Record: 1

Title: Educational research in crisis: Performance indicators and the decline in excellence.

Authors: Elliott, John

Source: British Educational Research Journal. Mar1990, Vol. 16 Issue 1, p3. 17p.

Document Type: Article

Subject Terms: *EDUCATION research

Geographic Terms: GREAT Britain

NAICS/Industry Codes: 923110 Administration of Education Programs
611699 All Other Miscellaneous Schools and Instruction
611710 Educational Support Services

Abstract: Focuses on the educational research crisis affecting institutions in Great Britain. Impact of government-inspired managerialism in higher education on the growth and development of Centers of Excellence in educational research; Call for BERA, as a professional organization of educational researchers to develop a set of political strategies as a response to the crisis.

Full Text Word Count: 8176

ISSN: 0141-1926

DOI: 10.1080/0141192900160101

Accession Number: 9706273237

Database: Academic Search Complete

Educational Research in Crisis: performance

What Crisis?

Having starved the British higher education system of resources, the present government is forcing it to accept a model of resource management which is endangering what 1 shall call conversational research communities. In my view, such communities, and not individuals working in isolation from them, are the repositories of excellence in research. Their excellence consists in the qualities they foster in their members, such as intellectual creativity, the courage to say new and interesting things to audiences who want the familiar certainties confirmed, a tolerance of intellectual deviance and methodological pluralism.

British higher education institutions have, in the past, spawned conversational research communities in the field of educational studies. It would be imprudent of me to risk causing offence by attempting to list them. In trying to illustrate the notion of a conversational educational research community, and the kinds of methodological principles of educational inquiry which underpin it, I shall draw on my own professional experience of the community I have belonged to for most of my research career. I shall then explore the ways in which the rising tide of government inspired managerialism in higher education threatens to undermine, contrary to its espoused intention, the growth and development of Centres of Excellence in

educational research. I will conclude by challenging BERA, as a professional organisation of educational researchers, to develop a set of political strategies as a response to the crisis.

Excellence and the Conversational Research Community

The Centre for Applied Research in Education (CARE) was established at the University of East Anglia under the leadership of the late Lawrence Stenhouse in 1970. I began my career as an educational researcher there from 1970 to 1976 and returned in 1984. At the time of its birth it was surrounded by controversy. A great deal of it focused on the view of educational research shared by its staff. This view might be crudely summarised as follows:

--the overriding purpose of educational research is to bring about worthwhile educational change;

--research is only educational when it is directed towards realising educational values in practice. It cannot be dissociated from conceptions of worthwhile educational practices;

--teachers and students have an important and significant role as participants in the educational research process;

--since attempts to realise educational values in practice shape up differently in particular situations, educational research is grounded-in the qualitative study of cases;

--since educational values are infinitely contestable, educational researchers should adopt a reflexive attitude towards their biases by entertaining alternative views of the situation.

These fundamental principles have over the years received different interpretations and emphases from individual researchers and projects working in the Centre. Soine have aimed to develop research strategies which enhance the decision-making capacity of policy-makers to effect worthwhile change (e.g. democratic evaluation). Others have aimed more directly at enhancing the capacity of teachers to effect change at the grass roots of the educational system. The latter have tended to give teachers a more central role in the research enterprise, whereas the former, while involving them in a reflective process, gave the major responsibility for the gathering, processing and reporting of data to professional researchers.

Differences also emerged with respect to case study methods. Some researchers have emphasised the importance of generating detailed portrayals of change processes in particular contexts as a basis for informing judgement. Others have tended to assert the importance of explicit theoretical analysis in developing an understanding of cases.

Perhaps the most vulnerable principle within the history of research at CARE has been the importance of self-reflection with respect to the value biases of the educational researcher. In a context where the credibility of research amongst policy-makers and many teachers still rests on the persistent assumption that its outcomes ought to consist of value-free knowledge, there is an inevitable tendency for researchers to mask their value commitments. It is only the existence of a healthy internal critique which has corrected this tendency to reify educational research.

The differences of interpretation and emphasis I have briefly outlined as operating within a common framework of fundamental principles are a continuing source of internal critique within the research

community at CARE. Without this kind of conversation about the ways fundamental methodological principles are interpreted in research practices the CARE tradition would have degenerated into either a permissive eclecticism or an arid dogmatism with respect to research methods. Later, I will indicate how resource management constructs of research, and in particular the notion of performance indicators, makes it difficult to maintain these principles in practice.

Method and Mediocrity

One of the reasons I returned to CARE in 1984 was that I missed the kind of conversation to be had there. It is necessary for my continuing development as an educational researcher. One of the biggest conversation stoppers, and constraints on one's development as a researcher, is the presumption that there is a right method or set of techniques for doing educational research. It is a presumption which dominates the training of educational researchers in higher education institutions. Methodology courses and seminars tend to be concerned with the acquisition of a standard set of techniques for collecting and processing data. The presumption operates in the selection, supervision, and assessment of research students. It results in a situation where the development of educational researchers is viewed as an initial 'tooling-up' phase, after which they are deemed competent to undertake research. Such a view is a recipe for mediocrity. Excellence in educational research depends on the continuous participation of researchers in a reflective conversation about their practices against a background of fundamental research principles. Within such a conversation there is no closure or constraint on the methodological possibilities entertained.

