

the account of the original incident (anonymously) to four people who, in different ways, were responsible for John's teaching, all but one (who made no comment) blamed John, as indeed he himself did. In a very real sense, however, such teaching has very little to do with the actual teacher, but is caused by other people, elsewhere. In Australia at any rate, most primary school teachers will not have studied mathematics beyond the minimum school-leaving age, and they will have been given less than one hundred hours' preparation for teaching the subject by their tertiary institution which will, however, certify them to teach it for life. Then, as in this case, the teachers' employers will have done nothing to further educate them either in terms of their own understanding of mathematics or in how best to teach it. Both groups will, however, happily blame John for failing to understand things that they have effectively prevented him from learning.⁶

Returning to the main theme, then, these last examples demonstrate two important points: first they provide instances of the kind of problems that arise when the previous two types of practice-to-knowledge relationship are absent. Detailed diagnosis of the phenomena was not occurring, and because nothing in the normal teaching-learning process overtly indicated that some kind of reflection was required, the practice did not become a matter for professional judgement, and the effects for the clients and society were not recognised. Second, teachers are not solely to blame: given the kind and amount of professional training that most teachers have had, to expect the outcomes of their mathematics teaching to be anything other than a reproduction of their own school experience, is absurd. It is quite unrealistic to expect them to either know about the problem or to be able to recognise it. The teachers are but the last in a line of responsibility, and their very lack of opportunity to know more about the matter makes them the least culpable.

Critical judgement

Thus far I have illustrated three kinds of professional judgement in teaching. The first is an instant and practical kind by which experienced and skilful teachers make the majority of their teaching decisions. The second, diagnosis, produces an explanation of the first, and leads to a conscious understanding of the nature and effects of the practical decisions made. These first two I have termed practical judgement for doing and diagnostic judgement for understanding. The outcome of the third kind of judgement, termed 'reflective', is rather different, however. It involves a more subjective evaluation of the incident and is most common when the teacher knows there are no obvious 'right answers' about how to act. I have suggested that all teachers who learn from experience become expert at practical judgement; that those who are also concerned and feeling people naturally reflect; but that very few teachers perform the kind of analysis necessary for a diagnostic judgement.

I now want to move on to a fourth kind of professional judgement which involves both a reflective critical attitude and the gathering of diagnostic information about professional practices through more formal and interventional research

strategies. It is well-illustrated in the following example which is based on an extract from a teacher's professional critical incident research file. The beginning action research on tale-telling.

Incident 57: Tale-telling

(*In my class*) Eleven boys and five girls were today's 'tale-tell' noticed that by far the most children approached me. The aide had action and the school experience student two.

Why? Are the children already so aware of authority figures? perceive the different role of a teacher from an aide? ... Does the s come to all three of us, or do certain children find it easier to int certain adults? If a child does go to all three of us, why? ... Is it jus seeking, or are there other causal factors?

The person writing was a very competent and experienced primary school Tale-telling was not something she was overly concerned about, but h accepted as a normal feature of classroom interaction with children at But the entry demonstrates teacher professionalism, in a number of w that she wondered about the nature and function of tale-telling in class the result of further professional study, which meant that she was n repeating the same strategies year after year, but was constantly seeking and improve her professional knowledge. Second, she could look se such a relatively minor aspect of her teaching only because all the more things were already being handled extremely well; she was at the stage of her performance. Third, she was not basing judgements on casual impres intuitions, but had methodically set about collecting data on the phenom she was dealing with. And fourth, she formed a number of specific h from the data which she could use to direct further investigation. So o entry shows her approach to be dedicated and scientific, both of which a tant features of doing a skilled job professionally.

This teacher's critical incidents also demonstrate a level of profes considerably beyond the practical. First, although certain kinds of freq tale-telling may cause annoyance, it is by no means clear that tale-t problem as such: it may just be an integral and necessary part of socia ment which, like children's addiction to cartoons at certain ages, is grown through to more adult behaviour. Whether it is a problem or n almost entirely upon one's knowledge of social development and con acceptable behaviour. Whether one knows something or not is the r stalling process; but judgements about socially acceptable behaviour a of a teacher's professional value system, and the 'correctness' of the ch are led to make about what action to take will be judged according to th and not according to any purely technical standards about what might b 'right answer'. In terms of the complexity and necessity for judgement,

matter this teacher is dealing with is much more like a legal or medical problem than a mechanical one.

