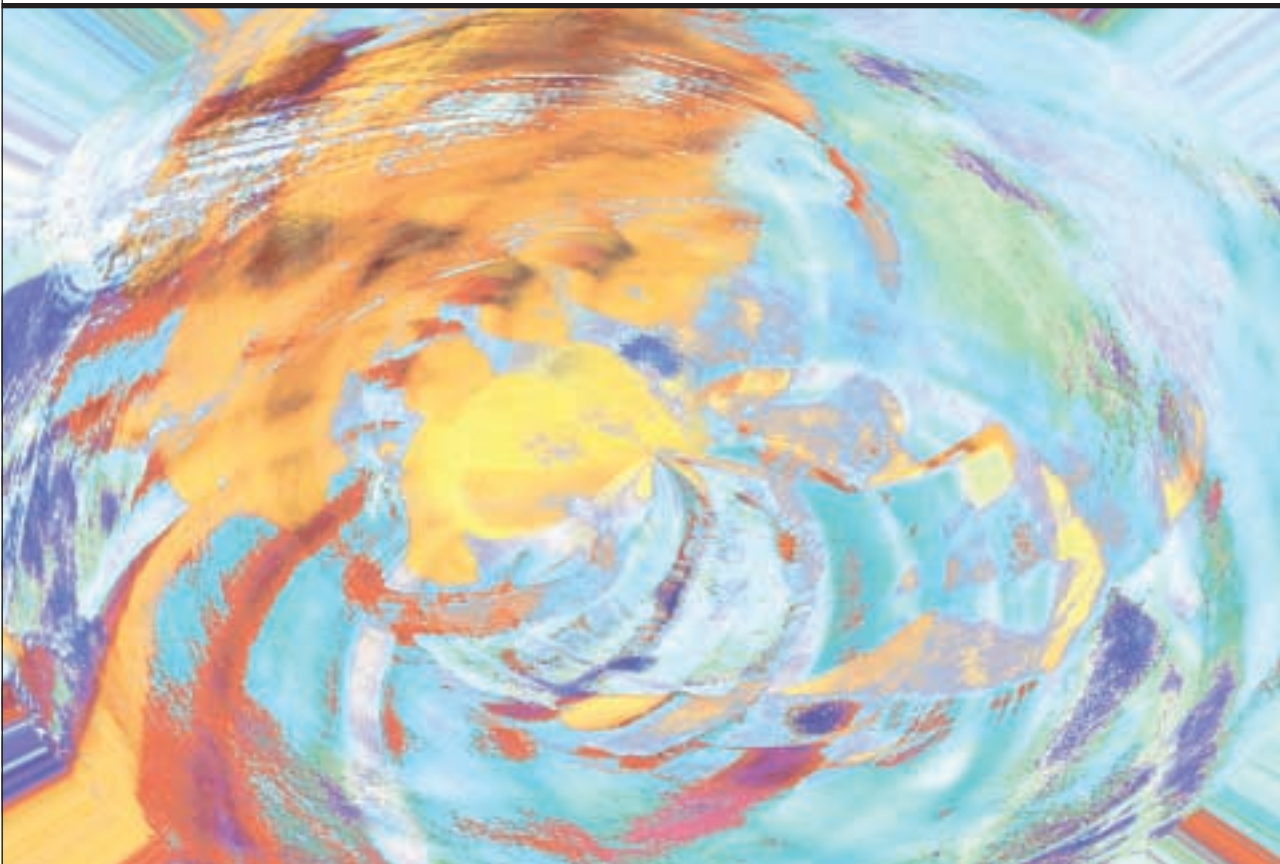


Practitioner Research and Professional Development in Education



Anne Campbell, Olwen McNamara and Peter Gilroy

Practitioner Research and Professional Development in Education

Practitioner Research and Professional Development in Education

Anne Campbell, Olwen McNamara
and Peter Gilroy



Introduction and editorial material © Anne Campbell,
Olwen McNamara and Peter Gilroy 2004

First published 2004

Apart from any fair dealing for the purposes of research or private study, or criticism or review, as permitted under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act, 1988, this publication may be reproduced, stored or transmitted in any form, or by any means, only with the prior permission in writing of the publishers, or in the case of reprographic reproduction, in accordance with the terms of licences issued by the Copyright Licensing Agency. Inquiries concerning reproduction outside those terms should be sent to the publishers.



