Effective Contributions from Research to Educational Conversations: style and strategy*

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A View from the Other Side

Almost all of the Presidential Addresses to the British Educational Research Association have been given by upright and eminent academics who have steadfastly pursued highly principled careers of research in the service of education. My career has been more erratic and in the last decade has been divided into two kinds of experience, covering roughly equal time periods. The first of these was spent as a quasi-civil servant at the Scottish Office, with responsibilities for commissioning and managing a £1 million research programme associated with the 'Munn and Dunning' development initiative for the Scottish Certificate of Education 'Standard Grade'. In that role members of the research community became extraordinarily friendly with me but I could expect to be categorised by them in private, at best, as a 'gamekeeper' and, at worst, as 'the enemy'.

My other main employment in the '80s was in a quango (quasi autonomous nongovernmental organisation), the Scottish Council for Research in Education (SCRE); there the primary task was to secure 'soft' money for research and so to give the staff of SCRE some security of employment; we sought funds however, and from whomever, we could (with the exception of South Africa or tobacco companies). Some of the contracts I signed could be regarded as undermining the rights and careers of researchers in general, and as endangering the democratic process and the public's 'right to know'. At the BERA symposium two years ago, where the matter of a code of practice was discussed, agreement to contracts of this kind was described as 'prostitution'. While deploring a term which always denigrates women, I have some sympathy with the sentiment and it is uncomfortable to live with the possibility that for short term gains I (along with, I should say, countless others) may have undermined the foundations of academic freedom and democracy. It would have been much more uncomfortable, of course, to have refused the contracts which provided continuing work for competent and loyal, but otherwise unemployed, researchers.

Having returned to an institution of higher education I suppose I am now a quasi-academic. I say 'quasi' because it takes time to become socialised and to be accepted back

into the fold. The returner does not necessarily take the same things for granted as the academic community. Plenty of people in that position have dared to offer, soon after their return, a contribution to the debate from 'the other side' and have been labelled as traitor, pragmatist, administrator or compromiser for their pains. I hope that what I have to say will not invoke such invective since my main concern is to discuss how BERA can build effectively on what it has already done. However, I *am* going to suggest that we need to address the style in which we communicate with policy makers, and that while we must maintain the grit in our approach we should do so with less abrasion. Life has moved on and I believe that now we have to view the future in more constructive terms than those illustrated in Jack Whitehead's (1989) phrase of two years ago 'the hostile years to come'.

There is another sense in which my view is from the 'other side'; the illustrations for what I have to say are drawn mostly from the Scottish education system which is the one I know best. In the last few years the debate about the political role of BERA has centred around educational policy for England and Wales, particularly that of the Education Reform Act 1988. Two not entirely consistent assertions are often made north of the border: first, that education in Scotland is more enlightened than in the south; secondly, that it is shaped predominantly by the English thinking of a political party which has no mandate at all from the Caledonian electorate. 'Neither claim would appear to be wholly valid, neither entirely devoid of substance' (Macbeth, 1988). Elsewhere (Brown, forthcoming) I have commented on some of the differences which are emerging as a result of the two recent Acts (Education Reform Act, 1988 and the Self-Governing Schools etc. Act, Scotland, 1989). In my view, the two parts of the United Kingdom currently find themselves in contrasting sets of circumstances with regard to the curriculum and assessment in schools. There are other differences (and many similarities), however, which may be more relevant to a discussion of the part research has to play in the education system and my concern here is not directly with the two Acts.

Continuity of Purpose

If BERA is to be an influential force in education we have to have some sense of continuity and of building on our strengths. In the light of that, let me start by recommending that everyone read again John Elliott's Presidential Address of last year (Elliott, 1990). His message on the importance of 'continuing conversation about the aims and principles of educational research' with practitioners, policy makers and other academics, and of retaining 'conversational research communities in the field of education studies', provides a sound basis on which to establish continuity of purpose.

Furthermore, under his leadership BERA has established policy task groups for assessment, curriculum, local management of schools and teacher education, and has made a crucial appointment of Janet Powney as its public relations officer. These developments have greatly strengthened BERA's capabilities for engaging in conversations about educational research and attempting to influence policy.

