topic and a really informed basis for their response.

11.4 Writing as a Literary Activity

My log seemed to offer perspectives on two aspects of the writing process seen as a matter of literary construction. The first, familiar to all research students, concerned the balance between my personal voice in the writing and the reference that I might or should make to published sources. The second related almost to the dramatic character of the writing as well as again the position that the author might occupy.

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[1]I do, nevertheless start to address this issue in the latest version of the paper here in chapter 19.

11.4.1   Personal Voice and Published Voices

One of the things about the process of writing which students, including research students, often feel uncertain about is the relationship between 'the literature' and their own thoughts. I will not be abstractly prescriptive on this question here, for this is an empirically based report on what I did rather than what I might think one ought to do. A log entry describes the approach I adopted here—as in some of my other writing:

> After a period of gestation and conversation I tend to write without doing a lot of reading so that I can find my own voice and give shape to what I want to say in at least an initial outline of the paper. I feel it is important for me to be clear what question I am posing or what issue I am investigating and what is the broad shape of my response before I start reading much about what other people have had to say. The point is that ingredients of the problem have been circling in my mind and the focus of conversations for ten years or more … and over this time I have been at least partly alert to what other people are saying or writing about the issue, so it is not as if I am starting from scratch. In fact I don't think I could or would choose to write about something from scratch any more—everything I write grows out of something else I have done and/or written about. (5 August)

So I had written a framework for the paper before I started digging into the literature which I had identified for supporting and counter-arguments and so on, which might need to be woven in, acknowledged, or responded to. I nevertheless pursued the literature fairly seriously in an intense burst at this stage:

> I searched through the *Journal of Applied Philosophy* since it was established, expecting to find some discussion of intellectual property or research, but there was very little of any relevance—except perhaps a bit by John Passmore in the very first issue on 'Academic Ethics?' which I might be able to use. (21 August)

> Got stuck in fairly seriously. I'm dipping busily into all the resources I have collected together now—putting in some quotes and cross-references and commenting on these—and hence refining my roughly hewn starting piece. I get particularly excited with the Roszak material, which is emerging as the substantive values position for the paper. (23 August)

But through this process I was still trying to hang on to a standpoint which was my own:

> I do like a paper to carry a point of view and perhaps an explicit set of values. I find it very easy in writing something like this for this just to get lost … It is very easy … to get lost in the issues and to lose a point of view. It was quite a test for me when it came to write the 'summary and conclusion' to consider what if anything I had said and what conclusion if any I had come to. (25 August)

11.4.2   A Literary Construction

> I realised that the piece could actually be re-arranged to have either of two endings … If I presented the moral complexity stuff as the penultimate section and then concluded on the resounding note of Roszak, the paper had a very up-beat, crusading and perhaps modernist

message and conclusion. If I reversed the sections and put the Roszak stuff as an extension of the argument about the politics of research first and then followed this and concluded with the section on complexity, it had a very different feel and message … (21 September)

I appreciate in other people's writing the literary virtues of, for example, clarity, elegance, and colour. I like to see some shape to a paper, some architecture, but also the flow and movement of an English country park. I fail to realise these qualities in my own writing, but they hang around there as aspirations. In this case I did decide in the end to ditch a section on dishonest representation of research reports, mainly because it seemed an unnecessary distraction which got in the way of the main argument (21 September). I also brought the discussion of epistemic drift in front of consideration of the 'moral' and political arguments against sponsor control over research because I thought that provided a stronger, more clearly philosophical argument up front. All of these were essentially design features of the presentation.

The big choice, however, came around the decision as to whether to end, as I originally wrote the piece, on the rallying cry of Roszak (1969) or, as I think I had previously imagined, in the mire (the 'maze' was the original metaphor) of moral complexity around the counter-arguments to the case of the heroic researcher taking on the enemies of the open society.

Then, prompted partly perhaps by Ian Stronach's postmodern voice (cf. Stronach and MacLure 1997) at the British Educational Research Association (BERA) conference, a further possibility occurred to me:

More curiously, I realised that the piece could actually be re-arranged to have either of two endings (cf. John Fowles, as I pointed out at the Cambridge Philosophy of Education conference) … In the end I decided for ECER to offer the reader a choice of order, ending and, hence, of conclusion—and added a slightly cryptic quote from Tom Stoppard for good measure. (21 September)

This move prompted more interesting thoughts during the symposium at the European Conference on Educational Research, to which the American Philosopher, Nick Burbules, contributed. He was talking about the impact of new technology on the business of writing and publishing, and in particular (in terms of my interests) of the impact of hypertext—'the ability to link together multiple textual sources (including multi-media sources) in a complex, criss-cross pattern' (Burbules 1997: 278–279).

Hypertext highlights the possibility of lateral as well as linear forms of textual construction and the supplementation of traditional forms of argument, based on hierarchical outline structures and step-by-step syllogistic reasoning, with other rhetorical forms, including bricolage, juxtaposition and parallel composition. (Burbules 1997: 279)

Burbules urged us to think of 'designing' a paper rather than just of writing a paper and of a literary form which gave the reader the opportunity to produce lateral as well as linear paths through a constructed piece of writing—one which could offer all sorts of routes and byways and in which the reader would have enhanced choice in, and control over, the resource (the text) which the writer had offered.

I need to reflect further, however, on the extent to which these strategies (as indeed my own very limited departure from conventional presentation) represent an

abdication of the responsibility of the author to take some kind of stand, however provisionally.

11.5   Writing as an Attempt to Satisfy (Methodo)Logical Requirements

I was, after all writing something within a particular disciplinary tradition, namely philosophy, albeit that I have for some time sought to bring together in my educational writing empirically as well as philosophically derived material relating to the topic under consideration. Nevertheless, I knew that if I was going to offer this piece as a paper to a philosophical, as well as a broader audience, then it had to reflect some semblance of an appropriate methodology or logic. This consciousness is reflected in my log:

> Here I have explicitly assumed a reference point of a society which apparently subscribes to liberal democratic values, but I have not attempted either to provide warrant for such a society or to elaborate in any detail on the patently contested notions of such a society. In a sense I have constructed an 'if … then …' type argument, but without again a very tight set of logical inferences between the premise and conclusion. (25 August)

It is clear, however, that whatever logical rules I was following, I was doing so largely intuitively rather than as a conscious attempt to follow any particular approach to argument or analysis. In one entry after some fairly intense writing I recorded:

> I feel it behoves me to give some account of what has been going on, what logic has been brought into play, what methodology employed—but frankly I have not a clue. (25 August)

I pressed myself on this question harder however, and my subsequent notes indicate at least the following ingredients.

11.5.1   The Intellectualisation of Perplexity

I think of this as something like the classically pragmatic process. I started with a felt perplexity which I attempted to render more explicitly in a form which could then be tested or examined more systematically. Thus I translated a graphic statement made to me by Chris Saville—then Director of Education in Nottinghamshire —'I buy research like I buy a sack of coal and when I have bought it I expect to do what the hell I like with it!' into a set of four more formally articulated propositions, which I could then consider more analytically.

Similarly, I had an only partly formed notion that there was more moral complexity in the area than is sometimes acknowledged by those who present the researcher as heroic defender of democracy—and one of the things that I tried to do

(though I did not take this as far as I intended) was to clarify this complexity, again as a set of propositions.

Another way of seeing this is simply as an attempt to *get clear* about the issues at stake in my subject matter.

11.5.2 Argument and Counter-Argument

In a sense, the initial four propositions which resulted from my attempt to 'intellectualise' the problem then constituted the testable hypotheses, though in this context the test was to see if they could withstand vigorous counter-argument. The whole piece is set up as a structure of argument and counter-argument, thesis and antithesis—with, at least on one reading, a synthesis (drawing on Roszak's notion of 'intellectual citizenship') as a conclusion. My log reflects a preoccupation with this approach:

> The literature and informal debate provide a variety of major arguments re the issues I am discussing—and I have been anxious to ensure that I have not been leaving out any important argument (though at the same time I am struggling to draw some boundaries round what is potentially a vast subject). More importantly philosophically I am all the time trying to anticipate or address or acknowledge possible counter-arguments of any importance. This is perhaps the most important part of the logic of the work—and I am conscious that I have not really done it justice—mainly because of time and the already substantial number of words. To some extent I will leave it to the occasions when I present the paper to discover if colleagues will identify important caveats, cautions or contradictions which I have not thought of in my rather hasty compilation. (20 August)

I note also, however, in the passage already quoted that, 'There is always a problem with philosophical writing (I might have added particularly in applied philosophy) with how far you go back in the argument' and I observed that I had largely assumed a reference point of a society which broadly subscribed to liberal democratic values of a certain kind. The whole piece therefore takes on the implicit form of a conditional or 'if … then …' type argument. I might have added, with an awful lot of 'if's. (See on this problem Chap. 5).

11.5.3 Observing Some Relevant Distinctions

As I reflected in the log:

> This arises partly out of my old training in conceptual analysis, partly out of my desire to provide a bit more analytic framework to the discussion, The economic/moral/political distinction between the different kinds of value of knowledge seems to me to have been quite helpful to draw in this context—but I have not gone very far down the route of fine distinctions. (25 August)

I did, then, find it helpful to observe some of the differences between what I described as the moral, the political, and the economic value of research. Similarly, I began the paper by presenting an extended version of Becher's (1985) classification of different relationships between the sponsor of research and the researcher. Finally, I followed Roszak (1969) in distinguishing three kinds of views of the university. None of this, however, amounted to conceptual analysis in conventional terms.

11.5.4 Representation of the Field

I was consciously operating in the domain of applied philosophy—which I think brings different or additional disciplines to bear to those that apply to philosophy in a purer form:

> In a sense part of my 'philosophy and educational research' project is to bring sources/voices together from different parts of the academic community and to present these back to the different parts in a way which will help them to see the connections—so I have a bit of a concern to represent those different communities reasonably adequately. It will I think be important to check what I have written against their separate opinions, so that I can feel reasonably confident that I have done them justice—or at least not done them gross injustice. (25 August)

In the section in which I deal with the 'epistemic drift' associated with the shift to sponsor-dominated research I deliberately chose to add to the a priori argument Norris's evidence from empirical research (Norris 1995), which from a more purely philosophical point of view might have been redundant or irrelevant, but which I felt helped to bridge the two domains and provide psychological if not logical support for the point.

I was particularly grateful to get comments on the paper from our research contracts manager in the UEA contracts office—and conscious that a weakness of the paper (thus far) was that it had failed to reflect sufficiently strongly the perspectives of research sponsors.

On this basis I suggest that there is a more complex interplay between empirical Evidence and experience and logic in this sort of writing than in 'purer' forms of philosophising.

11.6 Conclusion: So What Have I Learned?

I think I embarked on this process rather more out of simple intellectual curiosity than out of a direct attempt to develop my own practice—but the process has nevertheless informed, if not transformed, my practice of writing since the events reported here. Perhaps more than anything it has given me confidence in a process which can for several months seem a long way short of delivering the written

product to which I have committed myself, and yet which seems to work (for me) in the end—and it has helped me to recognise what some of the components of this process are and to ensure that they are in place in time:

- an open seeking of advice, references, etc. from colleagues;
- an early articulation of whatever perspective and thoughts which I have drawn from my own history and which represent my own (provisional) voice on the topic;
- the timetabling of spaces for bursts of writing, combined with a relaxed view of the 'distractions' which might get in the way between times (grounded in a newly optimistic confidence that something might be ticking away in the unconscious in the meantime);
- the early establishment of—if not a reflective log on quite the scale that I maintained on this previous occasion—at least a folder into which I can shove the odd thoughts which occur during the months of relatively low activity;
- enhanced interest in (though unfortunately not greatly enhanced capacity for) the literary or dramatic qualities that might be features of an otherwise rather dry academic paper.

Reflecting, finally, not just on the construction of that paper, whose history has continued with its inclusion in revised form in this book, but on the construction of this book itself, I think I can recognise these same processes at work. The single case is certainly generalisable across my own experience, though this does not mean that it will represent that of anyone else. But when I realise that I am now reflecting on the construction of one piece of writing (the book) which has included another piece of writing (the case study), which reflected on a third piece of writing (the original 'Research for sale' paper), I conclude that this reflexivity has gone far enough and it is time, if not to conclude, then at least to stop.

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Part IV
Truth(s) in Educational Research

Chapter 12
Educational Research: Pursuit of Truth or Flight into Fancy?

Abstract The question addressed in this chapter is: is educational research concerned in some sense with the truth in relation to the matter(s) which are the focus of its inquiry or is it not, as Guba and Lincoln among many others seem to imply? My answer is that either it is so concerned or it probably collapses into incoherence. If this seems rather starkly simple, it is important to remember that even in textbook philosophy there is more than one account of what it means to claim the truth of a proposition, and that these come with significantly different epistemological baggage. In this chapter I shall outline some of these different accounts; map different theories of truth against different models of educational research; and then discuss two particularly influential sources on educational research methodology that struggle—but fail, as I argue—to jettison the idea of truth as a principle governing educational, or indeed any other, inquiry.

> We regard our work as simply another construction. We hope the reader will find it reasonably informed and sophisticated, but it is certainly far from universal truth. Indeed there is no universal truth to which our construction is a more or less good approximation. We trust that continuing dialectic dialogue about what we have to say will lead to reconstructions of greater power and worth but not of greater truth. (Guba and Lincoln 1989: 16)

> Scoff at all knowledge and despise
>
> Reason and Science, those flowers of mankind;
>
> Let the father of all lies
>
> With dazzling necromancy make you blind;
>
> Then I'll have you unconditionally.
>
> (Goethe: *Faust*)

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12.1 Introduction

I am prompted to engage in this discussion by, in particular, my experience of a conference of the British Educational Research Association at which I heard on three occasions within the space of two days the confident assertion that 'Of course, there is no such thing as truth'. I also observed, among the majority of more pedestrian contributions, which were clearly untroubled by such matters, an increasing number of (often interesting) papers in which the notion of 'truth' (or 'Truth') was referred to in inverted commas (designed it appears to distance the author from any direct association with the poisonous notion); or claims to the truth of beliefs were denied in favour of, for example, some kind of theory of political dominance or multiple subjectivities; or the very notion of the truth of beliefs was assumed under some apparent orthodoxy to be already ruled out of court. Such standpoints are in some, but by no means all, cases associated with a declared 'postmodernist' stance but equally often seem to come from a naïve social relativism or subjectivism.

But can truth be so readily dispensed with in educational or educational research discourse? Is it not after all, as Pring puts it, that: 'The overriding principle that informs research would seem to be that of "finding the truth". This is much more than "telling the truth" although it does of course include that. The purpose of undertaking research is the production of new knowledge' (Pring 2000: 144). 'There are,' suggests Pring, 'difficulties in saying what one means when one says that a statement is true, and yet it seems impossible to get away from the notion— even if one carefully avoids using that word' (Pring 2000: 72). I want to draw on some fairly standard arguments in traditional epistemology to remind us that it is not so easy to dispense with the principle and aspiration of truth, even if (and partly because) neither its meaning nor the conditions which we need to satisfy to lay claim to it are straightforward matters either.

12.2 Statements, Propositions, and Truth

First, some preparatory work. I am using here the fairly standard sense of truth as something which may or may not be attributed to a statement or proposition, an assertion of something being the case, a belief—as represented, for example by the following:

- 'children learn to read more effectively when they are taught a phonetic approach';
- 'the national curriculum has contributed to a reduction of gender discrimination in education';
- 'educational discourse is an arena of propaganda and counter-propaganda';
- 'there is a high correlation between incidents of drug abuse among teenagers and areas of high unemployment'.

I offer these as examples of propositions (or particular sentence forms expressing propositions—see Lemmon 1966). From time to time I shall use the shorthand 'p' to stand for any such proposition.

My first observation is that, normally, when anyone offers us such a proposition in speech or writing, the general expectation is that they are suggesting that what they are saying is true, or at least, because they may psychologically entertain a particular belief with greater or lesser levels of confidence, that they believe that it is true. This is, I suggest, the standard character and understanding of this kind of speech act. So, if I say to you:

> 'Children learn to read more effectively when they are taught a phonetic approach' this would normally imply…
> 'I believe that the statement "Children learn more effectively when they are taught a phonetic approach" is true';
> and by extension.…
> 'the proposition "Children learn more effectively when they are taught by a phonetic approach" is true'.

In abbreviated form: my assertion of 'p' implies 'I believe that "p" and "p" is true'. This much is implicit in the *meaning* of the assertion. None of this, of course, necessarily carries the further implication that 'p' is indeed true.

12.3 Counterexamples (None of Which Seriously Undermine the Central Proposition)

12.3.1 Other Forms of Speech Act

I am not, of course, claiming that all speech acts have the purpose or function of affirming the truth of something. We are familiar, too, with imperative, with interrogative, and with exclamatory forms of speech, none of which affirm anything to be the case, though in their more complex forms there may be ingredients of such affirmation. There are other subtle categories like 'performative utterances' ('I thee wed', 'I promise you') which enact what they affirm. These are, however, not the forms of speech act with which I am really concerned here. On the whole, though educational research writing is indeed framed by some questions, and though it may offer some exhortations and a few exclamations, it provides for the most part statements, propositions of a specific kind or of a more general kind about what is, has been, could be or will be the case.

12.3.2 The Psychodynamics of Language

We are familiar, too, with all sorts of layers of emotional content which we may load onto statements and assertions, and which may indeed be more important from

certain points of view than the bare assertion which the statement makes. We know how the language in which an assertion is made may be selected to persuade, to intimidate, to assert authority or power over someone else—and it may be these dimensions of what is going on in a particular piece of discourse which interest us more than the truth or falsity of the proposition which it also presents. To acknowledge this psychodynamic dimension of language is, however, entirely compatible with maintaining its propositional, truth-asserting character.

12.3.3   Retreating to the Primeval Grunt

There is a rather extreme version of a kind of emotivist account of discourse which just about evades the propositional trap, though it carries a pretty high price, and it is not an approach which on the face of it many authors of educational research papers would acknowledge. We can escape that connection between proposition and truth claim by interpreting our thoughts as more or less sophisticated emotional expletives e.g.:

  'positive reinforcement … hurrah!'

  'government agency control over teacher training … grrr!'

  'school inspections … boo hoo!'

   Such examples display the response of the speaker to certain recognisable phenomena and tell us something about that individual's feelings. They escape, however, any kind of assertion of the truth of anything because strictly they make no statement, though some kind of statement may be implied. Arguably, it is only by reinterpreting our apparently sophisticated discourse as little more than primeval grunts that we can escape its truth- asserting function.
   There will be some, of course, who will suggest that the products of educational research do indeed amount to little more than primeval grunts, but I do not believe that those who seek to eschew the language of truth or falsity would seriously seek to represent either their own or others' work in quite these terms. Of course they seek to persuade; perhaps they seek to assert their power or authority in the research discourse; but they do so within conventions and forms of language which continue (inevitably, I would argue) to affirm the truth of the propositions which are at the core of their position.

12.3.4   Propositions of Contested Status

There are some important categories of statement whose status is rendered especially problematic by these several functions of language. Most importantly, perhaps, this applies to moral and evaluative statements. There are major debates in

moral philosophy, for example, as to whether a statement such as 'It is wrong to maim innocent children' is: (i) a proposition of which it is appropriate to ask whether it is true or false; (ii) a statement of the speaker's values, which may truly or falsely represent those values; (iii) a statement of some wider social code of values, which similarly may or may not accurately represent those codes; or (iv) an expletion, equivalent to 'maiming innocent children—urghh!' which has no truth claim, though it may raise issues about its authenticity or otherwise.

I have no problem myself in understanding a statement like 'It is wrong to maim innocent children' as articulating a view of what is indeed or *truly* wrong—that it's logical character is in this sense truth-affirming—even while recognising that the means of demonstrating the truth or falsity of such a proposition are deeply problematic. I would have to acknowledge however that this is by no means the only view in either popular or technical moral discourse.

12.3.5   Lying and Deceit

People may, of course, deliberately lie or deceive, or we may in fear, anxiety, or self-deceit misrepresent our true beliefs. These observations do not, however, undermine my general observation about the ordinary use of language. The possibility of lying or deceit itself rests on a general assumption: (i) that there is a distinction which can be drawn between truth and falsity; and (ii) that in general the presumption is in favour of people attempting to offer the truth as they see it.

12.3.6   Being Mistaken

People will, of course, assert what they believe to be true, but through e.g. carelessness, ignorance, or through being misled by others, do so mistakenly—i.e. they may be wrong. This is not really a problem for my central position. There is no incompatibility between, on the one hand, my asserting that 'p'; my believing that 'p'; or my believing that 'p' is true and, on the other hand, 'p' being false. My claim is not that educational researchers are invariably successful in the endeavour to establish the truth of the matter under consideration and to affirm it—but that they are inexorably driven to observe some sort of distinction between truth and falsity and that in their published work they are centrally concerned to affirm the truth as they see it.

12.3.7   The Denial of Truth

Some researchers may try to deny the appropriateness or applicability of notions like truth or falsity. But there are problems for them, too, for their very denial

represents an assertion, the nature of which is truth affirming, the intelligibility of which relies on our understanding that it is explaining that, and perhaps why, something is or is not the case. (I shall illustrate this argument more fully in my discussion of particular sources in Sects. 12.7 and 12.8). 'Not p' always implies at least one 'p': arguing that something is not the case is for this purpose of just the same status as arguing that something is the case.

This is, of course, a pretty cursory rush through some of the counterarguments, but I would claim that, although the seven points indicated above help to illustrate the richness and complexity of language in use, none of them changes the fact that in the standard use of language, in offering statements in speech or writing we are (albeit among other things) offering a statement of what we believe to be true. A flick through the synopses of any year's educational research conference papers suggests that, without exception, all contributors appear to be offering more or less complex sets of propositions of this kind.

It is not that they are 'pursuing the truth' as something outside or beyond their ordinary inquiry or discourse. I am not here concerned with the idea of truth as a kind of Holy Grail. Rather it represents a criterion, a standard against which the ideas developed and presented can be assessed. It is, then, a procedural principle or, as I shall go on to describe, a set of principles embedded in different, and to some extent competing, epistemological theories.

12.4   Five Theories of Truth

I suggest that part of the problem about references to the notion of truth in educational discourse, and in particular in the discomfort which some educational researchers clearly experience in employing the language of truth, is rooted in a failure to distinguish (perhaps to be aware of) different theories of truth—theories, that is, which give some account of what it might *mean* to talk about the truth of a proposition and of how we might *determine* or go about establishing the truth or otherwise of that proposition. Again, I do not propose here to go beyond some fairly basic textbook distinctions, which are sufficient at least to demonstrate that truth itself is not a monolithic concept.[1] The rejection of one notion still leaves you with other alternatives. Furthermore, as I indicated in my introduction, I think it is possible to show a connection between different theories of truth and different paradigms of educational research—and it will at least move the debate on if we can see that one has to observe some of these very significant distinctions in the discourse—and not talk about truth and research as if there were a single set of

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[1]My discussion is limited, too, to some fairly traditional epistemological sources and is not exhaustive of different theories of truth. Huttunen and Kakkori (2002), for example, draw on Heidegger, Gadamer, and Ricoeur to argue for the application of a hermeneutical notion of truth to narrative research. This simply reinforces my point that anyone trying to dispense with notions of truth has to grapple with a many-headed monster!

relations at stake here. I will first offer a short account of five such theories of truth; then consider some of the ways in which they might relate to different models of educational research; and, finally, discuss the place of truth in two recent and significant contributions to research methodology by Guba and Lincoln (1989) and Stronach and MacLure (1997).

12.4.1   Truth as Correspondence

'P' is true if and only if p—i.e. it 'corresponds' with an actual state of affairs or condition.

The correspondence theory of truth embraces both a notion of what it means for a proposition to be true and an indication of how we might check whether or not a proposition is true. Essentially, on this account a proposition is true if and only if it corresponds with a fact—a state of affairs which actually exists/existed/will exist (as appropriate). As Eisner reminds us, however:

> As an ideal, correspondence between the world and the inquirer not only refers to what the inquirer perceives and understands but to what he or she has to say about the world. In other words, correspondence is to occur not only in perception and understanding but in representation as well. (Eisner 1992: 10)

(Compare Guba and Lincoln below. They prefer to focus on only the second of these two relationships or 'isomorphisms'.)

It is as if, in the image which Rorty went on to attack, one was holding 'a mirror to nature' (Rorty 1979). Thus, to say that the proposition 'average class sizes have grown by 7% over the last ten years' is true *means* that there is a corresponding fact which is the growth of class sizes by 7% in the last ten years. In order to *determine* whether or not the proposition is true, you need to check it against the fact(s) and decide whether there is or is not a correspondence between the two.

The correspondence theory has a certain appeal. It is probably the closest of the five I shall consider to a common sense understanding of what we mean when we claim the truth of a belief. It makes it especially clear why the truth of a belief is independent of the fact that someone believes it. It also has some inherent problems. The nature of 'correspondence' is especially problematic. To take my example, even if it is true there may not be any classes of average size out there—so what does average class correspond to? In any case, in what sense can a string of words resemble either a statistical construct or some physical entities which include classrooms crowded with children?

> The word 'correspondence' suggests that, when we make a true judgement, we have a sort of picture of the real in our minds and that our judgement is true because this picture is like the reality it represents. But our judgements are not like the physical things to which they refer. The images we use in judging may indeed in certain respects copy or resemble physical things, but we can make a judgement without using any imagery except words, and words are not in the least similar to the things which they represent. We must not understand 'correspondence' as meaning copying or even resemblance. (Ewing 1951: 54–55)

But what, then, does it mean?

Eisner developed a similar criticism more recently and in the context of educational research:

> To know that we have a correspondence between our views of reality and reality itself, we would need to know two things. We would need to know reality, as well as our views of it. But if we knew reality as it really is, we would not need to have a view of it. Conversely, since we cannot have knowledge of reality as it is, we cannot know if our view corresponds to it. (Eisner 1992: 11)

A second difficulty about the correspondence theory of truth is that it comes close to circularity. A proposition is true if it corresponds to a fact—but what is a fact, if not a state of affairs represented by a true proposition. So how informative is the correspondence theory?

Thirdly, 'states of affairs' have themselves to be construed in certain ways—notions like 'effective management', 'supportive environment', or even 'classes growing in size by 7%' are not simply like pebbles on the beach to be picked up and matched against some prior specification:

> All so-called perception or observation is not simply the camera-eye recording the given, it is also the mind interpreting according to the pattern of one's past experience: and exactly what you will see will depend on what your interests are, either in general or in this special case. (Woozley 1966: 144)

Our 'construction' of the facts to which we attend is at least in part a function of the beliefs we entertain—and this construction represents both an indispensable and an unreliable check against the truth of those beliefs.

Fourth, while the correspondence theory has a certain plausibility in relation to accounts of the physical world, it is less clear how the notion of correspondence can be invoked to give an account of truth in, perhaps, mathematics, logic, or morality.

Finally, correspondence theory tends to see truth as a piecemeal characteristic of a fragmentary set of beliefs—with each belief being checked separately for its correspondence with the relevant fact. Our experience of beliefs is not like that, however. One belief implies or supports another; beliefs hang together (or fail to do so, in which case we feel some dissatisfaction) as part of an interconnected and mutually supportive system. Indeed it is precisely this feature—the coherence of a set of beliefs and the absence of inconsistencies between them—which lends confidence to the idea that they may be true. These features of our belief systems bring us then to a second theory of truth…

12.4.2 Truth as Coherence

'P1'… 'Pn' are true if and only if they represent a coherent, consistent, and comprehensive set of propositions.

The coherence theory of truth presents truth and the tests for truth as applying rather to a set of beliefs and the relationship between them than to a single

proposition in isolation. In the simplest terms, one's beliefs are true in so far as they are: (i) internally consistent and coherent (i.e. not only do they avoid self-contradiction but they are mutually implicative and supportive); and (ii) comprehensive (i.e. the more extensive their scope and elucidatory capacity—while retaining coherence—the stronger the confidence they invite).

Mathematical systems like Euclidean geometry illustrate the coherence principle, though they do not entirely exemplify it since they rest on premises which are not internal to the system and which cannot be warranted by the other beliefs in the system.

Woozley articulates the principle perhaps slightly more tightly:

> Coherence in the ideal sense may, sufficiently for our purposes, be defined as the relationship holding between a body of propositions such that no one of them can be false if all the rest are true, and that no one of them is independent of the others. That is, between all of the several propositions there exists a mutual entailment such that any one of them is deducible from all the rest, and no one of them could be true if any of the others were false. (Woozley 1966: 152)

Lying behind such a notion of truth is, of course, an idealist metaphysics of which this extract from Blanshard's 'The nature of thought' gives the flavour:

> That view is that reality is a system, completely ordered and fully intelligible, with which thought in its advance is more and more identifying itself. We may look at the growth of knowledge, individual or social, either as an attempt by our minds to return to union with things as they are in their ordered wholeness, or the affirmation through our minds of the ordered whole itself. And if we take this view, our notion of truth is marked out for us. Truth is the approximation of thought to reality. It is thought on its way home. Its measure is the distance thought has travelled, under guidance of its inner compass, towards that intelligible system, which unites its ultimate object with its ultimate end. Hence at any given time the degree of truth in our experience as a whole is the degree of system it has achieved. The degree of truth of a particular proposition is to be judged in the first instance by its coherence with experience as a whole, all comprehensive and fully articulated, in which thought can come to rest. (Blanshard 1939: 264)

Again there is something attractive and, I think, recognisable at a fairly commonsensical level about the coherence theory of truth. We commonly regard the incoherence of an explanation or chronicle of events as a reason for rejecting it, or at least for asking for some modification or development in the interests of coherence. In trying to make sense of some new experience or information we try to fit it into our established beliefs, and if we find that this is not possible then we have either to readjust our other beliefs to accommodate it or reinterpret it so that it can be accommodated. Of course, as a temporary arrangement we have no way of knowing which of these ways of achieving coherence is the right one: in principle (and there is some analogy to completing a crossword puzzle) subsequent experiences and pieces of information will help us to realise that our earlier arrangement, our earlier achieved coherence, was or was not a satisfactory one. Perhaps a later discovery (of a friend's disloyalty over many years, for example) may lead us to disentangle a whole string of beliefs and suppositions and reconstruct them to accommodate this latest bit of understanding. In the same way, the re-dating of a

piece of archaeological evidence, for example, can disrupt a whole section of ancient history and cause it to be rewritten in a way which fully takes into account this latest evidence.

There are nevertheless problems in such a theory of truth. Most fundamentally, it appears to suggest that we cannot really determine the truth of any belief until we have developed an entire and wholly inclusive system of beliefs. Secondly, it is not clear how, on a coherence theory of truth, you could decide between two sets of beliefs (two meta-narratives, perhaps) which were both internally coherent, but which were nevertheless mutually incompatible; or is it supposed that 'ultimately' only one such set of beliefs can stand—that 'one system only is true, namely, the system in which everything real and possible is coherently included' (Woozley 1966: 161)—in which case the theory seems to be invoking a principle additional to that of coherence, namely that of comprehensiveness or universality. Thirdly, the theory appears to rely on a truth presupposed independently of the theory itself—the truth of some of the basic laws of logic which themselves underpin the notion of coherence.

I shall leave my discussion of coherence theory at this point (see Everitt and Fisher 1995 for a discussion of modern coherentism). I am not concerned to argue for a particular view of truth (either what we might mean when we talk of a belief being true or how we might decide whether or not a particular belief is true). Rather, I am seeking to illustrate some of the different kinds of account which the philosophical literature has to offer. So let me turn to a third account of truth which is to be found in philosophical pragmatism.

12.4.3   Truth as 'What Works' [2]

'P' is true if and only if it 'works', i.e. it allows you to pursue your project/interests/purposes in practice.

Of all theories of truth, pragmatism has perhaps the closest identity with common sense—and indeed in non-technical parlance to be pragmatic is almost synonymous with applying common sense (as distinct from abstract or high-faulting principles) to the matter under consideration.

As I indicated in Chap. 13, it is easiest to understand its application in the context of technology where, for example, a diagnosis of a fault in the working of my car might be held to be true or correct if the action taken on the basis of that diagnosis remedies the fault. My belief that rotating the knob on my cooker will raise the temperature on the hob is true if when I rotate the knob it has the desired effect. It remains, indeed, part of my stock of knowledge until one day it does not work. I am told that a fuse, which I did not know I had, has gone, and I modify my belief system to accommodate this in a way which then allows me to pursue my

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[2]See also Chap. 13 on pragmatism and action research.

purposes effectively. The question as to whether the belief works or not becomes on this theory both: (i) a test for the truth or falsity of my beliefs; and (ii) an account of what it means to claim that they are true or false.

As I have indicated, this pragmatic theory of truth serves most comfortably in the world in which it is dealing with things working, i.e. in the domain of technology and in contexts in which people are going about their practical affairs. These may not be entirely trivial cases: a lot of what we do in education, health, housing, transport, and public welfare may well be governed by projects and belief systems in which the pragmatic principle serves us very well. It is less readily applied, though some have attempted its application, to areas like religion, morality, mathematics, or even less applied areas of science.

However, it is argued that the proper way to conceive of the relationship between truth and functionality is not (a) that a belief is true if it works but (b) a belief will work if it is true. In other words, while true beliefs will indeed 'work' (if they have that sort of application), but that they are true or false is determined by something else (back to correspondence) rather than by the fact that they work.

It is also argued against pragmatism that it begs some of the most important questions. A decision as to whether some belief (let us say in the context of classroom practice) 'works' or not presupposes some view of what would count as working. In this context this might involve some judgment about educational aims and procedural principles which cannot themselves be determined by reference to whether they work, since they provide the criteria used to determine whether or not some particular belief is working.

As I acknowledged in Chap. 13, this fairly conventional argument does less than justice to more developed versions of pragmatic theory (see e.g. James 1955, 1960) and some of its more sophisticated modern expressions. Cherryholmes, for example, distinguishes between 'vulgar pragmatism', which is 'premised on unreflective acceptance of explicit and implicit standards, conventions … meanings, rules and discourses—practices that we find around us' (Cherryholmes 1988: 151), and 'critical pragmatism', which is 'unbounded, radical, visionary and utopian, based upon visions of what is beautiful, good and true' (Cherryholmes 1988: 151). Barone explains this critical pragmatism as resulting 'when a sense of crisis is brought to our choices, when it is accepted that our standards, beliefs, values and guiding texts themselves require evaluation and appraisal,' (Barone 1992: 32). It may be, however, that such refinements to pragmatism meet some of the objections to the position only by invoking epistemological principles of a non-pragmatic character. (What, for example is the source of the 'visions of what is … true' referred to above?)

12.4.4   Truth as Consensus

'P' is true if and only if there is agreement that p universally or among a relevant population.

> But how then can we find out how things really are, and how they really work? … The best we can do is to come to some consensus (or as near to it as possible) that can be managed given the level of information and sophistication that we have. The construction to be 'believed' is that one which, in the opinion of those best able to make such a judgement, is the most informed and sophisticated. (Guba 1992: 20)

Consensus theory of truth draws on some of the constructivist thinking which underpins philosophical pragmatism, but effectively turns the truth or falsity of a belief into a matter of social agreement. It is perhaps unsurprising that it is favoured more commonly among sociologists than mainstream philosophers, given that it renders the processes of verification and falsification into ones readily and perhaps exclusively amenable to sociological or (as in Guba's own work) ethnographic enquiry. Elliott Eisner is among those who seem to have favoured an approach to the assessment of truth claims in research by agreement or consensus, which he defines 'consensual validation' as 'agreement among competent others that the description, interpretation, evaluation and thematics of an education situation are right' (Eisner 1991: 112).

There are clearly some contexts which lend themselves more readily to consensus theory than others. The English legal system, like many others, depends heavily on it. The correct interpretation of the law of the land is that interpretation which three law lords sitting together can agree upon. A person is indeed found guilty of murder if a jury of twelve citizens can agree that the person is guilty. Yet even in these contexts, it is clear from all the meticulous scrutiny of evidence and testimony which precedes a decision by a court of appeal or a jury that there is in operation a notion of truth which goes beyond the fact of consensus or otherwise. Was the accused actually at the place of the murder and at the time it took place? Do the fingerprints on the murder weapon match those of the accused? Did or did not the accused have a motive? And even after a jury has delivered its verdict and sentence has been carried out new *evidence* may come to light which clearly demonstrates a miscarriage of justice—and this can be acknowledged. Even in these contexts in which a consensus approach to truth is most nearly in operation, the achievement of consensus is always secondary in principle to an independent imperative which is to do with establishing the truth of the matter—on a different set of criteria.

Philosophers have tended to be sceptical of consensus theory as an account of what it means for a belief to be true, even if they acknowledge that, in many social contexts in which decisions have to be taken, consensus about what seems to be true has to be a practical or political substitute (though indeed a socially important one) for a demonstration of what can be established in some other way to be true. Revealingly, perhaps, even Guba's articulation of a relativist/consensus approach quoted above acknowledges the relevance of criteria—to do with 'the level of information and sophistication,' which are features of a belief—which point to the grounds for discrimination, 'warrants' perhaps (see below), which are independent of the mere social fact of consensus, even if (of course) they have to be assessed in a social context.

Davis points to another risk in the pursuit of consensus, especially in forms of research that begin to approximate to the aesthetic. This is the risk that such a search for consensus reduces the diversity of perception that might be present in a given situation, any of which may have something to contribute to an understanding of the object under scrutiny. The diversity and failure to achieve consensus may simply be rooted in the 'incommensurability' of different values (Davis 2007).

Researchers ought perhaps to share especially in this scepticism of consensus, since it is, arguably, their particular function as intellectual citizens to challenge the easy and self- perpetuating consensus that society creates for itself. At the very least they have to observe that what any group of people believe or agree to be true may rest on, for example, unexamined tradition, the hegemony of a dominant class, the suppression or self-censorship, of dissenting opinion, or collective hysteria—all the things that intellectuals and researchers have traditionally been expected to subvert.

12.4.5   Truth as Warranted Belief

'P' is true (provisionally) if and only if it satisfies the relevant tests for the truth of propositions of its kind.

> The relevance and adequacy of our explanations can never be demonstrated with Platonic rigor or geometric necessity … Instead, the operative question is, Which of our positions are rationally warranted, reasonable or defensible—that is well founded rather than groundless …? (Toulmin 1982: 115)

As I have hinted, perhaps the theories of truth that I have considered so far tend in each case to relate more successfully to some areas of knowledge rather than to others, especially in so far as they provide accounts of the criteria by reference to which truth is claimed (as distinct from what it means to say that a belief is true). Correspondence theory has the closest fit to empirical sciences (though perhaps pretty naïve empirical sciences); coherence theory to mathematics or metaphysical systems; pragmatism to technology or applied knowledge; consensus theory to the social/political arena of decision making. It is fairly clear that in practice how we go about *determining* the truth of a belief, and, hence, to some extent what we *mean* when we claim the truth of a belief, vary considerably according to the nature of the belief. We proceed differently in e.g. mathematics, science, history, philosophy, or literary criticism. Ewing suggested therefore that:

> The only way of determining the criterion or criteria (for truth) is to investigate the different kinds of well-authenticated knowledge and belief we have and see what the criteria are that convince us of their truth … It is clear … that we cannot do with just one criterion of truth. (Ewing 1951: 60)

This is, in a sense, what Paul Hirst did in his account of the different 'forms of knowledge' which embody different ways of establishing the truth or falsity of beliefs, different forms of verification, different 'tests for truth' as he called them

(Hirst 1965). It is also implied in my account of the 'disciplines' of educational research (Chap. 2).

On this approach we judge the truth or falsity of a proposition by reference to its capacity to stand up to the standards of evidence, argument, and critical scrutiny appropriate to its epistemological status and represented in the disciplined procedures of that form of knowledge (see Chap. 2). These will include tests of the internal consistency and coherence, perhaps in all cases (cf. coherentism); checks against 'external' evidence or tests of practical functioning where appropriate (cf. correspondence theory and pragmatism); checks in some cases against our private experience (e.g. in relation to accounts of human experience or motivation); checks against authoritative pronouncement (e.g. in the case of law or theology).

On this view we *judge* what is true on the basis of the application of these tests; and what we *mean* when we say that a belief is true is that it has successfully survived such tests and our belief is warranted on this basis.

It is perhaps helpful to note a number of features of this account.

Firstly, it retains a notion of truth which has a significant measure of independence of the believer. It places the business of the determination of the truth of a belief in some kind of external (to the individual) public forum. In academic circles this is emphasised in the importance which is attached to the publication of research and its exposure to public critical scrutiny.

Secondly, though I have perhaps not yet brought this point out, it separates the entitlement to claim the truth of a belief from closure of the consideration of that belief. Truth is not presented as either absolute or incorrigible. On the contrary, verification is a dynamic and continuing process. Beliefs which can legitimately be treated as true and spoken of as true, on the basis that they have survived critical scrutiny and that they appear to be warranted on established criteria, may nevertheless subsequently be found wanting. The truth of beliefs is in this sense provisional upon the outcome of the continuing accumulation of evidence and understanding, and the continuing process of critical scrutiny.

Not only are the substantive beliefs corrigible, but the disciplined forms of thought which provide for their warrant or their undoing are themselves evolving (though perhaps more slowly)—as seen, for example, in the seventeenth century separation of science from astrology and metaphysics, or the Enlightenment separation of ethics from religious authority.

Thirdly, this account locates the processes of verification/falsification very firmly in social practice. They become, therefore, prey to all sorts of human motivation and interests other than those which have to do with 'the pursuit of truth'. They are not, of course, alone in this: the principle of democratic government is similarly prey to all sorts of distorting ambitions, so we build in social practices designed to limit their scope. So it is too with the disciplines of verification and falsification. Of course, in an imperfect world they can be distorted by those who have interest in suppressing or misrepresenting the truth, but we build in safeguards designed to limit these distortions: public standards, transparency in publication, public scrutiny, and institutions called universities. In the age of market-driven, entrepreneurial higher education, it is worth recalling the epistemological and political function of

the university as a centre designed to cultivate among its members particular expertise in the application of these critical procedures, a particular attachment to their rigorous maintenance and sufficient independence to protect them from at least the crudest forms of political interference (at least, this is what I think is the central function of the university). It is an imperfect and fallible process—but that does not mean that it contributes nothing to the enhancement of our knowledge and understanding.

Finally—a problem. I am not sure that this account actually provides us with an account of what we have achieved when we have employed the 'tests for truth' referred to here. So I have scrutinised my reasons, evidence, and argument with appropriate rigour and have come up with my warranted belief that 'p'. So I am entitled, at least provisionally, to regard p as true. But what still does it mean to say that p is true? I easily fall into circularity here if I return to: 'Well it means that the belief has survived the appropriate tests for… *truth*'![3]

12.5   Theories of Truth and Paradigms of Educational Research

There is an illuminating (but not absolute) association between some of the classical theories of truth and the major paradigms of educational research. This is to be expected, perhaps, since, as Lakomski argues in her response to a set of contributions to a 'Curriculum Inquiry' debate on the nature of educational inquiry:

> The application of any type of research method and the defence of the results of inquiry thus obtained implies a view, or views, of what is to count as knowledge. The point of preferring one set of methods over another is to believe that the chosen set will lead to knowledge rather than mere belief, opinion, or personal preference. (Lakomski 1992: 193)

Correspondence theory—or something like it—is intimately associated with classical scientific or empiricist research, in which typically the researcher is combining the collection of data from a (perceived) external world and recording it in a way which faithfully reflects the data.

But, of course, even empirical research goes beyond this. The researcher will then seek to explain or interpret what he or she has observed; relate it to previous observations and theories; suggest adaptations to established theories in the light of the new information; draw out the implications of the new information for established theory; perhaps even propose some new and challenging paradigm shift for the understanding of the field of investigation in which the work is located—all of these in line with a coherentist construction of truth.

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[3]This is a rather contracted discussion of some complex issues. Further critical commentary on several of these approaches to the issue of truth may be found in, among other sources, Everitt and Fisher's very useful *Modern epistemology*, 1995.

A coherentist approach is also apparent in certain kinds of theory building and development in the social sciences—in, for example, the development and elaboration of a feminist perspective on education (and a lot else). Such major theoretical perspectives have the capacity to offer a new and far-reaching set of interpretations of experience and behaviour, which are not merely internally consistent but involve all sorts of mutually entailing and supporting beliefs. The limits to the explanatory scope of such theory may mean that they fall short of satisfying the full idealist aspirations of classical coherentism, but they nevertheless illustrate—and to some extent depend for their credibility upon—the underpinning coherentist approach.

Pragmatic theory, by contrast, is very clearly represented in the world of classroom action research (see Chap. 13) and, indeed, more broadly in at least some kinds of grounded theory. To stick to the first example, classroom action research is posited very firmly on the conviction that educational principles have no validity ('truth'?) until they have been tested in action and, further, that such principles are best derived from the results of practice in the classroom. Like pragmatic theory, the beliefs are to be held (as true?) in so far as they achieve the ends which the practitioner is aspiring to achieve, i.e. so long as they 'work', and they are revised or discarded if and when they fail to do so. Action researchers may nevertheless invoke a different notion of truth in seeking to establish empirically e.g. 'an accurate record' of events which took place in the classroom in order to inform decisions about their practice.

Consensus theory has come to occupy an important place particularly in qualitative research and evaluation, which is dominated by the language of e.g. 'triangulation' (one form of which might involve establishing consensus between three different observers or stakeholders) and the 'negotiation' of an agreed position in relation either to events themselves or some published account of those events. (Triangulation can also be construed as the use of different methods to provide evidence which carries contrasting challenges to truth claims, and is, in this way, based on something more like correspondence theory.)

Guba and Lincoln (1989) have been particularly influential on practice in this field—and since they appear both to be disavowing a concern for truth (or at least denying the possibility of 'a universal truth') and advancing a consensus approach to truth (though they prefer to talk of some accounts having 'greater power and worth' than others), their position seems to me to merit particular consideration in this context.

12.6 Truth and Constructivism in Fourth Generation Evaluation

The main source for this discussion is Guba and Lincoln's influential book *Fourth generation evaluation* (1989)—though compare the references I have already made to Guba's more recent (1992) writing on consensus. This is a particularly interesting

source since the authors make quite explicit the epistemological assumptions on which their approach to evaluation is grounded:

> We regard our work as simply another construction. We hope the reader will find it reasonably informed and sophisticated, but it is certainly far from universal truth. Indeed there is no universal truth to which our construction is a more or less good approximation. We trust that continuing dialectic dialogue about what we have to say will lead to reconstructions of greater power and worth but not of greater truth. (Guba and Lincoln 1989: 16)

The question I am interested in is, do Guba and Lincoln manage in practice to dispense, in spite of this denial, with all notions of truth—do they manage indeed to dispose entirely successfully with the notion of universal truth? My answer is that they do neither.

To take the toughest notion first—the denial of the idea of a universal truth. Now it may be (indeed it seems likely given the subject matter) that their own perspective on evaluation falls somewhat short of offering 'universal' truths. My guess is that the practice of evaluation is, in general, too closely tied to social context to stand much in the way of universal generalisations. Except, of course, this statement has itself every appearance of a universal generalisation—and their own statement 'there is no universal truth to which our construction is a more or less good approximation' is even more clearly an assertion of a universal truth of some metaphysical import. This is a problem to which I alluded earlier: negative propositions affirm the truth of something even in the process of denying the truth of something.

There are other ways in which Guba and Lincoln implicitly employ some notion of truth even while denying it.[4] What, for example, are we to make of the series of propositions about the authors in the paragraph quoted above: 'We regard… We hope… We trust…' Well, *do* they? I think that we are intended to accept these as truthful statements. Implicit in each case is: '(It is true that) we regard… (It is true that) we hope … (It is true that) we trust …' And as readers we may check by our reading that what follows in the text is consistent with their claims. If it is not, we may judge either that they fell short of their honestly held objectives or that they intended all along to deceive us. Truth claims and truth concerns will not go away.

Further, isn't one of the conditions which gives one account or construction 'greater power and worth' than another, that it satisfies certain public expectations of reasons evidence and argument—which, indeed, if they meet sufficiently rigorous conditions justify us in speaking of them as true? Guba and Lincoln quote

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[4]Pring has developed a parallel commentary on Guba and Lincoln's *Fourth generation evaluation* in very similar terms to those that I have used here. He observes that there is something peculiar about an *argument* for the abolition of truth. 'This is implicitly recognized by Guba and Lincoln, though explicitly denied, in their recourse to such words as "better informed", "more sophisticated", "more reasonable", and "more appropriate". In seeing the implications of this, one is forced to acknowledge "reality" as something not entirely "created" or "constructed" or "negotiated", but constraining and limiting—something which *is* independent of us, which shapes the standards of what we can *justifiably* say, and which restricts the conclusions which can be *correctly* drawn from the evidence given' (Pring 2000: 49).

with approval Glaser and Strauss (1967), who suggest two conditions which a joint grounded construction must satisfy: it must fit and it must work:

> It is judged to *fit* when the categories and terms of the construction account for data and information that the construction putatively encompasses… It is judged to *work* when it provides a level of understanding that is acceptable and credible to the respondents (or some subset of them) and to the inquirer. (Guba and Lincoln 1989: 179)

It is interesting to observe how close the authors come here to an affirmation first of a quasi-coherentist notion of truth and then of a more or less pragmatist position, though elsewhere they operate with an explicitly consensus model of truth: '"Truth" is a matter of consensus among informed and sophisticated constructors, not of correspondence with an objective reality' (Guba and Lincoln 1989: 44). But it is clear from some of the extracts which follow that they do not rest exclusively on the sophistication of the constructors (as a kind of psychological qualification), but on the sophistication of the process which they employ in their inquiry (as a set of epistemological criteria). In other words, it does become important not simply that a consensus has been achieved, but how it has been achieved. Indeed, it becomes a moral imperative bearing upon inquirers to observe certain procedural principles:

> The moral imperative on the responsive constructivist evaluator is continuously to be on the alert for—indeed to seek out—challenges to the prevailing construction (however much it may be supported in consensus) and to stand ready to refine, change, or even reject that which is currently believed in favor of something else that, on examination, seems more reasonable and appropriate to those in the best position to make that judgement. (Guba and Lincoln 1989: 47)

It is difficult to escape the sense that Guba and Lincoln are operating with at least some implicit criteria of what might constitute appropriate evidence and argument in a particular context. In another extract, writing about the principle of 'confirmability' as a criterion of the value of evaluation, they comment:

> Confirmability is concerned with assuring that data, interpretations and outcomes of inquiries are rooted in contexts and persons apart from the evaluator and not simply figments of the evaluator's imagination. (Guba and Lincoln 1989: 239)

Now part of the problem with this writing is that, notwithstanding its explicitness about the epistemological underpinnings of evaluation, the statements made beg an awful lot of questions. How is an inquirer expected to determine what is 'credible', particularly given the injunction that this must involve reference to 'contexts and persons apart from the evaluator'? What is the nature of the 'examination' of the prevailing construction which is called for? What are the grounds for deciding what construction is more reasonable than another? There are problems in confusing the psychological, or social psychological, account of what is involved in coming to hold certain beliefs (for which constructivism seems to me to serve rather well) with an epistemological account of the criteria by reference to which we ought to determine what to believe (what might be justified true belief). My reading of Guba and Lincoln is that lurking not far beneath the surface of their social and psychological constructivism is nevertheless some fairly traditional notion of the kind of

reasons evidence and argument which might indicate what beliefs warrant hanging on to and what beliefs should be discarded.

Guba and Lincoln acknowledge indeed that there is space within the constructivist paradigm for:

> specific data items of a factual nature (number of target persons served, number of children enrolled in a school-lunch program … number of fourth grade mathematical textbooks … high school English teachers employed …). (Guba and Lincoln 1989: 241)

However…

> The point we wish to make is that it is not the physical reality of objects, contexts and events that are of interest, either to us or to most human beings, it is the meanings we attach to them. Those meanings are the stuff of a constructed reality. (Guba and Lincoln 1989: 266)

I have some sympathy for this preferred focus of interest—but I am afraid that even in this direction, truth concerns do not go away. As Guba and Lincoln would acknowledge, in investigating people's constructions of their world, the meanings which they attach to events, social contexts, and so on, the researcher has nevertheless the aspiration to represent these… accurately, honestly, *truthfully*. 'There will be no deliberate attempt to lie, deceive, mislead, hide or otherwise offer misconstructions' (Guba and Lincoln 1989: 234). Not only this but the researcher will need to accept a responsibility to penetrate the 'misinformation, distortion or presented "fronts"' (Guba and Lincoln 1989: 237) which he or she is offered in place of the honestly held construction. On this account, constructivism dismisses the search for correspondence or 'isomorphism' between findings and an objective reality, but replaces it by 'isomorphism between constructed realities of respondents and the reconstructions attributed to them' (Guba and Lincoln 1989: 237). For example, you perceive your teaching colleagues as unsympathetic to your educational values and I provide an account negotiated with you which accurately presents that perception.

What is represented in this instance, however, is clearly a correspondence theory of truth (albeit couched in the language of 'isomorphism') applied to the particular context of giving accounts of people's constructions of their social worlds. The imperative on the researcher is clearly to penetrate all sorts of lies, deceit, and misrepresentation in order to provide as far as possible a *truthful* account of people's constructions of their world.

There is a further problem, however. Suppose we can establish authentically an account of a person's construction of their social world, of the interpretation which they put on other people's action and on the nature of the world about them. Are we never to question this construction? Are we never to suggest that they might have got it wrong? Even if they are convinced that the very stones they walk on are conspiring against them? Even if messages from outer space are telling them to rid the world of prostitutes? Or, less spectacularly, even if they are convinced that no-one in their organisation holds them in any kind of regard when independent evidence suggests that they are very highly respected but people are too timid to

communicate this respect in the way in which the individual is looking for? In each of these cases it seems to me that the individual constructor of reality might have simply got it wrong—and that someone ought to be helping them to see this for themselves. Cognitive behavioural therapy rests precisely on this sort of consideration—but so does research!

12.7   Truth and the Postmodern Researcher

I hope to have shown then that even if educational researchers eschew the language of truth, they do not (and cannot) escape some reliance on the concept. They are nevertheless engaged in articulation of propositions which have every appearance of asserting the truth or falsity of what they have to say—and I would suggest almost inevitably so; and they are operating (whether they acknowledge it or not) with identifiable theories of truth from the traditional and established repertoire.

The question I want to address in conclusion is whether self-defined postmodernist researchers are exceptions to these two claims, i.e. whether they manage in fact—as they seem to claim—to disassociate themselves from the pursuit or presentation of truth in educational research—or whether, like it or not, they are trapped in this engagement.

It is perhaps appropriate in this context to refer to Stronach and MacLure's publication *Educational research undone* (1997), since this explicitly presents a postmodernist perspective on educational research (see also MacLure 2007). There are a lot of interesting features in this work and I shall not attempt to do justice to it here. Let me offer just three observations which are pertinent to my own discussion.

First, it is very interesting to observe the character of the 'opening' section (for so it is called) of the book. The text runs as follows:

> Think of the title at the top of this page as a picture. An opening, a beginning, that is also not one, because insinuated into something else. A crack? Or perhaps a violent opening such as a rupture or an incision. Perhaps a dangerous opening in some ground or structure: an abyss. Or perhaps the opening marks the space where some of the dots in the line that stretches before and after it have been rubbed out. An erasure. Or it might even be blocking a space where something else might have emerged. Then again, maybe the opening is holding something together rather than dividing it. A suture or a scar, then. But perhaps the opening is not really a breach in the line at all, but just a kind of complication of it. A sort of fold or pocket. Now forget about the title being a picture, and think of it again as writing. (Stronach and MacLure 1997: 1)

What is interesting about this opening extract in relation to my earlier discussion of propositions is that it *almost* manages to avoid making any truth claims: it consists of only imperatives, questions, and phrases without a main verb. In this way—and in the absence of anything that takes the form of a proposition—the authors come close to avoiding their implication in offering truth claims. The closest they get to asserting something which might be verifiable or falsifiable is the

suggestion in the middle that the title 'might even be blocking a space', but even this is an affirmation of what might be rather than what is.

If the authors had sustained these kind of speech forms throughout the book, then they just might have escaped without offering anything which resembled a truth claim—though I suspect it would have made for a pretty unsatisfactory read. They might have settled for prose which moved or excited rather than prose which proposed, let alone argued, claims to belief. They might have sought, as Connolly has suggested was Foucault's goal: 'to *excite* in the reader the experience of discord between the social construction of normality and that which does not fit neatly within the frame of these constructs' (Connolly 1985: 386, my italics).

But of course they are not content with that, and the language games they go on to play have, thankfully from my perspective, all the resemblance of scholarly concern to provide reasons, evidence, and argument to support (provide warrant for) the claims that are made, the propositions which are offered for the reader's critical attention. So, for example, when claims are made about the character of postmodernist thinking, references are given to sources which illustrate or support the given interpretation: 'Meanwhile, Rorty tends to be pigeon-holed as a liberal puralist (sic), or a "cavalier elitist" (Haber 1994: 45). Even where critics have some sympathies with postmodernism they tend to stress the need to go "beyond" postmodernism towards some notion of a recovered "oppositional politics" (Haber 1994: 1) (Stronach and MacLure 1997: 18). Secondly, the authors are at pains to present and acknowledge or address objections to the position they are developing: 'most accounts of post-modernity and post-modernism … are—misleadingly— couched in terms of such metaphors, and are as a result subject to a number of logical objections (as exemplified in the recent work of Hargreaves (1994) and in Giroux's (1991) 'border pedagogy'). To enumerate some important objections …' (Stronach and MacLure 1997: 20). Thirdly, they show a clear attachment to argument of an entirely conventional logical form: 'We think it can be argued that a number of the seemingly unassailable objections against post-modernism previously rehearsed in this chapter can now be dismissed as irrelevant. If post-modernism posits no singularity or boundary, then the objection that it is the metanarrative of which it denies the possibility falls' (Stronach and MacLure 1997: 27). Finally, they even use the language of truth: 'Now it is true, of course, that such a tactic brings with it different problems that also need to be addressed …', and 'the same is no doubt becoming true of heterosexual males …' (Stronach and MacLure 1997: 27 and 31).

All of this illustrates that, although the authors are operating within a post-modernist mode, they are nevertheless attached to the kind of procedural principles which operate in the service of establishing the warrant for, and hence (as near as we shall ever get to) the truth of, our proffered beliefs. Indeed, from my point of view, these are the very qualities which establish the merit of the work they have produced.

Stronach and MacLure do not in this context explicitly deny a place for any notion of truth (though some writers in the tradition appear to), though they explicitly present deconstruction as 'helping to read new personal and political

situations in terms of hybridity and shifting meaning, rather than in universalistic and totalizing expressions of essential identity and certain truth' (Stronach and MacLure 1997: 32). If all they are denying is the possibility or desirability of either essentialism or certainty, then they may distance themselves from a particular and rather restrictive notion of truth, but I believe the earlier sections of this paper illustrate a variety of approaches to the notion of truth which depend neither on such essentialism nor on such certainty.

Now these observations may neither trouble nor surprise someone approaching educational research from a postmodern perspective. In one sense postmodernist writing is not so much occupied with the denial of the discourse of truth as disinterested in it. Postmodernist writing is focused, rather, on the 'disruption', 'deconstruction', 'rupture', or 'bafflement' of this and other forms of discourse; on opening up the complications that have been smoothed over by what Derrida refers to as 'violent hierarchies' (Derrida 1976); and it seeks to force a space for new questions about identity, humanity, agency. I am trying to capture the flavour of Stronach and MacLure's own account here, even though they disavow any intention to provide such an account of a domain characterised by 'an uncontrollable profusion of meanings' (Stronach and MacLure 1997: 11). Thus the strategy for educational research might be 'to see how far it can get by *failing* to deliver simple truths' (Stronach and MacLure 1997: 6, my emphasis), though I am left wondering when I read this how much hangs on the word 'simple'.

However much postmodernist discourse seeks to throw off the assumptions of the traditions it is attempting to disrupt, it cannot entirely dispense with those traditions in its own expression—as Stronach and MacLure themselves acknowledge. 'Although often interpreted as a total abandonment of the Enlightenment project of emancipation and the rational autonomy of the human subject, such work actually stands both outside and deeply within its logics' (Stronach and MacLure 1997: 5). This seems to me to be inevitable and is one reason why we might regard as fully justified 'the pervasive anxiety that has accompanied the dissemination of post-modernism through the disciplines, that the openings it promises are also dangerous openings that might cut away the grounds of its own arguments' (Stronach and MacLure 1997: 7). Interestingly, Constas, in a paper written from a position which is supportive of and expressive of a postmodernist perspective on educational research, observes similarly the self-refuting character of the writing of Stronach and MacLure:

> In their view, post-modernism exists in the boundaries and represents a series of irresolvable differences. However … they, like many who are sympathetic to post-modernism, also argue against generalised prescriptions that have the capacity to limit the possibilities of enquiry. Therefore, the prescription to condemn writing that draws boundaries is itself untenable. (Constas 1998: 40)

The position I reach so far, then—and hope to have evidenced from Stronach and MacLure's writing—is that unless postmodernist writers resort to a genre of writing (illustrated in the opening section of Stronach and MacLure's book) which relies more or less exclusively on injunction and interrogation, they will almost

inevitably get drawn into: (i) forms of expression which imply the truth of what is asserted; and (ii) forms of argument which imply the procedures by which these assertions are given the warrant of truth—albeit a more subtle and complex notion of truth than some others on offer and one seen as provisional pending further disruption. My argument around these particular instances falls short of demonstrating that there can be no metaphysical or epistemological platform in which these two features are absent. It does suggest, however, that neither Guba and Lincoln nor Stronach and MacLure occupy such a space.

By focusing on particular instances I have, I hope, made my argument concrete, but it risks the accusation of being *ad hominem* (*ad feminam*?). Siegel (1998) tries to develop the inconsistency or incoherence argument against truth-nihilism in more general terms, but ones which are very similar to those that I have used here:

> Some of these (post-modern) criticisms of foundationalism … face huge difficulties, as they appear to presuppose what they want to reject. For example, (the) post-modernist wants to reject the possibility of objective knowledge, but apparently regards it as an objective fact about the world that a subject's knowledge of the world is always 'pre- interpreted', and that knowledge is therefore never objective … Similarly, the post- modernist insistence that there is 'no privileged position that enables philosophers to transcend the particularities of their own culture and traditions' seems itself an attempt to speak from just such a position, since it seems to be making an assertion concerning all philosophers, cultures and traditions … In short, there appear to be deep internal inconsistencies in the post-modern position … (Siegel 1998: 30–31).

Cuypers responds to Siegel's arguments in terms which might also apply to my own—that they are correct but trivial. Cuypers, with a measure of devil's advocacy, offers three arguments which might constitute if not a postmodernist defence (can postmodernists consistently engage in this sort of ratiocination?) then a defence of postmodernism:

First, 'his response is trivial,' argues Cuypers, 'because … it only makes use of a formal strategy and as such it does not establish a substantial defence of Enlightened veritistic epistemology' (Cuypers 2001: 39).

Secondly, while robust truth-nihilism cannot without contradicting itself include the claim to the truth of the truth denial, the truth-denial might have the status not of a truth claim but of 'a regulative idea' which itself has no truth value, i.e. is neither true nor false.

Thirdly, the objection of inconsistency itself presupposes the principle of non-contradiction [not—(T and not-T)] but 'the post-modernist need not accept this principle in his (sic) radical critique of the "conservative" metaphysics of presence and its attendant veritistic epistemology' (Cuypers 2001: 39).

While I readily take the first point, I am not so sure myself that the *propositions* which explicitly deny certain claims to truth (as distinct perhaps from *imperatives* to act in a certain way) can so easily be turned into 'regulative ideas', which are deemed not to be making truth claims. Nor is it clear that postmodernists themselves want to embrace the enormous consequences for the possibility of meaningful communication (leaving aside any issues to do with truth) of the abandonment of the principle of non-contradiction. The inconsistency/incoherence

problem for postmodernists would come back with a vengeance if they seriously tried to claim that they were operating outside this particular logical framework. Their claim that they were so operating would in this case itself be entirely consistent with both the fact and their own belief that they were not.

The postmodern dilemma resonates with a premodern paradox. Epimenides, the Cretan, once said 'All Cretans are liars'. The logical issues raised were later distilled by Eulubides in the fourth century into the pure form of 'the liar paradox' represented by the sentence 'This sentence is false'. In another version of the paradox, one philosopher[5] presented another with a piece of paper. On one side was written 'The statement on the other side of this paper is true'; on the other side was written 'The statement on the other side of this paper is false'. The recipient turned the paper over a few times—and then, without a word, tore it into pieces. This is not one of the standard philosophical responses to Epimenides' paradox in its ancient or postmodern forms,[6] but it is one which it is very tempting to follow.

12.8   Afterword

This chapter has focused on whether it makes sense to talk about truth in relation to educational research. It argues that it is indeed possible, but that this does not mean that in different forms of educational research truth means or is validated by a single set of means. Underpinning the chapter is certainly an anxiety about losing all hold on some notion of truth in this context.

This does not mean, however, that truth is the only quality that is important. In a later chapter on research assessment (Chap. 23) I refer to considerations of the originality and significance of educational research, of style in its presentation, and of the integrity with which it is conducted. Stefan Ramaekers (2007) reminds us that educational researchers commonly seek other purposes or qualities in their research: the unravelling or disruption of established or taken for granted beliefs (Stronach and MacLure 1997; MacLure 2007); a way for practitioners to probe their deepest concerns (O'Dea 1994); or 'the power to stimulate thinking' or the focus on 'what is worth pondering' (Stake and Kerr 1995: 56 and 57). For Stake and Kerr, 'The able researcher draws attention to expectations and assumptions shocking the

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[5]My recollection of this story is that the philosophers were Russell and Wittgenstein, but I have been unable to trace the source of the anecdote. Certainly Monk's philosophical/biographical account of Wittgenstein has him giving pretty gruff treatment to the liar's paradox. Wittgenstein commented: 'It is very queer in a way that this should have puzzled anyone—much more extraordinary than you might think: that this should be the thing to worry human beings. Because the thing works like this: if a man says '"I am lying" we say that it follows that he is not lying, from which it follows that he is lying and so on. Well, so what? You can go on like that till you are black in the face. Why not? It does not matter" (Monk 1990: 420).

[6]There is a useful review of these responses at http://www.ocf.berkley.edu/~sjblatt/notes/nottrue.html.

reader out of complacency' (Stake and Kerr 1995: 57). I embrace such ambitions enthusiastically. However Ramaekers suggests that these and other 'alternative' approaches seek 'to abolish truth and the search for justified knowledge' (Ramaekers 2007: 108); I will comment on this shortly.

First, however, it may be that a more positive way of construing what is offered with these perspectives is to see them as attaching more significance to the questions that researchers pose than perhaps to their own role in providing answers. (As I observed above, Stronach and MacLure's book began in fact with a whole page of questions.) The researchers' questions stimulate, provoke, challenge practitioners, policymakers, or anyone else who engages with them. For Flybjerg, social science research provides the space for 'reflexive analysis and discussion of values and interests, which is the prerequisite for an enlightened political economic and cultural development in any society' (Flybjerg 2001: 3). For Flybjerg, as Ramaekers reads him (in terms that seem to me to echo something of MacDonald's 1987 and earlier accounts of 'democratic evaluation'):

> conclusions as to what has to be done, or 'what works', are not drawn by social researchers, nor do they make decisions. Such conclusions are drawn and such decisions made (that is, reliable answers are given) in and after the public debate that has (hopefully) been aroused, instigated by what the research has to offer. In terms of educational research, the reliable answers that teachers and policy makers are (said to be) looking for are not (and cannot be) offered ready-to-hand by the educational researcher. Rather, what is offered is the possibility of dialogue; what is delivered is a contribution to dialogue and praxis; what is implied is that reliability is not a straightforward empirical matter. (Ramaekers 2007: 95)

All of this is consistent with what I have said in earlier chapters about the relation between research and policy and research and practice. The 'conclusions' of the researcher cannot in either case substitute for the much more wide-ranging and better informed judgment of the people who have to make any policy or practice 'work'. The account properly identifies key roles for the research and the limitations of the researcher. It provides an alternative to a view of research as providing the right, the true, judgments on matters of educational research and policy. But if, as Ramaekers suggests, the project of these 'alternative' views of social science research is 'to abolish truth', then I dissent. It is easy to shock someone out of their complacency with a pack of lies but what sort of an achievement is this? And does anyone seriously offer this as an ethical project for an educational researcher? We can shock people out of their complacency in a variety of ways: by unpacking what they take for granted (that they take certain things for granted is, I take it, a matter of fact which they may dispute); by offering them alternative perspectives on their experience (which may be highly imaginative but which are perhaps more convincing if they bear some relationship to what is recognisable as true); by confronting them with some unpalatable facts demonstrating, for example, persistent and deeply embedded injustices in society. They may leave them to come up with their own answers to the questions raised by the researcher or the research. One component of these answers may well be to do with values or ideology, but if the answers are to provide direction for policy or practice they have also to be informed by a certain amount of information about the context

to which they will be applied—and might it not be better if this information is true? As Ramaekers acknowledged: 'the "non-scientific" approaches to educational research which supposedly or seemingly reject the quest for truth do not so much reject truth as shift the focus to other types of question, displaying the different interests' (Ramaekers 2007: 91). The net consequence of 'alternative' approaches to educational research may be to relieve the researcher from some responsibility for establishing (however provisionally) what is 'truthlike' to use Stefan Cuypers' expression (Cuypers 2003: 177), but this responsibility is then simply passed on to others.