Second, it is also a professional matter in terms of the consequences for the clients. I pointed out that more boys than girls seemed to be telling tales. She wondered what had happened because it was usually the girls who told more tales. She collected more data and then wrote:

Incident 58: Boys' gossip

I was actually surprised to find that the boys were the main tale tellers. I mentioned it to the aide that, 'One day sixteen children told tales, and fifteen of them were . . .', and she filled in, 'girls', for me. That made me wonder if other people thought that girls told more tales than boys, like I used to. So I spoke about my findings to five other colleagues and my husband, and everyone assumed that it was the girls who were the tale tellers . . . (Gender-based) negative assumptions and expectations are made of both sexes. Not until the conditioning (that results from these assumptions) is dispelled, will each person be able to function to their full human potential (and be) equally acceptable.

Here we can see that the matter is not simply a relatively minor technical aspect of interaction management within a classroom, but is integral with the broader context of the social construction of gender roles and expectations which will have great influence throughout her students' lives.

Tale-telling is considered by most people to be childish and unnecessary. But it is in fact quite a complicated functional process, and cannot be dismissed merely as the unnecessary bothering of public authority with trivial private concerns. Tale-telling is used competitively to gain individual advantage over peers, both by drawing attention to the shortcomings of others, and by demonstrating the extent of the tale-teller's compliance to the authority. That boys told more tales than girls in that class, suggests that there was more competition amongst the boys; but more important, the adults' perception that girls told more tales is a gendered judgement: girls tell tales, but boys report incidents. Such judgements about children mature into judgements about adults, such as that women gossip but men discuss. So two important factors can be seen here: one, if gossip and tale-telling are disapproved, so girls' discussions and reports, because they are labelled gossip and tale-telling, will be disapproved; and two, we know that people tend to do what others expect of them, so girls will feel that it's alright for them to engage in behaviour that will be labelled gossip and tale-telling. The longer term outcomes are obvious: if girls learn to see themselves as people who gossip and tell tales rather than as people who discuss and report, then they will tend to do the former rather than the latter, thus developing quite the wrong skills, attitudes and self-images for the competitive world of the workplace. So what is actually happening here is that girls are being taught to perform according to a gendered label. In this

matter, then, the consequences are again of a kind more akin to the effects of and medical practice than of more purely technical jobs.

Flowing from the last point, this incident reveals the nature of professional judgement in teaching in a deeper way. Even when this teacher appears to follow a technical routine, she recognises how it is actually herself, as one acts upon her own personal attitudes, beliefs and expectations in her classroom who cultivates the attitudes and expectations that have such far-reaching consequences for the students. She is prepared for self-criticism of a kind which re-enters right into her consciousness, a very different process from the kind of self-control expected of other than professional occupations. Furthermore, in writing a professional critical incident research file to document, explore and question action and values, she is being professional in her critique of her professional consciousness and judgements.

Conclusion

To summarise the substantive issue of this chapter, I have suggested that four kinds of judgement are necessary to professional teaching.

- 1 *Practical judgement* which is the basis of every action taken in the conduct of teaching, and the majority of which is made instantly.
- 2 *Diagnostic judgement* which involves using profession-specific knowledge and academic expertise to recognise, describe, understand and explain and interpret practical judgements.
- 3 *Reflective judgement* which concerns more personal and moral judgement involving the identification, description, exploration and justification of the judgements made and values implicit and espoused in practical (teaching) decisions and their explanations.
- 4 *Critical judgement*, which, through formal investigation, involves challenge to and evaluation of the judgements and values revealed by reflection.

Contrary to the logic of the way in which I have presented them, personal experience suggests that these kinds of judgement are not necessarily successively dependent, though I think they ought to be. The majority of teachers I have encountered who do think about their practice, do not work much, if at all, through analysis, especially diagnosis; rather they tend to make practical and reflective judgements. It would seem important, however, that each kind of judgement should be deployed upon the judgement produced by the previous form; in particular, the outcomes of reflection on practice greatly depend upon how the practice is explained and interpreted. So it seems to me that these forms should be sequentially employed.

This must not be taken to mean that these kinds of judgement are hierarchic in terms of their importance. Although critical judgement may, in some senses, be regarded as a further professional activity to practical, it is also the antithesis

experience and routine, and as such it inhibits the normal transactions essential to effective teaching. One can become too critically minded to be of any practical use. Mastery and use of the methods of analysis for all four kinds of judgement are therefore essential to professional teaching.