While John has set us an impressive agenda of aims, and we have some of the necessary support structures in place, there are still questions of strategy and style to be debated. Within that debate, there may well be a maturing of the concept of BERA's political role and of the organisational framework we need to underpin high quality research and help to bring about worthwhile educational change.

On the matter of the administrative infrastructure of the Association, I want only to say that the establishment of a membership office (at SCRE), the appointment of a public relations officer, the current plans for more effective secretarial support and the setting up of a sub-group of the Executive Council to consider what other support mechanisms are appropriate for an Association with our membership and means, all reflect the concern felt over the last few years about the need for a firmer base and sense of continuity. The Executive Council has been aware, as the membership has, that as many matters are discussed there is a sense of going over old ground, but without either access to, or time to consider, appropriate records of the cogent arguments presented or actions taken by BERA in the past. This has been most apparent for those who organise the annual conference; the aspiration to produce helpful but succinct guidelines to be used from year to year has had priority but our lack of administrative structure has hindered the process.

My main concern in this paper, however, is with style and strategy and with the ways in which we as a research association can best contribute to educational conversations and policy decisions. Obviously this is too vast a matter to cover comprehensively in one paper and I shall concentrate particularly on the notion of partnership in relation to conversations.

The Case for an Emphasis on Style and Strategy

There are three broad reasons why I am especially concerned about style and strategy. The first is that in recent years BERA necessarily has been thinking about its political role primarily in terms of crisis management, and the discussion has been replete with military metaphors. This is well illustrated in the Presidential addresses of both John Elliott and Tricia Broadfoot (1987, published 1988). In my view, the time has come to change to a focus on a steady state strategy and to look for metaphors from the construction industry. In no way am I challenging the assertion that the simple-minded market model of the last decade has been profoundly damaging to education. But previous governments' policies have fallen short of perfection (and, I have no doubt, those of the future will do likewise). Most have given the impression that their protagonists have heard education described but never had any. I was aware of many snide comments about the educational policies of a former Scottish Labour Education Minister whose pre-parliamentary experience was as a green grocer, long before Tory policy was likened to the deliberations of the corner shop grocer. My point is not to deny that matters of education are at an all time low, but simply to say that we have to think about strategies we can adopt to ensure that we have a *continuing* influence on policy and practice no matter what shade of government is in power. In the longer term, we want to ensure that the educational architecture is informed by our basic principles and research

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findings, and while politicians will always hold the aces we will have a say in what counts as an ace.

The second reason for an emphasis on style and strategy arises from some of the images we seem currently to be projecting to others and which are, I believe, weakening the impact of what we have to say. At an international level, there are reports of whingeing Brits promoting conference tedium for the rest of the world by constantly moaning about the Education Reform Act. Even Scotland is taken aback by the obsessive concern with the national curriculum south of the border (that could be countered, of course, by saying that the full force of the reform in this area has not yet hit the Scots). And there continues to be a suspicion that it is university matters and priorities (UFC and CVCP, concerns) which dominate BERA's response to initiatives in higher education more generally. These claims may be unfair, but they reflect how we are perceived and that is what counts.

My third reason concerns the nature and effectiveness of tactics we have used in the past. This government seems to me to have had success in its 'divide and rule' approach. By opening doors to researchers to become involved in its developmental activities (e.g. TGAT and SATS) it has also opened divisions within the research community rather than fostering *'tolerance* for disagreement, deviance and idiosyncracy' (Elliott, 1990). The ensuing attacks and defences (albeit mostly not in print) have had little of the interpretations of fundamental methodological principles, healthy internal critiques and self reflection which John Elliott (1990) was looking for in his conversations. Much more has there been a polarisation between the 'if you want to affect the course of events you have to get into the action and that means compromises' and the 'collaboration with the enemy and abandonment of fundamental principles' perceptions.

