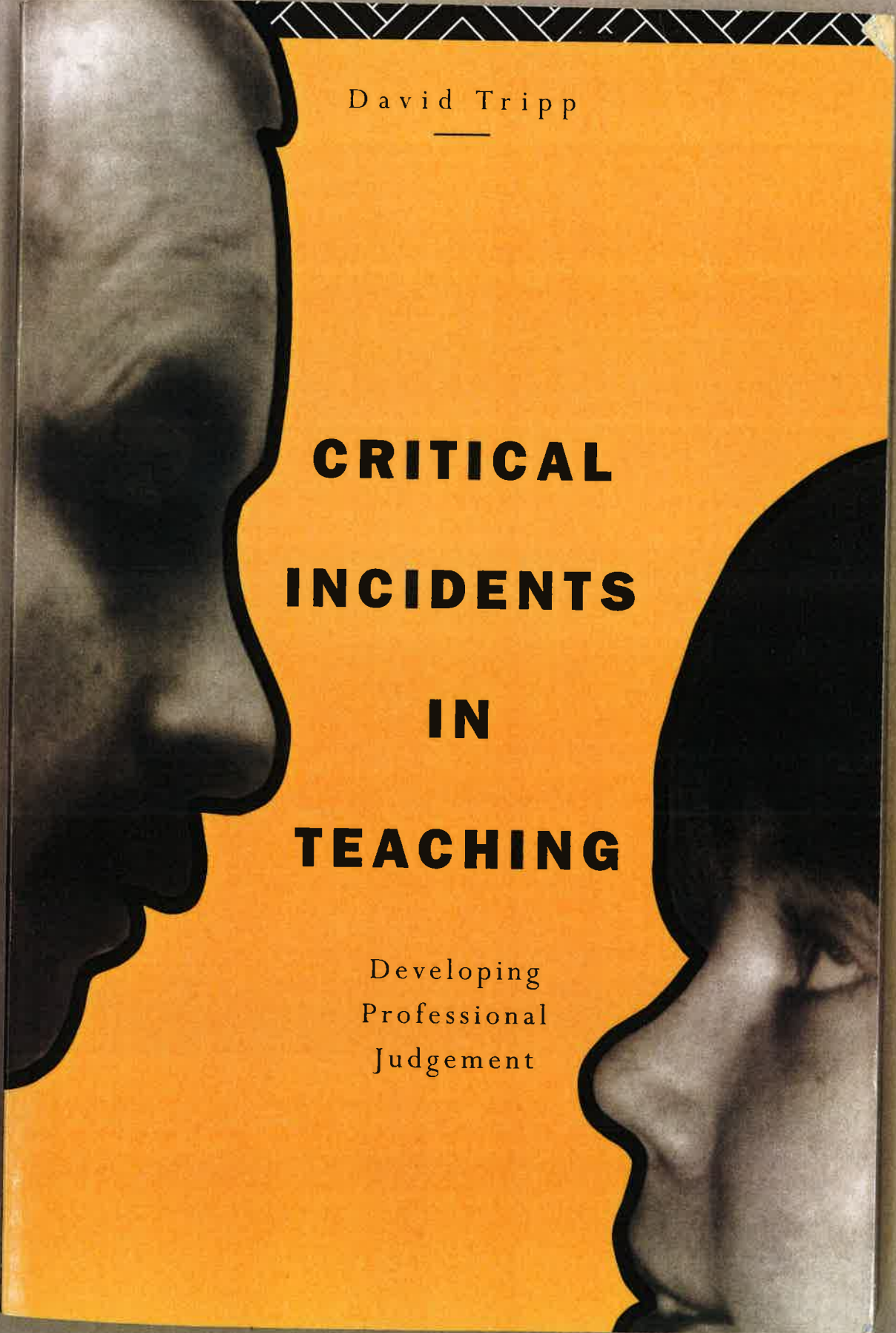


The book cover features a bright orange background. On the left and right sides, there are black and white photographs of human faces in profile, facing each other. The faces are partially cut off by the edges of the cover. A decorative black and white geometric pattern is visible at the top edge.

David Tripp

**CRITICAL
INCIDENTS
IN
TEACHING**

Developing
Professional
Judgement

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can analyse their practice in a scholarly and academic fashion to produce expert interpretations upon which to base and justify their professional judgements.