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Chapter 13
Educational Theory, Practice, and Research: Pragmatic Perspectives

Abstract I conceded in Chap. 5 that academic, discipline-based research, whatever its importance and interest, had problems in engaging directly with practice, especially when this practice is understood in terms of the agency of an individual practitioner working with a socially derived, but uniquely personal, set of constructs in a highly particular working context. I pointed to a developing tradition of practitioner research, and, more particularly, action research, as a response to this analysis of the kind of research which was needed for engagement with practice. In such research, teachers might test ideas, hypotheses, and theory—including their own tacitly or self-consciously held theory—against experience in their own classroom and modify practice in the light of such testing. Such an approach to the development of understanding and practice is, of course, not without its own philosophical underpinnings. In this case these lie pretty firmly in the tradition of philosophical pragmatism, which I introduced in Chap. 12 on theories of truth. Pragmatism is a particularly attractive position (or set of positions) in the context of what might be considered as applied research such as education, since its claims to truth, validity, or at least utility are tested precisely through its application and an examination of the consequences of that action. I suggest, then, that this is an area that merits closer attention and that a better understanding of the character, strengths, and weaknesses of philosophical pragmatism may help us to understand too the strengths and weaknesses of its application in educational research including, more specifically, practitioner and action research.

> The concept of truth that corresponded to the spirit of Kurt Lewin's pioneering work on action research was the pragmatist one of William James. (Papastephanou 2007: 171)[1]

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[1]Papastephanou does however go on to refer to other philosophical traditions that have contributed 'in varying degrees and selectively' to different formulations of action research, including MacIntyre and Aristotelian thought, Habermas and, in the case of Kemmis and Carr 'Ideologiekritik of a Marxist origin' (Papastephanou 2007: 171).

13.1 Pragmatism

In theory of knowledge, a popularised form of pragmatism dominates the Anglo-Saxon common world-view, even more than scientific or quasi-scientific empiricism. Pragmatism is the banner of common sense. To take a 'pragmatic' approach is, in ordinary language, to eschew lofty theory, ideology, and even rarefied scientific claims which, however researched, conflict with common-sense understanding. To take a pragmatic approach is try out a course of action against our own ordinary experience and to see if it 'works'. If it does, then we will accept it; if it does not, then we shall look for an alternative. What could be more sensible?

This popular and appealing theory of knowledge has come to dominate, too, a good deal of policy in relation to education. This rests increasingly on reference to the need to learn from experience, to test out approaches in the classroom, and hence the need to ground both initial and in-service education in the practical settings of the school and classroom— normally at the expense of something understood and referred to as 'theory'. Former UK Secretary of State for Education, David Blunkett, in a speech to the Economic and Social Research Council (2 February 2000) called upon social scientists to join with policymakers in breaking down the 'seam of anti-intellectualism running through society', but in almost the same breath he was explaining that 'We need social scientists to help to determine *what works* and why' [my italics—see on this Smeyers and Depaepe (2006), Bridges et al. (2009)]. This echoed the discourse developed in the United States by the 'What Works Clearinghouse' in the wake of the reauthorisation in 2001 of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act ('No child left behind'), though of course in this case the test for 'what works' was not practitioner experience but large-scale randomised controlled trials Ironically, in some respects, the same quasi-philosophical foundations are used both to legitimate highly centralised top-down educational policies and also to provide the intellectual resources for the much more localised and 'bottom-up' development of classroom action research. It is this second development that captures the more authentic spirit of pragmatism, and I shall focus especially on this here.

I hesitate to attempt any exegesis of pragmatism because I am aware of a literature comparable in scale and reverence for its sources to biblical studies. However, some treatment of pragmatic theory is called for in this context, in which I am discussing both the arguments around the practice of action research and theories of truth. So, 'fools rush in …'

Philosophical pragmatists were (and remain) a loosely associated group with overlapping and evolving concerns and points of view, rather than a single programme or set of commitments. Peirce and James often gave very different accounts of what they meant by 'Pragmatism' and Dewey's thinking reflected significant shifts of view over the three main periods of his writing career. The pages of *Educational Researcher* among other journals frequently ring with debates about, for example, what Dewey really meant and how he is to be located in terms of contemporary philosophical discussion (House 1991, 1992, 1994; Cherryholmes

1992, 1994; Garrison 1994) confirming, perhaps Thayer's early conclusion that 'a single definitive statement of a single thesis is not to be hoped for,' (Thayer 1967: 431). My interest is, however, not so much in this debate, but rather in what arguments around some of the substantive issues might reveal about the strengths and weaknesses of pragmatism as it is reflected, in particular, in action research. So what follows is inevitably something of a selection and simplification of pragmatic philosophy, or, as Dewey reformulated it, instrumentalism.

For the pragmatists, learning and the development of knowledge and understanding had its roots in an interest, purpose, task, or project which an individual was engaged with or pursuing.[2] It was in this sense firmly associated with a form of constructivist epistemology and psychology in emphasising the learner as someone already bringing to a task a whole structure of evolving beliefs, expectations, desires, sympathies, and purposes (Garrison 1995).[3] Learning is rooted in some kind of frustration to the pursuit of this interest, purpose, or task engendered by false belief or expectation, error or ignorance and thence some kind of uncertainty, doubt, or perplexity. Thus Murphey, summarising Peirce and Dewey, explains: 'A problem situation exists whenever we find our established habits of conduct inadequate to attain a desired end—and the effect of a problem situation upon us is the production of doubt' (Murphey 1961: 160–161). This perplexity arises because the knowledge, understanding, or skills which we have, do not seem to be sufficient, because our existing repertoire of responses or solutions do not 'work'. 'The individual is forced to confront issues that are not easily reconciled by current thinking. Interest is the only true motivation that can force this type of confrontation, pushing the mind from comfort into conflict. The only way to bring stability back to the situation through activity is to reconstruct thinking about activity so that it meets the needs of the situation' (Glassman 2001: 10).

Faced with perplexity or frustration, then, we have to modify or expand or amend the cognitive apparatus which has proved inadequate: we have to develop an alternative understanding, belief, strategy, interpretation, or hypothesis and see if with this revision we can proceed more successfully (see if it works). If it does not, then we are thrown once again into doubt and perplexity, and we have to repeat the revisionary process. If our modified belief, expectation, etc. 'works', then that

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[2]For Dewey, of course, it was critical that this interest or 'reflective attention' is an authentic one for the learner, rather than one imposed as the result of coercion or bribery. Dewey writes of 'the fundamental necessity (of) leading the child to realise a problem of his own, so that he is self-induced to attend in order to find out its answer' (Dewey 1990: 149). He explains, 'True, reflective attention … always involves judging, reasoning, deliberation; it means that the child has a *question of his own*, and is actively engaged in seeking and selecting relevant material with which to answer it, considering the bearings and relations of this material—the kind of solution it calls for. The problem is one's own; hence also the training secured is one's own—it is discipline, or gain in power of control; that is a *habit* of considering problems …' (Dewey 1990: 148, his italics).

[3]Garrison observes that 'many in the field of education have not recognized that Dewey held a constructivist view of knowledge' (Garrison 1994: 5), and indeed McCarthy and Sears (2000) emphatically challenge Garrison's view on this.

becomes part of the revised cognitive apparatus (knowledge and understanding) which we carry with us to the pursuit of future purposes, until such time as in its own turn it proves inadequate.

In short: 'There is a problem in immediate activity that is beyond the reach of our current thinking. The problem causes doubt and the child is forced to work through this doubt, and reconstruct thinking, in order to complete the activity. The completion of the activity, achievement of the aim, potentially creates a new problem to be solved,' (Glassman 2001: 11). Glassman suggests that 'the key to the educational experience is getting the student to recognize that this cycle of interest-doubt-problem solving is beneficial and worthy of pursuit' (Glassman 2001: 11). Presumably this applies *a fortiori* to the teacher researcher.

This process is both experiential and highly reflexive. Dewey explains that 'When we experience something we act upon it, we do something with it; then we suffer or undergo the consequences. We do something to the thing and then it does something to us in return … The connection of these two phases of experience measure the fruitfulness or value of the experience … When an activity is continued into the undergoing of consequences, when the change made by action is reflected back into a change made in us, the mere flux is loaded with significance' (Dewey 1916: 163). For Dewey, learning, inquiry, coming to know and understand all involved a very active, almost muscular, engagement with practical experience. He argued strenuously against what he called the 'spectator theory of knowledge', which he reckoned was responsible for many of philosophy's historic failings.

The full process, as I am presenting it can be described diagrammatically in a form which elaborates on, but is not far removed from, Kolb's often referred to learning cycle (Kolb 1984) (Fig. 13.1).

Part of the attractiveness of this kind of account (not least to educators) is that it offers simultaneously: (i) a theory of learning or of the conditions under which learning takes place; (ii) a theory of knowledge; and (iii) a theory of truth.

As a *theory of learning*, it places the learner and the learner's own interests and system of beliefs at the centre of the picture—and has provided an important source for and legitimation of 'child-centred' and more recently 'learner-centred' education.

As a *theory of knowledge*, it has demonstrated the roots of knowledge in subjectivity; the constraints imposed upon that subjectivity by an external world; and the provisionality, but yet utility, of what passes for both individual and social knowledge—a temptingly eclectic picture. It offers a picture of knowledge which is provisional, functional, and conveniently 'self-reparative'. 'Thus', says James, 'do philosophy and reality, theory and action, work in the same circle indefinitely' (Burkhardt 1977: 149). It also offers a *theory of meaning*, initially developed by Peirce, which sees meaning as lying in the practical consequences of beliefs or ideas in the experienced world.

As a *theory of truth*, the early pragmatists were perhaps at their weakest, for essentially their claim was that the test for the truth of a belief is that it 'works', it has or allows the consequences we desire, it serves to enable us to pursue our interests, to act upon the world (physical or social) in a way which does not lead to

Fig. 13.1 A simplified representation of pragmatic theory of knowledge

frustration and perplexity. 'If and only if a belief is true will it yield sensibly satisfactory results in experience when thus acted upon' (see Scheffler 1974—though Scheffler observes some differences between Peirce and James on truth). Partly as a result of several disputes with Bertrand Russell over truth, Dewey revised this sort of definition in favour of the notion of truth as 'warranted assertion'.[4]

Pragmatic theory, then, offers two or three useful perspectives on the relationship of theory and practice. Theory on this account would consist of that set of informing beliefs which guide our day-to-day living and working. These may, and commonly will, be held as 'tacit knowledge' as Polanyi calls it (Polanyi 1966), i.e. unself-consciously or implicitly, rather than as an easily stated and coherent set of beliefs.

For a lot of the time the beliefs enable us to go about doing whatever it is that occupies us, but from time to time it does not suffice, it does not work. We find that it does not fit with our experience, that the practice which we engage in on the basis of these beliefs produces unintended results, or no results at all—and it forces us to re-examine our informing 'theory'. Imaginatively we have perhaps to surface our tacit beliefs and re-examine them, amend them, either in the light of hypothetical possibilities which our imagination has rehearsed for us, or on the basis of further trial and error. At this point we may engage in more explicit theorising or con-jecture, we may 'intellectualise' the problem, though on the pragmatic account, this is more likely to be about appropriate means to ends than about the ends them-selves. The newly developed and revised theory then becomes part of our new set of more or less tacitly held beliefs, our new stock of theory, to be tested against

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[4]McCarthy and Sears (2000) argue, however, that 'The Deweyan-pragmatic perspective … is one that is ontologically realist and requires, epistemologically, a correspondence theory of truth, of a particular kind that Dewey very carefully explicates' (McCarthy and Sears 2000: 213).

experience and practice once more and to remain intact until such time as once again it fails to allow us to pursue our ends satisfactorily.

The attractiveness of pragmatism as a way of representing the relationship between (a kind of) theory and practice has not been lost on educators. In most significant respects, since it places such strong emphasis on experiment and experiential learning, it provides, as Papastephanou observes 'the broader philosophical framework of action research' (Papastephanou 2007: 167) and perhaps other forms of practitioner research.[5] The (repeated) cycle of classroom action research:

- starts with teachers identifying some aspect of their practice which they find unsatisfactory, puzzling, frustrating, not working as they would wish it;
- they move from a state of puzzlement or frustration to a more explicit articulation of the problem;[6]
- they investigate what is happening in their classrooms more carefully (in a more systematic and sustained way?) than they are normally able to do (hence the claim to research);
- they hypothesise in the light of this evidence some changes in their practice which will address the problem;
- they implement the changes in practice;
- and then they investigate again their impact on what is happening.

Notice in particular that the practice has, on this model, not only a role in testing theory but a role in its generation: it produces as part of an evolving process 'grounded theory'—theory which is firmly grounded in practice and experience. Action research has in fact its roots in what was originally called 'action science', which Argyris et al. trace directly to Dewey and Lewin:

> Action science is an outgrowth of the traditions of John Dewey and Kurt Lewin. Dewey was eloquent in his criticism of the traditional separation of knowledge and action, and he articulated a theory of inquiry that was a model both for scientific method and for social practice. He hoped that the extension of experimental inquiry to social practice would lead to an integration of science and practice. He based this hope on the observation that 'science in becoming experimental has itself become a mode of directed practical doing'. (Argyris et al. 1985: 6)

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[5]Coming out of the UK educational research community, I resort fairly naturally to the language of 'action research' where some, for example, North American colleagues might use the language of 'practitioner research'. Anderson et al. (1994) suggest indeed that 'practitioner research and action research, the preferred term in Britain, are sometimes used interchangeably,' (1994: 20). They share the characteristics of: (i) engaging practitioners as researchers (usually in their own domain of practice); and (ii) a particular focus on the situated and often tacit knowledge of practitioners. Action research suggests, however, a cyclical process of the testing of ideas in practice, and with it the kind of pragmatic philosophy indicated here, which is not a necessarily feature of all forms of practitioner research. For a discussion of these issues by reference to the US, see also Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1993).

[6]Adelman judges this to be the most difficult phase of action research: 'To move from felt "troubles" and "anxieties" to a statement of an issue, teachers have to engage in persistent reflexive thought about their own and others' practices' (Adelman 1993: 18).

The model of classroom action research is clearly rooted in pragmatic theory of knowledge and enjoys the benefit of its persuasive and practical representation of the relationship between theory and practice. But attractive as pragmatism may be both in its more philosophical form and its ready translation into more common-sensical terms, philosophers have suggested that there are some rather fundamental problems attached to it which bear upon both—and it is to these that we should now turn.

13.2   The Limits of Pragmatism

Pragmatism is at its most convincing within the realm of technology (technology even more than science), and indeed it probably suffers from having taken the technological domain as paradigmatic of all knowledge. Technology comes into play in very much the way that the pragmatists describe, when people want to do something or get somewhere, when they try out a solution. If that works and allows them to do what they want, then that is enough. The solution joins the current stock (personal or social) of technological knowledge. This applies in principle whether one is operating within a material domain (e.g. applying technology to lifting weights or bridging spans) or in the social domain (e.g. persuading people or perhaps teaching them).

Even in this field, however, pragmatism appears to be a necessary, but not sufficient, test for the adequacy of a solution. To put it another way, the test of whether a solution 'works' or not is a great deal more complicated than might at first be supposed.

First, we have become very much more aware in recent years that technological solutions to tasks in engineering, agriculture, and health, for example, commonly fail to define the technical problem sufficiently widely. For example, faced with the problem of disease afflicting wheat, an agricultural chemist may devise a spray which satisfactorily eliminates the disease. But someone else may respond that the problem was too narrowly perceived or defined, that it should have included technical dimensions to do with safeguarding wildlife, avoiding any health hazard to people, a concern not to allow any chemical trace elements to enter the wheat produce itself. In other words, the fault of the agricultural chemist was in his or her failure to conceive of, or define, the technical problem adequately—a failure rooted in the apparatus brought to the conceptualisation of the problem, rather than an inadequacy of the solution to the problem as perceived, which in its own terms 'worked' entirely successfully.

In fact one pragmatic philosopher, C. I. Lewis, went some way to address this problem in his version of what he called 'conceptualistic pragmatism' (Lewis 1929). Thayer (1967) explains that 'Lewis emphasised the role of mind in sup-plying the a priori principles and categories by which we proceed to organize and interpret sense experience. But he also stressed the plurality of categories and conceptual schemes by which experience can be interpreted and the evolutionary

character of our systems' (Thayer 1967: 435). This faces us, however, with the problem of how we select from these alternative conceptual schemes. For this Lewis argued for a 'pragmatic a priori'. This is to say that the decision itself needed to be made pragmatically in terms of its usefulness in serving our needs and our interest in increasing our understanding of and control over experience.

Secondly, pragmatism has a particular problem in providing a satisfactory account of moral and religious belief. In popular parlance, 'pragmatic' solutions to problems stand in contrast with those which rest on some kind of moral or social principle, and pragmatic solutions are typically ones that subordinate, ignore, or beg questions to do with the morality of what is proposed. This is not surprising, because, as Peirce recognised, philosophical pragmatism is at its weakest in its application to this morality and religion, notwithstanding James's attempts so to apply it. James's formulation of the justification of moral and religious belief boiled down to one couched (in recognisably pragmatic vein) in terms of their beneficial effects on a person's life. More technically: 'when, for a given person P, a belief B answers or satisfies a compelling need (of P to see or interpret the world in a certain way), the "vital good" supplied by B in the life of P (the difference it makes as a beneficial causal condition in the psychological and physiological behaviour of P) justifies B' (Thayer 1967: 433). While many might hope that particular religious or moral beliefs would so benefit the believer, and it is not uncommon for people, for example, to urge one to accept religious faith because of the comfort it might provide, few have been persuaded that this provides a philosophically satisfactory rationale for either religious or moral beliefs. The logical gap between on the one hand what we are entitled to believe, or what there are good grounds to believe and, on the other hand, what we might be happiest to believe or need to believe is too evident for us to be able to accept such a blurring. More seriously to pragmatism, we have a long tradition of recognising that the truth can be painful, injurious, even destructive in its consequences—this is the very stuff of tragic dilemmas.

Besides, one of the distinguishing features of moral discourse—and this is why it is so difficult to accommodate to pragmatism—is that it is about what is right categorically rather than what is right technically or conditionally ('hypothetically' as Kant would put it) for the achievement of some further end. To act honestly 'because honesty is the best policy' is not to act morally, but to act prudentially or for the technical purpose of achieving some other end (see Kant 1958 edn: 82ff.). From this standpoint, the pragmatic test of whether a particular piece of knowledge or understanding enables us to pursue our project or interest is neither here nor there in strictly moral terms. Rather, moral beliefs derived in some other way have to be brought to bear in evaluating the projects or interests we are pursuing, (i.e. we have to ask about the rightness or goodness of our ends) and they have to enter as an independent set of principles in considering the rightness or goodness of the means we discover for pursuing those ends. We have to ask not merely, for example, whether a particular solution to our perplexity will 'work' technically, but whether it is acceptable morally.

This distinction was clearly recognised in fact by both Dewey and Pierce. Indeed, in a 1925 essay on 'The development of American pragmatism' Dewey argues that:

> The term 'pragmatic' was suggested to him [Pierce] by his study of Kant. In the *Metaphysic of Morals* Kant established a distinction between the *pragmatic* and the *practical*. The latter term applies to moral laws which Kant regards as a priori, whereas the former term applies to the rules of art and technique which are based on experience and applicable to experience. (Dewey 1998a: 3)

This observation leads to a third problem with pragmatism which is of particular educational significance. The problem is that pragmatism—and a lot of the educational practice that goes with it—potentially leaves too much unchallenged. It suggests that the learner has almost physically to bump into problems before perplexity is engendered—and that the task then is to resolve that perplexity as simply and directly as possible. The pragmatic person does not look for 'unnecessary' problems.

This is not just a contingent feature of pragmatic theory. Peirce in particular was seeking a psychological foundation for the denial of Cartesian doubt—and he apparently found this in the writing of the nineteenth-century philosopher/psychologist Alexander Bain:

> To escape doubt and reach belief is … inherent in man; indeed, belief is our natural state, for we have an initial trust or belief in the continuation of the present state and the continued efficacy of our mode of behaviour. But experience disappoints us and so generates doubt, which must continue until a new pattern is established which does yield the desired result. (Bain, 'The emotions and the will', quoted in Fisch 1954: 419–420)

The consequence of this predisposition in favour of settled opinion is that, in both its popular and its philosophical form and practice, pragmatism begs or eschews many fundamental questions. Now this probably sounds perfectly all right if you are an engineer staring at a crack in a bridge, but from a more critical standpoint, philosophers and teachers want to extend learners' perplexity, to disturb their satisfaction with solutions, to make problematic what they take for granted, to raise wider moral, social, and political issues about their apparently straightforward, pragmatically satisfactory solutions. These requirements are, of course, precisely what motivates the more 'emancipatory' forms of action research associated with the German and 'down-under' schools.

13.3   Extending the 'Experiencing Nature'

This discussion ought to serve to caution us against reliance on an over-simple notion of experience-based learning or, pragmatically oriented practitioner research, and to give an indication of what in addition the proper development of applied knowledge and understanding requires. To put the caution in these terms is not

necessarily to gainsay philosophical pragmatism, but to reinforce some of the features of pragmatism that its less sophisticated disciples tend to overlook.

First, pragmatists such as Donald Schön would readily recognise this necessity for the intellectualisation of perplexity, which is a well-established part of the process of the construction of knowledge within a pragmatic paradigm. 'In real-world practice, problems do not present themselves to the practitioner as givens. They must be constructed from the materials of problematic situations which are puzzling, troubling and uncertain. In order to convert a problematic situation to a problem, a practitioner must do a certain kind of work' (Schön 1983: 40). We need to pay attention to the conceptual structures which, for example, teachers are able to bring to: (i) their definition of their task; (ii) their capacity to recognise 'problems' in the classroom and their definition of such problems; and (iii) their observation of what is going on in classrooms (cf. my references to Lewis's 'conceptualistic pragmatism' above). All of these are really part and parcel of the same problem which is rooted in the principle that 'all seeing is seeing as' and that our capacity for seeing and experiencing is a function of the conceptual apparatus and affective dispositions or what Bagehot (1905) called an 'experiencing nature' which we bring to observation and experience. We are familiar with the blindness which constrains any of us in an observational setting and the way in which, as possibilities are pointed out to us, categories are identified and labels provided, distinctions are drawn and connections are made, we come to see things which were previously invisible. They were invisible not because they were physically unavailable to our eyes or ears but because conceptually they were not discernible to our intelligence. As Elliott Eisner argued in his presidential address to the American Educational Research Association, 'humans do not simply have experience; they have a hand in its creation, and the quality of their creation depends on the ways they employ their minds' (Eisner 1993: 5).

In the context of teacher education, Calderhead (1988) has pointed to the unhelpfulness of the observation of classroom practice in the early stages of teacher training, when students simply cannot make sense of all the noise and movement around them, do not understand the significance of the teacher's actions, and are unclear what they are even looking for. Copeland (1981) describes such trainees' experience as 'a bewildering kaleidoscope of people, behaviours, events and interactions only dimly understood' (Copeland 1981: 11). Students need changed cognition (Berliner 1987), new concepts, schemas, and scripts in order to make relevant pedagogic sense of their observations, and 'the fact that new trainees have not yet had the experience to form these concepts is associated with the problem of not being able to "see"' (Maynard and Furlong 1993). Such observations do perhaps less than justice to the 13 years or more that student teachers have already spent in school classrooms, or the conceptual apparatus that they have developed for the interpretation and communication of that experience. It is, I think, a feature of teacher training programmes that they do little to profit from this experience. It is not so much that student teachers *cannot* understand classrooms, but that their mentors and the professional requirements of teaching require them to develop *different* kinds of understandings to serve them in their professional roles. The point

which is made here with reference to new teachers is further illustration of the way in which limited or inappropriate conceptual apparatus limits what we can observe and experience.

These conceptual and perceptual limitations affect whole groups as well as individuals—so that an entire community becomes conceptually blind to alternative constructions of their experience, to the selectivity and distortion of consciousness and hence in some instances to forms of oppression and discrimination latent in the situation which they are observing or 'experiencing'. To offer an elementary example, many of us taught or observed in classrooms for years without in fact observing the enormous variety of ways in which teachers operated to discriminate between boys and girls. Once alerted to this and its social significance, it becomes, however, difficult to observe any classroom without noticing this dimension of practice.

But individual reflecter/observers, whatever the dynamism of their reflective processes, are still trapped to some extent in the self-reinforcing and self-limiting world of their own conceptual framework. Elbaz asks 'how does one work from and with the reality of teachers without becoming bogged down in conventional views of schooling?' (Elbaz 1988: 174), and Handal has suggested that even teachers who engage in the research and reflective processes of school-based action research spend most of their time '*constructing practice*' at a technical level and little time '*deconstructing practice*' at an ideological level, (Handal 1991). Maynard and Furlong's conclusion nicely reflects the prevalence of pragmatism—and its limitations—among school-based teacher trainers: 'Studies of practice have found that too often trainees' and co-operating teachers' reflections centre superficially on issues such as whether a particular strategy "worked", on the children's apparent enjoyment of an activity, or whether specified objectives had been met … in essence focusing on the "safe" and not the "challenging"; on the "existing" and not on the "possible" (Maynard and Furlong 1993: 10; see too Calderhead 1987; Ben-Peretz and Rumney 1991). These are not new problems for action research. Adelman observes with reference to Lewin's early work in 'action science' that:

> Lewin's ideas on democratic participation in the workplace did not include any critique of the wider society, particularly the range of economic relations between worker and employer, capital and labour. Indeed a fair observation would be that although Lewin and his co-workers demonstrated the efficacy of action research for improving productivity, they did not develop conceptual structures that took explicit account of the power bases that define social roles and strongly influence the process of any change in the modes of production. (Adelman 1993: 10)

These problems suggest that some education is required of the ideas which inform practice and provide the structure of experiencing, if teachers or any other practitioners are to be able to see its wider rather than its more limited significance. Freire argued for an educative process of action and reflection through which participants 'simultaneously reflecting on themselves and on the world, increase the scope of their perception … (and) begin to direct their observations towards previously inconspicuous phenomena' (Freire 1972: 55). Easen, similarly, argues that among the central conditions for the development of classroom practice is 'the

problematization of those aspects of classroom life that are taken for granted by the teacher but whose development is crucial to the creation of new norms of practice in the classroom. In particular, this includes the typifications used for making sense of what happens and the accompanying routines. This suggests that practice development may involve ideological development through the process of perspective transformation …' (Easen 1992: 63).

What all this seems to call for is something stronger, more challenging, and more public than is conventionally conveyed in notions of reflection or reflective practice. It points to 'the non-circumventable presence and influence of discourses and critical reflection that have not been produced by practice as such' (Papastephanou 2007: 171). Reflection is undoubtedly *part* of what is demanded, but an individual's capacity to reflect has the same kind of limitations as his or her capacity to experience. These are partly dispositional limitations to do with the inquisitiveness, contrariness, engagedness, and other features of the individual's personality but, more importantly in this argument, they are limitations to do with the conceptual apparatus which supports his or her reflection, inquiry, experiencing, or imagination and which governs the practitioner's capacity both to perceive or pose problems and to generate and evaluate responses to them.

Schön's (1983) distinction between 'problem solving' and 'problem setting' is helpful here. The pragmatist focuses on problem solving and tends to beg the question of what is the problem which really ought to be posed. But we neglect problem *setting* at our peril, for it is this which shapes all that follows:

> When we set the problem, we select what we will treat as the 'things' of the situation, we set the boundaries of our attention to it, and we impose upon it a coherence which allows us to say what is wrong and in what directions the situation needs to be changed. Problem setting is a process in which, interactively, we name the things to which we will attend and frame the context in which we will attend to them. (Schön 1983: 40)

Schön illustrates in clearly pragmatic terms the kind of circumstances which destabilise the stock of commonly unstatable and tacit knowledge which for a time at least serves our purposes in action. These are, for example, 'situations of uncertainty, instability, uniqueness and value conflict' (Schön 1983: 50). It is these which create the puzzlement or perplexity to which we have to respond with changed assumptions, understanding, or beliefs. Schön also observes the variety of human conditions which lead us to avoid such perplexity, for example: boredom, 'over-learning', burn-out, selective inattention to phenomena that do not fit our preconceptions, an inability to recognise or explore puzzling events (Schön 1983: 61).

But though such references give some hints of the dispositions which 'reflections-in- action' require (an openness to and tolerance of perplexity? an active curiosity? an inventive imagination?), they provide little insight into the kind of cognition knowledge and understanding and even 'meta-cognition' (see Bridges 1994), which professional practitioners need to bring with them to reflection-in-action. In particular we need an account of the kind of conceptual apparatus which makes possible the questioning of the taken-for-granted

assumptions not just of the individual practitioner but of the professional—in this context the school staff—community in which he or she is located. MacKinnon (1987) emphasises the way in which we draw upon 'a repertoire of past experience *and ways of apprehending experience*' (MacKinnon 1987: 8, my italics) to reframe problems, but neither he nor Schön says much about these 'ways of apprehending experience', their sources and evolution, or the qualitative difference which there may be between some such ways and others. Munby and Russell argue that '[Schön's] work is not sufficiently analytical and articulated to enable us to follow the connections that must be made between elements of experience and elements of cognition so that we may see how reflection-in-action might be understood to occur' (Munby and Russell 1989: 74). It is, however not just Schön who stands accused of this neglect. In a fairly sweeping critique of advocates of reflective practice and classroom action research, Clarke concluded: 'there is a quite systematic failure to realise that reflection, being a distinctive operation of scrutiny, must be performed *with* as well as upon something, and that professional teachers need to be equipped with sophisticated competence in whatever it is that reflection is with' (Clarke 1994: 69).

Of course, one source for 'whatever that reflection is with' is the output of the more formal research community. However, as Kennedy (1997) has observed, this does leave us with a dilemma: 'for research that is conceptually accessible to teachers may be research that does not challenge assumptions or introduce new possibilities' (Kennedy 1997: 10). She refers to Chinn and Brewer's work on the role of anomalous data in knowledge acquisition (Chinn and Brewer 1993). This showed some of the ways in which scientists, science teachers, and children reject research findings that are incongruous with their prior beliefs. 'If that is the case,' she argues, 'then, conceptually accessible research could be research that further reinforces the stability of the education enterprise rather than research which challenges assumptions or offers new insights. To the extent that research that introduces new ideas is inherently less conceptually accessible to teachers, then we researchers also become dilemma managers' (Kennedy 1997: 10).

13.4 Theory Revisited

The implication of these arguments is that practitioners, like any other researchers, need to extend the conceptual apparatus which they bring *to* experience—which, of course, then interacts with experience—and not merely to expect to derive that apparatus *from* experience.[7] This requires, among other things, the abrasion of viewpoint against viewpoint and the expansion and challenge to one's own

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[7]There is, of course, the reciprocal implication that the conceptual apparatus which informs our understanding of education needs to be constantly challenged, modified, and informed by experience and ideas arising from that experience.

assumption which comes from being confronted actively and critically by the ideas, principles, moral commitments, and professional theories (in the widest sense of this word) of others.

And such extension must surely require, too, encounters with theory of a different kind than that tacit system of beliefs which we carry with us on a day-to-day basis and which, on the pragmatic model, evolves through its confrontation with experience and practice. I refer to theory in a more conventional sense of the 'big ideas', the major intellectual currents which themselves throw into question and challenge our taken for granted beliefs, if only we will pay them attention. I am bound to warm, then, to a teacher like the American Susan Ohanian, who in 'Who's in charge? A teacher speaks her mind' challenges university professors not to cave into the (naive) pragmatism of some teachers. 'We teachers need *less practicality* not more. We need to have our lives informed by Tolstoy, Jane Adams, Suzanne Langer, and their ilk—not by folks who promise the keys to classroom control and creative bulletin boards, along with one hundred steps to reading success' (Ohanian 1994: 209, original italics). I dare not claim that this represents more than a minority view among teachers at large, but it illustrates my point and offers some hope that it might find echoes among at least some practitioners. Everyday experience does not necessarily confront us with such ideas—this rather is the function of our teachers and of our reading material—in universities and teacher training institutions, but also in our schools.

Of course, some of the big and disturbing ideas of our day have, on the face of it, more relevance to the world of education than others. The theory which underpins the hypothesising of black holes or the discovery of the human genome may be intellectually shattering, but are not of obvious educational relevance (though I would certainly defer easily to someone who claimed to be able to show me otherwise). Among the sources which have challenged and continue to challenge educational thinking and practice we might still want to include reference to, for example: the theoretical frameworks which showed the connections between social class, economic standing, and educational success; feminist critiques of the school curriculum and of a multitude of taken for granted educational practices and similar critiques articulated in terms of race; postmodernist disturbance of traditional ideas about the relationship between language, narrative, and experience and the status of what is presented in schools as knowledge—or even, more modestly, the Piagetian perspective on the child as a developing being, or Mead's seminal ideas about the self. I am less attached to any particular selection of informing and, more importantly, challenging ideas than to the point that such ideas—such theory—ought to be part of the initial and continuing education of teachers, and their development a central responsibility of the research community, not to the exclusion of more pragmatically modelled learning or research, but as a supplement to it, dislocating what can otherwise become a very narrowly defined 'problematising' of our everyday practice.

I have presented these ideas as standing in some kind of contradiction to both commonsensical and philosophical pragmatism, but, at least as far as philosophical pragmatism is concerned, this is probably unfair. In emphasising the importance of

learning from experience, Dewey, for example, was primarily attacking forms of education which insisted on a sharp 'separation of "mind" from direct occupation with things' (Dewey 1916: 167) and 'the acquiring of knowledge as theoretical spectators' (Dewey 1916: 164)—one in which 'the intimate union of activity and undergoing its consequences which leads to recognition of meaning is broken' (Dewey 1916: 164).

Dewey was not opposed to expanding ideas or even theory. In his essay on philosophy and civilisation he wrote in praise of American social science, but acknowledged too its limitations and asked: 'What is the matter?' His answer:

> It lies, I think, in our lack of imagination in generating leading ideas. Because we are afraid of speculative ideas, we do, and do over and over again, an immense amount of dead, specialized work in the region of 'facts'. We forget that such facts are only data, that is only fragmented, uncompleted meaning, and unless they are rounded out into complete ideas—a work that can only be done by hypotheses, by a free imagination of intellectual possibilities —they are as helpless as all maimed things and as repellent as needlessly thwarted ones. (Dewey 1998b: 16)

What concerned Dewey was simply the tradition in which ideas were developed at a distance from, and out of contact with, experience and practice, to 'spectator theory'. Dewey was opposed to what he referred to as 'the great vice (of) intellectualism' (Dewey 1925/1981: 28). On Garrison's account, this meant a rejection of the idea that all knowing had to be like science and that knowing is the only or only important part of our experiencing. For Dewey 'feelings matter just as much as do ideas within the unity of the activity, especially social activity' (Garrison 1996: 22). Dewey is, however, alert to the interpenetration of ideas and experience —'Judgement is employed in the perception; otherwise the perception is mere sensory excitement …' he acknowledges (Garrison 1996: 168); and later, 'No experience having a meaning is possible without some element of thought' (Garrison 1996: 169). But ideas take life when they are employed in relation to experience: without such engagement they remain merely words, 'the counters for ideas' (Garrison 1996: 168). 'All authorities agree that discernment of relationships is the genuinely intellectual matter; hence the educative matter. The failure arises in supposing that relationships can become perceptible without experience … An ounce of experience is better than a ton of theory simply because it is only in experience that any theory has vital and verifiable significance. An experience, a very humble experience, is capable of generating and carrying any amount of theory (or intellectual content), but a theory apart from experience cannot be definitely grasped even as theory' (Garrison 1996: 169). This emphasis on the power of experience as a source of learning is the distinctively pragmatic contribution to this discussion, but I hope to have shown that it is consistent with such pragmatism to see such experiencing as informed by, as well as informing, our thought, our theory.

13.5   Research Revisited—and Conclusion

I dealt rather briefly with research in my discussion of pragmatism, because there is a view of research which places it very easily as simply a more 'systematic and sustained' form of the inquiry, which is part of any professional practice and characterised in my account of pragmatism. But clearly in terms of the point which this discussion has now reached, there is a more significant role for research and the research community. For it is the function of research not only to address pragmatically the problems which arise out of practice, to serve the purpose of improving the technical success to which we aspire which we have individually or collectively, but also:

- to dig out the less apparent evidence, perhaps the evidence concealed by an embarrassed government department, which challenges our ideas about what is in fact happening;
- to challenge the ends or purposes which are guiding our practice and the values and principles which are governing their pursuit;
- to challenge and to provide alternatives to the ideas which frame our understanding of and interpretation of what is going on in our classrooms, schools, or educational systems; and
- (cf. Stenhouse's 1980 definition of research) to make this public.

Research is, or ought to be, not only a resource for enabling us more effectively to achieve prescribed ends, but also an instrument of disturbance, disruption, and dissent—challenging not only the answers to questions about our practice but also the questions which we ask. It is in this sense that Theodore Roszak referred to the universities which are the natural homes to such research as 'delinquent academies' (Roszak 1967).

In this role, of course, researchers endear themselves neither to politicians, who rarely actually welcome criticism even if they subscribe to forms of democratic government which require them to submit to it, nor indeed teachers, who probably think they have enough problems to deal with before lunchtime without researchers or anyone else thinking up more! In the UK, first, the kind of critical theory I have referred to has been all but driven out of programmes in teacher education, and, now, there is increasing political manoeuvring to ensure that funding for educational research will enable government and its agencies to focus its efforts on the achievement of the government's defined agenda rather than more questioning and speculative projects.[8]

These do not seem to me however to be exclusive alternatives. Everyday pragmatism—and more sophisticated versions of it, as represented, for example, in

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[8]'The risk … is that a policy-maker's view of really useful research will resemble Margaret Thatcher's view of a really useful Minister … that it takes the problems which government brings to it, contributes to their solution, and refrains from adding new problems or further complicating old ones' (Edwards 2000: 304).

classroom action research—will serve us for much of our professional lives. But surely our teachers, above all, have to engage too with the wider and even more challenging intellectual currents of our day, and these will pose different questions and pose questions differently from the perplexities which ordinary experience will present. This may create more problems for teachers; but it may also render old problems more easily resolvable. Either way, we surely cannot accept a view of education which is constructed around the belief that its key practitioners should be protected from the big ideas which are simultaneously shaping the patterns of thought and life of the wider society of which they are part and with which their pupils will engage.

In so far as Dewey represents the voice of pragmatism, then pragmatism itself requires no less. Prawat argues that Dewey's theory comes down on the side of what he has termed idea-based social constructivism (Prawat 1995, 1993; Prawat and Floden 1994):

> Idea-based social constructivism … assigns the highest priority in education to important ideas developed within the academic disciplines. The teacher's task, according to this view, is to create discourse communities that allow students to hammer out and apply big ideas, like author's point of view in literature, or part-whole relations in mathematics, to real-world phenomena that they can then view with fresh eyes. Ideally in this scenario, the classroom becomes a centre of lively discourse, where people engage in animated conversations about important intellectual matters. (Prawat 1995: 20)

On another account (see Bernstein 1967: 385), the spirit of Dewey's entire philosophical endeavour was epitomised in his 'plea for casting off of that intellectual timidity which hampers the wings of imagination, a plea for speculative audacity, for more faith in ideas, sloughing off a cowardly reliance upon those partial ideas which we are wont to give the name of facts' (Dewey 1984: 10). Others will no doubt dispute the extent to which these carefully selected views do or do not reflect the true spirit of pragmatism or, more narrowly, the proper understanding of Dewey's own contribution to its elaboration. For me, what is most important, is that they reflect what I have argued to be essential priorities to both the professional development of teachers and to the development of practitioner, action, or any other kind of research. If this is pragmatism, then I am in favour of it.

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Chapter 14
n = 1: The Science and Art of the Single Case in Educational Research

Abstract This chapter examines the role of the single case (or by extension a small number of cases) in informing judgment about educational policy and practice. It does this in a research context in which numbers, and especially large numbers, are widely regarded as providing the soundest basis for such judgment, although the world remains one in which, as politicians and journalists recognise very clearly, the single case can still convey the true significance of a wider phenomenon and still carry huge power of persuasion. The chapter begins by looking at the role of the single case in quantitative research and then in other academic traditions, noting, for example, the importance of case studies in natural science, in history and in biography, as well as anthropology. It then turns to the thorny issue of how, if at all, one can 'generalise' from a single case. This leads to consideration of the role of the single case in conjecture and refutation; the scope for an inferential logic that takes us from the particular to the particular (i.e. bypassing the general); and the role of the richly textured single case in providing us with vicarious experience. In a final section, the chapter explores the senses in which case study, seen in this light, constitutes an art or a science.

14.1 Introduction

Individual cases can and do have enormous rhetorical and motivational power in public policy debate. At the same time, contemporary discussion of 'evidence-based policy' tends to push the individual case study to the margins of policymakers' interest, which is focused instead on large population studies and randomised controlled trials in which large numbers provide the appearance of validity and a sense of confidence in the results. This chapter seeks to examine the role of the single case (and, by extension, small numbers of cases) in informing educational policy and practice, asking how, why, and under what conditions

educators can properly pay attention to such research and how it might inform educational policy and practice beyond its own boundaries. The force of 'properly' here is to frame the question as primarily an epistemological one, though the argument will extend beyond a narrow interpretation of the epistemological in exploring the way in which any kind of research might inform judgment.

In psychological and rhetorical terms there are plenty of examples of the power of the individual case to shape decisions. Journalists are taught to ground big issues in the stories of individual human beings as a means of communicating their significance. Politicians know well the rhetorical power of the single exemplary story to persuade opinion. For example, in the UK the story of Laura Spence, a state-school pupil with excellent qualifications, who was not accepted by an Oxford College symbolised Oxbridge's failure to address issues of privilege in their admissions policies.[1] Contemporary legislation is increasingly, it appears, shaped by individual tragic events that seem to evidence faults in the system as in the terrible saga of the abuse of Victoria Climbié, which became a driving force for far-reaching changes in the social care system in the UK (Laming 2003 and HM Government 2003). Laws are even named after the individuals whose cases have come to symbolise the cause which the legislation addresses (cf. 'Megan's Law' requiring sex offenders to notify their communities of their presence—passed by the State of New Jersey in 1994: NJSA 2C and ff., and as Federal Law in 1995: 42 USC par. 13701). That single cases *can* have enormous persuasive power seems to me to require little argument; the question is, *should* they have this power and under what conditions? Is it rational to change policy or practice in the face of evidence from a single case?

14.2 Quantitative Research Methods and the Predilection for Large Numbers

There are clearly a lot of educational research questions which it would be non-sensical to answer on the basis of a sample of one. These would include any question which was concerned with the *scale* of an educational phenomenon. (How many children begin school without being able to write their names? What proportion of those entering Oxford and Cambridge have been educated in private schools? To what extent has the number of children being excluded from schools grown in the last ten years?)

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[1]The Laura Spence affair in 2000 enraged Gordon Brown (who was then UK Chancellor of the Exchequer). The fact that Laura, of Monkseaton Community High School, was rejected by Oxford's Magdalen College despite her straight—A predictions seemed so deeply unfair to Mr Brown that he resolved to make Oxbridge mend its elitist ways and admit more state school pupils. A White Paper presented to Parliament in January 2003 accordingly proposed the 'rapid expansion' of measures intended to 'widen access', and the government has kept up the pressure on both Oxford and Cambridge ever since (Boss 2006).

Similarly, questions about, for example, the relationship between different phenomena in large populations (To what extent is underachievement in school linked to gender, ethnicity, or social class? Which teaching approaches are related to high achievement in reading tests?)—i.e. correlational studies—would certainly require a sample larger than n = 1.

Some of these questions can be answered on the basis of something close to a full set of data (even if these are not necessarily entirely reliable). Given, for example, that all those entering Oxford and Cambridge have to record the schools in which they have been educated, it is possible for n to equal all those in the relevant population (n = N). More commonly in research we have to be satisfied with obtaining data from a sample of the population in which we are interested, and we use these observations to make inferences about the larger population. Here we enter a battery of requirements on this process of sampling, the satisfaction of which is a key condition for the 'scientific' acceptability of the research and hence its service to educational policy and practice.

These requirements would normally include measures designed to ensure that the population sampled 'represents' or mirrors as nearly as possible the characteristics of the population as a whole, both in the diversity of that population and the proportional representation of that diversity. (Pollsters who were way out in their predictions of the outcome of the 2014 general election in the UK confessed to failing on this second count.) Among the factors that determine the size of the sample that is required in this sort of research are:

- the extent to which the sample studied is carefully selected to match the significant characteristics of the wider population (which might permit a smaller sample of the kind employed, for example, in focus groups);
- the extent to which the sample is randomly selected (which would require a larger sample in order to ensure representativeness and reduce the margin of error); and
- what margin of error is acceptable in the results (is the researcher or the researcher's sponsor content with a rough and ready picture of what is happening or do they require something much more precise?); broadly speaking the margin of error decreases as the sample size increases, but there is always a trade-off between the margin of error accepted and the cost of the research.

This last principle is sometimes expressed (in terms which have particular significance for this paper) as *the law of large numbers*, which is a theorem in probability that describes the long-term stability of the mean of a random variable. Basically, the law dictates that the more observations you make of a particular variable, the more the sample mean will tend to approach and stay close to a particular value. If, for example, we toss a (fair) coin just 2 or 3 times, then it is quite possible that it will land as heads every time; if we continue for 10 or 20 tosses, then the proportion of heads will start to approximate to 50%; and it will get closer and closer to 50% the more times you toss the coin.

This law of large numbers tends to be extended (perhaps incorrectly, since it is essentially a principle applicable to a random variable with a finite expected value) as a general principle of research based on quantitative measures to indicate that, other things being equal, the larger the sample, the closer to a true picture, i.e. the more valid, will be the results. 'The larger the sample size, the greater its accuracy … The sampling error—the difference between the sample and the population which are due for sampling—can be reduced by increasing sampling size' [although] 'after a certain level, increases in accuracy tend to trail off as sample size increases' (Bryman and Cramer 1990: 104). This principle applies in general to both correlational research (e.g. to what extent is entry to higher education a function of ethnicity, gender, or social class?) and experimental research (how effective are mentoring schemes aimed at under-represented groups in raising entry to higher education in these groups?) In any research which is looking at the relationship between different variables, for example, if there are very few observations, then there are also few possible combinations of the values of the variables, and thus the probability of obtaining *by chance* a combination of the values indicative of a strong relation is relatively high. It is a feature of such research that when the inquiry has to be based on a sample rather than the entire relevant population, we are nevertheless interested in the confidence with which we can extrapolate from the sample to that whole population—and, other things being equal, a larger sample reduces the risk of error and or pure chance and increases the confidence with which one can draw inferences from the sample to the whole population.

It is against these sorts of expectations from quantitative research traditions that a sample size of a single case (n = 1), or even three or four cases, can look faintly ridiculous. But is it?

14.3 The Function of the Single Case *Within* a Quantitative Research Tradition

It is worth noting, first of all, that the single case (and I shall use this also to include a small number of cases, such that would not normally be thought to be statistically significant) can play an important and indeed devastating role even within the broadly quantitative research tradition. I have thus far accepted without comment the supposition which underpins the logic of a large part of empirical research in education as elsewhere, that one can draw inferences from an appropriately constructed sample that has been the object of study to the wider population from which it is selected; in other words, one can generalise from a suitable number of particular cases. However, Popper, most notably among philosophers of science, has pointed out the logical gap that always lies between any number of singular or 'particular' statements, such as accounts of the results of observations or experiments, and 'universal' statements, such as hypotheses or theories or generalisations that are held to be true for all instances. (Popper 1959, 1963). Instead Popper turns

the logic of scientific method on its head and argues that the task of empirical enquiry is to attempt to *refute* conjecture, i.e. such hypotheses or theories, and that the strength of such hypotheses lies in the measure of their ability to resist such attempts at their refutation (Popper 1963). But what then becomes significant is that it takes not a thousand but just a single case of convincing counter-evidence to achieve this refutation. In the often quoted example, however many observations of white swans you make, these will not be enough to demonstrate conclusively that 'all swans are white'. On the other hand, a single observation of a black swan will suffice to refute the same proposition. This is not just a technical philosophical point, it is a common feature of scientific experience that it is the occasional aberrational result that signals that there is something not quite right with the existing theory.

Significantly, Stake situates case study in this Popperian tradition in the sense of offering the power of the negative example:

> Case study is part of scientific method, but its purpose is not limited to the advance of science. Whereas single or a few cases are a poor representation of a population of cases and poor grounds for advancing grand generalization, a single case as a negative example can establish limits to grand generalization. For example, we lose confidence in the generalization that a child of separated parents is better off placed with the mother when we find a single instance of resultant injury. Case studies are of value in refining theory and suggesting complexities for further investigation, as well as helping to establish the limits of generalizability. (Stake 1994: 2).

Harvey Goldstein argues, however, that the application of Popperian ideas to social science can be problematic since many (most?) hypotheses cannot be framed in terms of a few simple logically distinct states. Stake's example really needs to be rephrased along something like the following lines: 'Children of separated parents, on average, are better off placed with the mother'. The counterexample would be valid only if we could carry out a study that demonstrated that *on average* they were not better placed. Of course, it is not that simple, since one would need to specify the circumstances of the case, the particular features of the situation or context which might explain the departure from the norm. So Popper's notions are often fine in the natural sciences where it may be reasonable to assume universally applicable relationships so that universal statements or hypotheses make sense. In the social sciences these ideas have less utility. Of course, finding, for example, that some families or schools appear to behave differently from others is interesting and leads to further questions and data collection, and a key role for case studies is to try and understand why this might be happening. However, in the social sciences a single case study will rarely refute a generalisation because propositions are usually offered as probabilities rather than as universally applicable laws (though this, of course, diminishes the confidence one can place in such hypotheses in a particular case as distinct from a large population).[2]

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[2]I am grateful to Harvey Goldstein for the argument in this paragraph, which he offered in response to an earlier draft of this paper.

Further, as Elliott and Lukes argue, 'case-focussed reasoning' is an intrinsic part of the development and application of quantitative studies:

> the construction of scenarios and cases is essential in the design of quantitative experiments and research projects both in the form of discursive assumptions and the actual case-based pilot studies. But it is no more absent in the policy implementation of the resulting data. Case like stories have to be told before a policy based on quantitative 'evidence' can be translated into prescriptive documentation, but they are also essential in the political justification of policy. (Elliott and Lukes 2009: 98–99)

In other words, when we are designing a quantitative experiment we have to construct a story about what might (or might not) happen in a particular situation given certain limited different conditions; and when we report the research we feel greater confidence in telling a story about what did happen in those situations given certain (limited) conditions and what would be likely to happen in other similar situations (this being the inferential turn). The trouble with such studies is they can only ever deal with a very limited set of descriptors of the situations, abstracted from what we know to be a very much more complex set of realities—which is precisely what draws some people towards not just case reasoning but case study.

14.4   Different Forms of the Single Case

On the whole, when we talk of research in education focused on a single case, we are not referring to quantitative research: we are moving, in the words of the title of the landmark text by Hamilton et al. (1977) 'Beyond the numbers game'. There is, of course, a long tradition of case study in psychology, especially in child psychology. For many teachers from the 1950s and 1960s a 'child study' was a key component of their teacher training. The psychoanalytic tradition was almost entirely constructed around a mixture of theory and case study (and the cases would not have withstood much scrutiny against the criterion of their representativeness either).

Subsequently in educational circles, case study became especially associated with ethnographic research in an anthropological tradition. In the last two decades, encouraged in particular by its espousal by feminist researchers, case study has often taken the form of biography and autobiography, narratives of people's educational lives and experiences presented either as the outcome of research or as sources to inform the writing of a research account (see Griffiths and Mcleod 2009). More widely, 'cases' have played a central role in the development of medical understanding and, whatever might be the general recommendations for medical practice defined, for example, by the National Institute for Clinical Excellence, the examination of the individual case and case history remains central to medical decisions. English common law, or as it is sometimes referred to, 'case' law, is indeed constructed around decisions about individual cases that have been

determined in the courts, the historical collection of which constitute the basis for contemporary legal argument, reference, and decision.

It is relevant to note too Stenhouse's argument that a great deal of history is best conceived of as case studies in the sense of studies of particular defined phenomena bounded by time and place (Stenhouse 1977). He gave as examples Girouard's *The Victorian country house*, *The working life of women in the seventeenth century*, *English wayfaring life in the middle ages*, and, to focus rather more on education, *English grammar schools in the reign of Queen Elizabeth*. Of course, the plethora of historical biographical works would also constitute cases of a slightly different kind. But, to take a more recent example, Carlo Ginzburg's *The cheese and the worms: The cosmos of a sixteenth-century miller*[3] explicitly positions itself as a qualitative and singular study and is contrasted by its author with the practice in which 'virtual teams of scholars have embarked on vast projects in the quantitative history of ideas' (Ginzburg 1992: xx). It is perhaps worth recording Ginzburg's rationale for this approach, which presages some of the arguments which will follow:

> Menochio [the miller in question] articulated the language that history put at his disposal. Thus it becomes possible to trace in his disclosures in a particularly distinct, almost exaggerated form, a series of convergent elements … A few soundings confirm the existence of traits reduceable to a common peasant culture. In conclusion, even a limited case (and Menocchio certainly is this) can be representative: in a negative sense, because it helps to explain what should be understood, in a given situation, as being 'in the statistical majority'; or, positively, because it permits us to define the latent possibilities of something (popular culture) otherwise known to us only through fragmentary and distorted documents, almost all of which originate in 'the archives of repression'. (Ginzburg 1976/1992: xxi)

In the context of educational research 'cases' may be constructed on the basis of a variety of forms of inquiry, and hence of data, including: descriptive writing by an observer or a participant (or a participant observer); interview data (typically derived from unstructured or semi-structured interviews rather than questionnaires); observational logs or diaries; documentary sources (including correspondence, official documents, newspaper reports, minutes of meetings); photographic images; and so on. In this sense 'case study' is not a research method: rather it is (i) a way of focusing or putting boundaries around a piece of research (cases are often referred to as 'bounded systems'—see Adelman et al. 1976: 141) and (ii) a form of representation of the research, a choice in favour of a particular form of representation of observation, evidence, and experience.

The outcomes of these various forms of inquiry have at least some of the following features in common:

- they focus on a single case or on a small number of cases;
- such cases are 'an instance drawn from a class' (Adelman et al. 1976: 141) or, as it is sometimes put, 'of the type but not necessarily typical', so in orthodox sampling terms they can only claim a very modest degree of 'representativeness';

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[3]I am very grateful to Lynne Fedler for drawing this fascinating work to my attention.

- they deal holistically with educational phenomena and involve 'a myriad of not highly isolated variables' (Stake 1980: 71);
- they provide a detailed or 'thick' picture of a situation or series of events (and consequently have narrative form)—of course such description does not exclude quantitative information where relevant: Stenhouse (1980: 4) emphasised in his 1979 Presidential address to the British Educational Research Association 'an acute need for attention to be paid to quantitative aspects of case study';
- they are typically written in ordinary, 'naturalistic', rather than technical language;
- they do not in themselves present results or conclusions—'Themes and hypotheses may be important, but they remain subordinate to the understanding of the case' (Stake 1980: 71).

The first thing to note about this picture of the single case is that it is qualitatively different (as well as different in scale) from what might be a single case in, for example, research based on a survey or randomised controlled experiment. In either of these approaches the actual information contained in a single case would be tiny by comparison with e.g. a life history or an ethnographic case study. Of course, if the 1 in n = 1 is a response to a questionnaire, then the single item is not a lot of use. 'To know particulars fleetingly,' wrote Stake, 'is to know next to nothing. What becomes useful understanding is *a full and thorough knowledge of the particular*, recognising it in new and foreign contexts' (Stake 1980: 69, my italics— and see also Stake 1998). The single case may even in this tradition be a book-length treatment of a single school—as in Stephen Ball's influential study of Beachside Comprehensive (Ball 1981).

Nevertheless, it would be difficult to find anything much further removed from the requirements described earlier for the credibility of correlational or experimental research than this account of case study. The two really do not admit of sensible direct comparison, though a lot of the literature on case study to show its consistency, or at least comparability, with natural science methods and methodology (cf. Kemmis 1980, below). As MacDonald and Walker argued: 'We might say that case study is that form of research where n = 1, only that would be misleading, because the case-study method lies outside the discourse of quantitative experimentalism that has dominated Anglo-American educational research' (MacDonald and Walker 1975/1977: 2).

Is it any surprise that the proponents of the related discourse of 'evidence-based' policy and practice and those excited by 'systematic reviews' of educational research tend to leave it aside as 'unscientific' and irrelevant? But are they right to do so—or are they confused about the different ways in which different genres of research—even those based on a single case—may inform (again, legitimately) educational policy and practice? In the remainder of this chapter I want to explore possible approaches to the question 'How may a single or small number of case studies inform educational policy and/or practice?

14.5 Generalising from the Single Case?

> To generalise is to be an idiot. To particularise is the alone distinction of merit. General knowledge are those that idiots possess. (William Blake in *Annotations to Sir Joshua Reynold's discourses* Reynolds 1992: 36)

If the case is 'an instance drawn from a class' (Adelman et al. 1976: 141)—for example a comprehensive school, a disaffected teacher, a multi-ethnic group of children—and is chosen because it has at least a *prima facie* representativeness, then it is tempting to suppose that one might generalise about the class from which the instance is drawn. However, apart from any of the standard critiques of such attempts from a statistical point of view, Adelman et al. have their own account of why it is not that simple:

> During the conduct of the study the description of the case will increasingly emphasise its uniqueness. Loosely speaking this means that the study will reveal increasingly some case bound features of the instance vis-à-vis the class. More strictly speaking, the study will transcend the principle of selection (i.e. selecting the instance as representative of a given class) and become a study of a unique case. It does not follow that the researcher, by virtue of this shift, abandons the hope of generalisation, though he may do so. Rather the basis of generalisation itself has changed. (Adelman et al. 1976: 141)

Quite what might constitute the alternative basis for generalisation here, I shall explore shortly. For the moment, however, it is worth noting a different message which might also be drawn from this account of what happens when you start to look at individual cases in a class, i.e. that they serve to remind the researcher or policymaker of the unique mix of conditions and circumstances which have significance in the individual case—and thus of the dangers of seeking to apply *any* generalised prescription as to how people should act under these particular conditions. In any case, as Alexander reminds us:

> the logic of illustration in educational research precedes the logic of generalisation. We come to understand ideals first through detailed examples of concrete cases, and only secondarily by means of abstract and universal covering laws. (Alexander 2007: 128)

Even quantitative researchers with any sophistication share this scepticism. David Byrne, for example, explains (in *Interpreting quantitative data)* that:

> Statistical inference, although often reified beyond its limited but important value in relating the properties of a sample to the contextual and local universe from which it is drawn, is only a component in the far more important and scientifically significant issue of generalisation. … The real world of the social/natural is composed of evolutionary and interacting systems. The epistemological consequence of this is that knowledge is inherently local. We cannot appeal to universal laws applicable everywhere … as the basis for generalisation. (Byrne 2002: 74–75)

Writing in the context of the evaluation of the Humanities Curriculum Project, Barry MacDonald came to a similar conclusion: 'No two schools are sufficiently alike in their circumstances for prescriptions of curricular action to be able adequately to supplant the judgement of the people in them' (Macdonald 1971, cited in

Simons 1971: 118). Perhaps it is, then, the very particularity of educational practice which needs to be understood. It was precisely for this reason that Lawrence Stenhouse presented a picture of the curriculum, not as a prescription to be followed unquestioningly, but as a hypothesis which needed to be tested against the particular conditions which applied in a unique setting. 'Theory is useless to the practitioner unless he can subject it to situational verification, that is, test it in the situation in which he currently finds himself' (Stenhouse 1977: 3). This is why he emphasised the need for teachers to be researchers, which was more a call for the adopting of a questioning, inquiring approach to generalisations about how and what to teach than a requirement on teachers to adopt a particular set of research practices. There were, in any case, always ethical constraints on the teacher's assumption of a research role: 'Given the ethics of the situation, the teacher can test theory only by taking educational action, that is action which can be justified in educational rather than experimental terms so that he could conscientiously take it without experimental intent' (Stenhouse 1977: 3).

Cronbach, similarly, acknowledged the complex particularity of social (including educational) settings and drew an important conclusion for the direction of social science research: its primary aim should become 'interpretation in context' not 'generalisation' (Cronbach 1975: 123).

St Clair (2005) has taken the argument a stage further, invoking the notion of 'superunknowns' as an obstacle to *any* possibility of transferring empirically-based knowledge between educational settings:

> In any social situation there are an infinite number of factors that could influence the interaction between humans (such as weather, language, height, breakfast food, and so on). Any infinite group of factors, even if there are millions taken into account, leaves an infinite number unaccounted for—these are the superunknowns. … [Further] there is no truly effective strategy to deal with superunknowns. This is because there are an infinite number of them, and not only do we not know what they are, we are also unaware exactly how important they are … [Consequently] If similarity is accepted as the basis for induction, and the importance of superunknowns is recognised, then the conclusion has to be that the justification for induction in educational research is weak—there is no systematic, logically coherent justification for the assumption that what we learn from setting A applies to setting B. (St Clair 2005: 446)

The problem about St Clair's argument is that it appears to remove the possibility not only of transferring understanding from one situation to any other but even of understanding a particular case, since here, too, there will presumably be an infinite number of unknowns as well as some things which are known. Or perhaps it is simply that one could never understand the particular case fully, which, while not entirely a trivial qualification, would be more than anyone might expect to do any way.

Nevertheless, St Clair's and the other cautions indicated here are ones which I think need to be taken very seriously, not least because they have important implications with respect to the level in any educational system at which practical decisions about teaching need to be taken. They argue that, although the broad values and principles which a system might be expected to realise might

appropriately be determined through some democratic process at a higher level, decisions about how in the end to realise these values in practice have to be made on the basis of a detailed understanding of the particular context in which they are to operate.

This caution has not, however, persuaded all advocates of case study to abandon the language of 'generalisation' even if, as Mejia (2009: 2) has pointed out, this is a very different kind of generalisation from that associated with randomised controlled trials. 'Various authors have rushed to assign it an adjective so that it is made clear that there is a distinction': *analytic* (Yin 1994), *retrospective* (Stenhouse 1980) or *naturalistic* (Stake and Trumbull 1982), among others. Other authors', continues Mejia, 'have preferred to drop the term "generalisation" and replace it with another one: for instance *relatability* (Bassey 1981), or *transferability* (Lincoln and Guba 1985)' (Mejia 2009: 2, my italics)—though Bassey later (2001) added '*fuzzy*' generalisations to the repertoire.

Connell seeks to reconcile the importance of some generally applicable theory with an insistence on the uniqueness of specific contexts from which it is drawn and to which it is to be applied: 'The power of the social science generalizations', Connell asserts, 'is multiplied if they can be linked to the characteristics of the context *within* which they apply' (Connell 2007: 207, emphasis in original). Such attempts at generalisation she calls 'dirty theory', which she defines as 'theorizing that is mixed up with specific situations. The goal of dirty theory is not to subsume, but to clarify; not to classify from outside, but to illuminate a situation in its concreteness' (Connell 2007: 207). Hardy, who follows and seeks to provide a concrete example of this approach, describes the main characteristics of 'dirty theory' as:

> (1) situating any form of theory development within the specific contexts in which data are collected and developed, (2) theorizing that is in genuine dialogue with local rather than remote issues, (3) theorizing that accounts for more marginal perspectives, and (4) theorizing that is historically informed. Such a position seeks to draw upon and develop theorizing that is relevant to particular situations, and to do so in ways that enable generalization but always in light of the historically informed context in which any form of research and theory development is undertaken. (Hardy 2012: 525)

I am entirely sympathetic to the approach to research and the social practices of research that are prescribed here. It embraces ethical principles of respect and inclusiveness, which may also function as epistemological desiderata too (see Chap. 22). I can see how theory developed in the way that is described might faithfully reflect the experiences of people in the local situations (the cases as far as this chapter is concerned) from which it is derived. So far, so good. What I am less clear about is whether and how it overcomes the problem of generalisability across other cases—cases for which the particularities of the context are unknown and the historical background unavailable to us. For these reasons I am not convinced that Connell's formulation, or Hardy's development and illustration of it, solves our problem.

How, then are we to respond to the question about how a single case can legitimately inform educational practice or policy. In the next sections I want to

explore three approaches: (i) the single case as a source of conjecture and refutation; (ii) relating the particular to the particular; and (iii) the single case as an extension of experience and as a contribution to practical wisdom.

14.6   The Single Case as a Source of Conjecture and Refutation

In a way this is perhaps the easiest case to advance because it is the most modest in its claims. Popper (1963) has offered a framing of science as a matter of conjecture (i.e. theory building or hypothesis formulating) and refutation (the negation of these through discussion, critique, and empirical testing)—and even if this has drawn its critics it has survived as at least a partial picture of what goes on in scientific enquiry. I have already discussed the role of the single case in the process of refutation. The single case (and *a fortiori* the single case richly described) is enough to make it clear that what might have been thought to be the case is not necessarily the case, need not be the case, might not be the case if particular conditions obtained.

It is the refutation side of Popper's twin concepts that tends to get more attention, but conjecture is at least as important, and it would be part of my argument that a well-described or narrated single case, and perhaps even more the sort of accumulation of cases that Stenhouse favours, provide a fertile source for such conjecture, moreover one in which the active imagination is 'grounded' in a graphic description of reality or in the multi-perspectival takes on reality that are characteristic of the modern ethnographic case. In the Cambridge Accountability Project, for example (Elliott et al. 1981), five researchers spent 18 months studying six secondary schools and their relations with their parents and communities. Through the process, and on the basis of the evidence generated, the researchers kept asking themselves, 'what general principles about school accountability can we offer on the basis of these studies?' (the conjecture) and 'can we find any evidence in the studies to challenge or gainsay these principles?' (the attempted refutation). In other terms, familiar to anyone engaged in case research, we were generating grounded theory (see, for example, Glaser and Strauss 1967). In such an example, the small scale of the sample is offset to some degree by the detailed examination of the cases in question.

In this case, the researchers were not technically able to answer the question 'how typical is this experience?', although at no stage in the subsequent conferences and events for head teachers and local authority officers was this seen as an issue; they could readily identify with the picture that was provided. In a sense the claim that I am more interested in making for this sort of research relates to the interest, the freshness, the fecundity of the insights and ideas that it can generate, and especially if these insights are sufficiently well grounded and well described that they command the response 'I can see that that is how things were', and

perhaps (but not essential to this part of my argument) '… and I had not thought of it like this before, but I can see that that is what is also happening in my own school'—which brings me to my second argument.

14.7   Relating the Particular to the Particular

> In its most significant form, generalisation about the case promotes generalisation from case to case … as in art, which teaches by example rather than precept … (Adelman et al. 1976: 142)

When Kennedy asked teachers what persuaded them about the utility of a particular piece of research, she began to build up a picture that, in fact, applied independently of the genre of research which they encountered: 'teachers *forged analogies* between the studies they read and their own situations or practices' (Kennedy 1999: 537, my italics). 'Forging analogies' is one way of expressing the processes which are involved in coming to understand one situation through an understanding of another. It is this process that Stake refers to a 'naturalistic generalisation':

> Often the situation … is one in which there is need for generalisation to a similar case rather than generalisation to a population of cases. Then the demands for typicality and representativeness yield to need for assurance that the target case is properly described. As readers recognise essential similarities to cases of interest to them, they establish the basis for naturalistic generalisation. (Stake 1980: 71)

However, I think it is misleading to call this process 'generalisation', because there is no generalisation and none is required. It is not a matter of a logical sequence which starts with a particular instance, moves inductively to a general theory about the class to which the instance belongs, and then deduces from the general theory what might be the case in another particular instance that falls within the class. It makes no general claims. It simply affirms that this single instance A is sufficiently like another instance B that I can gain some understanding of B (but also, perhaps, C, D, E, etc.) through my understanding of A. 'The general idea is that rich description of a single case or of a reduced number of cases, if of good quality, will help other practitioners see their own cases reflected and judge for themselves what is applicable in their own practice' (Mejia 2009: 2–3).

Such—let us call it—'application' of the single case is especially significant in the context of the relationship between research and practitioners, who are on the whole not too bothered about whole populations or systems of children, classrooms, or schools (and will probably regard their own situation as unique anyway) but only in their own situation. They are not so interested in general theory but in principles and practices which they can identify with and which 'fit' with their experience in their own classroom.

I strongly suspect that, notwithstanding their public subscription to the cult of large numbers, policymakers do not respond very differently to practitioners in this

respect, though it would need a different kind of study to establish this. Elliott and Lukes's (2009) account of 'case reasoning' fits with a model in which, even faced with, for example, the quantified results from a randomised controlled experiment, a policymaker still needs to envisage the forces at work in terms of a picture of what might be happening in a situation with which he or she is familiar or, perhaps, one which they have experienced vicariously or one they can construct in their imagination.

14.8   The Case as Offering a Vicarious Experience

> Experimental research 'guarantees' the veracity of its generalisations by reference to formal theories and hands them intact to the reader; case study research offers a surrogate experience and invites the reader to underwrite the account, by appealing to his tacit knowledge of human situations. The truths contained in a successful case study report, like those in literature, are 'guaranteed' by 'the shock of recognition'. (Adelman et al. 1976: 143)

Adelman et al. were here echoing, in particular, the views of Stake (who was a participant in the conference from which their paper emerged). There are four elements to this argument, which it may be helpful to distinguish.