Because I am more concerned in this chapter to open up realistic possibilities for the future of teaching than I am to merely describe the nature of judgements in teaching and to theorise the idea of professionalism, it is necessary to raise two important questions. I have suggested that, though most teachers expertly make practical judgements and are frequently reflective, they generally are not able to make either diagnostic or critical judgements. So first, do teachers really require the ability to employ all four kinds of judgement? And second, if they do, how can teachers develop those aspects of the professionalism of their practice? I have tried to answer the first in this chapter by showing how an adherence to practical judgement (and/or the inability to use any other) leads (in very subtle ways) to a serious lack of provision for children's (and hence society's) longer-term well-being. The answer to the second of these questions is fortunately the topic of a huge literature and the subject of several important national inquiries, but it appears to me that in the first instance responsibility lies with the academics who teach teachers and perform educational research.

The point is that if the specific examples and general theory of professional judgement that I have outlined are only partially correct, then some things must have prevented teachers from developing them and being regarded as members of an autonomous major profession. The problem is, I think, historical. The way in which education has been institutionalised in universities has created a divided profession. Differences between the agendas of teachers and educational researchers had led to the production of knowledge that is not only of more use to those who control teachers than to teachers themselves, but has also reflected teachers badly. How this has come about and what might be done about it are pressing questions which are dealt with in the next chapter, the Conclusion. In this chapter I hope to have shown how the analysis of critical incidents can be used to demonstrate three key aspects of teacher professionalism: (a) the kind of professional skills and knowledge currently possessed by teachers; (b) the kind of skills and knowledge that they need to acquire; and (c) the importance of the consequences of teachers' professional judgements for the lifelong well-being of children.

Conclusion

In this book I have critical incidents to show that basic practical competence is a necessary but not sufficient condition for a professional approach to teaching. The previous chapter I argued that quality in teaching lies in teachers' ability to recognise the need for professional judgement and the kind of judgements to make. And in outlining that theory of professionalism I stressed that the judgements teachers make come more from their understanding of the situation than from any set of teaching procedures that they may follow. I do not much deal with what I meant by 'who we are', so here I want to go on to show that what professional judgements we make depends on the interaction of aspects of being a teacher: who we are as private people, and who we are as trained and experienced teachers. On the one hand we each have an individual unique set of experiences, interests, values, circumstances and such, that give us the kind of person we are; and on the other we subscribe in various ways and to certain degrees to a common set of professional norms that make up the kind of teacher we are.

At a time when teachers are being more rigorously assessed on ever narrower observable criteria, who we are and what we know come to assume a new importance. Who we are as a person will produce quite different outcomes from what appears at first to be the same teaching technique, such as 'rewarding with verbal praise'. And differences in what we know about teaching will make us different teachers who will make quite different judgements about the same things. One can imagine serious conflict occurring when teachers are told there is one best way to organise a class, for instance. It may not fit with their professional experience, but they will have to comply if they cannot articulate a critique and defend an alternative. One of the best ways of justifying and explaining practice that is open to teachers is through anecdote: carefully observed and analysed critical incidents can communicate their aims and achievements better than many other kinds of evaluation. Let us now look at how critical incidents can enable us to understand how our personal views and experiences influence our teaching; and why it is important for teachers to begin to develop their own theories of their work.

The importance of who we are

I began this book with a contrast between a novice and an experienced teacher, making the point that the latter was professionally competent in a way that the former was not. I would like to conclude with another contrast, this time between two equally competent teachers who were achieving different outcomes because of who they were. It is a brief account of a kind of double facilitation: I was supervising the higher degree work of Jeff, a Deputy Principal, who was facilitating the professional development of two teachers new to his school. One was just beginning her second year of teaching, the other her sixth. Both were thoughtful, well-organised and conscientious teachers. The school was in a remote outback mining town and so included a number of Aboriginal students from the surrounding bush. The more experienced teacher had taught Aboriginal children in a similar context for the past five years.

Part of the role of the Deputy Principal in a Western Australian primary school is to keep the roll and chase up absentees. In doing this duty Jeff noticed that one teacher's class consistently had a higher Aboriginal absentee rate than the other. Jeff had observed both teachers' classes on a number of occasions, and occasionally taught them. He thought he could detect a 'difference in feeling' between the two, and he preferred the climate of the low absentee class. But he was not aware of anything specific that would explain the difference, so he asked the teachers what they thought was causing the absences of the Aborigines in their classes. Every reason produced by both teachers had to do with the children's home backgrounds; neither mentioned anything about what happened to them in school.