Quite apart from involvement in the developments, research has much to offer in the way of principles and research findings about such things as the conditions which promote successful curriculum innovation and effective teaching, how young people learn and how assessment can foster learning. The meagre impact which these principles and findings have had can be explained in part, of course, by the government's assertions that they are simply facets of a left ideology and so are dangerous. But there are three further factors which I believe are important: the fragmented way in which research evidence has been presented to policy makers, the lack of attention which researchers have given to principles well known to them about how to persuade people to reflect on and revise their ideas, and the fact that because educational research is about developing a deeper understanding of educational matters it can never expect to produce an impact overnight. Let me elaborate a little on these three factors.

I was struck at an AERA symposium this year by the frustration of researchers at the lack of reaction by state policy makers to grisly research findings on unintended outcomes of mandated testing. The session discussant made the point, however, that it is easy for policy makers to dismiss individual studies (especially when they are small-scale, in-depth studies of teaching and learning) as anecdotal and idiosyncratic; what is needed is a rational account of accumulated evidence across context within a coherent theoretical

framework. The problem of fragmentation of evidence weakening the case put forward by research has been recognised by BERA. By setting up its policy task groups it has established a structure and procedures for bringing together findings, providing a point of contact for those who have new evidence to offer, constructing informed and rational responses to educational initiatives and formulating ideas for further research which nourish theoretical perspectives and ideas for practice. I hope these groups will continue to play a major role in our strategy, go on to develop imaginative ways for ensuring they have access to all relevant research, make themselves accessible to other researchers and develop routes to policy makers and funding bodies not only to communicate what research already has to say but also to influence research planning for the future.

But what can be said about how to persuade people in more powerful positions to pay attention to what the BERA groups (or anyone else) have to say? There are several principles relevant to education upon which most researchers would agree; three are especially important here. First, it seems to me that one does not have to be a radical constructivist to agree that learning is not a matter of ideas being poured into empty minds; the conceptual frameworks, schemata, which the learner already has are the most important determinants of what and how he or she will learn. Secondly, we would probably agree that assessment of what is learned will be of educational value only if it is designed to recognise the learner's worthwhile achievements and to eschew labelling of individuals as failures.   And thirdly, if we want learners to behave creatively, thoughtfully and reflectively, then they have to have some sense of 'ownership' of the initiative they are undertaking. Politicians, civil servants and other policy makers are no different in these respects from other learners. Where they are different is in the power they have which allows them to disregard the views of others (whether teachers or researchers); and that is exactly what they will do if those others fail to recognise the importance of the way policy makers already think about education, of giving them recognition for the worthwhile aspects of their ideas, of allowing them to retain a sense of ownership and of making use of what is already known about encouraging learners to be reflective. There are always 'costs' to a. policy maker in changing tack; those 'costs' must be balanced by some sense of 'reward'.   Teachers know that children will not be persuaded to learn by being branded as failures; the same is true of policy makers.

Turning to the time-scale in which research can expect to have an impact, we have to look to the primary aim of research which, as John Elliott argued, is 'to promote worthwhile change by influencing the practical judgements of teachers and policy makers' through the search for 'practical wisdom'. In more specific terms, that means for me the generation of understandings of educational matters by addressing questions of how things are in education, why they are the way they are and how they could be improved. But to achieve John's aim, research has also to address the question of choices. It has a responsibility to articulate the alternative decisions or courses of action among which policy makers and practitioners can choose. Such alternatives are sometimes implicit or covert as far as the decision makers are concerned, and it is part of the researcher's job to ferret them out and to illuminate the implications of choosing among them.

The process of throwing light on the available alternatives will not offer a quick solution to whatever is the immediate problem for the policy maker or practitioner. Instead, a specific piece of research will provide a framework for understanding what may be a complex pattern of the costs and benefits which are likely to accrue in the formulation of a particular area of policy or practice. It is unrealistic to expect that the decision makers will achieve such understanding 'by next Monday afternoon', regardless of whether they are actively involved in the research (as are teachers in classroom action research) or see the research as someone else's responsibility (as do civil servants commissioning policy-related research). Nor must it be forgotten that the general understanding of the functions which research can and cannot fulfil is something we must continuously promote. There will always be decision makers who misconceive the role of research, expect from it what it cannot provide or have no appreciation for the potential value of what it has to offer. That may be because they are new to the job, or never have understood, or (in our terms) have regressed to more simple-minded schemata.