Paul Chapman Publishing
A SAGE Publications Company
1 Olivers Yard
London EC1Y 1SP

SAGE Publications Inc
2455 Teller Road
Thousand Oaks, California 91320

Sage Publications India Pvt Ltd
B-42, Panchsheel Enclave
Post Box 4109
New Delhi – 100 017

Library of Congress Control Number: 2003109190

A catalogue record for this book is available from the
British Library

ISBN 0 7619 7467 9
ISBN 0 7619 7468 7 (pbk)

Typeset by TW Typesetting, Plymouth, Devon
Printed in Great Britain by Cromwell Press, Trowbridge, Wiltshire

Contents

<i>Preface</i>	<i>viii</i>
<i>Foreword</i>	<i>ix</i>
Stephen Newman	
1 Research Traditions in Education	1
Introduction	1
Two crude traditions	2
Two more subtle traditions	2
Reflecting reflection	9
Notes	11
2 Researching Professional Development	12
The political context for teacher research and development	13
Your professional development	18
Interrogating the value of professional development activities you have experienced	20
Controlling your professional development	22
Teacher researchers	24
Further reading	26
3 Professional Identity: Who am I? What Kind of Practitioner am I?	28
The moving image	28
Exploring your professional development	30
Telling your story	35
Summary	46
Further reading	47
4 Identifying an Area for Research	49
Introduction	49
The first moves	49
Individual ways of approaching research	60
Concluding remarks	62

5	Finding, Reviewing and Managing Literature	65
	Types of literature	65
	Managing literature	67
	Searching for literature	71
	Reviewing your literature	78
	Further reading	79
6	Which Research Techniques to Use?	80
	Research: what research?	80
	Reflective writing, diaries, logs and journals	87
	Biography, stories and fictional critical writing	91
	Observation	93
	Interviewing	98
	Analysing the data from interviews	102
	Using questionnaires	102
	Conclusions	104
	Further reading	105
7	Critical Friendship, Critical Community and Collaboration	106
	The lonely researcher?	106
	How does critical friendship work?	109
	Critical community	118
	Mentors as support for research	122
	Further reading	124
8	Qualitative Data Analysis	125
	Introduction	125
	The broader picture	126
	Techniques for analysing qualitative data	129
	Further reading	145
9	Quantitative Data Management, Analysis and Presentation of Questionnaire Surveys	146
	Introduction	146
	Data management and coding	148
	Data analysis	159
	Data presentation	164
	Further reading	168

10 Writing up, Reporting and Publishing your Research	169
Writing up: genres, purposes and audiences	169
Legal and ethical considerations	172
Writing for a report	174
The research process	175
Writing for publication	177
Using literature	178
The process of writing	181
Pen-portraits: an alternative genre of writing	182
Concluding remarks	185
Further reading	186
 11 Evaluating and Disseminating Research	 187
The professional agenda	187
The mechanics of evaluation	191
Concluding remarks	198
 <i>Resources for Research</i>	 199
Harvard referencing: questions and answers	199
Summary report from the Friars Primary School: 'Improving Literacy: Intervention for Low-achieving Pupils'	205
Further reading	211
<i>References</i>	212
<i>Index</i>	219

Preface

There has been a major shift in the nature, content and location of professional development in the last five years. This has included a move away from courses and workshops to workplace and professional learning communities. This move has been accompanied by a gradual realisation of the importance of research-based professional development and research and evidence informed practice to promote teaching and learning and school improvement.

This book aims to support and prepare practitioners to undertake small-scale inquiries and research investigations. The processes of research and inquiry-based learning help teachers come to terms with the complexities and challenges of teaching as their responsibilities widen to include the notion of the teacher as researcher. This major shift in responsibilities has focused on teachers using and doing research, with a particular emphasis on examining how teachers' research can impact on teaching and learning. This emphasis is clearly related to the drive to raise pupil achievement and to related areas such as monitoring progress, performance management, inspection and collegiate and collaborative work for school improvement.

The idea for this book grew from the authors' teaching experience and day-to-day professional work with teachers and others in the caring professions. The book aims to open up forms of research for practitioners so as to develop critical appraisal and analysis skills appropriate to professional contexts. It will suggest activities and give support for doing and evaluating teaching by using authentic examples of teachers' research into professional issues. It aims to stimulate and promote teachers' narrative writing and autobiographical approaches to researching their professional lives. It also tackles quantitative data management and analysis procedures that are relevant for teachers and other professionals. It is envisaged that it could support those involved in performance management appraisals and threshold application.