Jeff decided to record some incidents in both classes. The first thing he noticed in the high absentee class was that a succession of questions was directed towards a single group of students which, it turned out, were all (white and) the highest achievers. Comparing this with the low absentee class he found the questions were very widely distributed so that he could detect no colour, ability or gender bias. He also noticed that in the high absentee class the children were for most of the time seated in ability groups, whereas in the low absentee class the children sat in rows all facing the front of the class for their 'desk work', and for discussions and whole class activities the children came to the front and sat on the mat; there were no set groups. He saw that this meant that who was doing well was clearly demonstrated in the high absentee class.

Jeff wondered if this was important and so decided to look at how differences in performance were treated in the classes. As both teachers used verbal praise as reward, he concentrated on this, recording the following exchange between the low absentee class teacher (Lat) and Jake, an Aboriginal child:

Incident 59: Verbal praise 1

Teacher: Oh! What a good effort Jake has put in. He has shown me he is improving. Can you show the class your work Jake, please?

Jake: Yes Miss L. (*Very proudly shows his work to the whole class*)

Tara: (*After seeing Jake's work*) I've improved too Miss L!

Teacher: (*Takes a look at Tara's work*) Yes Tara, you have improved well. I will be coming round to see all your work and I will looking for all the people who have improved. Now see if you improve as you finish off.

Jeff then looked at the high absentee class teacher to see what she did in a similar situation:

Incident 60: Verbal praise 2

Teacher: (*Speaking loudly to the whole class*) Marcus has done some good work. Isn't it nice to see Marcus trying hard?

(*The class look up from their work, look at Marcus and continue back to their work.*)

Teacher: (*A little quieter*) Well Marcus, it's good to see you've tried, but you will have to try harder if you are going to be the best.

Jeff analysed these in some detail, concluding that the differences were that the low absentee class teacher was singling out the child's work as well as the child's approval, and doing so in a way that included everyone in the class. On the other hand, the high absentee class teacher was only singling out the child and doing in a way that produced a competition which everyone but one must lose. Jeff then followed up these ideas of sharing and competing in his next observations.

Incident 61: Storywriting 1

Morning news. Merline (an Aboriginal child) is asked to tell the group what she did at the week-end. 'Nothing', she replied. The teacher then asked, 'But did you go hunting or out bush with your family?' and Merline shyly replied 'Yes'. 'Well can you tell the class what they shot, what you found to eat?' Merline seeing that the teacher was interested in her experience began to tell an expansive and detailed account of a highly successful hunting trip that held the attention of the whole class. Merline clearly relished the role of story-teller which she had an appreciative audience, and, exhilarated by the experience wrote some of the story in her diary, showing a general improvement in her work.

Again Jeff found a contrast in the high absentee class:

Incident 62: Storywriting 2

Teacher: (*To the whole class*) What shall we start our story with? (*Several children call out suggestions*) How shall we start our story? Hands up, please. Yes, Marcia. (*Marcia is an Aboriginal girl who*

seldom participates in whole group activities) It's lovely to see your hand up.

Marcia: Bubbles, yeah, bubbles, we made bubbles and they popped.

Teacher: Yes, Marcia, we made bubbles, but how did we start? Hands up please. Yes Jane. (*A girl from the top group*) All listen to Jane please.

Jane: We went outside to make bubbles. We took some wire and some detergent.

(*The teacher then wrote Jane's contribution on the board for everyone to copy.*)

Jeff's analysis of these incidents showed very clearly how the 'difference in feeling' was being generated. It had to do with how the two teachers regarded the culture of the Aboriginal children. It could not be reduced to general competencies, for both teachers handled their records, the setting and marking of work, time on task, the noise level, discipline, coverage of the curriculum, and so on, with similar expertise. And in terms of other competencies they were similarly praising and encouraging participation; as laid out in the syllabus the high absentee class teacher was even competently modelling the kind of language children are expected to use in a report. The difference lay rather in the teachers' expectations and attitudes to the children's performance and contributions; what they valued and how they felt about them in fact.