Firstly, there is a claim about what case studies can offer in the form of vicarious experience:

> One of the more effective means of adding to understanding—for all readers—will be by approximating through the words and illustration of our reports the natural experience attained in ordinary personal involvements. (Stake 1980: 65)

> Certain descriptions and assertions are assimilated by readers into memory. When the researcher's narrative provides opportunity for vicarious experience, readers extend their memories of happenings. Naturalistic, ethnographic case materials, to some extent, parallel actual experience, feeding into the most fundamental processes of awareness and understanding. (Stake 1998: 94)

Secondly, there is a view about how such vicarious experience engages with human understanding: extending their memories of happenings, entering their tacit understanding. In a sense, then, the argument rests on a theory about how practitioners and policymakers learn (come to extend their understanding) rather more than an epistemological theory about what authority can be claimed for what they learn. Kemmis does indeed make a direct connection with such learning theory when he writes:

> In Piaget's terminology, the reader must be able to assimilate the situation-as-reported to his present experience and accommodate the present forms of experience to the new forms of possible experience offered by the report. It is in this sense that case study often works by *Verstehen* (empathetic understanding) feeding imagination and experience as much as propositional knowledge in discourse. (Kemmis 1980: 128)

By extension, Adelman et al. suggest that there is a particular pedagogy attached to the use of case study 'which teaches by example rather than precept' (Adelman et al. 1976: 142).

Thirdly, and perhaps more controversially, contributors like Stenhouse and Stake have tried to address the claims of natural sciences about the predictive power of their hypotheses, though their language shifts from 'prediction' to 'expectation' and 'anticipation':

> The responsive diagnostic *predictions* which interplay with action may be called anticipations. Surprise in a phenomenology of understanding is equivalent to falsification in scientific theory. (Stenhouse 1977: 4, my italics)

> I am concerned here with how we can improve the professional common sense understanding of the educator which supports *anticipations* through diagnostics—in short with the improvement of judgement. (Stenhouse 1977: 5, my italics)

> Naturalistic generalisations develop within a person as a result of experience. They form from the tacit knowledge of how things are, why they are, how people feel about them, and how these things are likely to be later or in other places with which this person is familiar. They seldom take the form of predictions but lead regularly to *expectations*. They guide action. (Stake 1980: 69, my italics)

In short, then, what we have so far is a picture of the way in which the single case serves to extend, enrich, and inform personal experience and understanding, much of this at a tacit level. This is a very grounded, concrete understanding packed with detailed description and personal accounts of what it is like to be there 'where the action is'. It is in this sense perhaps the kind of understanding that Aristotle identifies as *phronesis* or 'practical wisdom'. Being thus grounded it positions the actor to anticipate (if not confidently to predict) what might happen if …, what to look out for, even if this always comes with the ultimate requirement to test out such anticipation in the particular circumstances of their own setting. Can any form of educational research really offer more than this to the practitioner, or even the policymaker?

Fourthly, what is clearly acknowledged here (cf. the reference to the Piagetian notion of assimilation above) is that neither practitioner nor policymaker is an educationally empty vessel. Both come to any research report with a huge load of mental and emotional baggage drawn from past experience (personal and professional), past reading or encounters with research, and past reflection. Further, as Stake has reminded us, much of this is buried in their tacit understanding of the world. Any contribution that research makes to their understanding will only be a small part of the total, and its significance will be hugely influenced by what is already there and by their current felt needs. Thus *any* research results (randomised controlled experiments included) will be interpreted by the reader in ways which reflect their pre-existing understanding and preoccupations:

> Even in factual terms every research report is open to multiple, more or less reasonable, interpretations and usually is interpreted in different ways by different people. It is not necessary to go to Derridean extremes about the 'dissemination' of meaning to recognise that there is a sense in which readers construct the meaning of any research report and may do so in diverse ways. (Hammersley 2002: 46)

This is another way of reminding ourselves that receiving research (of any kind) is a kind of learning and is subject to all that we know about the individual's construction of that learning. We need perhaps not so much a theory of generalisability as a theory of learning—which might be informed by Elliott and Lukes's suggestion that: 'The policy-maker's grasp of actualities is not so much enhanced by the straightforward application of general principles as by judgements that are tutored by the comparative study of cases' (Elliott and Lukes 2009: 89, and see Bridges and Watts 2009). Hence—and importantly if we care about practitioners and policymakers taking our research seriously, 'If the readers of our reports are the persons who populate our houses, schools, governments and industries; and if we are to help them understand social problems and social programs, we must perceive and communicate in a way that accommodates to their present understandings' (Stake 1980: 64–65).

14.9   Case Study: Science or Art?

Helen Simons edited a seminal collection of papers, from which I have drawn extensively, that appeared under the no doubt consciously provocative title *Towards a science of the singular* (Simons 1980), and one of its contributors, Stephen Kemmis, was unequivocally committed to 'the proposition, so heavily validated by lay and professional usage that it hardly needs defending, that case study work is science' (Kemmis 1980: 100ff. for his justification). He argues that:

> In [three] crucial ways … case study work is like all forms of science: it is an empirical process of truth seeking; it is a social, cultural and cognitive process; and it resolves in its practice the double problem of justified true belief—the justification of belief and the belief in justification. (Kemmis 1980: 106)

But even if case study satisfies these three conditions, is this sufficient to demonstrate that case study is a 'science'? More importantly, perhaps, does it matter? Why should one legitimate genre of research need to conform to the requirements of another—unless one is conceding that only the scientific, out of all the intellectual resources of the academy, can claim legitimacy? (See the discussion in Chaps. 3 and 4.) Kemmis seems to be in danger of falling victim to the very form of 'scientism' that he seeks to attack in the same paper.

It seems to me better to acknowledge that case study has its own strengths rooted in the arts and humanities, rather than derived from (or not just from) the natural sciences—that this carries with it requirements for thoroughness, accuracy, attention to detail, but also imagination, social sensitivity, contextual understanding, and quality requirements in the structure and writing of the report—in other words its own discipline and rigour which provide both the warrant for its credibility and the pedagogical or rhetorical power to affect the reader's understanding.

To free case study research from the particular requirements of the natural sciences is not by any means to suggest that anything goes. Simons argues that 'The

case study must not only be authentic and detailed … it must also be rigorously accurate and impartial' (Simons 1971: 122). For Stenhouse, these principles were honoured in case study by his requirement that any such study should be linked to a set of case data, i.e. all the materials assembled by the case worker. These, he acknowledged would be too bulky for repeated handling and too sensitive for immediate release, but they were (on an analogy which he drew with historical research) the primary sources against which, in principle at least, the case study could be checked and challenged. More accessible would be a case record 'a theoretically parsimonious condensation of the material of the case data produced by selective editing without explicit comment' (Stenhouse 1977: 20). The purpose of the case record, as Elliott and Lukes explain, is to enable others 'to critique the case study and to judge the extent to which it could be verified as a reasonable interpretation of the available evidence' (Elliott and Lukes 2009: 90).

But we can go further than this in locating case study within an artistic or, since the main but not exclusive tools of the case researcher are words, a literary tradition. In so far as case study pays attention to rich description and the evocation of place and time; to personal experiencing; to reflecting complexity (including moral complexity) rather than abstracting a few variables from complex situations; to 'portrayal' rather than (or as well as) analysis; to narrative form; to ordinary rather than technical language; to a good read; and to the essential indeterminacy of the text—does it not locate itself rather more in the stable of literature, or at least the humanities rather than science?

> The kind of case-studies which we believe education needs have characteristics which call for a fusion of the styles of the artist and the scientist. When Freud said, 'It still strikes me myself as strange that the case histories I write should read like short stories and that, one might say, they lack the serious stamp of science' he caught the unease of the researcher who, disdaining the 'safety of numbers', discovers that his data is most effectively exposed in a mode which is generically associated with the artist. (MacDonald and Walker 1975/1977: 3; Freud 1955: 160)

And not only should this not matter: why do we find ourselves constantly having to apologise because not everything in the academy meets the requirements of science (or what these are supposed to be)? Might not the difference, after all, be a source of excitement. Science may offer the *general* (though there are many reservations which need to be entered into even this claim—see e.g. Smeyers 2009) but the arts offer the possibility of the *universal*:

> To see a world in a grain of sand
>
> And heaven in a wild flower
>
> Hold infinity in the palm of your hand
>
> And eternity in an hour.
>
> (William Blake: 'Auguries of Innocence', in Nicholson and Lee 1916)

In a sense the greater the particularity of the case study and the more fully humanity is displayed in all its complexity and ambiguity—and there is a direct

analogy here with a great novel or drama—the more opportunity there is for the reader to discern not just what relates to their own condition or to a sub-class of subjects like them, but to humanity as a whole.

> Case study is the way of the artist, who achieves greatness when, through the portrayal of a single instance locked in time and circumstance, he communicates enduring truths about the human condition. (MacDonald and Walker 1975/1977: 3)

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Chapter 15
Narratives, Fiction, and the Magic of the Real

Abstract In popular terms 'truth' stands in contradiction with 'fiction'. Fiction tells a story that is made up, not 'real', not true. To describe an account of what happened as a complete fiction is to suggest that it is undeserving of any attention. And yet we can all respond to a novel or a drama—works of fiction—with a recognition that it has conveyed not just something true but an important and compelling truth about human experience. This chapter explores with particular reference to educational research expressed in narrative form some of its claims to tell the truth (or a truth). It considers the case for producing as a fictional account something rooted in empirical inquiry but not confined to what this inquiry can claim as evidence. It contrasts this with other narratives which are about 'what really, really happened' and the shift in significance associated with this perception of the story.

> When finally she feels she must, on pain of rebuke, <u>must</u> touch him, she reaches up to his face quite as he is launched into a gesture—actually the first expression of his presence— turning both hands outward at the wrist, and she walks each of her breasts into his hands. And then they laugh, and then hold—close—and then Rosemary is crying and Rob is calm. (Clough 1999: 430)

> Irie wished she could give herself over to these past-present fictions: wallow in them, make them sweeter, longer … But she had in her hand a cold key, and surrounding her lives that were stranger than fiction, funnier than fiction, crueller than fiction, and with consequences fiction can never have. (Smith 2000: 459)

15.1 Research and Literary Form

The biography, life history, case history, and other narrative forms of research and research representation have been, on Denzin's (1989) account, a part of sociology's history since the 1920s and 1930s, when University of Chicago sociologists,

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under the influence of Park, Thomas, Znaniecki and Burgess, Blumer and Hughes were trained in an interpretive, interactionist approach to human group life. Goodson (2000) traces them back a little further to the autobiographies of American Indian chiefs collected by anthropologists at the beginning of the century (see, for example, Barrett 1906). A subsequent generation of sociologists turned away from the genre, but in the last quarter of the twentieth century research writing in education has increasingly drawn upon narrative data and been represented in narrative form[1] (Lagemann and Shulman 1999). Indeed the dominance of narrative forms in educational research has been such as to lead Cizek to protest at what he refers to as 'the hegemony of the narrative' (Cizek 1995) and to one notable ethnographer, Duncan White, testifying during a session of the American Educational Research Association Annual Meeting that 'ethnography, specifically, and qualitative research in general, have fallen victim … to a type of group-think that has valorised one type of method—interview, narrative and the so-called emic perspective—to the exclusion of others' (Waite 1994: 4).

These narrative representations have, moreover, come closer and closer in style and form to the novel, the short story, the forms associated with narrative fiction. Readers might be excused for thinking that the first extract quoted above (and more fully below) was from some romantic novel, but it comes in fact from a paper presented at the British Educational Research Association conference and subsequently published in the international journal *Qualitative Enquiry*. Among the features of educational research writing which have produced what has been called the 'contiguity of literary studies with the project of ethnography' (Clough 1999: 444, but see Denzin 1997) are the following:

- the focus on the single case as an illumination of a wider phenomenon;
- the presentation of 'thick description' of the social context of events, of the physical setting, of the biographies of the characters involved;
- the use of the simple narrative form to 'tell a story';
- the visible presence in the writing of the author, of the author's history, prejudices, and reactions;
- the focus on the phenomenology of events, of the way people experience them, and of their affective as well as cognitive response to them.

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[1]It is perhaps helpful to distinguish between (i) *narrative as a form of research data*, that is, research which is constructed on a basis of, for example, personal stories or life histories which people have been encouraged to generate (and which might then be subject to analysis or reporting in a form which was not narrative); and (ii) *narrative as a form of research representation*, that is, research which gets reported or presented in narrative form, though it may be based on non-narrative sources like observational notes, interviews, correspondence, etc. Polkinghorne (1988) expresses this distinction in terms of 'analysis of narratives' and 'narrative analysis'. Clough's work discussed in this chapter is of the second kind, while Walker's is really of the first. Goodson (1983) also distinguishes between two forms of (auto) biographical narratives: a *life story* (a mere rendering of lived experience) and a *life history* which provides data that locates the story within a social and historical context.

The more that educational research reports embrace these features the more strongly they resemble fiction, even if they retain distinctive and distinguishing claims in terms of their relation to evidence and to what are in some sense, though not unproblematically, real events in a real world.

This relationship with fiction is brought even closer if we also acknowledge, as I think we must, that educational researchers, like writers of fiction, employ both art and artifice in the construction of their research writing. It is entirely compatible with their responsibilities as researchers to contrive their case study, their contemporary history, their biographical writing, their storying so as to engage the readers' feelings and imagination as well as their intellects, to draw them into the story, to help them identify with, or at least understand, their characters and their settings. They may reasonably (may they not?) make decisions in the interests of literary fluency, elegance, style, or dramatic effect. There are few who have engaged in this genre who have not, for example, selected a particularly juicy, attention-grabbing quotation for inclusion in the title, or juxtaposed startlingly contrasting views of the same events for effect.

Beyond this, any research author would have to recognise, I think, that in constructing such narratives we make selections from the data, we take points of view, we tell stories drawn from a pre-existing repertoire—all of which signal that the published narrative tells us as much about the author as it may about anything else, and remind us that there are possibly as many different ways of 'storying' the same events as there are people prepared to write them.[2] This is indeed why some working in this genre insist on a full declaration of, as it were, 'where the author is coming from' the better to enable the reader to take this personal history into account. Even with this assistance, however, the notion of any simple correspondence between the published narrative and the events of which it tells has already been rendered seriously problematic. Epistemologically, it becomes difficult to say either what it would mean to describe such a narrative as true or to explain how one would determine whether or not it was true. Though some argue that it is more appropriate in adjudging fictional research and theses to talk of meaning (Eisner 1995) or 'structural corroboration' (Kilbourn 1999) rather than truth.

'All writers know', wrote Martin Amis, 'that the truth is in the fiction' (Amis 2000: 28). It is not surprising in this context that some educational researchers have slid from research reporting in the narrative form to its logical conclusion in narrative *fiction*. They have licensed themselves: to tell their educational stories without the requirement to restrict themselves to what actually happened, or to that which they can support with evidence of one kind or another; to take the exercise of the imagination which is present in any research reporting a stage further to fill in the gaps in the evidence; to enter areas of people's thoughts or private lives which normally lie outside the evidential base; to add extra ingredients of drama or interest

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[2]And more, of course, because any individual will tell different stories to different audiences in different contexts and for different purposes.

where perhaps the story might have lacked either; to tell the 'greater truth', the 'greater realism' (Butor 1990: 48) which fiction has traditionally laid claim to express.

But does this mean that educational narrative research is indistinguishable from narrative fiction and that narrative fiction has a proper place at educational research conferences and not just at literary festivals? Or if, as I am inclined to suppose, the elision between educational research and narrative fiction obscures some distinctions which we might ignore at some peril, what are the significant differences between them and what their distinctive contributions to educational understanding? (Please note that I am concerned with distinctiveness and not necessarily with a hierarchy of value.)

This then is the broader context of inquiry within which this chapter lies. The chapter has, however, a narrower focus which I should now explain.

15.2   Two Contrasting Narratives

The starting point for this particular inquiry was a symposium on 'Narrative/fiction and the art of research' held at the British Educational Research Association conference in Belfast in September 1998.[3] It was the contrast between two papers in particular which set me thinking.

In one contribution to the symposium, 'The necessity of narrative: A correspondence' (Clough and Nixon 1998), Peter Clough read part of a short story which he had written about a sequence of events in and around a school. Here is the beginning of the story as he told it then (and as it was subsequently published, Clough 1999).

> When Rob Joyson was 43 years old, he came into school on a Tuesday morning much as usual, and passing at 10:40 by a maths class taken by Michelle G—a probationer of 23—and hearing terrible noise, and seeing through the window a boy at the back fetch a fat gob on Michelle's back as she walked down the aisle smiling, smiling too, too nervously, her hands doing 'down, please: down, down' at the noise; seeing this marbled yellow gob on Michelle's ordinary blouse on her decent body, Rob Joyson rushed into the room and to the back and took the boy—Mark something—by the ears, both ears, and pulled him up out of —through almost—his desk and repeatedly smashed his head against a chart of tessellations on the wall. And Michelle pulled at him from behind and screamed, and he twisted the boy down by his ears and pushed at him with his foot, kicking until he was quite under the desk. Then Rob started to cry and there was terrible silence—where there had been terrible noise—but for Rob searching for breath to fuel the small fearful wails that broke from him. When—thank god—someone laughed finally, unable to stay with the pain a moment longer, Rob fled the room.

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[3]Several of the contributors to the BERA conference met again at a seminar convened by Morwenna Griffiths on 'Little stories/small tales/educational research' sponsored by Nottingham Trent University and held at Stoke Rochford, 3–5 December 1999. This version of this paper has been informed by this discussion, and the version of Melanie Walker's paper referred to here was the one presented at this seminar.

By 11:30 he was at home, his wife and GP were expected shortly, and he was carefully drying the pots on the draining board. Rosemary Thorpe, the head-teacher, was putting the mugs on the hooks beneath the wall-cupboards. Rob had not spoken—not a word— since Rosemary had fetched him from the caretaker's 'den'; the caretaker had run to the office to say that RJ—as most people knew him in the school—was crying, no wailing in the den; was, well: barmy.

Rob … Rob, you know you shouldn't … O Rob, Rob, dear Rob. Look, let me …

And she made to wipe his nose with kitchen roll but—though he offered no resistance—she stopped at his smile that excluded her so clearly from his occupation.

I had this one—holding a mug celebrating the Miners' Strike of '84.

Rosemary is very short, short and quite round. When finally she feels she must, on pain of rebuke, must touch him, she reaches up to his face quite as he is launched into a gesture— actually the first expression of his presence—turning both hands outward at the wrist, and she walks each of her breasts into his hands. And then they laugh, and then hold—close— and then Rosemary is crying and Rob is calm.

The first words from Rob, each as flat as the next, an even pause between each: What/ever/shall/I/do/Rose … (Clough 1999: 429–430)

This is a story which, as his published synopsis declared (BERA 1998: 136) 'purports to be constructed from traditionally recognisable data' (he had conducted field research in the school) but which was elaborated, detailed, embellished, and constructed out of his professional experience and imagination and in a style which made it clearly redolent of works of imaginative fiction. Consequently, in, for example, its lack of deference to publicly accessible evidence, it appeared, as he put it 'to violate many commonly-held principles and procedures of social science research' (BERA 1998: 136). The piece, which he presented, evoked a powerful sense of recognition from the audience, a sense of its being 'true to life', even if the events described had not actually happened or not happened as they were described. It offered, in other words, the kind of insight and truth which one might associate with a well-researched and accurately conceived novel.

Other writers have, of course, advocated the writing of fictional narratives as a resource for educational understanding, and recommended more specifically the 'fictional-critical' method as an approach to the education of teachers (see e.g. Winter 1986, 1991; Rowland et al. 1990; Rowland 1991; Bolton 1994; Clements 1999). Bolton has summarised the value of narrative fiction in terms of:

- its capacity to offer 'an intelligible research summary of the huge body of data which qualitative research tends to provide';
- its capacity to enable people to explore a professional problem that is 'inaccessible or problematic by any other means';
- its capacity to convey 'the ambiguities, complexities and ironic relationships that exist between multiple viewpoints'; and
- its tendency to 'leave gaps for the reader to fill in and raise questions through the unresolved plurality of its meanings' (Bolton 1994: 56).

I do not want to comment specifically on these claims, though I shall make some observations which are relevant to them. For the moment let me proceed to a contrasting piece of writing.

A second contribution to the 1998 BERA symposium (Walker 1998, 1999) took as its source an edited collection of letters from Lily Moya, a young black South African, Mabel Palmer, an elderly white educationalist, and Sisusisiwe Makhanya, a black social worker (Marks 1987). There were several different layers to the paper including: 'an exploration of the educational discourse and the construction of identity manifested in the correspondence' and an exploration of 'the complicated generosities and simultaneous humiliations of white liberalism at the time' (BERA 1998), but near to hand in all these was 'the grittiness of the evidential base'—in this case, the correspondence itself (Walker 1998: 8). The text of the correspondence was poignant, starkly revealing, and 'de-stabilising' (as Walker intended) to many of those who attended, at least in part because the words were ones which human beings had really used in correspondence with each other. Here is a flavour of the correspondence—the reply by Mabel Palmer at the University of Natal (the white woman who had helped the young Lily Moya to attend Adams College) to a letter from Moya, which had expressed her unhappiness, and which had asked Mabel to arrange for her to move to a college closer to her:

> You say that one of your reasons for wishing to be in Durban is that you want to see more of me, but have you asked yourself whether I wish to see more of you? As a matter of fact I do not. Your romantic and self-centred imagination has built up for you a picture in which you are to be my devoted and intimate friend. Now you must forgive me for saying that this is all nonsense. Even if you were a European girl of your age it would be nonsense. What basis of companionship could there be between a quarter educated girl like you of eighteen and an experienced old lady like myself. And of course the racial situation in Durban makes all these things more difficult. (Marks 1987 quoted in Walker 1998: 5)

Clough's and Walker's contrasting papers[4] both celebrated the narrative genre and its contribution to educational research; both sought to give such narrative a foundation in research; both recognised the role of the author's imagination and design in constructing the narrative to be presented and the role of the reader in giving his or her own meaning to a text; both aspired to capturing some kind of 'truth' in the narrative; and both recognised that the nature of such truth was problematic. All this they had in common.

The contrast which interested me was that in the first paper the vividness and effect lay in the imaginatively constructed and essentially fictional detail, whereas in

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[4]I have chosen two particularly contrasting approaches here across what is of course a wide spectrum. In the same BERA symposium, for example, Max Biddulph presented a paper with a mixture of real material and fiction, which he described in the following terms: 'I am calling the data that I am presenting here "a story" because it is in some senses a form of narrative fiction. The original, "real" (real in the sense that this is what was said in the interviews) elements of the story are contained in most of the events described in the story. I have also tried to use the vocabulary from the original interview transcripts that was employed in its original telling to me … The fictitious elements to the stories are some biographical and situational details, which have been changed to protect the anonymity of the participants' (Biddulph 1998: 1).

the second the vividness and effect lay in the fact that the correspondence which we were hearing consisted of real letters which real people had actually sent to each other in a setting—and for Walker this is the real focus of attention—redolent with real injustice. 'It all happened, it all happened, it all happened', declares Walker in the final line of her paper (Walker 1999). (Can Clough make the same claim?)

There seemed, then, to be something special about a narrative based upon such authentic material and something particularly important to educational research in seeking to base itself on such authenticity, but discussion at the symposium did not take us very far towards identifying why this might be so. This chapter is my attempt to continue to wrestle with this problem and to consider the place of the real in narrative educational research.

In doing this I have made some cross-reference to sources in museology and museum education. In these fields there are considerable debates about both the way in which objects are presented, represented, and read and about the importance to the scholarly, communicative, and educative functions of museums of 'real' objects as distinct from replicas, virtual objects, photographs, or facsimiles or indeed the narratives or commentaries which might accompany them. My hunch is that arguments for the real object in museology may have something to offer our understanding of the distinctive interest of real material in narrative research—but we shall see.

15.3   The Real

I don't want to turn this chapter into a disquisition on realism and nominalism, but I have before I proceed at least to recognise that the ancient and medieval debate is alive in the structuralist, poststructuralist, and post-poststructuralist world of the 21st century. For present purposes I want to acknowledge both the problematic nature of talk of the real (real objects, real correspondence, real testimony) and the intelligibility, usefulness, and, I would say if pressed, the necessity of the distinction between e.g. the real and the imaginary, the real and the invented, the real and the pretense.

It is possible, to stay with the example of a correspondence, to acknowledge that its nature and its meaning(s) may be changed depending on how an author selects from it, edits it, presents it, juxtaposes different parts of it, introduces it or frames it, or by the way in which a reader does his or her own selection, editing, interpretation, and so on—and still to acknowledge that some such correspondence, e.g. Lily Moyo's, is real and some other correspondence, e.g. between two characters in a Jane Austen novel, is an imaginative invention.

Not that the imagination is restricted to the construction of narrative fiction. As Erben explains:

> Imagination is the vehicle the researcher employs to aid recognition of significant moments in the data, to relate these to each other and to the overall lives of the subjects under study.

> In other words imagination very often fills the gaps within, and develops an architecture for, the research data. At all points, however, the researcher is required to fix imagination in empirical sources—it cannot be allowed free reign and take unwarranted liberties with the lives of subjects. The fact that biographical research findings are imaginative constructions does not mean that they need to be fictitious. (Erben 1998: 10)

This requirement for imagination in the construction of educational research is certainly one of the things which makes it possible to erode the crude polarity between what is real and what is not,[5] and those who have contributed to such erosion have no doubt contributed usefully to our understanding of the complexity of the sources which inform educational research. The distinction clearly retains, however, both logical force and psychological power, as the reaction to some of the passages of Lily Moyo's correspondence illustrated and as I hope to show more clearly in what follows. Indeed, many writers in the narrative fiction or fictional-critical genres are careful to acknowledge the difference between the real and the fictional.[6] Biddulph, in the passage quoted in footnote 5, observes carefully which is which in his paper, and the very adoption by researchers like Winter and Rowland of the nomenclature of 'fictional-critical' writing is designed to draw attention to both the difference between this and research which aspires to represent something which is non-fictional and the residual restraint which remains even within this fictional genre.

So what is the distinctive role of the real in educational narrative research? In this chapter I shall discuss four approaches to this question. The first and third of these are drawn from fairly traditional epistemological discussions; the second and fourth were both prompted by, and are referenced to, work in museology, in which, of course, the distinctions between the authentic and the false, the reproduction, the restored, the imitation, or the facsimile are both critical and problematic. In the following chapter I continue the theme of the problematic nature of fact and fiction in educational research, but with reference to the literature which examines the relationship between history and fiction.

The first approach explored in this chapter suggests that the real might be necessary as a basis for assessing the truth or validity of fiction; the second argues for the real as enabling readers to enquire into aspects of a topic which the author has ignored or excluded; the third looks at falsifiability as a feature of factual or fictional work; and the fourth examines what I call 'the magic of the real'.

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[5]The real does not, of course, feature in a simple polarity. We contrast the real with: the *imagined* (the conscious and acknowledged creation of fiction—perhaps in the interests of 'true' understanding); the *illusory* (where the believer is unaware of the non-objective or false nature of what is perceived); and the *fraudulent* (where an agent deliberately and knowingly propagates false perception). It is the first of these contrasts with which I am concerned with here.

[6]It is relevant to observe here that when museums reconstruct, for example, a dinosaur incorporating authentic fossilised bones with new material they deliberately use a different colour for the new, so that the visitor can distinguish one from the other. In Peter Gough's story that distinction is entirely lost.

15.4   The Real as the Gold Standard

The suggestion here is that the real has a kind of logical priority over fiction, and represents a sort of measure, a gold standard against which the value or currency of fiction is judged. Thus, defenders of fiction will claim that this fiction can provide a picture or story of human experience which, despite its fictional character, conveys real insight into that experience, a veridical account—if not truth, then in Bruner's terms 'truth likeness'. In these terms it appears that the aspiration of fiction is in some way to match the real—not, of course, just the real of the world of material objects and externally observable behaviour but, more importantly, the real of the world of felt experience and subjectivity.

But in so far as the aspiration of fiction (or more particularly the fiction which is offered as a form of educational research) is successfully and subtly to represent what is real, what Lather (2000: 154) calls a 'truth effect'[7]—even 'a deeper reality' perhaps—then how do we know whether or not it is successful? Presumably, because we have some understanding of the real which is derived from other and non-fictional sources? Thus we can recognise the imaginative achievement of a novel about school life partly because we have independent sources of information and understanding which are derived from real first-hand experience or real accounts. It would seem to follow from this that the fictional narrative must always then be parasitic on the factual narrative (granted that this may include factual accounts of people's experience and feelings, not just of behavioural events).

The relationship is, I am sure, a more complex one than I have allowed here. In terms of my original metaphor of the real as the gold standard, it is salutary to remember that, of course, the money markets learned to dispense with the gold standard entirely for the purposes of setting their value. It is worth noting the observation that 'life imitates art' and our tendency to construct our real experiences in terms established through our fictionally informed imaginations. If we are trying to decide whether we are 'really' in love, perhaps our reference point is *Romeo and Juliet* rather than some psychological treatise on human bonding. Nevertheless, the touchstone of the real and the desire to peel off the layers of externally imposed and internally constructed deceits in search of the real (hence in part the notion of the 'fictional-critical') seems to be an aspiration of narrative fictions as well as more orthodox educational research endeavours.

Not that realism in fiction or non-fiction is necessarily a function of the amount or quality of real material which is incorporated in it. Pascal tells of an occasion when it was suggested to Goethe that he should embody letters in his

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[7]This was in the context of the controversy over Rigoberta Menchú's account of her experience as 'An Indian woman in Guatemala' (for which she received the Nobel Peace Prize), which it was suggested by some was invalidated because some parts of the story had been made up or embellished, but was defended by others as, this notwithstanding, telling a greater truth (Clark 2000).

autobiography. Goethe apparently refused on the grounds that 'incoherent realia strewn around must necessarily disturb the good effect' (Pascal 1960: 5).

15.5 The Real and the Unasked Question

This second argument is derived from the discourse of museology, but I believe that it may be applied to educational research. The issue in the context of museology is the importance or otherwise of real objects—as distinct from replicas, copies, representations of the object, or virtual objects—in educative and communicative contexts. Wander, for example, points out that: 'Often it (the museum object) is either too big or two small, too complicated or it produces too much noise—that is, too much irrelevant data for the message to come through at all, or at least sufficiently' (Wander 1989: 416) and, thence, that more selective 'representations' of the object might better serve the purpose. Against this, however, he argues that: 'Every "representative"… is shaped after the supposed need for information, yet this need happens not to be constant. No matter how complete and excellently structured a "representative" might be, and no matter how well it might answer to the existing demands… the confrontation with authentic objects frequently makes totally new and unexpected questions arise' (Wander 1989: 419). Not only this, but, as he goes on to point out, confronted with an authentic object, 'You will always find what you are not looking for' (Wander 1989: 420).

These arguments point to a number of considerations about educational research and the role of real data—and these apply particularly to the collection of data which underpins a research report and is in principle available to other researchers to inspect. The parallel with the museology argument would run as follows:

  (i) this data is in itself too huge and complex to be readily communicated to anyone—so the researcher needs to create 'representations' of it appropriate to the communicative purpose and audience;
 (ii) however, any such selection will involve editing in the interests of some questions rather than others—and the questions which readers want to pose change, so they need access to the unedited material;
(iii) this authentic material will also tend to confront the 'reader' with data that they are not slooking for and which, therefore, opens up new questions for them.

But does this line of argument help us to distinguish any particular merits that narratives which represent the real may have over narratives that have been consciously constructed as fictions? Not immediately, I think, because even the real narratives have clearly moved a long way from the noise and complexity of the original data to offer no more than a 'representation' of it—a selection that supports a particular story. Thus far, then, it can claim little superiority to the fully-fledged fiction.

There remains, nevertheless, an important distinction between representations of the real and representations presented as fictional. The data set of the fiction is bounded by the fictional text. There is nowhere else the inquirer can go, no additional material to which the reader can refer to answer the questions which are unanswered by the fictional work. By contrast, research narratives based on the real allow the reader to examine the narrative interpretation against the data inside and outside the text from which it was derived; to examine the data set with a view to answering questions which the narrative failed to answer; to seek additional connected data in order to explore further questions which the narrative did not address. None of these options are available to the reader of narrative fiction, which is thus much more restrictive in terms of the questions which it allows the reader to ask and answer (except hypothetically, of course, and—which may have its own value—in imaginative conjecture).

But there is a moral as well as an epistemological significance to the way in which the real, as it were, extends beyond the text. When Melanie Walker responds to narrative evidence of the horrors of apartheid with 'It all happened, it all happened, it all happened', this is not just an indication of the power of a certain kind of data to stand for or communicate particular events. It is, or so I believe, a signal of the moral gravity of such accounts and of their *ongoing consequences* in and for peoples' lives. Thus, in her much- celebrated first novel, *White teeth*, Zadie Smith reflects: 'Irie wished she could give herself over to these past-present fictions: wallow in them, make them sweeter, longer … But she had in her hand a cold key, and surrounding her lives that were stranger than fiction, funnier than fiction, crueller than fiction, and with consequences fiction can never have' (Smith 2000: 459). Accounts which we are persuaded to be accounts of real events have consequences for us and may morally require practical responses from us in a way which goes beyond anything which fiction can require, because the world represented in the text is an extract from a much wider world for which we have various kinds of moral responsibility.

15.6   Fiction and Falsification

Of course, it is a small step from this observation to the issue of falsifiability. It is a pretty sound (though again not unproblematic) principle of scholarly life that arguments and theories should be presented in a form which enables their refutation.[8] This requires that the evidence is provided or made accessible in a form that would enable someone else to demonstrate that inferences or conclusions had been drawn erroneously from it and/or requires that the methodology is sufficiently exposed that someone can critique this. Some empirical narrative researchers seek

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[8]There is, of course, an important, though perhaps rather restrictive, epistemological tradition which suggests that without the possibility of falsification theories also lack meaning.

to respect this principle by presenting as much data as possible and offering minimal and separate interpretation and commentary. Marks's *Not either an experimental doll* (1997) had something of this characteristic, which is one reason it has attracted so much subsequent commentary and interpretation.

Although some of the processes employed in fictional-critical writing include very clearly challenges to the offered narrative and the rewriting of events, this can only be achieved by sharing authorial responsibility, because no-one can really gainsay authorial authority when it comes to writing fiction. Interestingly, both Winter (1991) and Rowland (1991), look to the processes of fictional-critical writing to change the power relations between themselves and their students. There is a certain irony in their abandonment for this purpose of a scholarly tradition which subordinated the authority of the author to peer and public scrutiny against the evidence, in favour of a tradition which, on the face of, it allows the author a special authority. Both writers show awareness of this problem, however, and both have developed strategies which attempt to deal with it. Rowland, for example, describes how he attempts to turn himself from author to reader, and explains:

> This emphasis upon the reader at the expense of the author (which seems to be particularly vital if fictional writing is to have the critical edge of 'research') suggests an approach to text like that of Barthes in which: 'the birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the Author'. (Rowland 1991: 99)

Literary criticism allows for activity which has something of the character of refutation: one can argue the implausibility of a particular character or background acting in the way which is described (a test of internal consistency or coherence); one can talk about the unreality of a portrayal of a head teacher in a novel or play (a test of correspondence with other generalised description); one can offer a lot of views about what someone would or would not have done in the circumstances described (a test of consistency with general experience of human behaviour), but ultimately there is no gainsaying the author of fiction, who in presenting work as fiction gains a licence to invent anarchic worlds in which any general expectations of human behaviour are confounded and in which established scholarly logics are ignored.

By contrast non-fictional narratives can be subjected to tests against the evidence which informs them not only by the reader but by the writer. Ruskin, for example, noted that a despondent account of his aesthetic obtuseness on an early trip along the Riviera, which he gave in *Praeterita*, did not actually correspond with the record in his diary—'I see, indeed, in turning the leaves [of my journals], that I have been a little too morose in my record of impressions', and he then corrects any possible misapprehension by inserting a page of his journal into his account. Pascal, who recalled this episode, observes, however, that Ruskin did not in fact amend his account, but left the two of them side by side (Pascal 1960: 4).

Pascal tells a second story about a challenge to a narrative—in this case a piece of autobiographical writing by Henry James—which was in part a memorial to his philosopher brother William. From time to time Henry quotes from the philosopher's letters, which had been made available to him by William's son. The latter

had occasion to protest to Henry, however, when he realised that Henry had actually changed the wording of one of these letters. A somewhat chastened Henry tried to justify his action by claiming that he had only been trying to do his best by William and to present him as he believed him to be. 'I daresay I did instinctively regard it at last as my truth, to do with what I could', he explained, and added, 'never again shall I stray from my proper work' (James 1920: 359). The episode seems to me to illustrate three points relevant to this discussion: (i) James's observation of the difference between the novel and the non-fictional narrative; (ii) his acknowledgment that a certain discipline with respect to the use of evidence applied to the latter; and (iii) the capacity within this non-fiction genre of someone to hold the author to account and to challenge his version of events against real evidence. I would have to acknowledge that in James's case these considerations were enough to persuade him of the superiority rather than the inferiority of the novel form, but given his own mastery of the genre, this is perhaps no surprise.

Pascal suggests that as far as autobiography is concerned 'its value is always linked to its truth.' Value and truth arise out of 'the monolithic impact of personality that out of its own and the world's infinitude forms round itself, through composition and style, a homogeneous entity, both in the sense that it operates consistently on the world and in the sense that it creates a consistent series of mental images out of its encounters with the world' (Pascal 1960: 188). I shall not dwell on this account, however, because what I find interesting is his own immediate response to this offering:

> What is troubling about this way of looking at autobiography is that it may seem to bring it too close to imaginative art and obscure the fact that it tells of events whose truth may be tested from other sources. Historians have necessarily to check and often correct autobiographical statements and autobiographers are deeply concerned to correct current and anticipated misapprehensions. Matters of detail do not trouble us much … [but] we like to ask, does the author's representation of himself as a personality correspond to what we can get to know of him though other evidence? It is a question that can never be asked regarding a work of art. (Pascal 1960: 188)

The distinction which Pascal draws here is equally applicable I think to other narrative forms, and is particularly significant with respect to any such narrative which aspires to inform educational policy or practice. At least, in so far as the principle of falsifiability and the apparatus of accountability which lies behind this are to be valued in an educational research community, then we must, I think, attach a particular value to educational narratives which attempt to engage with the real rather than those which are represented as fiction.

15.7 The Magic of the Real

Walker chose as the title for her BERA paper a direct quotation from a letter written by Lily Moya, the black South African student: 'Mrs Palmer gave me scholarship to Sterkfontein'. Mrs Palmer was a liberal-minded white woman who had paid for her

education. Sterkfontein was the mental hospital where Lily ended up after her 'educational' experiences had wreaked havoc with her life. It seems to me—and clearly it did to Walker too—to be so redolent with messages, meaning, and disturbance that you are almost compelled to stop and meditate upon this alone (never mind any subsequent commentary). But it also seems to me that part of that power derives from the recognition that this was real—that it came from the pen of a real student on the basis of real experience in a society whose really oppressive structures could produce this real effect.

I think that museologists have gone further than educational researchers in understanding and interpreting the power of the real (acknowledgedly the selected and displayed real—as in the Walker example). Greenblatt, for example, writes of 'resonance' and 'wonder' as the sought responses to displayed objects in museums:

> By resonance I mean the power of the displayed object to reach out beyond its formal boundaries to a larger world, to evoke in the viewer the complex, dynamic cultural forces from which it has emerged and for which it may be taken by a viewer to stand. By wonder I mean the power of the displayed object to stop the viewer in his or her tracks, to convey an arresting sense of uniqueness, to evoke an exalted attention. (Greenblatt 1991: 42)

I suggest that this account of the aspirations of museologists for the objects that they display is readily transferable to the representation of real data—correspondence, transcriptions of speech, photographic material, and so on—in educational narratives, and that neither the kind of resonance described here nor (though this may be rarer even in the deployment of real material) the wonder described here is available in quite the same way in narrative fiction.[9]

The same resonance is not available because the relationships described in Greenblatt's interpretation are simply not there to be joined; the same wonder is not there because part of that wonder is attached to the very 'isness' (Witcomb 1997) of the words written or spoken, to the fact that someone actually said this.

It is this belief in the almost talismanic power of the real (in the research report or the museum exhibition) to link us to another person, another world—to provide what Honan refers to as 'present-ness' or 'sense of experience-in-events' (Honan 1979)—which leads us to place special store on the narrative which features and rests upon identifiable real material as distinct from one in which the real is lost in the fiction. To regard or relate to the real in this way is to return or attribute to it (or at least some of its representatives) a power which goes beyond the power to inform or even to validate or confirm: it is a power to draw the reader into a relationship with the object of cognition, a power to entrance, in anthropological terms a fetishist power—'the power to fixate, rather than simply the capacity to edify and inform' (Clifford 1985: 244). The processes of the Truth and Reconciliation

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[9]I think there is a different kind of resonance involved in responses to fictional writing, which has more to do with the fit between the writing and one's own experience and hence the subjective validation of what has been offered.

Commission (TRC) in South Africa provided some especially graphic examples of the power of 'real' objects to give materiality to people's stories[10]:

> The physical markings of violence and trauma that were identified held up and displayed provided tangible evidence of the individualised acts of history on each dismembered body: 'That hand, I want it back. That hand is said to be in the bottle in Port Elizabeth. I would like it back.' This kind of utterance is repeated again and again within the TRC process, identified body parts as sites of torture, physically recovering and re-membering the hidden past and uncovering and locating its source. Physical remains like those brought to a hearing by Joyce Mtimkulu and held up to be seen—scraps of her son's hair attached to parts of his scalp—envisioned these separate stories of remembrance with material life, truth's 'real' testimony. The physicality of mutilation was seen to embody the materiality of apartheid. (Rassool et al. 2000: 126)

'It really happened: it really, really happened', wrote Walker.

'Real' words, words from a letter, from a diary or (already at a slight remove, this) from a transcript of a recorded interview will rarely have the talismanic or evocative potency of these abused human remains, but I believe that they have something of the same capacity to connect the reader of a text with the lived experience of another—with, in Eisner's words, that 'qualitative world (which) is immediate before it is mediated, presentational before it is representational, sensuous before it is symbolic' (Eisner 1993: 5).

15.8   Conclusion

The same literature from museology, to which I have referred, also raises, however, some sharp questions for the representation of the real in educational research papers. Vogel opens a paper on museum displays by observing that 'Almost nothing displayed in museums was made to be seen in them' (Vogel 1991: 191), and goes on to grapple with the issues raised in—to take an extreme example—the display functions in a Western museum context of African tribal artefacts produced for very specific contexts, and the injury which is done to their meaning in this re-location. As Witcomb has argued, 'the collecting and display practices of museums erase the meanings objects had in the social world which made and used them' (Witcomb 1997: 386).

There are clear analogies here with what is going on when, for example, a private letter between a school student and a social worker (or even a piece of classroom dialogue) gets excised from its context (as inevitably it must at some level) and represented in a paper in an educational research conference. There is clearly not a single point at which the 'real' becomes transformed into the unreal or the invention, but there is a long spectrum of interpretation, selection, representation, and transformation somewhere along which whatever claims are made on behalf of the 'reality' of an artefact or data must run pretty thin.

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[10]I am grateful to Melanie Walker for bringing this example to my attention.

I have tried to show, nevertheless, that the distinction between, on the one hand, narratives which are based on and feature real data and, on the other hand, those that rest on the fictitious or that consciously obscure the difference between fact and fiction, is a distinction which is intelligible and worth maintaining. It was, in fact, the artist, Thomas Gainsborough, who declared, 'For my part I have that regard for truth that I hold the finest invention as a mere slave in comparison' (Gainsborough 1771). I think I have too high a regard for the insights of works of artistic invention, including fiction, to place them in quite this subordination, but I hope, nevertheless, to have articulated some arguments in support of the distinctive value of the real in educational narrative research.

15.9   Postscript: A 'Research Report' in a Work of Fiction

Shortly after writing the main body of this paper I read Ian McEwan's 'novel' (this is how it is described and referred to) *Enduring love* (McEwan 1998). This tells a story of the impact on a loving relationship between a man (the first person voice in the book) and a woman when a second man, Parry, develops a psychotic erotic and loving (but unreciprocated) passion for the first, mingled with a religious conviction of his mission to bring him to God. The first man discovers that Parry has an established psychotic syndrome known as de Clérambault's syndrome—or at least, reading the book as a novel, so the story goes.

I read and enjoyed the book as a sensitive work of *fiction*, albeit one which represented convincingly and illuminatingly aspects of human relationships, not as a work of *research*, educational or otherwise. But then at the end McEwan attaches an appendix, which is headed as follows:

Reprinted from the British Review of Psychiatry

Robert Wenn MB Bch MRCPsych & Antonia Camia MA, MB, DRCOG, MRCPsych

A homo-erotic obsession, with religious overtones: a clinical variant of de Clérambault's syndrome

What follows under this title has all the style and appearance of a scholarly paper from an academic journal which describes a real case of the syndrome, and events which took place which in all essentials correspond with the story embellished in the novel and which feature indeed a patient referred to as P but identified by McEwan as Parry. A second appendix presents a letter, reportedly taken from the real medical file of Parry, written by him from the secure hospital where he was residing.

I experienced a number of reactions to these appendices, which reflect on the issues about the place of the real in narrative research which I have been considering in this paper, and it may be worth recording these because they come at the problem from a different side: not from research which takes on fictional narrative

form; but a fictional narrative form which takes on some of the semblance of research. Here then are some possible reactions to McEwan's writing:

- How interesting to learn that the 'fictional' story which I had been reading was closely based on a real case and a sequence of events which actually happened.
- How irrelevant to learn that the vivid, sensitive, credible, intelligent 'fiction' that I had enjoyed was actually based so closely on a real case and sequence of events.
- Why does the author feel it necessary or desirable to add the scholarly appendix? Does it enhance the credibility of the previous work of imagination?
- But perhaps the 'scholarly appendix' is part of the fiction, i.e. the author has invented the 'real' medical case study—it is all part of the novelist's contrivance—the brackets round 'the novel' include the appendices as well as the consecutive narrative which preceded them?
- Did the paper really appear in an authentic journal called the *British Review of Psychiatry*? If it is real then I could also look up some of the papers referred to in the list of references. Of course—cf. my discussion of this limitation of the fictional above—if it is fictional then there is no extension to the data set outside the pages of the novel.

But my overriding response was that I did not want to know the answer to these questions (yet, anyway) because it was more interesting to conjecture as to what difference it might make as to whether the paper or the letter from the incarcerated Parry were real or not than to resolve that question. Thus I returned to the theme of this paper via a work of fiction which is presented as research as well as via a work of research which is (or is it not?) presented as fiction.

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Chapter 16
History, Fiction, and Educational Research

Abstract The issues which I was addressing in Chap. 15 in terms of the relationship between 'real' and 'fictional' accounts of events (where the real are visibly and explicitly connected to evidential support and the fictional are not) echo very closely discussions which I recall from my days as an historian about the relationship between history (and especially biography) and fiction—and especially about the standing and character of the historical novel vis-à-vis history as more conventionally understood. It occurred to me that this literature might well offer some clues to our more contemporary concern with the relationship between educational fictions and educational research. Translated into this domain, my question becomes: what, if anything, distinguishes history from fiction, or from the historical novel, and why or for what purposes might one prefer history to these sources—what does history do for us that fiction or the historical novel does not? And will the answer to this question shed light on the parallel issue in social scientific and educational research?

> Does the narration of past events, which in our culture from the time of the Greeks onwards has generally been subject to the sanction of historical 'science', bound to the underlying standard of the 'real', and justified by the principles of 'rational' exposition—does this form of narration really differ, in some specific trait, in some indubitably distinctive feature, from imaginary narration, as we find it in the epic, the novel, and the drama? (Barthes 1981b: 7)

16.1 History and Historical Fiction: Some Resemblance

History and fiction both take many different forms, but let me limit the field by declaring, first, that I am here concerned with the narrative form in both cases, with those expressions of both history and fiction which are expressed as stories. This

narrative form is of course one of the features which brings them together. Indeed, in the years since the publication of Hayden White's *Metahistory* (1973) 'narrativism' has become perhaps the dominant perspective in discussion of the nature of historical discourse, so that Callinicos can claim that 'the *differentia specifica* of historical writing is now held to be that it is a species of story-telling' (Callinicos 1995: 2).

Let us note, secondly, that these historical and fictional stories both constitute a literature in the more *generic* sense of a body of writing, such as that examined in the 'literature review' which research students are traditionally required to perform, and in the *honorific* sense of writing of some quality or literary merit. In the nineteenth century and after, the works of Gibbon or Macaulay, for example, have been read as works of literature and praised for their literary distinction almost as much as for their historical sweep and scholarliness. Winston Churchill's history of the Second World War won him a Nobel Prize for *literature*.

Nye suggests that:

> Because the nineteenth century believed man's mind to be controlled by reason and imagination working in harmonious relation, it believed poets, historians and philosophers could establish relations among themselves with ease and exactness … History and literature, their nineteenth century practitioners agreed, offered a continuous, integrated, selective narrative of experience that had meaning and relevance to man's condition; both attempted to distil out of experience some understanding of the relation between act and reaction, cause and effect … Both were assured of the importance of their relationship, confident of their common purpose and optimistic of their chances of achieving it. (Nye 1966: 124–126)

It was the introduction of quasi 'scientific' history under the influence of Ranke that eroded this intimate association of historical with literary writing, which had its roots in the literary character of history as much as in the historical content of the novel. I shall need to return to this schism later, because here lie, perhaps, some seeds of an important distinction.

Thirdly, long before the incursions of postmodernist theory, historians have acknowledged the problems of representation which are present in historians' reading of their primary sources—be these official documents or private correspondence, archaeological artefacts or features of landscape, paintings, photographs or film, newspapers or indeed contemporary novels. (Almost) any historian would acknowledge that their scholarly productions involve a selection of material, an interpretation of material, a particular form of re-presentation of material in a changed context, and that elements of subjectivity, of pre-existing theoretical constructs, of ideology, perhaps, shape this process.[1] Perhaps in the form of the novel, these elements have even freer play, but it would be nonsense to deny that they are present in even the most scholarly, most evidentially grounded histories.

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[1] The *International Handbook of Interpretation in Educational Research* (Smeyers et al. 2015) contains a whole section—including eight case studies—edited by Lynn Fendler and Marc DePaepe on the role of interpretation in historical approaches to educational research.

Fourthly, to approach the resemblance from the other side, it is clear that some fictions set in historical time can show a level of care for scholarly accuracy and detail comparable with that of the good historian. Thus, in a review of historical novels (to which I shall refer again below) Collins writes of:

> novels in which a well-researched background is combined with sympathetically drawn characters to allow genuinely historical issues to be examined (Collins 1990: 6).

These are not however only features of the genre of self-consciously 'historical' novels. If history approximated to the novel in the nineteenth century, so also did the novel approximate to history. Confronted with George Eliot's *Middlemarch*, Henry James was forced to ask, 'If we write novels so, how shall we write history?' (quoted in La Capra 1987: xii).

Fifthly, it is worth observing that both history and historical fiction make claims to be revealing truth about their subject matter in some way, though the notion of truth which is involved in this claim is one which carries some very different meanings. Note, however, that the historian's conveying of meaning is not restricted to the more prosaic or literal claims. As Nye points, 'the historian, like the poet and novelist, is aware of the metaphoric resources of language, and he draws upon them for both meaning and strength, as the scientist and the social scientist may not' (Nye 1966: 139). Nye may not have encountered the social scientists who frequent the contemporary education research conferences—but his point about historian's use of language is surely one we can recognise.

Sixthly, both literature and history require the active application of creativity and of the imagination. For the historian (since this is the less obvious application) as well as the novelist, the imagination is employed in the process of selection and of interpretation.

Selection involves decisions about which tale to tell, where to begin and to end, what facts to pick out, how to arrange them, and what significance to endow them with. Interpretation involves attaching meaning to what might otherwise be presented as 'one damned thing after another', construing pattern, cause and effect, interpreting relationships, and relating all this in terms with which potential readers may engage. Imagination is employed too in the historian's sympathetic engagement with the characters of history (including its villains as well as its heroes), the places, and the times. In these respects too, the creative and imaginary acts of the historian are not a hundred miles away from the parallel acts of the writer of fiction.

All of this echoes very closely the similarities I have observed previously between factually based ethnographic studies of education and narrative fictions of education. The parallels with history and the novel reinforce the contiguity of the two genres. But does closer observation of history and fiction help us any better to understand the differences? It is to these that I shall now turn.

16.2   History as Literature Written Under Handicap

Once we begin to explore the differences between history and literature, it is easy to come to the view that the historian writes under some disadvantage.

First, the novelist can enter domains of human consciousness and experience beyond the reach of the historian's evidentially tied imagination (cf. Gough's excursions into the private spheres of his characters in his educational fictions described in the previous chapter). As Nye puts it:

> The rules of the historian's game bar him from doing what the poet or novelist, or even the biographer, is allowed to do. The artist is permitted to deal with the *internal* currents of men's minds, with the emotions and ideas and motives that run between the masks that men assume. It is in removing the mask, in penetrating downward into the well of the individual consciousness that the Faulkners and Conrads and Eliots and Robert Lowells find their true purposes. (Nye 1966: 149)

Secondly, while the poet and novelist can exploit the reader's 'willing suspension of disbelief', the historian is limited by the conventional requirements of chronology, positionality (social and geographical), plausibility, and authenticity. The historian's opportunity for creativity and imagination are thus significantly curtailed.

Finally, even when historians might plausibly and without anachronism fill in the gaps between the parts of a story which the evidence will support, they are prevented from doing so by the requirement for an evidential base for their accounts. They may exercise their imagination and creativity in their selection of their evidence (historians tend to talk of their 'historical facts'), and in the ordering, and in the representation of their evidence—but the connection between the narrative and the evidence has always to be made, and if there is no evidence available, then the prudent historian stays silent on that aspect of history and leaves the field to the writer of fiction. As Kennan has put it:

> It is precisely in resisting the temptation to go further that his quality as a historian, as distinct from a literary person pure and simple, is most basically expressed. The true mark of his trade is that he accepts a set of rules far more rigorous and confining than those which govern the novelist or the poet. He cannot create the pieces of his puzzle; he must attempt to put it together from those he finds lying around. Not only that, but having found a few pieces, he cannot even order them to his heart's desire. They are ordered for him chronologically in advance by that most imperious of all historical masters, the documented date, and before this authority he must bow his head in unquestioning obedience … (Kennan 1959, quoted in Nye: 157–158)

All of this starts to make history look like little more than a poor relative to the relatively wide-ranging and liberated possibilities of fiction, for example in the well-researched historical novel—unless you start to see the constraints under which the historian chooses to work as contributing to some benefit, some particular quality which is lost in fictional creations written without the same set of constraints.

Before trying to uncover in more detail what these might be, however, I want to return to the history of the relationship between history and the novel and to the particular turning point in the nineteenth century which was marked by the emergence of a more 'scientific' approach to history and with this at least the temporary divorce of the two genres. Perhaps in this period of separation there are some clues as to what more positively distinguishes history from its fictional relations.

16.3   '*Wie Es Eigentlich Gewesen*'—'Scientific' History and the Break with Literature

The later decades of the nineteenth century saw a widening and self-conscious divorce between history and literature, and the arguments around this provide one source for an understanding of what might be distinctive between history and literature (and by extension between educational research and educational fiction). The key figures in the emerging duality were Hegel, who represented the literary tradition and who held that the writing of history began with a theory which might make order out of the course of events, and Ranke, who stood firmly in an empiricist tradition and the belief that history began with the gathering of information about events, which enabled the faithful historian to tell what *really* happened, and how it *really* happened: 'wie es *eigentlich* gewesen'.

There was more than one view of the sense in which history might aspire to the condition of science. These included:

(i)   the aspiration to a kind of moral neutrality (Ranke was reacting to, among other things, the tendency of some nineteenth-century historians to use history as a vehicle for moralising);

(ii)   the aspiration to objectivity in the sense of the author's resistance to pre-judgment in advance of the evidence;

(iii)   a search for laws of human behaviour akin to those which were developing contemporaneously in fields such as biology;

(iv)   a rigorous attention to evidence to 'the historical facts', which even led some to seek to limit themselves to providing the evidence at the expense of wider theorising;

(v)   the adoption of a more clinical, less literary style of writing in emulation of the scientific genre.

Nye explains that:

However they defined 'science' in history, these historians agreed that the 'literary' histories written by the early nineteenth century were unacceptable by the new standards. They did not mean that history might not be written with skill and attention to the use of language. They meant that narrative history, whose interpretations depend on the personal point of view of the historian, and whose meanings were influenced by his philosophical-theological beliefs, was really not history at all, but literature, which was quite a different thing. They did not believe that the historian should attempt to be a

conscious artist in the telling of his tale. He should be an observer, a generalizer … a narrator of what happened, and only that. The historian was to be honest and thorough and impartial: he should not write too well … though he should write as clearly, say, as the writer of a laboratory report or a sociological abstract. (Nye 1966: 128)

Not that all contemporaries accepted the view that a scientific concern for the facts was incompatible with attention to literary virtues in the form of presentation. Theodore Roosevelt, no less, observed that good history is simply a presentation of scientific matter in literary form: 'The great historian,' he argued '… must have the power to take the science of history and turn it into literature' (Roosevelt 1913: 16).[2] In allowing, however, the continuing presentation of history in a literary style, Roosevelt subscribed nevertheless to Ranke's aspirations for a genre which was 'scientific' in its approach to facts, to evidence, to reality.

The project of historical scientificity (however this might be precisely defined) clearly offered the prospect of a much clearer differentiation between history and literature. It also presented a view of the particular merits of history over fiction: history offered facts and a view of how things really were, trimmed of the prose-lytising morality, of the grand metaphysical theories, and perhaps even the literary pretensions of a previous generation.

Subsequent historiography has been riddled with debates around the claims and aspirations made on behalf of scientific history—and these were well rehearsed before such intellectual debates took their postmodern turn. The criticism has addressed both the naivety of its empiricism (in particular its failure to appreciate that historical 'facts' are produced by historians as much as they are found by historians) and the limited nature of its interpretative goals. 'By and large', wrote E.H. Carr, 'the historian will get the kind of facts he wants. History means interpretation' (Carr 1961: 18).

16.4   History as Narrative (Again)

The work of analytic philosophers like Danto and Gallie and then, more radically, Hayden White[3] refocused the attention of historical theory upon the nature of historical discourse at a time when structuralism was the most powerful available intellectual resource. The consequence was a reaffirmation of what might have been called (though as far as I know no-one used the precise words) 'the contiguity of

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[2]An extract from Roosevelt's own history of 'The winning of the west' gives a flavour of Roosevelt's own literary pretensions: 'The night was bitterly cold, for there was a heavy frost, and the ice formed half an inch thick round the edges and in the smooth water. But the sun rose bright and glorious, and Clark, in words, to ld his stiffened, famished, half-frozen followers that the evening would surely see them at the goal of their hopes. Without waiting for an answer, he plunged into the water, and they followed him with a cheer …' (Roosevelt 1923–1926: 380).

[3]'Probably the most influential American subverter-from-within of the epistemological self-confidence of the historical profession' (Spitzer 1996: 3).

literary studies with the project of history'. Barthes was among those who challenged the very distinction between 'historical' and 'fictional' discourse, and more especially history in its narrative form:

> Does the narration of past events, which in our culture from the time of the Greeks onwards has generally been subject to the sanction of historical 'science', bound to the underlying standard of the 'real', and justified by the principles of 'rational' exposition— does this form of narration really differ, in some specific trait, in some indubitably distinctive feature, from imaginary narration, as we find it in the epic, the novel, and the drama? (Barthes 1981b: 7)

As Barthes clearly intends, once notions of rationality and objectivity desert history, once the notion of reference to some kind of 'reality' is undermined (not to mention any claims to scientificity), then the distinction between historical and fictional narratives becomes extremely difficult to sustain. Just as in the nineteenth century, 'fiction' in the form of the novel and history were allied in their search for objectivity and social realism, so, according to Barthes, were both genres at one in their lack of reference to anything. Barthes again:

> Claims concerning the 'realism' of narrative are therefore to be discounted … The function of narrative is not to 'represent', it is to constitute a spectacle … Narrative does not show, does not imitate … 'What takes place' in a narrative is from the referential (reality) point of view literally nothing; 'what happens' is language alone, the adventure of language. The unceasing celebration of its coming. (Barthes 1981a: 115)

There is, of course a substantial body of literature associated with this line of argument. For the moment I must limit myself to three observations and a question, which will return us to the starting point of this chapter. The first observation is simply that we have in this discussion of historiography and the fictional narrative form, a perspective which would support not only the elision of historical narratives with fictional ones, but by extension the elision of fictional educational writing with other forms which lay claim to some kind of evidential base and reference to events in a 'real' world.

Secondly, if we accept the Barthian approach, it is not only the claims of history (or social science) to reflect that reality that fall, but also those of narrative fiction— and on a scale which would certainly subvert the kind of project on which people like Clough have embarked in his research-based fictional narrative in an educational context (Clough 1999, and see Chap. 15). Fictional narratives become not, as Clough might have hoped, a more effective way in which to represent the reality of lived experience, but simply another spectacle, another celebration of the bewitching power of language.

Thirdly, the argument which turns all narratives into a celebration of language around nothingness amounts to a hugely reductive project, which while being successful in observing some things which narrative forms might have in common, leaves unanswered the question of what kinds of things might yet distinguish some from others.

It is to this question of what might yet distinguish historical narrative from fictional narrative to which I want to return in my final section.

16.5   The Distinction Between the Historical and Fictional Narrative

It may well be that the distinction between historical and fictional narratives can only be maintained by restoring some kind of reference for historical works. We have to observe, I think, two ways in which the word history is used: (i) to refer 'to an object of study and to an account of this object' (White 1987: 55), to refer to the total of past human experience or some subset of it (for example, the history of the English-speaking peoples), and (ii) to refer to what has been written in an attempt to describe and interpret that experience (*A History of the English-Speaking Peoples*), to what I shall refer to for the sake of observing this distinction as historiography. Briefly, it is almost impossible to make sense of historiography without some notion of that history (in the first sense) to which it relates (and of course of which it subsequently becomes a part). So one view of the difference between fiction and historiography would be to do with the faithfulness of the account to whatever events and experiences it claims to be an account of (which brings us rather close to correspondence theory—Chap. 12).

This however is too simple, not least because historians like the rest of us have no direct access to the past; and so it is impossible in any direct way to observe or check the relationship between historical writing and history. We have instead to rely on various products of that history that are extant—artefacts, buildings, documents of many kinds, images—the evidence of history. Historians take care (variously) to ground their narratives on such evidence, to support their claims by reference to such evidence, to limit their accounts to territory in which such evidence is available, and to challenge each other's narratives by reference to (among other things) the evidence available or newly discovered. While fictional narratives may pay greater or lesser attention to such evidence, it is in their nature that they are not limited to it, confined by it, or indeed judged by their faithfulness to it.

However, such 'evidence' is itself deeply ambiguous. What, after all, is it evidence of, and how, without access to the past, can we know? What distinguishes history is not just its evidential base, but the disciplined and ethical way in which historians are expected to approach it. This is an observable discipline which typically includes: reference to such general requirements (with respect to evidence) as honesty, impartiality, thoroughness or comprehensiveness, accuracy; basic logical requirements about the way inferences are drawn, requirements of consistency, etc.; and more distinctive and technical requirements rooted in historical connoisseurship to do with the understanding and interpretation of evidence against its historical setting. 'When the political chips are down,' concludes Spitzer, 'stories about the past will continue to command our assent when they proceed from shared assumptions as to relevant evidence, legitimate inference, and coherent logic. We cannot validate these standards by appealing to them, but there is no need to validate them if the parties to the conversation share them' (Spitzer 1996:

120–121).[4] As Hunt argues, 'the discipline of a discipline, by which I mean the rules of conduct governing argument within a discipline, does have a worthy function. Such rules make a community of arguers possible' (Hunt 1991: 104). She might have added that they also serve to define the boundaries of that community.

The problem for my struggling argument is that much of what I have said here could probably be said in much the same terms about at least some fictional writing —most easily perhaps with respect to the historical novel. In an analysis of different kinds of historical novels, Collins (1990) develops a three-tiered hierarchy, which I suggest might equally well be applied to novels set in their contemporary setting. Collins distinguishes:

(a) Novels which are ostensibly set in the past, but whose overriding purpose is to concentrate on 'the timeless themes of love, sex and violence'. Reference to historical events is minimal, and the period chosen by the author is often ill understood and sometimes ill-defined.
(b) Novels in which the author's research has provided an authentic background of artefacts and events against which the fictional characters themselves are either stereotyped or anachronistic.
(c) Novels in which a well-researched background is combined with sympathetically drawn characters to allow genuinely historical issues to be examined. (Collins 1990: 6)

It is only the latter which Collins regards as 'genuinely historical novels' (Collins 1990: 6). But of course the criteria which Collins is using to pick out the genuinely historical novel start to look perilously close to those with which one might identify the genuinely historical narrative itself.

16.6   Ending

This excursion from the world of educational and, more broadly, social scientific research into the worlds of literature and history leaves me with three observations.

Firstly, it indicates that there is a rich and long-established body of writing in both these fields (and I have only scratched at the surface) which has direct application to, and is capable of informing, the debates in the educational research community.

Secondly, my excursion reinforces the complexity and contestability of the relationship between, on the one hand, fictional writing and, on the other, narrative forms which lay some claim to evidentially based representations of reality, as well as demonstrating, again, the intimate contiguity of the two.

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[4]Spitzer adopts an interesting and persuasive approach to the question of veridicality in history by examining a number of case studies of debates around attempts at historical deception and observing the standards to which they are appealing. He concludes, 'this is not to say that we can stipulate the universal standards of historical truth but that we can identify the specific standards that are assumed to legitimate a given claim' (Spitzer 1996: 12).

Thirdly, however, I am left with the same dissatisfaction with the reductionism which assimilates history to the novel as I am with that reductionism which assimilates educational research to fictional narratives. This is partly because such reductionism seems to me to limit the fruitful variety of intellectual resources and approaches which we can bring to our inquiry. It is also, inescapably, because I find it difficult to accept that the manuscripts that ran through my fingers in the Bodleian Library, or the landscapes, castles, churches, and ruins that I clambered over in search of evidence of the past were simply the product of narratives, rather than the products of events and experiences, the pride and the suffering, of our ancestors and I find it difficult to accept that these ancestors were simply products of our narratives rather than in some way their source.

Essentially, then, the issue becomes one of ontology (what kinds of things exist?) and of epistemology (how can we know about these things?). The capacity to maintain a distinction between narrative fiction and history or educational research hangs on the *ontological* position, that there exists something beyond the narrative, and the *epistemological* position, that there are disciplined forms of inquiry (represented in e.g. history and the social sciences) which give us, albeit imperfectly and problematically, some kind of purchase on these things. I do not claim to have argued the philosophical case for either of these positions in this chapter, though I have indicated some of the sources for, and ingredients of, such argument. For the moment I must content myself with the observation that success in defending these ontological and epistemological principles is a condition of maintaining the view to which I am instinctively drawn. That is, that the cultivation of those disciplined forms of enquiry and the interrogation of experience and events remains a core function of educational research, notwithstanding its proximity with forms of fictional narrative representation which have their own and distinctive capacity to illuminate human experience.

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Chapter 17
Interpreting the International and Intranational 'Translation' of Educational Policy and Practice: A Case of Opportunism, Serendipity, and *Bricolage*

Abstract At several points in this book I have emphasised the inescapable and important function of interpretation which is a feature of every stage in the process of educational or any other kind of research. In 2011 my colleague Paul Smeyers of the universities of Ghent and K.U. Leuven initiated a project with Nick Burbules, Morwenna Griffiths and myself determined to illustrate this feature of educational research. This issued in 2015 in *The international handbook of interpretation of educational research*, published by Springer—a two volume collection of 64 case studies as well as other cross-cutting material. One of my own contributions to these volumes was a reflection on a paper that I had written previously with Kairat Kurabayev and Assel Kambatyrova of the Graduate School of Education in Nazarbayev University, Kazakhstan on the international and intranational translation of educational policy in Kazakhstan. I include this reflection here, partly because it emphasises the importance of interpretation in research (which I do not see as in itself undermining claims to truthfulness) but also because it illustrates movement between empirical inquiry and philosophical reflection. It offers an example of educational research as itself 'a reflective practice'; a practice, though, in which all sorts of accidental circumstances and opportunistically taken lines of inquiry shape the acts of interpretation.

17.1 The Research Project in Context

This chapter reflects on a piece of research carried out during 2012 and 2013 on 'School reform and internationalisation' in Kazakhstan. The research grew out of a partnership between the University of Cambridge Faculty of Education and the

newly established Nazarbayev University Graduate School of Education (NUGSE) in Kazakhstan's capital, Astana.[1] The university was and is being grown through international partnerships between the schools within the university and selected international institutions. The Cambridge Faculty of Education advised on appointments, on course development and administrative process, admissions, even the organisation and equipping of teaching spaces. It was also tasked to help build research capacity, which we did through a few workshops, but we decided at an early stage that the best way to do this was through a thorough collaboration involving NU staff in every stage of the development and conduct of research, from initial planning to conference presentations and publication.

Some papers arising from this collaboration have been or will be published in national or international journals, but we were also successful with a proposal for a book under the title *Educational reform and internationalisation*: *The case of Kazakhstan*, published by Cambridge University Press (Bridges 2014a). One of the chapters in this book was the result of a collaboration between myself, Kairat Kurakbayev, and Assel Kambatyrova, two early career researchers from Nazarbayev University Graduate School of Education.

Membership of the research team fluctuated a little over the two years, but the core group consisted of six staff of the Faculty of Education, six or more staff of Nazarbayev University and, for fieldwork in 2013, three staff from a sister organisation of the university, Nazarbayev Intellectual Schools (NIS). Eight of the original team could speak Russian, six Kazakh, and one Ukrainian (the language of an ethnic minority in Kazakhstan). The research was funded through the University by the Ministry of Education and Science of Kazakhstan.