Thus the book is firmly located in work with teachers and others concerned with understanding education within continuing professional development contexts. We consider that practitioner research lies at the heart of professional development and so it seems timely to produce a book that focuses on understanding the connections between this form of research and professional development.

Anne Campbell, Olwen McNamara and Peter Gilroy

Foreword

Stephen Newman

Teacher professional development has a higher political profile today than for many years, and links with appraisal and performance management may mean that at times professional development is seen as something to be endured rather than enjoyed. Yet as the authors of this book make clear, teacher professional development can take many forms, and a key aspect of successful professional development is the commitment of the participants to the activity. Such commitment is more likely if the focus of the development activity is chosen by the participant rather than imposed from the centre.

Choosing which development activity to pursue imposes pressures of its own. You may feel that you have nothing to say or that the research you want to do is of little significance. Perhaps you are overwhelmed by the different possible lines your research could take. You may feel daunted by the difficulties of juggling all your responsibilities, professional and personal. You may even feel that you are being a little bit selfish, wanting to pursue an area of interest which inevitably is going to involve sacrifices by yourself and others. These at least were some of the thoughts I had when, as a full-time teacher in a comprehensive school, I decided to pursue some research part time. Even now, some years after my official periods of part-time study were successfully completed, reading through this book I am relieved to find that these fears and worries are perfectly normal.

Taking the initial steps of pursuing research once those initial fears have been overcome (or even perhaps when they have not) brings to the forefront a plethora of further questions. Is there anyone who will be willing to supervise the work? What will I have to write? Will my ideas be hopelessly inadequate? How will I be able to cope with all the literature? What research methods would be appropriate? These and many other questions are addressed in this book. It is useful to be reminded of the many opportunities that exist for small-scale research for educational development which can provide not only valuable professional development in themselves but which may also provide a route into larger-scale research. The questions and checklists are helpful in looking at the range of opportunities that already exist, in highlighting areas which can be developed, and in developing

techniques for making explicit aspects of professional identity. These techniques can help us as teachers to resist the view of professional development as something which is done to us by so-called 'experts', and promote the view that we can be active in choosing how we want to develop.

Having made the initial decision to pursue your ideas further it then becomes necessary to consider where you can best carry out your research and on what sort of course or activity. Of paramount importance it seems to me is the matter of finding someone to supervise your work with whom you are able to work well and who is able to act as one of the 'critical friends'. Here time spent at the beginning of your research will be time well spent. You will need to be able to trust your supervisor and accept the criticisms which you hope he or she is going to level at your work in order to help you to develop it. A poor relationship will sap your morale and your enthusiasm, and the quality of your work is likely to be the poorer as a result; on the other hand, a positive relationship should help periodically to reinvigorate your research, help you to focus your ideas (as you know they are going to be subject to close scrutiny) and promote your confidence in arguing your ideas.

In preparing to conduct your research it is worth giving some thought to the reasons which are going to provide you with your motivation. Motivation will be important; you may find yourself (as described in this book) writing late at night or early in the morning (and possibly both), and having to forgo some of the activities which, if it were not for your research, you would be able to enjoy. Motivation is, of course, very individual and may well consist of a number of inter-related factors which will help to give you the determination you will need and help to sustain you when you hit difficulties. Just like the results of educational research, your reasons for wanting to do research, and the factors that are going to help to motivate you, are likely to be complex; clarifying them in your mind will help you to persuade yourself and others that what you are doing has purpose and direction.

Let us assume that you have made a decision to conduct some research and have been able to meet someone who has agreed to supervise your work. Now is the time to start in earnest on the formal part of your work (assuming that you have been thinking informally about the issues hitherto). One point that I came to realise was very important to help me to progress was that it was pointless to wait for inspiration. So I can readily agree with the sentiment expressed in this book that it is important to write. Writing, I find, helps to develop my ideas and to clarify my thinking; drafting and redrafting help me to develop my ideas further. What you write may never make it into the final copy of your work but in working and in thinking through the ideas it is possible to find a line of argument which eventually turns out to be fruitful.

And what sort of writing you do can vary according to the time available and your alertness; note taking and following up references can be done when you are tired, so use quality time when you are alert for taking your arguments further and developing your arguments. But the general rule I had was that I would keep writing (writing notes, writing drafts, revising work) even when I felt I would make little progress; I came to feel that the 'slow times' were an integral part of the work, demanding of me the 99% perspiration which I hoped would eventually give way to the 1% inspiration.

