Chapter 2 – Contexts: Why am I concerned?

Before dealing with the contexts of the research in detail I draw your attention to two pieces of video on the web site. The first of these, taken from a national television news broadcast, shows a number of students engaging with Prime Minister Tony Blair and Taoiseach Bertie Ahern within the context of a video conference (http://www.ictaspoliticalaction.com /pages/northsouth.htm). The second piece of video shows one student asking Mr Blair about changes to the line up at Newcastle United football club and another student asking Mr Ahern how Ulster unionists can trust him when he makes a statement calling for a united Ireland in his lifetime (http://www.ictaspoliticalaction.com/pages/northsouth /blairahern.html).

The video exemplifies ICT as political action, not because of the two politicians involved but because it shows young people engaging with each other and with leaders in their community and pursuing ideas that matter to them. In my view, the young people are taking their place in a civic public sphere where their views and ideas matter.

Within the video the young people's confidence in themselves and in their engagement is obvious. They show that they are able to take their place in the public sphere and understand the importance of what they are doing.

Introduction

This chapter outlines the contexts of my research, and offers my reasons and purposes for undertaking it. I explain that my contexts often hold the reasons for my research in terms of concerns around the realisation (or not) of my values in practice.

In the previous chapter I indicated that my work is underpinned by my ontological values of creativity, justice, freedom and transformational forms. I have related my ontological values to a range of conceptual frameworks (Arendt 1958; Berlin 1998; 2003; 2006; Bohm 1992; 1995; 1996; Capra 1983; 1992; Habermas 1973; 1975; 1979; 1980; 1984; 1985; 1987; McNiff and Whitehead 2005; 2006; Wheatley 1992). The frameworks centre on justice and freedom. But addressing matters of justice and freedom often necessitates considering issues of abuse of power and control which work against the exercise of justice and freedom. I have explained that in my working contexts I often experience myself as a living contradiction when my ontological values are denied in my practice (Whitehead

1989; 1993). This experience of myself as a living contradiction provides the impetus for me to undertake my research. In this chapter I will explicate the issues that underlie my experience of myself as a living contradiction. I will show these issues in relation to the two main contexts that I work within. These are the contexts of my practice as a teacher of ICT and as a consultant of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) with a national awarding body.

Let me give two brief examples of my experience that gives rise to my concerns. When I started teaching I focussed considerably on personal mastery of my subject area and my teaching practice. I used creative approaches to teaching science focussing on providing a stimulating class by using practical work and interspersing book-work with slideshows, film strips and field work. However, I also had a considerable focus on testing to see how we were doing. But after a time I began to feel uneasy while testing. Testing may have been highly motivational for some students it was humiliating for others.

My analysis of this situation is that I was running a traditional authoritarian class. I was using a 'didactic model' (Dewey 1997) or 'banking model' (Freire 1972: 45-50). I was functioning as the gatekeeper transferring discrete packages of knowledge to the student (Kleinsasser *et al*. 1994). While this model worked well for some students it served others poorly. In fortnightly tests some students failed every time. My observation was that students who failed early in the year rarely improved. It seemed to me that the process of testing was a model for my approach to teaching; the failure in testing was symbolic of the failure of the model. As a consequence I had concerns about what I was doing to some students.

But in some respects testing was an aspect of a wider failure. I will deal with my dissatisfaction in relation to my class work in more detail in the next chapter. But in brief, it seems to me that the impact of testing was not confined to the students involved or to my class, but on a wider level it had systematic implications, because results of testing were an important part of the school culture. While the results of the tests reflected on the students in the classroom they reflected also on the teacher outside of the classroom. Each year when major state examinations results were released to the school both teachers and management studied them carefully. This put me under greater pressure to push my students to do well. My more recent insights into power and control within schools enable me to analyse this in terms of Foucault's model of institutions as the panopticon (Foucault

1977). At this point I will just say that I can now see myself internalising control within this situation.

Within the context of the NCVA, administrators were attempting to work with a massive expansion of the further education sector without the additional resources required. Administration staff indicated that it was impossible to continue with the level of expansion without resources or without new ways of working. But approaches to work were not determined by the staff involved; they were determined externally. Trying to cope with the expansion in demand with no way of dealing with the increased workload, and being denied the opportunity to devise new ways of working made this difficult for the administration workers.