In 2012 most of the Cambridge team were new to Kazakhstan and we conducted a scoping study informed primarily by document research and interviews with key players around the central organs of educational administration. We wanted to understand something of the policy context, to identify the sources of policy (in national and international terms) and what our colleague Olena Fimyar called 'policy rationalities' (Fimyar 2010). In 2013 we decided to look at the system from, as it were, the other end of the reform process and through the eyes and experience of teachers and school directors who had to implement the reform and (to some extent) those in the local administrative system and in-service training institutions who were part of the process of 'transmitting' or 'translating' messages from the centre to the periphery.

To this end, in 2013 we divided into three teams and went to locations in three very different parts of Kazakhstan: to Shymkent in the south, deep in the heartland of Kazakh people; to Pavlodar in the north (mainly Russian, but with, in one locality we visited, a significant Ukrainian population); and to Aktau in the west on the Caspian Sea. We focused in each location on two schools, one urban and one small rural school, as well as the administrative and training organisations that were

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[1]The partnership also included the University of Pennsylvania Graduate School of Education, whose research focus is on higher education.

the vehicles for translating national policy to them. Our aim was to produce rough-hewn case studies (case data with only a light thread of linking commentary) of the schools in the context of educational reform in their localities. These would then be available to all members of the research team for cross-site analysis leading to the production of thematic analytic papers grounded in the case material.

In advance of two periods of fieldwork in Kazakhstan, we agreed among ourselves on the central research questions which we would seek to address through the research. The overarching question was:

> How do mainstream schools in Kazakhstan perceive and understand the aspirations, expectations, and requirements of the contemporary educational reform in Kazakhstan—and how are they responding to these?

But we also asked, among other things:

> What issues were identified in translating educational policy and practice from international to national contexts and from the centre to the periphery in Kazakhstan?

> What was the role of school directors in the reform process?

> How do the requirements for reform impact on teachers' professional identity?

Each team agreed to collect data which would help members of all teams to address the research questions which most interested them. The data were in the form of documents, photographic evidence, transcripts of semi-structured individual and group interviews with people at all levels in the school and local system, and questionnaires administered to both teachers and students. With this substantial data set to hand (coded using NVivo software) we could then interrogate the material and write about the issues that interested us. For Kairat, Assel, and myself our particular interest was in a nest of issues around the notion of the translation of educational policy and practice, and this was the focus of the paper that I shall discuss here.

These, then, are the bare bones of an account of what we did, but I should reflect perhaps on what lay behind this approach, because one's own life and research experience already enters into the research process from the very beginning.

17.2   Reflecting on the Project Plan

When wondering how we might best begin to understand what 'educational reform' might mean if you were situated somewhere on the edge of Kazakhstan's vast geographical spread (the country is the size of Western Europe with a populations just over 16 million), I drew, in particular, on the model of the first empirically based project in which I participated, between 1979 and 1981, the Cambridge Accountability Project, directed by John Elliott (see Sect. 10.3, which discusses this as an example of interdisciplinary inquiry). This project looked at six 'self accounting' schools in the East of England and their relationships with parents and

other local stakeholders. Eighteen months of fieldwork (for all but one of the team in one school) issued in six case studies, which we were then all able to use as a basis for cross-site analytic papers (published in Elliott et al. 1981). This always seemed to me a very effective way to combine depth of study with a sufficient range of examples to stimulate comparison and, on some issues, to develop cross-site analyses and generalisations—grounded theory perhaps—that were at least not contradicted by these cases.

All this juggled with more pragmatic considerations about how we outsiders might even begin to understand Kazakhstan education if we did not engage over time with schools and their communities, how to satisfy the genuine research interests of a large and diverse team, and, in the light of our mission to 'build capacity', how to give colleagues from Kazakhstan a variety of research experience. Personal history and pragmatism thus combined to produce a fairly loosely defined methodology that gave scope for different members of the research team to give emphasis to their own interests and approaches in what I hope was a spirit of mutual support and collaboration.

17.3 The Research Paper

The focus of the paper that Kairat Kurakbayev, Assel Kambatyrova, and I wrote out of this work was on the international and intranational 'translation' of educational policy and practice. More especially, we were intrigued by what happens as these policies and practices moved across national boundaries—invoking the discourses of 'policy borrowing' (Phillips and Ochs 2004), 'policy transfer', and 'policy travelling' (Silova 2005), the 'internationalisation' and 'globalisation' of educational policy (see e.g. Sayed 2006: 12; Giddens 1990: 64), and of 'international socialisation' (Sayed 2006)—and then what happens within the country when policies and practices are 'translated', 'transmitted', 'rolled out', 'cascaded', 'mainstreamed' from the centre to the periphery. It is generally recognised that, as Robert Cowen put it with admirable succinctness, 'when it moves it morphs' (Cowen 2009), but how are we to interpret, understand, or respond to this morphology?

The language and literature tends to divide at this point. At one extreme the response draws on a rhetoric of criminality with references to 'subversion', 'hijacking' (Silova 2005), and 'brand-name piracy' (Steiner-Khamsi and Stolpe 2006: 2 ff.). Many are tempted, as we were, to write of what is 'lost in translation', but something more positive is indicated perhaps by those who write of the 'indigenisation'—as, for example, in the country which is the focus of their major study, 'Mongolisation' (Steiner-Khamsi and Stolpe 2006: 2 ff.). For my part, as I worked on the paper and read the evidence from the case studies, I became increasingly convinced, first, that reframing, and reinterpretation of policy and practice messages was inevitable in the process of translation and, secondly (and more interestingly

perhaps), that, conceived of in terms that might be borrowed from work on linguistic and literary translation, the co-construction of meaning from the original source, the creative interpretation of meaning, the realisation or discovery of new meaning in the literary, policy, or practice 'text' could be viewed as something very positive, something to be engendered rather than feared. To return to our cliché, meaning could be found as well as lost in translation. This then pointed to the engagement of stakeholders at all levels in the system in critically examining and creatively interpreting and developing policy and practice—something of which we found a number of examples in our school-based studies.

In this context I should perhaps pause to note one or two features of the writing process (which I also reflected on in Chap. 11). I wrote in the previous paragraph that 'as I worked on the paper and read the evidence from the case studies, I became increasingly convinced …' Some models of academic writing seem to suppose that the author has a clear idea of the 'results' of their research or the conclusions to which they point before they start writing their 'research report'. In such cases the inquiry, the research, is seen as something independent of the writing of the report. For me, by contrast, the writing is emphatically part of the inquiry, the research. In general I do not know when I start writing what I shall conclude or where I shall end, and on more than one occasion I have been rather surprised to find where my argument has taken me. (I do not as I write this know where this paper will end up either, though of course there will come a point of re-reading and revision when I shall know the destination and perhaps lay clearer markers as to how I get there[2]). My own practice is to take in as much of the 'evidence' and the 'literature' as I can, then set it aside for some time, and then to construct a narrative or, in my more philosophical mode, an argument, an interpretive pathway through the sources and data. Only when I have completed a first draft do I go back to the sources for confirmation, for contradiction, for illustration and example. But the interpretation comes through the writing process itself: the writing is an attempt to make sense of and to convey to others what I have read, seen, or heard.

Except that the writing starts before I put pen to paper (so to speak). The writing begins in conversation (Bridges 2014a, b and Chap. 26): accidental conversations over lunch in the university cafeteria, in the pub, on the staircase, trying out ideas, making connections, rehearsing what I might be beginning to want to say. In the case of this paper a conversation with Lynne Parmenter, Associate Dean, Nazarbayev University Graduate School of Education in the cafeteria at Nazarbayev University in Astana helped to open up for me the literature on literary translation, which turned out to be one of the most fruitful sources for our conceptualisation of policy and practice translation. But before coming to this let me provide a more sequential account of our search (more accurately, feeling around) for ways of making sense of, interpreting 'translation'.

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[2]'Not I, not I, but the wind that blows through me' was how D.H. Lawrence described his experience of authorship, though I make no claims to quite the same inspiration.

17.4   Interpreting 'Translation' in the Context of Educational Policy Transfer

None of the authors brought to this writing project any grandiose or very systematic theoretical framework. MacLure writes (in Derridean mode) of the of the *bricoleur* as 'a kind of professional handyman who makes things by cobbling together bits of other objects, and often has no fixed idea at the start about how things are going to turn out' (MacLure 1995: 110). Our paper was, in this sense, something of a theoretical *bricolage*, with images, metaphors, and theories snatched from some rather different sources in the hope that they might help to illuminate, describe, explain. I will here refer to just five of these.

17.4.1   *From Flow Diagram to the Silk Road*

At an early stage we tried to produce a flow diagram showing pathways through the educational system that policies and practices travelled in the process of international and intranational translation. This was helpful in so far as it became immediately obvious how many stages there were in the process of translation, how many points at which someone was involved in selecting and interpreting the message to be passed on. We noted that: 'In the UK there is a children's game, known as "Chinese whispers" in which a message is whispered from one person to another round a room. The fun is in comparing the message that is announced at the end of this process with the original—to which it rarely bears any resemblance.'

But the flow diagram was all too tidy and we then realised that Kazakhstan's own historical position on what has been since the nineteenth century known as the 'Seidenstrasse',[3] the Silk Road, provided a more accurate picture of its complexity and diverse pathways.

> The term is a misnomer: the Silk Road was not really a road at all—it was vast network of land-based and maritime trade routes, and the merchants who used it carried far, far more than silk … Along with trade goods came new ideas—religions, medical knowledge, scientific and technological innovations passed in both directions and the Silk Road became a complex network of veins and arteries, carrying the lifeblood of nations across the then known world. (Tucker 2011: 1)

In the paper we wrote:

> The Silk Road had not one starting point nor one destination but several. Nor did goods necessarily travel all the way from one end to another: rather they were traded at different points, carried on through a kind of relay, sometimes worked on and processed to add value and thus transformed as they were transported. This, rather than the flowchart, is a richer,

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[3]So named in 1877 by the German geographer Baron Ferdinand von Richtho fen, great uncle of the Red Baron (Tucker 2011).

more complex and more accurate picture of the process of the translation of educational policies and practices. (Bridges 2014a, b: 265)

17.4.2 Piaget Revisited: Towards a Cognitive Model of Translation

It is 50 years ago since I was introduced to Piagetian cognitive psychology on my teacher training course but the notions of accommodation and assimilation were clearly well embedded in my consciousness (even if I had to go back to the source to check which was which), and they resurfaced when I was thinking about some of the difficulties encountered for individual learners and for social groups in coming to terms with, especially, radical new ideas. Both processes, or so it seemed to me, are usefully understood as learning processes and might usefully be illuminated by learning theory. In the paper we explained:

> Piaget (1978) points, then, to two sides of the coin of the absorption of new ideas or practices. On one side the ideas themselves get re-shaped in order for the receiver to be able to accommodate them to their existing conceptual apparatus. In the extreme case, where they are too far removed from what the subject can make sense of, they may simply be totally rejected. On the other side, the understanding, the thinking, the conceptual apparatus of the learner gets changed to a greater or lesser degree in order to accommodate the new ideas. Either way a new balance or 'equilibrium' is struck between previously held beliefs and the new ways of thinking.

This perspective also forewarns us of the need to prepare people for the reception of the new ideas. One Kazakh colleague became enthused by the notion of classroom action research while studying in Cambridge. On one of her visits back to Kazakhstan she held a workshop in which she tried to explain this practice to colleagues from schools in Kazakhstan. She came back despondent: 'They just don't get it', she said, so we started to talk about why they might not 'get it' and began to identify a whole series ideas and practices that needed to be in place before anyone could really make much sense of action research:

> It presupposes perhaps a different concept of small scale applied research from those that teachers are mainly familiar with; it presupposes a higher level of self actualisation and professional autonomy than teachers in a country like Kazakhstan may be accustomed to; it presupposes (in most of its forms) a professional collaborative culture which may be non-existent in schools in which teachers are encouraged to compete with each other for credit for innovative practice.

As with individual learners, so also with social communities. From this perspective, the 'indigenisation' of educational policies and practices is essentially part of this process of assimilation. Understanding these processes through the lens of even this very basic learning theory helps us to normalise the changes that take place in translation, rather than seeing these as an aberration, but also to see how

one can structure individual and social learning so as to achieve, perhaps, a learning outcome which has a reasonable proximity to what is sought.

17.4.3   Deconstructing the Indigenous

The notion of 'indigenisation' itself was, however, not straightforward in a country for which its position on some of the main arteries of the Silk Road, its nomadic past, and its multilingual, multi-ethnic, and multicultural population are powerful components of contemporary political rhetoric and cultural identity. We quote in our paper one senior government officer, who explained:

> We are Kazakhs, nomads, and many cultures crossed our steppes. Even during the USSR, Kazakhstan became a refuge for many repressed nations. Many nations found a second motherland—Germans, Koreans, Chechens, Turks and various Caucasus nations. We have more than 137 nationalities and we have rich experience in tolerance and multiculturalism. [Respondent A MOES]. (Bridges et al. 2014: 272).

To a significant extent the contemporary educational reform agenda is (rightly or wrongly) about moving away from Kazakhstan's Soviet/Russian past, though the respect for Russian culture is deeply embedded even in its iconic Kazakh scholars like the nineteenth-century poet and philosopher Abai:

> One should learn to read and write Russian. The Russian language is a key to spiritual riches and knowledge, the arts and many other treasures. If we wish to avoid the vices of the Russians while adopting their achievements, we should learn their language and study their scholarship and science, for it was by learning foreign tongues and assimilating world culture that the Russians have become what they are. Russian opens our eyes to the world. By studying the language and culture of other nations, a person becomes their equal and will not need to make humble requests. (Abai 2005: Word 25: 124–125)

So is 'indigenisation' about embedding internationally sourced policies and practices in the Russian/Soviet tradition, or in contemporary conceptions of Kazakh culture, or …? In a country that is trying to hold these and many other traditions together in the interests of national harmony and cohesion the answer is not a simple one. In a sense, what is perceived as and can be presented as *international* 'best practice' provides a safe haven from these issues of internal identity.

17.4.4   Positionality and Perspective

As I have already indicated, over the first two years of this research we consciously changed position in relation to the reform process. In the first year we tried to understand what was going on through the accounts provided in official policy documents and through interviews with people who saw themselves as driving change from the centre. Theirs was in a sense a rhetoric of aspiration and intention. In 2013 we

deliberately set out to find out how things looked from the periphery. We asked, if you are working on a day-to-day basis in a school what does the education reform agenda mean to you? And through what channels is it communicated? I suppose that we should not have been surprised that many of the answers were very uncertain.

When we asked teachers and head teachers what were the main features of the government's educational reform programme, they were often at a loss to answer, and when they did answer they tended to come up with two fairly tangible responses: the introduction of computers and the twelfth year of schooling. We very rarely encountered any reference to, for example, shifts in pedagogy. It is not so much that schools are resistant to its demands or to change in general: they were greedy for knowledge of how things were done elsewhere. But, in a sense, for those whose daily lives are wrapped up in a school and the demands of its children, the school *is* the centre.

We had at first understood that we were dealing with a very strong 'centre to periphery' model of change, but it became rapidly obvious, first that the centre itself (in the form of the Ministry and its agencies) was seriously uncoordinated and following disparate paths, but also that the 'centre' itself was not, like the rainbow, always somewhere else, but rather:

> The 'centre' seems sometimes to be wherever you are situated. Officials locate it in the Ministry, the Oblast or the Rayon, but the Vice Director of a local ORLEU [the main in-service training organisation] was also able to claim 'We are the centre of all educational reforms'. It does not stop there: one deputy head explained: 'time has shown that we have already anticipated all the reforms that later have come from education authorities' (Deputy Head 2, School F). And finally, and perhaps most compellingly: 'Everything depends on the teacher … Speaking frankly … everything depends on the teacher' (Biology teacher, School F). (Bridges et al. 2014: 278)

There were other issues of positionality—an interpretative perspective that we did not fully explore but about which we can nevertheless offer some observations —and these were to do with the positionality not of research participants but of the research team. The Cambridge team included two postdoctoral researchers, Olena Fimyar, who was originally from Ukraine and Natallia Yakavets from Belarus. Both commented in their own writing on the way they were perceived both as insiders ('You as a former Soviet person, you should remember this …' Interviewee A, NIS) and outsiders, since they did not come from Kazakhstan.

We relied heavily on our Kazakhstan colleagues for translation, especially where we needed Kazakh and, being mainly young and female, these struggled to get acknowledgment as *bona fide* researchers rather than as interpreters. Being mainly city dwellers themselves, they came to some of the country schools with some of the unfamiliarity of outsiders. One of the men in this team, Kairat Kurakbayev, writes about his own position on an insider/outsider 'pendulum':

> I have perceived my role as an insider because I have been generally familiar with school settings in Kazakhstan and have even worked in some of the schools in our case-based research. I have considered myself to be an outsider because I have been away for so long from complex realities of the schools in Kazakhstan and now come to visit those rural schools from Astana. This distance prompted me to question my experience of having been a schoolteacher and 'to make the familiar strange' (Stenhouse 1975).

> Doing collaborative educational research with international researchers has also been a great stimulus for not taking everything for granted. For example, if you, as a child, have grown up in a school where every classroom has one and the same layout, you would have learned to expect them to be that way. But for international co-researchers the universal conformity to this organization was, in the words of one colleague 'mind-blowing'. 'Making the familiar strange' often requires the assistance of someone unfamiliar with our own world who can look at our taken-for-granted experiences through, precisely, the eye of a stranger. (Private correspondence).

My own struggle, perhaps, was judging when to accept gratefully, and when to try to discard in the interests of inquiry and authenticity, the status that the combination of age, grey hair, and Cambridge University bestowed on me among these deeply respectful and hospitable communities.

My point here is that participants in the research selected in different ways for this rather diverse research team what they wanted us to hear according to their perception of us; and we inevitably selected too from the experience that the research provided what we were interested in seeing and hearing, explicitly according to the research questions that guided our individual and collective inquiry, but also less self-consciously according to who we were and our relationship with the research field.

17.4.5 Understanding Policy Translation Through the Lens of Literary Translation Theory

Where do the ideas come from that enter our analysis and interpretation of educational research? On doctoral programmes students are taught to immerse themselves in 'the literature' (but which literature—perhaps they should be reading the Norse sagas?) and then from this to select a theoretical framing for their research. Perhaps our paper would have been more scholarly if I or we had adopted this approach, though in fact all of us brought to the research a familiarity with at least some relevant 'literature(s)'. But for me at least the story is rather one of serendipity, opportunism, and *bricolage*.

One of the ways of thinking about our narratives about the translation of educational policy and practice that seemed to me most illuminating was looking at it through the lens of literary translation theory. Perhaps this is a fairly obvious move, but in practice I arrived at this place via a long and winding path. It starts in the early 1960s with me sitting outside Basel cathedral with a Swiss friend watching a performance in German of Schlegel's translation[4] of Shakespeare's Hamlet. Even with my limited German, the poetry of the translation was eloquent, powerful, and

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[4]To be accurate the translation of Shakespeare's works to which I refer here was initiated by the Romantic poet, August Wilhelm Schlegel, but ultimately completed under the supervision of Ludwig Tieck by his daughter Dorothea and Wilf Heinrich Graf von Baidissin in the early nineteenth century.

moving. My friend explained that in German literary circles Schlegel's translation was regarded as an outstanding work of literature in its own right. This idea of a translation that brings something rich and new to an existing work intrigued me then, and lay at the back of my mind (as you may see) to the present. The idea was reinforced some thirty years later when I was teaching at the University of East Anglia in Norwich. UEA was the first university in the UK to establish a degree-level course in creative writing and for a number of years it ran a conference on literary translation. I never entered beyond the edges of this event, but it reminded me that translation was a literary art in its own right—and that it had an accompanying literature. These serendipitous events from my personal biography resurfaced when I sat looking at what we were writing and found the notion of translation and the evidence of the reconstruction of meaning in front of me. Surely there might be something in literary theory that would illuminate this phenomenon?

At this point, my conversations with Kairat and Assel about this approach led to their having a conversation with a recently appointed colleague at Nazarbayev University, Lynne Parmenter, who, as it turned out, was familiar with some of this literature. She provided us with a selection of material, including, most interestingly Walter Benjamin's (as I now know) celebrated *L'essai sur la traduction*.

Much of what we read about literary translation resonated with and enlarged our thinking about policy translation. We noted, in particular:

The active role of the translator in interpreting the source material. 'Translation ultimately depends on dynamic, contextual reading, understanding and sometimes creative reception of a source text. In the process of translation, the mediator's own understanding or "misunderstanding" of the source text will be realised in the translated text' (Wang 2002: 284).

The importance of understanding the possibilities and limitations of the destination language and culture if the meaning of the original text is to be successfully conveyed. According to Brisset (2010) 'the cultural turn' in translation studies that revolutionised translation studies came in the wake of post-colonialism, though the need to problematise the cultural context of translation came from as far back as the anthropological work of Malinowski. 'The problem for anthropologists,' writes Brisset, 'is that the translation of other cultures is always beset by the dangers of distortion posed by interpreting indigenous concepts in a conceptual system that is foreign to them' (Brisset 2010: 71). Such also, we argued, is the problem of translating educational policies and practices.

The charge of neocolonialism when there is a one-way traffic in translation. Wang (2002), for example, discusses this in the context of the rather unbalanced traffic of translation between China and the English-speaking world. The UNESCO *Index Translationum* suggests that only a trickle of books get translated from English compared with the flood that get translated from other languages into English. In education policy terms, Kazakhstan is clearly a major receiver rather than a transmitter of texts, although, as we illustrated in the paper, the sources are very

diverse, and it has explicit ambitions to offer models of educational reform at least across Central Asia—and institutions established for this purpose.

The role of the reader and not just the author or translator in constructing meaning from text. Dobson writes of the translator as pedagogue and of the pedagogue as translator, and he highlights 'the teacher's need to teach the pupil to be active and collaborative with the pedagogue in order to co-author meaning through acts of translation in the classroom' (Dobson 2012: 283). We saw the translator of educational policy and practice as emphatically in this pedagogic role, and those at the destination of translation as actively engaged in re-defining and co-constructing the locally applicable meaning of what is received.

The scope for creativity and the bringing of new meaning through translation. This is a rather crude way of expressing something that, for example, Walter Benjamin conveys rather more subtly in *L'essai sur la traduction* (1997). Benjamin points out that translation proceeds not so much from the life of an original, which are rarely translated in the age in which they are produced, but from its 'afterlife' or 'survival' [*Überleben*] and perhaps because of their continuing life [*Fortleben*]. 'Translations that are more than transmissions of a message are produced when a work, in its continuing life, has reached the age of its fame … In them the original's life receives its constantly renewed, latest and most comprehensive unfolding' (Benjamin 1997: 154). Further, 'in its continuing life, which could not be so called if it were not the transformation and renewal of a living thing, the original is changed. Established words also have their after-ripening' (Benjamin 1997: 155).

There are, however, dissimilarities between literary and policy translation, which are also revealing.

One of the ethical obligations of the translator of the literary text is, as far as is possible, to be *faithful* to the text, to be *true* to the original work. The translator of policy or practice—at least in the context of the international translation—really has no such obligation. Indeed, it is almost the opposite: the policy translator has a responsibility to adapt international practice to local requirements and to the functions they are expected to perform in that context. Derrida allows room for a slightly pragmatic function of translation even in his discussion of literary translation:

> A relevant translation would therefore be, quite simply … a translation that does what one expects of it, in short, a version that performs its mission, honours its debt and does its job or its duty while inscribing in the receiving language the more relevant equivalent for an original. (Derrida 2001: 177)

But, we asked, does this freedom/responsibility of translators to adapt (for example, at regional level or at school level) apply equally to the intranational translation of policy and practice, or does the centre here have an entitlement to require conformity rather than adaptability?

Secondly, the translator/interpreter of a given text does not assume responsibility for the truth or value of what that text has to say. His/her task is to translate, not to make any judgments or enter into any debates about the truth or falsity of what is being said or written. It is not obvious, however, in the context of policy or practice translation that the translator can avoid some such responsibility. The position is analogous to the contrast that the philosopher G.E.M. Anscombe draws between the interpreter and the teacher:

> Consider the belief reposed in what an interpreter says—I mean the belief reposed in the sentences he comes out with. If you believe those communications, probably—i.e. in the normal case—you are believing his principal: your reliance on the interpreter is only the belief that he has reproduced what his principal said. A teacher, on the other hand, even in no way an original authority, is wrong if what he says is untrue, and that hangs together with the fact that his pupils believe (or disbelieve) him. (Anscombe 1979: 147)

We argued that neither government officials not external consultants are simply in the business of describing how things are done elsewhere; by deciding to translate practice or policy from one place rather than another they are giving it their own approval and authority, and they have to take some responsibility for the validity of what they are putting forward.

In short, we felt that an examination of both the similarities and the differences between literary translation and policy translation helped to illuminate and give shape to our observation and understanding, and they served to provide a helpful summing up of what had become a rather long (12,000 word) paper.

17.5 Interpretation, Interpretation, Interpretation

One of the first points we made in our original paper was that the 'translation' of educational policy and practice always requires interpretation, evaluation, and selection, so in a sense the research paper that I have discussed here was already an attempt to interpret what was going on in a process of interpretation.

Now I have added another layer of interpretation by reflecting on our own attempts to interpret the interpretation/translation. This reveals, in short, no grand design, but rather a seeking after a metaphor, a descriptive or explanatory framework, a theory that might illuminate what we have read, observed, experienced, and reported. I have also indicated the part played in this process by really rather serendipitous episodes from personal biography, ideas that have been reawakened by the focus of our research, and chance encounters that have proved timely and fruitful—all seized gratefully and assembled in a *bricolage* of interpretation which, if it lacks consistency, is hopefully put together in an form that itself prompts reflection, interpretation, and ongoing conversation.

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Part V
Ethics and Educational Research

Chapter 18
Four Issues for Ethical Code Makers

Abstract This chapter was written in the context of reviews by both the American Education Research Association and the British Education Research Association of their ethical codes and a joint AERA/BERA symposium on this topic at the 2009 BERA conference. This came at a time of perhaps heightened awareness of the increasing significance of such codes in shaping the professional work of the educational research community. Some of us who were participating were cautious about what we saw as the increasing bureaucratisation of ethical principles and regimes of control, which seemed to have more to with protecting universities from being sued than to do with inherently moral consideration for research participants. The cautions expressed then about the limitations of ethical codes remain significant not just for the design of such codes but, more importantly perhaps, for the way they interact with institutional ethos and the cultivation of intellectual virtue.

I shall comment here on four issues about ethical codes and their application:

(i) the first is about whom the codes are intended to protect from what and asks in particular whether existing codes offer strong enough support for the independence of, in particular, commissioned or contract research in an environment in which universities seem ready to sacrifice basic conditions of academic freedom for the sake of collecting research funding;

(ii) the second asks about the appropriateness of many of the requirements of codified ethical practice developed in western countries to research conducted in very different cultural settings; and

(iii) the third points to the limitations of ethical codes when it comes to exercising ethical judgment in the field;

(iv) the fourth asks whether the bureaucratisation of research ethics does not reflect a breakdown in the social practices of higher education which are conducive to the cultivation of academic virtue—and whether indeed they can ever substitute for such social practices.

This chapter has been developed from a paper under the same title presented to the American Educational Research Association symposium held at the annual conference of the British Educational Research Association, Manchester, 1–5 September 2009.

18.1   Ethical Codes and Academic Independence

Ethical codes appear to be designed primarily to protect the weak and the vulnerable from exploitation or harm, which is entirely proper. However, they have tended to do this at the expense of other worrying concerns. Educational research is not focused exclusively on communities defined or self-defined as 'disempowered', communities which lack either legal or psychological 'ownership' of research or the research process. Walford (1994) has observed that in both the USA and the UK there has been a growth in the number of studies that have attempted to 'research up' and examine those *with* power in educational situations.[1]

Some of this research has been independently sponsored; other research has taken the form of commissioned work focusing, for example, on the evaluation of government educational initiatives or policy implementation. Such research raises a different set of issues about the rights and obligations of the researcher. Deem points out, for example, that in the discussion of empowerment it is rare to hear anything about disempowerment, yet 'for every person involved in the research process that the researcher may wish to empower, there are also likely to be some whom they wish to disempower. The latter is particularly likely when research involves socially, politically, or economically powerful groups' (Deem 1994: 166).

The British Education Research Association (BERA) Council had drawn to its attention (in fact via the Universities Council for the Education of Teachers) a number of research contracts which seemed to allow the commissioners of the research an inordinate amount of control over, among other things, the research methods to be employed, the form in which the research report will be published (and indeed whether and to whom it would be made available), and even the 'tone' of the final report. BERA established a working group to look into the terms of such contracts, which focused on three dimensions of this (possible) problem that concern me.

Firstly, there is enormous pressure on university departments today to win preferably high-cost research contracts; indeed the volume of such contracts becomes in many settings a metric of success (which ironically makes inexpensive research, such as philosophical or historical work, less attractive). Under this pressure their own loyalty to the principles of academic freedom and the independence of research is easily compromised by external and internal pressures to earn money and to be seen to be offering 'service' to government departments and private corporations. (See Chap. 23 on criteria for research 'quality' assessment and Chap. 19 on the commodification of educational research.) These developments pose the question of how determined universities will be in protecting academic freedom and research independence in the face of internal and external pressures to bring in the work.

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[1]Walford offers an interesting collection of reflections on this experience in *Researching the powerful in education* (1994).

Secondly, for all the rhetoric of open government, government departments and government agencies practice the black arts of 'spin' and the manipulation of public opinion with a sophistication and determination which might have amazed a previous generation— and those at the lower reaches of such departments and agencies live in fear of embarrassing their seniors by allowing research reports to come out in a form which might challenge their publicly declared beliefs or commitments.

But, thirdly, even ethical codes for a long time offered very little support for the principle of academic freedom. The BERA Ethical Guidelines (2004) declared a set of 'Principles underpinning the guidelines' and stated specifically (par. 6) that:

The Association considers that all educational research should be conducted within an ethic of respect for:

- The Person
- Knowledge
- Democratic Values
- The Quality of Educational Research
- Academic Freedom.

And continued (par. 7):

In guiding researchers on their conduct within this framework the Association sets out its guidelines under the following headings:

- Responsibilities to Participants
- Responsibilities to Sponsors of the Research
- Responsibilities to the Community of Educational Researchers.

First let us note that the commitment in par. 6 to democratic values found no counterpart in par. 7 or in the guidelines in terms of responsibilities that researchers might have to a wider democratic community, which presumably has no small interest in the education of its members and anything which might better inform it about such education. (The only nod in the guidelines to 'the public's right to know' was embedded in par. 44, which was concerned that 'researchers should avoid bringing the community into disrepute through public accusations or allegations.') It is precisely the way in which government departments and others interpose themselves between researchers and the general public that gives me cause for concern—a concern which I think can be legitimately defended by reference to those democratic values that BERA claims to represent.

But what of 'academic freedom'? There is only really one paragraph in the guidelines that refers to this, albeit in a rather coy way, buried among 'responsibilities to sponsors of research' in a paragraph that is otherwise about the responsibilities of researchers to the sponsors. I say 'coy' because there is no explicit reference to either the importance of the 'independence' of research or to the notion of 'academic freedom' itself. There is, nevertheless, the reminder that:

> Researchers must avoid agreeing to any sponsor's conditions that could lead to serious contravention of any aspect of these guidelines or that undermine the integrity of the research by imposing unjustifiable conditions on the methods to be used or the reporting

outcomes. Attempts by sponsors or funding agencies to use any questionable influence should be reported to the Association. (BERA Ethical Guidelines 2004: par. 33)[2]

The issue I wanted to raise here was whether, in a context in which there are also all sorts of external and internal pressures not to rock the boat (i.e. to permit the exchange of, in particular, government departmental and agency funding for terms of contract which maximise that department's control over research findings), we need a strengthening of codes in the defence of 'democratic values' and 'academic freedom', and a stiffening of our collective resolve to defend these principles.

The AERA Ethical Standards provided some assistance here: the section on 'Sponsors, Policymakers and Other Users of Research' has several important points. The first two are significant not least because they echo a principle that BERA endorsed the previous time it looked at this issue in detail in the 1980s (see Bridges et al. 1988) but which seemed to get lost. This was the principle that 'the right to publish independently will not unreasonably be refused'. AERA standards current at that time enshrined this principle even more clearly:

> Educational researchers are free to interpret and publish their findings without censorship or approval from individuals or organisations, including sponsors, funding agencies, participants, colleagues, supervisors or administrators. This understanding should be conveyed to participants as part of the responsibility to secure informed consent. (AERA Ethical Standards V,B,: par. 2)

> Researchers conducting sponsored research retain the right to publish the findings under their own name. (AERA Ethical Standards V,B,: par. 3)

And then, even more explicitly related to the issue of academic freedom:

> Educational researchers should not agree to conduct research that conflicts with academic freedom, nor should they agree to undue or questionable influence by government or other funding agencies. Examples of such improper influence include endeavours to interfere with the conduct of the research, the analysis of findings, or the reporting of interpretations. (AERA Ethical Standards V,B,: par. 4)

And:

> Educational researchers should not accept funds from sponsoring agencies that request multiple renderings of reports that would distort the reports or mislead readers. (AERA Ethical Standards V,B,: par. 6)

BERA's 2011 review of its own ethical guidelines (which, I should acknowledge, I chaired) 'refines and strengthens the Association's position on the rights of researchers in commissioned research contexts.' (BERA Ethical Guidelines 2011: Preamble). This is most clearly displayed in the section of the guidelines on the publication of research (pars 40–42):

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[2]This precise form of words was expressed in other ways in the 2011 version of the guidelines, but is still present in a number of institutional codes that have been derived from the 2004 BERA version.

40. The right of researchers independently to publish the findings of their research under their own names is considered the norm for sponsored research, and this right should not be lightly waived or unreasonably denied. This right is linked to the obligation on researchers to ensure that their findings are placed in the public domain and within reasonable reach of educational practitioners and policy makers, parents, pupils and the wider public.

41. Researchers must avoid agreeing to any sponsor's conditions that could lead to serious contravention of any aspect of these guidelines or that undermine the integrity of the research by imposing unjustifiable conditions on the methods to be used or the reporting of outcomes. Attempts by sponsors or funding agencies to use any questionable influence should be reported to the Association.

42. Researchers have the right to dissociate themselves publicly from accounts of the research that they conducted, the subsequent presentation of which they consider misleading or unduly selective. Sponsors enjoy a similar right. It is in the interests of researchers and sponsors alike to prevent this situation arising by agreements on publication or, if necessary, through arbitration. (BERA 2011)

Clearly these developments are in a direction of which I approve. However, the guidelines in themselves are only that, and the extent to which principles of academic freedom and obligations to put the outcomes of educational research into the public sphere will depend on the resolution and ethos of research institutions and of individual researchers as well, perhaps, as the availability of disinterested sponsors of research. (There is further discussion of this question in Chap. 19.)

The fact that research codes of national research associations do address some of these issues of responsibility to both an informed public and an academic community of scholars is part of an answer to concerns raised by Smith and Conroy:

It is common, especially in the world of Education, for 'ethics' to be seen as a matter of optional (bolt-on) issues, professional protocols of a largely routine nature, that can be treated in a tick-box fashion. For example: were interviewees anonymised? Was their consent obtained in writing? Was data stored securely? It is a sad comment on academic life that ethics tends to be seen largely as the domain of Ethics Committees, which focus on such necessary but banal questions as these. The Committees would be unlikely to reject a proposed project on, say, a new strategy for evaluating children's performance in literacy tests on the grounds that such an approach to literacy is complicit with a culture of league-tables and testing that is potentially abusive and almost certainly anti- educational. Such large questions are no doubt beyond their remit. Thus we have the irony of Ethics Committees refusing to consider important ethical issues at all. (Smith and Conroy 2016)

It will be clear from a number of my own comments in this chapter that I do not have particular faith in ethical codes or ethics committees, but some codes do reflect some of the wider responsibilities to which they refer. Of course, whether particular universities or their policing ethics committees choose to respect or ignore these responsibilities is a further question.

18.2   Applying British or American Codes in Non-western Environments

My second issue is especially significant, not just for countries other than the USA and UK or countries with diverse cultural traditions, but also for universities in the USA and UK where a large proportion of research students are from outside these countries (more than 60% of graduate students in Cambridge University) and where an increasing number of these and established researchers are engaged with research outside their own country. These features of contemporary research pose the question as to how universalisable are the ethical codes developed by western research associations and universities.

In my own experience, three situations pointed to the same problem. The first was a conversation with a Hong Kong University (HKU) student from Laos. She was shortly due to return to Laos to conduct her fieldwork in her own village. She had received strict instructions from the HKU authorities about the ethical code which she was to apply (with most of which she had no difficulty). However the regulations also required her to get a signed consent form from research participants. She was almost in tears about what she saw as the humiliation which this requirement would heap on her and a community in which she was known and trusted. What would the presentation of such a form to members of that community say about her distrust of them—and their inability to trust her?

I received a similar response from a group of students from Ethiopia that I was supervising at Addis Ababa University, this time on behalf of the University of East Anglia. They understood that they had to treat research participants with respect and to honour their wishes with respect to the research, but the idea of approaching them (some of them in any case illiterate) with forms or documents was laughable if it were not also offensive. 'They will think we are trying to acquire their land' said one, 'or that we are government tax officials!' suggested another. One later reported a conversation with a village elder he wanted to interview: 'Why do I need this paper?' said the elder, 'you are Amare's son and Solomon's brother. Shall I not trust you?' (see Adugna 2008).

My third encounter was with an Egyptian researcher, Mariam Attia, who at the time was presenting issues arising from her research at a BERA conference poster session. (Do not miss the conference poster sessions!). Later, in her doctoral thesis she described the nature of the relationship with research participants on which she relied for her research—one inevitably rooted in Egyptian culture's embeddedness in Arab culture:

> For example, 'asham' is a well-established social concept in Egyptian culture. It may be defined as an expectation and hope that one gets a preferred response, that is, acquiescence to a request … On the basis of 'asham', full access was guaranteed and complete assistance was granted. (Attia 2011: 97)

And then:

> The anticipation of assistance that I returned with was based on a history of shared lived experiences which in Arabic may be referred to as '*ishra*'. The concept is related to a kind of expected solidarity and mutual assistance stemming from belonging to an '*asheera*', that is, a tribal community, clan, or kinsfolk. (Attia 2011: 98)

In all three settings that I have illustrated, openness is secured not by the reassuring terms of contractual engagement (the consent form) but by culturally embedded relationships that are perhaps best translated into English as mutual trust. But even if we could rediscover or re- establish trust in Western research settings, it is, perhaps, a little too easy to invoke trust in the place of a codified set of requirements. Trust is, as Baier explains, 'a double edged sword' (Baier 1994: 103) which can be a comforting interpersonal or social embrace, but also unreliably placed or deliberately abused. Pendlebury and Enslin point both to the necessity of trust in a research engagement and also to its potential for such abuse:

> Research, like teaching and many other human practices, requires that the researcher be entrusted with a range of discretionary powers, yet in granting such discretionary powers the truster opens the way for the trusted to use her discretionary power for questionable, and even harmful, ends…. While trust is necessary for research to thrive … not all things that thrive when there is trust among people are things that should be so encouraged. Conspiracy, exploitation and oppression can also thrive in the soil of trust. (Pendlebury and Enslin 2002: 62)

Nevertheless, the ethical codes with which we are familiar in the West arise out of places and times characterised by what (Power 1997) has identified as '*a pathologicality of distrust*'—a society (including a higher educational community) in which 'risk' is something to be assessed, managed and, as far as possible, eliminated. We pretend that ethical codes are designed to protect the weak, but, as Harry Torrance suggested in his contribution to the BERA 2007 conference, perhaps the primary motivation is an institutional fear of being sued.

But not all societies are like that; nor are the behaviours that have grown out of our own 'pathologicalities' necessarily appropriate in communities where bonds and obligations of family and community, of honour and trust, remain a crucial part of the ethos of society. Linda Smith captured rather beautifully what might be the requirements which her own indigenous New Zealand community might make in encountering even an outsider researcher: 'Is her spirit clear? Does he have a good heart? What other baggage are they carrying? Are they useful to us? Can they fix up the generator …? (Smith 1999: 10). Do you need to ask anything more?

So my second issue is to do with the cultural locatedness of contemporary ethical codes, their locatedness, moreover, in a pretty sick culture—and the extent to which it is appropriate to apply them in very different cultural settings.

But are codes then not enough…?

18.3 The Insufficiency of Ethical Codes and the Need for Situational Judgment

Small argued that 'philosophers have found codes of ethics too congenial for their own good' (Small 2002: 90), and he continued, 'A codified practice is of very limited usefulness in arriving at ethical decisions' (Small 2002: 91). There are two different but related arguments against reliance on ethical codes for the assurance of the proper conduct of educational or any other kind of research. The first is in a sense *epistemic*: they simply do not tell you all that you need to know in order to reach a decision about how to proceed. At the BERA conference in 2008 a group of self-designated 'early career researchers' brought to the attention of the Association their frustration with ethical codes, saying that when it came to the real-world situations in which they found themselves doing research, the ethical codes to which they had signed up provided insufficient guidance about what they should do in practice. They faced situations in which different ethical principles seemed to conflict with each other or to place irreconcilable demands upon them, and other situations which the code simply did not seem to have anticipated. They were of course echoing reflective accounts by other researchers who regularly report the problems they were faced with in practice when applying the principles contained in such codes (see e.g. Simons and Usher 2000).

This should really come as no surprise to anyone. The search for a single overriding ethical principle which might resolve all ethical dilemmas has not been very successful, even in the Benthamite formulation of the greatest happiness of the greatest number. In the Judeo- Christian tradition God offered the Ten Commandments, but he was wise enough to explain that just one of these would provide all or most of the guidance that was needed. BERA currently offers 48 principles. And of course the more principles you enunciate, the more conflicts you will generate.

It is not that we can surrender ethical principles altogether in favour of some purely 'situational' judgment. Situations still need to be understood and responded to by reference to some principle or principles of behaviour. But the principles themselves will always need to be applied intelligently or wisely in the light of particular features of a situation the features and complexity of which the code makers could not possibly have anticipated except in the most general terms. In the terms of Wittgenstein's sceptical question: 'How can a rule show me what I have to do at this point? Whatever I do is on some interpretation in accord with the rule' (Wittgenstein 1967: par. 198). Wright explains:

> merely having the rule in mind is no help. For I can have a formula in mind without knowing what it means. So—the response continues—it is necessary in addition to interpret the rule. But that response sets up the 'paradox' of *Investigations* 198. … An interpretation of this thing I have in mind is of help to me … only if it is a correct interpretation. But to invoke the idea of correctness at this point makes the play with interpretation futile. For how am I to know which interpretation is correct? Presumably that is a judgement which

must be regulated by further rules, rules for adjudicating among rival interpretations of rules. But then, if these further rules are to be any help to me, I will need to get them 'in mind' too and know in turn how they are properly interpreted—and that is to impose an infinitely regressive structure on one's recognition of the correct application of a rule. (Wright 2002: 11; see also Kripke 1982 for a helpful exposition of Wittgenstein on rules)

If this is the problem, how then can we support new, or indeed experienced, researchers in making these situated judgments?

The group of early career researchers that put forward these concerns were pretty nearly right in asking for some sort of (probably virtual) space in which they could exchange experience and seek advice. I say right because one of the main ways in which one learns to work with any rule-governed system—and I believe this is consistent with Wittgenstein's own response—is by using the language in a community, through conversation. It is only through talking through rules and situations that we become clearer about how these interrelate, what the principles really mean in practice, what practice that is really informed by the appropriate rule-governed behaviour might look and feel like. By contrast, 'by defining moral obligations in a formal fashion, they give the impression that these may be satisfied by a single procedure of compliance, rather than through a continuing process of considering the ethical aspects of one's actions' (Small 2002: 93). Working with an ethical code is interpreting and co-creating shared meaning in real social situations, and that is something we need to do socially in conversational communities, not (not just) in isolation.

There is, however, a second concern about reliance on ethical codes which has more to do with the character of moral responsibility. As Homan argues, 'Statements of ethics invite the individual to surrender the moral conscience to a professional consensus' (Homan 1992: 331). There is little morality as such in mere compliance with a set of rules, unless one has considered them carefully and decided for oneself that these are right. The problem about situated judgment is that it does indeed require 'judgment', interpretation, reflection and action. To seek to dispense with these in favour of 'rule following' is bad faith—which is precisely why researchers whose experience I used by way of illustration in the last section were faced with a moral quandary and the need to wrestle with the detail of the case as well as the reconciliation of perhaps conflicting obligations. In ethical terms this takes us into the realms of casuistry (see Chap. 21: 6 and Jonsen and Toulmin 1988). It also points us towards the need 'to define the task as one of education rather than enforcement, and the means of achieving it as learning rather than deterrence' (Small 2002: 92). Further, as Beauchamp and Childress argue:

> Principles require judgement, which in turn depends on character, moral discernment, and a person's sense of responsibility and accountability… Often what counts most in the moral life is not consistent adherence to principles and rules, but reliable character, moral good sense, and emotional responsiveness. (Beauchamp and Childress 1994: 462)

And these are the kind of considerations that take me in the final section of this chapter to the importance of the cultivation of intellectual virtue.

18.4   From Ethical Codes to Intellectual Virtue and Academic Practice

'A clear spirit'? 'A good heart'? Linda Smith removes us from the world of codes, and even situated ethical reasoning, to a world where what really counts is the honesty and integrity of the individual. These three steps—ethical code to situated reasoning to intellectual virtue—are taken by Beauchamp and Childress: 'Principles require judgement, which in turn depends on character, moral discernment, and a person's sense of responsibility and accountability…

Often what counts most in the moral life is not consistent adherence to principles and rules, but reliable character, moral good sense, and emotional responsiveness'. (Beauchamp and Childress 1994: 462).

It is tempting to see the rise of the ethical code, the ethics committee, and the administrative supervision of compliance—in short, the bureaucratisation of research ethics—as an acknowledgment that the sort of processes which might be needed to initiate academics into the academic virtues which are a necessary underpinning to academic practice have failed. The external institutional development and enforcement of ethical codes is one way of regulating the ethical conduct of research. The internalisation of such principles is another. The cultivation in academics of certain forms of human excellence and their habituation in the dispositions and patterns of behaviour that these forms of excellence require—i.e. the cultivation of virtue—is a third, and arguably the most important, not least because such virtue may render the codes redundant; but, as I have argued, the codes will never dispense with the need for their virtuous interpretation and application.

I think it is fair to say that we admire the researchers we admire most not just for the content of their published work (though of course this is important) but also for the sort of person they are, the way they conduct themselves in relation to this work and to others with whom they relate—their integrity. We admire their modesty, their courage, their care and commitment to just causes as well as their industriousness, their honesty, their fair- mindedness, their scrupulousness in sifting evidence and argument, their imagination, and their insight. These qualities may have their roots in broader moral virtues which are not specific to the academic life, and I would not go to the stake for the distinction between these and more narrowly academic virtues, but there is a long tradition of writing going back to Aristotle which draws a distinction between the two. Richard Pring reflects this tradition when he describes the moral and intellectual virtues required by research:

> The moral virtues would be those concerned with resistance to the blandishments or attractions which tempt one from the research even when the intellectual virtues press one to go on: courage to proceed when the research is tough or unpopular; honesty when the consequences of telling the truth are uncomfortable; concern for the well-being of those who are being researched and who, if treated insensitively, might suffer harm; modesty about the merits of the research and its conclusions; humility in the face of justified criticism and readiness to take such criticisms seriously. (Pring 2000: 152; and see also Pring 2001)

I am not sure that the distinction between academic and more widely moral virtues is worth huge attention in this context, though clearly the requirements of research and teaching in higher education call especially into play virtues like honesty, determination, and humility, which have a wider role to play in life outside the academy. For Dewey the 'attitudes' to be encouraged included open-mindedness, wholeheartedness, and responsibility (Dewey 1916). For Hume they included wisdom, a capacious memory, keenness of insight, eloquence, prudence, penetration, discernment and discretion (Hume 1983). For Montmarquet (1986, 1993) there are three clusters of virtue: intellectual *impartiality*, or openness to the ideas of others; intellectual *sobriety*, i.e. the virtues of the careful inquirer who accepts only what is warranted by relevant reasons, evidence and argument; and intellectual *courage*, which includes perseverance and determination. More recently, and in the context of social science research, Macfarlane (2009: 42) proposes courage, respectfulness, resoluteness, sincerity, humility and reflexivity. Banks's rendering of researcher integrity is especially pertinent because, again, it is addressed specifically to the field of social science research:

> Researcher integrity, in its thick sense, is about researchers being aware of, and critically committed to, the purpose, values, ethical principles and standards of their discipline and/or broader research field; making sense of them as a whole; and putting them into practice in their research work, including upholding them in challenging circumstances. Stated in this way, researcher integrity is an over-arching, complex virtue. It entails not just upholding and acting upon all the values of the profession, but also working to revise, re-evaluate and hold them together as a whole. (Banks 2015: 5)

I am less concerned to promote a particular view of what these virtues are than to enlarge the discussion of research ethics to include consideration of such virtues and hence of the social practices in a university which might contribute to their development. I use 'practice' here in the sense that MacIntyre has developed it, i.e. as 'any coherent and complex form of socially established cooperative human activity through which goods internal to that form of activity are realised in the course of trying to achieve those standards of excellence which are appropriate to, and partially definitive of, that form of activity, with the result that human powers to achieve excellence, and human conceptions of the ends and goods involved, are systematically extended (MacIntyre 1985: 187). In more familiar terms, perhaps, this is a matter of the ethos of a research environment and the personal qualities and 'ways of going on' that are cultivated through it. As we have seen, ethical codes alone will in any case not really provide the assurance which they seem to promise. I do not want to say that codes have no function, but they need to be employed by people who have, independently of the code, a deeply embedded sense of and commitment to the moral and intellectual values which underpin academic work and the habit of reflecting these in their practice—and universities should be places centrally concerned with the cultivation of such commitment and practice. Learning to be a researcher involves more than acquiring 'research skills' and satisfying the requirements of the research committee.

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Chapter 19
Research for Sale? Epistemic, Moral, and Political Drift Through the Commodification of Educational Research

Abstract This chapter is concerned with some of the moral and social issues which are raised by the commodification of research, and more specifically with what happens as the funding and character of university research—and more particularly educational research—shifts increasingly in the direction of 'contract research'. It was provoked by a particular interaction with a UK local education authority officer (described more fully below) who claimed that since he had paid for a piece of research he could do whatever he liked with it. The issue that this opens up is of course a much wider one (touched on in Chap. 18, on ethical codes) of the rights and responsibilities of educational researchers in their relationship with research sponsors or 'purchasers', the wider academic community, and the general public, who after all have a legitimate interest in anything that might illuminate educational policy or practice. It also raises questions of an ethical and almost ontological character as to the very nature of research and whether, like sex perhaps or the air we breathe, it is appropriately for sale. These are the issues that this chapter seeks to untangle.

La propriété, c'est le vol![1] (Proudhon 1966: 57—originally 1840)

[1] 'Property is theft!'

19.1   Introduction

I want to contrast two models of research production which, as a shorthand, I will label 'researcher-led research' and 'purchaser-led research'. For this purpose 'researcher-led research' is supported by public, or perhaps private, charitable funds[2] which provide researchers with time and perhaps other resources to engage in research of their choosing or proposing, the fruits of which are subsequently placed in the public domain (even if this means little more that publishing it in an academic journal). This contrasts with 'purchaser- led research', which is purchased by private businesses or corporations or, more significantly, government agencies or departments, typically to a brief constructed by the contractors, the fruits of which are subsequently owned by, and under the control of, those who have purchased it.

What is crucial about the increasing dependency of universities on purchaser-led research is the major extension of power and control which those who provide the funding exercise over those that carry out the research in the new contractual relationships. The second crucial feature is that when this development is accompanied by others, which create competitive market conditions for the securing of research funding and contracts, and make the successful securing of such contracts a further criterion of success in research achievement (with further rewards attached to the 'successful'), a dynamic develops by which universities fall over each other in the rush to submit themselves to the new mechanisms of control. 'The result is', on some analyses, 'that there is scarcely a university in the UK whose academic freedom has not been compromised by its funding arrangements' (Monbiot 2000a, b), and it is difficult to imagine that many universities in the United States, for example, could escape the same charge, though their experience of, in particular, corporate involvement has a longer history, and so has the debate about the role and responsibility of the university and of 'the public intellectual' in these relationships.

One can usefully observe some different models of these relationships between funder and researchers. Becher (1985) distinguishes five strategies which those paying for research use to control to a greater or lesser degree the research which is done. These include:

- proprietorship: funders create dedicated research establishments in-house—maximising their control over every aspect of the research;
- purchase: bought-in researchers commissioned by project contracts—i.e. the sort of research relationship I am concerned with here;
- prescription: the concentration and steering of research resources through the designation of particular centres of excellence;

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[2]Or, as many university staff would complain, such research is supported by themselves in the few hours of the day or night when they are not occupied with teaching, meetings, or administrative chores!

- persuasion: identification and designation of a preferred theme and the encouragement of academics to put forward proposals for research relating to this theme (cf. UK Economics and Social Research Council research themes);
- pluralism: responsiveness to researcher demand—selection by perceived merit of proposals (cf. ESRC open bidding process). (Becher 1985: 183)

Beyond these in terms of almost non-existent control mechanism he might have added:

- personalisation: i.e. research conducted by individuals on their own agenda under publicly funded posts in universities (or simply in their own time)—which I have referred to as 'researcher-led research' above.

The development on which I want to focus is the shift from this largely uncontrolled research conducted from a tenured position, to the very much more tightly controlled 'purchased' or contract research that Kogan and Henkel have referred to as 'the slide into dependency' (Kogan and Henkel 1992: 112). More specifically, I want to examine the increasing tendency in educational and social science research for researchers to find themselves entering funding regimes or relationship in which those providing the money see this as providing them with full proprietorial rights over the research, or at least over its products, including in these the right to hold the results of the research to themselves or to release information selectively. Norris and Pettigrew have observed how:

> the economic language of customer-contractor, purchaser-provider, has served to legitimate the privatisation of applied research and the expectation that its products are owned and controlled by the sponsor for their own interests. In the new contractual order … research is treated as property conferring rights to exclude others from its use or benefits. (Norris and Pettigrew 1994: 4–5)

I recall from some years ago a conversation with the then Director of Education in Nottingham, about some evaluation work which he had commissioned from the Centre for Applied Research in Education (CARE) at the University of East Anglia, in which he asserted:

> I buy research like I buy a sack of coal and when I have bought it I expect to do what the hell I like with it!

My apologies if this is anything other than an exact recall of the conversation (and he can't have bought a sack of coal in many years), but this chapter will show that I am still working out my response to this succinct statement of a position, which at the time felt—and was probably intended to shock as—faintly sacrilegious.[3]

Since that conversation, many developments in British society, actively promoted by neoliberal administrations since the Margaret Thatcher and John Major

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[3]Similar views of research/evaluation reports as property which has been bought are reported in David Jenkins's account of the evaluation of the Schools Cultural Studies Project in Northern Ireland (Jenkins 1987).

governments, have supported what is commonly referred to as the 'commodification' of the 'goods and services' provided by higher education. The terms of research contracts with the UK Department for Education, for example, are couched in the same language that might be used for the purchase of a suite of computers or of school furniture: 'The Contractor warrants that any goods supplied by the Contractor forming part of the services will be of satisfactory quality and fit for their purpose and will be free from defects in design, material and workmanship' Department for Education 2014: par 7.2.10).

These same trends have indeed been observable in many parts of the world—in Australia and New Zealand, for example, as well as in the well-established tramping grounds of the market ideology in North America—and more recently, and as a result of the missionary zeal of the World Bank, in the developing world. Slaughter and Leslie (1999) have documented across universities in five different countries what they describe as the rise of 'academic capitalism' to describe this process (of which some of the consequences are presented by Leslie in her 2006 book on *The research game in academic life*). They use the language of 'the entrepreneurial university'; and Marginson and Consadine (2000) 'the enterprise university', though, as we shall see, much of this was already anticipated by Roszak's (1969) assault on what he called in contemporary terms 'the service university'.

The application of market (or quasi-market) forces, relationships, and practices have been seen as not merely economically efficient but morally virtuous: rewarding enterprise, encouraging self-reliance, enhancing accountability, bringing a new discipline to the quality of service provided to consumers, providing greater choice (see e.g. Gray 1992). Over the years, these principles and practices have been applied to health, policing, education, and other public services, as well as actively promoted in a private sector which, in the judgment of some, had grown soft and uncompetitive through years of excessive interference, protection, and centralised control by government. In the UK, government research contracts in the wake of the 1971 Rothschild Report (Cmnd 4814) became simultaneously more widely open to competitive tendering and more tightly defined and controlled through the detailed clauses of the contracts. Philo and Miller argue, for example, that it was the UK Ministry of Agriculture Food and Fisheries' (MAFF) control over and interference in research into BSE which prevented early intervention in the process by which the disease entered the human food chain. They accuse MAFF of, first, preventing research from proceeding. Then, 'MAFF also denied researchers access to necessary data and attempted to influence the research funding priorities of the supposedly independent funding councils'. It was claimed that MAFF censored scientific reports and bullied scientists into changing their supposedly "independent" advice. They continue: 'As it stands now almost all government departments have clauses in their research contracts that give them power over the release of the final results. Research for the Department of Education and Employment, for example, requires researchers to "incorporate the Department's amendments"' (Philo and Miller 2000: 22).

During this same period, universities in the UK have found themselves operating on the basis of declining units of resource and simultaneously in a fiercely

competitive research environment in which a significant factor in their success is their capacity to attract contract research funding. They need this both directly, to support the continuing employment of research staff (and increasingly the provision of research equipment and facilities), and indirectly, as a major indicator of their national and international research standing (as assessed in the UK under the Research Assessment Exercise for example and more recently in the Research Excellence Framework), which is the basis for the level of core funding for research which they receive.

Stronach et al. (1997) observed in an editorial in the *British Educational Research Journal* what they describe as 'a shift in preoccupation away from "research" as knowledge production, to research as an entrepreneurial activity, a question of finding money rather than answers …' (Stronach et al. 1997: 403). Some argue that such developments represent a fundamental challenge to the very idea of a university. The problem is compounded when this sort of market-driven environment is combined—as Furlong (2013), Barnett (1990) suggest that it is—by the sector's loss of confidence in its own epistemological authority. If, as is sometimes maintained, there is no reference point in academic procedures for regarding one set of beliefs as carrying better warrant, stronger reasons, evidence, and argument, than another, then we are left with a market in which what passes for 'truth' is simply what is desired or sought by the highest bidder. But as Furlong argues:

> The maximisation of reason… is the essential purpose that marks the university out as a unique institution in society, even today. Other institutions—schools, think tanks, businesses, political parties, religious institutions may, at times, engage in activities that have things in common with universities. They, too, may sometimes undertake research; they may critically assess evidence; they may engage in robust debate. But … they are not the essential purposes of these institutions. Schools, businesses and most other institutions can and do continue to function perfectly well without making the maximisation of reason a core activity. What is distinctive about the university is that that is its very essence … If a university is not adopting that as its guiding principle, then it is not really worthy of the name.' (Furlong 2013: 182)

So the pressure to engage in purchaser-led contract research has been powerful; the temptation to become less fastidious about the terms of that engagement increasingly strong; and the need to be clear about the principles at stake more and more acute. In an important sense, I believe, the academic community will define itself and the university of the twenty-first century by our response to these issues.

19.2 The Proposition

It will be helpful, I think, to begin by formulating the proposition or set of propositions associated with the defence of the proprietorial rights of those purchasing research. They amount to something like the following:

(i) research activity can be purchased on an explicit and legitimate under-
     standing that any fruits of that activity will become the property of the
     purchaser;

(ii) the knowledge, understanding, invention, discovery, and creativity which are
      the fruits of research—'intellectual property' for short—are all things which
      can legitimately be owned, bought, sold and cast away like any other
      commodity;

(iii) in purchasing and owning such intellectual property, the owner is under no
       obligation to other people with respect to what he or she does with it;

(iv) university academics can appropriately enter into research contracts on the
      basis of these first three understandings, providing of course the purchaser is
      paying the full costs, including the academic's time.

Let us note that the purchasers and would-be proprietors here include private
sector organisations, public service organisations, local government, and national
government departments or quasi-government agencies. Indeed the latter have been
among the most enthusiastic in adopting a purchaser/provider relationship with
university departments. Moreover, as MacDonald has observed:

> Government funding of educational research is now conditional upon disavowing owner-
> ship of its products and vowing silence with regard to their contents or how Government
> makes use of them. Invoking Rothschild's principle, never intended by him to be applied to
> social research, such knowledge has now been commodified and privatised for the dis-
> cretionary use of the executive and its agents. (MacDonald 1996: 248)

There is a *prima facie* reasonableness to the four propositions I have set out.
After all, though there are indeed—and importantly—charitable bodies which will
be happy to pay for services, including research, which are then made publicly
available, these bodies, by their very designation as 'charitable', signal their
exceptional character. It would be a much more common expectation that the
payment for services rendered the products of those services the property of the
person who had made the payment. Furthermore, the very notion of property
implies a high level of control and discretion on behalf of the proprietor in the use
and disposal of that property. In what is commonly described as a 'knowledge
economy' it is not surprising if, as Burton-Jones, suggests, 'Knowledge is fast
becoming the most important form of global capital—hence "knowledge capital-
ism"' (Burton-Jones 1999: vi).

Even within a capitalistic liberal democracy there are, of course, important
qualifications to this principle, in general based on considerations such as: pro-
tection of neighbours from various forms of nuisance; care and consideration for
sentient beings (so there are moral and legal restrictions on how we might treat
'our' animals, for example); public health and safety; and, more significantly in this
context, protection of national heritage (so that one might be severely restricted in
what one could do with a farmhouse which one owned in a National Park). These
qualifications illustrate, however, that the general disposition is in favour of
allowing owners by the very nature of that ownership to do what they like with their
property unless some exceptional grounds can be offered for qualifying that right.

There are, of course, more radical challenges to this position within the modern communistic tradition (of which Proudhon's celebrated slogan 'property is theft' is an early statement) and in some traditional societies in which, for example, grazing rights are held in common (though notions of collective ownership may still be proprietorial in the sense of denying rights or access to other groups or peoples). More recently, and within the framework of broadly liberal democratic assumptions, environmentalists have put forward notions of 'trusteeship' of, for example the world's natural resources, and of the diversity of species, as a deliberate challenge to more conventional notions of ownership, precisely because they wish to deny contemporary 'owners' the entitlement to dispose of these resources or to reduce that biodiversity for their own purposes, and to assert instead a notion of our obligation to hand on intact to the next generation the global resources of which we are but passing beneficiaries. There are interesting ontological questions as to whether knowledge and understanding are indeed more akin to a sack of coal, to a national park, or to the air we breathe.

We shall see whether any of these kinds of qualifications to the principle of owners' entitlement to dispose of their property as they please has application when it comes to the purchase of knowledge and understanding through contracted research. The central question to which I now wish to turn is: are there any grounds for qualifying or, even more strongly, contradicting, the position outlined in the four propositions above? The first kind of objection I wish to represent is essentially an epistemological one.

19.3 Epistemic Drift and the Publication of Research

Stenhouse's definition of research, which I have employed through most of this book, as 'systematic and sustained enquiry *made public*' (Stenhouse 1980, my italics) implied, in good Popperian fashion, that the publication of research and its subjection to critical scrutiny by one's academic peers was something integral to the research process itself, a crucial stage in the research and not merely an option to be considered after its completion. It is, in this tradition, part of the testing of the research, part of its purification of error, that it is so exposed and so scrutinised.

Now one of the problems of contract research for non-academic sponsors (and especially when only they have access to the research) is that you can quickly find researchers gearing their work so as to satisfy the demands and expectations of their government or corporation sponsors, rather than the demands of their academic colleagues, whose critical scrutiny is perhaps no longer part of the process. External norms replace norms internal to the academic community and sponsor validation replaces academic validation in what Elzinga refers to as 'epistemic drift' (Elzinga 1985).

> Epistemic drift may thus be interpreted as a shift from a traditional reputational control system associated with disciplinary science to one that is disengaged from disciplinary science and, thus, more open to external regulation by governmental and managerial policy

impositions. The norms of the new system have a strong relevance component, transmitted from the bureaucracies to which the hybrid research community is linked. The bureaucracy thereby influences not only the problem selection but the standards of performance of research, standards of significance and territorial definition of the field or speciality in question. (Elzinga 1985: 209)

Norris and Pettigrew (1994) report evidence which illustrates Epistemic drift in evaluation research, where sponsors entirely lacking in methodological competence demand (and get) narrowly focused research, which begs crucial wider issues, and demand quasi-experimental methods inappropriate to the research task. However:

The most significant methodological compromises do not centre on specific acts of accommodation but rather on the reduction in the scope of validity enhancing strategies. Taken together the absence of qualified critics at the commissioning stage, restrictions on discussing work in progress, and the potential lack of peer review of reports represent a considerable erosion of the traditional processes of quality control. (Norris and Pettigrew 1994: 8)

There is, of course, a ready remedy to at least some of the worst threats of this epistemic drift—and that is for sponsors not merely to allow but to insist on the publication of the research they sponsor—not just to the wider public but specifically to the relevant academic community. On the view I have articulated, the research process will in any case not have been completed until this peer review has taken place. More particularly, the response of the academic community will give sponsors a pretty good indication of the faith that they can place in the research and of whether or not they have received good value for their investment.

Epistemic drift, as described here, is a possible rather than necessary consequence of changes in research funding which turn researchers increasingly towards contract research for government, private corporations, or charities. Another response to the same (empirical) observation is to say that within such relationships researchers must simply steel their resolve to maintain proper academic standards and to recognise this as an important ethical obligation. John Passmore, in a paper on 'Academic ethics?' (Passmore 1984), argues that:

they (academic researchers) have a special responsibility, which does not apply to the same degree to the research worker in an industrial concern, to uphold the moral traditions of research and to root out the corruptions to which it is subject … They are academics … not salesmen, even if it is unfortunately true that in order to attract funds they are sometimes forced into the latter role, with its corresponding temptation. (Passmore 1984: 71)

Similarly I have already (Chap. 18) cited passages from both the American and British Educational Research Associations' ethical guidelines which place firmly on researchers' shoulders the obligation to put their research in the public domain. However, while no doubt researchers should feel these kinds of obligations, the point is that they cannot be fully met by themselves alone. The self-critical stance of the researcher needs to be complemented by the external critical response of his or her peers working within the same or a complementary academic tradition. Furthermore, it requires exposure to the broadest critical gaze—and all this demands the publication of the research.

19.4   A Moral Argument Against Restrictive Ownership of Educational Research

It is helpful to observe the distinction between the economic or commercial value of educational research and what we might regard as its moral value, in so far as it might allow us to engage both with normatively framed educational ends and the principled as well as technically proficient means to pursue these.

By commercial value, I mean simply that it is the sort of knowledge someone might pay for because they saw it as useful to a commercial activity. To stick to the educational domain, a survey of school use of computers or a study of children's interaction with computers could be extremely valuable commercial information to a firm of software developers. The research-based development of a new instrument of assessment of students' suitability for study in higher education could be commercially exploited by an examining board. New insights into how children learn to read could provide a commercial advantage to a publisher planning a new set of reading texts for schools. In a slightly different way, evaluations of new educational initiatives have economic value to the sponsors of these initiatives (perhaps government departments or charitable bodies), in that they can focus their efforts on what is most effective and provide better 'value for money' on their investment of resources.

These last examples, in particular, show however that commercial value and moral value are often interlinked. The same research which allows an organisation to sell a product at a profit or focus its efforts most cost-effectively also has a capacity to inform, and hence to enhance, educational practice. If education is to be seen as a basic human good having intrinsic moral worth, then the research has moral value independently of its economic value because of its contribution to the securing of a public good or to an understanding which is necessary to the achievement of that good. In so far as all educational research has the capacity to inform educational progress, then all educational research has this kind of moral value.

There is a slightly wider sense in which not just educational, but social science research in general, might be said to have moral value independently of any economic value. In so far as social science informs us about the social and political world which we mentally inhabit, then the understanding which that research generates contributes to our capacity to act intelligently and autonomously in that social and political world—a capacity which, within a liberal democratic framework of values at least, we must regard as morally desirable. MacDonald and Norris link the evaluation of educational initiatives with this wider social purpose:

> We are not just in the business of helping some people to make educational choices within their present responsibilities and opportunities. We are also in the business of helping all people to choose between alternative societies. (MacDonald and Norris 1982: 10)

By and large, then, the fruits of educational and, more broadly, social science research must be regarded as (to a greater or lesser degree) having intrinsic or fairly directly instrumental moral value.

There is a further important feature of such knowledge which we should note in association with these observations. Here we need to invoke the economists' distinction between goods for which access or ownership is competitive, i.e. one person's enjoyment of a good excludes another person's enjoyment of the same good, and goods which are non- competitive or 'indivisible', i.e. ones for which any given unit 'can be made available to every member of the public' (Taylor 1987: 5).

The point to be made here is that, in general, the moral benefits of knowledge and understanding which are the fruits of educational and social science research are in this sense indivisible: they can be shared equally and without loss by all citizens. The commercial benefits, such as they are, however, are not: they require exclusive or at least limited ownership by those seeking to exploit them. In this way the commodification of the products of research and the exclusivity of ownership which that requires undermines the widest possible sharing in the moral value of that same research.

These features of the knowledge and understanding which issue from social science or, more narrowly, educational research seem to me to constitute a *prima facie* case in favour of such knowledge being placed in the public domain and against allowing those who wish to exploit the economic value of such knowledge to purchase it and to restrict other people's access to it. Those who claim that their purchase of educational research entitles them to keep its results and illumination to themselves are holding to themselves understanding which could be shared universally to the benefit of all in the pursuit of the fundamental human good which is education.