The more experienced teacher had spent some time with Aboriginals and had a sympathetic understanding of their culture: she was more 'laid-back' and had naturally developed a 'sharing' atmosphere in which all children could participate from their own experience in their own terms. She persisted with getting Merline to tell a story because she interpreted 'Nothing' as indicating reluctance rather than literally nothing. In a subsequent interview the low absentee class teacher spoke of her belief in the importance of getting Aboriginal children to bring their culture and experiences out in the classroom. In contrast, the high absentee class teacher had a much more formal approach, partly because she felt she needed to retain more control of the class, but also because she believed that a major purpose of school was to enable Aboriginal children to assimilate and achieve in the terms of the dominant school culture. For that reason she accepted Marcia's contribution as true, but not as the way it needed to be expressed.

In some ways, then, what both of these teachers were doing was 'good practice' for which they had good reasons. But it was not an easy situation. All teachers experience difficulty balancing conflicting cultural values in class, whether they are due to differences in race or language, class or gender. The difference here lay in the teachers' view of what was good practice and the extent to which the children were expected to conform to it. One teacher tended to incorporate the Aboriginal children's experiences and values into her class because that was how those children were; the other tended to exclude them because how those children were was not how they were supposed to be in class. Thus the teachers acted differently because of who they were: they had had different experiences in life,

and so interpreted similar things differently. What the children had to say meant different things to them.

Those differences in the teachers' being and value could only be revealed explained by interpreting what they did in their classes. Once a number of such incidents had been compared and analysed, both could see and understand the way each regarded the culture of her Aboriginal children was informing professional judgement. It was then possible for the teachers to decide if and how they would change their views and how a changed view would change their classroom practices.

Theory, practice and professional judgement

In one way or another, professional judgement is always based on theory, whether it is a teacher's 'theory-in-use' or their 'espoused theory' (Argyris 1980). The basis of scientific theory is the empirical world, and the empirical world teachers is their practice. If teachers' professional judgement is to be scientific then one must have theories of practice. Unfortunately, in teaching, theory and practice are all too often dichotomised. This is not a single dichotomy produced just by the well-recognised conceptual barriers that exist between the realms of classroom practice and the theories that are said to inform and explain it. Theorists and practice are also dichotomised by well-organised social barriers such as those between the people concerned, between school teachers and university academics. These social barriers are institutionalised in many ways, particularly in differing interests and work practices. Over the past decade I have worked on these social barriers because they appear to be more immediately tractable and amenable to change than the conceptual gaps between theory and practice, different theories and different practices. I have tried to take on teachers' interests in the practica and to mesh our work through collaboration. The interesting and hopeful thing to have come out of this attempt is that the conceptual dichotomies appear to be produced by the social, for when one deals with the social barriers between practitioners and theoreticians, the conceptual dichotomies seem also to disappear.

The reason for this is that a conceptual theory-practice gap is frequently caused by attempts to apply theory generated elsewhere (in psychology or sociology, for instance) to teaching. When one works the other way round, when one becomes involved in theorising teachers' experiences, this gap always disappears. One cannot chant the old saw that, 'It's all very well in theory but it will not work in practice' when the theory is an attempt to explain what is working in practice. How can there be a theory-practice gap when one is constructing theory of the practice? Yet very little educational theory has yet been constructed in this way: most 'educational' theory has in fact been produced in what are often mistakenly called the 'foundational' disciplines of education. A number of problems have resulted.

An idea such as 'motivation', for instance, has tended to be dealt with in strictly psychological terms, such as a concern with an 'intrinsic/extrinsic' distinction. Unfortunately, psychological concerns on their own are inappropriate to teaching

because teachers actually teach a set curriculum in a social group, which means that they are always dealing with motivation in terms of getting a group of students to do particular things (see Egan 1983). It is not much help to a teacher with a class of differently motivated students, that research on motivation has demonstrated that extrinsic rewards can lead to intrinsic motivation, but that using extrinsic rewards with intrinsically motivated students can lower their motivation. Teachers already know from experience that the difficult part is usually getting students to start and finish work, so their concerns are rather how to stimulate and maintain interest. If one were beginning with teachers' classroom experiences, then one would perhaps work on a theory of interest that includes social relations, the nature and substance of the task, and students' interests.

This suggests that what is often perceived as a gap between the application of a theory and practice is actually a gap between different theories, between the theory of researchers and the theory of teachers. This can be illustrated by the way in which educators can blame teachers for not implementing Piaget's idea of the construction of knowledge. Piaget's constructivist ideas are usually given to teachers with the idea that young children are less logical than adults; indeed, I have heard it said that because they are at Piaget's 'concrete operations' stage they cannot yet think abstractly. Teachers' experience tells them that children can think highly abstractly and are ruthless logicians, on which knowledge they have constructed their own theory of what children can do and why. The theory-practice gap in this case is a theory-theory gap. I have tried to summarise this in Figure 4.