Perhaps one of the greatest fallacies promoted in educational institutions today in the interests of efficient resource management is the idea that Skills can be specified as sets of standardised techniques, irrespective of the contexts in which they are exercised and the persons who display them. The specification of performance standards as a basis for course-planning and evaluation is enthusiastically promoted by the National Council for Vocational Qualifications. The NCVQ is already taking an interest in professional education and the prospect of research training being required to conform to its tenets is not entirely fanciful. Yet those who have achieved excellence in high skill enterprises tend to be opposed to the idea that becoming skillful is a matter of learning a correct way of doing things. Jack Nicklaus, perhaps the greater golfer of all time, significantly entitled his classic book Golf My Way (1974). He opens Chapter 1 with the following statement:

I am not a believer in 'methods'. I am a believer in fundamentals. Whatever any golfer does with a golf club should have only one purpose: to produce correct impact of club on ball. If he can achieve that consistently, the manner in which he does so does not really matter at all.

For Nicklaus, the fundamentals of golf are those basic characteristics manifested in the performance of all good play, "swinging with a smooth tempo", "aiming one's body in the intended direction of the ball". Fundamentals are the basic conditions necessary for achieving that successful relationship between player, club and ball which Nicklaus calls Impact. According to Nicklaus, there is no right method for establishing the basic conditions of impact. Excellence in golf does not imply commensurate methods.

My own means of achieving this goal [of impact] are, of course, distinctive. I have a very personal method of swinging the club... In all modesty ... I would not exchange my method of playing golf for any other golfer's, past or present, even if I could.

Given his apparent methodological relativism, why did Nicklaus bother to write a detailed account of his way of playing golf? Although he doesn't believe in a right method he acknowledges the extent to which the development of his own style has been influenced by golfers whose styles are very different to it. Indeed, his book is remarkable for the way it places his own methods in the context of alternative ways of playing golf. The whole work possesses the quality of involving the reader in a reflective conversation with other masters of the links he has enjoyed playing with and against. The following passage is merely one example:

I play every standard shot with the ball in the same position relative to my feet. That position is opposite my left heel. Although down through the years many good players have used one ball position for all basic shots ... others have preferred to move the ball about in relation to the feet, depending on either the club they were using or the type of shot they intended to play. Thus since both systems have worked, there can be no hard-and-fast rule on the matter for golfers in general. But, so far as my own game is concerned, I keep the ball's position fixed . . . But let me warn you once again against copying me too closely. Each golfer's ideal ball position, relative to his feet, depends on his individual swing style.

I only wish more books on educational research methods were written in the autobiographical, self-reflective, and conversational form adopted by Nicklaus in what emerged as a golfing classic. Helen Simons's book Getting To Know Schools In A Democracy (1987) is one notable exception. The relative absence of such books is perhaps an indicator of the dominance amongst educational researchers of the presumption that there is a right way of doing research, and of the poverty of our conversation about our research practices.

Conversation offers no promise of a final agreement over methods of discovering firm foundations for research practice. It is a meeting of idiosyncratic voices who take from it what they need to develop their own personal research styles. Conversational research communities are necessarily organised anarchies; an organisational concept which will be somewhat alien to the bureaucratic minds currently emerging as the managers of research in higher education. Areas of consensus emerge in conversational research communities, but provide only temporary resting places before they are disrupted or transcended by deviant voices. The ethos of such communities are characterised by tolerance for disagreement, deviance, and idiosyncracy.

Such tolerance should not be confused with an atmosphere of indifferent permissiveness in which few care about the issues at stake. As a virtue it is the negation of the conflict and confrontation which inevitably accompanies a dogmatic research ethos grounded in the presumption of a right method. Much of the controversy which has surrounded the research in CARE over the years can be explained by the prevalence of this presumption amongst not only educational researchers, but also sponsoring agencies in local and central government. It is not easy to sustain a conversational research community in dogmatic institutional and political climates. The tendency to internalise the dogmatic presumption of a correct method when under attack from without is strong. The alternative methods one is perceived to represent are reified and dogmatically defended. The internal conversation is diminished as a consequence. If educational research communities like CARE are to survive, strategies need to be discovered for extending the conversation about educational research practices into the institutional, social and political environments in which they operate.