These are two examples of everyday concerns in relation to my practice. I will give more detailed accounts of some interventions in my technology class which illustrate my concerns later. I will do the same in relation to NCVA. Concerns like these are important in the thesis because they provide the basis for me to undertake a self-study of my practice in order to improve that practice and to attempt to bring my practice into line with my values.

The two situations outlined above may appear like two relatively simple problems that should be easily solved. However, as I worked to solve these problems I discovered that in each case they had underlying reasons and influences that went far beyond my direct work. For example, I could have just stopped testing my students but that would have resulted in difficulties with the authorities in the school and with parents. In NCVA we could have worked harder to handle the larger volumes of work but this is a limited response. As I studied my activities in school and in NCVA I began to understand that curriculum, pedagogy and administration are all influenced by the dominant logics within organisations. The difficulties that affected me in school and NCVA were part of a larger web of influence. As I examined this web the range of my concerns widened. In this section therefore I will indicate what the areas of concern were and indicate why they concerned me.

The nature of and reasons for my concerns

My concerns arise in various areas of my work in relation to a range of different matters. I have concerns in relation to my practice as a teacher and consultant; to the practice of

authority within the institutions that I work; and to my learning and how it influences my practice. I have concerns in relation to educational research and educational theory and how they affect practice within education. While examining my practice I have become concerned about the way ICT can be used in education with an emphasis on efficiency and potential for productivity rather than its life-affirming qualities.

By setting out my concerns I am showing the reasons for undertaking my research. Traditional research frequently sets out simply to describe and explain issues. Indeed it has been argued that 'the philosophers have only interpreted the world, the point is to change it' (Marx and Engels 1978: 145). Because of my values around creativity and generative transformational forms I have a desire to take action to address my concerns and bring my practice into line with my values (McNiff 2000; 2002 *inter alios*). Experiencing myself as a living contradiction provides the reasons for my research, but the research is not an end in itself (Whitehead 1989). The research has purposes. In addition to setting out the reasons for my research I also set out purposes. While I have multiple concerns I also have multiple purposes. My primary purpose is to remove the dissonance between my values and my practice by improving the justice of my practice (Festinger 1957). This overall purpose is expressed in a variety of ways. They range from my personal purposes to improve my learning and support my students and colleagues in improving their learning, for the purpose of making a contribution to theory, and contributing to the knowledge base of educational research (Hiebert *et al.* 2002; McNiff 2002b; 2003; Snow 2001).

To assist you in following my thinking I have separated my reasons and purposes. In this chapter I will detail the reasons for the research and in the next chapter, the purposes which were most important in carrying out the research will be addressed. Because my research is focussed toward developing a personal living theory of practice it is important to see that the purposes for my research are closely aligned to the purposes of my practice. The focus of my practice is to move away from a traditional didactic and authoritarian approach to teaching and develop emancipatory pedagogies that may enable young people to think for themselves and make their contributions to life. Within NCVA the focus of my practice was to move away from traditional approaches to administration which usually focus on efficiency (Callahan 1962) and move towards a model offering the possibility of questioning the basis of the work we were doing by examining our underlying individual and organisational values and assumptions (Argyris 1982: 160). This would open the

possibility of using a model that was educational for those involved and enabled administrators to think for themselves and make their own contributions.

I see my work in the two organisations as closely related, as being of significance for each other and influencing each other. I started in my teaching career as a teacher of Junior Science, Biology and Physics in a large secondary school. As new technologies have come to be seen as important in education my focus has moved toward new technologies. These have included Junior Technology, sometimes called Craft, Design, Technology in other contexts, and Information and Communications Technologies. Before starting my research I had been appointed information and communications technologies (ICT) coordinator for the school. While the thrust of my work as a teacher is to teach and support the development of ICT within the school, the government sponsored development plan 'Schools IT2000' has given this work a particular focus (Government of Ireland 1997).

My school context is a traditional one. The school is under the trusteeship of the Irish Christian Brothers and like many schools of its type has an authoritarian system. The school is considered by staff and parents to be an academic institution with a record of good discipline. In this context, 'academic' means a traditional school with traditional views of how students should be taught and how they should behave. The teaching staff is largely male although that has been changing rapidly in recent years. The student population is all boys.