This is not a new consideration: I was moved by the fervency of the French encyclopaedist, Diderot, writing in defence of 'collective institutions and the public utility of inventions as an answer to the very active market for inventions that had been developed at the beginning of the eighteenth century' (Hilaire-Perez 2002: 143):

> Nothing is more contrary to the progress of knowledge than mystery. … If it happens that an invention favourable to the progress of the arts and sciences comes to my knowledge, I burn to divulge it; that is my mania. … Had I but one secret for all my stock in trade, it seems to me that if the general good should require the publication of it, I should prefer to die honestly on a street corner, my back against a post, than let my fellow men suffer. … We exist within such an existence so ignorant, so short, and so sad, that the vicar sparing his money and the philosopher sparing his discoveries, both steal from the poor. Besides, I think that discoveries are safe and valuable, only when they have come into common knowledge, and I hurry to bring them in. (Diderot 1755, cited in Hilaire-Perez 2002: 142–143)

… and Diderot's indignation was a response to those who sought to keep secret only the technique of painting in wax!

19.5   Knowledge and Politics

I have so far written only of two kinds of value which might be attached to knowledge and understanding—the *economic* value associated with its commercial exploitation and the *moral* value associated with its capacity to inform both professional and lay citizens in their autonomous choice and in their pursuit of basic goods such as education, health, and social wellbeing. The literature on the commodification of educational research sees this as part of a nexus of ideologically driven developments. Radder, for example, suggests that 'Key notions in discussing this question include: commercialization, contract research, privatization, patenting, scientific productivity, publish-or-perish culture, marginalization of noncommodified research, and the demise of public interest science' (Radder 2010: 4). Radder, however, focuses on the commercial or economic interests that lie behind this 'commodification'

> This development is often described as the economization, or economic instrumentalization, of human activities and institutions, or even entire social subsystems. In this wider and more appropriate sense, academic commodification means that all kinds of scientific activities and their results are predominantly interpreted and assessed on the basis of economic criteria. (Radder 2010: 4)

In the context of educational research I am rather more concerned, as I have indicated above, with the social and political capital that is represented by academic research production. The issue is not so much, in this case, one of the pursuit of profit but rather of the ownership of research 'property' and the impact that this has on the distribution of knowledge and power within the education and wider social and political system. Jacob's account of commodification focuses more closely on this dimension, linking commodification with the control of information and governance:

> Commodification is here defined after Marx as those instances in which knowledge is exchanged for money where the knowledge is packaged in a form that the buyer can use the knowledge without the intervention of the producer. The paper [i.e. the analysis that follows] singles out commodification as a process which is distinct from commercialisation in order to make transparent how commodification functions as a steering mechanism … creating room for separating issues of ethics arising from commercialisation process from issues of governance. (Jacob 2009: 392)

It is this connection between the purchaser and researcher and the *political* value that the possession of the fruits of social science (including educational) research may have that I want to explore in this section. By political value, I have in mind its capacity to strengthen or weaken the hold on power of those who control the information or those whose actions and policies are the focus of the research. In this sense, as it is sometimes put, 'knowledge is power'. Kushner and MacDonald write, for example, of the ways in which:

> … civil servant managers who commission evaluations are vulnerable to unfavourable judgements of the policies they are implementing or of the ways in which they have chosen to prosecute them … They do not want, and will strenuously oppose, policy evaluation of a

kind that could embarrass their superiors by raising questions about the validity of the programme rationale. (Kushner and MacDonald 1987: 152)

Social science research may, for example, readily reveal discrepancies between the claims made by government or other sponsors of educational innovation and the evidence of the research, though (less frequently perhaps) it may confirm those claims; it may reveal improprieties in the behaviour of politicians or officers, or confirm their integrity and public- mindedness; it may reveal that the pet schemes upon which politicians have staked a significant part of their credibility are successful or are flawed. In any of these cases, political reputation, authority, and power can be at stake, and in this sense research can have a political value which is independent of its economic or moral value, though it is indirectly linked to the latter. In these circumstances, who owns the research and who consequently has the right to publish it or withhold it from publication become themselves important political issues.

It is not at all obvious that the fact that someone (perhaps a senior civil servant or a local education officer) has paid for the conduct of a piece of research (after all with public funds!) entitles them to determine who may know or not know the outcomes of that research. Two related arguments point to an obligation to place the results of that research in the public domain.

Firstly, there is a general argument that applies at least to research bearing on the work of publicly funded bodies, about the accountability which, for example, ministers, government departments, and local authorities owe to the public at large. In areas such as education, health, and social policy it is difficult to see on what basis public access to research findings can or should be denied, unless perhaps there is a genuine basis for argument that the research itself has been badly or improperly conducted, which is something that ought to be determined by a competent professional body and not the relevant government department. An avowedly democratic government (at national or local level) has no real basis for denying its citizens access to information which can shed light on its conduct in these fields or inform their judgments—as students, as parents, as governors, or as citizens.[4] Indeed, as part of its democratic accountability, such a government ought to be committed both to exposing its actions to independent and systematic research and to making the outcomes of such research widely available, whether it be flattering or otherwise. Kushner and MacDonald make the case with particular reference to evaluation, but it seems to me equally applicable to applied research in education:

If … a liberal democracy is more than a mere 'mechanism of authorisation', and if, which we consider to be evident, categorical funding strategies constitute potentially dangerous concentrations of single-minded power over educational futures, then that 'legitimacy' should be subject to continuously informed and renewed public consent. Programme evaluators have an opportunity, and we would argue therefore an obligation, to play a role

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[4]A slightly different position may be tenable in an area like defence, where a measure of secrecy may well be in the public interest.

in supporting democratic processes of policy formation and accountability. (Kushner and MacDonald 1987: 153)

Secondly, government departments and local authority officers sometimes act in these circumstances as if they were entirely independent of the public funding which goes to support both their policies and programmes and the research which illuminates these policies and programmes. Yet the real purchasers of this research are not they as individuals but the tax-paying public whom they are supposed to serve. There is then a special argument in the case of the purchase of research by government departments that they act on behalf of a wider public who are actually paying for the research and are entitled by this token as well to access to its findings. It seems to me that in such cases—i.e. where a national or local government department or agency is using public money to commission research into an aspect of public affairs—then there is an extra layer of obligation on both that department and on the researchers to place the knowledge and understanding generated in the public domain.

Yet, as Norris observes with reference to government-sponsored research (and much the same would apply I believe to corporation-sponsored research):

Officially, government departments commission research to support their strategic objectives and continuing responsibilities. One effect of this is that government sponsored research is not only for government but of government. Just as civil servants can never be seen to be critical of ministers or government policy, researchers funded by government risk similar strictures. (Norris 1995: 274)

In 1988 a British Educational Research Association (BERA) seminar on Sponsor Control of Educational Research focused on the increasingly restrictive contracts which UK government departments in particular were seeking to impose on researchers. One paper issuing from this seminar illustrated some of the terms of contracts upon which education researchers had been engaged. These included the following example from a Health Education Authority (HEA) contract:

No information concerning work undertaken by the grant holder at the Authority's expense may be published or released to the press in any form without the prior agreement of the HEA project officer. The term 'published' is defined as 'the communication of such information to anyone other than staff of the grant-holdings institution or of the HEA, or to recognised workers in the same field of inquiry, who shall in turn be required to observe confidentiality as a condition of receipt of such information. (quoted in Bridges et al. 1988: 13)

A second example, from the then Department of Education and Science, carries its sting in its tail:

The Secretary of State shall be consulted before any written statement paper or press notice is published, or press or other conference held in connection with the project or the said materials. A draft of any such written statement, paper or press notice shall be sent to the Secretary of State in sufficient time to allow him a reasonable opportunity to comment on it before the proposed date of publication, and any such publication shall be subject to his approval. (quoted in Bridges et al. 1988: 13)

The precise terms of such contracts have been the focus of some fairly intricate negotiation between HE institutions and government departments in recent years. The distinction drawn above, between the economic or commercial value of research and its moral value has been useful in this context, in that it has been perfectly easy for universities to acknowledge the right of funding bodies to benefit from any commercial exploitation of the research; the issue for them has been their right to independent publication of the educational, social, or political import of the work. BERA adopted a phrase first observed in a Scottish Education Department contract by which the research sponsors agree that the right of the researchers to publish independently out of the research 'will not unreasonably be denied'. The latest (2011) version of the BERA Ethical Code, as we have seen in Chap. 18, has reaffirmed this principle with more comprehensive cautions.

As far as I know there has not yet been any test in the courts of what it might be to act 'unreasonably' in these circumstances, but if the law of copyright is anything to go by, researchers might be disappointed by the courts' response to a legal challenge on this clause. The law of copyright is described as representing 'a complex attempt to balance private right and public interest' (Prime 1992: 110), but from the perspective of democratic accountability with which I have been approaching these issues, the balance seems to be fairly heavily on the side of the rights of the owners of the copyright (i.e. in the case of contract research, typically the Crown or the corporation) or similarly those to whom a duty of confidentiality is owed. Ungoed Thomas summarised the scope of public interest defence in support of the breach of such copyright as follows:

> The defence of public interest clearly covers and … does not extend beyond disclosure … justified in the public interest, of matters carried out or contemplated, in breach of the country's security, or in breach of laws, including statutory duty, fraud, or otherwise destructive of the country or its people, including matters medically dangerous to the public; and doubtless other misdeeds of similar gravity. (Beloff v. Pressdram Ltd 1973 1All ER 241 at p. 260 also quoted with approval in Distillers Co Biochemicals Ltd vTimes Newspapers Ltd 1975 1 All ER 41 at p. 50—see Prime 1992: 111–112)

The most likely fora of contest in education are areas in which, for example, researchers reveal that a minister's or charitable sponsor's favoured educational initiative, launched with much trumpeting of its benefits, is shown to have been grossly mismanaged, to have been ineffectual, and/or to have been perhaps even damaging to the educational interests of those whom it was intended to serve.[5] The research might have even more far-reaching implications—throwing into question perhaps the ideological foundations of government reforms. Now it is interesting to

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[5]I have deliberately chosen not to distinguish here between the issues arising out of evaluation work per se and other forms of, in particular, applied research. I am encouraged in this by Norris's conclusion in his ESRC end-of-award report, 'Evaluation and the profession of research', that: 'in the minds of researchers and research managers there was no clear cut distinction between evaluation and research' (Norris and Pettigrew 1994: 4). MacDonald (1987) defends the distinction, but not, I think, in ways which materially affect the argument in this paper.

consider whether the courts would support a researcher who published such findings in the face of the kind of constraining contracts I have illustrated. Would they be judged as 'misdeeds of similar gravity' to those which threatened public health or national security?

I am not, however, here concerned with the technical legal position so much as the political morality which one might hope that the law would come to reflect. On this question there seems to me to be little doubt:

- that in a democratic society the evidence of bona fide research into education (and indeed other public services) is evidence which ought to be accessible to 'all those who have a right to make informed judgements about whether they can entrust children to the care of compulsory state institutions' (Kushner and MacDonald 1987: 167);
- that neither government departments nor other purchasers of research thereby gain the right to restrict that access (though they may well retain the right to profit from the commercial exploitation of research which they have funded); and
- that contracts purporting to impose such restrictions should either not be entered into by researchers, or be entered into with a willingness to break them in the public interest.

19.6   Some Complexities

It is, however, all too easy to articulate a view of the obligations of university researchers which portrays them as the heroic defenders of the people's right to know against the secrecy and evasiveness of the powerful. Educational researchers can find an attractive identity in the role which Winter has described as the 'professional-as-hero'—'the hero who only just triumphs, by means of the arduous journey … through the series of 'dangerous confrontations' (on the street, in the court, in the lab) with the forces of error and injustice by which professional work is always threatened' (Winter 1987: 99). We ought at least to acknowledge the possibility of both self-conceit and self-deceit in the adoption of this role. The world, including the moral world, is rarely that simple. Researchers (and more especially perhaps those who direct research projects) sit at the nexus of a range of obligations and prudential concerns—and I want to represent at least some of this complexity.

Researchers have, after all, to make a living themselves. They may feel just as acutely in the contract research environment the obligation to secure the next research contract for research assistants who are dependent on them for the next phase of their employment. The consequences of a refusal to agree a research contract on some grounds of principle will rarely be visited on the tenured staff who make the grand moral decision, but rather on short- term contract research assistants and administrative staff who may not even know that such a stand has been taken.

Similarly, researchers or research directors may have to think of the impact on the funding of other (academically satisfactory) activities in their institution if they create a public storm around a major research sponsor. Will they tar the institution with a bad reputation for being troublesome, giving research investors a hard time, failing to give them what they want?

Researchers may build up relations of respect and trust with those for whom they are doing the research, or people who might be affected adversely by the publication of research. 'This respect for the other person as vulnerable and as having entered into a relationship of trust puts considerable constraints upon the evaluator however much public importance he attaches to the information he has' (Pring 1984: 288). Even in, for example, their dealings with a government department, they may encounter well-intentioned professional colleagues who will feel most brutally the consequences of ministers' displeasure if researchers they have hired make public challenge to policies outside their (the underlings') control.

Researchers may acknowledge 'the right of others to preserve a degree of privacy even in matters that affect the public good' (Pring 1984: 279). More pragmatically, they may wish to deny such privacy as a right, but recognise its importance in allowing those in power to change their policies without losing face. Researchers will wrestle with issues of whether they are more likely to achieve change in what they judge to be misguided educational practices by seeking publicly to embarrass their perpetrators, or by working more closely with them in the development of their programmes.

Researchers will in any case be aware of the limitations of their own work and have their own uncertainties about their conclusions. They will know that in a context of public controversy, the subtle and qualified messages of a research paper will become reduced to some crude and perhaps distorted oversimplifications of its conclusions—and that these will in turn be taken over for their own purposes by different political interest groups with which the researchers do not necessarily have any sympathy.

One does not in any case lightly break a contract or enter into one in the prior determination to be willing to break it. Whatever the legal niceties and political demands on one so to do, it remains a form of dishonesty not lightly to be entered into.

Researchers themselves may acknowledge the claims made by, for example, local authority or government department officers that they act on a democratic mandate and within a structure of democratic accountability which gives them better claim than the relatively free-floating and democratically unaccountable researcher to represent the interests of a wider public. The somewhat esoteric nature of the academy undermines researchers' claim to be of the people; they are certainly not appointed by the people; nor is it entirely self-evident that they are operating for the people.

Here, then, are some seven reasons, all of them with an appeal to ethical obligations, any one of which might provide legitimation for the researcher to compromise on a straightforward commitment to putting in the public domain research

findings which a research purchaser wishes to keep confidential. Such pressures for reaching an accommodation with the research purchaser will be legion and seductive—perhaps perfectly legitimate—and it will often be difficult to draw clearly the boundaries between improper collusion and compromise reached with reasonable integrity. There is, then, a conclusion to this discussion for which there are no heroes, no clear overriding principle, simply a complex web of obligations to which each of us will need to respond in ways which will define us individually and socially.

But can we rest content with this? Perhaps we do need 'heroic' academic David's to tackle political Goliaths?

19.7 Educational Research and 'The Delinquent Academy'

Barry MacDonald, who did perhaps as much as anyone both to articulate the democratic functions and obligations of educational researchers and to represent them in his own professional life, tells of a conversation with Maurice Caston (then a civil servant with the Ministry of Education and Secretary to the Schools Council). Caston had listened to MacDonald outlining his ideas about 'democratic evaluation' and responded with his own succinct statement of the researcher's task:

> I get it. There are the good guys and there are the bad guys. We know we're the good guys and we know which are the bad guys—so let's get the buggers! (told in 'CARE as drama: The first 25 years': CARE research seminar 3 February 1997)

'*Écrasez l'infame!*' as Voltaire might have expressed it.

I envy the simplicity of this standpoint, even if I rarely find it in my own professional life. Nevertheless it is a refreshing reminder that researchers have to stand up for something and, by extension, for someone (or vice versa). They are neither neutral in their values nor neutral in terms of the social and political institutions and processes which they challenge or endorse, but individually and collectively we rarely today describe ourselves in terms which render explicit our views of where we stand.

Yet … 'There was a time when men of intellect described the purpose of their lives in ways that stirred the souls of the noble and chilled the blood of the base … "Dare to know!" So Kant defined the function of intellect in a day in which the critical examination of life and society was pursued neither as an amusing pastime nor as a lucrative career, but rather as an act of defiance and of risk' (Roszak 1969: 11).

And what, asks Theodor Roszak, are the imperatives which our students would find inscribed upon their teachers' lives? 'Secure the grant!' 'Update the bibliography!' 'Publish or perish!' (Roszak 1969: 12). His 1967 analysis (this was the date of the original publication) is even more pertinent today than it was half a century ago in the midst of the Vietnam War and campus riots Roszak goes on to attack two

supposedly irreconcilable traditions in American Higher Education.[6] The first is the self-referencing scholarly tradition characterised by 'entrenched social irrelevance' (Roszak 1969: 19) and 'esoteric professionalism' (24).[7] Writing of the academic community in the late 1950s (though the observation is perhaps as relevant today) C. Wright Mills charged:

> They live and work in a benumbing society without living and working in protest and in tension with its moral and cultural insensibilities. They use the liberal rhetoric to cover the conservative default. They do not make available the knowledge and the sensibility required by publics, if publics are to hold responsible those who make decisions 'in the name of the nation'. They do not set forth reasons for human anger and give to it suitable targets. (Mills 1963: 145)

The second and perhaps newer tradition is represented by the 'service station' ideal of education vulgarised by the multi-university: the university which teaches and researches, in Robert Hutchin's words 'anything we can get anybody to pay for' (Roszak 1969: 16). 'The ideal of service,' observes Roszak, 'has matured into a collaboration between the universities, the corporate world, and the government, so indiscriminate that the American welfare state has had no greater difficulty finding hirelings for any project—bar none—than its totalitarian opposite numbers' (Roszak 1969: 17).

Against the dichotomy between these two traditions, Roszak offers a synthesis that draws on the French *philosophes* and their notion of citizenship, not just as a legal status but as a moral vocation:

> For the *philosophe*, intellectuality began at the point where one undertook to make knowledge work. The intellectual was one who intervened in society for the defence of civilised values: free speech, free thought, free inquiry for the sake of reform. He was one who sought to clarify reality so that his fellow citizens could apply reason to the solution of their problems … It meant performing the service of criticising, clarifying, dissenting, resisting, deriding, exposing: in brief, educating in the fullest sense of the word as a member of 'the party of humanity'. (Roszak 1969: 32)

This vision of the moral and civic duty of the intellectual (and I want to extend this, I hope without too much difficulty, to include the educational researcher) was well articulated in a statement in defence of academic freedom produced by the American Association of University Professors at its inauguration in 1915:

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[6]There is, of course, a continuing and more contemporary literature around these issues (see for example Bloom 1987; Pelikan 1992; Barzun 1993; Cole et al. 1994; Readings 1996; Menand 1996; Smith and Webster 1997; Barnett 1997), but Roszak's early, trenchant, passionate, and succinct laying out of the issues is a fresh and pertinent today as it was then and I am happy to continue to use it as my point of reference.

[7]Of the academic conference, Roszak observes: 'What does it imply when those who are particularly charged with the cultivation and defence of civilised values come together year after year ostensibly to make a collective assertion of their identity as teachers and scholars, but in reality with no more socially significant purpose in mind than an assembly of plumbers or hotel managers? (Roszak 1969: 22–23).

> The responsibility of the university teacher is primarily to the public itself, and to the judgement of his own profession … in the essentials of his professional activity his duty is to the wider public to which the institution itself is morally amenable … One of the university's most characteristic functions in a democratic society is to help make public opinion more self-critical and more circumspect, to check the more hasty and unconsidered impulses of popular feeling, to train the democracy to the habit of looking before and after. It is precisely this function of the university which is most injured by any restriction upon academic freedom. (AAUP 1915: 26 and 32)

What all this offers, then, is a vision—an ideal perhaps—of the university academic/intellectual/teacher/researcher as having a fundamental duty of intellectual citizenship which requires him or her to inform their fellow citizens and to enable them to be more questioning and self-critical, but above all to be enabling of the processes of challenge and criticism which are directed at those in power. Other 'researchers'—consultants perhaps, or in-house employees—may provide the kind of tightly circumscribed investigations which are characteristic of the service function of the multiversity. The particular onus on the university and its researchers is precisely to place some of those defined boundaries under question, to ensure that a wider rather than a narrower public is equipped to engage in the questioning, to provide for, in Norris and Pettigrew's terms:

> the production of knowledge with the potential for creating uncontrolled informed discourse and alternative authoritative views about the public sphere than those that are officially sanctioned or useful. (Norris and Pettigrew 1994: 4)

This is the spirit in which they must continue to approach 'contract research', and it is in this spirit too that they must continue to resist, to challenge, and to subvert some of the more restrictive terms under which such contracts are offered.

By contrast, however, the new contract research environment threatens what Derber (1982) calls the 'proletarianisation' of researchers and the commodification of the knowledge they produce. Derber distinguishes between two notions of proletarianisation of professionals which, I think, illuminate some of the consequences of the commodification of research for the roles and professionalism of researchers: 'ideological proletarianisation', where professionals are expected to have specialised skills but are increasingly stripped of choice and authority to move beyond their designated areas of work—they lose control of the research agenda and the scope for critical positioning—and 'technical proletarianisation', which involves a loss of control over the work process itself (Derber 1982). Some contemporary research contracts, which not only set the research agenda (and its boundaries) but also prescribe and provide oversight of its modes of inquiry, threaten proletarianisation on both counts.

But how are such tendencies to be resisted? Norris and Pettigrew (1994) offer a range of useful strategies for such resistance or subversion:

(i) exploiting discrepancies between the contract and proposal (ii) appending to the contract statements about freedom to publish (iii) preparing the ground for the reception of bad news (iv) threatening to expose any attempt at censorship or suppression—especially to powerful people or bodies (v) getting reports leaked

(vi) ensuring that short-term evaluative research is part of longer term and more general research programmes. (Norris and Pettigrew 1994: 12)

A *Times Higher Education Supplement* leader on the reported repression of research scientists' work on BSE pointed out, however, that the conditions of independence among researchers lie not just in their individual courage and defiance, but in the support they receive from their institutions and, in particular, the heads of those institutions:

> The failure of scientists to speak up is the weakness of universities in defending their research staff. Cutting-edge research that may seem obscure can have direct human effects, and scientists who make significant breakthroughs can be marginalised at critical moments. Given all the uncertainties that surround their work, if scientists are to make their voices heard in a timely way so that members of the public can assess the risks they face, someone needs to ensure that scientists do not suffer for it. (Times Higher Education Supplement 2000: 16)

And yet, as the article goes on to point out, many academics have no more confidence in the commitment of their contemporary managers to support their academic independence (especially at the price of lucrative research contracts) than they have in government or other patrons.

Of course, some of the strategies proposed by Norris and Pettigrew would require researchers to offend one general moral principle (notably that of honesty) in order to protect other academic or broader social values. Some might well argue that allegiance to the principle of honesty (*a fortiori* in the case of an academic researcher) is a categorical one not amenable to situational concessions (though cf. Bok 1978 on *Lying*). Others, that the allegiance requires one to seek to maximise people's access to honest understanding in a political context in which the powerful will often act so as to limit that access—and that limited dishonest acts may be a necessary part of securing the best aggregate of honest understanding in an imperfect world. 'At times', suggests House (1980) 'evaluators may have to resort to their consciences rather than to their contracts.' Such moral dilemmas become more commonplace as research operates at the interface of very different cultures (academia and government, or academia and commerce) rather than within the more protected groves of academia alone.

A democratic citizenry may sensibly decide, however, that it does not wish to pin its hopes for honest information on the way in which researchers and contractors resolve such dilemmas or on the moral and political steeliness of researcher's defence of an open society. They might prudently resolve to sustain their own access to the fruits of academic research and to support a strong tradition of public-domain research by continuing to fund that research through the traditional channels of unhypothecated core research funding for universities—although if university researchers are really to serve the democratic polity and not just their own self-referencing interest group, they will need not only to maintain sources of funding which are relatively free from sponsor control, but also to change radically both the media and the language through which their works have traditionally found 'publication'. The readership of papers published in the enormous proliferation of

academic journals is barely perceptible within the academic community itself; they can make no claim to address the kind of wider population of the disempowered. However, as MacDonald and Norris conclude:

> If we *are* in the business of helping all people to choose between alternative societies, that is, to enter into the democratic political process, then it is essential to help effect a more equitable access to the policy making, policy implementation and policy evaluation processes of our societies. We will be stretching what political good will there is in the system to its limits. We will be testing the commitment to the justifying principles of liberal democracy, the egalitarian maximisation of utilities and powers. Yet we can do no less if we want to actualise our mission as a disinterested service to the liberal democratic impulse. (MacDonald and Norris 1982: 16)

19.8   Commodification, Corruption, and Control

I have expressed epistemological, moral, and political objections to the sorts of constraints on research that are associated with contracts which bestow 'ownership' of the research in the hands of the contractor and with this control over both its conduct and its publication. But I have also hinted at what is almost an ontological objection to treating research on a par with a sack of coal or other 'commodity'. Instinctively I feel that research is *just not that sort of thing,* but let me examine a little more loosely the notion of commodification and the particular commodity which is educational research.

Brown describes commodification in terms that closely reflect the attitude of the Director of Education to whom I referred earlier and also my response:

> commodification refers to the social process whereby a person or thing becomes understood as a 'mere thing,' as entirely separate from the people and that give it meaning. Commodities are seen as commensurable with each other through the medium of money. When academic research becomes a commodity, it loses any explicit association with either particular scientific communities or society as a whole, and it becomes reduced to a possession of individual agents that can be exchanged on the market. (Brown 2010: 1–2)

He distinguishes two kinds of objection to this kind of commodification—coercion arguments and corruption arguments:

> Coercion arguments focus on how money, power, and other resources are socially distributed, and whether uneven distribution enables some people to exercise undue power over others. Corruption arguments focus on what money can buy, and whether some things should not be for sale. (Brown 2010: 2).

It is the corruption argument that interests me here. This points to 'the degrading effect of market valuation and exchange on certain goods and practices' (Sandel 1998: 94). There are some things that cannot be bought ('Can't buy me love', as The Beatles explained); but there are other things that should not be thought of in relation to their commercial value, because of their incommenurability and/or because they become degraded, corrupted, if treated in this way.

The examples that Sandel gives include the commercialisation of prison services, the sale of babies, surrogate motherhood (for payment), the sale of human organs, the sale of sexual services, 'the marketing of "Ivy League" sperm' (a new perspective for me on the financial returns of a higher education!). I think that some popular objections to the privatisation of public health provision or public education and the selling off of national heritage sites are of a similar character, i.e. these are the sort of things that belong in public hands to be employed for public benefit under public scrutiny, not things hived off for private profit. Moreover, if they are sold off like this then it is an affront to their very nature.

In the case of university-based educational research, it is not necessarily that it is being 'sold off' in order that someone else can make a profit from it (these will be exceptional cases rather than the rule). The issue under the more restrictive contracts is, as Derber, whom I cited earlier, pointed out, one of control, power, governance. In agreeing to such contracts, universities are placing the fruits of their research labours in the hands, not of the academic community, nor of the general public, but of their political masters and mistresses. This is the 'corruption' that is the consequence of conceiving of research as a commodity to be bought and sold.

19.9 Summary and Conclusion

  (i) I hope to have illustrated ways in which important ethical, social, and political issues are raised for the educational and social science research community, and for the wider polity, by the commodification of research through the development by government—as well as private corporations and charities—of contract research on a commercial model.

 (ii) I have focused in particular on the restrictive view of the ownership of research and its governance which dominates this model, and its consequences both for wider public access to the research and for access to it by the research community.

(iii) I have acknowledged that those who make a financial investment in research are entitled within reason to whatever economic or commercial return that investment might provide, but that …

(iv) As far as possible the largely non-competitive 'moral' benefits of that research should be made as widely available as possible.

 (v) Within a democratic polity, it is difficult to see how anyone, and least of all government, can justify any kind of restriction on public access to research findings about educational policy and practice. Such information is a condition of people exercising intelligent and autonomous judgment in fundamental areas of human wellbeing. This applies *a fortiori* in the case of government departments which are, after all, spending public money.

(vi) Following Roszak, I have offered a vision of the university researcher as having a duty of 'intellectual citizenship' which places on him or her a special obligation to support fellow citizens in the processes of challenge

and criticism of those in power—an obligation which should reinforce researchers' determination to oppose and subvert attempts by those in power to stifle or contain such criticism.

(vii) There are more specific arguments which focus on the case for contracted research being exposed to the critical scrutiny of the research community—without which the research process is in any case significantly incomplete and without which the research risks 'epistemic drift' in the form of the replacement of the standards of research design and validity of the research community by whatever requirements satisfy the research sponsor.

(viii) Treating research like any other commodity, as something that can be bought and sold without loss. Can itself be corrupting of the research itself and the purposes and people it should be allowed to serve.

(ix) And yet few of these issues turn out to be quite so straightforward in practice. Researchers may have duties of prudence both to themselves and their colleagues—especially perhaps where others will actually have to bear the painful consequences of the researcher's noble moral stand; attachment to the principle of honesty may limit the range of subterfuges and subversive acts which they will feel it legitimate to use even against agencies most deeply in offence against open and democratic principles.

But, finally, the educational and social science research sector risks moral as well as epistemic drift if it does not take its stand on some values. With Howe (1998) I hold that 'although significantly flawed, much of the emancipatory project of modernity can be and ought to be preserved' and, further, that 'the task of social research and philosophy is to see this project through.' (Howe 1998: 12).[8] However, neither the tradition of socially isolated scholarship nor subservience to the market provide the kind of purpose which, according to Roszak, 'stirred the souls of the noble and chilled the blood of the base' in the age of the *philosophes*. The notion of 'intellectual citizenship', and the duties which might be attached to such citizenship, may provide some leverage on, though I suspect little comfort in, the moral complexities which I have attempted to describe.

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[8]To be more precise, I would prefer to say that this is one of the tasks. It seems to me that the postmodernist enthusiasm for deconstructing, de-normalising and de-stabilising not only has a place in social science and philosophy but that it can also contribute to the emancipatory project (modernist or otherwise).

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Chapter 20
'Nothing About Us Without Us': The Ethics of Outsider Research

Abstract Although the dichotomy between 'insider' and 'outsider' in the relationship between educational researchers and those being researched is one that is regularly employed, the chapter begins by challenging it—primarily on the grounds that people have multiple identities which frequently render them outsiders in certain respects and insiders in others. Nevertheless the chapter continues to employ the contrast and examines reasons why outsiders might be disqualified from research relationships with, in particular, already 'disempowered' communities. These reasons are organised under four propositions, each of which is considered in detail: that only insiders can properly understand and represent their particular experience; that outsiders import inappropriate and damaging frameworks of understanding; that outsiders exploit research participants from the communities they are researching; and that outsiders disempower participants from inside the community being researched. While the author recognises the force of some of these arguments, none of them, he suggests, constitute a knock-down argument for excluding the outsider, even if they make compelling demands on the way in which the research is conducted.

> If we have learned one thing from the civil rights movement in the US, it's that when others speak for you, you lose. (Ed Roberts, a leading figure in the Disability Rights Movement, quoted in Driedger 1989: 28)

20.1 Introduction

The relationship between researcher and researched has become a matter of intense controversy in a number of apparently very different contexts. These have, nevertheless, certain key features in common: they are all contexts in which groups of people who define themselves as 'disempowered' resist the 'intrusions' of

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researchers from outside their own community or at least the current terms of such intrusion. More accurately, some of their members define them as disempowered; not all would necessarily agree. Dangerously perhaps, I shall take this self-designation as given for the purpose of this discussion. In the recent literature these groups have included: women, people with disabilities, gays and lesbians, and indigenous people in societies dominated by white former colonialists. In treating these together I fall into something close to what one writer describes as 'the new feminist mantra (of) integrated analysis of race, class, gender, ethnicity, sexuality' (Patai 1994: 61). This arises simply from the observation that the issues are defined and discussed in very much the same terms across these different spheres of activism and inquiry (even if their 'literatures' are developed by and large in self-referencing silos). Cases have been made by reference to, and on behalf of, each of these communities that are critical of research into their experience conducted by people from outside their communities. It is argued, *a fortiori*, that research into this experience should be conducted by people from within the community. 'Nothing about us without us' is, for example, the striking slogan that has emerged from the disability camp (see Charlton 1998), while in New Zealand there is a growing body of Maori educational researchers whose motto might be encapsulated as 'by Maori, in Maori, for Maori' (Marshall and Martin 2000—see also on this Marshall and Peters 1989; Peters et al. 1989; and Marshall and Peters 1995). In this chapter I shall explore more closely the nature of these arguments and the ethical and epistemological costs of sustaining them. I shall argue for the importance of retaining a role for outsider research in such communities, though one which must operate under appropriate ethical constraints and on the basis of proper human respect and care.

20.2 Dissolving the 'Insider'/'Outsider' Dichotomy?

I need from the start to observe (and I am, of course, not alone in this) that the distinction, the polarity, which I am sustaining here between the insider and the outsider researcher should itself be challenged. Even with generalised identities such as 'disabled', 'blacks', or 'working class', it is not always very obvious who is inside and who outside the group. However, as we add more descriptors to define the identity of any given community (for example, black, middle class, female, graduate) we are more likely to create people who stand in relation to it in some respects as an insider and in some as an outsider (for example, they are black, middle class, and female but not graduates or they are female graduates but not middle class or black). My own recent research in Kazakhstan involved fieldwork with two colleagues, one of whom had grown up in Ukraine and one in Belarus. Although these were strangers to Kazakhstan, interviewees in Kazakhstan quickly recognised that my colleagues shared a 'Soviet' history and educational experience with them ('You, as a Soviet person, should remember this', said one), and this seemed to open up the interviews (Fimyar 2015: 1527). Olena Fimyar (the

Ukrainian) subsequently wrote about the way she drew on her own early experience to help her interpret what she encountered in Kazakhstan:

> By embracing the possibility of re-visiting our Soviet childhood, we were encouraging our 'children's voice to fully participate in writing, interpretation and analysis. Born and raised in the two republics of the former Soviet Union, Kazakhstan and Ukraine, and later educated to degree level in UK universities we, as authors of the paper have acquired what Pavlenko calls 'the joys', and we also add the burdens, of 'double vision' … Being able to see close and far, we encouraged both our 'expert' voice and 'children's' voice to equally participate in the study (Fimyar 2015: 1526; the Pavlenko reference is to Pavlenko 2003: 182).

Griffiths refers to Haw's (1998, 1996) research on Muslim girls as an illustration of the 'different set of ways in which researchers have to negotiate a complex set of insider-outsider identifications' (Griffiths 1998: 138). In this instance Haw was partly an outsider in her research setting (white, non-believing, but of Christian heritage) and partly an insider (female, ex-teacher, British). Besides, as Razavi (1992) acknowledges, the insider researcher will always be something of an outsider in his or her own community by virtue of becoming a researcher, *a fortiori* in any community which is itself culturally remote from the world of academe. 'By virtue of being a researcher, one is rarely a complete insider anywhere …' (Razavi 1992: 161).[1]

Unsurprisingly, one site in which insider/outsider relations have been extensively explored is that of international and comparative education, of which much of the literature (necessarily, given its subject matter) occupies a space between or across these insider/outsider perspectives. Almost every paper in the book *Revisiting insider/outsider research in comparative and international education* (Crossley et al. 2016) emphasises the misleading polarity associated with the insider/outsider distinction, largely for the reasons I have already indicated (here and in the 2001 version of this chapter). The discussion invokes notions of 'multiple identities', 'fluid identity', a 'third space' between observers and participants in which meaning is co-constructed—and yet the insider/outsider distinction continues to be employed. Perhaps it helps, rather than personalising a researcher, as an 'outsider' or 'insider', to construct the language as an abstract noun and talk about our insiderness and outsiderness—given that both are present in some measure in any relationship between one person and a given community.

'Debates [about the pros and cons of being one side or another of the insider/outsider divide] are fundamentally flawed because they do not take into account individuals' multiple identities, which enable them to move fluidly between groups' writes Savvides (Savvides et al. 2016: 115). With this acknowledgment, I will nevertheless fall back on the crude distinction (as indeed do most of the contributors to the book referred to above), because even in the individual

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[1]See also Phurutse's (2000) account of his reflections on his experience as a member of a scholarly community conducting an ethnographic study of the experiences of children at school in his own village in the Northern Province of South Africa, which is the subject of interesting discussion in Pendlebury and Enslin (2001).

experience of 'a complex set of insider-outsider identifications', we are pulled by the demands and expectations of these different roles, just as the fact that one might talk about good or evil does not mean that a particular individual can be characterised entirely by reference to one or the other.

The arguments in support of the exclusion of outsider researchers (let us perhaps understand this as a reference to researchers perceived predominantly as outsiders) from disempowered communities seem to me to be of three kinds:

(i) epistemological arguments that an outsider *cannot* understand or represent accurately a particular kind of experience and about the inappropriate explanatory frameworks which outsiders bring with them to their research and which provide the grounding for the argument that they *should not* attempt to do so;

(ii) more directly ethical arguments to do with exploitative or disrespectful behaviour of researchers;

(iii) ethico-political arguments about the disempowering effects of having others articulate your views for you.

In the following sections I shall represent and comment on each of these in turn.

20.3 Only Insiders Can Properly Represent the Experience of a Community

First, it is argued that only those who have shared in and have been part of a particular experience can understand or can properly understand (and perhaps 'properly' is particularly heavily loaded here) what it is like. You need to be a woman to understand what it is like to live as a woman; to be disabled to understand what it is like to live as a disabled person, and so on. Thus Charlton writes of 'the innate inability of able-bodied people, regardless of fancy credentials and awards, to understand the disability experience' (Charlton 1998: 128).

Charlton's choice of language here is indicative of the rhetorical character which these arguments tend to assume. This arises perhaps from the strength of feeling, including perhaps the pain, from which they issue, but it warns of a need for caution in their treatment and acceptance. Even if able-bodied people have this 'inability', it is difficult to see in what sense it is 'innate'. Are all credentials 'fancy' or might some (e.g. those reflecting a sustained, humble, and patient attempt to grapple with the issues) be pertinent to that ability? And does Charlton really wish to maintain that there is a single experience which is *the* experience of disability, whatever solidarity disabled people might feel for each other?

The understanding that any of us have about our own conditions or experience is unique and special, though recent work on personal narratives also shows that it is itself multilayered and inconstant, i.e. that we have and can provide many different understandings even of our own lives (see, for example, Tierney 1993).

Nevertheless, our own understanding has a special status: it provides among other things a data source for others' interpretations of our actions; it stands in a unique relationship to our own experiencing; and no-one else can have quite the same understanding. It is also plausible that people who share certain kinds of experience in common stand in a special position in terms of understanding those shared aspects of experience. However, once this argument is applied to such broad categories as 'women' or 'blacks', it has to deal with some very heterogeneous groups; the different social, personal, and situational characteristics that constitute their individuality may well outweigh the shared characteristics; and there may indeed be greater barriers to mutual understanding than there are gateways.[2]

These arguments, however, all risk a descent into solipsism: if our individual understanding is so particular, how can we have communication with, or any understanding of, anyone else? But, granted Wittgenstein's persuasive argument against a private language (Wittgenstein 1963, perhaps more consecutively presented in Rhees 1970), we cannot in these circumstances even describe or have any real understanding of our own condition in such an isolated world. Rather it is in talking to each other, in participating in a shared language, that we construct the conceptual apparatus that allows us to understand our own situation in relation to others—and this is a construction which involves understanding differences as well as similarities.

Besides, we have good reason to treat with some scepticism accounts provided by individuals of their own experience and by extension accounts provided by members of a particular category or community of people. We know that such accounts can be riddled with special pleading, selective memory, careless error, self-centredness, myopia, prejudice, and a good deal more. A lesbian scholar illustrates some of the pressures that can bear, for example, on an insider researcher in her own community:

> As an insider, the lesbian has an important sensitivity to offer, yet she is also more vulnerable than the non-lesbian researcher, both to the pressure from the heterosexual world—that her studies conform to previous works and describe lesbian reality in terms of its relationship with the outside—and to pressure from the inside, from within the lesbian community itself—that her studies mirror not the reality of that community but its self-protective ideology. (Kreiger 1982: 108)

In other words, while individuals from within a community have access to a particular kind of understanding of their experience, this does not automatically attach special authority (though it might attach special interest) to their own representations of that experience. Stronach argued powerfully:

> To be an insider is, first of all to belong. But to belong is not to understand: it is to be in the know rather than to know—that is, to know in the critical, assumption-challenging, idea-transforming sense that the idea of 'education' carries with it. (Stronach 1989: 3)

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[2]I recall in Ethiopia the bewilderment of local villagers encountering Rastafarians from Jamaica and the US who arrived convinced of their shared histories and identities.

Moreover, while we might acknowledge the limitations of the understanding which someone from outside a community (or someone other than the individual who is the focus of the research) can develop, this does not entail that they cannot develop and present an understanding, or that such understanding is worthless. Individuals can indeed find benefit in the understandings which others offer of their experience in, for example, a counselling relationship, or when a researcher adopts a supportive role with teachers engaged in reflection on or research into their own practice. Many have echoed the plea of the Scottish poet, Robert Burns (in 'To a louse'):

> O wad some Pow'r the giftie gie us
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> To see oursels as others see us![3]

—even if they might be horrified with what such power revealed to them. Russell argued that it was the function of philosophy (and why not research too?) 'to suggest many possibilities which enlarge our thoughts and free them from the tyranny of custom … It keeps alive our sense of wonder by showing familiar things in an unfamiliar aspect' (Russell 1912: 91).

'Making the familiar strange and the strange familiar',[4] often requires the assistance of someone unfamiliar with our own world who can look at our taken for granted experience through, precisely, the eye of a stranger. Sparkes (1994) writes very much in these terms in describing his own research, as a white, heterosexual, middle-aged male into the life history of a lesbian PE teacher. He describes his own struggle with the question 'is it possible for heterosexual people to undertake research into homosexual populations?' but he concludes that being a 'phenomenological stranger' who asks 'dumb questions' may be a useful and illuminating experience for the research subject in that they may have to return to first principles in reviewing their story. This could, of course, be an elaborate piece of self- justification, but it is interesting that someone like Max Biddulph, who writes from a gay/bisexual standpoint, can quote this conclusion with apparent approval (Biddulph 1996).

People from outside a community clearly can have *an* understanding of the experience of those who are inside that community. It is almost certainly a *different* understanding from that of the insiders. Writing about his own research with a deaf community, Lane (1992) distinguishes, for example, between coming to know a culture from the inside as a 'native speaker' and knowing it from the outside as a trained and attentive listener. Whether such outsider accounts are of any value will depend, among other things, on the extent to which the listeners have immersed

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[3]For the benefit of international readers, this transcribes (with some loss) into standard English as 'Oh would some Power give us the gift to see ourselves as others see us!'.

[4]In educational research circles the phrase is sometimes attributed to Lawrence Stenhouse, but it has a much longer history, not only in its natural home of anthropology but also in the context of art (Paul Klee and Russian formalist critics like Victor Shklovsky), in drama (Brecht's notion of 'alienation'), and in poetry (Eliot, Coleridge, and the German poet Novalia aka Friedrich von Hardenberg (1772–1801). It is clearly a fertile idea.

themselves in the world of the other and portrayed it in its richness and complexity; on the empathy and imagination which they have brought to their inquiry and writing; on whether their stories are honest, responsible, and critical (Barone 1992). Nevertheless, this value will also depend on qualities derived from the researchers' externality: their capacity to relate one set of experiences to others (perhaps from their own community); their outsider perspective on the structures which surround and help to define the experience of the community; on the reactions and responses to that community of individuals and groups external to it.[5]

Finally, it must surely follow that if we hold that a researcher, who (to take the favourable case) seeks honestly, sensitively, and with humility to understand and to represent the experience of a community to which he or she does not belong, is incapable of such understanding and representation, then how can he or she understand either that same experience as mediated through the research of someone from that community? The argument which excludes the outsider from understanding a community through the effort of their own research, *a fortiori* excludes the outsider from that understanding through the secondary source in the form of the effort of an insider researcher or indeed any other means. Again, the point can only be maintained by insisting that a particular and itself ill-defined understanding is the only kind of understanding which is worth having.

The epistemological argument (that outsiders *cannot* understand the experience of a community to which they do not belong) becomes an ethical argument when this is taken to entail the further position that they *ought not* therefore attempt to research that community. I hope to have shown that this argument is based on a false premise. Even if the premise were sound, however, it would not necessarily follow that researchers should be prevented or excluded from attempting to understand this experience, unless it could be shown that in so doing they would cause some harm. This is indeed part of the argument emerging from disempowered communities and it is to this that I shall now turn.

20.4   Outsiders Import Damaging Frameworks of Understanding

Frequent in the literature about research into disability, women's experience, race, and homosexuality is the claim that people from outside these particular communities will import into their research, for example, homophobic, sexist, or racist frameworks of understanding, which are offensive or damaging to those being researched.

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[5]This is not to imply that insider researchers are incapable of some of that externality too. An Iranian researcher, writing about her enquiry into absentee landlords in her own country, explains: 'The fact that I am "one of them" does not mean that I am incapable of analysing them … This, I think, arises from being a researcher, which makes total immersion very difficult; it distances the researcher even from her or his own supposed class and sub-culture' (Razavi 1992: 161).

In the case of research into disability it has been argued that outsider researchers carry with them assumptions that the problem of disability lies with the disabled rather than with the society which frames and defines disability. 'The essential problem of recent anthropological work on culture and disability is that it perpetuates outmoded beliefs and continues to distance research from lived oppression' (Charlton 1998: 27). By contrast: 'a growing number of people with disabilities have developed a consciousness that transforms the notion and concept of disability from a medical condition to a political and social condition' (Charlton 1998: 17). Charlton goes on to criticise, for example, a publication by Ingstad and Reynolds Whyte (1995), *Disability and Culture*. He claims that, although it does add to our understanding of how the conceptualisation and symbolisation of disability takes place, 'its language and perspective are still lodged in the past. In the first 40 pages alone we find the words suffering, lameness, interest group, incapacitated, handicapped, deformities. Notions of oppression, dominant culture, justice, human rights, political movement, and self- determination are conspicuously absent' (Charlton 1998: 27).

In her discussion of the 'neocolonialism' of outsider research into Maori experience, Smith extends this type of claim to embrace the wider methodological and metaphysical framing of outsider research: 'From an indigenous perspective Western research is more than just research that is located in a positivist tradition. It is research which brings to bear, on any study of indigenous peoples, a cultural orientation, a set of values, a different conceptualisation of such things as time, space and subjectivity, different and competing theories of knowledge, highly specialised forms of language, and structures of power' (Smith 1999: 42; see also, for example, Ladner 1971 and Foster 1994).[6] Krupat presents a similar complaint from a different continent—this time from Hopi Tribal Council Chairman Vernon Masayesva, who writes: 'Research needs to be based on the reality of our (Hopi) existence as we experience it, not just from the narrow and limited view American universities carried over from the German research tradition' (quoted in Krupat 1993: xix).

It is a small step from the observation of (i) differences between the metaphysical assumptions of different peoples and (ii) the evident social and political dominance of some of these peoples over others to (iii) analysis of this combination of circumstances in terms of, as Scheurich and Young have put it, 'civilisational racism'. Their accusation is that historically an almost exclusively White group of philosophers, writers, politicians, corporate leaders, social scientists, and educational leaders 'have constructed the world we live in—named it, discussed it, explained it. It is they who have developed the ontological and axiological categories or concepts like individuality, truth, education, free enterprise, good conduct, social welfare etc. that we use to think … And it is these epistemologies and their

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[6]For a particularly interesting collection of papers on different culturally embedded philosophical perspectives and their implications for researchers see Marshall's special 2000 edition of *Educational Philosophy and Theory* on 'Education and cultural difference'.

allied ontologies and axiologies, taken together as a lived web or fabric of social constructions, that make or construct "the world" or "the real" (and that relegate other socially constructed "worlds", like that of African Americans or the Cherokee, to the "margins" of our social life and to the margins in terms of legitimated research epistemologies)' (Scheurich and Young 1997: 8). In terms of my immediate discussion of the ethics of outsider research, the implication of this sort of analysis is that, in some settings at least in which differences of power are linked with differences of 'civilisation', the outsider researcher risks, along with any other form of oppressive behaviour, the additional charge of 'civilisational racism'.

Scheurich and Young open up a much wider set of issues than I can deal with here. They seem to me to labour rather heavily under the ethnocentrism which they try to lay bare. They can succeed in labelling the creators of 'our' world views as all White only if they ignore the contribution of such people of colour as Jesus of Nazareth, Buddha, Confucius, Mohammed, Lao Tse, and the authors of the Hindu sacred texts. If 'the world in which *we* live' includes the world in which *all* human beings live, then 'we' will certainly not escape the profoundly formative influence of their thought and that of many others—and this applies to contemporary populations of the United States, Australasia, and Europe as well as those of Asia and Africa. Similarly, Scheurich and Young seem to share a naïve view of the unity of 'African' thought. It may well be that shared experience of oppression in the United States has given African Americans a sense of shared identity, civilisation, or even epistemology, but it needs little examination of world views of the peoples of the African continent itself (compare, for example, the ancient Coptic tradition of the Amhara people of Ethiopia with the Berbers of North Africa, the Hausa of West Africa, and the Bantu of the South) to see that there is huge diversity. These observations may of course be taken as data to support their own thesis regarding the ethnocentricism of the educational research community. It might also be offered as a warning as to the unreflexive character of their own position.

The case for the exclusion of educational researchers on the grounds of their ethnocentrism requires, I think, some limitation. Firstly, researchers are clearly not immune from some of the damaging and prejudicial attitudes on matters of race, sexuality, disability, and gender which are found among the rest of the population, though I might hope that their education, training, and experience might give them above average awareness of these issues and above average alertness to their expression in their own work. Even where such attitudes remain in researchers' consciousness, this intelligent self-awareness and social sensitivity mean on the whole that they are able to deploy sufficient self-censorship not to expose it in a damaging way. Researchers may thus remain morally culpable for their thoughts, but, at least, communities can be spared the harm of their expression. It is also a matter of some significance that researchers are more exposed than most to public criticism, not least from critics from within these disempowered communities, when such prejudices do enter and are revealed in their work. If they employ the rhetoric of, for example, anti-racist or anti-sexist conviction, they are at least in their public pronouncements exposed to the humiliation of being hoisted by their own petard. It is difficult to see the fairness in excluding all outsider researchers on the a priori

supposition of universal prejudice. It is better, surely, to expose and challenge it where it is revealed.

Secondly, it is plainly not the case that Western research is located exclusively (as is implied by Smith) in a positivist tradition, even if this tradition has been a dominant one. Phenomenology, ethnography, life history, even, more recently, the use of narrative fiction poetry and performance as forms of research representation, are all established ingredients of the educational research worlds in the UK, USA, Australasia, and elsewhere (and in Chap. 2 I discussed some of the complexities which arise from this very diversity). Contemporary research literature abounds with critiques of positivism as well as examples of its continuing expression.

Scheurich and Young, however, press the argument a stage further. Not only positivism but 'neo-realisms, postpositivisms, interpretivisms, constructivisms, the critical tradition, and postmodernisms/poststructuralisms' are all the 'legitimated ways of knowing' of a 'racially exclusive group' (Scheurich and Young 1997: 8).

But even if the observation about the racial character of the people who developed these ways of thinking were correct, this does not in itself imply that these ways of thinking are neither accessible to nor useful to people of different races. The fact that Christian teaching was largely generated by a Jew and a number of his disciples of several nationalities in what today we think of as the Arab world, and that its dissemination was substantially assisted by the imperial ambitions of the Romans is a matter of historical interest, but none of these are considerations count for much in my own assessment of the merits or otherwise of the teaching or the ideas which underpin it—and nor, I think, should they. The cultural distance between Buddhism and 'Western' thought (a tired concept that hardly reflects the heterogeneity and mobility of the contemporary world) may make it more difficult for Western people to access, but it does not stop people who have caught a glimpse of its wisdom from determining to engage with it, to understand it better, and to lead a life informed by its teaching. My point is simply that stories about the social and historical origins and origination of particular bodies of thought, or systems of thought, do not in themselves constitute grounds for deciding whether they do or do not make a helpful contribution to our understanding of, or our enquiry into, the world we inhabit.

I am also unconvinced that the alternatives which are sometimes proposed really take us into any very different territory. After all, most of what educational researchers are inclined to present as the most radical and critical contemporary thinking are rehearsals of some pretty ancient debates—their novelty being sustained only by a systematic ignorance of the history of thought. Scheurich and Young do acknowledge (1997: 10) that some of the 'new' race-based epistemologies are in fact historically 'old'. However, even the example they appear to quote with favour as an example of a distinctive 'Afrocentric feminist epistemology' appears readily locatable within the contemporary canon of 'White' qualitative research methodologies. I refer to Collins's chapter 'Toward an Afrocentric feminist epistemology' in her book *Black Feminist Thought* (1991), in which she names as the four characteristics of her race-based epistemology: 'concrete experience as a criterion of meaning' (Collins 1991: 208–212); 'the use of dialogue in assessing

knowledge claims' (212–215); 'the ethic of caring' (215–217); and 'the ethic of personal accountability' (217–219). Leaving aside for the moment the question raised by the presentation of ethical principles as epistemological ones (see Chap. 22 on this), this is surely familiar enough ground to any contemporary ethnographer drawing on sources which predate by a long way the presentation of these ideas as either Afrocentric or feminist?

There clearly are circumstances in the relationship between (outsider) researchers and any given community in which the researchers are open to the charge of importing all sorts of presuppositions which are not shared by that community, of seeing the world through perspectives which they do not share, of requiring forms of validation for opinion or belief which are different from the forms which satisfy them. There does seem to me to be an onus on the researcher: (i) to be alert to these possibilities; and (ii) to provide research participants with their own opportunity to observe them and, where appropriate to have such observation on the record (which does not necessarily mean that the researcher has to defer to them). Here, as elsewhere, I have placed considerable weight in these considerations on the importance of any research being exposed to criticism—most importantly, perhaps, but by no means exclusively, by the people whose experience it claims to portray or represent. This principle is not simply an ethical principle associated with the obligations which a researcher might accept towards participants in the research. It is a fundamental feature of the processes of research and its claims to command our attention. It is precisely exposure to, modification through, and survival of a process of vigorous public scrutiny that provides research with whatever authority it can claim.

In contemporary ethnographic, case study, and life history research, for example, this expectancy of exposure to correction and criticism is one which runs right through the research process. The methodological requirement is for participants to have several opportunities to challenge any prejudices which researchers may bring with them: at the point in which the terms of the research are first negotiated and they agree to participate (or not); during any conversations or interviews that take place in the course of the research; in responding to any record which is produced of the data gathering; in response to any draft or final publication. Indeed, engagement with a researcher provides any group with what is potentially a richly educative opportunity: an opportunity to open the researcher's eyes and to help him or her see things differently. It is, moreover, an opportunity which any researcher worth his or her salt will welcome.

Not all researchers or research processes will be as open to those educative opportunities as is described here, and not all participants (least of all those who are self- defining as 'disempowered') will feel the confidence to take them even if they are there. This may be seen as a reason to set up barriers to the outsider researcher, but they can and should more often be seen as problems for researchers and participants to address together in the interests of their mutual understanding and benefit.

Notwithstanding these considerations, one of the chief complaints coming out of disempowered communities is that this kind of mutual interest and benefit is

precisely what is lacking in their experience of research. It is to this consideration that I shall now turn.

20.5   Outsiders Exploit Insider Participants in the Communities They Research

Ellen describes how fieldwork has become 'a rite of passage by which the novice is transformed into the rounded anthropologist and initiated into the ranks of the profession'—a ritual by which 'the student of anthropology dies and a professional anthropologist is born' (Ellen 1984: 23). This is a reminder that research can carry benefits to the researcher which go beyond those associated with the 'pure' pursuit of understanding. As participants in research become more aware of this, their attitudes towards research and researchers can, understandably, change. The following observation was made by a woman from a community that had experienced several waves of enthusiastic researchers:

> The kind of behaviour researchers have towards locals tells us that they just want to exploit them and take from them their ideas and information. It also tells us that they don't really care at all. They want the information to use in front of a group of people at home, so that they can be seen as clever academics. Then in the end they publish books, reviews, articles etc. in order to spread their popularities. So what is this, and what is research really about? Not all researchers are exploiters, but most are, and I think it is time up now for this, and that these researchers should also be exploited by local people. (Florence Shumba, quoted in Wilson 1992: 199)

Researchers who are sensitive to this issue typically look for ways to counter the imbalance of benefit. They will sometimes discuss with participants ways in which the research could be designed to benefit all parties, by, for example, ensuring that it addresses issues on which the participants themselves need information as well as the researchers, or by providing data which the research participants could use independently and for their own purposes. In the absence of any other perceived benefit, some schools in the UK have responded to researchers' requests for access and time for interviews by proposing to charge by the hour for teachers' time. Of course, sometimes participants will be persuaded to participate on the grounds that some other people whose interests they care about—pupils in schools, for example, or children currently excluded from education—will secure the benefit of the research, but there has to be the link between something which they perceive to be a benefit (albeit altruistically) and the commitment which they are asked to make.

These illustrations of the terms of engagement between researchers and their participants present a picture of a trade in benefit, the negotiation of a utilitarian equation of mutual happiness, and, perhaps, pain, though one in which higher satisfactions (e.g. new insights and the improvements to the future education of children) have a place alongside lower ones (a bit of self-publicity or cash in the school fund). Questions of exploitation, in Kantian terms of treating people as

means rather than ends[7] (see Kant 1964) come in if, as is sometimes alleged, researchers use their positions of authority or their sophistication to establish relationships in which the benefits are very one-sided in their favour.

This distinction between the utilitarian principle and the Kantian one is rather crucial here. The utilitarian principle might require us to measure in the scales a much wider community of benefit. If, for example, the researcher could show that, even though the Maori community he or she was researching experienced the inconvenience of the research without the benefit, thousands of other people would benefit from it, then the utilitarian equation might provide justification for the research. But this is precisely one of the weaknesses of the utilitarian principle of the greatest happiness of the greatest number—at least when it is applied with this sort of simplicity. It requires either a broader take on the utilitarian principle (which might observe that a programme of action which allocates all the benefits to one group and all the 'pain' to another will not be conducive to the greatest aggregation of happiness) or the invoking of something closer to the Kantian principle, which would demand that we do not exploit one group of people to the exclusive benefit of another.

Researchers seeking collaboration with participants in disempowered communities have essentially two forms of appeal—to their self-interest or to their generosity. Either they need to see some benefit to themselves which is at least roughly commensurate to the effort that is required of them (or in some cases the value of what they have to offer); or they need knowingly to contribute out of their own benevolence towards the researcher or others whom they believe the research will benefit.

In this second case, the researcher is placed in something of the position of the receiver of a gift and he or she needs to recognise consequently the quite elaborate ethical apparatus which surrounds such receipt. There is a particular 'spirit' in which we might be expected to receive a gift: a spirit of gratitude, of humility, of mutuality in the relationship. There may also be a network of social expectations which flow from such giving—of being in thrall to the giver, of being in his or her debt[8]—but on the whole anyone contributing to an educational research project would be naïve to assume that such 'debts' might be repaid. Most of the time, researchers are in fact inviting the generosity of their participants, and perhaps there is something more ethically elevated in responding to such generosity with a true spirit of gratitude and a recognition of the mutuality of relationship which binds giver and receiver, than in seeking to establish a trade in dubious benefits. Smith (1999) provides a wonderful picture of the combination of spirit and benefits that might be involved in establishing this relationship (as well as a whole new take on the notion of 'empowerment'!) when she outlines the range of issues on which a

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[7]'Act in such a way that you always treat humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, never simply as a means, but always at the same time as an end' (Kant 1964: 96).

[8]The locus classicus for discussion of the gift economy and culture is Marcel Mauss's *Essai sur le don* (1924), but see also Hyde's *The gift: Imagination and the erotic life of property* (Hyde 1979). Both emphasise the reciprocal obligations that accompany the giving of gifts.

researcher approaching a Maori community might need to satisfy them: 'Is her spirit clear? Does he have a good heart? What other baggage are they carrying? Are they useful to us? Can they fix up our generator? Can they actually do anything?' (Smith 1999: 10). Set aside your ethical codes and your consent forms: perhaps all educational researchers should be required to satisfy participants on these questions.

I conclude that the possibility that outsider educational research may be conducted in an exploitative manner is not an argument for obstructing it comprehensively, but it is an argument for requiring that it be conducted under an appropriate set of principles and obligations and in a proper spirit. 'Qualitative researchers,' argued Stake, 'are guests in the private spaces of the world. Their manners should be good and their code of ethics strict' (Stake 1998: 103). Any community may legitimately reject a researcher (insider or outsider) who fails to establish and conduct relationships under these requirements.

In this field, ethics is never far removed from politics. This chapter has focused on the relationship between educational researchers and communities that are self-defined as 'disempowered' but has not really addressed the issue of power. At the heart of the objections to outsider research is a view that such research, far from challenging and removing such disempowerment, operates to reinforce it. It is this argument which I shall now address.

20.6 Outsiders' Research Disempowers Insiders

At least one of the arguments against outsider research into self-defined 'disempowered' sections of the population is made independently of the measure of sensitivity and care which the outsider researchers demonstrate in its conduct. 'If we have learned one thing from the civil rights movement in the US,' wrote Ed Roberts, a leading figure in the Disability Rights Movement (DRM), 'it's that when others speak for you, you lose' (quoted in Driedger 1989: 28).

Roberts's case is, in part, that for as long as such groups depend on outsiders to represent them on the wider stage, they will be reinforcing both the fact and the perception of their subordination and dependency, as well as exposing themselves to potential misrepresentation. They have to break the vicious circle of dependency —and that means taking control for themselves of the ways in which their experience is represented more widely:

> The DRM's demand for control is the essential theme that runs through all its work, regardless of political-economic or cultural differences. Control has universal appeal for DRM activists because their needs are everywhere conditioned by a dependency born of powerlessness, poverty, degradation, and institutionalisation. This dependency, saturated with paternalism, begins with the onset of disability and continues until death. (Charlton 1998: 3)

Outsider researchers sometimes persuade themselves that they are acting in an emancipatory way by 'giving voice' to neglected or disenfranchised sections of the

community. Their research may indeed push the voice of the researcher far into the background as he or she 'simply presents', perhaps as large chunks of direct transcription and without commentary, what participants have to say. But, as Reinharz has warned, this is by no means as simple as it might appear:

> To listen to people is to empower them. But if you want to hear it, you have to go hear it, in their space, or in a safe space. Before you can expect to hear anything worth hearing, you have to examine the power dynamics of the space and the social actors.

> Second, you have to be the person someone else can talk to, and you have to be able to create a context where the person can speak and you can listen. That means we have to study who we are and who we are in relation to those we study.

> Third, you have to be willing to hear what someone is saying, even when it violates your expectations or threatens your interests. In other words, if you want someone to tell it like it is, you have to hear it like it is. (Reinharz 1988: 15–16)

Even with this level of self-knowledge, sensitivity, and discipline, there is a significant temptation in such situations towards what is sometimes called ventriloquy: the using of the voice of the participant to give expression to the things which the researcher wants to say or to have said. This is a process which is present in the selection of participants; in the framing of the questions which they are encouraged to answer; in the verbal and visual cues which they are given of the researcher's pleasure or excitement with their responses; and, later, in the researcher's selection of material for publication. Such ventriloquy, argues Fine, disguises 'the usually unacknowledged stances of researchers who navigate and camouflage theory through the richness of "native voices"' (Fine 1994: 22).

The argument that insiders within 'disempowered' communities (or any other communities for that matter) should be researching and, where appropriate, giving public expression to their own experience is surely uncontroversial. In a context in which insider research has been negligible and hugely subordinated to waves of outsider research, there is a good case for taking practical steps to correct that balance and spare a community what can understandably be experienced as an increasingly intrusive relationship with research.

There are, however, at last three reasons in principle for keeping the possibility of outsider research open: (i) that such enquiry might enhance the understanding of the researcher; (ii) that it might enhance the understanding of the community itself; and (iii) that it might enhance the understanding of a wider public. There is no doubt a place for researching our own experience and that of our own communities, but surely we cannot be condemned lifelong to such social solipsism? Notwithstanding some postmodernist misgivings, 'There is still a world out there, much to learn, much to discover; and the exploration of ourselves, however laudable in that at least it risks no new imperialistic gesture, is not, in the end, capable of sustaining lasting interest' (Patai 1994: 67).

The issue is not, however, merely one of satisfying curiosity. There is a real danger that if we become persuaded that we cannot understand the experience of others and that 'we have no right to speak for anyone but ourselves', then we will all too easily find ourselves epistemologically and morally isolated, furnished with a

comfortable legitimation for ignoring the condition of anyone but ourselves. We shall become, as Caughie (1999) has put it, tied up in collective indifference or silence in just those situations where 'an ethics of responsibility' or just plain decency may call for intervention. This is not, any more than the paternalism of the powerful, the route to a more just society.

How then can we reconcile the importance of wider social understanding of the world of 'disempowered' communities and of the structures which contribute to that disempowerment; the openness of those communities and structures to the outsider researcher; and the determination that the researcher should not wittingly or unwittingly reinforce that disempowerment? The literature (from which a few selected examples are quoted below) provides some clues as to the character of relations between researcher and researched that 'emancipatory', 'participatory', and 'educative' research (among other things) might take.

To begin with, we need to re-examine the application of the notion of 'property' to the ownership of knowledge (see Chap. 19 above). In economic terms, knowledge is not a competitive good. It has that distinctive virtue that (at least in terms of its educative and intellectual function) it can be infinitely distributed without loss to any of those who are sharing in it and it can indeed gain from such distribution. Similarly the researcher can 'take it' from people without denying it to them, and can return it enriched (see references above to the economy of gifts eg in Hyde 1979 and, classically, in Mauss's 1929 *Essai sur le don*). However, it is easy to neglect the processes of reporting back to people and *sharing* in knowledge, and the importance which can be attached to this process by those concerned. For Smith, a Maori woman working with research students from the indigenous community of New Zealand to whose work I have already referred (above), 'Reporting back to the people is never a one-off exercise or a task that can be signed off on completion of the written report.' She describes how one of her students took her work back to the people she interviewed, 'the family was waiting for her; they cooked food and made us welcome. We left knowing that her work will be passed around the family to be read and eventually will have a place in the living room along with other valued family books and family photographs' (Smith 1999: 15–16).

For some, what is required is for research to be regarded not so much as property but as a dialogic inquiry designed to assist the understanding of all concerned:

> Educative research attempts to restructure the traditional relationship between researcher and 'subject'. Instead of a one-way process where researchers extract data from 'subjects', Educational Research encourages a dialogic process where participants negotiate meanings at the level of question posing, data collection and analysis … It … encourages participants to work together on an equal basis to reach a mutual understanding. Neither participant should stand apart in an aloof or judgmental manner; neither should be silenced in the process. (Gitlin and Russell 1994: 185)

McNess et al. describe what are offered as the benefits of such a dialogue:

> In the process of intercultural communication, there is a third perspective which is constructed when the insider and outsider meet. This liminal space of in-betweenness can be an area of hostility, but also one of great creativity, mutual understanding and new wisdom. (McNess et al. 2016: 30)

This takes us towards what Bhabha among others refers to as the 'third space between insider and outsider perspectives': 'it is the "inter"—the cutting edge of translation and negotiation, the in between space—that carries the burden of the meaning of culture' (Bhabha 1994: 38). Bakhtin describes how:

> A meaning only reveals its depths once it has encountered and come into contact with, foreign meaning … We raise new questions for a foreign culture, ones that it did not raise itself; we see answers to our questions in it; and the foreign culture responds to us by revealing to us its new aspects and its new semantic depths … such a dialogue encounter of two cultures does not result in merging or mixing. Each retains its own unity and open totality, but they are mutually enriched. (Bakhtin 1986: 7)

For some, it is in this dialogic space and through this process that new shared meaning is to be co-constructed and the insider/outsider dichotomy needs to be resolved.

But, short of this, researchers have, not simply a kind of professional principle of respect for others but also of a requirement of care:

> The researcher encounter needs to be imbued with more than a simple desire to collect data from a 'subject'. As researchers, one facet of our research capability must be to exhibit a sense of care and concern to understand the other's possibility. (Tierney 1994: 105)

Noddings expands:

> Apprehending the other's reality, feeling what he feels as nearly as possible, is an essential part of caring … For if I take on the other's reality as possibility and begin to feel its reality, I feel also, that I must act accordingly; that is, I am impelled to act as though in my own behalf, but in behalf of the other. (Noddings 1986: 16)

For many within the field that I have been reviewing, however, respect, care, and dialogic relations are not enough. Research must be conducted in such a way that it contributes actively not just to the co-creation of meaning (though this may help) but to a more just society. Researchers, it is argued, should adopt what have been offered as emancipatory research methods:

> Thus, I am arguing that the researcher/author has three tasks: the researcher engages the researched in a reflexive encounter; the research 'act'—the book, article or presentation—brings to light the inequities of power that may exist; and the researcher actively works for care and change. (Tierney 1994: 111)

> 'Participatory activist research assumes that knowledge is best gathered in the midst of social change projects; that the partial perspectives of participants and observers can be collected by researchers in "power sensitive conversations" (Haraway 1988: 590), which need to be transformative—they cannot be just a pluralistic collection of voices but need to be a struggle'. (Fine 1994: 29)

On this argument, it is not enough for researchers to seek to understand the worlds of the disempowered; nor even simply to join with them in some 'third space': they must also seek—as Marx would have urged—to change them. This, however, might be a step too far.

Researchers' prime responsibility (qua researchers) is, surely, to seek honest and, as far as possible, truth-like understanding of whatever is the focus of their enquiry.