That ideal and the method of achieving it outlined in this book are, I believe, particularly valuable in regard to two important and rapidly developing trends: the attempt to specify good teaching in terms of a set of observable competencies, and the move towards the removal of teacher education from universities to re-site it in schools. Unless this is to produce a form of straight apprenticeship training, teacher-educators have to find new ways to teach in school situations the professional academic knowledge that has hitherto been taught on campuses. Working in an academic fashion with novice and experienced teachers to understand their everyday working experience is clearly one way to turn to advantage the increased time spent in schools.

CRITICAL INCIDENTS

People often ask what a critical incident is and how to recognise one. The answer is, of course, that critical incidents are not 'things' which exist independently of an observer and are awaiting discovery like gold nuggets or desert islands, but like all data, critical incidents are created. Incidents happen, but critical incidents are produced by the way we look at a situation: a critical incident is an interpretation of the significance of an event. To take something as a critical incident is a value judgement we make, and the basis of that judgement is the significance we attach to the meaning of the incident. This is dealt with in detail in Chapter 2; for now, let us analyse another example to show what makes it critical.

In principle, we can read any and everything that happens in a critical fashion. Often the events we notice and remember are just routine things we feel good or unhappy about, or things that amuse us, like this one.

Incident 3: The horse butterfly

The teacher had just completed a fairly clear lesson on insects, their characteristics, etc. She then chose individual children to move about like an insect of their choice, and about six of the children hopped and wriggled around. One of the children who had not been chosen to perform, frantically waved his hand to attract the teacher's attention, but the teacher did not choose him. She then went to her desk and picked up a painted butterfly and started to explain how she wanted the children to make one like it. The boy said in a loud voice, 'Oh Miss, I wish you'd've chosen me, I'd've been a horse.' 'No you couldn't,' another boy said, 'that's not an insect.' The teacher heard only the last part and said, 'Of course it is, it's a butterfly,' and went on with her instructions. The second boy said nothing at all, but sat looking at the first boy in great puzzlement.

At one level this incident is, of course, just amusing. But judging from some of the

things the teachers of my own children have been credited with, this kind of misunderstanding is a very common occurrence in classroom communication. It is a special kind of misunderstanding, however, because the student did not misunderstand the teacher's actual words, nor the teacher the boy's; the misunderstanding occurred because they each included the other's words into their own quite separate context. Further, it was a failure of communication rather than understanding, but the result was that the student was left with misinformation. By definition then, misunderstandings of this type cannot be picked up by the students or the teacher, because when they are detected they are corrected immediately, and cease to be a misunderstanding. On this occasion we were able to see the genesis of the misunderstanding only because there was an observer present.

Deciding what kind of an event it was is the first step towards understanding it; but to turn the event into a critical incident something more than merely categorising it has to be done. We have to ask both what happened and what allowed or caused it to happen, which means we have to describe some of the deeper structures that produce that kind of incident. One of those structures is the hidden curriculum, a part of which is the mythology (in Barthes' [1973] sense of the word) of schooling. It is not difficult to suggest two myths that appear to be operating here: the teacher knows everything, and the teacher is always right. Another part of the hidden curriculum is the unstated procedural rules of classroom learning. Here, the rule the boy seems bound by is not to argue with the teacher unless invited to do so. The result was that although the teacher's assertion clearly conflicted deeply with the boy's existing knowledge and understanding, he overtly and at least temporarily accepted the misinformation. The incident may now be said to be critical in that it shows several different aspects of the hidden curriculum, namely, the asymmetry of the classroom speech situation and students' valuation of their understanding in relation to that of their teacher.

Interestingly, for it only happens rarely, this incident may also be critical in terms of the child's social and intellectual development. Believing what is patent nonsense from a teacher may be the norm at this age, but children (to a greater or lesser extent) do grow out of the habit as they become more confident of their own knowledge and understanding. It may be that such a serious conflict in knowledge between a student and a teacher serve to sow the first seeds of doubt in a young student's mind, and will enable them later to challenge their teachers rather than just to accept everything they say. So this incident is also an example of a critical incident in the original historical sense of the term, because it could mark an important change or turning point in this learner's biography.