My second work context is that of information and communication technologies consultant to the national certifying body, National Council for Vocational Awards (NCVA). NCVA was an Irish state agency set up in 1991 to develop and make awards in the area of further education and training. At its formation some 8,000 students were taking Post Leaving Certificate (PLC) courses (Department of Education 1995). These were post-compulsory education courses. Many of these courses prepared school-leavers for employment in specific vocational areas. In addition to the PLC sector, programmes offered second chance opportunities to young people who for one reason or another left compulsory education early. Many of the PLC and other programmes had no system of certification in Ireland and indeed many courses were certified from outside the country by bodies like City and Guilds of London, Royal Society of Arts and others. Under the terms of the Qualifications (Education and Training) Act 1999, NCVA was subsumed into the Further Education and Training Awards Council (FETAC) in 2001 (Government of Ireland 1999).

My work in NCVA involves my interaction with administrative staff in handling data, designing computer programmes to process data and designing forms and other documentation. As part of my practice I researched with development officers, teachers, school administrators and staff who process the data and I used feedback from all to modify the practice of the certification section (O'Neill 1997). My enquiries focused on understanding the nature of the programmes being certified, understanding the special administrative difficulties posed by these programmes and devising means of certifying the programmes speedily without compromising their integrity. Between 1994 and 1998, I spent considerable time devising computer programmes, designing forms, developing procedures, talking with teachers, centre co-ordinators, administration workers and development officers, all with the intention of devising means of administering the system of assessment in a way which would be educational for the students and the workers involved. A detailed account of this work has been given elsewhere (O'Neill 1997).

During 1997 I took a substantial step in my learning as I came to realise that the approach that I had been using has been described as 'single loop learning' (Argyris 1982: xii; 159). Single loop learning is essentially about refining existing policies and procedures and making them more efficient. This works well for routine programmed activities or emergency situations that require prompt unilateral action. The model in use is the one that Schein (1996) in his three cultures model calls 'The Engineering Culture'. People working in this culture show a preference for people-free solutions, have an absolutist view of reality and are safety oriented. It was becoming clear to me that an 'engineering approach' would not enable learners and administrators to achieve their potentials. Argyris offers a second model for learning which he calls 'double loop learning'. That is learning that involves 'non-routine, non-programmed, difficult issues that cannot be solved unless we examine our underlying individual and organisational values and assumptions' (Argyris 1982: 160). The 'double-loop learning' model offers the possibility of questioning the basis of the work we are doing rather than simply making our present activities more efficient. Schön has asserted that the way forward will not be achieved only by analytic techniques, 'but the active synthetic skill of designing a desirable future and inventing ways of bringing it about' (Schön 1991: 16). This gives rise to one of my key concerns:

I have concerns that the current approach to administering the process of certification is not educational for learners or administrators and requires a radical rethink of how we work.

Concerns about practice – whole class teaching

While teaching as a traditional teacher I meet many students who are happy with didactic approaches and others who are resistant to learning in this way. I am not sure why this is. Perhaps it is the constraining nature of the classroom. It is implausible that everyone will find that sitting still in a two foot square for six hours a day is the most effective way to learn, or that reading books or writing into a copy book is the most effective way to learn for all people (Gardner 1993; Gardner and Hatch 1989). From my observations I find that some students find activity works better; either moving continuously or the opportunity to move around a room from time to time. For others it seems to be the sense of taking control of what they are doing rather than passively listening that enhances their learning.

The kinds of logics in use in schools are the logics used in many institutions (Schön 1971). They are traditional western, linear, propositional logics. In our western society we are literally schooled to think in a particular way using a particular form of logic, and that logic supports the reproduction of the dominant culture (Bourdieu 1992; 2000; Illich 1995). The discourses in use are communicated through culture to teach us to think in particular ways. One of these is the model of the teacher as possessor of knowledge which must be imparted to students. Despite this, I find as I teach that when I am trying to impart something to my students I am often imparting something else instead. This phenomenon in schooling has been termed 'the hidden curriculum' (Jackson 1968; Snyder 1970). In addition many students are learning things that you never set out to teach. Despite the extensive control measures that we use in schools, students are good at organising themselves, their time, and each other when they are doing things that they want to do. Many think in ways that are not generally acknowledged in traditional schools (Gardner 1993; Gardner and Hatch 1989). While the school looks for order in terms of students sitting in place, dressed appropriately and for students to write well formed essays with a beginning, middle and an end, many children do not think in a linear propositional way; yet their ways are not accepted within the school. I have values in relation to people participating in quality educational experiences. However, the teacher-centred classroom approach which I have used so often does not acknowledge students' diverse ways of learning and knowing. Despite my emancipatory values I find myself operating within strict orthodoxies using the logics of control. As a result, within my practice I frequently do not provide my students with a quality educational experience.