Even while advancing the case for educational research in the cause of social justice, Griffiths acknowledges that 'educational research is about getting knowledge' or, more specifically, 'better knowledge', as she calls it (Griffiths 1998: 129). Veck, recounting his own attempts at 'emancipatory' research, explains how he came to the conclusion that 'in committing to social justice I was logically bound to the pursuit of truth. If the outcome of my research was to uncover injustice, to pronounce what is wrong, then what I had to say had to reflect the reality of that social injustice with the utmost accuracy' (Veck 2002: 334).

This pursuit of knowledge, *a fortiori* with 'the utmost accuracy', will certainly require of researchers an alertness to the prejudices which they bring to their inquiry and a reflexiveness which will allow the inquiry itself to challenge these assumptions. Such inquiry should, as I have already acknowledged, be conducted under a moral imperative of respect for participants, which is a requirement to treat them as ends rather than as a means to ends, and a responsibility to anticipate and avoid possible harm to participants (and I would include in this their disempowerment). Of course, one of the ways in which the researchers may contribute to challenging or correcting social injustice of one kind or another is by representing it, or participants' perceptions of it, honestly, vividly, and accurately in their research products and making these public. Another way will be through their own reflective, 'dialogic', or 'educative' engagement with the researched community. This much is a proper requirement of the research as research and of the researcher as researcher ('proper' in the sense that it is difficult to see how it could claim to be research unless it did these things and 'proper' in that these are the kind of things that one might reasonably expect a researcher to be competent to do).

To impose on researchers a further obligation to work as part of the research process for political change of a kind which will address any perceived injustices reported in the research is, however, to raise expectations which run, dangerously perhaps, beyond their competence as researchers. Educational researchers, qua researchers, are not obviously any more competent than anyone else to define the proper ordering of a just society; nor discerning as to the best path towards such a society; nor skilled in managing the political processes by which such a social order might be achieved. Perhaps among the number of educational researchers there are some who happen to have, in addition to their research skills, this combination of political wisdom and political acumen, and perhaps these can appropriately apply this combination of talents to their field of inquiry, but should we wish that the political naivety and ineptness which may be more commonly associated with sound research skills in the educational research community be thrust upon the disempowered as a matter of general principle? This really would give them grounds for seeking the 'outsider' researchers' exclusion.

And yet this conclusion is misleadingly at odds with much of what I have been arguing in the course of this chapter, and when I read, for example, Griffiths's (1998) advocacy of a framework for 'educational research for justice' I find in her 'ten principles' much that resonates with what I have defended here as ethical requirements falling upon the educational researcher going about his or her business of trying to understand the world, or more particularly in the context of the

insider/outsider discussion, other people's experience of it. The principles and aspirations which I have attached to even a single-mindedly research endeavour reflect necessary if not sufficient conditions for a more just society. At least, and more modestly, they reflect the conditions for greater justice in that part of its activity which lies in proximity to the practice of educational research. Commitment to, for example: sensitive and reflexive understanding of the experience of others; respect for others as persons; listening to others in conditions of respect and care; mutuality of benefit and gratefulness for giving relationships; openness to criticism and the exposure of prejudice—such commitments may not directly challenge wider social and economically formed structures of oppression, but they are the sort of principles which have the capacity to render such structures visible and display them as intolerable. And if their application in the context of research relationships will not extend to changing the world, at least they might render those relationships themselves humane, respectful and just.

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Chapter 21
Working Without Shame in International Educational Research and Development? From Consequentialism to Casuistry

Abstract This chapter arises in the context of the ever-widening outreach activity of, in particular, Western universities and, more specifically, out of my engagement in research and development in countries, some of which might be judged to be 'undemocratic', or poor in terms of their record on human rights. But should I have been there? Should my university have endorsed such activity? The central question addressed in this chapter is about the ethics of engaging in collaborative research projects and educational development in countries such as these. More particularly, since it is in the context of philosophical discussion, the chapter examines the nature of the arguments that are brought to bear on this issue. It suggests that these are essentially consequentialist in character and hence fall prey to many of the limitations of such consequentialism, including the unpredictability of what will unfold, the indeterminacy of the consequences, and the complex balance sheet of (perhaps incommensurable) benefits and losses that might be anticipated. The chapter also suggests some unease about the way judgments are made across international boundaries of the acceptability or otherwise of political processes and about the presumptions of a 'democratic' Western perspective. The observation of these complexities of principle and fact take the argument into the territory of case-based ethical judgment and the world of casuistry.

21.1 Introduction

There are at least two sets of ethical dilemmas for anyone working across national and international borders in educational research and development. One set of dilemmas is related to *how one functions in such contexts* and to potential charges of, for example, introducing or even imposing culturally inappropriate ideas or practices, of neocolonialism or exploitation These are the issues that I discussed in a previous publication (Bridges 2014) but see also Chap. 20 on outsider research.

But I noted in the 2014 paper another set of what are, in a sense, prior issues and dilemmas as to *whether one should be there at all*, at least in some countries with perhaps an autocratic leadership or poor human rights record, where one's presence might be deemed to be endorsing or giving succour to a leadership hostile to the principles of a liberal democratic society. It is this second set of issues that I want to explore in this chapter with a view, even if I go no further than this, to clarifying the nature of the arguments in such discussions.

I should perhaps acknowledge that over the period of my own engagement in development education I have worked in a number of countries marked by political practices of an unsavoury character as well as others which certainly have been and remain contentious. My most recent work has been mainly focused on Kazakhstan —a commitment that has raised some eyebrows in my department, albeit, in some cases, among staff who had some difficulty in distinguishing it (as indeed I would have done a few years ago) from Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, or any other central Asian republic. So this chapter, I acknowledge, risks the accusation of special pleading or, as I shall consider later, casuistry of the disreputable rather than ethically legitimate kind.

21.2   The Charge

Moral censure in this context takes some slightly different forms. The logic of the argument has the shape of the following syllogism. First, there is a principled stand rooted in an affiliation with, say, liberal democratic values or a particular view of human rights. From this it follows that one should not do anything in contradiction with these values. Then (and here the argument becomes more entangled with the facts of the matter) working in educational development in a country that does not respect these values is a form of endorsement of its unacceptable practices. Further, given that country X is one in which these values are not respected, one should not be working in country X.

What is, I hope, immediately clear from this formulation of the argument is that *principles* and *facts* relating to both the general claim (working in such countries provides endorsement of offensive practices) and of the particular case (this is such a country) are intimately entangled in any judgment as to how to proceed. I am sympathetic to the argument that Judith Suissa advanced in a symposium at the 2005 annual conference of the Philosophy of Education Society of Great Britain about the related issue of academic boycotts that:

> this issue demands that each individual case be debated closely. One cannot be *for* or *against* boycotts in general because no two cases are the same; the empirical and the evaluative aspects of each case are often confusingly intermingled; the 'facts of the case' are often precisely what is under debate, and it is in analysing the features of particular cases that one's moral and political convictions become clear. (Suissa 2005: 1, and see on case based-ethics Jonsen and Toulmin 1988)

I shall return to this perspective, but I want, nevertheless, to examine separately two components of any such case-based judgment.

21.3   It Is Wrong to Engage in Educational Development Work in a Country with an Oppressive or Undemocratic Government and/or a Poor Record on Human Rights

In fairness few would offer this claim quite so baldly, or it would be very strange to do so. It is arguable that such countries are precisely those with the greatest need for educational development, including contributions from external agents with a strong commitment to human rights and democratic principles; that the right to education, regardless of gender, religion, or ethnicity is precisely one of the rights that needs to be advanced in such countries; and that improved education is one of the prerequisites of improved governance and a population equipped to demand and to take their place in a democratic society. A tutor contributing to the Woolf Inquiry into the London School of Economics' (LSE's) involvement with Libya argued: 'Education makes people free … LSE Enterprise focuses on making a positive contribution to civil society … Inevitably some governmental clients will be from developing nations whose governance is of questionable integrity. As an educator I find it risible to refuse an opportunity to teach public servants from these regimes. They are exactly the people that LSE should teach' (Woolf 2013: par 29). So, far from meriting moral disapproval, contributing to educational development in such countries might be considered almost a moral obligation. It would be odd to take the contrary view that the only places in which one should contribute to educational development are squeaky clean democracies (if there are such).

The critical standpoint is, however, more subtle. Firstly, it is not necessarily addressed against all interventions but more typically at those that involve close association with the ('oppressive and undemocratic') government. Secondly, it is not necessarily addressed against individual educators but rather at institutions, especially highly reputed institutions like universities that form such collaborative partnerships. And, critically, the argument is that such collaborations add legitimacy to the ('oppressive and undemocratic') regime. This is the actual, if not the intended consequence, of such collaboration. Thus runs the argument that I need to unpick.

First, since this is intended as a philosophical chapter, let me note that this version turns what might have been a categorical or unconditional imperative ('it is simply wrong to have anything to do with an oppressive regime') into a conditional and consequentialist argument ('it is wrong insofar as it has the empirically veri-fiable or reasonably predictable consequences of undermining human rights'). This move is, of course, to take a step into the tradition of utilitarian philosophy, but I shall be concerned here almost exclusively with the consequentialist rather than the hedonistic aspect of utilitarianism, where consequentialism is defined as 'any

outlook which holds that the rightness or wrongness of an action always depends on the consequences of the action, on its tendency to lead to intrinsically good or bad states of affairs' (Williams 1972: 97).

Once we define the problem as one where the morality depends on the actual, intended, or what Quinton (1973: 4) calls the 'rationally expectable', consequences of acting in one way rather than another, it becomes, however, much more complex. To make a judgment one would, for example, need to take into account a lot of different considerations, including the following:

(i) Does the partnership in fact provide validation of the government concerned —in general, or for its work in educational reform? And if the government is demonstrating a real commitment to educational reform (including e.g. equal participation by girls, wider access to higher education, improved teaching and learning, even the introduction of 'critical thinking' perhaps), what is the balance of advantage in winning it some approval—for that at least?

(ii) What is the (long and short term) cost in human and social terms of providing validation of an 'oppressive' regime measured against the long and short term benefits of the educational reforms that can be achieved (let us suppose) through collaboration with such a regime? This is what MacFarlane, for example, refers to as '"the developmental argument" [which] has been made by universities in their dealings with undemocratic regimes and democratic ones that violate human rights'. The Chairman of the LSE Council argued in his testimony to the Woolf Inquiry into the LSE's collaboration with Libya that: 'our decision to proceed needs to be seen against the background of the West's clear strategy of assisting Libya to reform, albeit under the continuing leadership of the Gadaffi regime. … While far from ideal this pragmatic approach did seem to be bringing change, of which requests for externally provided executive education across many fields was an example' (Woolf 2013: par 28). Sutton's report for the Henry Jackson Society, which is generally critical of universities' engagement with 'repressive' regimes, acknowledges that: 'several universities were … found to have provided consultancy or training services to authoritarian states including North Korea Egypt, Libya and Vietnam. However, the potential for improvements in governance following such activity should be taken into account' (Sutton 2013: 9). MacFarlane (in a discussion of university overseas branch campuses) argues, however, that 'it is generally not possible to do business in this way without giving succour to practices that conflict with home country or international norms. Western universities that set up… in such contexts lend credibility to governments that fail to respect human rights.' (MacFarlane 2012: 31)

The balance sheet of the consequences of committing oneself to, or withdrawing from, educational development in authoritarian or repressive states is, however, an extraordinarily difficult one to draw up, and one on the basis of which different people and institutions come to different conclusions. As Williams argues, it is inevitably a general feature of such calculations that: 'Any actual utilitarian

calculation will take place under conditions of considerable uncertainty and very partial information, so that its results are likely to be uncertain' (Williams 1972: 104). For all we know, the 'validation' which is said by some to be provided to oppressive regimes may make not a jot of difference to how the regime proceeds or to its durability. The purity of our intentions is no guarantee of our moral satisfaction with the outcomes. In the context of a call in 2005 for an academic boycott of Israel, the late and much-missed Ilan Gur-Ze'ev, an academic and 'loving warrior' (McLaren 2012), publicly vilified in Israel for his own radical and vocal critique of Zionism and the occupation of Palestinian territories, argued that, contrary to the expectations of, for example the UK Association of University Teachers, who were at that time calling for an academic boycott: 'an academic boycott would lead to the strengthening of ethnocentrism and to the empowerment of ultra nationalistic-oriented policies and surely will threaten academic freedom and humanistic-oriented agendas in more general terms' (Gur-Ze'ev 2005: 8). For all we know, the educational intervention may not make a jot of difference either, though I presume that we always enter into such intervention in the belief that it can and will make a difference. Likewise with the other side of the consequentialist balance sheet: in general we might reckon that the benefits of educational reform tend to outlast particular political regimes, but how far into the future does one extend the estimate of social benefits and losses?

(iii) This consideration points to one of the well-recognised problems about consequentialist ethics: that in principle the balance of accounts is never closed, and, therefore, no final judgment of right or wrong based on such a balance can be made. 'No one can hold that everything, of whatever category, that has value, has it in virtue of its consequences. If that were so, one would just go on for ever, and there would be an obviously hopeless regress' (Smart and Williams 1973: 82).

(iv) We also have to take into account the fact that the human and social benefits of educational improvement extend way beyond the normal measures of *educational* achievement. They are visible in indices of infant survival, of adult health and life expectancy, of personal income and national economic growth. If the price of endorsement (if that is what it is) of an oppressive or undemocratic regime are gains across all these areas of people's lives, then, perhaps, this is a price worth paying? Or, at least, if we believe that declining to contribute to educational development is likely to be to the detriment of ordinary people and their children, but we still want to act to change the nature of the administration, we have to consider what alternative courses of action might achieve the desired affects without the harmful consequences. Deciding what to do within this consequentialist framework is not just a matter of deciding between the options most immediately to hand.

(v) Of course, one of the problems about such tables of accounts is that one is not 'weighing' like against like. How does one balance e.g. the lack of press freedom against e.g. an increase in the number of opportunities for higher education? How does one balance the achievement of universal primary

education against the imprisonment or exile of leaders of the political opposition? In these examples we are not only comparing chalk and cheese, but we also have to take into account (at least on a strict utilitarian equation) the *number* of people affected for better or worse as the result of these policies.

(vi) All of this presupposes, of course, that there is in this 'oppressive' regime a genuine opportunity though international partnership to make a difference, at least in the sphere of education, but perhaps more widely. Even 'oppressive' regimes can genuinely want to raise student achievement, to make education more accessible to girls, to improve IT skills, to establish new universities (if only for the sake of currying favour with parts of the country that feel neglected). Nevertheless, an early part of the judgment that anyone contemplating an educational intervention anywhere (and not just in 'oppressive' regimes) has to make is whether there is a genuine will for it to succeed and a chance that it might. In so far as the consequentialist equation has to be predictive rather than based on investigation of currently observable events, such assessment is rather critical to the judgment.

Thus far, I have argued, then, that the general proposition that 'it is wrong to engage in educational development work in a country with an oppressive or undemocratic government and/or a poor record on human rights' only makes sense when interpreted as resting on a consequentialist assessment of a balance sheet of human and social costs and benefits, and I have pointed out some of the complexities of drawing up such a balance sheet, even when such a calculation is worked out on a case-by-case basis (as Suissa suggests), rather than as a universal principle. It could be argued, however, that sufficient practical examples over a period of time might constitute a basis for suggesting that as *a general rule* this principle should be observed (i.e. we make the move taken by some philosophers from act utilitarianism to rule utilitarianism). So I might decide that, on the basis of a number of examples from past experience, the balance of consequences from working in educational development in undemocratic regimes is a negative one—and therefore I should apply to this newly encountered undemocratic regime the principle of not contributing to its educational development programme. This does little to resolve the problem, however. As Williams points out:

This sort of model cannot render palatable to a consistent utilitarian a form of argument which invokes neither the actual consequences of a particular choice, nor the actual consequences of the general following of a rule, but the hypothetical consequences of an imagined following of a rule' [and later] 'the more general the provision to which the utilitarian calculation is attached, the more cases there will be in which particular calculation in that case would have produced a different result. (Williams 1972: 106)

Besides 'no rule can be entirely self-interpreting':

The considerations that weigh with us in resolving the ambiguities that arise in marginal cases, like those that weigh with us in balancing the claims of conflicting principles, are never *written into* the rules themselves. In dealing with real life moral problems, which so

often turn on conflicts and ambiguities of these two types, we are forced to go behind the simple rules and see what underlies them. (Jonsen and Toulmin 1988: 8)

There is always, on this argument, a need for intelligent interpretation of any rules in the context of the particularities of an individual case and its context and its similarity or otherwise with other cases to which judgment has already been applied. It is in a sense the ethical equivalent of English case law. It is casuistry.

21.4   The Ethics of International Business: A Counter-Argument?

There is an interesting literature in business ethics which in many ways parallels the sort of concerns and arguments that I have been outlining here. It was highlighted in particular in the days of apartheid South Africa, when there were many calls on business to disinvest in South Africa as a way of putting pressure on a regime that continued to deny basic human rights to the majority of its population. This context provided the backdrop to a philosophical monograph by Donaldson (1989) under the title *The ethics of international business*, in which he discusses what he calls the 'condition-of-business principle'. His first formulation of this principle is in the form: 'that *ceteris paribus* (all things being equal) business transactions by B with A are impermissible when A is a violator of human rights' (Donaldson 1989: 131). He goes on to acknowledge, however, (as indeed I have argued above) that in this form:

> the principle clearly embraces too much and yields the severe conclusion that business relations with most states and many organisations must be severed, since most states and many organisations from time to time engage in rights violations [and so] the evil being committed must be of a persistent and fundamental sort. (Donaldson 1989: 132)

Donaldson then goes on to allow a further concession:

> One might infer—and common sentiment tends to confirm—that if business transactions tended to discourage rights violations and either to harm or, at a minimum, to fail to benefit rights violators in consequence of their rights violations, then the transactions may be permissible. (Donaldson 1989: 132–133)

In this way he comes to a different formulation of the 'condition-of-business' principle:

> *Ceteris paribus*, business transactions of B with A are impermissible when A is a systematic violator of human rights, unless these transactions serve to discourage the violation of human rights and either harm or, at a minimum fail to benefit A in consequence of A's rights-violating activity. (Donaldson 1989: 133)

It is interesting, from the perspective of this chapter and my own argument, that the case for withdrawal from educational development work in a rights-violating country depends on a weighing of the consequences of alternative courses of action, and that Donaldson appears to claim that his argument is *not essentially a*

consequentialist one but rests on a universally applicable principle. Yet he then immediately makes another concession:

> Not all consequential exceptions to the condition-of-business principle can be precluded by appeal to the nature of principled moral reasoning. One need not be a consequentialist … to recognise that most principles can be overridden either by stronger principles or by the threat of moral catastrophe. (Donaldson 1989: 134)

'Moral catastrophe' in this context might mean, for example, a widespread threat to public health as a result of an international company's refusal to supply necessary medicines, or actions that might provoke a bloodbath.

I have two observations on Donaldson's position as outlined here.

First, while agreeing with Donaldson that principle has to be a constant point of reference in these decisions, I do not think he has undermined my claim that the application of the principle to situations in which human rights are abused depends on an assessment of the consequences of one's continuing engagement with, or withdrawal from, that situation. Donaldson himself concedes, first, that you have to look at the impact of (in his case) disinvestment on those responsible for rights violation. Donaldson also allows that where the consequences include 'moral catastrophe' for innocent people, then this should prompt reconsideration. But once this is conceded I cannot see why other consequences—short of the catastrophic but nevertheless harmful, or consequences which are benign for a population— should not also be taken into account.

This last argument is especially pertinent if the business one is in is education, because *in so far as one can credibly claim* to be contributing to, for example, improved access to education or its improved quality, one is contributing directly to the realisation of a basic human right. There is, further, compelling evidence of the benefits to the health of a population of achieving even universal primary education. The National Family Health Survey in India, for example, has shown that the education of women can play a major role in shaping their attitudes and behaviour. Educational attainments showed strong associations with every important variable considered, including age at marriage, fertility behaviour, the use of and demand for family planning, number of children desired, use of antenatal care, delivery in a health facility, vaccination and nutritional status of children, use of oral rehydration solution, and infant and child mortality. Furthermore, the more years spent in schooling the better the outcome on these variables (International Institute for Population Sciences 1995: 36–39). Not only this but there is a plausible argument that improved and more widely extended education will contribute to the development of a citizenry which will itself assert more effectively its claims to other fundamental rights. In arguing thus I am suggesting that the more fundamental principle that should be applied in these situations is not simply that of non-association with violators of human rights, but rather the advancement of human rights even, or especially, in settings where these are not fully respected.

Such an approach takes us back to the point I reached before this excursion into business ethics—to the requirement for intelligent interpretation of such a principle in the context of a full understanding of the situation to which it is applied, with an

appropriate alertness to competing principles as well as to the negative and positive consequences of acting in one way or another.

Of course, any conclusion that *it is wrong to engage in educational development work in this country* depends on the further condition that *this is a country with an oppressive or undemocratic government and/or a poor record on human rights*, and I want now to comment on some of the problems of this assertion in arguments about different forms of international collaboration in educational development.

21.5   This Is a Country with an Oppressive or Undemocratic Government and/or a Poor Record on Human Rights

I want to challenge two sets of assumptions that easily creep into the use, in particular in western 'liberal democratic' countries, of this kind of judgmental discourse.

The first is to invite a little more reflection in the West about our rather arrogant assumption that our own societies are paragons of virtue judged in these terms. I do not want to underestimate the privileges we enjoy, but we cannot feel complacent in the UK, for example, about the freedom of the press which lies under such restrictive and plutocratic ownership; with a justice system that has been found on so many occasions by a European Court of Human Rights to have failed to respect human rights (or politicians who, as a consequence, wish to deny British citizens access to the European Court); with a government headed by an unelected monarch qualified simply by being the eldest progeny of a particular family; with elected members of parliament, many of whom seem to be primarily focused on extracting (legally or illegally) the maximum expense claims; with a police force apparently riddled with racism, sexism, and corruption; or with a multi-party democracy in which political parties struggle to identify any real ideological differences, except one that panders to the incipient racism in British society—not to mention, on the other side of the ocean, a camp for political prisoners that is outside the reach of normal juridical procedures and that eludes all attempts—even by the President himself—to close it. Let me be clear: I would still prefer to live in the UK than many other countries, but I do think we need to act with a certain humility in our moral assessments of other parts of the world.

Secondly, when we do start to look at other parts of the world, perhaps we need to be a little more intelligent and sensitive in our assessments of, for example, how 'democratic' they might be. One study that especially provokes this reflection is *Africa betrayed* by Ayittey (1994), which argues that in the rush to impose on Africa models of democratic governance derived from western culture, the former colonial powers ignored the checks and balances on the exercise of power that were present in traditional political systems and exposed countries instead to much less

successfully moderated exercise of power by majority groups and their political leadership. 'If Africa is a mess, the fault lies not in any innate inferiority of the African people, but rather in the alien, defective political systems instituted across much of the continent' (Ayittey 1994: 337). In particular, he argues, 'Westerners solve political problems by majority vote. Africans do so by consensus' (Ayittey 1994: 348)—a perspective that might apply equally across many parts of Asia. I reflect, too, on the politics of Kazakhstan, where, almost certainly, a Western-style multi-party state would quickly crystalise into one party that was predominantly Kazakh and Muslim and another that was predominantly Russian and Christian (although in both cases years of Soviet secularisation has moderated what elsewhere might be fuller expressions of these religious identities). The predominantly Kazakh majority party would hold power indefinitely and would naturally be inclined to rule in the interests of the Kazakh population that had elected it. The Russian minority would become increasingly disaffected and … (Compare political events in Northern Ireland). In so far as the current President (usually portrayed in Western circles as an autocratic leader) achieves a quite delicate balance between majority and minority ethnic groups in Kazakhstan (even quite small minority communities are, for example, entitled to have a school which uses their language as the medium of instruction), is that a stronger or weaker expression of 'democratic principles' than the multi-party alternative? (I am nevertheless aware that there is more to be said than this about human rights issues in Kazakhstan)

One cannot set aside context when looking at political institutions, whom they serve and what they contribute to wellbeing and capability, as well as more specifically to human rights—i.e. there are approaches to the evaluation of political systems which give emphasis to different criteria of their merit or otherwise. Camilla Cavendish writes, for example, of the 'paradox' of contemporary Ethiopia. On the one hand:

> It is a genuine aid success story, with plummeting child mortality, 95% of children going to school, and no more famine of the kind that moved us all in 1984. The 2010 drought did not lead to famine in Ethiopia, unlike in Somalia, because the government identified areas of possible shortage and got food to those areas on time. That saved many lives. (Cavendish 2014: 23)

On the other hand:

> The government in Ethiopia is a brutal one party state … There are more journalists in prison in Ethiopia than any other African country except Eritrea … The country has a sinister programme of commune development, which is allegedly forcibly resettling tens of thousands of people, leasing their lands to commercial investors and beating and murdering those who resist. (Cavendish 2014: 23)

She continues:

> The government of Ethiopia is popular with donor agencies because it has built machinery that delivers aid efficiently. But that machinery is also a powerful instrument of oppression. (Cavendish 2014: 23)

In this case, many aid workers and NGOs take the view that there is little that they can do to change the government (the last two changes have only been achieved through bloody revolutions), so they might as well get on with the job of helping the poor.

So this raises the question: if a comparatively autocratic regime successfully provides (or enables its citizens to secure), let us say, enough food and water, a home, personal security, education for their children, and access to a reasonable level of healthcare, how important to our assessment of whether or not we should work with it are the additional considerations that it restricts press freedom, excludes religious 'extremists', and makes it difficult or impossible for opposition parties to function? Clearly in this sort of balance sheet we are not comparing like with like. There are at least elements of a tension between a 'rights' discourse and a 'capability' discourse, though, of course, these have all sorts of interdependence.

Another important part of context is the historical dimension. Even if we were able to assume the goal of a single political utopia (and I am not convinced that we can), we still have to be aware that different societies are approaching this from different starting points and are at different points on the journey. When President Nursultan Nazarbayev of Kazakhstan addressed a question about Kazakhstan's human rights record from an international correspondent at a press conference following UK Prime Minister David Cameron's visit to the country in July 2013, he argued:

> What should be taken into account is that … the first bill of rights was adopted in Great Britain in 1660, and parliamentary democracy is 600 years old … Of course our way should not be as long as that, but of course the direction of that way, of that path, I believe is very correct. So democracy is the outcome … the final goal, not the beginning. (Nazarbayev 2013)

Only twenty years after a century of first Russian colonialism and then Soviet imperialism, with, on one side, China, on the other side, Russia, and with Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Kyrgyzstan on its southern borders, should we be surprised if a country like Kazakhstan does not entirely measure up to the most liberal or democratic standards? What I have found surprising in my own work at ministry level in Kazakhstan (see Chap. 9) is not the autocratic style of its leaders so much as their acute sensitivity to popular opinion (especially in the wake of events in Ukraine) and to the views of parliamentarians and, in turn, their deference to the people of the regions they represent.

However, this is by way of illustration of my main point here, which is that both contemporary and historical contexts are extremely important both to an understanding of the political character of any regime and also to any moral assessment of the pride or shame one should feel by association with it.

There is a further set of considerations which should affect how a judgment about the character of a regime—'democratic' or otherwise—might affect one's decision to be associated with its attempts at educational reform. Few political regimes are entirely of one character. It is in the nature of politics that even in, for

example, one-party states, there are hawks and doves, conservatives and reformers, 'the good guys and the bad guys'. In work in educational development, as in any other, one hopes to find 'the good guys' and to work with them to advance what one sees as finest and fairest in their aspirations. *'Il principe bisogna sceglierlo'*, as Machiavelli might say: You have to choose your prince. Yes, perhaps a high-status foreign university can provide validation, but perhaps, if this is attached to the right side, this can serve to advance the cause of liberal democracy (if that is the just cause) against its enemies.

So, any assessment of the liberal or democratic character of a political regime that 'we' may make should be sensitive to contemporary sociopolitical context and historical trajectory; it should also be reflective about the way in which democratic principles may or may not be realised in and through different social organisations and institutional arrangements. And of course it must also not shrink from unpalatable evidence—where this is available—of the abuse of human rights. These are not always easy assessments, surely, this is the least one might expect—especially of an academic community—before they rush to judgment?

But is there not a further principle that should be observed if we are to situate our judgment in the context of human rights and democratic principles—the right to a fair 'trial', i.e. the opportunity for people from the country concerned to address or debate the criticisms laid against it? The principles of academic inquiry suggest *a fortiori* the importance of this opportunity in the context of the discussion of such issues in an academic environment.

21.6 Therefore … It Is Wrong to Engage in Educational Development Work in This Country: From Consequentialism to Casuistry

I have discussed some of the complexities involved both in justifying and in applying a general principle that 'it is wrong to engage in educational development work in a country with an oppressive or undemocratic government and/or a poor record on human rights' and some of the complexities involved in determining that 'this is a country with an oppressive or undemocratic government and/or a poor record on human rights'. These considerations provide at least a caution against concluding in any particular case that 'it is wrong to engage in educational development work in this country'.

There is, however, a further problem that I should acknowledge, which is thrown up by the consequentialist character of the general claim. The criticism of such engagement rests on the observation of either the *actual* consequences (so far) where the educational intervention has already taken place or the *predicted* consequences where the intervention is still to come. But if, as indicated earlier, in a consequentialist approach 'the rightness or wrongness of an action always depends on the consequences of the action, on its tendency to lead to intrinsically good or

bad states of affairs' (Williams 1972: 97), we have still to apply some evaluative, normative, or ethical principle to our appraisal of these consequences in order to determine whether indeed the state of affairs they lead to is 'intrinsically good or bad'. Case-based moral reasoning recognises the need for such principles, but we need to draw on other ethical traditions to help us decide what they should be. Utilitarianism links a consequentialist approach to ethics and social policy to the accompanying principle of the maximisation of happiness, which is one answer to this problem, albeit one fraught with its own philosophical problems. G. E Moore refines the utilitarian approach to answer the question of how the 'intrinsically good or bad' is perceived by a 'combination of a consequentialist theory of right action with an intuitionist account of the indefinable property of goodness' (Quinton 1973: 106, Moore 1903).

My concern here is not to resolve the central problems of philosophical ethics. It is rather to point out that the resolution of the ethical dilemma I am discussing requires not just an assessment of the consequences of doing this or that in the particular circumstances, but also an evaluation of the desirability or otherwise of these consequences and the state of affairs that results from them against a single ethical principle (such as that provided by the maximisation of happiness) or by a perspective that includes reference to more than one value (e.g. freedom of speech, personal security, peace, freedom from hunger), in which case one will almost certainly be confronted not with a simple answer but with competing claims, a further set of dilemmas and with no further point of reference for their resolution. By contrast, as Williams points out, for the thoroughgoing utilitarian 'tragedy is impossible' (Williams 1972: 100), because there is a single point of reference for any moral assessment, however complex, i.e. 'the greatest happiness of the greatest number'.

But this discussion leads us into two other areas of moral philosophy (and indeed moral theology): first, as we have seen already, into casuistry and then into Aristotelian ethics and *phronesis* (usually translated as 'practical wisdom'). All of the argument that I have engaged in thus far points to the observation that simple reference to a high level principle, for example an unqualified endorsement of 'liberal democratic values or practices', independently of any other consideration, let alone a much more indirectly justifiable principle such as not working in countries that are not characterised by such values, is an insufficient basis for determining how to act in particular circumstances. Rather, one is compelled to look in some detail at the particular circumstances of the case, and, as I have argued, the actual or likely consequences (or somewhat indeterminate chain of consequences) of doing this rather than that. In short, the argument points towards an examination of a particular case—an approach that in moral theology and philosophy is known as casuistry.

As Jonsen and Toulmin acknowledge in *The abuse of casuistry* (1988), this is a moral tradition that acquired a bad name, notably at the hands of Blaise Pascal in his *Provincial letters*, a biting satire on the evident excesses of some Jesuit casuistry in the seventeenth century (Pascal 1660, 1967). At its worst it took the form of highly spurious moral reasoning providing facile excuses for exceptions from

important moral principles.[1] Indeed, the Oxford English Dictionary still defines casuistry in terms that reflect the success of Pascal's destructive wit: 'a quibbling, evasive way of dealing with difficult cases of duty; sophistry'. But, as the Anglican casuist Kenneth Kirk has argued: 'The abuse of casuistry is properly directed, not against all casuistry, but against its abuse' (Kirk 1927: 125), and a number of more modern moral philosophers have contributed to its reinstatement as a form of moral reasoning (Jonsen and Toulmin 1988, Bok 1978, etc.). Though the Jesuits that Pascal attacks had clearly been drawn into excess, they were simply, at their best, compelled to a more subtle interpretation of lofty moral principles by, among other things their experience of the confessional and their realisation (one that their Jansenite opponents lacked) that life as it was lived and experienced by ordinary people was a lot more complicated than the universal principles of the church seemed to allow. 'Even today', write Jonsen and Toulmin:

> Christian moral theologians are troubled by the problems of linking a faith that includes moral imperatives of paradoxical sublimity with the incessant demands of a rough and mean world. Some resolve the problem by dwelling in a realm of ideal generalisations and exhortations; others plunder into the welter of practical life attempting to cut and shape their ideals to its fragmented demands. (Jonsen and Toulmin 1988: 239)

In this second, casuistic, approach context, history, practicality, and the facts of the case become material to the way in which the principle is applied and how it is interpreted. Faced with a plague of HIV/AIDS, and thousands of orphaned children in Zambia, a former Cambridge colleague and Catholic priest instructed the order of nuns that he oversaw to distribute condoms, though he never abandoned his principled objections to this form of contraception. Pascal would no doubt have recounted such casuistry with glee. In this approach to moral decision-making we do not have to lose sight of principles, or even abandon allegiance to principles we may regard as universal, but we have to realise them in circumstances that are rarely unambiguous and that are full of the unknowns, uncertainties, and the complex twists and turns which are characteristic of human experience, for, as Immanual Kant famously observed: 'Out of the crooked timber of humanity no straight thing was ever made' (Kant 1784/1963).

Such a perspective on moral conduct has, of course, even more ancient sources, not least in Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*. Like the later casuists, Aristotle challenged the assumption that moral reasoning and moral judgment could be drawn *exclusively* from universal principles or invariable axioms. Rather, they rest

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[1]In Letter VII, for example, Pascal provides the example of the way in which the Jesuits reconciled the gospel requirement to 'turn the other cheek'—'vengeance is mine saith the Lord'—with contemporary attachment to preserving honour through often fatal duels. 'Such is the way in which our fathers [i.e. Jesuits monks] have contrived to permit those acts of violence to which men usually resort in vindication of their honour. They have no more to do than to turn off their intention from the desire of vengeance, which is criminal, and direct it to a desire to defend their honour, which, according to us, is quite warrantable. And in this way our doctors discharge all their duty towards God and towards man. By permitting the action, they gratify the world; and by purifying the intention, they give satisfaction to the Gospel' (Pascal 1660: 53).

on a combination of considerations and call for a combination of human qualities brought together as wisdom, or what is usually translated as 'practical wisdom' (*phronesis*): 'wisdom is exact knowledge of science combined with the intelligence that grasps the truth of first principles when this combination is employed upon the grandest subjects of contemplation' (Aristotle 1953 edn: 179). In this way, casuistry seems to be well situated in the Aristotelian tradition with which, of course, the Jesuits despised by Pascal would have been intimately familiar.

But casuistry does not provide any escape from moral principle or moral responsibility: it provides what I suggest is a subtle and less dogmatic account of how such principle is applied in particular circumstances and it compels careful examination of the features of that situation. In international education, as in any sphere of life, one has to consider what one stands for, what one is: an inquirer, perhaps, a creature of curiosity—tempted to enter even, or especially, the murkier areas of moral experience, philosophical torch in hand?

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Chapter 22
Ethics and Epistemology in Educational Research: Educational Research as 'Fiction Written Under Oath'?

Abstract In Part IV I discussed a number of different issues relating to the truth claims that might be made for educational research, i.e. questions to do with the epistemology of educational research. So far in Part V, I have turned to ethical requirements and constraints on the conduct of research and different ways in which the dilemmas they present may be resolved. In this chapter, I want to bring the epistemological and ethical issues together, to consider the relationship between them, and in particular to explore the argument that ethical considerations might even substitute for epistemological requirements in educational research. The chapter will explore the ways in which ethical considerations might inhibit the pursuit of knowledge and understanding; the extent to which they provide the necessary conditions for and support the development of such understanding; and, most challengingly, the extent to which, as is sometimes argued, they can substitute for epistemological principles, rendering these redundant.

> Educational research is fiction … written under oath. The question is: what's the oath?
> (Barry MacDonald, unrecorded aphorism)

22.1 Introduction

It is a rather paradoxical feature of contemporary educational research that epistemological scepticism—i.e. doubts as to the possibility of truth claims (see Chap. 12) and indeed the erosion of any distinction between fact and fiction (see Chaps. 15 and 16)—are accompanied with self-confident claims about the ethical conditions under which that research should be conducted (see Chap. 18). Indeed, as Hammersley has suggested, 'where, previously, ethical considerations were believed to set boundaries to what researchers could do in pursuit of

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An earlier version of this chapter appeared in Bridges, D. (2003) *Fiction written under oath: Essays in philosophy and educational research*, Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers.

knowledge, now ethical considerations are treated by some as constituting the very rationale of research … the possibility and perhaps the desirability of knowledge have come to be downplayed by instrumentalism and post-modernism (and) a concern for ethics has expanded to fill the space' (Hammersley 1999: 18). But how, one wonders, can confident claims about the justice or otherwise of certain research approaches, about hegemonic and emancipatory practices, and about the rights of different kinds of stakeholders be reconciled with such sweeping scepticism as to the truth or rightness of claims to belief? Surely such claims both constitute themselves and rest upon what their advocates must hold to be in some sense warrantable beliefs —those which we have the right and perhaps the duty to believe?

The project of the assimilation of ethical principles with epistemological ones goes further, however: in MacDonald's aphorism, we find ethical principles offered almost as a substitute for epistemological ones. The validity of research is taken as lying in the ethical character of its conduct rather than in any independent epistemological procedures for the determination of the truth of the matter under investigation.

These observations are both a prompt to further reflection on the relationship between the ethical and epistemological principles which bear upon educational research, and a reminder of a rich philosophical literature, notably in the long tradition of writing on 'the ethics of belief' which might inform such reflection, and this is the focus of this chapter. I propose to distinguish and to examine four propositions with regard to the relationship between the ethics and epistemology of educational research[1]:

- that ethical principles constitute an obstacle to validity and truth in research;
- that ethical principles provide the necessary social or interpersonal conditions for the achievement of validity and truth in research;
- that ethical principles provide necessary conditions for the quality of the individual research and hence the validity and truthfulness of the claims which issue from it;
- that ethical principles provide both the necessary and sufficient conditions for the validity and truthfulness of the outcomes of research.

22.2   Ethical Principles Constitute an Obstacle to Validity and Truth in Research

This proposition can I think be dealt with fairly quickly. It is plain that ethical principles have been applied to the research community as, among other things perhaps, a *constraint* upon researchers who might otherwise have offended against

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[1]I am concerned here with educational research, but I see no reason why these arguments (like many others presented in this book) should not be equally applicable to other forms of research.

the legitimate rights or interests of those whose experience they were researching. Principles which require, for example, respect for privacy; respect for parents' rights over their children; the honouring of the terms of a research contract (even if it turns out to allow the censorship of research reports); participants' control over data; etc.—all have, *prima facie*, the effect of either restricting the researcher's access to information or restricting the use which the researcher can make of that information. Hence, in the name of some wider ethical concern, the epistemological project of the pursuit of understanding is constrained.

Of course there is room for discussion here about the actual balance of epistemological gains and losses when researchers submit themselves to these ethical regimes. Experienced researchers will often argue that they obtain fuller information under conditions in which respondents feel that they have control over their material than under conditions in which they do not and so engage in all sorts of self-censorship before speaking or allowing researchers access to material. In balancing benefits in this way, researchers turn straightforwardly ethical principles into prudential principles designed to maximise, as it were, the epistemological benefit. I shall say more about this in the next section. For the moment, however, let me acknowledge this only as a qualification to the general proposition that subservience to certain ethical principles can and does limit how researchers can go about their business, what they can find out, and what they can do with what they find. Principles to do with, for example, the protection of people from hurt and respect for their capacity to be self-directing are judged to override in such contexts other values to do with the pursuit of understanding or even truth.

22.3   Ethical Principles Provide the Necessary Social or Interpersonal Conditions for the Achievement of Validity and Truth in Research

Researchers do not, however, necessarily perceive ethical principles as a barrier to their research endeavour. The references in Chap. 20 to 'emancipatory' and 'developmental' approaches to research reflect a more positive view of the reciprocity of interest between the ethical principles under which research is conducted and the contribution which that research can make to both the researcher's and participants' understanding. Simply, some social conditions and relationships are more likely than others to enable people to be open and honest about their experience, their perceptions, and their feelings—and hence to enable them to contribute to a fuller and more truthful understanding of that situation. Hence, if researchers allow their work to be governed by principles which support those sorts of social conditions and relationships, they will be able to produce better research.

What precisely these principles are or should be I shall not argue in detail here, but they might include: openness and honesty on behalf of the researcher about what he or she is doing; respect for participants as persons, as ends in themselves

and not merely as means to ends; an equitable distribution of power between participants and researcher or (on some views) the empowering of participants vis-à-vis the researcher; control by participants over access to and the use of their data. I acknowledge, however, that each of these principles raises at least as many questions as it answers in terms of how precisely it is to be interpreted.

To regard the ethical imperatives in this way is to see them as what Kant (1964 edn) would have termed 'hypothetical imperatives', i.e. ones conditional upon desiring some other end. Researchers may also see the same principles as 'categorical imperatives'—unconditional requirements about how in any case they ought to relate to other people. On Kant's view it was a defining feature of ethical principles that they offered in this way categorical imperatives. In so far as they are seen as categorical imperatives then we would expect to observe them independently of their effect on our research endeavour. If, however, they are only hypothetical imperatives, then the case for serving under them relies not simply on the intuited, self-evident, or transcendentally derived rightness of the principle, but on the evidence that it does in fact produce the benefits which it is claimed to produce (and further, that these outweigh the sort of losses which also arise from the constraints which researchers impose upon themselves). This means the drawing up of a rather complex balance sheet, but it is not obvious that the result of such accountancy will be the same in every context.

The argument in favour of developmental and emancipatory principles in educational research has, naturally enough, been developed in contexts in which researchers have been working with groups perceived as disempowered—at least in their relationship with an academic researcher. The balance of power might be rather different however in contexts in which educational researchers were researching, for example, the effects of government policy, the nature of decision making in senior political circles, or the motives for and effects of corporate sponsorship of educational programmes. It is at least plausible that in circumstances in which the research is focused on the actions of the powerful, the ethical as well as the epistemological balance sheet might justify the kind of covertness, subterfuge, invasiveness, and disregard for participants' wishes that is the hallmark of investigative reporting. To justify such behaviour, however, would almost certainly require us to invoke some other ethical principles: an appeal to people's right to know or to a public interest which might override individual claims to confidentiality or to the protection of 'their' data. (See Chap. 19 above).

This contrast between the researcher's relationship with the disempowered and the powerful, suggests three qualifications to the proposition that observance by researchers of appropriate ethical principles contributes to the establishment of the social conditions and relationships under which fuller and better understanding is achieved. Firstly, the actual principles which may need to be invoked for this purpose will be different ones in the context of different power relationships between researcher and researched. Secondly, in so far as these principles are invoked as hypothetical (instrumental) ones rather than categorical ones, then their utility will need to be assessed by reference to empirical evidence as to their actual, as distinct from their intended, consequences. Finally, in so far as they are invoked

with this kind of utility in mind, then they cease to be, in the strict sense of the term, ethical principles and become instrumental ones, procedural guidance whose rationale is to be found in terms of the consequences of behaving in this way rather than that (with all the problems about consequentialism discussed in Chap. 21).

22.4 Ethical Principles Provide Necessary Conditions for the Quality of Individual Research and Hence the Validity and Truthfulness of the Claims Which Issue from It

The claim here is that ethical principles apply not only to the relationships which a researcher enters into with participants in and stakeholders to the research process, but to his or her engagement with the process of inquiry and coming to know. According to a long tradition of philosophical writing on 'the ethics of belief' (Locke 1975; James 1937; Newman 1979; and see McCarthy's 1986 useful collection of nineteenth- and twentieth-century sources for the debate) researchers/inquirers might be expected to do what has been referred to as their 'epistemic duty'. Locke provides a classic statement of such duty:

> Faith is nothing but a firm assent of the mind: which if it be regulated, as is our duty, cannot be afforded to anything, but upon good reason; and so cannot be opposite to it. He that believes, without having any reason for the believing, may be in love with his own fancies; but neither seeks truth as he ought, nor pays the obedience due his maker, who would have him use those discerning faculties he has given him, to keep out of mistake and error. He that does not this to the best of his power, however he sometimes lights on the truth, is in the right but by chance; and I know not whether the luckiness of the accident will excuse the irregularity of his proceeding. This, at least is certain, that he must be accountable for whatever mistakes he runs into: whereas he that makes use of the light and faculties God has given him, and seeks sincerely to discover truth, by those helps and abilities he has, may have this satisfaction in doing his duty as a rational creature, that though he should miss truth, he will not miss the reward of it. For he governs his assent right, and places it as he should, who in any case or matter whatsoever, believes or disbelieves, according as reason directs him. He that does otherwise, transgresses against his own light, and misuses those faculties, which were given him. (Locke 1975 edn: IV.1.2)

In more contemporary terms, the argument is that we are *morally* accountable for the way we come to hold our beliefs and the way in which we continue to hold and advance them. There are ethically driven requirements on the epistemological project.

Consequently we criticise people if they do not come to their beliefs in an appropriate manner—'we blame a person who makes hasty generalisations or who ignores the testimony of reliable authority' (Zagzebski 1996: 5). Similarly, 'when people call others short-sighted or pigheaded, their criticism is as much like moral criticism as when they call them offensive or obnoxious; in fact what is obnoxious about a person can sometimes be limited to a certain pattern of thinking …'

(Zagzebski 1996: 5–6). Even in ordinary life we offer moral critique of prejudiced, unwarranted, and unfair beliefs as well as behaviour; for failure to look at the facts of a case before jumping to condemn someone; for careless, inaccurate, or dishonest reporting of events; for an unwillingness to listen to someone else's argument or to engage in any self-criticism or questioning. *A fortiori* in the context of a life professionally focused on the pursuit of knowledge and understanding, such behaviours and traits of character invite particular (moral) condemnation and in extreme cases dismissal.

Conversely, those are deemed particularly worthy of esteem, who display in full measure such intellectual virtues and behaviours as: careful attention to argument and evidence; thoroughness; honesty; responsiveness to criticism; perseverance; humility with regard to one's own knowledge; and respectfulness with regard to the knowledge claims of others.

As I indicated in Chap. 18 above, Aristotle attached importance to the distinction between intellectual virtue and broader moral virtue, claiming that virtues such as courage and temperance differ in nature from such qualities as wisdom and understanding, though courage and temperance may of course play an important part in the conduct of educational or any other research and it seems to me that they are hardly disassociated from intellectual virtue. Pring reflected this Aristotelian distinction in his discussion of the moral and intellectual virtues required by research: 'The moral virtues', he argued, 'would be those concerned with the resistance to the blandishments or attractions which tempt one from the research even when the intellectual virtues press one to go on; courage to proceed when the research is tough or unpopular; honesty when the consequences of telling the truth are uncomfortable; concern for the well-being of those who are being researched and who, if treated insensitively, might suffer harm; modesty about the merits of the research and its conclusions; humility in the face of justified criticism and readiness to take such criticisms seriously' (Pring 2000: 152). Among contemporary discussions, Zagzebski (1996) has argued, I think persuasively, that 'intellectual virtues ought to be treated as a subset of the moral virtues in the Aristotelian sense of the latter' (Zagzebski 1996: 139). He argues:

> [that] although there are some rough differences in the degree to which these two kinds of virtue involve strong feelings and desires … an intellectual virtue does not differ from certain moral virtues any more than one moral virtue differs from another, that the processes related to the two kinds of virtue do not function independently, and that it greatly distorts the nature of both to attempt to analyse them in separate branches of philosophy. Intellectual virtues are best viewed as forms of moral virtue. (Zagzebski 1996: 139)

I am not sure how crucial to my present argument is the successful elision of moral and intellectual virtue. The basic point is that there are certain clearly ethical or moral principles, such as honesty, which are a general requirement of good living but a *sine qua non* of decent intellectual endeavour. There are other particular requirements of decent intellectual endeavour (perseverance, careful attention to reasoned argument and evidence, open- mindedness, respect for the opinion of others, etc.) which are also arguably important prerequisites of a more broadly

moral life. Like Zagzebski, I see little value in trying to draw a sharp distinction between principles which underpin both intellectual and more broadly moral virtue. But these principles and the virtuous behaviour which they demand are significant not just in terms of the quality of individual existence that they support, or in terms of the kinds of relations with other people which they permit; they have in addition a function related to a desired end, which in this case is something like the successful development of knowledge and understanding. More strongly, as Sosa put it, 'an intellectual virtue is a quality bound to help maximise one's surplus of truth over error' (Sosa 1985: 228).

Interestingly, this is a line of argument which suggests that in or along with our programmes of 'research training', which typically have a focus on methods of research and the developing of technique, we should be considering how and where we are contributing not just to an understanding of an ethics of research that typically focuses on the researcher's obligations to participants and stakeholders, but also one which contributes to the pursuit of truth (I use this as a shorthand here); to the cultivation of intellectual virtue; and to those qualities which help to transform the mere possession of information and the apparatus of inquiry and criticism into something closer to wisdom.

22.5 Ethical Principles Provide Both the Necessary and Sufficient Conditions for the Validity and Truthfulness of the Outcomes of Research

'Educational research is fiction…written under oath.' MacDonald's aphorism suggests the abandonment of educational research as an epistemological project designed in some sense to get at the facts, at the truth of the matters under investigation. Instead, one might be enjoined to accept the fact (?), the reality (?), that anything one produces will be another fiction; but also to recognise that such fictions should be constructed under some ethical principles. But why?

There seem to me to be several sorts of answer. The first is that the acknowledgment that one is writing fiction ought to be associated with some duty of care for those whom these fictions might harm. As one of E. M. Forster's characters in *The Longest Journey* suggests: 'Don't you think there are two great things in life that we ought to aim at—truth and kindness? Let's have both if we can, but let's be sure of having one or the other.' The same speaker continues, in fact—in anticipation, perhaps, of the postmodern turn—'My aunt gives up both for the sake of being funny' (Forster 1960: 128). If we are destined to write fictions, perhaps we should at least accept an obligation to write kindly ones?

Or is the oath a promise of honesty? The trouble is that it is logically impossible to invoke an ethical principle of honesty at the same time as surrendering entirely any epistemological principle of truth. One cannot 'honestly' convey what one feels

unless what one says is indeed or reflects truly what one feels. And if one can attach meaning to the notion of truth or truthfulness as an ethical principle, why cannot one also apply it as an epistemological principle and write research reports which are not (just) fictions but have some warrant for their facticity or at least truth-likeness?

Or is the project a more ambitious one that is essentially to employ ethical principles in some way as epistemological ones? In fact, the arguments which I have drawn upon in this chapter offer some plausibility to this project. Let us suppose, first, that we could describe (at least for any given situation) the social and relational conditions which were most conducive to, for example:

- the free expression of ideas, feelings, and experience;
- in a regime characterised by a reasonably equitable distribution of power;
- careful, respectful, and attentive listening to and recording of these ideas;
- the open communication of and interaction with these ideas, including critical interaction;
- reflective and interactive interpretation of these ideas.

These ethically driven principles support the conditions which are traditionally held to be conducive to the successful pursuit of knowledge and understanding (truth, even). At the same time, of course, they are—in the first four cases at least—almost defining characteristics of an open or democratic society (see on this Bridges 1979).

Such social conditions need however to be peopled—and these people need to include some at least who are driven by curiosity, by a desire to know and to understand, and who are equipped not only with the know-how of systematic and sustained inquiry but also with the deeply based and ethically driven dispositions which support the quality of that inquiry—i.e. the kind of moral/intellectual virtues discussed above.[2]

One might argue, then, that excellence in knowledge and understanding (an excellence identifiable against some independent criteria) tends as a matter of empirical observation to issue under conditions in which these social and individual ethical principles/virtues are most fully present (a position close to that discussed in the last section). There is however a stronger argument, which is that that excellence is defined by and knowable only through the (ethically bounded) conditions under which that knowledge and understanding was produced.

In more traditional epistemological terms Firth (1978) argues that 'The ultimate task of a theory of knowledge is to answer the question, "What is knowledge?" But to do this it is first necessary to answer the question, "Under what conditions is a belief warranted?"' (Firth 1978: 216). In this case, we might suggest that a belief is warranted to the extent that it has been generated under the sort of ethically framed

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[2]Zagzebski defines virtue as 'a deep and enduring acquired excellence of a person, involving characteristic motivation to produce a certain desired end and reliable success in bringing about that end' (Zagzebski 1996: 137).

social conditions and by people operating under the sort of ethical/intellectual imperatives described above. The warrant, credibility, and perhaps truth value that we attach to a belief is, in short, a function of the ethical conditions under which it has been constructed. Ethics, in this way, substitutes for epistemology and, as Hookway (1994) has suggested it should, epistemic evaluation focuses on the activity of inquiry rather than on the beliefs themselves.

I have pushed this case as far as I feel able to. It offers an intriguing perspective which is in many ways in line with what I have already observed, among qualitative researchers in particular, to be a curious combination of epistemological scepticism and ethical self-confidence. The position seems to me however to be seriously flawed. Such ethical requirements may provide necessary or at least highly desirable conditions for the development of knowledge and understanding but it is difficult to see that they are sufficient. At least three arguments seem to be seriously damaging.

Firstly, this focus on the ethical conditions of inquiry appears to set aside the technical competence with which the inquiry is conducted including, for example, issues to do with the appropriateness of the methods to the task, or the sufficiency and appropriateness of the evidence in relationship to the claims which are made. Moral/intellectual virtues may *dispose* people to act in the right way in relation to inquiry, to be thorough, careful, honest, persevering, etc., but, surely, this will be to no avail unless they are also technically competent. Zagzebski's (1996) definition of virtue includes reference not just to characteristic motivation but also to 'reliable success in bringing about that end' (Zagzebski 1996: 137). But if we allow notions of technical competence to creep into the equation in support of ethical intentionality, then we drive a wedge in the claim for the sufficiency of the ethical criteria as a basis for epistemic evaluation. In answering the question 'Under what conditions is a belief warranted?' we now have to resort to considerations of the way in which the inquiry/research was conducted, to the relevance and sufficiency of the evidence, to the appropriateness of the research methodology, in short, to the epistemological discipline of the inquiry (see Chap. 2).

Secondly, the very notion of virtue and the dispositions and behaviours which are associated with it, are posited on their service in the production of a desired end (cf., again, Zagzebski's 1996 definition). In the instances we are examining here, that desired end is something like[3] knowledge and understanding. The principles, behaviours, dispositions, and motivations which we judge to be desirable are desirable precisely because they serve that end. But if this is the case, then we need to have an understanding of the nature of that end—of knowledge and understanding and the hallmarks of quality in that knowledge and understanding—which is derived independently of our judgment about the processes which are conducive to it. Again it is difficult to see how the ethical principles can be derived without reference to some epistemological ones.

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[3] I am trying to allow here for a variety of views about the precise status of the kinds of beliefs which might issue from a process of research or inquiry.

Thirdly, many of the virtues and principles which have been offered as conditions for successful inquiry themselves require epistemological reference. I have already suggested that a notion like honesty can have little meaning without some reference to truth. The kind of scholarly qualities of care and thoroughness which are picked out in accounts of intellectual virtue are logically attached to notions of, for example, the comprehensiveness of data, the seeking of possible contradictory evidence, faithfulness between reported accounts and documentary and other sources—all of which are wrapped up with important epistemological principles relating to what provides warrant for belief.

None of these arguments undermine the case for the importance or even the necessity of either the ethical principles governing the conditions under which inquiry/research is conducted, or the moral/intellectual dispositions and behaviours of those who are conducting them. They do however challenge their sufficiency.

Further, they challenge the notion that at the end of the day all one can produce is fiction. Our efforts in pursuit of knowledge and understanding may be puny and are certainly flawed. Our accounts (as I have already acknowledged in Chaps. 15 and 16) may resemble the accounts of fiction in all sorts of ways—and fiction itself in any case offers powerful contributions to human understanding. But there is little gained by the reductionism which loses sight of the particular kinds of warrants for belief and procedures for providing such warrants which are represented in the traditional and evolving disciplines of knowledge. The logic, certainly of the discourse of virtue and also of consideration of the ethics of educational research is, first to be clear as to what demands these disciplined forms of inquiry make upon us and then to consider what social conditions, codes of behaviour, or personal traits of behaviour most usefully serve those demands. These are not, as I have acknowledged, the only ethical or other principles which need occupy a researcher, because knowledge and understanding are not the only social or personal goods, but they must certainly be among the principles which are taken into account.

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Part VI
Research Quality and Its Assessment

Chapter 23
Generic Criteria of Quality in Educational Research?

Abstract Research quality assessment drives the behaviour of those engaged in research, and especially those working in higher education, in a multitude of ways, and yet there are many acknowledged complexities in conducting such assessment in a manner that is fair, consistent, and faithful to the character of the research itself. Nowhere, perhaps, is this complexity greater than in educational research which is, as I have described in previous chapters, a field of research drawing on an increasingly wide variety of disciplinary resources and serving a variety of different audiences. Against what criteria, then, might we conduct such assessment? Are there any generic criteria that can be applied sensibly across the different forms of educational research? This chapter examines a number of candidates for this position—all of them commonly employed, and none of them without some fairly serious issues when it comes to their interpretation and application. These include: rigour; originality; relevance; significance; impact; integrity and ethical conduct; style; and 'the scientific'. All are discussed in some detail, with particular reference to the UK Research Excellence Framework which has had (for better or for worse) a big influence on the development of system-wide research evaluation in many parts of the world. The discussion is extended into Chap. 24 on references to the 'international' in consideration of research quality and Chap. 25 on the science and art of research assessment.

> Education research is assessed in a wide range of contexts and for a wide range of purposes, from funding to publication decisions. Each assessment is based on operational criteria that depend largely on its context, although a common core of generic concerns may be identified. (Teaching and Learning Research Programme 2009)

23.1 Introduction

In previous chapters I have stressed the diversity of genres of research that contribute to educational inquiry. In the perplexed terms of the one-time reviews editor of *Educational Researcher*: 'Ours is a field characterised by paradigm proliferation and, consequently, the sort of field in which there is little consensus about what research and scholarship are and what research reporting and scholarship should look like' (Donmoyer 1996: 19). One inquiry into educational research quality concluded: 'We found no single objective definition of what actually constitutes 'good quality' research. Different people and organisations will adopt different measures; some incorporate concepts of relevance and/or utility, others … do not' (Hillage et al. 1998: 25). There are, nevertheless, significant attempts to establish and operationalise generic criteria that can be applied not only across different genres of educational research but, in some cases, across the range of academic disciplines. These include criteria of rigour, originality, relevance and significance, impact, integrity, ethical considerations, and style. In this chapter I will discuss the possibilities and problems in applying these criteria.

23.2 The Central Role of Research Quality Assessment in Higher Education

I probably do not need to labour the observation that research quality assessment is one of the main drivers of the behaviour of higher education institutions and their staff. It controls access to publication in books and journals and the presentation of one's work at academic conferences; it plays a central role in the appointment and promotion of academic staff (notwithstanding some worthy attempts to give due credit to, for example, teaching quality); it determines who gets grants from research councils and other bodies; in some countries that have a system-wide approach to quality assessment, it determines the core and infrastructure funds which universities receive for research; and it plays an important part in shaping the recruitment of postgraduate students. If, in the words of the old song, 'money makes the world go round', it is research quality assessment which, in the higher education context at least, makes the money go round.

It is argued with some justification that 'academic research is probably one of the most rigorously and consistently evaluated sectors in modern society' (Blockmans 2007: 89), and this is, of course, partly what provides its warrant as basis for public understanding and any esteem that the academic community has in the eyes of the public. However, in the process, this assessment actually shapes the very construction of knowledge in the academy. What counts as good research rests upon a set of principles about what will count as research at all. The UK research assessment system (previously the Research Assessment Exercise, currently referred to as the Research Excellence Framework—see www.REF.ac.uk) has, in fact,

allowed—with admirable liberality of judgment—that a website or piece of software, a painting, a sculpture, a curated exhibition, a musical composition, or a novel might all be acceptable as 'research outputs' alongside books and journal articles. In so doing it has aligned such activity with the more traditional work of the university: but they might not have done so. At the other extreme, the What Works Clearing House (www.w-w-c.org) has notoriously measured research quality against the standard of the double blind controlled experiment (a judgment that, of course, was not and could not itself be made on the basis of a double blind experiment), with the result that vast swathes of educational research that would normally pass as of high quality but employing different methodologies have been excluded. Even the London Institute of Education EPPI Centre (http://eppi.ioe.ac.uk/cms/) 'systematic reviews' have 'systematically' excluded from consideration in most of their reviews, for example, historical and philosophical work, case studies and biography, critical theory, discourse analysis, deconstruction, and small-scale action research. Over a period of time such inclusions and exclusions begin to affect what knowledge, what research, there will be a place for in the university.

If research quality assessment is going to play such an important role in controlling the destinies of individual researchers, of university departments, and indeed of whole universities and of the knowledge which has a place in these universities, then it rather points to the importance of assessment practices which are fair, valid, reliable, and consistent with the values and principles which inform the practice of higher education—but this is easier said than done.

23.3   Some Complexities in the Assessment of Educational Research Quality

I shall focus here on educational research, but I think it fair to say that much of what I have to say about the diversity of educational research (which is perhaps at the heart of the problem) would be applicable to other areas of social science research (especially applied social science) and, in these postmodern times, to the humanities. Indeed, the main panel for the assessment of educational research in the UK Higher Education Funding Councils Research Excellence Framework (to which I shall make substantial reference) established criteria that were common to a wide range of broadly social science subjects, which included law and architecture, as well as education. The natural sciences too are considerably less homogeneous than is often presented—and they would be more obviously diverse were it not for the huge resources which have been dedicated to work occupying the central ground of experimental scientific method. (What space, for example, is there for a phenomenographic study of patients' experience of illness compared with the resources available for a pharmaceutical cure?) In the field of education, the last 40 years have seen a remarkable proliferation in the intellectual resources brought to educational inquiry (see Chap. 2). This is partly the result of the fragmentation of

disciplines which were, in the 1970s, temporarily held together. Thus, different ingredients of 'sociology' have crystallised around identities such as ethnography, critical theory, large population studies and multi-layered modelling, feminist and post-colonial research, case study, and so on. 'Psychology' was always divided by tensions between, for example, behaviourist, cognitive, and psychoanalytic approaches. Today, two of the most influential currents come from phenomenography, at one end of a kind of humanistic to scientific continuum, and neuroscience, at another. Mix into this already diverse set of ingredients, some literary theory and discourse analysis; some biography, autobiography and 'little stories' (including fictional ones); some history (including 'contemporary history'); some iconography and 'connoisseurship'; not to mention (my favourite from the 2001 RAE exercise) 'Narcissus myth and deconstruction'—and you are really faced with an overwhelming diversity in the theoretical framing of educational research and in the epistemological and ontological assumptions which underlie it, let alone the methods employed and the forms in which it is subsequently represented. An American Educational Research Association (AERA) symposium on the assessment of quality in education research took this observation of the diversity of such research as its starting point:

> The state of discourse in the field of education research has been likened to the cacophony in the Tower of Babel (Phillips 2006). Not only is there a breakdown in communication due to the 'multitude of tongues' within the field—the multitude of theoretical and methodological approaches, all with their own specialist terminologies that make mutual comprehension difficult—but, in addition, proponents of different perspectives often hold strikingly different assumptions about the nature of the enterprise in which they are engaged. These include different assumptions about the ends of education research, about its epistemology, and relatedly, about whether it is or should be (or even could be) value free. There are concomitant and often charged disagreements about conceptions of quality or rigor and about the effects of different choices on the educational community. As a result, researchers working in different frameworks often 'talk past' each other, if they try to talk at all. (Moss et al. 2009: 501)

Nor is this a problem restricted to the Anglophone educational research community. In a review of the condition of '*les sciences de l'éducation*' across Europe, Hofstetter and Schneuwly observe 'a surprising heterogeneity of configurations (which) the disciplinary field (of educational science) has taken in … different national contexts' (Hofstetter and Schneuwly 1999: 17). They continue:

> The heterogeneity … appears … in what concerns the problems studied, the methodologies used, the privileged reference to other disciplines which differ from one country to another, from one institution to another, from one researcher to another and even from one research to another. This impression of heterogeneity is certainly amplified by the fact that the criteria of analysis, the object and the problems to be presented and the points of view to be privileged are not clearly defined and by the fact that even in each national community, the disciplinary field is fragmented … (Hofstetter and Schneuwly 1999: 17)

When Robert Donmoyer became features editor of *Educational Researcher*, the journal of the American Educational Research Association, he wrote a piece under the perplexed title 'Educational research in an era of paradigm proliferation: What's

a journal editor to do?' and observed: 'ours is a field characterised by paradigm proliferation and, consequently, the sort of field in which there is little consensus about what research and scholarship are and what research reporting and scholarship should look like' (Donmoyer 1996: 19). If a journal editor has this problem (and one response to the proliferation of paradigms has been the proliferation of journals), how much more of a problem and a responsibility lies with those tasked with research quality assessment across a whole national system? How is one to respond?

23.4 Are There Meaningful Generic Criteria of Quality that Can Be Applied to Educational Research?

It is perhaps not surprising that, faced with this diversity, those who are invited to articulate criteria of quality resort to rather abstract principles, or, as I shall illustrate in Chap. 25, lean on criteria, even metrics,—what the European Education Research Quality Indicators project (EERQI) called 'extrinsic' indicators)—which are at something of a remove from actual judgments of quality in terms of what the same project called 'intrinsic' indicators such as rigour, originality, and significance (EERQI 2011; Gogolin et al. 2014). It is tempting, for example, to substitute *quantity* or 'research productivity' for quality, but the UK Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) and the more recent Research Excellence Framework (REF) have been very emphatic that their focus is on the *quality* of research carried out in university departments. They have separated this judgment from information about the quantity of research produced by researchers by restricting the number of pieces of work submitted for assessment to a maximum of four (drawn from about six years of academic work) in all cases.

But against what criteria can and should we be assessing research quality? To what extent can one identify generic criteria that can be applied across the sort of diverse forms of research that I have indicated? Of course, there are some variations in the selection of these generic criteria, though often simply in the way they are expressed. The review of such criteria published in a *Briefing* by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) Teaching and Learning Research Programme (TLRP 2009) observed some significant differences between criteria employed by journal editors, by conference programme reviewers and by research-grant holders, but there were nevertheless a core of common requirements. The EERQI project carried out a wide ranging and iterative consultation with international research associations, partner universities, and expert advisors out of which it proposed five key criteria:

- rigour;
- originality;
- significance (for other researchers, policy, and practice);

- integrity (including considerations of authenticity, honesty, and ethical requirements in the conduct of research); and
- style (including clarity, communicability, eloquence, and elegance).

Its report concludes that, 'These concepts were positively evaluated by the consulted experts and considered as generally relevant for the assessment of educational research quality' (EERQI 2011: 17).[1]

In what follows I shall focus fairly closely on the five criteria.

23.5   Rigour

The idea of research as 'systematic' and 'sustained' inquiry already points us in the direction of what is perhaps one of the least contested criteria of quality, that of scholarly rigour. As I have discussed in Chap. 2, the 'systematic' suggests that there are procedures *sui generis* to the particular form of inquiry that need to be satisfied, and rules that need to be adhered to (or any non-adherence explained). The 'sustained' points to something pursued over time, to thoroughness and care, of a kind that would normally be a luxury for a good journalist for example. By extension, then, I suggest that whatever methods or methodology is embraced in a piece of research, the following qualities are relevant:

   i. carefulness, thoroughness, attention to detail, and accuracy in the reporting and representation of evidence and/or argument;
  ii. comprehensiveness of the relevant knowledge base, including awareness of what others have to contribute to the topic under consideration;
 iii. coherence and consistency;
  iv. the appropriate derivation of claims that are made or conclusions that are drawn to the supporting evidence and/or argument, and the soundness of the reasoning that holds the whole argument together;
   v. the corresponding acknowledgment of the limitations or weaknesses of the claims, and of possible alternative interpretations—a self-critical stance.

My view is that without at least some level of observance of these principles, an inquiry does not even deserve to be called research at all and, further, it cannot be regarded as high-quality research unless it observes these requirements with some meticulousness.

Of course, these requirements still require interpretation in different disciplines. In much empirical research the fourth principle above will require the careful sifting

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[1]Subsequently EERQI wrestled with the last two of these criteria, claiming that: 'This was due to the empirically based insight that questions referring to "integrity" and "style" were lacking discriminatory power and thus impaired the criteria validity of the instrument. Items that are related to "integrity" and "style" were integrated in the scales for rigour and originality in the second version of the questionnaire' (EERQI 2011: 17).

of evidence in support of claims, and also care as to the logic of the inferences drawn from the data to any conclusions. In philosophy (which my former colleague Donald MacIntyre always referred to provocatively as 'data-free research'), the emphasis is on analysis and argument.