Much of your writing will develop from reading. Access to the Internet and all the electronic resources available today makes the task of accessing resources a lot easier than it once was, but with the drawback that now the sheer quantity of material may be overwhelming. Getting to know the main libraries you will use, and how they work, will be time well spent. Similarly I quickly came to appreciate how important it is to keep an accurate record of every book or article consulted. Two minutes making an accurate note at the time of initially consulting a work can save hours later trying to find a 'lost' paper or book. I found it useful to make notes on my computer and to make and keep dated backups so that I could always go back through my archive to find the original source of any quotation or idea. I also found it important to make a note of which library I had found the book or article in and the shelf-mark of each book; this made going back to the original that much easier.

It is likely that in doing your research you will come across references which you need to follow up but which are only obtainable from elsewhere. Perhaps you will find some references impossible to trace, perhaps because they are incorrectly noted in your sources. This at least was my experience. Although initially frustrating, I came to enjoy pursuing lines of inquiry and tracking down a book or article which had almost been 'lost'. I was delighted by the care with which library staff (in the UK and abroad) and academic staff would try to help track down papers from 20 or 30 years ago, where perhaps only one copy remained in some dusty file. This camaraderie is part of what binds those working in what is sometimes called the 'academic community'. Becoming part of that community you will be attending meetings and conferences where you may meet people whose work you have read but whose faces are unfamiliar. This was my experience, made all the more enjoyable by the realisation that I could contribute and have my ideas scrutinised by others. Sometimes I was happy to participate as a silent witness to exchanges between well-known academics and to follow the cut-and-thrust of a lively academic debate. Either way, whether as contributor or witness, this involvement with those at the forefront of research is exciting and rewarding. This is an aspect of the academic community to which reference is made in this book which rings true for

me. And the contrasts which research affords can be illuminating; an early morning meeting with my supervisor followed by a drive to my school for the rest of the day's work would see me switching thought mode from the later philosophy of Wittgenstein to the normal routines of school within an hour. But even here the insights given by my research enabled me to view the daily life of school in a new light.

Perhaps you wonder what your colleagues will make of your involvement in research. Perhaps some will see it as slightly bizarre. If so, this is something to relish, just as those who enjoy other interests relish them, interests which you may find bizarre. Variety is the spice of life. Some may be interested and eager to participate or to know more. Some may have done research previously and be eager to discuss your ideas and progress with you. But much of your research will be quite a lonely task, at least in terms of the physical presence of someone doing the work with you. But come to see the books and papers you will be using as the voices of colleagues in another room and it does not seem so lonely after all. And, of course, you will come to meet with fellow researchers, even if infrequently, who can help to offer the framework of critical support which can help to move your own work forward.

Making your research results public in some form is an important aspect of research and of professional development. The discipline of publication helps sharpen arguments and reduce confusion and errors and opens up your work to peer review, a vital role of the academic community. Not only is it professionally rewarding to see your work made public but it can also give personal satisfaction to you and those who have supported you through the sometimes lonely experience of research. It is also to be expected that, having completed your research, you will have conclusions to share with others; having your work published provides a way of formally presenting your ideas for this purpose.

Your involvement in research may result in some form of accreditation. It may also give you a lasting interest in your chosen area of study, to which you may be able to return at a future date or continue in another form after the official part of your research is completed. Other consequences of carrying out your own research for professional development are likely to include an increased scepticism (in my view, healthy) of many of the edicts handed down from 'on high' to the teaching profession, and a recognition (again, in my view, healthy) that the learning community is one which extends across formal institutional boundaries and that practising teachers have an important contribution to make. For reasons such as these I am delighted to have been asked to contribute this Foreword.

Perhaps reading this book will give you new ideas for research as part of your professional development. If so, the underlying message of the authors, it seems to me, is that you should have the confidence to take your ideas forward.

In memory of Helen Francis
(PG)

With thanks to all the teacher researchers
I have had the fortune to encounter.
My special thanks to Ian Kane for his 'red pen' work.
(AC)

1

Research Traditions in Education

OVERVIEW

This chapter introduces some of the key concepts used in the book by introducing you to some of the more important broad traditions of education research. This leads you into an introduction to the practitioner research movement, which underpins the ideas that form the core of this book.