In what follows I hope to indicate something of the mutually reinforcing relationship between marketing

constructs of resource management so favoured by the present government, and the kind of methodological dogmatism I have argued to be inconsistent with the flourishing of conversational research communities. It is worth pointing out at this point that this kind of dogmatism is not only being reinforced within higher education institutions by their management strategies. It is also being reinforced in the forms of control and censorship increasingly being exerted over the conduct and reporting of educational research by government sponsoring agencies. Since BERA as an organisation has already developed an initiative on this issue--we debated it at last year's conference, and published proposals for a Code of Practice in Research intelligence (see Elliott, 1989a)--I am not going to dwell on it in this address. I simply want to highlight yet another political constraint on the development of excellence in educational research.

How Performance Indicators Foster Mediocrity and Stifle Excellence

There is currently a great deal of discussion about the idea of differential research funding based on Universities Funding Council (UFC) designated Centres of Excellence in universities. Considerable criticism has been expressed about the kinds of performance indicators employed for rating university departments, such as the number of papers published in refereed journals, or the amount of external funding attracted from recognised bodies like the research councils. Performance indicators are creatures of the bureaucratic mind. They enable evaluations to be conducted in the office on the basis of paper returns and indicate very little about the research ethos in academic institutions. It is my contention that excellence in educational research is the manifest outcome of what I have called a conversational community. The UFC rating exercise is unlikely to differentiate such communities as Centres of Excellence on the basis of bureauctratically expedient performance indicators. Indeed, it is likely to have damaging side-effects on the capacity of universities to spawn and proliferate such communities in the future. The source of these damaging side-effects lies in the way the marketing metaphor shapes the criteria employed in selecting individuals for academic positions. The view that academics largely exist to supply a product called research is, according to Mary Midgley (1989), now widely held outside the profession. It is certainly a feature of the Thatcherite restructuring of higher education in the late 80s, and it forms the ideological basis of the damaging notion of performance indicators. One reason why this notion is damaging is because the market metaphor which underpins it results in a selection and promotion process which focuses, in Midgley's words, "on the sheer number and technicality of learned books and papers" individuals have published "regardless of their teaching and pastoral work among students, of the quality of their original ideas, and of the need there is, with any difficult problem, to think long and carefully before ever starting to write".

As the editor of an educational studies journal I have witnessed a considerable increase in the number of papers submitted for publication. It has not made the search for high quality material easier. The pressure on academics to publish, to increase either their promotion prospects or the UFC's rating of their department does little to enhance the quality of educational research in our universities. I can only agree with Midgley's general conclusion that: "this bizarre flood of paper can surely serve only to discredit further the whole enterprise of learning", and more specifically, I would add, of learning about education through research.

The Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals' (CVCP) consultative paper (July 1989) on research performance indicators does, indeed, display an awareness that assessments "based solely on publication counts may ... give a misleading impression". Note the term 'solely'. The CVCP accept quantity of output as

one of the important performance measures, and display no awareness of its potentially damaging side-effects. The Committee is of the opinion that quality can be safeguarded if the 'surrogate' measure of citation frequency is used to supplement sheer productivity. Although it admits that, "the most creative or far-reaching papers are not necessarily the ones that are cited most frequently", and expresses other obvious reservations about quantifying quality, the committee nevertheless endorses numerical citation analysis. I suppose it could attempt to justify its position as an exercise in damage limitation. In my opinion, the effect of assessments of research quality based on citation frequency are just as damaging as a procedure which exclusively stresses volume of output.

Citation analysis will not only marginalise highly original research which is far ahead of its time--certainly further ahead than the "3 years after publication" assessment point recommended by the CVCP Committee--but it will reinforce cautious and conservative thinking amongst researchers. The pressure will be on to have one's work cited by the major representatives of established ways of thinking about problems. Low-risk research will be reproduced on a massive scale, and the challenge of new ideas to the existing 'research establishment' will be minimised to a level which perpetuates its conservative influence.

Another damaging side-effect of the employment of performance indicators is that they tend to encourage a separation between research and teaching. Midgley again is surely right when she argues that:

. . . teaching has a vital part to play in the development of new ideas themselves. The more original those ideas are, the more essential it usually is that their inventor should have to try to express them clearly, and taking note of various responses. New ideas, indeed, are mostly developed communally by co-operative groups, among whom pupils--including obstructive pupils--are an invaluable element.

She asserts a strong connection between intellectual creativity and what I have called conversational research communities, and argues that teaching is one of the conversational modes which are necessarily an integral part of research in such communities. It is not an additional extra. Teaching within conversational communities is a necessary part of the research process. And in this context, Midgley points out what we already know from common-sense experience; namely, that the quality of teaching, and other activities--like writing--which professional academics engage in as a legitimate part of the research process, is heavily dependent upon the personalities of the individuals involved. So we have a state of affairs in which research excellence is heavily dependent upon the personal elements individual academics bring to conversational activities like teaching and writing within their research communities.