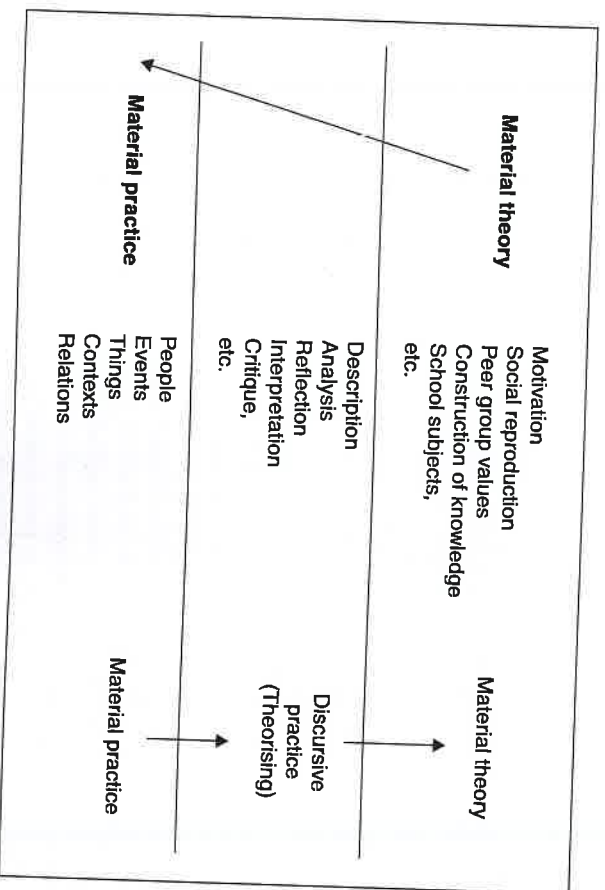


Figure 4 Theory and practice.

On the left we have a representation of what tends to happen in the traditional teacher education model where teachers are taught the theories of the 'foundation' disciplines in universities. Attempts to get teachers to apply theories taken out of their context in other disciplines to their work usually fail because they do not either engage teacher's practice or develop in teachers the discursive practices necessary to translate from theory to practice. On the right is the critical incident approach which begins with material practice and creates theories through involving teachers in the processes of theorising. This is a 'grounded theory' approach (Glaser and Strauss 1967) in which incidents from teachers' practice are theorised.

The importance of all of this is that teachers suffer professionally because their professional judgements are often misjudged. In some situations their judgements are said to be misinformed because they do not use academics' 'educational' theories to form them: in others their judgements go unrecognised because what they are judging is not part of a formally articulated and researched theory. In this situation teachers are effectively denied the expertise of academics in improving their judgements. One way to improve this state of affairs is through the construction, documentation and theorisation of critical incidents. The approach enables teachers and academics to work collaboratively on teachers' experiences rendered material as accounts of classroom incidents.

A collaborative approach to critical incidents

There are many different forms of collaboration, so it is important to lay out what I consider to be the basis of the working agreement between an academic and a teacher. At the time of writing the agreement involves the following:

- 1 A shared commitment to the necessity for the research.
- 2 A research agenda consisting of topics of mutual concern.
- 3 Equally shared control over the research processes.
- 4 Outcomes that are of equal value to all participants in professional terms.
- 5 Using 'fairness' to inform matters of justice amongst participants.

The model I am currently using for working on critical incidents with teachers involves the use of teacher-written incidents which I regard as essential to set the research agenda and ensure that the teachers are the principal audience for the research. It is a method derived from an action research approach that is common to most kinds of reflective teaching, with a slightly different cycle for analysis and theorisation. The first cycle is principally for the teacher and the other principally for the researcher. The moment of analysis in which the two cycles overlap, is where the majority of collaboration takes place.