Introduction

Let us assume that you have identified some aspect of your professional practice in your classroom that is puzzling you. You may have noticed that one particular technique you use to encourage effective learning does not appear to be working as well as it used to, or that another is working very effectively. You may have seen something in the news or read something in the educational press that reminded you of your own classroom or at least caused you to wonder how it might apply to your own professional situation. At this point you have taken the first step as a researcher in that you have identified an educational issue that might need resolving. We could generalise by saying that much educational research focuses on interesting puzzles that have been identified by practitioners.

The second step in the process is to carry out a small-scale study of the aspect of your professional practice in the classroom that is puzzling you. However, as a beginning researcher in education you may not realise that there are a number of research traditions in education and that you may find yourself operating within them without realising that you are doing so. It is important that you recognise the tradition you are perhaps unknowingly accepting, as each has various methodological advantages and disadvantages which feed through to your findings and conclusions. In fact, the practitioner research approach we have described above is itself just one tradition amongst many. These traditions are themselves worthy of

research, as they hide puzzles that have a knock-on effect to the research they generate in ways that we will discuss in this chapter.

Two crude traditions

One of the most common ways of identifying traditions of educational research is to identify a distinction between quantitative and qualitative approaches to research. As the term suggests, quantitative educational research deals with measurement of quantities of some sort or another. If you studied for your teacher's qualification in the UK before the 1980s it is likely that at some point you will have been introduced to the so-called disciplines of education, in particular the psychology and sociology of education. There are still parts of the world where such an approach to preparing students for teaching flourish. Research within the psychology of education set out to make the understanding and improvement of education scientific, in that it would provide objective knowledge about education so as to allow for that knowledge to be used to improve the learning of pupils and the teaching techniques of teachers. Similarly, early forms of the sociology of education made extensive use of statistical analyses with, for example, pupil achievement being measured in quantitative terms.

There have been a number of criticisms of this approach to educational research, not least being the fact that education involves interpersonal relationships whose subtleties cannot easily be captured in quantitative terms. The argument being presented by such critics is that education involves issues to do with the quality and nature of these relationships, so educational research is uniquely qualitative. As such, objective scientific measurement of the activity is more often than not inappropriate as a quantitative approach to qualitative debates can rarely capture such inquiries, though they may be used to inform aspects of them.

Two more subtle traditions

In outlining the quantitative approach to education research we have referred to research being scientific and therefore producing objective knowledge. That conception of science is itself a particular tradition with a particular understanding of the nature of knowledge and one we now need to examine in more detail.

THE POSITIVIST, COMMONSENSE TRADITION

This is an approach to knowledge which is usually first referenced to August Comte's 1844 publication, *Discourse on the Positivist Spirit*. He argued that there were three broad ways in which natural phenomena can be explained, the theological, the metaphysical and, finally, the positivist, this last being an approach whereby natural events are properly to be explained by reference to empirically observable concrete phenomena. From that conception of how knowledge is to be gained comes what might be called the commonsense view of science.

This views scientific research as progressing through a series of steps as follows. The researcher begins with observations and experiments which produce facts which in turn allow a hypothesis to be developed. The hypothesis is further tested so that it can be confirmed and, once it *has* been confirmed, this allows the researcher to produce (or induce via a process termed induction, where one moves from some to all) a law which represents objective Knowledge,¹ Truth or Reality. This aspect of the research tradition is represented in the five steps presented in Figure 1.1. The final stage in this research tradition is to use the objective Knowledge that has been produced through the empirical process represented in Figure 1.1 to produce explanations and predictions based on that Knowledge by a process termed 'deduction' (see Figure 1.2).