The reason why the notion of performance indicators will tend to split research from teaching is that it cannot accommodate the personal and idiosyncratic aspects of human performance. Its guiding marketing metaphor ensures that research outcomes are abstracted from research processes, and thereby prevents them from being viewed in relation to the quality of such processes. The quality of any professional enterprise, as occupational research is increasingly demonstrating (see Klemp 1977; Spencer 1979) cannot be entirely explained in terms of impersonal knowledge, attitudes and skills. These may be necessary, but they are not sufficient as a basis for excellence. What makes the difference between excellence and mere technical competence are highly personal and idiosyncratic elements which individuals bring into the way they perform their professional roles. The notion of performance indicators cannot accommodate this fact. They condemn academics to, in Midgely's words, "a Jekyll-and-Hyde existence, dividing their inner life between a specialist who is a standard robot and a private person who is an idiot".

The latest UFC Circular Letter on Research Policy (Universities Funding Council, 1989) acknowledges, in passing, the importance of a research environment which is not unlike what I have called a conversational community, but it says nothing about the effects on such an environment of its proposals to exercise greater state control over the focus and organisation of research programmes.

The UFC circular also argues that its policies will safeguard the link between research and teaching. But it conceptualises this link in bureaucratically convenient categories. An effective distribution of research centres, it argues, will strengthen teaching in the universities. However, the assumption remains that they are separate activities. Research may have instrumental value for teaching. But they are not viewed as integrated activities. Nothing is said about teaching as a dimension of the research process and research as an integral part of high quality teaching.

Both the UFC and CVCP documents I have cited reveal similar qualities to most government circulars; namely, blandness, ritualistic genuflection to anticipated and received criticism, surface plausibility, dependence on bureaucratic structures of thought and a distancing from the intellectual enterprise. The socialisation of academics involved in contemporary state policy-making is indeed a rapid process which can be explained in terms of the way academic cultures have come to dissociate, in schizoid fashion, research from reflection about how to realise human values in action.

This brings me to a consideration of a further damaging side-effect of performance indicators. They reinforce a dissociation of research from the practical problems and dilemmas which confront people, including researchers, in everyday life. The underlying marketing metaphor suggests that research is a production process which, like other such processes, proceeds according to a set of standardised and impersonal operating procedures. It therefore places limits on one's conception of the primary aim of research, implying that it should consist of tangible outcomes that can be quantified, and are not flawed by subjective personal elements entering into the production process. In this context the primary aim of research gets conceived as the technical production of value-neutral facts which can be tangibly represented as propositional knowledge.

When the research enterprise is constructed in these terms it becomes dissociated from the complex problems of living. Academic discussion largely becomes a matter of criticising and defending research findings in terms of the correctness ('reliability' and 'validity') of the methods employed in the knowledge production process. This methodological squabbling is justified as a concern for intellectual rigour. Rigour, as Midgley argues, gets construed simply as "the careful practice of negative and defensive techniques".

This whole construction of the research enterprise, which rests on the presumption I talked about earlier--of a 'right' method--was endemic in academia long before marketing metaphors began to dominate public discourse in the field of education, and policy-makers and managers started their search for performance indicators. It is grounded in the empiricism of Locke, Hume and Russell which has shaped the British and American traditions of academic inquiry.

All I am asserting is that the marketing metaphor and talk of performance indicators reinforces this empiricist construction of research and imposes constraints on the growth of those alternative constructions which have emerged.

Richard Rorty (1980) has argued that at the heart of empiricist theories of knowledge there lie two historically persistent ideas. The first is that human beings have an essential self whose essence lies in the accurate mirroring of the surrounding universe. This contemplative view of human nature is complemented by a second idea; namely, that the universe is made up of "very simple, clear, and distinctly knowable things". Put these two ideas together and you emerge with the view that knowledge is the realisation of our essential selves by accurately mirroring sets of simple, clear and distinct facts about the world we live in. It is not difficult to see how this view is being shored up in our new National Curriculum.

Let us focus on the relationship between this theory of knowledge and the research enterprise. An academic culture which persists in understanding the aim of inquiry as the accurate mirroring of atomistic facts about a world which exists independently of the inquirer, allows the market metaphor and its attendant constructs to penetrate deep, and provides no basis on which to mount any form of creative resistance.

This understanding of the aims of Inquiry has underpinned the development of an educational research tradition in the UK and USA. The need for academic credibility in a practical field, which was not acknowledged in many universities as constituting an appropriate focus for a rigorous science, inevitably resulted in researchers modelling their inquiries on the human discipline which appeared to have established its credientials as a rigorous enterprise, namely, empiricist psychology. Researchers seeking academic legitimation tended not to question the appropriateness of the model within the field of education. When BERA was established in the early 70s, its membership largely consisted of empiricist psychologists. There were a few, like myself, who embraced an emerging qualitative paradigm in the sociology of education and curriculum studies.

During the 1975 annual BERA conference at Stirling there was, in my view, a decisive confrontation between the empiricists and the representatives of the 'new paradigm', after which subsequent conferences were characterised by a more tolerant form of discourse and greater participation from 'qualitative researchers'.