A final point about this incident is that we obviously need to discover more precisely the nature and extent of such taken for granted attitudes, how they are reproduced in succeeding generations of students, how they are maintained in what kinds of classrooms, and how they are resisted and overcome by which children as they develop. So this incident also raises yet another important teaching issue about which there is very little educational research.²

Interpretation: Creating critical incidents

INTRODUCTION

Most of this book exemplifies the use of critical incidents. In general, I find they have two major uses: they are an excellent way to develop an increasing understanding of and control over professional judgement, and thereby over practice; and they are also a means of finding a focus for classroom action research. Unfortunately it is not possible to deal with this second use here, though critical incidents are constructed in the same way for both uses.

In this chapter I want to concentrate upon the nature of teacher's professional critical incidents, dealing particularly with the importance of diagnosis and how it can become an approach to teaching in its own right. Interpretation is important because we act according to what we think things mean. It is also the process by which we render incidents into critical incidents. In Chapters 3 and 4 I shall then outline some techniques which teachers and researchers have found useful for analysing incidents. And in the fifth and sixth chapters I shall deal with how to handle a collection of critical incidents by constructing a critical incident file.

WHAT IS CRITICAL ABOUT A CRITICAL INCIDENT?

The term 'critical incident' comes from history where it refers to some event or situation which marked a significant turning-point or change in the life of a person or an institution (such as a political party) or in some social phenomenon (industrialisation, a war or some legal negotiations). Being major events, this kind of critical incident occurs so rarely in a teacher's lifetime that it alone could not constitute an adequate basis for a professional research file, particularly one that is being used to inform on-going educational action research. But highly significant events (see, for instance, Incident 53: *Spitting* or Incident 49: *Homework*) do occur and have very important consequences, and so that is one kind of incident which ought to be included for professional reflection in a critical incident file (see Woods 1992 and 1993 for an account of this kind of critical incident).

The vast majority of critical incidents, however, are not at all dramatic or obvious: they are mostly straightforward accounts of very commonplace events

that occur in routine professional practice which are critical in the rather different sense that they are indicative of underlying trends, motives and structures. These incidents appear to be 'typical' rather than 'critical' at first sight, but are rendered critical through analysis. An example of this kind of critical incident has already been presented (Incident 2: *Settling down* 2). It was an incident which passed entirely unnoticed when it occurred, but which was made into a critical incident by what was subsequently seen in and written about it.

There are thus two stages to the creation of a critical incident: first, some phenomenon is observed and noted, which produces a description of what happened. This could be called the production of an incident, which can then be explained (so we have 'what' and 'why'). The critical incident is created by seeing the incident as an example of a category in a wider, usually social, context.

For example, this observation is an incident:

Incident 8: Permission

Mary raised her right hand. After about a minute her teacher noticed, and asked her what she wanted. Mary asked if she could sharpen her pencil.

It is a description of what was observed. It is not an explanation because it does not say why this exchange took place at all. 'It is the way children are supposed to ask the teacher if they can do things' explains it, and 'Mary is conforming to the rule' tells us what is signified by it. But all this is still at the concrete level of the particular incident. To create a critical incident one would have to say what the incident meant, which means moving out of the immediate context in which the incident occurred. For instance, one might see that raising her hand to ask if she could sharpen her pencil meant that she was not allowed to decide such matters for herself in that class, and that in turn was indicative of the power structure of the classroom: it was one that made her in some respects dependent upon the teacher's rather than her own judgement and authority. And of course, Mary's classroom is contextualised by the school system which is contextualised within the local district which is contextualised within the wider national society. At each of those levels, the significance of the original incident (Mary raised her hand) will become more general: Schools teach children to accept and depend on the authority of the state rather than on themselves and their own initiative.

I have tried to schematise one way of creating a critical incident in Figure 1. Perhaps the most obvious thing to note about this is that there is a sequence to the analysis: it is only possible to suggest what an event means if we know what the event was (i.e. if we have described it). Similarly, it is only possible to find a more general meaning if we know what it means in its specific context.

It is also an important aspect of professional practice to act from a considered and justifiable values position. In this case, both the explanatory and the critical questions should enable us to arrive at a position such as, 'I think students should