Figure 1.1: THE FIVE STEPS OF TRADITIONAL RESEARCH

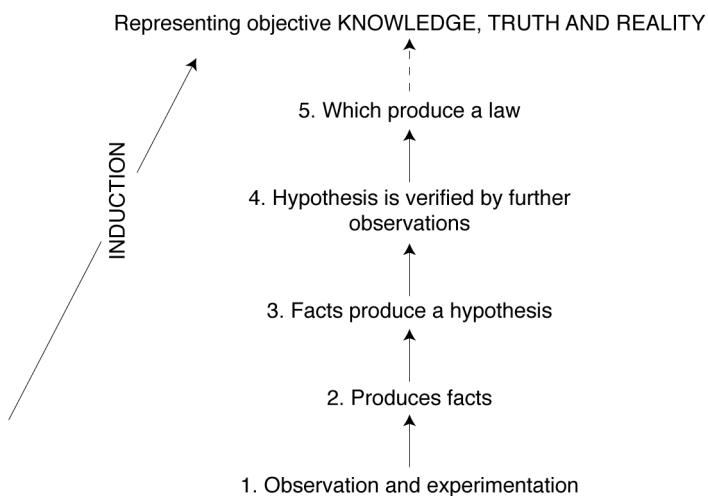


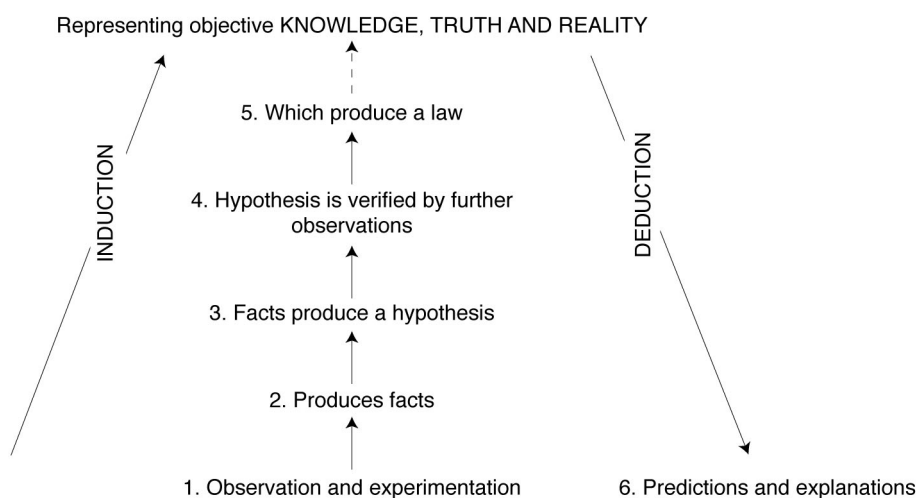
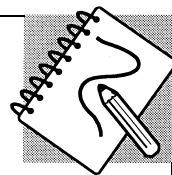
Figure 1.2: THE SIXTH STEP OF TRADITIONAL RESEARCH

Illustration: the positivist tradition of research



If you decide to carry out an inquiry which has the following features:

- ◆ you identify a hypothesis;
- ◆ you use observations to prove your hypothesis;
- ◆ you make use of the facts identified by your proof to identify some sort of objective Knowledge; and
- ◆ you deduce a universally applicable conclusion

then you are clearly operating within a positivist tradition of research, irrespective of whether your work is to be seen as quantitative or qualitative research (or even a mixture of these two approaches).

An example drawn from the English context shows how this tradition might be relied upon to justify practice. Let us assume that after a number of observations of young children successfully learning to read in, say, Singapore, it has been suggested that it is necessary to have highly structured reading hours provided on a daily basis, with equally rigidly structured activities to follow. This hypothesis to explain why it is that Singaporean children read so effectively is then tested by observing as many young Singaporean children's reading lessons as possible, to produce the law that all young children can be taught to read effectively in this way. Given this empirically derived Knowledge it is then but a small matter to deduce the prediction that the reading abilities of young English children will be improved by using these methods. In this way an apparently sound, evidence-based policy decision can then be introduced to the teaching profession.

This tradition has at least three major problems which you need to be aware of, as they will seriously compromise your findings if you do not find ways of addressing them.

Problem 1

The first step in this tradition depends upon observation. But observation itself depends upon what we are interested in observing. That is, we do not approach situations, especially social situations such as those we find in the classroom, free of certain assumptions about their nature. These assumptions allow us to select from the wealth of information that we are presented with only those details that interest us, so we are not observing in some pure, assumption-free manner. Consequently, the kinds of knowledge that we create as we observe social situations are inevitably influenced by the assumptions we bring to bear on the situations we observe and try to make sense of.

Problem 2

Figure 1.1 shows clearly that induction, the move from some to all, underpins the move from singular observations to universally applicable objective Knowledge. Yet the number of observations that are required to justify the move from some to all, from the finite to the infinite, would have to be an infinite number too. As finite creatures ourselves this is clearly impossible. The critical effect of this basic problem on positivism has been described thus: 'That the whole of science . . . should rest

on foundations whose validity it is impossible to demonstrate has been found to be uniquely embarrassing' (Magee, 1973: 21).