However, specialist historians, philosophers and radical sociologists, working within the field of educational studies, have remained somewhat thin on the ground with respect to participation in the activities of BERA. Is it because the organisation is still perceived to support a largely empiricist view of educational research? Cannot historical studies, neo-marxist theorising or philosophy count as forms of educational research? If one restricts the use of the term 'research' exclusively to inquiry based on empiricist methods then they are excluded.

This kind of methodological dogmatism no longer dominates BERA conferences, or even its journal. Indeed, what dominates today is the view that educational research must primarily focus on the complex practical problems which face policy-makers and teachers in the system, rather than on problems defined solely in the terms of a narrow academic specialism. In this context, the researcher must choose the methods to fit the problem, rather than vice versa. If the specialisms I have referred to are not viewed as forms of educational research, it is because their concerns are felt to be too dissociated from the practical problems of education. This may, in fact, be the case, but I do not believe it is necessarily so. Let me now explore this more holistic and practically focused conception of educational research more fully and the place of more specialised forms of inquiry within it. In doing so, I shall return to the methodological principles I cited as underpinning our work at CARE.

These principles signify a radically different conception of the primary aim of educational research; namely, to promote worthwhile change byinfluencing the practical judgements of teachers and policy-makers. On this view what makes research educational is the positive vision of education which conditions the inquiry. The research process is not dissociated from a concern to change things for the better. The primary outcome of educational research is not propositional knowledge but practical wisdom: a capacity to judge or discern what can be changed in a particular set of circumstances to effect an improvement, and what cannot be. I am reminded of the prayer of St Francis, which goes, if my memory serves me correctly, something like this:

O Lord, give me the patience to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to tell the difference.

Wisdom might be defined as the discernment of what can be changed in a situation to improve it. Such discernment is grounded in a very holistic understanding which synthesises a great deal of complex information into a total picture of the situation. In my view, the primary aim of educational research can be couched in terms of fostering 'practical wisdom', 'discernment', and 'holistic awareness'. In the educational field, this kind of research has been categorised under the label of action research, and tolerated as simply one sort of educational research amongst others. I have always asserted that educational research is action research. The rest is what I have called research-on-education, since its primary aim is the generation of knowledge about education.

There has been a tendency for self-styled action researchers, like myself, to interpret the practical aim of educational inquiry over dogmatically: the consequence of an anxiety to demarcate clear boundaries which differentiated action research from research which emphasised knowledge generation. We have tended to assume that highly specialised forms of inquiry in a particular academic discipline cannot constitute intrinsic elements within the action research process. I now believe, after having read Maxwell's From Knowledge to Wisdom: a revolution in the aims and methods of science, that this assumption is wrong. Whether specialised forms of inquiry in education count as types of educational research or as types of research on education will depend on their overriding purpose and the extent to which the search for knowledge is dissociated from the pursuit of wisdom.

In his book, Maxwell contrasts two different views of the aims of intellectual inquiry; namely, the 'Philosophy of Knowledge' and the 'Philosophy of Wisdom'. The former posits knowledge production as the primary aim, whereas the latter sees the "central and basic intellectual task of rational inquiry" as helping us to "imbue our personal and social lives with vividly imagined and criticised possible actions so that we may discover, and perform, where possible, those actions which enable us to realize what is of value in life". His book constitutes a detailed argument for reconstituting all forms of intellectual inquiry on the basis of a Philosophy of Wisdom. In a recent paper I have already explored, in some detail, the relationship between Maxwell's view of inquiry in general and the development of a theory of educational action research (see Elliott, 1989b). For the purposes of my present argument, I briefly want to describe the role Maxwell ascribes within a Philosophy of Wisdom perspective to the generation of knowledge through highly specialised forms of inquiry.

Maxwell argues that, from the standpoint of the Philosophy of Wisdom, the search for knowledge is rationally subordinate to the discovery of values and the discernment of how they are to be realised in the

circumstances of everyday living. But this is not to ignore the important role specialised knowledge can play in supporting the fundamental process of practical inquiry. Maxwell cites two principles governing the utilisation of specialised knowledge within this overall process. "In tackling a complex problem", he argues, "it is often helpful to break the given problem up into a number of subordinate, specialised problems". This analytic phase generates knowledge which can then be "put together to solve our original overall problem". The second principle suggests that "in order to develop good ideas for a solution to our given problem it is often helpful to look at solutions to analogous, already solved problems", which may refer to either an overall practical problem or to a subordinate problem of knowledge. These two principles help us to grasp the relationship between social practitioners engaged in practical inquiry or action research and academics engaged in more specialised disciplines. The former search for knowledge in order to 'fill in the picture' of the circumstances which need to be changed if their values are to be actualised in practice. In doing so they analyse a complex practical problem into a number of subordinate problems of knowledge. It is during this analytic phase of practical inquiry that the knowledge generated within more specialised disciplines can be utilised. But this is only possible if the problem structures within the disciplines are analogous to problems of knowledge which emerge from the analysis of complex problems of living. Knowledge generated within the specialised disciplines must not become dissociated from people's attempts to resolve the complex problems which emerge in the circumstances of their lives. And this implies that academic specialists should not attempt to dissociate their inquiries from their value commitments in everyday life. Value bias is a necessary condition of useful knowledge.