There are two main points I am making here. The first is that the nature of research is such that inevitably its impact will be delayed because it is dependent on the growth of practical wisdom, not just among researchers but also policy makers and practitioners. Fundamental learning of that kind takes time. Unfortunately, decisions are often made much more quickly and may seem incomprehensible in researchers' eyes. The second point is that a major and continuing priority for researchers must be to educate others to have realistic expectations of research and to take full advantage of what it has to offer. We have to accept that the practical wisdom generated by research is only one factor in educational decisions. Political ideologies, practical constraints, personal and irrational preferences are all influential and currently more so than practical wisdom. I am not suggesting, of course, that we should throw in the towel. I am suggesting that in order to promote the role of practical wisdom we have continually to support subtle and insidious approaches which will affect the basic thinking of the powerful groups in education, whether policy makers or teachers, about the role of research.

Partnership: a concept in need of refinement

The government might well claim, of course, that it is already promoting educational conversations within and among communities through the plethora of 'partnerships' it is establishing. 'Partnership', like 'enterprise', is a word of the moment; I groan as yet another notice of a conference entitled 'Emerging Partnerships' arrives. The government uses the term constantly to give the impression of fostering some kind of 'equal' relationship with other groups. So often, however, so-called partnerships (and not just those involving governments) turn out to be one individual or group looking for control over others who will be flattered and kept malleable by the status of being a partner. The legal and medical professions are less hypocritical; they have senior partners (mostly men) and junior partners (most of the women) and it is clear who is in charge. All of us have at some time entered into educational partnerships where promises of equality have given way to events which have resulted in feelings of betrayal comparable to those of Celtic Football Club when Mo Johnston signed for Glasgow Rangers.

Whatever the shortcomings of the concept of partnership, it is central to the way many policy makers think about education and so I believe it must be one of the starting points in any attempt to influence events. The current thinking which formulates all conceptions of partnerships into enterprises which have the goals of the market place, and sees sharing among partners in terms of profits and losses or as teamwork in a competition, will not be changed by naked confrontation. Thoughtful infiltration is what is needed. I would not wish to underestimate, of course, the difficulty of developing strategies which deter everything from being carried along on the tide of false assumptions that education is just another form of business and that learning is just a product to be marketed like fast food or transistor radios. We will need all the help we can get from the creative ideas of others.

I was impressed by a vivid and fascinating lecture which the distinguished composer Nigel Osborne gave at a recent and splendid conference promoted by the Royal Society of Edinburgh, held at Glasgow University and entitled *Creativity and Discovery in the Arts and Sciences*. He spent an hour weaving for the audience a beautiful pattern explaining the different ways in which science and music have been interdependent through the ages-a true partnership in which each has been instrumental in a thousand instances of discovery in the other. A comment he made at the end of his talk was crucial: there have been no examples in history of a commercial venture which has led to creative outcomes from the partnership between science and music. May be that is true of all partnerships which genuinely extend knowledge? At the same conference the mathematician Benoit Mandlebrot illustrated, with breath-taking colour slides, how his fractal structures have enabled us to make much greater sense of what apparently is natural chaos and of the formal structures of language and music. Anyone who has met Mandlebrot will know that his work has *never* been based on anything remotely resembling the profit motive, but is fundamentally concerned with productive partnerships across different aspects of knowledge. He does depend, however, on the private sector (IBM) for his, no doubt generous, income and working environment.

One rather obvious point I drew from this memorable experience was the priority we must continue to give to thinking about *how* we communicate with the rest of the educational community, politicians and the public more generally. The cool, logical detailed, evidence-laden, hatchet-job critique of government plans or assumptions goes down extremely well in academic seminars, but elsewhere cuts little ice and may well be judged not only as 'deadly serious' but also 'deadly'. Those other venues call for relaxed humour and spectacle if the disastrous and absurd are to be highlighted. Alas, as I believe William Hazlett said, 'Wit is the rarest quality to be met with among people of education', but we can strive for more charismatic sparkle and beware of cosy complacency and humourless cynicism. In that way we can expect not only to illustrate the foolishness of policies with which education has to contend, we can also take the initiative in the debate on the future.