Problem 3

Figure 1.2 indicates that deduction, the move from all to some, underpins the move from universally applicable objective Knowledge to the singular application of that Knowledge. The difficulty here is that the crucial distinction between something being *true* and an argument being *valid* is being blurred. Here are two examples of logically valid arguments, valid in that they move from 'all to one' in a logically valid way:

A

1. All books on research methods are boring.
2. This is a book on research methods.
3. Therefore this book is boring.

B

1. All writers on research are female.
2. The author of this chapter is a writer on research.
3. Therefore the author of this chapter (Peter Gilroy) is female.

Step 1 of both arguments are assumptions but only argument B's assumption is demonstrably false. However, that does not prevent argument B's conclusion being valid but untrue. The point here is that even if there were to be universally applicable Knowledge about the social world you have to take very great care in relating it to particular situations, as deduction alone will not guarantee the truth of your conclusions.

We said that you would need to address these three problems if you wanted to work within this positivist tradition. If you do not then you might produce conclusions to your research that assumed that the observations you made were untainted by

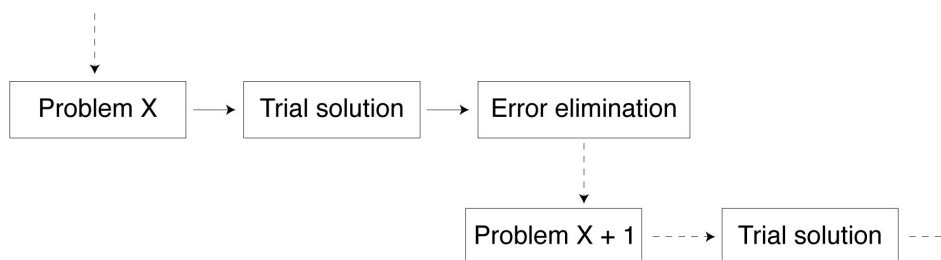
the assumptions you bring to bear to select one set of observations from another. This would have the problem of preventing you seeing that your conclusions were inextricably linked to the assumptions that underpinned the observations you selected as significant. The second problem we have identified makes it clear that you cannot justifiably make a universal generalisation from specific observations, which would clearly influence the way you treated your findings. The third problem suggests that the move from all to some, the reverse of the problem of induction, is one that might be valid but you would still need to test for its truth, irrespective of its validity.

These three problems seem to lead towards a modification of positivism which is so drastic that it in effect represents a rejection of the tradition. The key modification is to reject the attempt to produce universal conclusions and to accept the need to operate at a more specific level of inquiry. We identify this tradition as contextualism, and will now examine its key features.

THE CONTEXTUALIST TRADITION

There are a number of different approaches to educational research that could be accommodated within this broad tradition, but before identifying them we first need to establish the key features of the tradition itself. The central identifying feature of the tradition is its emphasis on context as providing the background to any social inquiry, none more so than educational inquiry.

A key thinker in this area is Karl Popper, who claimed to have solved the problem of induction ‘in 1927, or thereabouts’ (1971: 1). He accepted that it is not possible to justify universal Knowledge by reference to finite observations but, rather, that instead we have to falsify them by testing them to destruction. In addition he accepted that observations are dependent upon the various assumptions made by the person carrying out the observation or, as he put it: ‘Observation is always selective . . . these observations . . . presupposed the adoption of a frame of reference . . . a frame of theories’ (1974: 46–7). He argued that inquiry is caused by recognising that a trial solution that had been offered up for falsification (or error elimination) would eventually produce a further problem that would require error elimination and so on, with the process of inquiry being never ending. Consequently the knowledge that is created is provisional, always the possible object of further attempts to falsify it. This approach is represented in Figure 1.3.

Figure 1.3: THE PROCESS OF INQUIRY

It is Popper's notion of a frame of reference that we term *context* and which provides the basis for the observations that allow for research to begin. It is in this sense that we talk of observations being context dependent. It follows that any conclusions we draw from such observations are also context dependent, as are the application of those conclusions.² So this research tradition emphasises the context-specific nature of all stages of its methodology, from the initial formulation of a particular problem through to whatever tentative and highly provisional conclusions might be produced which are also, of course, context specific.