The validity of knowledge claims within the Philosophy of Wisdom perspective rests not on the extent to which they mirror a set of neutral facts but on the pragmatic test of whether they enable us to realise our values better. The fundamental context for validating specialised knowledge is not the efficient, smoothly operating, 'right' method for mirroring neutral facts, but the hermeneutic standpoint of a continuing and unconstrained conversation between the specialist and the user about how to realise values in the circumstances they confront. Since the specialist is also a user, this conversation must incorporate and reflect an interior dialogue. The specialist operating in this context has let go of any aspiration for his or her discipline to serve as a mirror for reality. S(he) is engaged in a process where self realisation has become the major goal of thinking. With respect to the discipline of philosophy, Rorty calls such thinkers edifying philosphers and contrasts them with those who see themselves as primarily engaged in the quest for truth. The former engage in philosophy without mirrors. To generalise this notion I would suggest that edifying thinkers can emerge in any specialised field of inquiry. What characterises them is shared with Rorty's edifying philosophers; namely, the attempt to say something interesting and new, rather than irrefutably true, about some aspect of human experience.

Let me now attempt to briefly summarise the implications of the Philosophy of Wisdom perspective for the relationship between educational research and the specialist disciplines. If the specialists ground their inquiries in a continuing conversation with themselves, and others--e.g. teachers, parents and policy-makers --about how educational values are to be realised in practice, then they can be regarded as engaged in educational research, which can be held to cover both the overall action research enterprise and the investigation of subordinate problems of knowledge.

It should now be clear why the use of performance indicators will-reinforce the dissociation of academic research in the field of education from the complex problems of realising educational values in practice. In

encouraging the separation of researchers from the teachers of teachers it imposes constraints on the development of the fundamental context for specialised forms of educational research; namely, the mutually edifying conversation between practitioners and academic researchers. The imposition of performance indicators will generally encourage a retreat into an intellectually moribund mode of inquiry in education based on a discredited Philosophy of Knowledge.

Researchers who dissociate their inquiries from questions of value do not generate neutral facts as they may claim. They simply deceive themselves into believing that their findings are grounded in the 'brute facts'. As Midgely argues, facts do not entirely consist of 'raw data'. The concepts we employ to grasp facts with are conditioned by an evaluative attitude towards the natural and social environment, whether we are aware of it or not. Midgely points out that:

. . . as European thought came to accept that slavery. was wrong, its bad consequences-came to be accepted as facts. But those who opposed this process took themselves to be equally factual.

Presumably the latter were unaware that what they accepted and rejected as 'the facts' depended on the value biases they brought to the situation.

Researchers who dissociate their findings from their value biases do not, as a consequence, generate neutral knowledge. They simply place themselves in an unreflective state, and thereby escape from their moral responsibilities. This is what makes their findings useless. Their refusal to reflectively locate their findings in a context of values renders them incapable of engaging others in the kind of conversational discourse about the facts which clarify and illuminate their evaluative significance and render them useful. According to Midgely, "We do not find it easy to see facts in a way which fails to fit our values". Certainly, as educational researchers, our findings will only speak to others if we engage them in a conversation about their evaluative significance.

Such a conversation offers no guarantee, in a pluralistic society, that others will be convinced about the significance of the facts. It may, indeed, modify the researcher's own judgements of significance. Nevertheless, the conversation is necessary if research findings are to be rendered publicly useful. This is what makes .the current tendency for government sponsoring agencies to control, censor and delay the release of research findings so depressing. It fosters unreflective and morally irresponsible research by denying researchers opportunities to validate the practical significance of their findings through public conversation. Of course, it is just such a conversation that the sponsoring agency may wish to avoid, if the findings do not fit its own value biases. In which case censorship and control of research become devices for pre-empting any public challenge to the prevailing ideology of government, while often being rationalised as an attempt to ensure that the public are not misled by biased and unscholarly research.

In spite of this debilitating situation, some educational researchers appear happy to take the money and sign contracts giving the Secretary of State ownership over their findings. They then lie down like "lambs to the slaughter" when their reports are censored and the release of them delayed. This may do little harm to their departments' research rating, indeed I suggested earlier that it reinforced emerging constructs of resource management, but it does a great deal. of harm to the professional integrity of educational research.