Structural Influences on Partnerships and Conversations

No matter how carefully thought out and subtle our approaches, however, the way the education system is structured will have a powerful influence over our effectiveness in educational conversations. In particular the structures will determine who will determine who will be the partners in the conversations. I am going briefly to explore this in relation to one Scottish example which I believe is important.

Relationships between researchers and central government, that is politicians and Scottish Education Department (SED) officers, have experienced over the last two decades the mediating influence of the SED's Research and Intelligence Unit (RIU). Set up in 1973 under the direction of HMCI Ian Morris who remained with it for ten years until his retirement, it has provided continuity, achieved a basic understanding of what research can, in principle, offer to education and developed an intimate knowledge of the research community in Scotland and of its strengths and weaknesses (Brown, 1985). Over the years the RIU has shown itself ready to enter into conversation with the research community and, from its privileged position of knowing what is happening on both sides of the fence, to discuss the areas of education likely to be most fruitful for researchers to put forward ideas. As time has gone on, it has made considerable efforts to promote and facilitate dialogue between the research community and the Scottish Office more generally.

The RIU is, of course, part of the Civil Service but is unusual in that its staff, drawn from HM Inspectorate and the Central Research Unit of the Scottish Office, tend to remain with the Unit for a substantial period of time, rather than encounter the musical chairs to which most Civil Servants are exposed every couple of years. This somewhat anomalous position has two positive outcomes: first, the RIU staff have developed strong commitments to, and good understandings of, research and are motivated to seek funds anywhere they can to support research; and secondly, they have access to, and a tradition of conversations with, the rest of HM Inspectorate, administrators at the SED, Scottish politicians and the Directors of Education in the local authorities. Because members of the RIU have placed great importance on getting out to meet researchers in their own institutions and to attend educational research conferences (the usual pattern at the annual conference of the Scottish Educational Research Association, for example, has been for the whole staff of the Unit to attend), they have, in my view, been able to provide a valuable link between researchers and those policy makers who never step out of their offices.

There have been of course, a variety of criticisms of the RIU. Within the Scottish Office it has been seen as something of a maverick, and Ian Morris' wizardry in grabbing any resources available, making outrageous statements in public and letting cats out of bags were notorious and less than popular with many (but not all) of his colleagues. The research community loved the fun and appreciated the eclectic approach which fostered educational research in many different forms. But as we moved through the 80's there were grumblings within the ranks of that community. Accusations of paternalism and patronage were voiced. It was suggested that although the RIU was active and effective

in promoting the research it liked, particularly if proposed by its favourite sons and daughters, it had a powerful veto over anything which did not take its fancy and had no obligation to pass it on to the rest of the SED (most of which displayed, at best, a passing interest in research).

Whether or not there was truth in these criticisms, it clearly is necessary regularly to re-assess the role of an agency like RIU. The important matter to keep in mind, however, is that any changes to be implemented must seek as their primary goals the criteria for effective public research programmes, and not those for private business. As researchers, we have to be concerned that in the future the RIU should continue to operate in a way to facilitate the crucial educational research conversations which promote the generation of practical wisdom and to create the conditions for excellent research which fosters worthwhile change in education.

For those of us who work in Scotland (particularly members of BERA or SERA and the SERA Teacher-Researcher groups), this means that we have to have regular discussions with the SED about the planning and commissioning of research. We must put to the policy makers constructive ideas about more effective ways of negotiating contracts. There have to be three elements to our contribution. First, there will be new ideas about how to ensure that research is well designed and planned, carried out with competence and flair, and disseminated widely and properly. Secondly, there will be support for maintaining the valuable facets of the RIU's current pattern of activity, particularly its facilitation of conversational networks and the educative function it fulfils within the Scottish Office in helping administrators to understand the role, importance and potential value of research. And thirdly, there will be positive arguments to discourage changes in the system which might be mooted by the SED but would clearly be to the detriment of research. I am thinking here especially of any suggestion that RIU staff should loosen the very strong links they have with the research community, or that the contracting system should be one which is essentially identical with competitive bidding for, say, the building of prisons or repairing of roads according to precise specification. If the RIU became simply an administrative unit, without making its knowledgeable contribution to research decisions, then government funded research would go to the bids which offered the most ambitious goals for the least money. The potential of proposals for high quality research is not something we can expect the general run of administrators to be in a position to judge.