These were my thoughts about school and schooling. I had little idea of what my students thought of my teaching. Within the authoritarian system that I operated students did not discuss teachers or what teachers did. If students discussed teachers they did not do it where a teacher could hear. At a later point I began to understand the value of looking for my students' views and I will deal with my experience of this in the next chapter. This gives rise to my second major concern:

I have concerns that the modes of thinking underlying my practice result in me missing opportunities for influencing learning. At the same time these modes of operation are preventing my students improving their learning.

Concerns about practice – keys as symbolic control

A recent edition of the 'Time Team', a popular TV programme which undertakes archaeological excavations, featured the discovery of a medieval skeleton during a dig on the site of an old priory. The casual viewer could see little, apart from a small bundle of bones in a hole in the ground. One of the archaeologists, Phil Harding, told the viewers that this was a woman of high status. He knew this because he could see a few small pieces of corroded metal on a chain which had been a set of keys. "She is a woman of high status," he said. "The keys show she has control over the sacred places." Her keys were an element of symbolic control: an element that was still interpretable a millennium after her death (Bernstein 1996; Bernstein and Solomon 1999).

Throughout my teaching life school keys have always been important. Access to keys is often restricted. Within my school, keys belong to a 'security suite of keys', which means copies cannot be made. Teachers have a key for their own room, but not for other rooms and not for entry to the school. Traditionally keys are not easily available for access to computers or video players. The question of access to keys might seem trivial but access to keys is a question of symbolic control. The old principle of domestic economy that if you 'look after the pennies; the pounds will look after themselves' is carried through to institutions in terms of control and domination. In my school small matters like access to keys, to rooms and to photocopier paper is strictly controlled. It seems to me that this means the institution does not need to look after the major issues of domination. Because the principles of domination have been internalised in relation to small matters, control does not need to be imposed in more important matters. Domination and control are

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established as part of the culture. Within schools the established orthodoxy is that good teachers have good control. The result of this thinking is that you must exert control in order to consider yourself a good teacher. This orthodoxy reinforces the internalisation of control. Foucault (1977), drawing on Bentham's idea of the panopticon model of prison, claims that within the panopticon external surveillance becomes unnecessary because control becomes internalised within the jailor and the prisoners. From this I express my third major area of concern in the following way:

> I have concerns that within my workplace a social formation exists which has internalised domination and control and that this social formation is denying the creativity of individuals and preventing them from realising their natality.

Concerns about the social order – democracy

Historian Eric Hobsbawm (1995), in his analysis of the history of the twentieth century, claims that there were only twelve states in the world that remained democratic during the interwar period, from 1918 to 1939. Five of the states were in Europe. The only European countries with adequately democratic political institutions that functioned without a break throughout the entire inter-war period were Britain, Finland (only just), the Irish Free State, Sweden and Switzerland. This would appear to indicate that Ireland has had an enviable record of democracy. However, McCarthy takes a different view. 'An Irish man sees authority as something conferred on him from above. There is no tradition which says a man must first govern himself – dynamism from below has never been a feature of Irish society' (McCarthy 1969: 42). The experience in Irish education draws more from McCarthy than Hobsbawm. 'The dominant pattern is one of church ownership and management…with the state having central control of curriculum and assessment' (Drudy and Lynch 1993: 118). Within the pattern of church ownership the pattern of management is such that the churches, in the form of the religious orders which run the majority of secondary schools, maintain complete control. This is accomplished by having a board of management of eight members. Four members are nominated by the religious order which act as trustees, two elected representatives of parents and two elected representatives of teachers. The trustees appoint the chairman to the board. In the event of a tied vote the chairman has a casting vote. The controlling religious authority has an effective veto on any decision made by the board of management (*ibid:* 81).