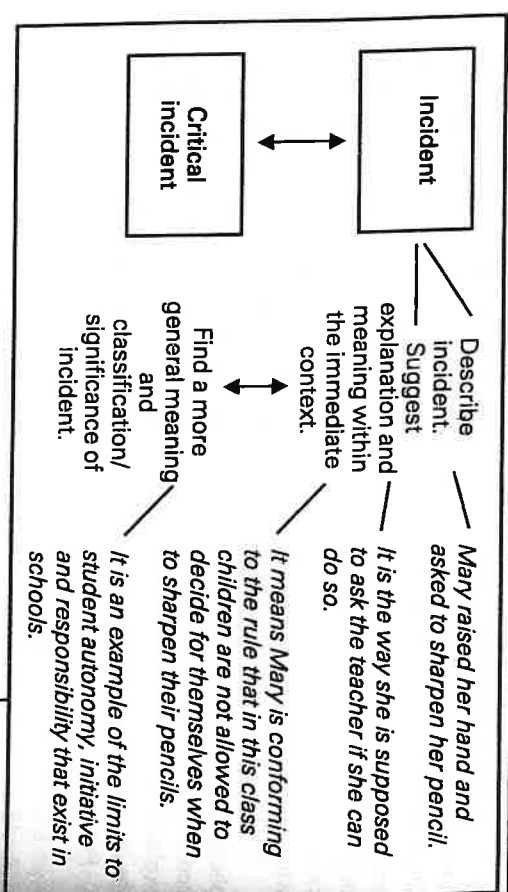


Figure 1 Creating a critical incident

be more responsible for their behaviour in school' which may well then make a teacher decide to let children decide for themselves when to sharpen their pencil.

Another feature shown by the figure is that 'the analysis' actually consists of several different kinds of analysis. All analysis involves breaking a complex structure into its simpler constituent parts in order to better understand its nature and composition, and what kind of analysis one uses depends upon what aspects one is interested in understanding, which in turn depends upon the purposes of the analysis. In Figure 2 I have named the kinds of analysis that I have used here according to the kinds of information that I want, and hence the kinds of questions that I would ask about the incident. I have then grouped these kinds of analysis into four sections because they are associated with different kinds of professional judgement which I have called practical, diagnostic, reflective and critical. These terms are dealt with in more detail in Chapter 9. In each kind I have emphasised the importance of considering the people involved.

I recovered these kinds of analysis from an examination of my critical incident analyses. I use the terms for the four kinds of judgement also as superordinates for the kinds of analysis involved in producing them, talking about 'diagnostic analysis' for instance to refer to the co-ordinated use of descriptive, causal, affectual

Kind of judgement	Kinds of analysis		
	Information required	Questions asked	People involved
Practical	Procedural	What should I do? How? When? Where?	For and/or with whom?
	Descriptive	What happened?	Who was involved?
	Causal	What made it happen?	Who acted?
	Effectual	What does it do?	For whom?
Diagnostic	Affectual	What does it feel like?	For whom?
	Semantic	What does it mean?	To whom?
	Explanatory	Why did (does) it occur?	With whom?
	Personal Evaluative Justificatory	Do I like it? Is it a good thing? Why?	Do others like it? For whom?
Reflective	Classificatory	What is it an example of?	Whose classification?
	Social	Is it just?	For whom?
Critical			

Figure 2 Kinds of judgement and analysis

semantic and explanatory analysis. Of course, it is not possible or necessary to get all that information about every incident: some will be more appropriate than others depending upon the incident and the purpose of the analysis. As this book demonstrates, I do not take these questions as a formula, though to use it as a list of suggestions may help when learning to create critical incidents.

Returning now to our original point, Figure 1 shows that the incident itself (Mary raising her hand) was not 'critical' in any way in the context in which it occurred; on the contrary, it was wholly routine. To be critical, it had to be shown to have a more general meaning and to indicate something else of importance in a wider context. Thus one can see that critical incidents are not simply observed, they are literally created.

Just to expand on that idea, the point is that incidents only become critical because someone sees them as such. This is really just another aspect of awareness because someone deals with as 'problematic' in Chapter 1. We always operate with a habitual

view of what is critical and what is not. Most of us would see an incident in which the roof collapsed or a student swore at us and overturned a table as critical because they are so entirely contrary to our ideas of safety and how students should behave in class. But if we expected roofs to collapse and thought such student behaviour was OK and it happened every day, we would not see either incident as 'critical'. Thus it was that the teacher who always had one music prize for the girls and another for the boys did not see her giving my daughter the girls' prize as critical in any way. On the contrary, it was a normal part of her routine. It was only when the child's response was analysed in detail that it became clear that the event was significant and should be questioned.