The circumstances in which educational researchers from the south find themselves is not one where the aim can be to preserve and develop a structural feature like the RIU. The DES has never felt the need for such a formal Unit. Instead, I suspect researchers will have to make use (as some already do) of the *ad hoc* groups of HMIs or administrators which are established in relation to the different initiatives which the government undertakes. Inevitably those efforts will be fragmented, but they could have the advantage of providing a wider base than in Scotland for educating central government policy makers about research. The crucial question is whether we can use this as an effective channel to contribute our ideas and so take some of the initiatives, instead of

being always in the position (as is almost everyone from teachers' unions to the School Examinations and Assessment Council) of responding to those of the government.

Having put most of my emphasis on the development of partnerships and conversations with policy makers, especially central government, I will turn briefly to other conversations which BERA members have among themselves, have with teachers, or observe and provide support for but are not the main participants.

Reflecting on Other Conversations

Researchers with Other Researchers

It is necessary, of course, that in any campaign to persuade others to be self-reflective and open to change we have to demonstrate comparable qualities and overtly pursue what John Elliott (1990) has called a 'healthy internal critique'. His description of the enviable conversational research community at the University of East Anglia's Centre for Applied Research in Education (CARE) provides a framework of emphasis on tolerance, self reflection and. the democratic participation of researchers, teachers and students. While these kinds of principles are shared in the rhetoric of many other institutions, it is less clear to me that it mirrors practice.

There are in some institutions deep internal divisions among the potential community of researchers. This phenomenon is not unusual in other parts of the world. I was stupid enough on one occasion to remark to one of the 'great names' at Stanford University on what a rewarding experience it must be to have such a close and constant association with so many others in the forefront of educational research. Uncharacteristically he snapped at me and made it clear that they all avoided each other as far as possible and creatively circumvented efforts on the part of the University's President to arrange for them to work on collaborative initiatives. The outcome of that, of course, has been the establishment of several research communities within the institution. Multiple communities of this kind are found in many other universities in the USA and often reflect deep rivalries and intellectual disagreements, notably illustrated at the University of Chicago between the followers of Benjamin Bloom and of Joseph Schwab.

In this country, I think we have to be flexible in deciding what counts as a research community, careful that despite our democratic rhetoric of tolerance some people within those communities are not silenced, and aware that what is a pressing priority for some communities may have little relevance for others. Most of our research communities can never expect to have the size and variety which adhere to the gurus in the USA with their tens or even hundreds of graduate students; indeed, the size of the CARE community is well beyond many of us. Even in these smaller groups, however, it is not unknown for individuals to be intimidated into silence by intolerant and self-satisfied atmospheres which promise that anyone expressing different views will be greeted with accusations that it is they who are intolerant and/or ignorant. And the greatest among us can miscalculate what are the most urgent concerns for the educational conversation in which they find themselves. I recall a seminar for researchers and others in Scotland led by the

eminent scholar Lee Cronbach in the early seventies. He launched into a crunching attack on the dominance of the quasi-experimental paradigm for educational research. The other participants looked blanker and blanker and after a few minutes he stopped and asked if there was a problem. David Hamilton gently pointed out that there was no commitment to such an approach in Scotland and, he suspected, many of those at the seminar had never even heard of it; it was certainly not the urgent methodological issue for that community at that time.