Religious-run secondary schools form by far the greatest proportion of post primary schools in Ireland. They have a strong academic tradition (which means a concentration on academic subjects) (*ibid:* 6-7). However the principal curricular option at senior cycle – the Leaving Certificate – has been evaluated as unsuitable for a substantial proportion of senior cycle students (Curriculum Awareness Action Group 1991). While the most educationally disadvantaged groups improved their position in absolute terms through higher rates of participation, they have not gained any great advantage in relative terms with middle class groups (Drudy and Lynch 1993: 118). In 2004 Lynch was still lamenting the inequality in Irish schools but this time placing the responsibility on the intellectual tradition in schools. She claimed that 'One of the most significant omissions in Irish education is the absence of a strong intellectual tradition focused on equality, human rights and social justice' (Lodge and Lynch 2004: 105).

The disadvantage experienced by some students through the Leaving Certificate programme was emphasised by a recent decision of the Equality Authority (2006). The Authority determined that two students had been discriminated against by the Department of Education and Science under the terms of the Equal Status Acts, 2000-2004. The equality officer stated that it was worthy of comment that there is an assumption running through the submissions made by the Department that 'the examinations process is sacrosanct', and that it is 'absolutely objective'. No evidence, she stated, was produced to confirm this viewpoint. The equality officer appeared to be indicating that the logics underpinning Department policy did not permit the officials to see the injustices that they were perpetuating. One of the difficulties with inequality and injustice is that it can become part of the logics of institutions; in effect it can become institutionalised and it can be difficult for those within an institution to see it.

Alienation from much of what goes on in school is a key factor in the marginalisation of students. Drudy and Lynch (1993: 5) tell us that 20% of students undertaking the Leaving Certificate achieved a grade 'E' or less (failed) in thirteen out of thirty-two subjects. In 2005, the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) confirmed this, stating that 20% of students leave school before the end of senior cycle and a further 20% perform badly in exams (NCCA 2005: 13). My students express it less scientifically: 'School is boring', 'What use is Physics?', 'The rules are stupid!' Their bad behaviour is a way of acting out their frustration. In many cases they are frustrated because they cannot engage

with education as they meet it in their classroom. Education is something which is 'done' to them.

The management style of my school is one which is hierarchical and authoritarian. The predominant attitude to this style by both teachers and students is one of compliance. However, there are students within the system who feel alienated, and respond, in frustration, with aggression. Some students and some teachers are marginalized – the students because of their bad behaviour, the teachers because they are seen to be unable to cope with the bad behaviour.

A key element in the marginalization of the teacher is his/her isolation within the classroom and his/her isolation professionally. The physical isolation within the classroom is in part caused by the traditional 'egg-crate structure of schooling' (Lortie 1975 cited in Fullan and Hargreaves 1992: 11). This results in a teacher being alone in a classroom of some thirty students. If these students do not want to be there then this can be a lonely classroom. The 'egg crate structure' of schooling does not refer only to the physical isolation of the teacher. Professional isolation may be worse.

Shortly before he retired a few years ago, my Deputy Principal of fifteen years remembered my first day at school: "I gave you a text book, showed you to the room and we never saw you again for the rest of the year," he said. I was initially pleased at this compliment to my capacity as a new, young teacher to cope. But this was really a reference to my 'ability' to cope with isolation, not to make demands, and not need support. Is this really admirable? To what extent is coping with isolation educational? Professional isolation limits access to new ideas and solutions that might enable a teacher to deal with new and challenging situations. The stress of isolation can fester and accumulate, leading to greater frustration and further isolation (Fullan and Hargreaves 1992: 10). The isolating structure of many of our schools leaves little opportunity for participative action.

Apple (2003: 12) describes the situation where the citizen's only opportunity to participate in the democratic process is by 'voting' or 'buying'. He refers to this as 'thin democracy'. He contrasts this to 'thick democracy' where community activists and parents and sometimes students themselves are full participants in the development and articulation of policies and where even the principal is elected by the local community (Gandin and Apple 2002; 2003). In my school the citizen-student has no means of participating in the

democratic process. The citizen-teacher participates by voting for board of management members. But the board has been designed so that one group, the trustees, always has a voting majority.

As I examine my practice within school I realise that the concerns I have are not unique. Many others have voiced the same concerns and theorised them well. The difficulties that I experienced in relation to the testing of my students can be examined in the light of Drudy and Lynch's (1993) analyses of Irish education. The difficulties that I face are not unique to my classroom but appear to be part of the institutional structure of Irish education and indeed traditional education outside of Ireland. It appears to me that access to higher levels of participation in the decision making processes around education is key. If I were assessing participation in decision making in my class or school using Arnstein's ladder of participation (1969; 1971), or one of the modifications of it (Hart 1992; John 1996; Lansdown 2001; Treseder 1997), my classroom practice and indeed school practice would be placed at the lowest level; one that 'assumes a passive audience, which is given information which may be partial or constructed'. This lack of involvement in decision making may lead to the perpetuation of systems which do not meet the needs of those that the systems are purportedly set up to serve.