Considering the two cycles separately first, the teacher's cycle is the traditional action research cycle as suggested by Lewin (1946). It consists of initial observation of current practice, analysis of the observational data, planning change

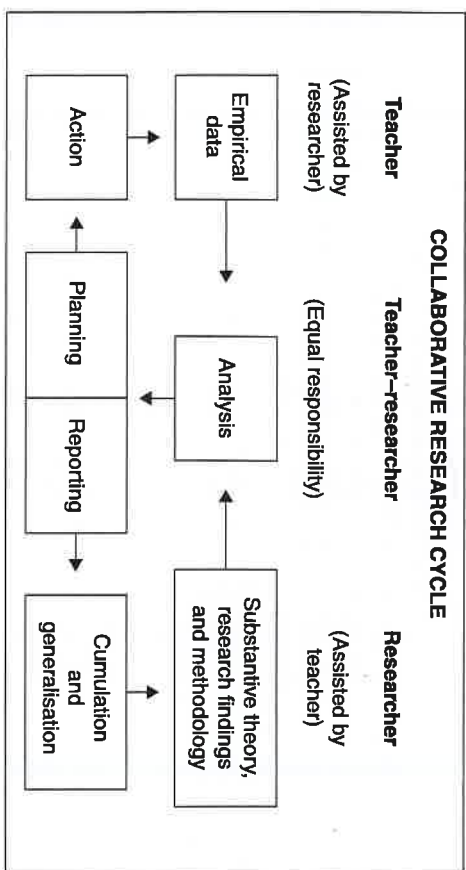


Figure 5 A model for collaborative action research.

practice, implementation, observation of the new practice . . . etc. It is that over which the teacher, being the practitioner, has to have control. On the other hand, the research's cycle consists of using analytic procedures and knowledge of theory in the interpretation of the data, documentation of the whole teachers' cycle, and then cumulation and verification towards the development of grounded theory.

In this approach, collaboration in terms of equality of input is probably at its strongest in the moment of analysis. Although collaboration means that the value for both parties should be mutual and symmetrical, it does not mean that they have to contribute in the same way, or gain the same outcome. Indeed, it is the very differences between contributions and expectations that make collaboration so strong methodologically. It allows for either researcher or teacher to generate an analysis, and the other party to critique and verify it. Thus whilst the researcher draws upon their specialist knowledge of existing theories and analytics for one explanation of the data, the teacher draws upon other relevant experience and their critical judgement in a process of case-to-case generalisation to produce another kind of analysis. This can be shown in a third variation of Figure 4 (see Figure 6).

The difference here is that there is now a two-way interaction between existing theories and teachers' practice as what the academic already knows is brought to bear upon the teaching incidents. This process has been present in most of the critical incident analyses in this book (e.g. correspondence theory in Incident 7: *Finishing work*), but an extended example, where I used theories of communicative competence to explain an incident, is to be found in Tripp 1987.

The other phases of the model are more co-operative than collaborative: one or other party has to have the final say because they must take responsibility for the

consequences. In the planning moment, for instance, the teacher must have the authority to decide what to do, because it is they who have to enact the plan in their classroom. Ideally, they should be able to generate the plan together, but ultimately the researcher is but the teacher's critical friend: they can only make suggestions, offer advice and alternatives, and act as a sounding board for ideas. In the observation moment, however, the researcher can act as a second or outside observer for the teacher.

The professional critical incident research file is crucial to the data moment in this model, and both teacher and researcher have equally important but different roles to play in it. Critical incident research files are a good way of enabling practitioners to set the collaborative research agenda because, though it is teachers' choice of what items to record in their critical incident research file experienced critical friends and trained researchers are also necessary in the process if the teacher is to avoid the effects of minimisation, denial and delusion which threaten all forms of self-reflection (Mellody 1989: 129–33). So it is in the data and analysis moments that collaboration is most clearly realised: far from excluding teachers from the choice of the research question and casting them the research object of an outside 'professional' researcher, teachers make their own choices and are active, self-reflective researchers into their own practice situation.

For the researcher, the teacher's interpretation of the data and experiences the teacher's critical friend provide the data that they then use in their research

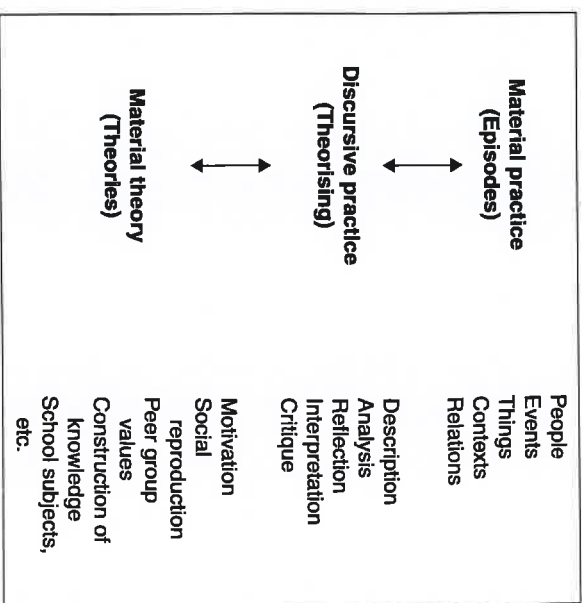


Figure 6 Theory-practice process with teacher-researcher in collaboration.

