

## PART FIVE

### CRITICAL JUDGEMENTS IN ENGAGING WITH THE IDEAS OF OTHERS

#### 5.1 Narrative

In Part Four I have evaluated my past learning in the explanation for my present practice. I have asked for a 'suspension of judgement' about my future intentions whilst I include some further critical judgements. This break serves to stress importance of living with the tension of the contradictions which critical judgements reveal, and waiting for the originality of mind which moves the enquiry forward. The following critical judgements have also clarified the ideas which I take into my future intentions in my enquiry, 'How do I live my values more fully in my practice?'.

The contents of the 1982, *'A Dialectician's Guide for Educational Researchers'* (5.2) have been referred to in Part Two, when relating my critical judgements to include 'I' as a living contradiction within a materialist discourse. The other papers which follow were written to stand on their own and should speak for themselves. I do however want to add a few words of explanation on the part these judgements have played in clarifying my ideas and in taking my enquiry forward.

The 'Dialectician's Guide' (5.2) was produced in response to the following critical judgements on a previous Ph.D. submission in 1982:

*Has the candidate shown that he is able to conduct original investigations and to test his own ideas and those of others?* NO

*Does the thesis contain matter worthy of publication?* NO (Whitehead, 1993, p.41/44)

In telling my story I do not want to underestimate the power of emotion in my enquiries. Hence I should also add that I was also driven by the fury of existing as a living contradiction within a regime of truth which denied the right of any Ph.D. researcher to question the competence of the examiners' judgement under any circumstances. The fury was based on the value of academic freedom to question ideas and judgements and is the subject of a another text (Whitehead, 1993).

These critical judgements drove me to clarify my ideas on how a dialectical approach to educational research could bridge the gap between educational theory and practice. As I say in the introduction to the booklet:

*This work is the summary of fourteen years of educational research. In its present form it is unlikely to be of value to many educational researchers. It makes too many assumptions about the background of the reader. (5.2, p.1).*

The clarification of the ideas in this booklet enabled me to articulate the ideas on a distinctively 'educational' research methodology (pp. 61-67), the logics of education (pp. 107-119) creating living theories (p. 17) and using values as educational standards in the creation of a discipline of education. I am thinking of the values in a scientific form of life (pp. 61-67), an ethical form of life (pp. 68-77) and an aesthetic form of life (pp. 78-84).

In the Chapter on 'The Disciplines Approach to Educational Theory' (pp. 18-53) I examine the assumptions in a number of schools of thought in the philosophy, psychology and sociology of education. My critical judgement is focused on their capacity to produce appropriate methodologies for investigating problems of the kind, 'How do I improve this process of education here?'.



The significance of 'A Dialectician's Guide..', is that it serves as another benchmark in my educational enquiry. In that respect it is similar to my first paper (2.2) from 1977. The evidence of my educational development in the movement between these two texts, shows that my critical responses to the critical judgements of my examiners, produced an explicit articulation of the methodologies, logics, theories, values and discipline, which had been missing from the 1977 paper. Perhaps the most important point to focus on in 'A Dialectician's Guide....' is the statement:

*My starting point is the statement made by R.S. Peters (1964/1977), on the 'Principles for Selection and Presentation of Theory', in his work on 'Education and the Education of Teachers';*

*" ..... 'education' is not a distinct discipline but a field where a group of disciplines have application... ( 5.2, p. 18)*

My thesis contradicts this position in its claim that the standards of originality of mind and critical judgement constitute my education as a distinct discipline in which a group of other disciplines have application and value.

Responding to Wilson's (1983) criticism in my 1985 paper on, '*A Dialectician Responds to a Philosopher who Holds an Orthodox View of Knowledge*, (5.3), helped me to clarify the epistemology in my claims to educational knowledge from within a living theory perspective. I am thinking particularly of my responses to his assertions that:

8 To talk of 'Living Contradictions' serves no useful purpose (p. 39).

9 I pervert the concept of contradiction (p. 41).

10 I put dialectical and propositional logics in opposition (p. 43)

I am also grateful to Wilson's criticisms for enabling me to exercise my own critical judgements in a response through which I clarified my position on Knowledge Acquisition and Knowledge Structures (p. 45), The Differentiation of Knowledge Structures (p. 47), Facts and Values (p. 48) and Theory and Practice (p. 49). I would not want this gratitude, which has strengthened since his untimely death, to mask the fact that it was the motivating emotional power of the anger in feeling misunderstood and misrepresented on reading the criticisms, which moved me to respond.

The Presidential Address to BERA, in 1988, on research-based professionalism, began to refocus my attention on my educative influence with my students (see the Appendix of paper; 5.4 pp.14-17). I take up this theme again, some ten years later in a Keynote Address to the Educational Studies Association of Ireland (5.8), with the evidence on the internet of successfully completed living theory Ph.D. Degrees. I will consider this address below.

In responding (5.5) to Jean Rudduck's (1989) ideas, in 1990, I focused on an apparent lack of evidence concerning the influence of university teachers with their students. Exercising my critical judgements on Rudduck's work enabled me to clarify my own position:

*When I think of my own practice in teacher education, I am conscious of holding a view concerning the nature of an educative relationship which requires my own students and colleagues to speak on their own behalf when I am making a claim concerning my professional practice as a teacher educator. In other words I judge my own effectiveness in teacher education by the extent to which my students and colleagues voluntarily acknowledge that ideas from my research and teaching are integrated within the sense they make of their own practice. I also judge the quality of my educative relationships in terms of the extent to which the ideas of others are subjected to critical scrutiny within the discourse. (5.5, p.30)*



These judgements also enabled me to form the following question about showing how my own practitioner research was meeting my own educational needs and those of my students.