My fourth area of concern therefore relates to the logics underlying traditional education and may be summarised as follows:

> I have concerns that the model in use in the traditional systems operating within our schools and in official policies discriminate against some students and prevent them achieving their goals.
>
> In addition I have concerns that the academic model of the established Leaving Certificate is unsuitable for a proportion of the students that I teach.
>
> I am concerned about the lack of opportunities for participative action within my professional community.

Concerns in relation to educational theory

Education is often seen in terms of a 'transmission metaphor', where knowledge is transferred from the 'knower' to the 'learner' (Sfard 1998). The model, which Freire (1972: 45-50) refers to as the 'banking model', is the dominant model in use in schools in

Ireland (Green 1995). I have often and still find myself accepting this status quo. The tendency to accept the status quo is in part accounted for by our approach to knowledge. Korthagen and Kessels (1999: 7) distinguish between Aristotle's concepts of *episteme* and *phronesis*. Schools and perhaps all organisations are dominated by *episteme* – knowledge which aims primarily at helping us to know more 'about' a situation. The banking model is good at helping us to know 'about' things. By contrast, *phronesis,* which Korthagen and Kessels translate as 'practical wisdom', places the emphasis on perceiving more in a particular situation and finding a helpful course of action on the basis of strengthened awareness. A more perceptive approach can lead to alternative readings of a situation and may reveal alternative means of challenging oppressive power relations.

The traditional scientific approach to solving problems has been to break them down into their component parts. Solving the difficulties posed by the components is usually easier than solving the problems of the whole. This has given rise to the tendency to fragment various areas of work (Bohm 1995: 1-26; Wheatley 1992: 8). The disciplines approach to educational theory is one example (Hirst 1966; 1983). The underlying principle is to break education down into the disciplines of the philosophy of education, sociology of education, history of education and so on. These theories 'about' education should then be applied by the practitioner/teacher to solve the problems of their practice. However my experience of learning and of teaching is that it does not work like this. It appears to me that rather than a fragmentary approach, a holistic one is required. The separation of theory and practice into different areas and valuing of the contemplative over the practical extends back to Plato and his Cave allegory (2003: 179). This approach is reflected in the divide between classroom teachers and educational researchers (Coulter and Wiens 2002: 15). Zeichner (1995: 154) has expressed the situation clearly: '…for the most part educational researchers ignore teachers and teachers ignore the researchers right back…' It seems to me that the inter-relationship between practical, technical everyday work and the theoretical, philosophical, and epistemological ideas that affect them is an important part of practice. Practice and theory are closely inter-linked, and separating them into different areas of work to be carried out by different people does not make sense to me. I find, in my work, that theory and practice are influencing each other and informing each other. The process of change within my work occurs because of the interplay of practice and theory; and maybe even to speak of interplay is a mistake. Interplay suggests that practice and theory are two different

things working together. Practice and theory can be related aspects of the same thing. Niels Bohr suggests such an idea when responding to Heisenberg's explanation of his Uncertainty Principle. Peat's (1996) commentary on this suggests that 'classical' thinking is so ingrained in us that: 'indeed it is part of the language we speak, immediately upon opening our mouths we cannot help but talk about individual objects' (*ibid:* 46). It may be that classical thinking, leading to fragmentation, prevents us from seeing unity of theory and practice. My concerns in relation to educational theory therefore can be summarised in the following way:

I have concerns that the dominant form of theory in education is propositional in nature. It is based on a transmission metaphor and a 'banking' model and there is considerable resistance to change. The use of this banking model is tied to our ideas of educational theory.

Concerns about method – technical rationality

Schön (1983) argues that scientific research has traditionally been seen as the basis for professional practice. Social science research is based on the models of medicine and engineering with their emphasis on 'measurement, controlled experiment, applied science, laboratories and clinics' (Schön 1983: 39). The dominant view of professional knowledge is as the application of scientific theory and technique to the problems of practice (*ibid:* 30). Within education and elsewhere the dominant model is a technical rational model (Schön 1987: 3). The problems I face defy technical rational solutions and therefore I have concerns around approaches based on technical rationality.