The point is that everything that happens is a potential critical incident: we just have to analyse it critically to make it one. The counsellor officer who tends to sit in the same place (in front of or behind his desk) when interviewing parents, can consider the effects on any routine interview. The adult literacy teacher who always asks students to write about themselves first, can consider that with reference to an individual or/and a whole class. The Deputy Principal who keeps staff informed through general notices and personal written notes, can analyse that. The teacher who likes to 'have a laugh' with the students, can critique that.

Those kinds of routines are not single incidents, but are nevertheless composed of a succession of them. A teacher who habitually brings her students out to sit on the mat at the front of the class when she wants them all to listen to her, and sits them at their tables when she wants them to write, has a routine. But that routine is just a repetition of what is, to all intents and purposes, the same incident, and the routine can therefore be critiqued in exactly the same way as can a single incident of things happening according to that routine. Because critical incidents should question the way things normally operate, those which deal with the minutiae of routine practices are therefore by far the most common, and the majority of the writing is subsequent analysis rather than dramatic narrative accounts of exceptional events.

DIAGNOSTIC TEACHING

One of the problems of presenting a method is that people may be left with the impression that they have to do all or none of it. This is not the case here, for there are many different ways in which critical incidents can be used on their own in everyday teaching. The skill of diagnosis is one of them. I want to show here how the analysis of critical incidents tends to produce an approach to classroom teaching that one might broadly term 'interpretative'. This term is to emphasise that professional judgement is based upon a scholarly analysis of our ideas of the meaning of the incidents rather than on our experience of the incidents themselves. The main reason for using 'interpretation' to make this distinction is that it indicates the construction and choice of meaning, and it therefore appropriately carries the idea that a transformation of experience occurs when one renders teaching practices into discourse.

'Interpretation' also seems appropriate for the creation and analysis of critical incidents in teaching because of its associations with what is often called the interpretive approach in the sociology of education.² Interpretive sociology aims to produce micro-analytic accounts of the everyday in terms of how participants receive, perceive, create and negotiate their 'reality', which is precisely what one does in the analysis of critical incidents. The point is that how one acts in an incident, what one learns from it and the judgements one makes about it, all depend upon interpretation. To explain this it is necessary to look rather more closely at what is meant by interpretation in the context of an approach to teaching. There are many different kinds of interpretation, but I want to illustrate just one interpretation, 'diagnosis'.³

It is unfortunate that diagnosis has associations with disease, because in its wider sense 'to diagnose' means, 'To identify by careful observation', a diagnosis being a 'distinctive characterisation in precise terms' (Oxford English Dictionary). But diagnosis also involves explanation by inference: one looks at the physical manifestations (or 'symptoms') and infers their causes. To term a high temperature 'a fever' is not a diagnosis; to see that a fever is being caused by flu or malaria is; identification of the disease through inference from the symptoms explains the occurrence of the fever. Accurate diagnosis is so important in medicine because it is a serious mistake to treat the symptoms of the disease rather than the disease itself, or to treat the wrong disease.

Diagnosis works in much the same way in teaching and is just as important. One can call one's interpretation 'a diagnosis' when there is reason to be relatively sure that one has identified the cause or causes of a phenomenon. Consider this incident:

Incident 9: Bad behaviour

Matthew kept messing around in our silent reading period, fidgeting, getting up, talking to himself and others. I'm fed up with his bad behaviour. Telling him off doesn't work for long. I'm really going to try to do something about it next time.

To term 'talking during silent reading' 'bad behaviour' is not a diagnosis; and to treat the 'bad behaviour' without trying to discover its causes can be both ineffective and harmful. Yet, contrary to medicine, lack of a diagnosis or an incorrect one seldom shows in teaching because it is possible to treat the symptoms with apparent success. The difficulty is that punishing a student for bad behaviour does usually make the bad behaviour disappear. But if the bad behaviour is in fact an understandable response to an underlying problem, it is a symptom of a problem, not the problem itself. If the student is then punished for the bad behaviour, the symptom will often disappear but the original problem may be compounded, perhaps with the addition of carefully hidden resentment. Thus traditional approaches to discipline often mean that suppression or transformation of the symptoms of underlying problems that may be preventing learning is actually seen as successful classroom

management. That view may account for diagnostic expertise not having become a professional ability generally expected of teachers.