If we apply this to the example previously identified regarding the use of research on the method used to teach young Singaporean children's reading, we can see immediately the importance of context. For example, if the children's social background was such that they had considerable assistance and support in reading at home, if the Singaporean culture is one that encourages reading in various ways other than those actually observed then these, amongst many other context-specific factors, have been ignored: and that is to leave aside the various complex contexts in England where a straightforward application of the methodology of one context's success to another context or set of contexts might be quite inappropriate.

The drawback to this tradition of research is the difficulty of providing any meaningful generalisations as conclusions to the research. However, from the point of view of a contextualist that is not so much a drawback as a major advantage, for generalisations are part and parcel of the positivist tradition. Another criticism might well be that the conclusions are so specific to a context that they have little or no standard against which to judge their truth, unless you are also part of that context. Again, the contextualist would not see this as a problem but rather as an inevitable aspect of social inquiry, with descriptions of social phenomena accepted as *ringing* true, rather than *being* true.

Teacher-initiated research, which as we shall see is part of teachers' continued professional development, is likely to follow the contextualist tradition. To begin with it is unlikely that many teachers will have the resources to carry out the large-scale surveys or case studies necessary to produce the sheer quantity of data required to allow for some form of research within the positivist tradition. More to the point, Popper's 'problems' and 'error eliminations' are more likely to create further problems within the context of a class or set of classes that a teacher is responsible for. So for both practical and methodological reasons it is likely that teachers will be drawn towards a contextualist tradition once they begin to carry out research.

We now need to examine in a little more detail the practitioner research movement.

Reflecting reflection

Perhaps the first person to argue that teachers, by dint of the fact that they were teachers, were also researchers, was Lawrence Stenhouse. In opposition to those who wished to impose curriculum developments on teachers, with teachers seen as little more than technicians delivering a curriculum 'product' that others had designed, he argued that curriculum development was a process whereby teachers translated their educational values into practice. It follows that curriculum development (which, of course, includes teaching a particular curriculum) is a form of research, with teachers researching their own practice so as to come to a better understanding of the values they are relying on to inform and improve that practice.

Although not referring to Stenhouse directly or, for that matter, to teachers in any detail, an American thinker, Donald Schön, has been seen as developing these ideas further. The key concept he introduced into educational debate was that of the reflective practitioner, with 'practitioner' being used to include a very wide range of professions, including architects, psychotherapists and lawyers. His arguments for the way in which these professions develop their practitioners have been used by many in teacher education to explain what they regard as the key feature of being a teacher, namely reflection on practice. Indeed, it would be an unusual course which nowadays did not at some point make mention of reflection or reflective practice. But what is meant by reflective practice and how does it connect to the teacher as researcher?

Schön introduces his seminal work, *The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think in Action*, by stating that the book is an ‘exploration of professional knowledge’ (1983: vii). He continues by setting up a straightforward distinction between two accounts of what he calls professional knowledge. The first he terms Technical Rationality and he argues that, for various reasons, such an approach to accounting for professional knowledge should be rejected, not least because it cannot account for the ‘artistic, intuitive processes which some practitioners do bring to situations of uncertainty, instability, uniqueness and value conflict’ (1983: 49).

The second is a form of knowledge which he terms Reflection-in-Action. Schön argues that in everyday life we have a tacit knowledge of aspects of our behaviour and this is revealed by the rule-governed way in which we act. This ‘knowing as revealed by actions’ is often quite spontaneous and the actors concerned are usually unaware of it (1983: 54). Part of what it is to be a good practitioner is to be able to bring this tacit knowledge to the surface by a process called reflection-in-action, by thinking through one’s actions as one is producing them in the thick of one’s professional situation. This behaviour, reflecting critically on one’s actions whilst at the same time acting, is what he identifies as reflective practice.

There has been much discussion around Schön’s work (see, for example, Gilroy, 1993; Newman, 1999) but in the context of this chapter it should readily be seen that it can easily be assimilated to what we have termed the contextualist tradition. The reflective practitioner is by definition a researcher, researching not just their own professional context but, crucially, researching that context as they act within it. Moreover, they may be doing this at a tacit level without realising that they are adjusting their behaviour to accommodate the complex situations they are acting within. It is in this sense that such individuals are researchers, researching their everyday practice *as* they practise.

In Schön’s terms, our book is intended to provide the understanding and tools which will help to improve your reflective practice, by allowing you to see how you might (consciously) critically reflect on your (subconscious) reflections. In so doing you will, with Stenhouse, be behaving as a teacher researcher.