But what they do with that data, the conclusions they draw from it and the theories they build, are similarly open to the critique of the teacher. Thus the teacher might draw the researcher's attention to further or counter-instances of a particular phenomenon which the researcher must either incorporate into a theoretical framework which is broader than the original data, or treat the instances differently. In this way the learning is symmetrical (the teacher learns as much as the researcher), but the substantive outcomes are quite different: the teacher's gains are principally in the form of improved practices and understanding of their own teaching, whilst the researcher gains data for theorising schooling and teacher's practical knowledge. It is in terms of those outcomes and the processes by which they are achieved that this form of research is collaborative.¹

To summarise the approach, I believe the collaborative model is one where teachers can make their own choices and are active researchers and self-reflective interpreters of their own practice and situation. For the outside researcher, working collaboratively means that the teacher's experiences in those roles are the research data, so the overall substantive outcomes are markedly different: the teacher's gains are principally in the form of improved practices and understanding of their teaching, whilst the researcher gains data for theorising schooling and teacher's practical knowledge. It is in terms of those outcomes and the processes by which they are achieved that the nature of the research must be determined. Collaborative research in the classroom thus takes place between two consenting but somewhat schizophrenic professionals who share a common bond: a teacher-researcher and a researcher-teacher educator.

The task ahead

The main task suggested by this book is to enable teachers to develop the scope of and their expertise in professional judgement. The critical incident approach leading from practice through diagnosis and reflection to critical interpretation is but one way in which this could be done. And as an advocate of the kind of diagnostic teaching produced by the examination of critical incidents, I am necessarily involved in the attempt to develop the approach by improving the methods, producing more and better quality examples, telling others about it, and so on. But behind these efforts lies an agenda for why one should use a diagnostic method rather than any other, such as reflective teaching.

One compelling reason for using critical incidents is that the conditions under which teachers work and are educated and certified are rapidly changing. What many teacher-educators see as two major threats to the quality of their work have recently appeared. One is the general move towards specifying professional teaching behaviour in terms of the competencies required, and the other is the particularly British and Australian move to remove teacher education students from tertiary institutions, requiring them to spend up to 80 per cent of their preparation time working in schools. Under present structures this is likely to lead to a cycle of reproduction in which purely practical competencies would dominate,

further deprofessionalising teaching. But using critical incidents in some of the ways advocated here could actually turn both of these moves to advantage. The minimum practical competencies necessary to professional teaching may perhaps best be learned from expert practitioners in the reality of the job situation. But as merely practical competencies are insufficient for professional practice, the creation and analysis of critical incidents is a good way to develop the equally necessary skills of informed professional judgement.

In the longer term a more important reason for teacher and academic collaboration in critical incidents has to do with the nature and politics of knowledge in education, whose and what kind of purposes that knowledge best serves. As I wrote right at the start of this book, it was only when I recognised the fact that I had been very successful in the classroom when I was very ignorant of what academics considered knowledge essential to teaching, that I became aware of the difference between the knowledge of academics and the knowledge of teachers. It has since become clear that most academic educational knowledge is of very little use to teachers and that teachers' knowledge and understanding of their practice is seriously under-represented and discounted in the university discipline of education. This difference has created and maintained deep divisions between teachers and academics and so between practice and theory which I believe are primarily responsible for the under-valuing of school teaching. I see critical incidents as a particularly effective way of redressing these imbalances.

In contrast to the dominant form of academic educational knowledge, the knowledge gained from critical incidents is deeply contextualised in the culture of classrooms and the actions and values of teachers. Not only is it both immediate and real for teachers, but it explains teaching from their point of view. Thus the interpretation of critical incidents offers a way to involve teachers as both clients and partners in research on the understanding and improvement of their practice. It appears to me that the most promising means of improving teaching is by grounding educational research (and thus theory) in the realities of teachers' everyday experience. Overall, I believe that an approach based on the interpretation of critical incidents has the potential to change the nature of the teaching profession by dealing with the fundamental practical, political and epistemological problems of education in teachers' terms.