John Elliott (1990) made an important point about leadership of educational research communities. He called on 'Professors of Education, and other senior educational academics ... [to retain] a reasonable level of involvement in the primary activities ... [and] to articulate an ethic, a set of fundamental principles, to guide primary practices within the institution, and to accept responsibility for their realisation'. I strenuously support him on this, but with one caveat: that first on our list of matters of self scrutiny and articulation of ethics should be the scandalous under-representation which half of the population continues to have among the leadership. Let me draw a comparison. I belong to a minority group, those BERA members working north of the border, which has succeeded in having 25 per cent of BERA Presidents from Scottish institutions when in population terms it might have expected ten per cent; in contrast with that, women *(not a minority group)* might have expected to constitute 50 per cent of Presidents but have had less than 20 per cent. BERA is not alone. I am often bemused by people asking me how it is that Stirling University has such a high proportion of women professors. 'High?' I ask myself when the proportion is less than one in seven? 'High', of course, in comparison with the country as a whole where the ratio is something like one to thirty-three.

The gender issue in research still cuts deep. In the most recent BERA Research Intelligence, Gerver and Johnston (1990) voiced considerable disquiet about Scottish research practice. In another context, the annual conference of the Scottish Educational Research Association at St Andrew's University in 1989, we debated the motion that 'The Best Educational Research is Done by Women'. Elizabeth Gerver (then Director of the Scottish Institute of Adult and Continuing Education, now Professor of Continuing Education at the University of Dundee) and I opposed the motion; we won hands down. Our case was built of course, on the argument that the initiating and commissioning of research, the senior and permanent positions in educational institutions and the direction of research programmes and projects, is overwhelmingly in the hands of powerful men. Although the labour force in educational research is substantially populated by women, the crucial decision-making which determines the quality of the research and the contribution it can make to education is controlled by men.

In her introduction to the 1989 edition of Dale Spender's *Invisible Women: The Schooling Scandal,* Sue Adler makes the point that while we cannot yet know all the effects of the educational changes of the last decade 'What we do know is that the old, old problem of sexism remains fundamentally untouched'. In her Presidential Address in 1983 Sara Delamont reminded us that 'Woman's place in education will be nearer when Mothercare is renamed Parentcare, just as it will be nearer when BERA elects its tenth woman

president in 1994'. The first of these seems as unlikely as ever; the second is already lost. What plans are we hatching in our research conversations to address this matter?

Researchers with Teachers

A very great deal has been written about relationships between teachers and researchers and the nature of their educational conversations. Jack Whitehead (1989) paid particular attention to the importance of these links in his Presidential Address two years ago. This is not the place to review and critique the literature on classroom action research and reflection in action; I will limit myself, as a bystander, looking at current research practice, to commenting briefly on two features of conversations of this kind which seem to me still to require attention.

First, we have to beware of what I have heard Sharon Fieman-Nemser call 'hollow praise' of teachers. Teachers, like anyone else are motivated by praise and recognition of their worthwhile achievements, but they are quick to register what is essentially adulation of the trivial. At the extreme, it is not unusual at conferences to hear American researchers who collaborate with teachers who use phrases like 'awesome' and 'exquisite' to describe classroom practice. I believe teachers, in this country, if not in the USA, are turned off by such extravagance (particularly when subsequent conference sessions document carefully the dire state of levels of achievement in American schools) and recognise it as the flattery used to persuade them into partnerships where others will have the control.

My second point arises from instances in which teachers have been concerned that, in their own terms, they believe their teaching has deteriorated as they have become involved in the conversations of collaborative action research. I am talking here about teachers who are committed to the idea that knowledge about education is generated *through* practice and not *applied in* practice, and to the tenets of action research. It seems to me that their problem is associated with taking on the assumption that teaching is 'reflection-in-action'-a description which may fit very well the practice of other professions (Schon, 1983) and of research but is questionable in its application to classroom teaching.