In this section I set out my concerns in relation to my work. As noted, these concerns relate to two different contexts of work, teaching and administration, in two different organisations. One organisation had an authoritarian structure, while the other was much more egalitarian. Despite these differences the underlying practices in each organisation were similar and my concerns were similar. In keeping with my view of the web-like nature of life, these concerns are wide-ranging and diverse but not unconnected. In fact connectedness is a key feature of my concerns. My concerns relate to my practice and my learning from practice. However my practice and my learning are affected by the institutional structures that I work within and the philosophies and practices that underpin the structures. As I am involved in developing my living theory of learning and supporting

others in developing their living theories of learning and administration the dominant views of theory are my concern. Among the dominant theories that concern me are theories of ICT in education. Let me explain.

In a school conversation about what we should be teaching as part of ICT I suggested that I did not think doing the European Computer Driving Licence (ECDL) was a good idea. I suggested that ECDL was a narrow skills based qualification and I suggested that we should be doing more worthwhile things with ICT in schools. One colleague responded, "Oh, we don't need to get caught up in all theoretical stuff." My colleague apparently saw ECDL as a fundamentally worthwhile thing to do, as a given. I believe that this thinking ties in with the key values within schools which are order, uniformity, control, and not challenging the status quo. These values are linked with education as product, as a commodity. Dewey, in his examination of traditional education, identified the pedagogies that are associated with traditional education as didactic and controlling. He suggested that good teachers 'will use devices of art to cover up the imposition so as to relieve it of obviously brutal features' (Dewey 1938: 17-23), but this does take away from its brutal nature. Eisner echoed these sentiments sixty-five years later:

> This search for order, this desire for efficiency, this need to control and predict were then and are dominant values today. They are values that pervaded the industrial revolution and they are values that reside tacitly beneath current efforts at school reform.

(Eisner 2002)

ICT can fit into this methodology in that it can work in exactly the same way. Many computer assisted learning (CAL) systems do precisely that. They provide a controlled and controlling approach to using ICT. Many people support ICT systems within schools because of their capacity to assess and report, and in many respects assessing and reporting can be tools of control. The major literatures on ICT reflect, among others, the vocational rationale for introducing ICT – it will help students to get jobs. While this is a worthwhile endeavour in itself it is a limited view of the potential of ICT and of education. Hawkridge (1990) lists seven rationales for the introduction of ICT into schools. Among these is the vocational rationale. He also includes the catalytic rationale. This is described as the ability of ICT to promote change. This raises the question of what type of change. Is it just productivity and efficiency? Many ICT tools are developed as productivity tools (see Bromley 1998: 6-8, 21, 22; Callaghan1962; International Society for Technology in

Education 2000; NAEYC and NAECS/SDE 1992). The concept of productivity suggests reproducing 'the given' in larger amounts in shorter times. However, Apple makes a case for taking alternative views to the obvious when he says that texts can be and are subject to oppositional readings.

> …Where something comes from – a subject position from the state, a commodified piece of popular culture such as a rap CD, or a product for use in schools such as a text book – need not determine its political or educational use in any concrete situation. Context and the balance of power in the specific situation do count.

(Apple 2003: 14)

An oppositional view of productivity tools enables them to be used to support original human agency in contributing something unique to human experience (Arendt 1958). The dominant view of ICT is a technical rational view of technology. Within this worldview ICT can be dominating rather than emancipating. Marcuse (1964) has examined the dominating role of technology in 'One Dimensional Man'. I will pursue his ideas further in Chapter 4. For the moment I summarise my concerns in relation to the ICT in the following:

I have concerns that the dominant form of theorising ICT is around productivity. The kind of knowledge underpinning this is instrumental, functional, and utilitarian.