*"In the spirit of dialectics I will finish with a question which may help to take practitioner research forward. Can you (and I) present the evidence, in forms such as Westminster Studies or the British Educational Research Association, which shows that your practitioner research is meeting your own educational needs and/or those of your pupils and students?" (5.5, p.35)*

Exercising my critical judgements in 1991, in my response to Ortrun Zuber-Skerritt's (1991) emphasis on method and conceptual theories, enabled me to argue for:

*'..a greater concentration on the creation and testing of living and dialectical educational theory for professional practice, within which one's own philosophy of education is engaged as a first person participant'. (5.6, p. 436)*

My critical judgements (5.7) in response to Mike Newby's (1994) ideas in 1996, enabled me to work on improving the quality of my communications in publishing my ideas on living educational theories and living contradictions. I am thinking particularly of the later part of the paper where I write about the 'tone' of my response. I still have much to learn about sustaining qualities of connectedness in learning from the critical responses of others in educational enquiries. I say this in the light of recent work on 'Balkanisation' (Donmoyer, 1996) and 'The New Paradigm Wars' (Andersen and Herr, 1999), where different communities of educational researchers appear to be interested only in defending their own positions, rather than seeking to learn from an understanding of each other's positions.

*"I hope that I have integrated what I have learned from the human qualities expressed by Peter Reason, Orlando Fals-Borda, Terri Austin and Tom Russell, in the content and tone of my response. I hope Mike Newby feels directly addressed and that he experiences my response as a genuine invitation to continue to critique my ideas. Other readers might like*



*to join with me in showing how our philosophies not only interpret our world but are also integrated in our living educative relationships with our students, as we try to improve them. I am thinking of the creation of our own living educational theories that show how we are struggling to express more fully and to justify the values that we think will help to regenerate our culture and that at the same time will help us to improve the contributions our philosophies can make to the creation of an educated community.” (5.7, p. 461)*

In the 1998 keynote address to the Educational Studies Association of Ireland (5.8) I return to the theme of my 1988 Presidential Address to BERA, on research-based professionalism. In this 1998 paper I explore some implications, from my educational enquiries and those of the teacher-researchers I have worked with or supervised, for the creation of a Teacher’s Council in Ireland. I draw on criticisms of the Teaching Training Agency in England and Wales and ideas from the Ontario College of Teachers (OCT) in Canada. The connection with the Ontario College of Teachers is that Linda Grant, the Manager of Standards of Practice, at OCT, came to see the action research programmes at Bath in 1995 and subsequently invited me to organise seminars on action research with Ontario teachers. The invitation to give a keynote to the Educational Studies Association of Ireland, was due to Jean McNiff’s position on the organising committee for the conference. My address was supported by direct access to the internet through which I was able to show the location and ease of access of the living theory theses described in the paper (5.8):

*“What I now want to do is to draw your attention to the kind of educational action enquiries which have already led to the awards of M.Phil. or Ph.D. Degrees. The teachers have created their own living theories in which they describe and explain their own professional learning as they ask, answer and research the following kinds of question:*

*How can I help my pupils to improve their learning?*

*How can I help to establish action research approaches to professional development in my school?*

*How can I support teachers in establish action research approaches to professional development in their school in a way which can help to improve the quality of pupils’ learning?*

*How can I fulfil my system’s responsibility for staff appraisal , staff and/or curriculum development.” ( 5.8, p.4)*



This paper also moves my concern into my political contradictions with government policy:

*"Indeed, I find analyses, such as those offered by Jim Graham (1998), both helpful and disturbing. I find it helpful to be able to understand how teacher professionalism has been one of the key arenas in which the contradictions of economic and social change have been played out in a series of crises of control for the state (p.11). I find the analysis offered by my colleague Hugh Lauder (Brown and Lauder, p.6, 1996) on Fordism, Neo-Fordism and Post-Fordism most persuasive as it helps me to understand my present disquiet with the policies being pursued by our New Labour Government, a government I voted for and fought hard to see elected. I share Graham's concern that far from being a radical transformation to recognise the importance of teachers as professionals in the premier division of international economic and social activity, the current policies are, 'locked in the Tory legacy of blinkered bureaucratic myopia essentially committed to maintaining traditional patterns of power and control at the expense of precisely the social and economic objectives they propose to achieve' (p.12). (5.8, p. 8).*

Here are the contributions to Part Five.

5.2 (1982) A Dialectician's Guide for Educational Researchers'. Mimeo. Booklet presented at a Roundtable Discussion at BERA 1982, University of St. Andrews.

5.3 (1985) A Dialectician Responds to a Philosopher who Holds an Orthodox View of Knowledge. Are we Really Addressing the Same Question? A Response to Wilson's Criticism. *Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education*.

5.4 (1989) How do we Improve Research-based Professionalism in Education? - A question which includes action research, educational theory and the politics of educational knowledge. Presidential Address to the British Educational Research Association, 1988. *British Educational Research Journal*.

5.5 (1990) How Can I Improve My Contribution to Practitioner Research in Teacher Education? A Response to Jean Rudduck. *Westminster Studies in Education*.

5.6 (1992) How can my Philosophy of Action Research Transform and Improve my Professional Practice and Produce a Good Social Order? - A Response to Ortrun Zuber-Skerritt. *Proceedings of the Second World Congress on Action Learning, Action Research and Process Management*.

5.7 (1996) Living Educational Theories and Living Contradictions: A response to Mike Newby. *Journal of Philosophy of Education*.

5.8 (1998) Developing research-based professionalism through living educational theories, Keynote address to the *Educational Studies Association of Ireland* at Trinity College, Dublin, November, 1998.