The Political Challenge for BERA

Many a new and interesting idea has come to fruition in rural Norfolk. Recently, the Chief Constable of the West Midlands Police, Geoffrey Dear, is reported to have sat above the cliffs for a week in Cromer while deliberating about evidence of corruption in his serious crimes squad. By the time he left, he had decided to radically dismantle its command structure. The decision, he said, was accompanied by the conviction that Police Forces have had a lot of management but very little leadership. It is a distinction which Professors of Education, and other senior educational academics, might well take to heart at the present time. So many o us appear to be immersed in the activities of resource management within our institutions. Although we may rationalise this in terms of protecting our departments from the worst ravages of resource starvation, we will nevertheless come to accept in practice many of the constructs and basic assumptions which define the role. We will, for example, 'distance' ourselves from the primary activities of research and teaching and from responsbility for their quality. We do, of course, increasingly manage a quality control system, but it will typically distribute responsibility and blame away from the manager. It negates the whole idea of leadership.

I understand the idea of leadership to embody two major characteristics. The first is the retention of a reasonable level of involvement in the primary activities. How often do we hear Professors complain that they no longer have time to undertake research at first hand (although their names may appear at the top of publications), or even teach to any significant extent.

The second, not unrelated, element in leadership is the ability to articulate an ethic, a set of fundamental principles, to guide primary practices within the institution, and to accept responsibility for their realisation. It is the acceptance of this kind of moral responsibility which was clearly manifested in the leadership of the West Midlands Chief Constable. I do not know the extent to which Professors of Education take responsibility for the development of a professional research ethic within their institutions, but I receive little evidence of their widespread involvement in articulating such an ethic in the wider public and political arena, or in helping their research staff to realise its principles in their field work.

My views are rather coloured by the lack of response, on the part of senior academics in education, to BERA's draft code of practice for educational research. The only response we received was from Canada. I am possibly being unfair to colleagues who, having reluctantly got sucked into resource management, may well admit that 'time' for exercising research leadership is a restricted commodity.

Professional research leadership, and professionalism in research generally, has a political dimension. We can no longer pretend that the quality of educational research is independent of the political forces which shape our working conditions. It is an important part of our academic role to participate in political activities, aimed at protecting and developing the conditions under which the fundamental aims and principles of intellectual inquiry can be realised. This is all part of what taking responsibility for the quality of the research enterprise means. Professional leadership especially cannot simply be restricted to the internal aspects of research work. However, it is involvement in the internal aspects which imbues the external aspects of the leadership role with a coherent vision.

What might BERA do to foster and protect professionalism, leadership and a concern for excellence in educational research, at a time when these qualities are being eroded by the growth of managerialism in higher education? The basis of any strategy must consist in the potential of BERA to develop as a conversational research community at a national level, since only this kind of community can exemplify the

qualities just cited.

During the last few years, BERA's Council has attempted to strengthen its political role in voicing the concerns of the educational research community through the media. The Council has established links with the Association of Learned Societies, which enables scholars from a variety of fields to publicly express their shared concerns. BERA increasingly incorporates 'political' issues into the proceedings of seminars and its annual conference. BERA Council has also recently taken steps to appoint an officer who can devote time to developing a wider political role. But the role is relatively weak in relation to the dimensions of the crisis. In the light of this address I would like to see the membership endorsing the following priorities and participating in suggestions about how they are to be effectively addressed:

(1) Membership should be made more attractive to a greater range of specialists in the field of educational studies, e.g. to historians, philosophers and sociologists. This should involve providing such specialists with opportunities to contribute to interdisciplinary inquiries in major areas of practical concern to teachers, school governors, parents, etc., e.g. national assessment, the implementation of the National Curriculum and local management of schools. However, part of the attraction would surely lie in a perception of BERA as an effective political organisation capable of representing the practical significance of their specialism in the public arena.

The specialist disciplines in education are particularly vulnerable at present to philistine national policies which regard them as largely irrelevant to the professional preparation and development of teachers. The educational disciplines have their own professional associations, but operating in isolation they are unlikely to develop an effective political role. Establishing formal liaison procedures with an over-arching research organisation like BERA could be of mutual benefit. It would strengthen the claim of BERA to represent the whole of the educational research community in Britain. And it would provide the specialist associations with a more effective device for publicly representing the professional concerns of their members.

(2) A renewed effort should be made to broaden membership and involvement from practicing teachers, and in establishing a dialogue with their professional associations.

I have argued that educational research is a form of practical inquiry which fuses inquiry with practice. There can be no educational research if teachers play no important role in the process of articulating, analysing and hypothesising solutions to complex educational problems. The specialist inquiries of professional researchers should be viewed as subordinate to this fundamental process.

BERA needs to involve practitioners in generating a structure of contemporary educational themes which could provide a focus for collaborative inquiry with professional researchers. If BERA is to grow as a conversational research community in education, it needs to sustain the collaboration with teachers on a continuous basis, and not rest content with merely involving them in the proceedings of its annual conference.

During the last 13 years the Classroom Action Research Network (CARN) has supported collaboration and dialogue between teacher-researchers and academic educationalists. A strengthening of formal links with CARN could enhance BERA as a conversational research community and enable the views of teacher-researchers to be more effectively presented in the public and political domain.