Concerns about my capacity to act

In my role as form teacher I hear students being referred to as 'uneducable' and 'unable to learn'. I am told that they 'should be placed in a sin bin'. Students tell me that their teacher 'is mad'. 'He throws you out of the class even before you get in!' 'He says you're not doing your work even when he has not given you any!' When I meet these situations and hear these things; when I see how students, teachers and administrators are affected, 'I am no longer of the opinion that one can simply be a bystander' (Arendt 1994: 4-5). I have a responsibility to think as an independent person and resist the dehumanisation of students, teachers and administrators; I have a responsibility to 'support them in being the best that they can be' (Arendt 1958: 19). I could avoid addressing these conflicts. Bakhtin (cited in Apple 2003: 223) describes the use of balconies at carnivals in the middle ages. The affluent were both attracted and repelled by the cultural, political and bodily transgressions that accompanied carnival. They used a balcony to allow them to experience the 'smells,

the noise, the possibility of loss of control, the undercurrent of danger, all of this was fascinating. But the bourgeoisie could not let go of their safe havens… one could be in and out, almost participant but mostly observer…' (Stallybrass and White 1986). Can I (after Adorno 1981) '...call everything into question and criticise nothing'? (Osborne 1996: xii cited in Apple 2003: 223). I believe that I cannot. I must engage in some way, but how? My response is to follow Schön's advice: 'If she [*sic*] is to deal with it competently, she must do so by a kind of improvisation, inventing and testing in the situation strategies of her own devising' (Schön 1987: 5). My work proceeds then, after Schön, 'by a kind of improvisation' engaging with students, engaging with teachers, engaging on a basis that is open to others' points of view, which is free from coercion, which accepts others as equal participants (Mezirow 1991: 78).

I draw inspiration from Eisner's (2002) suggestions regarding what education can learn from art.

> Consider first the task of working on a painting, a poem, a musical score. That task requires, perhaps above all else, the ability to compose qualitative relationships that satisfy some purpose.
>
> (Eisner 2002: 4)

Within my work I will attempt to develop qualitative relationships with my colleagues and students that support all of us moving toward realising our natality.

> In the arts ends may follow means. One may act and the act may itself suggest ends, ends that did not precede the act, but follow it. In this process ends shift; the work yields clues that one pursues. In a sense, one surrenders to what the work in process suggests. This process of shifting aims while doing the work at hand is what Dewey called 'flexible purposing.'
>
> (Eisner 2002: 6)

Eisner's comments suggest that detailed planning, including the setting of aims and objectives and declaring milestones and tollgate reviews, is not the ideal. More can be gained by 'flexible purposing', taking tentative steps and capitalising on the emergent features. My way of proceeding will owe more to exploration and discovery than to prediction and control.

> How something is said is part and parcel of what is said.
>
> (Eisner 2002: 6)

How ICT is learned matters, how one speaks to a student matters, what a classroom looks like matters, how one tells a story matters. I strive to ensure that the content of the work underlying this thesis is congruent with the form. When I attempt to support students in empowering themselves, the nature of the work undertaken will be empowering.

> Not everything knowable can be articulated in propositional form.
>
> (Eisner 2002: 7)

Eisner draws on Michael Polanyi (1966) who speaks of tacit knowledge and says, 'We know more than we can tell' (Polanyi 1966: 4), and on Dewey who asserts that while science states meaning, the arts express meaning. Meaning is not limited to what is assertable. In many cases, work with my students and colleagues will take a multimedia form supporting the representation of the tacit and the aesthetic.

> The sense of vitality and the surge of emotion we feel when touched by one of the arts can also be secured in the ideas we explore with students, in the challenges we encounter in doing critical inquiry, and in the appetite for learning we stimulate.
>
> (Eisner 2002: 9)

In developing educative relationships I strive to provide a sense of vitality and a passionate approach to learning through the media used and in doing this develop a new culture of teaching and learning.

Summary

Within this chapter I have presented my concerns in relation to my practice and in relation to educational theory. Earlier I indicated that my principal concern arises from studying my practice as a teacher in an autocratic school and from studying my practice as an administrator in an organisation pressured by high levels of change. The focus of my work became the pursuit of ways of working that did not deny my values of justice and respect. As I undertook this work I came to appreciate that we were not just facing problems to be solved but situations that required engagement with and an in-depth understanding of the power structures and the logics in institutions. As my work turned toward research I came to appreciate that finding new ways of theorising practice required a similar engagement and in-depth understanding of the power structures and the logics that underpin research.

Because of this the concerns I address are wide ranging but not unconnected and deal with issues of justice and injustice, theory and practice, power and control, and of democracy

and authoritarianism. I have given some indication of an underlying approach to changing my practice. In the next two chapters I will give some account of what I might do to let go of my 'safe haven' (Stallybrass and White 1986 cited in Apple 203: 223) and address the matter of 'experiencing myself as living contradiction' (Whitehead 1993).