The concepts of 'reflection-*on*-action' and of 'reframing' (getting to see things in another way) are relevant, of course, to teachers' thinking and discussions about their work. But the actual business of being out there with, or in front of, pupils is a different matter. What I am asserting here is that it is one thing to encourage teachers to behave outside the classroom as researchers by reflecting on the actions they take, making explicit and questioning their underlying assumptions, reviewing the alternatives open to them, formulating practical theories and generating plans to test those theories in classroom action. It is quite another thing, however, in talking about teaching to give the impression that 'the reflective practitioner' is the stance to be taken when, for example, one is faced with a restive class which may have lost interest or be eager to get on with the learning or be hostile to what is on offer. In those circumstances, pausing to wring one's hands, while reflecting in action on available alternatives or fundamentally questioning one's basic assumptions, is unlikely to lead to sweetness and joy all round. The open reflective

'research' approach has to be replaced by one which is confident, decisive, supportive and goal-focussed. The teacher has spontaneously to take account of the conditions impinging on his or her teaching and identify immediately from a wide repertoire of actions those most likely to achieve the chosen goals for maintaining the desired pattern of class activity or progress (Brown & McIntyre, 1988). Researchers may choose, of course, to call this 'reflection-in-action' but its spontaneity and immediacy run counter to the common-sense notion of 'reflection'. Misinterpretation, therefore, is hardly surprising.

Teachers with Teachers

As well as being part of various conversational communities, researchers have responsibilities to facilitate, and facilitate understanding of, those in which others are engaged. A particularly important example is the dialogue between experienced teachers in schools. In Scotland, HMIs testify clearly to the excellence of classroom practice in some schools and its absence in others. Especially in the area of assessment in primary schools, they are calling for teachers' sharing of their classroom expertise, about when and how they do what they do well. Appointments of 'senior teachers' as an alternative (and classroom) career route have assumed a sharing of knowledge, skills and strategies of teaching with others who are less or differently competent. And the concept of appraisal as a part of school-based professional development of teachers is a third pressure for the sharing of professional craft knowledge.

Such sharing of pedagogical expertise can be conceived in either hierarchical terms (learning from the great and good), or as conversations among equals. Whichever is the case, however, it is uncommon and infrequent. Teachers are accustomed to talking about content, resources, organisation and pupils' activities but not about their own craft of teaching, and only rarely do they observe each other's teaching.

The sharing of professional craft knowledge has to be at the expense of traditional bastions of privacy which separate 'teachers with their classes into a series of "egg-crate" like departments, isolated and insulated from one another's work ... [creating] an often welcome measure of protection from inspection and intrusion' (Hargreaves, 1988). Furthermore, teachers are often highly sceptical about adopting new strategies unless they can be shown that these strategies are routinely used by other teachers in circumstances similar to their own, are given guidance in demonstrated concrete terms and have the personal support and encouragement of the school's senior management. There are some examples of the systematic sharing of pedagogical expertise among teachers (e.g. Gates, 1989), but their infrequence reflects the embryonic stage of our understanding of the conditions which enhance and encourage these kinds of conversations. The challenge is there for research to explore ways of enabling or persuading experienced teachers to learn from each other, to illuminate the influence of social climates and institutional priorities in schools on teachers' readiness to become committed to such enterprises and to investigate how and to what extent they are able and willing to assimilate and build upon what they have learned in their own thinking and practice.

Summary

The message of this paper is encouragement to build on the vision of educational conversations given to us by last year's President. BERA is in need of continuity and of a way of working which will ensure a steady impact on educational thought, policy and practice. To achieve that it has to move away from crisis response and scrutinise its style and strategy for constant interaction with others in the educational community.

Our style and strategy should take account of what we already know about the importance of how evidence is presented, the conditions under which others can be motivated to reflect on their policies and practices, and the nature of the influence we can expect research knowledge to have on those policies and practices. We should take advantage of any humour, subtlety, charisma or spectacle we can bring to educational conversations; features like those make clear logic and uncomfortable research findings much more palatable to others than do aggression and cynicism.

Understanding at a general level of what, in principle, research can and cannot offer to education is something we will have to continue to explicate if we want others to hear the specific things we have to say. It is necessary to use both structural features of the system and personal contacts to establish such understanding among policy makers and practitioners.

There is no doubt that persuading the rest of the educational community to be ambitious, reflective and self-critical will be easier if we sustain that pattern for ourselves. BERA members have the great benefit of conferences like this which provide opportunities for scrutinising the characteristics of our own conversations and asking whether our practice fits our public oratory.

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