In supporting teachers' based research in schools, BERA should seek the cooperation of their professional associations. We need to find ways of involving the unions in a conversation about the aims and principles of educational research, and its contribution to teachers' professional development. If involvement in educational research is an integral part of teachers' professionalism, then we need their associations to sympathetically represent the process in the public and political domain. For example, there is a lot of discussion about establishing a National Teachers' Council. In my view, educational research along the lines I have described, and its promotion as the basis of teacher professionalism, should be a central component in the work of such a council. BERA should support its establishment, and play an active role in attempting to shape its concept of professionalism. I doubt if this role would be possible without the support of existing teachers' organisations.

(3) A dialogue about the role of educational research should be established, with national organisations representing parents, schools governors and employers.

Each group has a growing influence on educational practice in schools. They can each make an important contribution to the development of a coherent agenda for educational research in the 90s. And if educational research is to make a significant contribution to the improvement of schooling during the next decade, these groups need to be involved in the conversation about its aims, principles and practice.

(4) Promoting educational research beyond the boundaries of formal schooling into a variety of institutions and agencies which have an educational function, e.g. various forms of professional and occupational education, museum education, community health education, environmental education, etc.

Educational research must keep abreast of the growth and spread of learning systems in society and not be confined to the study of formal schooling. This is not only important for improving the quality of learning generally in society; it confronts professional educational researchers with contexts, other than schooling, in which educational values have to be realised, and thereby stimulates them to think about these values in new and interesting ways. This broader conception of educational research will also challenge us methodologically, and would help us to resist lapsing into a stale dogmatism by stimulating reflective conversation amongst us about our research practices. It would also help to free educational researchers from being largely dependent for their careers on the fate our government may have in store for teacher training in higher education. This freedom would be even greater if faculties of education generally broadened their base to cover the education of educators operating outside mainstream schooling.

(5) Strategies need to be discovered for involving senior educational academics in a continuing conversation about the aims and principles of educational research, the institutional conditions which support and impede their realisation and their own leadership role; both internally within higher education institutions and externally in the wider political and public arena.

Not only do we need to find ways of involving our senior academics more in the activities of BERA, we also need to carry the conversation on a formal level to the organisations which represent their concerns at the policy level; namely, the Universities Council For The Education of Teachers (UCET) and the CNAA. BERA must ensure that the dimensions of the crisis which confronts educational research today are fully considered in UCET as an integral part of its legitimate concern for the future of Teacher Education in Universities, and by CNAA's Research Committee.

The general view underpinning these proposals is that BERA can only develop an effective political dimension to its activities if it can discover common ground between its concerns and those of other groups, and the organisations which represent them. BERA needs their active support if it is to exercise much leverage in the present crisis. It can only secure this support by involving the groups and organisations I have cited in a continuing conversation about the aims and principles of educational research, and the problems of realising them in the suboptimal conditions which currently prevail in higher education.

Working on these suggested priorities will require a great deal of effort from more than a few. I am not too optimistic about the outcome, but the proposals sketch out possibilities which may enable me to operate as your president this year in at least a hopeful spirt.

* This article is the text of the Presidential Address to the British Educational Research Association given at the University of Newcastle-upon-Tyne, 1989.

REFERENCES

COMMITTEE OF VICE-CHANCELLORS AND PRINCIPALS (1989) Issues in Quantitative Assessment of Departmental Research (CVCP/UFC Performance Indicators Steering Committee).

ELLIOTT, J. (1989a) Towards a professional code of research practice, Research Intelligence, February.

ELLIOTT, J. (1989b) Educational theory and the professional learning of teachers: an overview, Cambridge Journal of Education, 19, pp. 81-101 (Special Issue on New Directions in Educational Theory, Pt 1).

KLEMP, G. O. (1977) Three Factors of Success in the World of Work: implications for curriculum in higher education (Boston, McBer & Co).

MAXWELL, N. (1984) From Knowledge to Wisdom: a revolution in the aims and methods of science (Oxford, Basil Blackwell).

MIDGLEY, M. (1989) Wisdom, Information, and Wonder: what is knowledge for?, especially Chs 2, 7, 15 (London, Routledge).

NICKLAUS, J. (1974) Golf My Way (London, Pan in association with William Heinemann).

RORTY, R. (1980) Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature, Chs 7, 8 (Oxford, Basil Blackwell).

SIMONS, H. (1987) Getting to Know Schools in a Democracy: the politics and process of evaluation (Lewes, Falmer Press).

SPENCER, L. M. (1979) Soft Skill Competences (Oxford, Oxford University Press).

UNIVERSITIES FUNDING COUNCIL (1989) 'Research Policy', Circular Letter 22/89, 1 August.

~~~~~~~~

By JOHN ELLIOTT, Centre for Applied Research in Education, University of East Anglia

Correspondence: Professor John Elliott, Centre for Applied Research in Education, University of East
~~~~~~~~

Anglia, Norwich NR4 7T J, United Kingdom.