I am not, of course, arguing that rigour is the only relevant generic criterion (as this chapter will go on to show); I am however tempted to suggest that it is a *sine qua non* of quality, except that there may be some forms of what are sometimes referred to as 'transgressive' research that favour imaginative sweep over these perhaps more pedestrian considerations.[2]

23.6   Originality

The requirement for originality features alongside that of scholarly rigour in virtually all research assessment criteria It was a generic criterion for research quality employed across the entire academic field in the UK-wide research assessment exercise, the Research Excellence Framework or REF. In the most recently completed assessment, in 2014, the Education Sub-Panel defined originality as follows:

> Originality will be understood in terms of the innovative character of the research output. Research outputs that demonstrate originality may: engage with new and/or complex problems; develop innovative research methods, methodologies and analytical techniques; provide new empirical material; and/or advance theory or the analysis of doctrine, policy or practice. (HEFCE 2011: par. 69)

It is precisely the function of research to extend and enrich knowledge, though this may also include revealing that we know less—or less certainly—than we had previously imagined. So, though we might nevertheless admire 'what oft was said but ne'er was said so well' in research assessment, we look for something other than what has already been articulated, described, or explained.

The criterion of originality may, of course, be satisfied in a variety of ways that reflect perhaps the different ways in which different disciplines advance knowledge and understanding. As researchers we may, for example:

- gather new evidence;
- offer a new interpretation or reading of existing evidence;
- challenge (perhaps 'de-construct') existing beliefs with evidence or argument and analysis;

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[2]In his introduction to the section of the *International handbook of interpretation in educational research* (Smeyers et al. 2014) on 'Cultural-transgressive approaches', Bob Davis writes that 'The essays in this section … welcome Hermes in all his ambiguity to the limits of the known and the knowable, to the edges where transgression of the established measures of meaning and measurement is not all nihilistic … but redounds to the enriching transformation of interpretation as an art of the human imagination applied to the joys and the sorrows, the successes and the failures, of experience and learning' (Smeyers et al. 2014: 1411).

- make new connections between, or offer a new synthesis of, existing knowledge;
- develop new forms of inquiry, extending the repertoire of educational research.

And, of course, we may do any of these things to a greater or lesser degree. In the evaluation of research we especially admire work that is highly original, perhaps seminal in so far as it opens up new thinking, challenges fundamentally established beliefs, frames the thinking of a whole generation of other researchers. Bassey distinguishes between 'pedestrian research [which] will add a small increment to the existing accumulation of knowledge' and 'significant research' which may, for example 'offer novel insights of potential power, put forward a new method of inquiry, or integrate previously fragmented understandings' (Bassey 1995: 121). There is some work (I think of Kelly's work on the self concept, Bernstein's work on language and social class, Stenhouse on teachers as researchers, Schön on reflective practice) which has had the capacity to stimulate, shape, and inform all sorts of continuing research, debate, and practice, some of which has further spawned another generation of ideas and practice. Furthermore, it has achieved this over a period of time which has transcended the passing vagaries of political fashion.

I am talking here about qualities which are primarily referenced to the work of the academic community in which originality is prized, but where that originality needs to be strengthened by reference to the significance of the work for the academic community. This is surely one of the things that must underpin an assessment of research quality. The criterion of significance is used in a different way, pointing to the significance of the research not just for the academic community but also for the community of policy and practice. I tend to view this second requirement as an additional and separate claim on educational research, which is different from judgment of the 'quality' of research, but this distinction is not in my experience observed at least in system-level approaches to the assessment of research quality.

There have been, however, those even at the centre of policy who have acknowledged the importance of what is significantly original in academic terms as a source for radical thinking in policy fora. The then UK Secretary of State, David Blunkett, recognised that:

> there must also be a place for the fundamental 'blue skies' research which thinks the unthinkable. We need researchers who can challenge fundamental assumptions and orthodoxies and this may well have big policy effects further down the road … if academics do not address it, then it is difficult to think of anyone else who will. (Blunkett 2000: 23)

23.7   Relevance and Significance

I am treating the criteria of relevance and significance together here (I shall discuss impact in the next section), though they are not quite the same. 'Relevance' simply suggests that a piece of work has something to say about the sphere to which it

relates; 'significance' is a stronger notion that suggests that this is something of importance.

The UK Research Excellence Framework (REF) criteria used by the Education Sub- Group define significance in this way:

> Significance will be understood in terms of the development of the intellectual agenda of the field and may be theoretical, methodological and/or substantive. Due weight will be given to potential as well as actual significance, especially where the output is very recent. (HEFCE 2011: par. 69)

The REF account of significance limits its application to 'the intellectual agenda'; the EERQI expansion of the notion of significance uses it to apply to significance for the academic community, as well as the spheres of policy and practice.[3] The REF was able to privilege reference to the intellectual agenda in its account of significance, because it also had, independently, a powerful tool in the form of its 'impact' criterion (see below) that did the other work for it. 'Relevance', significance', and 'impact' are, however, the assessment tools that are primarily used to drive research in the direction of policy and practice. Main Panel C, which assessed a wide range of social science submissions including education, explained that it wished 'to encourage the disciplines submitting in its UOAs [its units of assessment— for the most part university departments] to showcase the impact that their research has achieved *outside academia* during the assessment period' (HEFCE 2011: par. 74, my italics). Later it prescribes that for the part of the submission for assessment under 'impact', the submission 'should describe the main non-academic user groups, beneficiaries or audiences for the unit's research' (HEFCE 2011: par. 101). The focus on impact does not simply relate to research 'outputs', it is expected to shape the very research infrastructure in the university: 'Submissions should describe the unit's approach and its infrastructural mechanisms to support staff to achieve impact' (HEFCE 2011: par. 101).

In the Unites States, the pursuit of relevance and the utilisation of educational research was one of the main goals of the Strategic Education Research Program (SERP). SERP's strategic educational goal, or its 'very big ambition' as it is described by Bruce Alberts, the National Research Council Chair and President of the National Academy of Sciences, is 'to increase the usefulness and relevance of research to educational practice' (NRC 1999: vii). Similarly, as Kennedy has observed, 'Concerns about relevance frequently motivate the US Department of Education's Office of Educational Research and Improvement to require research grantees to involve teachers in the design of their work, on the assumption that such

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[3]The EERQI Report expands on the notion of significance as follows:

1. The study contributes to the development of its research field.
2. The study makes a significant contribution to the latest discussions within the research field.
3. The study makes a significant contribution to the latest discussions within the educational policy field.
4. The study makes a significant contribution to the latest discussions within the educational practice field. (EERQI 2011: 17).

involvement will force researchers to attend more to teachers' questions and concerns' (Kennedy 1997: 5). Hammersley argues, however, that too much importance can be attached to ensuring that research is perceived as relevant by teachers: 'Teachers are not the only audience for educational research, there are other sorts of practitioners involved in education as well. … What teachers *ought to be* concerned about cannot be decided by what they *are in fact* concerned about. Teachers do not have any uniquely privileged position in deciding what are important educational issues. … The issue of relevance is more complex than it might at first appear' (Hammersley 1993: 216).

Strand and Kvernbekk describe how in 2004 the Norwegian Research Council established an Evaluation Committee to assess the quality of educational research in the country (in which in 1999 educational researchers constituted as many as 972 of the 3595 researchers in higher education). This committee presented a picture of the opposition between relevance and quality, suggesting that the pressure that researchers were under to show 'relevance' actually undermined its claims to 'scientific quality' and intimated that a focus on relevance might 'make the research instrumental and conformist, and thus limit the space for critical and original research' (Strand and Kvernbekk 2009: 273). The 'Follow-Up Committee' that the Council established in 2005 challenged this dichotomy, however: 'We warn against exaggerating the contrast between relevance and scientific quality. The aim must be that also practically useful research satisfies the quality standards' (NRC 2006: 13; trans. Strand and Kvernbekk 2009: 274). But as Strand and Kvernbekk point out, relevance seems to be understood as an inherent property of the research, which begs the questions: 'relevant to whom?' relevant to what?' For Strand and Kvernbekk, 'what is relevant and useful becomes that which helps promote the quality of research and move educational research forward' (Strand and Kvernbekk 2009: 275).

As these observations suggest, the notions of 'relevance' and 'significance' both command excessive reliance: they do far less work for us in any context than is widely assumed. Indeed, Woods goes as far as to suggest that: 'Of all notions of argumentative and dialectic appraisal none is more intuitive than relevance, and none is in worse theoretical shape. In plainer terms, we have no theory of relevance; and so in an important sense we do not know what relevance is' (Woods 1994: 82). Both principles rely on someone making an imaginative connection between the research and, for example, some area of educational policy or practice. To observe the relevance of one belief, or theory, or research finding to some part of one's experience is always, however, to *construct* a connection rather than to *observe* it as one might a cable connecting a switch to an electric light (an observation which, even so, requires a good deal of construction of meaning and significance). In other words, there is an important dimension of subjectivity to considerations to do with the relevance or significance of research, so that it becomes appropriate to ask not only relevant to, or significant for, what, but also for whom. 'The only kind of relevance that exists,' argued Crabtree, 'is a contextual one; it is a relative relevancy, applicable to the problem at hand, perceived as such and accepted by the individual sufferer' (Crabtree 1971: 33).

It might seem indisputable to demand that educational research should at least be relevant to education, but how is such relevance to be determined? Philosophers of education, for example, may well start off with a concern about approaches to education for citizenship (clearly 'relevant' to education); get drawn into ideas of education for world citizenship (OK, but getting a little towards the margins?); thence to notions of cosmopolitanism in Kant and Stoic philosophy (well, I suppose philosophers would get drawn in those directions); and thence into Stoic ideas about human nature (er, yes…). But if I am writing about Stoic ideas of human nature, is my work 'relevant' to education?

One natural and legitimate response to this question is that it is if it can be shown to be: I have to reveal the connection between the inquiry into human nature and the more strictly educational inquiry in which, perhaps, it originated. But there are a number of problems with this requirement.

Firstly, its relevance or significance or otherwise is not dependant on any particular connectedness which I might choose to show. There are all sorts of other possible connections (relevances or significance) depending in part on the imagination and in part on the interests of those who engage with the material. Thus, my account of the relevance of my work to 'education' may be *sufficient* provided it is a convincing one (though my ability to convince is at least partly dependent on the imaginative capacity of my auditor to make the connection); it is, however, clearly not a *necessary* condition for the relevance of my work. I may see something as having a significance for education that my reader simply does not see: my reader may see relevance in my work that I had not observed.

Secondly, in a paper entitled 'The dysfunctional pursuit of relevance in education research', which may give some indication as to the direction of his argument, Labaree draws attention to 'a potentially pathological consequence of the effort to make research relevant: It may lead to educational knowledge that is short-sighted.' (Labaree 2008: 423 and see also Augier and March 2007 on the tendency towards 'myopia'.) Labaree continues: 'When education researchers seek to make their work relevant, they feel the need to tailor their work to the demands of educational practice in the present time and the local place (or the location of the intended client–consumer). The problem is that this work, even if it is helpful in that particular context, is not likely to be useful in the conditions of educational practice that exist a few miles away or a few months in the future.' By contrast, 'research that seems like an abstract exercise in theory building at one time and place may become highly relevant for practical purposes that were unforeseeable at the point when the work was done' (Labaree 2008: 423).

Thirdly, it is not clear what is this 'education' to which I have to show its relevance. How widely do we allow the field to be construed? Surely it is much wider than the set of practices typically associated with educational institutions like schools, colleges, or universities? Does it indeed have to relate to educational practice at all—or is it enough that it relates to another area of educational theory? And surely we can be engaged in something which is of educational significance in

this broader sense without employing the traditional discourse of education, training, learning, teaching, classrooms, assessment, and so on? So what do I have to show my examination of Stoic theory of human nature to be connected to in order that it can qualify as 'relevant' to education? Again, the problem of persuasion is partly a problem of the imagination of whomsoever it is I am trying to persuade.

I am tempted to conclude that the 'irrelevance' of any piece of philosophical or other writing to the field of education, or its 'insignificance', is a function not of the research itself but simply of the imaginative reach of the reader. I grant, however, that some contributions to the educational research agenda stretch this imaginative capacity to the limit. I certainly did not feel optimistic as to my own capacity to observe the educational connection as I listened to one contributor to a philosophy of *education* conference introduce a paper by explaining, 'This is a post-colonial reading of a reading by Derrida of a text by Plato, the Timaeus'. Of course, the philosopher can make this exercise of imagination more likely to succeed by writing in a way which takes into account both the nature of the research material and the interests, concerns, and frameworks of understanding (in so far as any of these are accessible) of the readers. This is good pedagogy in any context. This, however, throws the onus on the researcher to be an effective pedagogue on behalf of his or her research, as well as the producer of high-quality research, to have persuasive rhetoric as well as convincing logic. Personally, I think this is a perfectly reasonable expectation, but it is worth observing that it is a *different* and in principle separate task and, further, that some of our greatest and most original minds—Wittgenstein is an example here—have relied significantly on others to fulfil this pedagogic function on their behalf.

To return to the UK Research Assessment Exercise and its successor, the Research Excellence Framework, the question of 'relevance to whom?' is answered in terms of the 'stakeholders' who are included in the panel of assessors as representatives of 'users' (albeit that they may also be people of good standing as researchers in their own right). 'Sub-panels should normally also include members from the private, public or third sectors with expertise in commissioning, applying or making use of research' (HEFCE 2010: par. 36). The constituencies from which assessors were drawn for the assessment concluded in 2014 were the General Teaching Council for Scotland (the only concession to teacher voice in the process); the Welsh government; the UK government Department for International Development; the Education and Training Foundation; the National Health Service Trust; and the Quality Assurance Agency. (The QAA conducts quality assurance across higher education in the UK). It is to my mind a slightly odd assortment of people to represent what is in a sense public interest in educational research, but no doubt the individuals concerned were able to make some useful contributions. Their role was probably especially significant when it came to applying what in UK (and, I think, international) experience was a new and demanding requirement to assess the impact of research.

23.8 Impact

In research assessment and elsewhere, the criteria of *relevance* and *significance* increasingly get extended into the criterion of *impact*, which Oancea (2013) describes as a metaphor deemed worth turning into a governance technology, as it were the operationalising of these other principles and something more readily observable or describable. Surely it says something about the quality of the research if it can be shown to have had an impact on the educational community: on what happens in the upbringing of children, in schools or other educational institutions; on educational policy; locally, nationally, or internationally. Thus, the (former) UK National Education Research Forum asked in its consultation: 'How can existing experience in education and other sectors be drawn upon to construct an impact model for research and development in education?' and then 'How can we ensure that research intended to have an impact' (it does apparently acknowledge that not all research may be so intended) 'and is designed and funded with in-built measures of impact from the outset?' (quoted in BERA 2001: 17). The search for impact has by no means been restricted to the context of the UK. Yates describes how the requirement for impact and the view that 'research matters in so far as it contributes to economic and social outcomes' has long been a feature of the 'tacit arena in which educational researchers in Australia operate, and in which decisions about their employment and promotion are made' (Yates 2009: 222). It has also been since 2006 part of the official agenda signed off by the Minister of Education, albeit that it has been through subsequent fluctuations of political favour.

The UK Higher Education Funding Council adopted for the Research Excellence Framework that reported in 2014 a new requirement as part of its research assessment process, which was to ask university departments to demonstrate the 'impact' of their research. In the previous (2008) Research Assessment Exercise, credit had been given for impact—claimed in very short narratives accompanying publications or as part of a departmental description of their achievements, but not as a separately assessable component. For the 2014 assessment, impact was defined as: 'any effect on change or benefit to the economy, society, culture, public policy or services, health, the environment, or quality of life beyond academia' (www. hefce.ac.uk/rsrch/REFimpact and see Finch 2016).

As I have noted already, this impact was widely interpreted:

Impact of any type may be local, regional, national or international, in any part of the world. The beneficiaries of impact may include (but are **not** restricted to) community/ies, the environment, individuals and organisations. The panel will treat all forms and spheres of impact and any beneficiaries described on an equal basis. (HEFCE 2011: 79)

However, the HEFCE guidance states explicitly:

HEIs are reminded that impacts on research or the advancement of academic knowledge within the higher education sector (whether in the UK or internationally) are *excluded*. (HEFCE 2011: par. 74, my italics)

This element of the assessment carried, in fact, 20% of the weighting in the overall assessment of departments.

With thousands of contentious academics ready to respond to this element of research assessment, the proposals received a pretty thorough going over before they were implemented, and this enabled HEFCE and the assessment panels considerable scope to anticipate and to address some of the more obvious criticisms. I will present these in some detail, because as far as I am aware no-one has gone into these issues and addressed them in practice with quite the same thoroughness as the UK funding councils. So, for example:

(i)   *Surely you cannot measure impact*?

No, but you can tell a story about it, describe it—and hence the presentation of claims to impact in the form of case studies—albeit at an estimated cost for this element of assessment alone of £55 million (Grant 2016). In a contribution to an Academy of Social Science conference on the 2014 REF, Wilsdon acknowledged that impact was even more difficult to measure than even the other criteria employed: 'Impact is even more problematic—even Elsevier can't make the case that there are metrics to capture impact as it was captured in REF 2014' (Wilsdon 2016: 18).

(ii)   *But how do you differentiate greater and lesser impact*?

You have to employ two criteria—of 'reach' and of the 'significance' of the claimed impact. Dame Janet Finch, who chaired the broadly social sciences panel in the REF explained: The criteria for assessing were reach and significance. The HEFCE criteria expand on both notions:

Reach will be understood in terms of the extent and diversity of the communities, environments, individuals, organisations or any other beneficiaries that have benefited or been affected.

Significance will be understood in terms of the degree to which the impact has enriched, influenced, informed or **changed** policies, opportunities, perspectives or practices of communities, individuals or organisations. (HEFCE 2011: par. 102)

(iii)   *But surely it can take a long time for a particular piece or body of research to have any impact; this does not usually happen overnight*?

'Impact starts with recognition of the difficulties the education system has in assimilating new information and acting on it' (Beveridge 1998: 108). Both the RAE Education Panel that reported in 2008 and the 2014 REF have recognised the fact that it often takes time for research to have any impact on policy or practice. 'The quality of research will often be demonstrated through its influence on other researchers working in the same field, or on policy makers and practitioners. Evidence of such influence will be taken into account, though the Panel recognises that such impact is not always direct and can take some time to become observable' (HEFCE 2010: par. 3.59.3). The impact of any piece of research can only be judged against a relatively long time frame—partly because durability and seminality are

themselves part of what is contained in the notion of impact, and these necessarily require time; and partly because it can take many years for the significance of really important and challenging work to be seen. Bernard Crick's elevation to personal adviser to the UK Secretary of State and Chair of a national working party on education for citizenship some 30 years after he wrote his research papers on the subject is both a caution against hasty judgments of impact and an encouragement to disappointed researchers to stay hopeful! Sadly, however, he would have missed any credit he might have won through two research assessment exercises and was retired before his particular moment of glory arrived. Gipps offers the case of the UK Assessment of Performance Unit as an illustration of what Weiss (1979) has called 'knowledge creep and decision accretion'.[4] In the years of the Unit's operation in developing new models of national assessment of pupil performance, it remained in constant anxiety about the failure of teachers to take any serious notice of its work. It is only in retrospect after 15 years that it is possible to see both the impact it had and the circuitous routes through which that impact came. 'Research knowledge', writes Gipps, 'gets only slowly into policy deliberation and may begin to affect policy not by a single clear decision but through a more diffuse process of influence (or, as the ancients phrased it: *scienta dependit in mores*—knowledge works its way into habits)' (Gipps 1998: 73).

Notwithstanding these considerations, clearly, in the context of research assessment, a university department claiming credit for the impact of its research today has to have some resemblance to the department that generated the research in the first place. The research for which it is claiming impact credit will probably not have been conducted during the period of the last five years, but there has to be some historical limitation. The HEFCE REF which reported in 2014 allowed that research conducted since January 1988 was eligible as an underpinning to current claims of impact (HEFCE 2011: par. 87), which seems to me to be not unreasonable.

(iv) *Research is often critical of policy and practice, and challenges it without necessarily offering an alternative course of action. Surely we do not want to discourage this critical function of research?*

If impact, in the sense of visibility and implementation, becomes the criterion of value of research, then it becomes very tempting to develop a research agenda which is essentially a handmaiden to government policy and priorities. From the perspective of e.g. a Secretary of State this may seem eminently reasonable, but

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[4]'That decisions often take shape gradually, without the formality of agenda, deliberation, and choice, helps to explain the lack of direct utilisation of research and analysis. When decisions accrete through small uncoordinated steps taken in many offices—by staffs who have little awareness of the policy direction that is being promoted or the alternatives that are being foreclosed, there is scant opportunity for deliberate application of research information to the task. But staff base their ongoing actions on the sum of their knowledge and judgement. To the extent that research has entered into their understanding of the nature of the problems and of feasible responses, they draw upon it as they carry on their work' (Weiss 1991: 184).

there is something deeply uncomfortable about an approach to the evaluation of research quality which makes its sympathy with government policy and its underlying ideology a condition of its applicability and hence of its merit.[5]

And yet there are those within the educational research community who appear to have already internalised this expectation. Fairbrother offers this report on a BERA Special Interest Group seminar on assessment:

> One contributor, speaking, I think, about her own personal research, and supported by others, said she wouldn't risk her University's standing by carrying out research which was not perceived to be needed by policy makers or commissioning agencies. She said it would be professional suicide to do so. A specific example of this would be to work in an area which criticises OFSTED assessment when OFSTED inspectors are vital to the financial viability of their institution. (Fairbrother 2001: 27)

As Beveridge has warned, 'Merely disagreeing with a government does not make for a sound principle of quality control' (Beveridge 1998: 100), and some academics might have to acknowledge that not all government policies and statements on education are inherently flawed. (Mm—not easy.) Nevertheless, as the RAE Education Panel recognised: 'research can fulfil an important function by offering independent criticism of policy or practice' (HEFCE 2010: par. 3.59.3). There is an important function of a research community in a democracy as a form of authoritative and informed dissent, which is surrendered at some political cost.

The main way in which they were invited to demonstrate this impact was to provide case studies of the way particular bodies of work (the requirement was not attached to individual publications) impacted on policy or practice. This raised the question:

(v) *Will not the production of these case studies simply reward the best 'bullshitters'?*

There are, however, requirements for evidence to support any claims: 'The sub-panels will use their expert judgement regarding the integrity, coherence and clarity of the narrative of each case study, but will expect that the key claims made in the narrative to be supported by evidence and indicators' (HEFCE 2011: par. 83), and there is also an audit system in place covering the whole submission and not just the case studies, which entitles HEFCE to visit any institution and verify its claims.

Smith and Conroy provide a slightly different gloss on this concern. In a paper on 'The ethics of the Research Excellence Framework' (Smith and Conroy 2016) they point to the risk of rewarding not so much the downright dishonest but the 'boasters': 'This is what is objectionable in the demand that every scholar or researcher should demonstrate "impact". It is not just that it leads them to

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[5]There are, of course, parallel concerns associated with attempts to put research at the service of the corporate sector. Willinsky warns that 'If research is to be a greater part of a thoughtful and informed discussion of educational issues, then it should offer an alternative source of public information to the increasing corporate concentration within the media and the commercialization of information economies' (Willinsky 2001: 9).

exaggerate their impact when they have little, or to lay claim to it when they have none to speak of. It is simply that it turns them into professional boasters: and this, as Aristotle notes (*NE* 1127b9), is wearisome.' By contrast there is not much space in the world of REF and impact for the ironic person, who 'misses the truth by excessive understatement ("I'm one of those academics whose work gets read by three people, one of them my mother"), and may mislead the innocent and the literally minded' (Smith and Conroy 2016).

(vi) *You can do everything in your power to bring your research to the attention of the relevant public body but there may be quite other reasons why they do not act on it.*

There is more to this problem that I would like to set out in more detail.

First, it is clear from the analysis of what goes into policymaking offered in Chap. 6 that research findings are not, could not be, and indeed should not be the only informational sources shaping educational or any other policy:

> The main determinants of practice and policy lie outside the field of research, knowledge transformation and the dissemination of findings. In essence, research is most likely to make impact when the findings or recommendations match existing desires and expectations. This is true almost regardless of quality. (Hodkinson 2001: 21)

I have argued that considerations that include political ideology and political prudence all play a legitimate part. So, if research does have an impact on policy it may be simply because of a fortunate alignment of these forces—as in the case of Bernard Crick's work on citizenship mentioned above—rather than the quality of the research. Equally good quality and relevant research, e.g. focused on the values of fraternity and community, may just come at the wrong time when the political orientation is towards competitiveness and the market. If impact depends to this extent on the alignment of the stars, it is difficult to see why one would give much weight to its achievement in research assessment.

A second problem for those seeking to have an impact on public opinion, policy, or practice is that this depends not just on the quality of the research, but also on the researcher's capacity to market it through channels other than the usual academic routes to which he or she is accustomed. The problem is that in terms of, e.g. press coverage and response, this is as much a matter of the sexiness, eccentricity, or topicality of the theme and the promotional capacity of (most commonly) those commissioning the research as of any inherent quality in the research itself. The January 2001 edition of *Research Intelligence* reported that by January 2001 the UK Department for Education and Employment was employing 100 information officers dealing with media relations, publicity campaigns, and ministers' announcements. The report suggests that perhaps some of this resource could be used to put educational research findings more firmly in the public domain. My point is rather to observe that if you (e.g. as a Minister or senior civil servant) have this sort of resource at your disposal, then your capacity to shape what research is given prominence in the public eye (and what is knowingly placed where no one

will notice it) and what, therefore, has the greatest impact in these terms, is enormous.

The third problem about the fact that quality research that is directed very clearly at policy or practice does not always have any impact on these, is that for this to happen policymakers and practitioners need to have at least some predisposition to pay attention to such research, and this is perhaps not as widely distributed as researchers might like. 'Impact starts with recognition of the difficulties the education system has in assimilating new information and acting on it (Beveridge 1998: 108).

The mechanisms through which educational or social science research is brought into utilisation are, however, poorly understood.[6] In the United States, the National Research Council (NRC) and the Strategic Education Research Programme (SERP) have grappled with very much the same issues of research utilisation as have been discussed here. The SERP plan spoke of a need for 'the preparation of teachers so that they can be consumers of research' (NRC 1999: 2) but, as Willinsky has argued:

> this goal of research consumption suggests the ready digestion of research-dictated practices rather than teachers' critical engagement with this knowledge. Teacher preparation for research consumption could be mistaken for an act of social engineering intended to expedite implementation rather than professional development or deliberation. (Willinsky 2001: 7)

These sorts of observation support the argument that quality of research is not a sufficient condition for it to have impact (or impact a necessary condition of its quality); point to the complexity of the conditions which enable research to be utilised; and indicate the ideological as well as the practical considerations which are present in such arrangements. The NRC acknowledges with Weiss (1979, 1991) what 'an extraordinary concatenation of circumstances' it takes for 'research to influence policy decisions directly' (NRC 1999: 44).

Fourth, we have to recognise that the focus on the evaluation of impact—and in the UK the research funding councils have adopted a similar orientation—does itself have an impact on the research culture. Grant has conducted an early follow-up study of the 2014 Research Excellence Framework under the tile 'The impact of impact' (someone was bound to use it!) from which he reported that:

> about a third [of respondents to a survey] felt that the impact process of REF was giving them better recognition in their impact activities. It's hard to challenge that. It may be argued whether that's a good thing or a bad thing, but there's been a cultural change in the higher education sector. (Grant 2016: 7)

Finally, we need to note that our desire that educational research should have an impact on educational policy or practice or on other research is presumably conditional upon the research being of high quality in the first place, otherwise it will

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[6]There is, however, a useful discussion of some alternative models in vol. 26 of the *Oxford Review of Education*—nos. 3 and 4 constitute a special issue on 'the relevance of educational research' (Pring and Sylva 2000). (See also Smith and Smith 1992.)

not only be misleading research but will also provide the legitimation for badly grounded practice or policy. Considerations of quality are, therefore, separate from considerations of impact but, for policymakers and researchers, need also to be a prime consideration. HEFCE guidance for the REF recognised that these are two separate judgments and introduced the idea of a 'threshold' of quality as a basis for claiming credit for any impact:

> The main panel notes in particular that while the REF is a process for assessing the excellence of research in submitting units, there is a key difference in the assessment of impact: the excellence of the underpinning research for an impact case study is a threshold judgement (a level which has to be met in order for a case study to be eligible for assessment), but the quality of the underpinning research will not be taken into consideration as part of the assessment (or indeed the assigned quality profile) of the claimed impact. (HEFCE 2011: par. 90)

23.9   Integrity and Ethical Considerations

So far I have developed some views about the quality criteria which might arguably be applied to educational research without reference to the ethical conditions under which the research was conducted. This leaves open the possibility that you could have research which was judged excellent on these criteria, but which was nevertheless based upon plagiarism, or the fraudulent concoction of evidence, or conducted in ways which were widely regarded as offensive to some basic human rights: research, perhaps, which caused evident suffering to people who had been manipulated into participating, or research which exploited vulnerable groups of people. I have discussed in Chap. 22 something of the complex interrelationship between ethical and epistemological considerations in educational research, but for the moment let me consider the implications of these observations for the development of quality criteria for research.

One response is to regard such ethical considerations as separate from considerations of research quality. They could be applied, for example, as what we might call eligibility criteria, so that a piece of research only becomes eligible for consideration in terms of its quality, provided it meets certain basic requirements regarding its ethical conduct.

It may, however, be very difficult to police such an ordering of judgment. Information about the ways in which a researcher exploited participants may not come out till long after the research is published and assessed, though it is an increasingly well-established practice for journals to require of contributors some statement about the ethics of the conduct of their research. It would be difficult to insist on people refraining from applauding perhaps the exciting and original insights provided by the research in parallel with condemnation of its unethical conduct. Milgram's classical work on obedience to authority (Milgram 1963) received elements of both these responses. In any case there would certainly be

those who would view the (ethical) mode of conduct of research as something much more integral to the epistemological project, and thence to core criteria of quality, than this sort of separation suggests. All of these considerations point to the ethics of the conduct of the research as something standing in a more integral relationship with, especially, criteria of scholarly rigour and perhaps also originality. In certain forms of ethnography or biographical research, in particular, parts of the research method and the research discipline are constructed out of the obligations which the researcher is required to honour in relations with participants. One asks, for example, did informants have chance to verify or amend transcripts of interviews? Did they have chance to comment on the way in which their contributions were used in the context of a research report and to ensure that their intended meaning had not been distorted by the 'ventriloquy' of the author—ethical considerations that are partly to do with the rights of participants in the research, but which are also checks on the faithfulness of what is reported to the original sources, and hence requirements on the scholarly rigour of the research. Such considerations seem to me to be integral to the assessment of research quality, not an optional extra. It is interesting in this connection that the REF Education Sub-Group include considerations of integrity and 'ethical issues' in their own definition of rigour:

> Rigour will be understood in terms of the intellectual precision, robustness and appropriateness of the concepts, analyses, theories and methodologies deployed within a research output. Account will be taken of such qualities as the integrity, coherence and consistency of arguments and analysis, such as the due consideration of ethical issues. (HEFCE 2011: par. 69)

23.10   Style

I have, then, said something about the qualities of research which are linked to its function in helping us to judge the confidence with which we might hold certain beliefs, and its function in the origination of ideas. Are these, then, the only expectations? I think we cannot leave the discussion without recognising that any research includes representational and communicative processes associated with 'making public' the research, and that these representational and communicative processes have their own qualities or excellence which I shall briefly consider in terms of qualities of style.

Most research is represented by some form of literary production—typically a paper, report, or book. Of course, the features of style that are most often written into the requirements for a conference presentation or publication are to do with basic features of the use of language (including in many 'international' journals the use of English), of intelligibility, lucidity, and economy of words. With certain interesting exceptions (see Chap. 15 on the presentation of research in the form of fictional stories), such works are not presented primarily as artistic, aesthetic, or

literary productions, but this is no reason why they should not additionally aspire to please or delight the reader with their elegance, wit, lucidity, economy, or charm in the use of language or excite, provoke, engage, or induce calm reflection and dispassion through their use of rhetorical or dramatic effect. I have already acknowledged the responsibility of the research author to help the reader to see the significance of the research for whatever sphere of policy or practice it seeks to illuminate. In other words, the researcher's use of language and literary form may be judged, among other things, against a range of literary criteria, and the quality of the use of language. The construction of the research report, including in this the ordering of evidence and the development of the argument, is a quality or part of the quality that we may look for in the work. Many years ago, John Dewey wrote of his aspirations for 'genuine social science' in which 'the highest and most difficult kind of inquiry and *a subtle, delicate and responsive art of communication* must take possession of the physical machinery of transmission and circulation and breathe life into it' (Dewey 1926: 180, 184; my italics). There is an art and a style to research writing as well as a set of scholarly and intellectual requirements.

This judgment (or set of judgments) of research quality in terms of style is, of course, one of considerable complexity and contestability. The European Educational Research Quality Indicators project (see above) gave up on it, though such requirements remain features of the European Education Research Association's conference assessment criteria. It is contestable in literary or aesthetic terms, in the sense that literary critics will disagree both about what criteria should be applied to the judgment of a piece of writing and about how an individual piece of writing should be judged against any one of these criteria (though such controversy can be overstated). It is also problematic in more narrowly educational research terms. Different educational research methodologies seem to call for different styles of research writing and hence to invite different qualities of literary style. Even something as elementary as clarity or lucidity is challenged as an expectation by, for example, a postmodern researcher like MacLure (2003: 114), notwithstanding her own capacity to represent both qualities admirably in her own scholarly writing—though this is in the context of challenging the preoccupation of journal editors with more mundane features of writing and their discouraging of style, and flourish, and so on. MacLure argues that this editorial restraint is connected with a particular view of language and how it gives access to the world: 'We have become accustomed to thinking of the supposedly plainer (more puritanical) versions as closer to the truth, more innocent, or at least more appropriate for research purposes' (MacLure 2003: 115).

It must surely be the case that one can and will bring some sort of functionally appropriate expectation of literary style to any piece of writing—even educational research—and that if we find these functional requirements met with particular skill and enhanced with expression which allows a restrained enjoyment of some supernumerary literary virtues, then we shall respond with some appreciation of its quality.

23.11 The 'Scientific' as a Criterion of Quality

The notion of the 'scientific' is, as I am sure I have amply illustrated in previous chapters, a troublesome one in the context of educational research. This is partly because scholars mean a number of different things when they talk about research as 'scientific'. It is also because it is part of the rhetoric of persuasion to indicate that educational research is worth taking seriously. But since it is also employed as a criterion of research quality [see *Scientific research in education: Report of the National Research Council Committee on Scientific Principles for Educational Research* (Shavelson and Towne 2002)], it is pertinent to pause and examine it here.

First it is important to recognise that one of the problems is the use of the term 'scientific' to indicate some very different ranges of research:

(i)   any scholarly endeavour that is conducted in a systematic and rigorous way. The French use of '*les sciences de l'éducation*', for example, would normally include such disciplines as philosophy and history;

(ii) any form of *empirical* inquiry that is conducted in a suitably *rigorous* way—see, for example, the US National Research Council 2002 report (Shavelson and Towne 2002);

(iii) only *a subset of empirical inquiry*, such as randomised controlled trials that apply methods drawn from the natural sciences, though, as I noted in Chap. 4, advocates of this view of the 'scientific' have a peculiarly narrow view of the methods employed in the natural sciences themselves—and this is what I refer to as 'scientism'.

What makes things very confusing is that not only is the term used to mean different things in different parts of the literature, but influential sources like National Research Council 2002 report seem to use it in different ways (with significantly different consequences) within the same document. In some passages the report seems to be taking a very eclectic view (as in point i above) of what might count as scientific:

> Although science is often perceived as embodying a concise, unified view of research, the history of scientific inquiry attests to the fact there is no one method or process that unambiguously defines science. The committee has therefore taken an inclusive view of 'the science of education' or 'the educational sciences' in its work. (Shavelson and Towne 2002: 24)

> Importantly, our vision of scientific quality and rigor applies to the two forms of education research that have traditionally been labelled 'quantitative' and 'qualitative'. (Shavelson and Towne 2002: 19)

Even more promisingly:

> critically, the committee believes that scientific research in education is a form of scholarship that can uniquely contribute to understanding and improving education, especially when integrated with other approaches to studying human endeavors. For example,

historical, philosophical, and literary scholarship can and should inform important questions of purpose and direction in education. Education is influenced by human ideals, ideologies, and judgments of value, and these things need to be subjected to rigorous—scientific and otherwise—examination. (Shavelson and Towne 2002: 24)

This last reference to rigorous examination which can be 'scientific or otherwise' is, in a sense, somewhat ambivalent. I am not too worried by the suggestion that, for example, philosophy, history, or discourse analysis might not be 'scientific' (I see them in any case as rooted in what have been traditionally referred to as the 'humanities'), if it is acknowledged that these may nevertheless be rigorous and a crucial component in the formation of policy. However, this is a report about research *quality* and what ought to provide the foundation for national policy decisions, and this rapidly becomes defined and described exclusively in terms of the *scientific*, and then the scientific becomes defined in terms of the *empirical* ('theories, hypotheses, or conjectures must be stated in clear, unambiguous, and empirically testable terms'—Shavelson and Towne 2002: 18), and then the empirical in terms of, e.g. *replicability* and *generalisability*, that exclude a number of approaches rooted e.g. in anthropology. The report advances five 'scientific' principles, three of which could readily apply across the diversity of approaches to educational research, but two indicate a commitment to a much more restricted assessment:

> Ultimately, the final court of appeal for the viability of a scientific hypothesis or conjecture is its empirical adequacy. (Shavelson and Towne 2002: 3)

> Ultimately, scientific knowledge advances when findings are reproduced in a range of times and places and when findings are integrated and synthesized. (Shavelson and Towne 2002: 4)

Reference to the 'scientific' therefore seems to me to be unhelpful as a generic criterion of research quality because it tendentiously restricts the range of research that can exhibit quality as it is defined. (For fuller discussion of some of these criticisms see Erickson and Guiterrez 2002; St Peter 2002; Howe 2005; Moss 2005; Eisenhart 2005). In any case, reference to the scientific adds little to the more widely applicable criterion of rigour that I have discussed above.

On rigour, however, the report sets itself some interesting standards:

> Because in many ways this report is itself a product of scientific work, it had to live up to its own depiction of what constitutes good science. The authoring committee has applied rigorous reasoning to its scrutiny of evidence and ideas, considered alternative perspectives, and presented its findings and conclusions in a language that invites constructive discussion. (Shavelson and Towne 2002: vii)

Perhaps if it had stuck to these expectations its outcome would have been more inclusive.

23.12   Conclusion

In this chapter I have considered what criteria might be brought to judgments of the quality of educational research. I have discussed a number of criteria which are commonly offered as generic criteria of quality which can be applied to the diverse forms of contemporary educational research. None of these is unproblematic, though they may offer some basis for a synthetic judgment. What is important to observe is their interdependence: scholarly rigour can be pedestrian without some spark of originality; originality can be trivial without some consideration of its significance to the academic community; (more contestably) what is significant for the academic community is of little consequence unless it can also be demonstrated to have significance for the policy and/or practice community; such significance counts for little unless the research is successfully communicated so that it has impact; but (as the HEFCE criteria make clear) that impact has itself to be assessed in terms of its significance, and if it is not good research in the first place any impact may be a negative rather than a positive one.

What Davis argued about the evaluation of good teaching applies equally to that of good research:

> the criteria cannot be considered and assessed *on their own*. How they are applied to classroom processes depends on how other criteria are applied and vice versa. There is a kind of hermeneutic circle here. We cannot understand one criterion unless we understand others and how that one relates to others. Yet in turn we cannot understand any one of the others either without understanding the rest and how they fit together. (Davis 2007: 82)

Whether it employs all or only some of the criteria discussed in this chapter, therefore, research quality assessment is a holistic judgment that needs to consider the interaction between these different factors and not judge them in isolation from each other.

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Chapter 24
The International and the Excellent in Educational Research and Its Assessment

Abstract The context for this chapter is one in which the assessment of the quality of educational (and other) research is playing an increasingly important part in determining the funding which is provided to support that research and, hence, the possibility of maintaining that research at all. It is also one in which the discourse of the 'international'—'internationally refereed', 'internationally benchmarked', 'world class'—mingles intimately with, and sometimes apparently substitutes for, the discourse of 'quality' in a way which I feel is confused and unsatisfactory. Not only this, but the same discourses potentially marginalise forms of social science research which arguably provide the best chance of informing practice in a way which is both contextually sensitive and convincing to practitioners. This chapter attempts to clarify the relationship between these two discourses—i.e. of the 'international' and of 'research quality'—and to highlight some of the issues raised by quality assessment systems which rely on reference to the international to support judgments of quality. It will consider: (i) the sense in which 'international' can be applied to the character of the research and the extent to which research of this character can also be said to be of high quality; (ii) the significance of research being published in 'international' refereed journals (or not) for indications of its quality; and (iii) ranking quality on an international scale.

24.1 Introduction: The 'International' as a Criterion of Quality

The notion of the 'international' can, of course, be simply descriptive, suggesting that the university, the journal, or the conference in question is one to which people from many different countries contribute or participate. But it has also become a criterion of quality: the 'international' is superior to the national or the regional.

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University staff are urged to publish their work only in 'international' journals. Since few journals claim to be anything other than 'international' these days, this is really code for English-language journals. Unsurprisingly then, the reference to the international features prominently too in the discourse of research quality assessment. The UK Research Excellence Framework, to which I have referred in some detail in Chap. 23, has worked with a five-point scale for the assessment of research. Its definition of the five levels is as follows:

4*	Quality that is world leading in terms of originality, significance, and rigour
3*	Quality that is internationally excellent in terms of originality, significance, and rigour
2*	Quality that is recognised internationally in terms of originality, significance, and rigour
1*	Quality that is recognised nationally in terms of originality, significance, and rigour
Unclassified	Quality that falls below the standard of nationally recognised work. Or work which does not meet the published definition of research for the purposes of this assessment. (HEFCE 2011: 1)[1]

In an increasing number of countries, the element of core funding attributable to research activity (including that portion of an academic's salary which is, notionally at least, attributable to the time they spend doing research) is distributed on the basis of an assessment of the quality of research produced by different sections of the university community. This has been the case in the UK since the early 1990s. Australia and New Zealand are following much the same model. The New Zealand Tertiary Education Commission established a Performance-Based Research Fund, the primary goal of which was 'to ensure that excellent research in the tertiary education sector is encouraged and rewarded. This entails assessing the research performance of tertiary education organisations (TEOs) and then funding them on the basis of their performance' (Tertiary Education Commission 2005: 1). Introducing the new 'Preferred Model' for an Australian Research Quality Framework (RQF), Education Minister Brendan Nelson explained that 'It is critically important that the RQF is designed to identify and reward outstanding research quality and impact in Australia's publicly funded institutions' (Department for Education, Science and Technology Expert Advisory Group 2005b: 1). Summing up the rationale for Australia's Research Quality Framework in a keynote address to the Australian Association for Research in Education, Yates suggested that the desired outcomes of the exercise are 'producing evident economic, social and environmental benefit for Australia; of increasing efficiency and effectiveness in

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[1]It should be noted that for all practical purposes—i.e. in terms of the funding that flows from this assessment—it is really the scale of 4* quality that counts, and anything below 3* will bring little or no return.

terms of research resources; and of enhancing Australia's *international* standing in quality research performance' (Yates 2005: 17, my italics). The Minister for Education, Science, and Technology in Australia has clearly stated that:

> the only benchmarks and/or standards that will matter in the future are *international* benchmarks and standards. The RQF can be reasonably expected to identify units of research excellence in Australia as determined by peer review. *International benchmarking* will ask the question of how *globally* competitive is that research excellence when compared with other such research efforts *overseas*. (Department of Education Science and Technology, EAG Working Group 2005a: 1, my italics)

This language is an indication that the discourse of the 'international' and the 'world class' is a pervasive one when it comes to talk of research quality, and by no means limited to the UK. China has stated its subscription to the same principle, although in this case the scale of the higher education system means that resources will be focused on a 'mere' 200 'world class universities' (out of a total of, I believe, some 2300). The establishment in the Netherlands in the 1990s of specialised 'Research Schools' was, similarly, a response to a belief that research expenditure which is thinly spread across the system will not produce the 'world class' research needed to fuel a competitive knowledge-based economy and that expenditure needs, therefore, to be concentrated in a smaller number of centres of proven excellence.

The 2014 Hong Kong Research Assessment Exercise offers an important distinction, however. In many respects, including the five quality levels, the Hong Kong approach follows that of the UK, except in this case 'regional' is substituted for 'national'. However, discussion around this criterion of the 'international' raised questions about reference (especially in the case of material published in Chinese) to a different socio-spatial entity, that of greater China. The 2014 document on assessment criteria explains 'international excellence' in these terms:

> This should not be equated with output items published outside of Hong Kong or the region; rather it is intended that evaluation should be made with reference to the best international norms in that discipline or sub-discipline. It is possible that in some particular disciplines, such norms are set by output items published in Hong Kong or the region. (University Grants Committee 2014: par. 21)

The University Grants Committee goes on to make an important distinction regarding the 'regional' and the 'international' in terms which others might usefully observe:

> A distinction should be made in qualitative terms between (a) a publication that is regional because it addresses regional or local issues, and (b) a publication that is regional because it does not meet the standards of rigour and scholarship expected internationally in that discipline. In the former case, the categorization of the item will not be adversely affected; in the latter, it will. (University Grants Committee 2014: par. 21)

Hong Kong's wrestling with these issues is an early indication that once the assessment of research quality gets tied into reference to particular socio-spatial contexts, it readily assumes political significance.

I shall return to this political dimension later in this chapter. For the moment, however, I simply want to explore some of the different ways in which a connection can be made between research quality and the international. I shall consider: (i) the sense in which 'international' can be applied to the character of the research and the extent to which research of this character can also be said to be of high quality; (ii) the significance of research being published in 'international' refereed journals (or not) for indications of its quality; and (iii) ranking quality on an international scale.

24.2   'International' as a Descriptor of the Character of the Research

There are pragmatic financial considerations here, considerations rooted in the global economy and epistemological considerations. The sheer cost of some areas of scientific research and the range of specialist scientific resources which need to be brought to bear upon it require a complex web of international collaboration. Among the most spectacular examples of such investment and collaboration is the Geneva-based CERN research into subatomic particles, which involves some 7000 science researchers worldwide; research based on space exploration; research into global warming; and major areas of medical research, such as the international assault on cancer. In these and other fields, internationally derived teams of researchers work in internationally resourced centres, meet routinely on a predictable circuit of international conferences and seminars, and publish collaboratively authored papers credited to an international team of writers in internationally recognised journals. (One paper that came out of the CERN research and was published in *Nature* ran to 35 pages, of which the first 28 consisted of the list of co-authors!)

This is the world of 'big science', in which perhaps a substantial majority of global expenditure on research is invested. For universities this is also where the big money for research is to be found, and one of the unfortunate consequences for the rest of the research community is that it becomes the paradigm, the standard against which very different kinds of research in other fields are judged. I recall a social science colleague proudly announcing over coffee in Cambridge that he had just won a £200,000 research grant. Another colleague from the Department of Material Sciences, who had just spent £2.5 million on a single piece of equipment, peered over his spectacles. 'In my department', he said, I think speaking figuratively rather than literally, 'that is money for stamps!'

The big-science paradigm of international research may be partly driven by considerations of cost, but it is also permitted by significant epistemological considerations rooted in a positivistic view of the world. Science tends, or even seeks, to discount the person of the researcher and the social setting of the research.

Subatomic particles behave in the same way wherever they are located[2]; the temperature at different points in the ocean is measurable objectively[3] and it does not matter much from what cultural context you come to take those measurements, although real scientists are perhaps more cautious about their data and their findings than those in the educational research or policy communities who would seek to emulate them. These are, nevertheless, the presumptions or aspirations that feed the aspirations of governments in the US and the UK to develop national policy guidelines for educational practice (on the model already established in medicine) based on 'scientific research' in the double-blind controlled experimental tradition.

In social science, by contrast, understanding of events in relation to their social and cultural context has become a prime driver for ethnographic approaches to research, narrative research, and phenomenography among others. Educators are suspicious of 'research'-based policy which is insensitive to the importance of very local conditions in determining what might 'work' in a particular classroom setting with a particular teacher and a particular group of children on a wet and windy Friday afternoon in November! While science aspires to a 'unified theory of everything' (which sits very comfortably with the idea of research as an integrated international endeavour), social science becomes increasingly suspicious of a universal theory of anything. Nearly fifty years ago, Lawrence Stenhouse, while running a major national curriculum development project in the UK, acknowledged that any pedagogic principles that the project might offer teachers should be treated as hypotheses to be tested against experience in their own classrooms, and thus were the seeds sown for the development of classroom action research in the UK. Teachers, argued Stenhouse, need to be *researchers in their own classrooms* precisely because they could never rely on the broad prescriptions for practice developed anywhere else.

A second movement in social science and educational research has reinforced the *essentially local* character of educational research. This stems from both ethical considerations about how people involved in research should be treated and pragmatic considerations to do with the conditions under which people will allow research to influence their practice. The ethical arguments suggest that it is improper to treat people as merely the objects of research, to be studied (as traditional positivistic research might require) in as anonymous, disinterested, and disengaged a way as possible. From this positivistic point of view, the people who are being studied would in an ideal world not even know they were the objects of study, because this knowledge might well change their behaviour. The double blind approach to medical testing of drugs, in which neither the patient nor the researcher

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[2]Although of course the whole CERN project is designed to extract behaviour from the atom in very particular conditions in an environment constructed painstakingly for this purpose.

[3]Again, this is perhaps not as straightforward as might appear given the politicisation of the global-warming agenda and the powerful corporate interests which are at stake.

knows who has the experimental treatment and who the placebo, is a technical device for overcoming this problem. But many social scientists regard this sort of treatment of people in research as unacceptable because (crudely) it treats them as means rather than ends: it bypasses their own agency. This concern provides the basis for 'participatory' research in which the division between researcher and researched is broken down and participants gain control of the research agenda, of the methods employed in the research, of the research data, of the analysis, and of the research product, published or otherwise. The pragmatic part of the argument is that people who gain this level of 'ownership' of the research are also more likely to acknowledge its force and to absorb it into their practice.

I am not concerned here to argue the case for this kind of research (though I have considerable sympathy for it). The point I want to make is that although these methodological tendencies may themselves be international in character—though by no means universal—they create a research environment in which the kind of 'international' research associated with big science is not simply beyond the resources of most of the social science research community, but counter to prevailing views about what is desirable in the character of that research. There is, then, an argument from the perspective of locally focused, community engaged, contextually sensitive social science that the international is not necessarily the good. The corollary is that the good is not necessarily the international.

There are, of course, counter-tendencies which I should acknowledge in terms of ways in which educational research operates internationally. There are major projects which seek to compare, for example, the mathematical performance of pupils in different systems and the conditions that contribute to these differences—as well as the whole field of comparative education. The field of international development is increasingly constructed around North/South research partnerships. In the European Community there is an explicit attempt to encourage international research partnerships in a 'European educational research space', which is especially interesting in this context because it reflects an aspiration to identify, or to create, exactly those shared cultural values which render transnational research meaningful. Angelos Agalianos, Director General Research in Social Sciences and Humanities at the European Commission, has called for 'a genuinely European research agenda—A research agenda that will go beyond filling the gaps of national research programmes to include concerns which are of Europe-wide relevance and which will address a number of problems that contemporary European societies are faced with' (Lawn et al. 2003: 186).

Even more significantly, perhaps, as education itself falls into the hands of global corporations and as bodies such as the World Bank apply a template for educational 'reform' on countries of very different characters, there is an increasing need for educational researchers to combine resources across national boundaries in order to give research-based critical engagement a powerful international focus. Daniel Tröhler has argued, for example, that 'the answer to nationally focussed economic

globalization is internationalism, because in this way alternatives are made visible that were possibly non-existent or marginal in our national traditions and that are certainly not obvious …' (Tröhler 2005: 126). In other words, if we focus too locally in our research, we shall miss what is happening in the bigger picture and the increasingly global forces which are structuring our national and local experience. To understand these international and global developments we need international collaboration in research with a global, or at least international, focus.

This argument seems to me to make a convincing claim on part, though not the whole, of the educational research agenda. It does not, however, follow that the style and methodology of this international research must be, or will suitably be, based on the positivistic scientific model. We are looking here at political and economic developments the interpretation and analysis of which will draw on some very different parts of the methodological resources of the social sciences—from economics and political science and from analytic and critical frameworks, as well as from statistical and empirically based studies. Such material may well attract international as well as local interest and find its way into international journals, but, as we shall see, this is neither a necessary nor a sufficient indicator of its quality.

It is worth observing, perhaps, that some research 'travels' internationally more easily than others. Kwok suggests that the tension between the local and the international is less great in subject areas such as science, medicine, and engineering because these subjects enjoy 'universality of context' (Kwok 1998: 199) in a way that subjects such as education or social science based fields do not. Katyal and Evers take the argument a step further, suggesting that even within educational research there are distinctions to be observed: 'theoretical work that largely abstracts from particularities, or comparative research where the particularities are welcome' (Katyal and Evers 2009: 165). Philosophy of education is, perhaps, an example of an educational discipline that has successfully cultivated genuinely international conversations, though I am tempted to observe, rather as Katyal and Evers suggest, that this is at the price of distancing it from more locally relevant *educational* concerns and taking it into the more abstract realms of *philosophy*.

There is, then, a case for social science research which is international in *character*—in the composition of research collaborations, in the intellectual resources it draws on, in its perspective. There is also a case for research which is more locally focused, more intimately related to local context, more capable of engaging participants in the research practice and in response to its outcomes. There is no reason to regard one of these forms of research practice as inherently superior to the other, or to suppose that quality is associated with one but not the other. They fulfil different functions and satisfy different normative and epistemological principles, and the quality of their conduct and their outcomes has to be judged in rather different terms.

24.3   'International' as Published in International Refereed Journals

I want to leave aside for the moment the 'refereed' bit of this criterion (given that 'national' or even local journals may be refereed) and focus on the way in which 'international' functions here.

What is 'international' about such journals as the *Journal of Philosophy of Education* (the house journal after all of the Philosophy of Education Society of **Great Britain**), *Educational Theory* (with its home in the University of **Illinois**), the *Oxford **Review** of Education* or the **Cambridge** *Journal of Education*? Typically they will have an Editorial Board with a membership drawn from a number of different countries, though many such boards do not meet and have little interaction. The journal will probably draw too on referees from a number of different countries (often, indeed, members of its board). 'International' also signals, significantly, something about its intended readership (so there are authorial guidelines which warn against assuming knowledge of the author's national educational system) and the sales aspirations of its publishers. The combination of publishers' aspirations and the aspirations of researchers to be published in 'international' journals has meant that few educational journals today present themselves as anything other than 'international'.

The aspirations for an international readership (and, perhaps more significantly, the hope that the journal will be purchased in different parts of the world) carries further requirements, however. It requires publication in a *language* which that international readership can read (for most practical purposes this means English) and on *matters* which will be of interest to and make sense to an international community. Let us note straightaway that these requirements have nothing to do with the quality of the research. Smeyers and Levering (2000) and as Levering and Smeyers (2009) have written about a number of damaging consequences of the increasingly powerful requirement on Dutch academics that in order to demonstrate the quality of their research it has to be published in international journals. These consequences include:

- publication channels using the Dutch language cease to operate;
- an increasing orientation towards international issues;
- research participants and Dutch taxpayers are denied access in their own language to research findings to which they have contributed with their time and insights or their taxes: 'would it not be very strange indeed that the very community who pays for research in the universities can no longer be expected to be informed of its outcomes except in another language!' (Levering and Smeyers 2009: 322);
- even in the remaining Dutch-language professional journals, 'the publication policy aimed at the international level led to … low appreciation of the Dutch educational (professional) journals (Levering and Smeyers 2009: 19)

- difficulty for people using a second or third language to convey the full subtlety of their thinking;
- 'the denial of one's cultural heritage' (Levering and Smeyers 2009: 321)—so should Dutch be replaced by English as the language of education?

Smeyers and Levering argue that research which is heavily and locally context bound is unlikely to be of interest to the 'international' research journals, precisely because it requires the readership to take an interest in these local circumstances, characteristics, and idiosyncrasies and to engage with local practical and policy agendas. Rasmussen argues in similar terms—in this case with reference to Danish research:

> I am not arguing that Danish educational researchers should refrain from publishing internationally. … But making international publication in itself the main criterion of quality is a misconception. Not only because it may … create unnecessary difficulties in connecting educational research to the social reality that Danish educationalists exist in, try to investigate and communicate with, but also because it fails to appreciate the extensive amount of research that is published in Danish in national communication channels and therefore can be mediated more directly to educational practitioners. (Rasmussen 2009: 310)

The risk is that precisely the sort of locally applied research that Smeyers, Levering, and Rasmussen would argue has greatest potential value will be marginalised and even driven out of the educational agenda in favour of high-level research which addresses the issues which are of common interest to a wider international community from which the tiresome demand to understand local idiosyncrasy has been removed. US and UK researchers, by contrast, tend to assume that the rest of the world will be both familiar with and interested in their rather parochial internal debates—in the case of the UK, their TDAs, their Ofsteds, their QAAs, and so on.

The Finnish response to the matter is to embrace almost entirely the English language and, to a significant extent, the international agenda in their research, and the Finns are consequently very visible both in international research conferences and in international publications. Perhaps this approach is not unconnected with the dependence of the high-growth Finnish economy on the international competitiveness of its major knowledge-based industry. Is this also the course that another small country such as Lithuania needs to take? And if so, what is the cultural cost? One Lithuanian social and educational science journal, *Socialiniai Mokslai*, strikes an interesting but still one-sided compromise, with a mixture of national and international contributors and the main text in English (sometime translated from an original text in Lithuanian) but with summaries in Lithuanian.

All of this indicates that while work published in the international journals may well be of high quality, these will exclude high-quality material on grounds which are not related to quality, but rather language, or focus, or the demands it places on an international readership. As quality assessment practices use 'international publications' as a short cut to judging the entitlement of an individual academic for promotion, or of a university department to receive government funding, languages (and especially minority languages) other than English will come under pressure,

journals published in these languages will fail, and the research agenda itself will become increasingly focused on the priorities which run across the major language communities at the expense of minority interests both within those communities and those outside.

If publication in international refereed journals is not a necessary condition for the quality of the research thus brought into the public (albeit perhaps a rather esoteric public) domain, is it perhaps a sufficient one? Well, many educational researchers would probably acknowledge that for something to be published in, let us say, *Educational Researcher* or the *Journal of Philosophy of Education* might be a pretty good guarantee of its quality (up to a point at least)—but what about *Chung Cheng Educational Studies* or the *Ethiopian Journal of Education*?[4] Both of these would claim to be 'international' journals; both have an international editorial board; both put papers out for international peer review; and both, though published by a university press rather than a commercial publisher, aspire to an international readership. If these do not carry the immediate credibility of the *Educational Researcher*, it cannot be because they are not 'international'. I would have to acknowledge, as someone proud to be an international Editorial Advisory Board member of both journals, that they are not (yet) of the same quality, or at least not consistently so.

But if this is the case, then it follows that international peer-reviewed journals are not highly regarded simply because they are international, but because they are high quality judged on some other grounds—in which case the attempt to define quality by reference to what appears in international peer-reviewed journals collapses. It follows that we have to judge quality by reference to quality criteria such as those discussed in Chap. 23, rather than by reference to the place in which a research paper is published.

The supposed equivalence between the 'international' English-language publication and high quality comes at another cost. A few years ago I attended, within a few weeks of each other, the conference of the British Education Research Association and a Francophone conference in Geneva organised by Francophone researchers from France, Switzerland, Belgium, and Quebec. Many of the themes with which researchers engaged at the two conferences were the same, but the papers presented from the two language communities had barely a shared reference. Few researchers in the English-speaking world have access to the huge volume of educational research published in Russian or Chinese, let alone the multitude of smaller language communities. So the discourse that aligns quality, the international, and English-language publication is woefully arrogant and self-deceived. The problem of the separation of research into national silos is not just a problem for mutual awareness between different language communities. One can search for a long time among papers presented by American scholars at, for example, the

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[4]*Chung Cheng Educational Studies* is published by the College of Education of Chung Cheng University, Chiayi, Taiwan and the *Ethiopian Journal of Education*, now close to its fiftieth year of publication, by Addis Ababa University.

annual conference of the American Educational Research Association (AERA) for any reference to work emanating from the UK, Australia, or New Zealand, let alone India or Anglophone countries of the African continent. There were six distinguished contributors to the AERA symposium on educational research quality that I have referred to elsewhere (Moss et al. 2009). The symposium took place a year after the completion of one of the most substantial and sophisticated research quality assessment exercises, which had to address exactly the issues that were the focus of the symposium—a worked example of how one might address the problem—but neither this nor any of the surrounding arguments in the UK research literature received a single mention by any of the contributors, and no doubt they could point to comparable absences in the writing of UK researchers.

In a paper published in the AERA journal *Educational Researcher* under the title 'Defining a literature' Kennedy (2007) puts the question in a very interesting way. She begins by noting the common expectation that doctoral students, scholars preparing a paper for publication, and, more substantially, those conducting a 'systematic review' all have to review the 'literature' that is relevant to their theme. But, she asks, what is this 'literature'? How is it defined? What are the principles that underlie its inclusions and exclusions? One assumption that she makes is that 'a systematic review usually focusses on a very specific empirical question' (Kennedy 2007: 139), which may be true descriptively, but is one reason why these 'systematic reviews' fail to be systematic and end up missing many of the most important questions. More relevant for my current purposes, however, is her failure at any point in her discussion of inclusions and exclusions to acknowledge the assumed but unstated exclusion of anything in any language except English. The example she uses to illustrate the process of definition makes it an even more narrowly defined requirement that: 'Each study must take place in the context of K–12 schools in the United States and focus on the teachers of record.' As Kennedy points out, 'This rule meant that we excluded studies of student teachers, preschool teachers, teachers of college students and adults, and teachers working outside the United States.' (Kennedy 2007: 140). Of course, she is entitled to define the parameters of her 'literature' as she likes, but the implicit and explicit exclusions do not really signal the 'international' character or standing of the literature or the research.

Even within the Anglophone research community, then, we are still a long way from occupying a common, international research space.

24.4 Ranking Quality on an International Scale

These arguments indicate that the notion of the 'international' does not help us very much when it comes to assessing the quality of research. In none of the senses in which I have used it will it substitute for an assessment based on quality criteria, and it seems to me that we have to think more richly about what these criteria might include.

However, this still leaves us in the UK, Hong Kong, Australia, and elsewhere with the uncomfortable task of ranking nationally derived research 'outputs' on a five-point scale in a process which has reference to international standards. The assessment is, therefore, both criterion referenced and norm referenced. The norms are provided by research outputs from the rest of the world—research outputs with which assessors are supposed to be familiar, even if they are not drawing direct comparisons with the already large volume of national publications which they are expected to read. In these circumstances it is difficult to see that one could proceed without some framework of assumptions about how the one national educational research community (or those parts of it with which one has any familiarity) measures up against the international competition, if that is the right way to put it. In a note I submitted to the UK Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) Panel for Education that reported in 2008, I suggested:

> I start off with a very strong impression gleaned from many international conferences that UK educational researchers stand well among the most interesting, clear minded, analytic, policy and practice aware and penetrating in the world, and before I receive a single bit of data from the RAE, I expect to see a healthy number of these researchers among the 4* and a good deal more among the 3*. If we produce criteria or assessments against our criteria that produce a different result, then this would suggest to me not that my declared presumption was false, but that we had lost our nerve or sense of proportion in the process or that we had failed to observe and correct the insidious process of regression to the mean. (Private memo 8 September 2005)

I might have been wrong in this framing of our assessment; I should perhaps have expressed it less boldly; and it was an opinion that had to be considered by the panel and, especially, between the 'international' external moderator and the panel (though we cannot shift the onus of decision onto one person, however capable). My point is that unless we are going to provide a basis of comparison by carrying the same RAE process into an assessment of the quality of the research of the rest of world's educational research community (please God, save us from this!) then some such very approximate, primitive, and unsophisticated framing assumption has to guide our work. Alternatively, we drop the 'international' as an independent point of reference and simply call the best, as judged against the sort of criteria discussed in the previous chapter, the 'international'.

24.5 'Strong Internationalisation': A More Radical Challenge?

In his Routledge Lecture to the 2006 annual conference of the British Educational Research Association Fazal Rizvi (who was already appointed to serve as an 'international' member of the 2008 Research Assessment Panel for Education in the UK) speaks of the relationship between the international and quality in terms that reflect fairly closely the distinctions I have drawn here and in a previous publication (Bridges 2006). In a final section of the published paper, however, he draws on the

work of Appadurai and others to suggest what is perhaps a more radical view of the significance of the international for judgments of quality. It is, however, one that I find somewhat confused or confusing, because it lumps together a number of rather different criticisms of the practice of the international research community. At the risk of over-simplification, I suggest that the argument runs something like this:

i. There is an unequal distribution of power across the global community when it comes to the production of research (including educational research) and in the very definition of what will count as research.

ii. This requires both an acknowledgment of the ways in which these inequalities function and 'recognition of the researcher's positionality within Western universities and their relationships to these geographies of power' (Rizvi 2009: 56).

iii. This could provide 'a beginning for challenging the silent valorisation of Western epistemologies in research of all kinds, including education policy research' (Rizvi 2009: 56).

iv. This 'challenge' might require researchers to examine their own rhetoric and practices of 'systematicity, prior citational contexts, and specialised modes of inquiry', along with 'an imagined world of specialised professional readers and researchers' (Appadurai 2001: 12). It requires, too, 'a new research ethic of openness to a greater diversity of theoretical and methodological traditions that are not tied to the western academy' (Rizvi 2009: 57).

iv. So, what is sought is a 'deparochialisation of research' and 'strong internationalisation' drawn from 'grassroots globalisation' (all terms derived from Appadurai 2001) and 'the creation of communities and conventions of research, in which membership does not require unquestioned prior adherence to existing norms' (Rizvi 2009: 57).

There is clearly more to these arguments that I am able to present in this short treatment, but let me nevertheless indicate something of a response.

First, I recognise that there is an unequal distribution of power in terms of what will receive at least public recognition as quality research—and I discussed one dimension of this this above in relation to the dominance of English language in 'international' research publications. The framing of the international educational reform agenda—and hence the educational research agenda—is not unrelated to the sources of funding which are directed towards these reforms and the neoliberal economic and political agenda which bodies like the World Bank have espoused and promoted.

This said, there is a certain geopolitical myopia among some critics of *Western* colonialism and neocolonialism. If you engage with educational thinkers and practitioners in, for example, Kazakhstan, you are reminded of the large swathes of Central Asia and Eastern Europe that have been dominated for generations by, first, Russian imperial ambition, and then the Soviet Union (and in a previous era the Mongolian 'hordes'). The research resources that provide the framing and main point of reference in universities and pedagogic institutions in Kazakhstan today are

very largely Russian rather than 'Western' sources, leavened in most cases in Kazakhstan by the much exalted moral homilies of the great nineteenth-century Kazakh philosopher and poet, Abai. And can we describe the global geopolitics of educational thought without reference to the hundreds of thousands of educational researchers and thinkers whose work has been framed by the Confucian tradition and the Chinese communist regime—or the many more who continue to work within a Muslim tradition of educational thought and practice? If we are going to attend to the geopolitical distribution of power, let us at least be aware that the Western European colonial legacy is not the only one that frames contemporary international thinking. It is perhaps a Western European vanity—shared by the colonised as well as the colonising—to assume that only its own colonial past is significant as a contemporary legacy.

Nor do I recognise the picture offered by Rizvi and others of an educational research community characterised by 'unquestioned prior adherence to existing norms'. Yes, there is a constant struggle to oppose attempts at the hegemonisation of educational research by a restricted repertoire of methods (see discussions of the 'What Works Clearing House' and systematic reviews), but the counter-movements are vigorous, and, as I have illustrated at several points in this book, the diversity of forms of contemporary educational research and its representation is quite bewildering in its inventive variety. (See, for some less conventional approaches, the section on 'Cultural Transgressive Approaches' to educational research in volume 2 of the *International Handbook of Interpretation in Educational Research*, Smeyers et al. 2015). The problem, as I see it, is not so much a matter of uncritical compliance with certain norms of research, but the difficulty of establishing coherent normative communities of research practice that can develop their work to a high standard over a sustained period of time.

I struggle with the notion of alternative 'epistemologies', possibly because I suspect I use the term 'epistemology' rather differently from some of those who invoke it in this context. I have no problem with the idea that there are different belief systems that might extend from systems based on different understandings about the physical world (e.g. about what causes thunder or disease), through different beliefs about the values that should underpin our social living, to different metaphysical beliefs about fate, destiny, the universe, and so on. Some of these will affect our views about education—about the justification or otherwise for discriminating between boys and girls in education or—recalling the throngs of students flocking to the Confucian temples in Taiwan in advance of their examinations—the power of prayer to contribute to educational achievement. (It probably beats target setting and performance-based pay, though demonstrating this via a randomised controlled trial may be challenging!)

In Ethiopia, among other parts of Africa, the world of spirits is widely considered to be responsible for bodily wellbeing or sickness, abundance or scarcity of crops, and social (including educational) success or failure. Haile Gabriel Dagne describes some of diverse ways in which these spirits can be controlled, especially by people who have the 'hidden knowledge' of names that can be summoned and potions that can be taken. These measures extend to what he calls 'educational

magic'. Haile Gabriel describes a number of prayers and incantations, sometimes accompanied with the eating of special foods, which employ secret magic and powerful words in order to assist perception, cognition, skill retention and understanding, and even the development of a singing voice—an important component of traditional church education (Dagne 1971, and see also Bridges et al. 2004). But does this illustrate what is meant by an 'alternative epistemology'? What is it that we are being asked to embrace if our research, or our research reference, is to be properly 'international'?

Well, epistemology is, among other things, the study of the sources of knowledge. In the context of the traditional belief system in Ethiopia the sources of such knowledge include (sometimes secret) sacred texts; the special powers, knowledge and authority possessed by some individuals in the community; and tradition. Few in Ethiopia or outside would describe this as 'research', though it might, as in Haile Gabriele's work, be the object of research.

If, by being invited to accept alternative epistemologies, we are being asked simply to recognise that the sort of knowledge that might inform educational policy or practice could be of this kind then, as a statement of (empirically verifiable) fact, I have no problem. I have acknowledged from an early stage in this book (see Chap. 2) that the kind of knowledge that we draw upon even in 'the West' to inform our educational practice and policy includes knowledge gained through experience, knowledge passed on to us by those who have gone before, knowledge that has the force of authority, and so on. But (again) we do not on the whole refer to this as research, although (again) we may well make it the focus of research, rendering what is often believed implicitly explicit through reflection, or perhaps a process of sensitive conversation. To return to the African continent, Griaule's classic work on the world of the Dogon people was based on 32 'conversations with Ogotemĕli', an elder of the tribe (Griaule 1965).

If all we are being asked to do is to acknowledge such diverse sources of knowledge and understanding, whether in our home territory or far away, then this sounds neither radical nor challenging. Or are we being asked to regard the derivation of knowledge in these ways as 'research' (the process) and its outcomes as 'research' (the product), i.e. to extend our definition of 'research'?

I cannot really see what is gained by this move, apart from a level of obscurity and pseudo 'valorisation'. I say 'obscurity' because the move obscures what I think is a significant distinction between the derivation of beliefs from experience, authority, and tradition and the derivation of beliefs from, to stick with Stenhouse's definition, 'systematic and sustained inquiry made public'—a distinction which it may be especially useful to recognise when one of these sources of knowledge contradicts another. I say 'pseudo valorisation' because either knowledge from these other sources deserves attention because of what it is (in which case there is nothing gained by calling it research), or it is not so deserving of attention (in which case honouring it as research provides phoney valorisation as well as misdescription).

So, I am supportive of the idea of 'strong internationalisation' if this means developing and demonstrating awareness of the multitude of sources which can and do inform educational policy and practice across the world; if it means at least some

understanding of the very different frames of reference (metaphysical, normative, and social) that shape and structure thought and practice in education in different societies; if it means respect for such diversity.

I do not, however, subscribe to the epistemological and social relativism that sometimes appears to underpin the argument for 'alternative epistemologies'. Different forms of warrant may justify different beliefs that we may hold, but this does not mean that any warrant is as good as any other in relation to any particular belief. Ogotemĕli may speak with one kind of authority about the norms that do and should govern life among the Dogon people, but were he to have maintained, against the best evidence of international medical research, that his community was immune from the threat of Ebola because of some words a village elder had pronounced, I would suggest that government policy should discount this reassurance in favour of the evidence of medical science—and the response 'that's just because you are imbued with a very parochial neocolonial epistemology' is not one that I find very persuasive.

For a different example I go back to Haile Gabriel Dagne and traditional Ethiopian thought. He describes how this is grounded in a metaphysical view of the eternal struggle between the body and soul and the desires attached to each of these. In this tradition, hardship, fasting, and even torture are used as a means of training the body and releasing the soul for higher spiritual activities. This view carries implications for education:

> Learning is a higher spiritual activity, for all the movements of the human mind or consciousness, including cognition, feeling and memory, are abstract, and therefore are functions of the soul. The teacher, therefore, can justify the harshest and most repressive disciplinary measures on the ground that these measures liberate the soul from the importunities of the body and therefore make learning possible. (Dagne 1971: 4)

There is not space here to enter into the wider debates about social relativism, but let me be clear that, whatever my interest in and openness to the thinking that underpins educational practice in Ethiopia or elsewhere, the basic rights of the child —however 'Western' in conception—trump an argument that justifies the infliction of 'the harshest and most repressive disciplinary measures' on a child in the belief that this will make learning possible, or an argument that suggests that such beliefs and practices should be immune from criticism by a Western researcher on the grounds that they are rooted in 'an alternative epistemology'.

The 'global' or 'international' educational space should be one in which there is wide-ranging understanding of and respect for the diversity of ways in which people set aspirations for themselves and for their societies, choose to bring up their children and make sense of all of this. But it should also be a space in which people of all sorts, but *a fortiori* those who commit themselves to research, are able, sensitively, humbly, and respectfully to set out the arguments for what they do believe and to challenge, on the same basis, what they believe to be wrong— independently of the geopolitical space that they may or may not occupy. If we can

combine the sort of criticality I refer to here with the sort of wider international and global awareness and understanding that we have been urged to develop, we may well see the 'international' and the 'excellent' conjoined.

24.6   Conclusion

I have argued that the notion of the 'international' as a descriptor of educational research and as a criterion of its value or quality is deeply and dangerously ambiguous. In particular we need to observe the difference between:

- research which is international in focus—i.e. addressing a shared international agenda of a kind from which it is reasonable to expect international response;
- research which is published in 'international refereed journals';
- research which is of a quality (judged against both generic expectations of research quality and standards appropriate to its particular genre) which places it among the best in the world irrespective, even, of its 'significance' in geospatial terms;[5] and
- 'de-parochialised research' that reflects alertness to and respect for the radically different ways of seeing things across the global communities.

I have suggested that the first two of these interpretations of the 'international' provide neither necessary nor sufficient conditions for the assessment of work as being of the highest quality, though the fourth consideration may well be relevant since one of the things we expect of high-quality research is reflexivity, acknowledgement of the counter thesis, and awareness of the sort of taken for granted assumptions that a wider, international perspective might provide. However, we have no real option but to focus our attention on the discernment of quality and its multi-varietal expression in contemporary educational research practice of which this consideration might be one.

Part of the power of any quality assessment system is that it has huge impact on what will count as research—A locally produced report on some action research carried out with a group of teachers? A piece of educational software? A course book for students? A philosophical paper presented at a conference?—and what research will, consequently be carried out or in what form it will be published. This chapter has raised questions in particular about what kinds of research risk being pushed to the margins and discounted if the international—and not just any national —research community starts employing the 'international' in these different senses as a criterion of quality and value.

In particular, I have argued that if the requirement is that research is international in focus and engaged with an international agenda, then it risks marginalising

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[5]Of course, were it otherwise, then philosophical inquiry could claim a uniquely privileged significance, since it alone seeks to address what is true for all time and places *sub specie aeternitatis*.

research which is needed to inform more locally bounded policy and practice; it risks subordinating other national research agenda to those of the hegemonic English-language community; and it risks marginalising research which is self-consciously local, participatory, and context sensitive. There are sound arguments in favour of research which is more international in character. My case is: (i) that we should not institute quality assessment procedures which only validate such research; (ii) that the fact that research is international in character does not in itself mean that it is of the highest quality; and (iii) that both international and more locally focused research should be judged against both generically appropriate quality criteria (such as 'rigour'), interpreted in ways appropriate to the particular genre, and criteria which may be *sui generis* to a particular genre (such as biographic reflexivity in certain forms of feminist and life history research).

This said, there is a sense in which we might expect all research to observe the universal (or, more modestly, the international) in the particular, the global in the local. The power of the individual case study, richly embedded in local context, is that we can see in it something which touches a much wider range of human experience. The best writers of educational research can join a broad multi-perspectival, multi-cultural, international understanding to whatever they are engaged in (which is one reason researchers need to be educated and not just trained!). It is not the socio-spatial scope or breadth of the research itself which is the hallmark of quality, but the breadth of mind ('magnanimity' viewed as an intellectual as well as a moral virtue?) which the researcher brings to and evidences in work of whatever socio-spatial dimension.

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Chapter 25
Research Quality Assessment in Education: Impossible Science, Possible Art?

Abstract For better or for worse, the assessment of research quality is one of the primary drivers of the behaviour of the academic community, with all sorts of potential for distorting that behaviour. So, if you are going to assess research quality, how do you do it? This chapter explores some of the problems and possibilities, with particular reference to the UK Research Assessment Exercise and the subsequent Research Excellence Framework, and the work of the Framework 7 European Education Research Quality Indicators project (EERQI). It begins by reflecting back on the previous discussion of generic criteria of quality which can be applied to research, and the tension between such criteria and the diverse and sometimes contradictory requirements of educational research. It then looks at attempts to identify measurable indicators of quality, including consideration of the location of the publication, citation and download counts, and approaches based on semantic analysis of machine-readable text, but finds all these quasi-'scientific' attempts at quality assessment wanting (hence the 'impossible science'). This is all the more the case because of their attachment to extrinsic correlates of quality rather than intrinsic characteristics of quality, and hence the probability that the measures will induce behaviours not conducive to quality enhancement. Instead the chapter turns to a different approach. This is better expressed perhaps as quality 'appreciation', 'discernment', or even 'connoisseurship', and is rooted in the arts and humanities rather than in (quasi) science. It considers whether this might offer a better approximation to the kind of judgment involved in quality assessment of a piece of research writing than the sort of metrics approaches favoured in current discussion.

> She was handsome, but the degree of it was not sustained by items and aids: a circumstance moreover playing its part at almost any time in the impression she produced. The impression was one that remained, but as regards the source of it, no sum in addition would have made up the total. She had stature without height, grace without motion, presence without mass. Slender and simple, frequently soundless, she was somehow always in the line of the eye—she counted singularly for its pleasure. (James 1902/1947: 6)

25.1   Introduction

In Chap. 23 I discussed possible generic criteria that might be applied in the assessment of the quality of educational research. In the contexts of peer review of academic papers or conference proposals, the quality assessment of research conducted over a period of time, or case studies claiming impact, this assessment all rested on a *reading* of the texts presented by the researchers.

Reading any volume of research papers can become quite onerous, and, as the volume of publications expands, it is no surprise that journal editors and conference organisers struggle to find people willing to do this work (for no remuneration, in almost all cases). When the reading of research publications becomes the basis for system-wide evaluation of research, this burden can begin to look overwhelming. In the UK Research Excellence Framework assessment (see www.REF.ac.uk), assessors across the range of subjects were asked to assess 191,150 'outputs' from 52,061 staff. For education alone, the figures were 5526 outputs from 1606 staff (a reduction in numbers compared with the 2008 Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) because for strategic reasons universities were being more selective as to whose work they submitted (HEFCE 2015). In the case of the Education Sub-Panel there were 22 panel members assisted by 13 assessors to carry out this task.

Reading of research outputs—indeed a 'detailed reading' as HEFCE required—was at the heart of the UK Research Excellence Framework in 2014 and its predecessors, as indeed it is at the heart of most research quality assessment. Peer review, based on such reading is, after all, the very foundation of the credibility of academic publication and the selection of papers for presentation at research conferences (albeit that larger conferences tend to do this on the basis of a synopsis). Of the final research profile for 'units of assessment' (for most purposes, university departments), 70% of the profile in 2008 and 65% in 2014 was based on the reading and assessment of up to four 'outputs' (in this case mainly journal articles, book chapters and books) from each member of staff submitted for assessment.[1]

One objection to this approach to quality assessment is that it produces unreliable or inconsistent assessments. Any journal editor knows that the process of peer review can generate startlingly different assessments of the same paper. But of course these have no opportunity to calibrate their judgments against each other, to understand what qualities different reviewers might attach particular importance to, to discuss their approaches to assessment. In the 2008 research assessment exercise in which I was a panel member, assessors did not, by contrast, work entirely independently of each other. Indeed, one of the most important parts of the process —begun two years before there was anything actually to assess—was talking to each other about the criteria and their interpretation, comparing and discussing our

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[1]Full details of the most recent Research Education Framework (and documentation from previous assessments) are available on the Higher Education Funding Council for England website at www.ref.ac.uk. (One of the features of the assessment is the Council's commitment to transparency in the procedures employed).

assessment of a variety of pieces of work (drawn from outside the UK) and, as we got into the assessment process proper, comparing and moderating our assessments. Indeed, I believe we engaged in precisely the sort of 'dialogue' and 'learning from our differences' that was the focus of the symposium on research quality assessment presented at the 2009 American Education Research Association (AERA) conference (Moss et al. 2009). One of our number said at an early stage that we would never arrive at a form of words (e.g. in our rubric) which removed all ambiguity in terms of what we might mean by 'rigour', 'originality', and so on, but that we would have to build a 'community of meaning', a shared language through talking together in the way which I have described. I believe that this is exactly what happened and I do not think that there is any substitute for this process. It is one which is, of course, commonly used by UK examination boards in their examination procedures, including their assessment of student essays and project reports.

Let us suppose (what I would claim, but would not expect everyone to accept) that through this process of discussion and reading we were able to achieve a pragmatically acceptable level of consistency in our judgments (reliability) and of responsiveness to the variety of forms which educational research could take (validity). Do we then have a satisfactory system for quality assessment?

The second problem for this approach to research assessment, as I have already begun to indicate is the burden of work, the time it takes, and the sheer cost. Apart from the scale of the task, there is also, of course a cost for all this which includes the cost for higher education institutions of the preparation of these substantial and carefully framed submissions; the elaborate administrative structure established by HEFCE for this purpose; and the costs in terms of travel, accommodation, and subsistence of bringing panels together over a period of years, even if their time is contributed (at a cost, of course) by their universities. Universities spent about £4000 for each researcher they submitted to the Research Excellence Framework in 2014. The *Times Higher Education* reported that:

> The estimate of institutions' own total spend on the REF exceeds £230 million, of which £55 million went on preparing impact statements and £19 million for panellists' time. The cost to the four UK funding councils is estimated at £14 million, according to the report by policy advisory group Technopolis, putting the total cost of REF 2014 at an estimated £246 million. (Else 2015)

—though this only represents 2.4% of what the funding council expects to spend on research in the six years following the REF, expenditure that will, of course, be very much informed by the REF results. Unsurprisingly perhaps, government departments, funding councils, and others have been keen to find a more 'efficient' alternative. The UK has not been alone in this search. The New Zealand Ministry has also taken the view that: 'It is easier and less burdensome to collect information on performance through indicators' (Ministry of Education and Transition Tertiary Education Commission 2002: 23).

Alongside other concerns has been a lurking sense that there is something not quite 'scientific' (by now readers will know that I use this term somewhat

cautiously) about an assessment which relies on an individual reading of a piece of work (even with some moderation) and the absence of measures, of metrics.

Even while the 2008 RAE was still under way, therefore, the UK government initiated a review of the system for funding research in higher education. The main features of proposals which were put out for consultation in November 2007 are captured in the following paragraph from *Research Excellence Framework* [Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE), November 2007 and www. hefce.ac.uk/research/ref/]:

> The new assessment and funding framework will be based as far as possible on quantitative measures. There will be an overarching framework within which differences between the disciplines will be accommodated. For the science based disciplines, funding and assessment will be driven by bibliometric indicators of research quality and data about external research income and research students. For the arts, humanities and social sciences, there will be a light touch peer review process, informed by metrics. (HEFCE, November 2007: 4)

HEFCE had already commissioned some background study (Centre for Science and Technology Studies, Leiden University 2007; Adams et al. 2007) which gave it some confidence in the practicality of this approach, although the evidence was almost entirely garnered from science and technology. (Both reports are available at www.hefce.ac.uk/research/ref/.) By May 2009, and on the basis of further studies and work by 'expert advisory groups', HEFCE retained a commitment to bibliometrics, but this was clearly seen as 'informing' and not replacing expert review: 'There was a strong consensus that bibliometrics are not sufficiently mature to be used formulaically or to replace expert review, but there is considerable scope for citation indicators to inform expert review in the REF' (HEFCE 2009a: 2). It is also by no means obvious that their use as part of a more systematic assessment of research quality would produce the financial savings that governments are so keen to find. Expert groups working on the revised Research Evaluation Framework had concluded by May 2009 that 'whichever approach to bibliometrics was used … HEIs will want to verify the data, and therefore the burden of using bibliometrics within the REF is unlikely to be reduced compared with the RAE' (HEFCE 2009b: 18). The fact that the HEFCE Expert Advisory Group anticipates that 'any additional cost of using bibliometrics would be largely absorbed by internal management within institutions' (HEFCE 2009a: 7) does not immediately endear the proposal to the nation's universities.

The EU Framework 7 European Education Research Quality Indicators (EERQI) Project (www.eerqi.eu) is in search, similarly, of 'bibliometric' answers to the question of research quality assessment and, as we shall see, explored a wider range of approaches. So the question is posed, can we not find some more 'objective', perhaps more 'scientific', measure of research quality which can be administered much more cost effectively?

25.2 Measurable Indicators of Quality?

This ambition has pointed towards a number of possible indicators (some would say 'metrics') of the quality of research texts. These include: (i) the location of their publication; (ii) the number of times they have been cited; and (iii) the number of times they have been downloaded. None of these seem, however, very satisfactory proxies for reading-based assessment. Let me discuss each in turn.

25.2.1 The Location of Publication

Can we make a judgment of the quality of a piece of research simply by noting where it is published? After all, in certain publications a paper or chapter will not appear unless it satisfies certain criteria applied through a process of peer review, so publication (in this context) is already an indication that it has satisfied a certain quality threshold judged on the basis of a reading of the piece in question.

Clearly a number of universities in mainland Europe think so, because this is precisely the metric used in many contexts as a basis for decisions about appointments and promotions. The University of Ghent, for example, in common with other Flemish universities, has a system of points awarded for each piece of work published in refereed journals, with publications in English-language international journals earning as much as 12 times the credit as national publications in Flemish. (For a discussion of some of the distorting effects of this practice see Smeyers and Levering 2000; Bridges 2006 and Chap. 24.) In France, the Ministry of Education has introduced a system under which it awards a grade on a four-point scale as a judgment about the quality of academic journals—and the new Australian system of research assessment is employing a similar metric. This in turn serves to indicate the quality of papers published in them and, hence, decisions about appointments, promotions, and so on.

The European Reference Index for the Humanities (ERIH) had at one stage used the letters A, B, and C to divide journals into 'highest ranking international publication' (A), 'standard international publications' (B), and those with important 'local and regional significance' (C) (Corbyn 2009: 7). However, the European Science Foundation (EFI), which is behind the index, agreed to drop the letters in favour of a written description of the differences, which, it insists (against widespread scepticism), are intended to describe the different character of the journals and not to place them on a hierarchy of value. Sixty-one editors of international journals in the field, however, committed to publishing editorials in their first issues of 2009 dissociating themselves from the plan and requesting that their journals be withdrawn from the scheme. 'We want no part of this dangerous and misguided exercise' reads their joint editorial. '[This is] an expression of our collective dissent and our refusal to allow our field to be managed and appraised in this fashion' (Cook et al. 2009: 4).

The education panels in successive Research Assessment Exercises in the UK have taken a conscious decision to ignore information about the location or form of publication and judge every piece of work on its own merits. There were a number of reasons for this decision, and these begin to challenge the appropriateness of relying on place of publication as an indicator of quality—at least in research in education. To begin with, unlike perhaps some areas of scientific research, there is no clear or agreed hierarchy of English-language publications (let alone across multiple languages) which could serve as a proxy for a more direct judgment of quality—and this reflects, among other things, the great diversity in both methodology (as illustrated above) and substantive focus of research in education. Secondly, even if publication in some highly esteemed research journals might provide some basis for assessing a piece of work to be of good quality, it certainly does not follow that publication in other locations (which might be motivated by a wide range of considerations) indicates poor quality. Thirdly, the UK RAE and its successor, the REF, required some fairly fine-grained quality assessment above the threshold that one might reasonably expect a good journal to maintain. The HEFCEs require assessment to be conducted against a five-point scale as follows, and invited each panel to provide its own gloss on how it would interpret the given criteria. The criteria employed were as follows:

4* Quality that is world-leading in terms of originality, significance and rigour.
3* Quality that is internationally excellent in terms of originality, significance and rigour but which falls short of the highest standards of excellence.
2* Quality that is recognised internationally in terms of originality, significance and rigour.
1* Quality that is recognised nationally in terms of originality, significance and rigour.
Unclassified Quality that falls below the standard of nationally recognised work. Or work which does not meet the published definition of research for the purposes of this assessment

(HEFCE 2011: 46)

The point is that, while we might with reasonable confidence judge that a paper published in a number of refereed educational journals would have come up to 1* or even 2* standard, it would be difficult to take the place of publication as providing sufficient evidence that the piece was of 3* or 4* standard. No educational journals publish material consistently at that level. If, as in the case of some continental European systems, it is sufficient that it has reached a threshold of academic acceptability, then it might be easier to be guided by the place of publication, even if this is still not entirely reliable. Even so, there remain issues about the way in which books are evaluated in such a system, and these are particularly significant in the humanities and social sciences, where books play a more important part than in the natural sciences and are an expected form of publication of at least senior researchers. (Or at least they have been so; current research assessment processes

are tending to drive academics to publish in refereed journals and at the sort of length that these require).

25.2.2   Citation

There is a considerable body of opinion in favour of citation as a metric of research quality, not least, I suspect, because it is quantifiable and allows direct and commensurable comparisons to be made on a single scale. In particular this seems to have gained acceptance in the natural sciences (though not universally so even there). It also has certain claims to validity in so far as it reflects the attention which an academic's peers (at least) have given to a piece of work. In this sense, citation (of journal articles) indicates two levels of peer review. In the UK, as I have indicated, the Higher Education Funding Council for England has taken a favourable view of citation as, at least, data which should inform if not replace expert review.

There are nevertheless a number of objections to the use of citation as a proxy for quality assessment. The first relates to the narrow range of journals on which current citation indices are based and the apparently arbitrary selection. In philosophy of education, for example, only one out of, perhaps, four leading journals in the field appears in the Thompson/Reuters Web of Science Index. I have already noted the diversity of forms which are taken by contemporary educational research —and these have spawned an equally diverse array of journals, but only a fraction of these appear in the citation indices. In the humanities and social sciences (in contrast to the natural sciences) importance is attached to books as a form of academic expression, but these have no place in existing citation indices. From a European and wider international perspective the problem gets worse, because existing indices acknowledge only work published in English (see Smeyers and Levering 2000 on the impact of this on Dutch-language researchers). The Framework 7 EERQI project sought to address some of these issues by piloting a European Education Research Citation Index which would include books and book chapters and French-, German-, and Swedish-language publications as well as those in English, but there remain a number of technical difficulties to be overcome before this can operate in any significant way.

A second objection also points to the unreliability of the databases which provide evidence of citation. The report on the May 2009 discussions within the HEFCE Expert Advisory Group meetings observes that 'Differences in the two citation bases (Web of Science and SCOPUS) led to some marked differences in the results' (HEFCE 2009a: 5). It remains to be seen whether other databases more widely used in different disciplines (such as ArchiV and Google Scholar) would produce even more diverse outcomes, but given the diversity of material which is included in these different databases, it seems likely that they would.

A third set of objections to the use of citation metrics to assess quality is to do with the invalidity of the metric. It is argued that work may be cited not in any way

in recognition of the quality of its contribution to the field but because of its crass stupidity; it may get attention because it is especially controversial (e.g. people continue to cite the Milgram experiments, not because of the quality of the work, but as examples of unethical research). In short, comparatively high citation counts may have nothing to do with the quality of the work being counted. Semantic analysts working on the EERQI project sought to explore the possibility of identifying the semantic features of 'negative citation'. I guess that the proximity of the words 'absolute rubbish' to the citation might be one such indicator, but I am not sure, given the nuanced way in which academics tear each other's work apart, that they would ever be able to produce a very reliable tool for this purpose.

Fourth, citation rates vary enormously from one subject to another (a discrepancy which can, however, to some extent be taken into account). Of work published in 1998 (i.e. mature work which has had a chance to receive critical attention) the average citation rate for molecular biology (the highest scoring) is 46.06, for social sciences 7.48, and for mathematics (the lowest scoring) 5.73. The rates also steadily decline as you approach the most recent year. The comparative figures for 2008 publications were: molecular biology 0.75, social sciences 0.16, and mathematics 0.11 (source: Thomson Reuters' Essential Science Indicators Database as presented in the *Times Higher Education Supplement* 2009: 23). It becomes questionable when you start to deal with the very small numbers in the social sciences, for example, how significant these figures really are. It would be very easy in what purports to be an indicator of quality for the figures to be disturbed by other quite irrelevant features of the article in question.

There are, of course, technical means available to deal with these variations through statistical 'normalisation' of the results (e.g. citations for a specific paper may be normalised so that they are compared with rates in the same field, in the same sub-disciplinary area, or even the same journal). But these distinctions raise complex questions about what is the right level of normalisation; what level of granularity or aggregation should we employ in assessing the impact of a piece of writing by reference to the number of citations. An HEFCE paper on 'The use of bibliometrics in the REF' (HEFCE 2009c: 25–26) provides an example of a paper published in the *British Journal of Haematology* in 2002 which received 24 citations to the end of 2007. When normalised to the average citations for that journal volume, its impact was 1.76; normalised for the Web of Science subfield of haematology, the impact was 1.52; normalised for the Thompson current contents category for the field of haematology, it was 1.38; normalised for the Thomson ESI Field category of clinical medicine it was 1.72. The report observes:

> There is no simple answer to the question 'what is the right level for normalisation?' Common sense suggests that it should not be too fine a level, which becomes unduly self-referential. Nor should it be too coarse a level, which loses any sense of disciplinary and cultural context. But in between there are important nuances about the relative significance of fields and sub-fields. (HEFCE 2009c: 25–26)

Moreover, 'The answer is not solely a technical one, if it is technical at all. It is also, perhaps, largely political. Decisions about the level of normalisation will be

value judgements' (HEFCE 2009c: 26)—and ones, I might add, of considerable significance for the organisation and construction of knowledge in the academy.

A fifth concern is to do with the ways in which academics might try to buck the citation system by, for example, establishing 'citation clubs', i.e. networks of researchers who agree to boost each other's tally by citing each other. Already, it is argued, 'citations are the currency through which scientists pay others back'. Moreover '[they] have become a currency which is convertible into dollars and cents' (Figà-Talamanca 2007: 83, 84). It may be comparatively easy to develop software which will pick up patterns of mutual citation. However, given that such cross-referencing within networks of academics is a common feature of academic practice—especially in the somewhat fragmented and ghettoised structures which are characteristic of contemporary academic life—it would, I think, be difficult to distinguish between a natural and an artificially constructed network of cross referencing.

25.2.3 Downloads

Counting downloads of articles from the Web is sometimes offered as another metric of research quality and even vaunted as a 'democratic' form of assessment, since it is an indicator of what has interested a wide community of potential readers. However, this metric shares many of the limitations of citation, without, perhaps, some of the strengths. To start with, some publications are downloadable free of charge, some at a cost, and some not at all. These differences clearly impact on the number of downloads in a way which has nothing to do with the quality of the article (or book) in question.

Downloads are driven mainly by the connection between key words in the title and the interest of the person accessing the paper. The most frequently downloaded article among recent issues of the *Journal of Philosophy of Education* (attracting, apparently, particular interest in Pakistan) was one on the wearing of headscarves in schools. Now this is a perfectly good piece in a respected journal, but the fact that it has attracted such interest has probably more to do with the topicality and controversiality of the topic than its particular excellence.

Downloads have in any case a fairly random character. The person may not even bother to go any further when he or she sees the paper itself, especially if references to 'teenage sex' result in a rather dusty analysis of a survey rather than the anticipated set of erotic images. Even if the person accessing a downloaded paper does read it, he or she may well conclude that it is a pedestrian and uninteresting piece of work of low quality. My point, again, is that, whatever else they tell us, download counts are invalid and unreliable as measures of quality.

I have probably not exhausted the list of possible metrics of research quality—and will welcome consideration of any other alternatives—but an examination of the claims of some of the most frequently offered (and widely regarded) metrics

does not give one much confidence in them. They simply lack validity as proxies for quality assessment.

25.3 From Measurement to Machine-Readable Semantic Analysis?

All the measures I have considered so far have related to things that happen outside the text which is to be assessed, but we normally expect to read a text, carefully, if we are serious about assessing its quality. Perhaps, then, there may be more promise in an approach to quality assessment which focuses closely on the text and its features. One thread of the EU Framework 7 EERQI project is an exploration of the possibility of identifying the features of machine-readable texts deemed to indicate good-quality educational research. One measure of success would be that they could identify features which, while not conclusive evidence of quality, would nevertheless draw attention to the work as likely to be high quality. For the moment the ambition seems to be limited to being able to provide a reader with some data which might assist a more traditional form of assessment (i.e. one based on reading).

One of the discussions in the wider project concerns the threshold or thresholds of quality which might be observed in this way. Clearly, to start with, the machine has to be able to recognise whether a particular text is indeed about education (something it can probably do by reference to a lexicography of educational terms). Then it needs to be able to determine whether it is indeed *research* at all. This becomes slightly more complicated unless one accepts some rather superficial distinguishing features such as the presence of an abstract and a set of references. Only then can it begin to determine whether it is *good quality* educational research (in one of its diverse forms). Here it becomes difficult to know at what threshold or thresholds to apply the criteria. It is difficult to imagine that a machine could be programmed to make the sort of fine distinctions in quality assessment that were made by the UK RAE panels.

So how might you go about programming a machine to detect indications of quality in an educational research text? One approach, which the European Educational Research Quality Indictors project explored, followed this sequence of steps:

- clarify the criteria of quality which you want to apply—e.g. rigour, originality, significance;
- develop a more specific set of descriptors of what you would look for in a text as evidence of quality, for example, text segments that describe the research problems and the authors' contribution to them;
- read an educational research text and highlight the words or strings of words which indicated to you that it had these features;

- programme these into the computer so that it can then search for the same or similar semantic features in other texts.

Ágnes Sándor and Angela Vorndran, who were responsible for part of this work within EERQI, describe their ambitions cautiously as follows: 'Our approach consists in highlighting key sentences in the articles that can be regarded as the logical backbone of the article. Our tool does not evaluate, but aims at focusing the evaluator's attention on the parts of the texts that are relevant as a basis for his/her judgment' (Sándor and Vordran 2009: 1). There are, however, some profound conceptual and practical problems inherent in the wider ambition to, as it were, mechanise research quality assessment. Let me just indicate three of them.

First, it is extraordinarily difficult to accommodate in this process the very diverse forms which educational research actually takes and the diversity of styles in which it is presented or reported (problem enough for any single template for the assessment of, for example, conference presentations. Philosophers and historians tend to score zero for both the explanation of their methods and for their statement of the 'results'!). If we take the criterion of 'rigour', the rigour in, for example, a piece of experimental psychology, is probably demonstrated by what is said explicitly in an explanation of the way in which the research was conducted. One might be looking at things like the size and representativeness of the sample, the piloting of the method to iron out any problems, care in the elimination of the influence of the researcher, the use of an appropriate statistical tool in the analysis of the data, and so on. However, none of these would feature in, for example, the assessment of the rigour of a philosophical argument, historical writing, or a piece of (auto) biographical research—all of which have a legitimate place in the educational research community. There are parts of the educational research which seek to render the researcher absent (or at least invisible), other parts that require a prominent acknowledgement of his or her presence, a biographical positioning. There are parts that require the researcher to be detached from social and political commitments, parts that require the researcher to pursue social justice through the very practice of research itself (Griffiths 1998). Could one ever accommodate this sort of diversity and internal contradiction in any thesaurus of semantic features— and if you could, how would the machine know which it was appropriate to apply in a particular situation?

The second problem is, if anything, even more deeply problematic, because it raises issues about what happens and what needs to happen in a reading of text. I went through the sort of exercise described above with a number of texts provided by the EERQI team. It was difficult enough identifying strings of words which indicated rigour, which in any case is a function of how evidence and argument are strung together rather than to be found in disconnected vocabulary). Things became even more difficult, however, when it came to identifying features of the text which indicated either originality or significance.

The problem is that recognising these features in a piece of published research is not just about seeing what is in a text, but seeing it in relation to a much wider understanding of what is in other texts (not present) and what is going on in the

wider world of education and politics. John White's work on the aims-based curriculum became significant at the point when government curriculum policy was floundering somewhat and he was invited to contribute to a number of consultations. Lawrence Stenhouse's work on the neutral teacher, which had long been set aside, took on new significance when teachers in a deeply divided Northern Ireland were trying to work out how to deal with these events in classrooms in which Catholics and Protestants sat side by side. Nothing changed in the text during this time, but it took on new significance because of what was happening in the world. As a professional educator I can know about this, but can the machine reader? And can it assess the 'significance' of a piece of research in the absence of this wider knowledge?

Even more narrowly, in the application of the criterion of originality, we are faced with a similar—and it seems to me insurmountable—difficulty, as indeed the EERQI team has acknowledged. If I judge a particular piece of work to be original, this is partly on the basis of what I read in that work, but the judgment also relies absolutely on what I also know about other work in the field. I need to feel confident that what I have spotted in the one text is not something which has already been observed or argued in another somewhere. Of course, we already have software which can detect crude plagiarism, but in applying a criterion like 'originality' we are concerned with more than an assurance that it is not plagiarised. We are not just concerned with the replication of a form of words, but with ideas that can be expressed in an infinite variety of ways.

And this brings me to my third problem, which is to do with the reading of text. As I understand it, machine-based semantic analysis can identify vocabulary, can recognise strings of words, and can identify semantic features of these strings of words—and for some purposes such capacity may be very useful. However, when human beings read text they do much more than is implied by this sort of recognition. They bring all sorts of understanding and experience to text which allows them to interpret layers of meaning and significance which are not mechanically available in the text. They can observe irony and pastiche, they can pick up on the regional or social class reference which is embodied in a particular choice of vocabulary, the emotional force behind a choice of language, the political alignment implied by the author, the rhetorical as well as the logical force of an argument; they can read the meaning which is embodied in the paper as a whole as well as in particular sentences. Now perhaps I underestimate the power of semantic analysis, but I have yet to be shown that it is capable of 'reading' text in this meaningful way. I would argue, further, that unless it is, it is going to be incapable of making judgments about, or even usefully informing judgments about, the quality of a piece of research writing.

25.4 Impossible Science?

The reason for one part of my subtitle will by now be apparent. I am unpersuaded that any of the metrics proposed provide a satisfactory proxy for the assessment of quality in educational research. I am unconvinced that machine-based semantic analysis of text will provide any very useful basis for such assessment—though I acknowledge that these are early days in the investigation of the possibilities. This is why I regard research quality assessment as 'an impossible science'.

There is a further set of arguments which reinforces this scepticism of the search for what are typically referred to as 'quality indicators'. The trouble is that what start off as perhaps empirically grounded extrinsic *indicators* of quality rapidly become *targets* that people seek to achieve—and this distorts behaviour in a way which invalidates the original evidence of an association. 'Goodhart's Law', which formulates this as an economic principle, was derived originally from analysis of monetary theory and practice (Goodhart 1983) and extended by Strathern (1997) to apply to audit in the British university system. In brief, it predicts that when something shifts from being a *measure* to a *target*, then it ceases to be a measure.[2] When the research community and university managers know that, for example, citation in particular sources is what gets rewarded, then all sorts of distorted behaviour, only some of which is anticipated in the consultation document, will be produced to achieve high scores—a phenomenon well documented in the assessment literature, especially that on language assessment, as 'washback' (see, for example, Alderson and Wall 1993; Cheng et al. 2004). The *Times Higher Education* ran a piece in the context of the consultation on HEFC's proposals for a revised form of research assessment, which quickly assembled an imaginative range of 'dirty tricks' that academics already planned to use to profit from a system based on citation bibliometrics (Corbyn 2008). De Montfort University (and it was almost certainly not alone), in anticipation of future moves under the new Research Evaluation Framework, quickly developed a 'Citation Strategy' and provided lunchtime workshops for its staff to help them improve their citation scores (as something quite independent, of course, from 'How to improve the quality of your research'). Journal publishers issue guidance to their editors and contributors on how to raise their own citation score and the 'impact' measures of the journal itself. None of this, however, has anything to do with quality.

These considerations point to the importance of ensuring that, whatever form of quality assessment you have, or whatever 'quality indicators' you employ, they reinforce rather than distract from behaviour which is actually conducive to the production of high-quality research. To this end, it is important to distinguish between characteristics of a piece of research writing which are intrinsically good

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[2]See also the report by Evidence Ltd to Universities UK on 'The use of bibliometrics to measure research quality in UK higher education institutions' (Universities UK 2007: 35).

(type A indicators) and characteristics which may at some point in time be shown to correlate with these, but which are extrinsic (type B). Thus, for example, if I am assessing the quality of a cut diamond and this quality consists partly in its clarity and purity, then these indicators would be intrinsic or type A. I may, however, observe that high-quality diamonds are normally very expensive and that cost correlates with quality. Cost may in this way be a type B indicator of quality, but it is not an intrinsic feature of that quality. If I know people are judging the quality of my diamonds on the basis of their cost, I can easily price them higher, and may persuade some people in this way that they are better, but this does nothing to enhance their quality.

Similarly, in educational research, evidence of rigour or originality in a piece of writing would be a type A indicator of qualities intrinsic to the quality of the work. It may be shown that other characteristics ('indicators') correlate with judgment made on this basis—the location of the publication or the institutional base of the researcher are, as we have seen, two which are sometimes suggested. These are type B indicators. The problem is (as with the diamonds) that if I know that people are judging the quality of my work by reference to such extrinsic features, I will be driven to change these features of my work as far as I can, but in so doing I will do nothing to improve the quality of my work. Ergo, any quality assessment system needs to ensure that this assessment is based on type A indicators, on characteristics which are intrinsic to the quality of the work, rather than indicators which are not intrinsically about quality, the use of which will distort academic practice but do nothing to improve quality.

But how can we assess such qualities, and, if a quasi-scientific approach to research quality assessment appears impossible, what are we left with? At this point my paper becomes rather more speculative, but let me begin to explore some ways forward.

25.5 Possible Art?

Perhaps we are looking entirely in the wrong direction in expecting even a quasi-scientific answer to a question about 'quality' assessment. In ordinary circumstances we do not employ a scientific language to describe such a process. We talk about '*appreciating*' the quality of something; such appreciation is based on '*discernment*', which suggests an '*intelligent and informed appreciation*', one capable of observing relatively nuanced differences between one object of appreciation and another. We may talk about '*relishing*' or '*savouring*' the quality of something. It is revealing, perhaps, that the first question posed at the 2009 AERA symposium on research quality assessment was: 'What are the *touchstones* by which you judge quality or rigor in education research?' (Moss et al. 2009: 501, my italics).

My point here is that we might take the cue from the language I have illustrated that perhaps quality assessment owes more to aesthetics than to science—that it is perhaps more akin to *connoisseurship* than to measurement. The extract from Henry James's novel, *The wings of a dove*, with which I introduced this chapter rather beautifully illustrates this contrast, in this case with an eloquent appreciation of a handsome woman:

> She was handsome, but the degree of it was not sustained by items and aids: a circumstance moreover playing its part at almost any time in the impression she produced. The impression was one that remained, but as regards the source of it, no sum in addition would have made up the total. She had stature without height, grace without motion, presence without mass. Slender and simple, frequently soundless, she was somehow always in the line of the eye—she counted singularly for its pleasure. (James 1902/1947: 6)

Note in particular in this extract: (i) that quality is 'not sustained by items and aids', i.e. we are looking at 'pure' quality unadorned; (ii) and most significantly— that the *qualities* the writer attributes to the woman (stature, grace, and presence) are discerned in spite of the absence of their quantitative measures (height, motion, and mass); (iii) that the total impression is explicitly something quite different than could be achieved by adding up the sum of its parts; and (iv) that the observation of these qualities elicits a response of pleasure in the beholder. James has quality assessment in a nutshell.

I suggest that it is fruitful to extend this picture of sensibility and discernment to a wider concept of connoisseurship when looking at the judgment of quality. The connoisseur, after all, has to be equipped with wide knowledge of, and experience in, the field in which she is making her assessment. She needs to be able to know what sort of thing it is she is looking at and to judge whether this is indeed the sort of thing which she can appraise or whether she needs to pass it on to someone with a different kind of expertise. She then needs to judge it in terms appropriate to what it is (is it good *of its kind*?), not against inappropriate standards or criteria. She needs to be responsive to novel features of the particular case—perhaps something she has not come across before. She will see things that the lay person will probably have missed—and she will understand the significance of things which again will have been passed over by the untutored eye. Then, though she may comment on specific features of the object, she needs to have a sense of how they all combine to give an overall effect. (The child in the picture may be out of proportion to the adults, but the overall effect, given that this is the Christ child, is right.) And if the work is indeed of quality, she will respond to it with appreciation, with delight even.

The suggestion that forms of educational evaluation might be conceived in terms of connoisseurship is, of course, not a new one. Most significantly, it is a view advanced by Elliott Eisner through a number of publications, in particular in his essay on 'The forms and functions of educational connoisseurship and educational criticism' (Eisner 1979/1985). At its worst, the notion of connoisseurship can

suggest something entirely subjective,[3] or at least non-transparent, an opinionated judgment which it seems impossible for the lay person to gainsay, but Eisner manages to anticipate some of the potential critique of the notion of *connoisseurship* by linking it to the more public process of *criticism*. This is how he explains the two terms and their relationship:

> Effective criticism, within the arts or in education, is not an act independent of the powers of perception. The ability to see, to perceive what is subtle, complex, and important, is the first necessary condition. The act of knowledgeable perception is, in the arts, referred to as connoisseurship. To be a connoisseur is to know how to look, to see, and to appreciate. Connoisseurship, generally defined, is the art of appreciation. It is essential to criticism because without the ability to perceive what is subtle and important, criticism is likely to be superficial or even empty. The major distinction between connoisseurship and criticism is that connoisseurship is the art of appreciation, criticism is the art of disclosure. Connoisseurship is a private act: it consists of recognising and appreciating the qualities of a particular, but it does not require either a public judgement or a public description of those qualities. (Eisner 1979/1985: 219)

The connoisseur/critic of educational research requires, then, the qualities of discernment and appreciation that I have been trying to convey, but these need also to be linked to a capacity to express, explain, and defend the grounds for any appreciation, assessment, or evaluation in a public forum—to reveal to others what the connoisseur has appreciated for himself or herself, to point to what is good, bad, or indifferent and to explain convincingly the grounds for such assessment. It is this connoisseurship 'made public' (to echo one of Stenhouse's (1980) requirements for something to count as research), and the susceptibility to peer review that goes with that, that protects it from some accusations of being esoteric, purely subjective, or unaccountable.

My suggestion is that this account of connoisseurship/criticism, taken with my earlier elaboration of the characteristics of the sort of judgment involved, describes pretty well the process of quality assessment of a piece of educational research. This is, broadly speaking, what it requires. If this account is right, it is difficult to imagine any satisfactory short-cut through the requirement that such quality assessment requires a direct encounter between the assessor and a piece of work, i.e. normally, a reading.

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[3]Smith and Conroy, themselves members of the Education Panel in the 2014 REF in the UK, address the issue of subjectivity in relation to what they prefer to call 'judgement'. They acknowledge that 'the use of judgement is equated with subjectivism and subjective preference, as if a Panel member's verdict was on a level with preferring one kind of cheese or beer over another. But Panel members were recruited on the basis of expertise and experience: they had been referees for journals and journal editors themselves, they had refereed submissions to research councils and so on. Professional judgment, though it can be faulty from time to time, is not the same as subjective preference. Those making this equation would presumably not accept that their marking of student essays or their work as PhD examiners came down to the exercise of personal preference' (Smith and Conroy 2016).

25.6 'Love's Knowledge' and Practical Wisdom

The analysis that I have represented in this last section takes me very close to thinking which is rather beautifully articulated in a set of essays on philosophy and literature by Martha Nussbaum under the title *Love's knowledge* (Nussbaum 1990). These relate to the wider field of ethics and are largely rooted in Aristotle's *Nicomachean ethics* (Thompson 1955). Nussbaum might well be astonished to find the commentary applied to research quality assessment, but the work is significant and applicable because it is to do with a 'sense of life' (Nussbaum 1990: 36), of what constitutes human being and human experience and the values that lie at the heart of it and how, as a consequence, things are to be understood and evaluated. There are two particular features of what I think of as qualitative judgment that emerge from her analysis:

(i) 'The noncommensurability of valuable things'. More particularly, Nussbaum describes the tendency to reduce quality to quantity as 'ethical immaturity—at worst callousness and blindness' (Nussbaum 1990: 36). Quality in research is not reducible to a single set of values, nor representable by a single set of measures on a scale. In making qualitative judgments we have to find a way to hold a plurality of values in our minds at once and to discover such as are appropriate in the object under scrutiny.

(ii) A demand for 'a much finer responsiveness to the concrete—including features that have not been seen before and could not therefore have been housed in any antecedently built system of rules' (Nussbaum 1990: 37). 'Excellent choice cannot be captured in general rules, because it is a matter of fitting one's choice to the complex requirements of a concrete situation, taking all of its contextual features into account (71). 'Aristotle', writes Nussbaum, 'stresses complexity and context, [and] both of these features call for responsiveness and yielding flexibility, a rightness of tone and a sureness of touch that no general account could adequately capture' (72). Hence, we come again to an artistic rather than a scientific model of what is involved in such judgment: 'Good deliberation is like theatrical or musical improvisation, where what counts is flexibility, responsiveness and openness to the external; to rely on an algorithm here is not only insufficient, it is a sign of immaturity and weakness' (74).

Of course, neither Nussbaum nor Aristotle was writing about research quality assessment, but they were writing about perception of the good and of what it was right to do in particular circumstances, and it is my argument that this account bears a closer resemblance to what is properly involved in a judgment of the quality of a piece of research writing than is captured by any of the bibliometrics offered thus far. Further, the problem is not just with existing bibliometrics but with the whole project of reducing quality assessment to an algorithm for the interpretation of what can be measured. Quality assessment is not reducible to what can be measured scientifically. It is rather a judgment rooted in:

- an understanding of the wider historical and contemporary context of the production of such a work and its place within it;
- an appreciation of the qualities which are being sought for in the object of assessment based on prior encounters with them in other works;
- an appreciation of which of these qualities it might be appropriate to look for in the sort of work under scrutiny and what form these might take;
- an alertness to the possibility of the work exhibiting unlooked for qualities;
- perceptiveness and discernment in observing such qualities or their absence in the work;
- and, *pace* Eisner's notion of the need to ally criticism to connoisseurship, an ability to point to, articulate, explain, and defend these perceptions in the public sphere.

It also requires of the person engaged in this appreciation sufficient humility to recognise when they are entering territory beyond their own actual competence and understanding—but there is no requirement for a tweed suit, flamboyant bow tie, bulbous red nose, or any of the other attributes associated with 'connoisseurs' in the popular stereotype.

Whether we call such judgment connoisseurship or practical judgment, I am not too worried. It is, however, probably closer to the sort of judgment which occupies a central place in the humanities and the arts, in aesthetics and ethics than in more narrowly conceived versions of science or mathematics. However, as a helpful reviewer of the paper on which this chapter is based has properly pointed out, such 'practical judgment', including connoisseurship and the aesthetic, plays a central role in science and mathematics, properly understood, too (Hadamard 1945; Poincaré 1996). Part of the problem is that the twin discourses of the 'scientific' and the 'measurable' which have come to play a hegemonic role in the conversations of the educational community represent a mean and intellectually impoverished version of these two great, rich, and varied traditions of inquiry. (See on this Chaps. 3 and 4.)

Finally, such judgment may not be easy or uncontroversial, but it is a form of judgment with which, in a modest way, we are routinely familiar in our ordinary and professional lives: it is, in this sense, a 'possible art'.

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Part VII
Epilogue

Chapter 26
Conversation in the Construction and Representation of Research

Abstract This chapter sets out to explore the idea of research as something perhaps less tangible than the published paper or book that dominates the productive life of many academics, something less material, but still ongoing, enduring: a discussion, a conversation, a part of what Michael Oakeshott memorably referred to as the great 'conversations of mankind'. The chapter considers the centrality of conversation as part of the *process* of research, but also, and more radically, the ways in which the ongoing conversation should be seen as *what it is all about*. In this sense, the conversation is not just the means to an end (which is some sort of product or 'deliverable'); rather its sustaining and enriching quality is itself what matters; it is what it is. Though publications may serve as markers—reminders of particular stages in the conversation—that is all they are, and they are, for the most part, no less ephemeral than the conversation itself.

26.1 Conversation and Discussion

In this chapter I am going to use the term 'conversation' rather than 'discussion' for what I am writing about, although for these purposes they are more or less interchangeable. When I first wrote about the concept of discussion, I was at some pains to distinguish it from conversation. I argued that:

> Discussion differs from the social art of conversation in that what the talk is about is a matter of some serious importance in discussion and to discussants, whereas conversation and conversationalists may, and perhaps are conventionally expected to, address their subject lightly or indeed playfully. In staff rooms and common rooms in educational institutions the uninitiated or the obstinate create all sorts of social tensions by approaching conversation with the seriousness of discussion or discussions with the playfulness of conversation. (Bridges 1979: 14)

I did, however, go on immediately to acknowledge that the distinction was a 'not altogether unproblematic one' (Bridges 1979: 14). Montaigne's presentation of *The art of conversation* is a picture of what on the whole we might recognise as a fairly robust and serious discussion. He marks the distinction between such 'serious' conversation and 'the brief and pointed repartees exchanged between friends under the influence of mirth and intimacy, when they briskly and pleasantly chaff and poke fun at one another' (Montaigne 1958/1595: 305), but he also makes a plea that this be included under the heading of social conversation because of its potentially serious contribution to our understanding: 'In our frivolous moments we sometimes pluck some secret string of each other's imperfections, which we cannot touch without offence when sober. Thus one points out the defects of another, to our mutual profit' (Montaigne 1958/1595: 305).

Oakeshott goes further in collapsing the distinction between the playful and the serious as quickly as he observes it:

> The excellence of conversation … springs from a tension between seriousness and playfulness. Each voice represents a serious engagement (though it is serious not merely in respect of its being pursued for the conclusions it promises); and without this seriousness the conversation would lack impetus. But in its participation in the conversation each voice learns to be playful, learns to understand itself conversationally and to recognise itself as a voice among voices. As with children, who are great conversationalists, the playfulness is serious and the seriousness in the end is only play. (Oakeshott 1962: 202)

So, let me not be over-exercised by the niceties of any possible distinction between discussion (serious) and conversation (playful). Conversation and discussion have their most significant features in common:

- They require interaction between the expressed thoughts of two or more people.[1]
- The interaction must be about something (i.e. there is a topic of conversation or a subject under discussion).
- The interaction calls for at least a measure of listening, of mutual responsiveness, and hence acknowledgment and respect for the contributions of the other.
- The interaction also calls for at least some level of shared understanding of, in the Wittgensteinian sense, 'how to go on' (Wittgenstein 1953: par. 155)—of the 'rules' under which the conversation or discussion proceeds: 'the discipline of a discipline, by which I mean the rules of conduct governing argument within a

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[1]Of course it is also common to refer to a person writing a piece such as this as 'discussing' a topic, where he or she presents an interaction between different ideas, but I suggest that this use is parasitic on the primary case of interaction between two or more people.

discipline, does have a worthy function. Such rules make a community of arguers possible' (Hunt 1991: 104).[2]

Henceforth I shall refer to this sort of human interaction as conversation. This preference is influenced by the association of this term with what Michael Oakeshott refers to as 'the conversations of mankind',[3] the historic and universal conversations of, for example, poetry and science and philosophy which are part of the dynamic of the evolution of human thought—conversations participation in which define our humanity. I argue that the dinner table, the pub, the seminar room, the conference are all sites of this larger conversation and part of the continuum across space and time that constitutes its broader expression. I shall return to this theme in what follows.

26.2 The Role of Conversation in the Origination and Development of Research

My first claim is for conversation as a key part of the process of doing research. Whether as a student researcher in a supervision, tutorial, or seminar or an experienced researcher in a meeting with a sponsor or group of colleagues or at an academic conference, we formulate and refine our research project and research questions through conversation with others; we discuss possible approaches to the conduct of the research; we gather new sources of reference; we talk to others about how to interpret the evidence we are collecting or the sources we are reading; and through this talk we start to get clearer about what it all might signify or we construct its meaning. Our conversations point us towards new understandings and new sources of information; and then, as we begin to order our ideas we present them for critical discussion among close colleagues or to a wider and more critical audience of our peers or of those that we hope to inform or influence through our work.

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[2]This is not intended to suggest that there is only a single set of rules governing any discussion. For Oakeshott in particular, it is important to acknowledge the different 'voices' in the conversation of mankind, the voice of poetry as well as that of science, of history as well as philosophy. Of course this raises interesting questions about conversations running across these different traditions and the language in which these conversations are conducted. Oakeshott resists any sense of a hierarchy among these different discourses, however, and sees their relationship in different terms: '[Conversation] is impossible in the absence of a diversity of voices: in it different universes of discourse meet, acknowledge each other and enjoy an oblique relationship which neither requires nor forecasts their being assimilated to one another' (Oakeshott 1962: 198–199).

[3]A number of references in this paper come from a period before the gendered nature of the language used was properly appreciated. I have left the language intact and hope that colleagues will not find this offensive.

At least, this is the way it seems to me. There are relatively few empirically grounded accounts of how exactly researchers *do in fact* go about their work in practice in contrast with the plethora of texts prescribing how they *should do* so. It is, however, not difficult to find references to conversation in such accounts as we have of academic work—from Plato's symposia to Watson's account of the discovery of the double helix. Watson makes clear, over and over again, the importance of his and Crick's conversations to their achievement—not least those in the Eagle pub in Cambridge (which has a plaque commemorating its part in their scientific achievement). Watson celebrates what he refers to as 'the conversational life' (Watson 1968: 47), and he exulted when he was released from some laboratory work for which he felt no enthusiasm that: 'No obstacle thus prevented me from talking at least several hours each day to Francis [Crick]' (Watson 1968: 47).

Latour and Woolgar, who studied the work of scientists in the Salk Institute for two years, also came to understand research as conversation. Scientists, they argued, 'construct knowledge in conversation about their work over lab benches and in hallways and offices and by revising what they think in the course of that conversation. This is the conversation of conjoined intelligence … made by confluent, simultaneously raised human voices, explaining things to each other' (Latour and Woolgar 1979: 37). When a new building was planned to house mathematics and applied physics in Cambridge's Newton Institute, it was designed to maximise the opportunities for just such conversations, with alcoves along corridors where passing words could be turned into a serious conversation and whiteboards in the lifts to assist those whose communications required the instant scribbling of an equation.

Paulus, Woodside, and Ziegler provide an account of their research practice that certainly reflects a conversational model: 'Through our collaborative experience, we have redefined what we understand to be research: a group process of active meaning-making through dialogue rather than a "discovery" of new knowledge' (Paulus et al. 2008: 231). They go on to describe the writing of research findings as not so much a product representing ideas created and owned by individuals as 'one part of an ongoing conversation among scholars' (Paulus et al. 2008: 231).

A few years ago, in response to a request for a paper about methods of doing philosophy, I decided to keep a log of what I actually did over an eight-month period (including a lot of time when I did nothing) in order to produce a paper for an educational research conference about the ethical issues which confronted researchers operating under commercial contracted research. The log is littered with notes about conversations—with colleagues who had ideas about useful sources, with a professor of law who was a specialist on intellectual property, with another colleague who had written from a sociological perspective about programme evaluation, etc., etc. In the paper I wrote about my log I noted with some satisfaction: 'The university [this was the University of East Anglia] served, in fact, as universities are supposed to—as a source of ideas, as a community of conversation within and across disciplines of study' (Bridges 1999: 225).

The reference to philosophical work in this context cannot but remind us of the example of academic work afforded by Plato's (or Socrates's) dialogues. Although these feature carefully crafted philosophical argument, they are almost always set in the context of a conversation. *Ion* begins with Socrates asking about Ion's travels and his success in a recent competition. Richard Smith describes how *Parmenides* is set in a chance meeting in the agora, which is followed by an extensive exchange of pleasantries before Pythodoros tells Antiphon of a conversation between Socrates, Zeno, and Parmenides that took place 'many years ago'. 'Antiphon, now much more interested in horses, somewhat unwillingly relates this conversation … to Cephalus…', although Smith observes that many philosophers seem to be professionally committed to ignoring (and in some cases to editing out) this contextual and conversational framing of the discussion (Smith 2014). The *Symposium* is the most obvious example of Plato/Socrates's attachment to conversation, not only because it describes a conversation set in a banquet (including an extensive discussion about how much they had to drink the night before and how much they might or might not drink on this occasion—Montaigne would have felt very much at home) but also because the text we now have was the product of a conversation between Apolodoros and a friend with whom he was out walking, in which Apolodoros recalls a further conversation with Aristodemos, who attended the banquet with Socrates some 15 years previously (Warmington and Rouse 1956). It is a conversation that recalls a conversation about a conversation … which we still talk about today.

Of course, different scholars have different ways of pursuing their inquiries, and some may be more isolated, perhaps more heavily focused on reading than on conversation, but it is conversation which provides an immediacy of interaction of ideas and the opportunity for early critical and creative engagement by others. It is conversation which brings the individual work into the community of discourse and conversation that gives energy and spontaneity to the intellectual life.

> The study of books is a languid and feeble process that gives no heat, whereas conversation teaches and exercises at the same time. If I talk with a man of strong mind and a tough jouster, he presses on my flanks, he pricks me right and left, his ideas stimulate mine. Rivalry, vanity and the struggle urge me on and raise me above myself. And agreement is an altogether tiresome constituent of conversation. (Montaigne 1958: 287)

It would require more than I have provided here to provide a conclusive argument for the centrality of conversation to the actual conduct of research, though I think this might be widely acknowledged. This is not however what I am primarily concerned to argue. The symposium to which this chapter was originally a contribution (published in Smeyers and Depaepe 2014) was about different kinds of representation of research in 'a material culture'—different forms of product or (the term I am required to use by my current research sponsors) 'deliverables'. I want to argue that the conversation is not just the means to the end (which is perhaps some form of publication) but is itself the end: the conversation is the thing.

I have a concrete example of this turn in one context of educational inquiry. In the 1980s, the UK government introduced a rapid sequence of initiatives for educational 'reform', including different approaches to the sponsorship of the in-service training of teachers. These were managed through local education authorities (LEAs). In every case the LEA had to produce an evaluation of the programme for which they had received government funding, and I found myself involved in conducting a number of these evaluations—each duly resulting in an evaluation report (Bridges 1989). It became rapidly clear, however, that no-one was really interested in these reports. By the time the evaluation had been completed, the initiative on which it was reporting had already been replaced by a new one, which was now the focus of attention. Given the haste with which these initiatives were introduced, the short time in which their impact was supposed to be evaluated, the multiplicity of changes that were taking place simultaneously, and the inherent difficulty in attributing change in children's learning to a particular piece of in-service training, the evaluation reports tended in any case to say that there was not yet much evidence of the initiative having any impact, that it was too early to make any judgment, or even that the sponsors would frankly never know what effects their input had had. These were not messages that anyone at the local level or in government wanted to hear, so they instinctively found a variety of strategies for burying the evaluation reports in a remote corner of LEA-land.

Towards the end of this period, I persuaded Suffolk LEA to adopt a different approach to evaluation. There would be no final report. The evaluators would join with the project management committee and participate in their meetings, feeding into the discussion any evidence, perceptions, or questions which arose from their visits to the field. This immediately reduced the threat that was represented by an external evaluation, enabled us to feed evidence into the management of the initiative while it could still exercise some influence, and also provided opportunity for ongoing critique of the evaluation as well as of the programme. The conversation was the process and the output.

Unfortunately, however, I have to rely on my memory of these events to provide an account—because there was no report and because at that time there was no expectation on a lecturer in a teacher education institution to publish their research (or even to do research). So the reader has no independent way to verify this account. But if this suggests the ephemerality of conversation as the product of research, it does not in itself demonstrate its inconsequence or its discontinuity. We quickly lose track of where conversations move, what direction they take, how they resurface in unlikely and wholly unpredictable circumstances as other people take their recollections of one conversation into another context—and continue it there —sometimes re-joining with the original source. Forty years after the work of the Humanities Curriculum Project in the UK (a project which on most standard criteria would have been deemed to have 'failed'), I can see an ex-pat member of the staff of Haramaya University in Eastern Ethiopia smiling at my reference to Lawrence Stenhouse: 'That was the most formative experience in my professional life; it is still central to my teaching', he says after my talk. But who would have known that that conversation goes on in this, as in many other, unrecognised places and forms?

26.3   Conversation as a Metaphor[4] for Academic Work

> Universities began as conversations. Changing lives through conversations is perhaps the best way to describe the purpose of a university, and the role of the university professor. (Common, undated: 1)

I have illustrated some of the ways in which conversations have constituted part of the practice of research within communities of scholars, 'communities of arguers' as Hunt describes them. These are conversations in a straightforwardly literal sense that I think we can all recognise. Oakeshott extends this idea to something much larger, and in his essay 'The voice of poetry in the conversation of mankind' (Oakeshott 1962) he presents a picture of conversation in the form of traditions of thought that extend over historical time and universal space, participation in which constitutes our membership of humanity:

> As civilised human beings, we are the inheritors, neither of an inquiry about ourselves and the world, nor of an accumulating body of information, but of a conversation, begun in the primeval forests and extended and made more articulate in the course of centuries. It is a conversation which goes on in public and within each of ourselves. (Oakeshott 1962: 199)

Burke provides a helpful alternative metaphoric account of such conversation:

> Imagine that you enter a parlor. You come late. When you arrive, others have long preceded you, and they are engaged in a heated discussion, a discussion too heated for them to pause and tell you exactly what it is about. In fact, the discussion had already begun long before any of them got there, so that no one present is qualified to retrace for you all the steps that had gone before. You listen for a while, until you decide that you have caught the tenor of the argument; then you put in your oar. Someone answers; you answer him; another comes to your defence; another aligns himself against you, to either the embarrassment or gratification of your opponent, depending upon the quality of your ally's assistance. However, the discussion is interminable. The hour grows late, you must depart. And you do depart, with the discussion still vigorously in progress. (Burke 1957: 110–111)

A metaphor, perhaps, but also, I think, an instantly recognisable account of our passage through an academic life and, soberingly, our fleeting presence in the conversation.

This view of what we might call intellectual work has particular significance for alternative conceptions of the 'products' of research, because it subordinates material products like books and journals (or even artistic or dramatic representations of research, websites, or performances) to the ongoing conversation (of which

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[4]I hover between thinking of conversation as a metaphor for academic work (Burke's account below falls clearly in this category) and recognising it as a literal description (Watson's account of his work with Crick on DNA clearly describes this as heavily dependent on conversation in a very ordinary sense of the term). Ian Mundy has suggested that perhaps conversation is a metonym rather than a metaphor in the sense that it is a way of describing something indirectly by referring to things around it, but I think I see it as being more integral to academic work than that.

they might, however, form a constituent part). It is the process, the conversation itself which is the thing.[5]

The idea that it is the conversation itself that matters, rather than any other outcome, is clearly evidenced in Oakeshott's account. 'Conversation', he says, 'is not an enterprise designed to yield an extrinsic profit, a contest where a winner gets a prize, nor is it an activity of exegesis; it is an unrehearsed intellectual adventure'. And later: 'It is with conversation as with gambling, its significance lies neither in winning nor in losing, but in wagering' (Oakeshott 1962: 198). He explains:

> In conversation 'facts' appear, only to be resolved once more into the possibilities from which they were made; 'certainties' are shown to be combustible, not by being brought in contact with other 'certainties' or with doubts, but by being kindled by the presence of ideas of another order; approximations are revealed between notions normally remote from one another. Thoughts of different species take wing and play round one another, responding to each other's movements and provoking one another to fresh exertions. (Oakeshott 1962: 198)[6]

In such conversational conditions, then, each participant arrives with a unique perspective, which is uniquely changed through the conversational encounter. But of course the conversation does not end there; it continues, perhaps with the same participants, perhaps elsewhere and with a different group, and, as in the picture presented by Burke (above) it goes on even when we no longer take part, taking forward, perhaps, some traces of our own participation, though their source will almost certainly be lost among the myriad of voices which have shaped any one person's understanding at any one time.

Nine years after *The voice of poetry in the conversation of mankind*, Oakeshott contributed an elegantly rhetorical paper to the annual conference of the Philosophy of Education Society of Great Britain on *Education: The engagement and its frustration* (Oakeshott 1971). In this he had dropped the specific language of conversation, but nevertheless managed to present a very powerful picture of education itself as an 'initiation'[7] into what were, effectively, these 'conversations of mankind', the historically constructed and evolving ways in which human beings had given meaning to their existence and the means to share in this meaning, as well

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[5]The Glasgow painter, Richard Wright, won the 2009 Turner Prize for art with a beautiful painting, which, as is his custom, he painted over within months of the award. In a BBC *Imagine* documentary he explained to the presenter, Alan Yentob: 'It seemed to me to make the action more poignant, more sharp, whereas [previously] it was the object—it was the painting—which was the thing' and then 'I liked the idea of there being nothing left when I had gone'. But of course there was something left, though not the original painting, and, as the television programme illustrated, the conversation goes on.

[6]This is a very different view of conversation from that presented, for example, in the psychological literature on 'conversation theory', in which the requirements of a conversation are 'two cognitive systems seeking agreement' (Ford 2004: 773–774, and in its original source Pask 1976). The kind of conversation that Oakeshott is describing requires (and is indeed defeated by) such consensus.

[7]This was, of course, a term that also endeared itself to Richard Peters: Chapter 2 of *Ethics and Education* was entitled 'Education as initiation' (Peters 1966).

as their different ways of understanding themselves and their experience.[8] But note that here too it is the taking part that is important, rather than any extrinsic purpose, outcome, or product:

> This transaction between the generations cannot be said to have any extrinsic 'end' or 'purpose': for the teacher it is part of his engagement of being human: for the learner it is the engagement of becoming human. … Each in participating in this transaction takes in keeping some small or large part of an inheritance of human understandings. This is the mirror before which he enacts his own version of a human life, emancipated from the modishness of merely current opinions … (Oakeshott 1971: 51)

The research community—and its conversations—are simply an extension of this educational community of teachers and learners, and it is shaped by the same practices. Its own conversations, however, are explicitly framed by ambitions to interrogate and to expand the understandings that participants have inherited—but, again, not for any extrinsic purpose or with a view to any material production, but because that is in the nature of conversation at a sophisticated level, that is what makes the conversation stimulating, interesting, worthwhile.

26.4 Conversation and the Written Word

All of this may, however, present academic work as unpalatably ephemeral, 'inconsequent adventures' (Oakeshott 1962: 201). Do we not need to fix parts of this conversation, to hang on to some of what we might judge to be the most valuable contributions so that people in different places and at different times can access them? After all, I could not have written what I have done here, had, for example, Oakeshott's work not been published and made accessible in print or online.

I am not proposing, however, that we should dispense with the publication of ideas, argument, perceptions, and so on. It is rather a matter of how we perceive these and the priority we give to them. On my argument, these become simply part of the wider conversation, the one that also takes place in bars and seminar rooms and long walks in the country. They are notes that remind us of things said at different times and places, but they are not the point of the conversation, which

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[8]Compare, too, John Passmore: 'To be educated one must be able to participate in the great human traditions in critic-creative thought: science, history, literature, philosophy, technology …' (Passmore 1967: 200). Later, Passmore uses the language of 'discussion' more explicitly to refer to these 'critico-creative traditions': 'Critical discussion … of accepted rules can begin at a very early stage in a child's life: what happens later, as he begins to enter into the great traditions is that the area of discussion widens and the difference between different types of discussion more clearly emerges' (Passmore 1967: 209).

moves on even before they are published.[9] They remind us that our conversations have a history, and of course that history can continue to illuminate our present, but they themselves always have to be interpreted and reinterpreted in terms of our new understandings and the shifting contours of our conversation. Gadamer reminds us that our relationship with a text is itself dialogic, conversational. For Gadamer this is more than a metaphor: reading is always interpretation and means bringing the text 'into the living present of conversation' (Gadamer 1989: 368, and see also Gallagher 2002).

The form of academic texts and the expectations we have of them reinforces this view of their place as voices in a wider conversation. We expect them to locate themselves in the conversations which have preceded them (hence, for example, the literature review in the doctoral thesis); we expect them to 'discuss' their findings or conclusions by showing what they contribute to the ongoing conversations, what new insights they provide, what old assumptions they challenge; and we expect them to suggest the directions that the conversation might take in the future (compare Burke's account above).

So the publication, the text, has a role, but its issuing is neither the objective nor the end of the conversation; it is just a note of a passing phase in the conversation, to borrow Wittgenstein's phrase, 'assembling reminders for a particular purpose' (Wittgenstein 1953: 127). It is a note which some at the time may have seen as of particular significance, but for the vast majority, even this importance will be quickly lost (after all how many academic papers ever get read, let alone cited or referenced, and for how long are they remembered?) or the ideas will be absorbed untraceably into diverse imaginations, like the words we exchange in the cafes, bars, or restaurants of the world—wherever two or more researchers or philosophers choose to meet.

So research is not about the material product that may or may not be one of its outcomes, whether this be book, paper, image, or website; it is about participation in an ongoing conversation, enriching the conversation, and keeping the conversation alive. 'The object of the game is to go on playing it' wrote the distinguished mathematician, John von Neumann (Neumann 1958, cited in Boyd 2004). It is through such participation that we share in the intellectual adventure which is part of the richness of human living, and in keeping the conversation alive we make it available to another generation.

Perhaps even those grandchildren to whom this book is dedicated—Louis, Lily, and Albert—might take part.

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[9]In my reflections on the process of writing a philosophical paper for a conference and subsequent publication (see Chap. 11), I wrote: 'On this evidence [i.e. the evidence of my log], writing philosophy is a temporary rendering at a point in time of a continuing conversation. For a short period it diverts a social activity of conversation into an individual activity of representation, but even in that activity the writer continues to reach out to the sources of the conversation for help' (Bridges 1999: 226).

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