Another reason that teachers are not taught to diagnose their practice is that the difficulty of diagnosis is immeasurably greater in teaching than in medicine because students can choose which symptoms to display, when and where and to what degree, and even whether to display any symptoms at all. This means that symptoms of a problem may or may not be made manifest to the teacher, and that if they are, they may be made to appear in quite different ways by different students, and in different ways by the same student on different occasions.⁴ This is very important because it means that accurate observation of phenomena alone is not a sufficient basis on which to judge the best action to take. As in medicine, what teachers do should depend more on their understanding of the cause of a phenomenon than on the manifestation of the phenomenon itself. Which is the reason for dealing with incidents critically.

Tempting as it is to see diagnosis as an objective matter of facts, it is important to remember that all diagnosis is interpretation, which means that one has to construct and choose a meaning from among several possible meanings.⁵ These aspects are well-displayed in the 'translation' of languages: interpretation is necessary because the equivalent words of different languages do not have precisely the same meanings.⁶ So in teaching, interpretation is necessary because there is never a single way to categorise an incident, action or situation. It is a characteristic of the professions that interpretation is something each member does for him- or herself, even if the judgements of colleagues are sought and taken into account. Interpretation is also a matter of one's taking a 'position' on something. 'We interpret this as a threat', is an interpretation because we acknowledge that it may not have been intended as such and that others could see it differently. What interpretations we make are therefore very much determined by who we are. It is for that reason that it is so important to reflect upon and critique our judgements.

In fact, interpretation is essential to professional practice because it always comes between observation and action. One student is copying from another: what the teacher does depends entirely on what he or she decides the act of copying means for those children in that situation. If it were during a test, the teacher would probably interpret the copying as 'cheating'. If the student who was copying had missed the previous lesson, it would probably be interpreted as 'catching up'. If the students were working together on a project, it would probably be interpreted as 'collaboration'. And so on. Because in each case interpretation has involved seeing the behaviour as an instance of a particular category, it is a diagnosis, though which category is chosen does not depend upon what is happening (copying), but upon an understanding of what the student is trying to achieve, the history of the incident, its current context, and so on. Those things are a fairly straightforward factual matter involving description. And, given sufficient information, one could easily match the description to a general category to make a diagnosis.

Again, diagnosis in teaching is in this respect more complicated than in the practice of Western medicine because some diagnoses themselves require interpre-

tation.⁷ Suppose, for instance, that an incident in which one student copying from another was diagnosed as cheating; the reason for the phenomenon (copying) is explained, but by a phenomenon which itself requires explanation: what caused the student to cheat? That is a much more difficult matter which may well stretch the professional resources of a child psychiatrist to understand and explain. So the teacher has to make their own judgement, which will depend very much upon how well they know the child, how they regard cheating, and their understanding of the situation in which it occurred. Their diagnosis is a matter of their understanding of the meaning and significance of what they observed: they may decide the copying was an aberration for a usually honest student; that it was simply too easy to copy; that the student did not regard it as important; that it was the result of too much parental pressure; that the student was over-anxious to succeed; and so on. The only way to decide why the cheating occurred is to analyse the incident as much as possible, making a judgement based upon an interpretation of the meaning of cheating in the incident. For such reasons, diagnosis, though an essential tool, should be seen as a specific kind of a more generally interpretive approach to critical incidents. Diagnosing a critical incident is one way to ensure that our reflection and evaluation is grounded in actuality.

THE DIAGNOSTIC TEACHING CYCLE

Being aware of what something means to us is of little practical value unless we do something with it. Creating a critical incident before acting in or analysing an incident is a matter of postponing action and reflection, not of avoiding them. One way to use critical incidents in our practice is to follow some kind of an action research cycle such as in Figure 3. In this strategy one alternates between action in the field of practice on the one hand, and interpretation in the field of discourse on the other. Reflection is centred on a series of incidents, each of which is explained prior to action, the explanation then being used to inform the response to what happened. In this approach, the teacher keeps a critical incident file in which incidents are first of all described and then analysed. These incidents then act as both an agenda for further action and a way of evaluating and interpreting it.

This cycle can be used instantly during teaching in an informal way. But when it is used in the more formal way described here, there may be a delay of anything from a day to several weeks between making an observation and responding to it. This is not just because interpretation based upon scholarly analysis takes time; it is also because it has to be worthwhile investing the effort necessary to create critical incidents, which means that the matters that arise in the incidents tend to be large and important ones.

DESCRIBING INCIDENTS: THE IMPORTANCE OF DETAIL

Moving on to the recording of incidents, I will also continue to indicate further aspects of the nature of critical incidents as we look at how to create them. As usual,

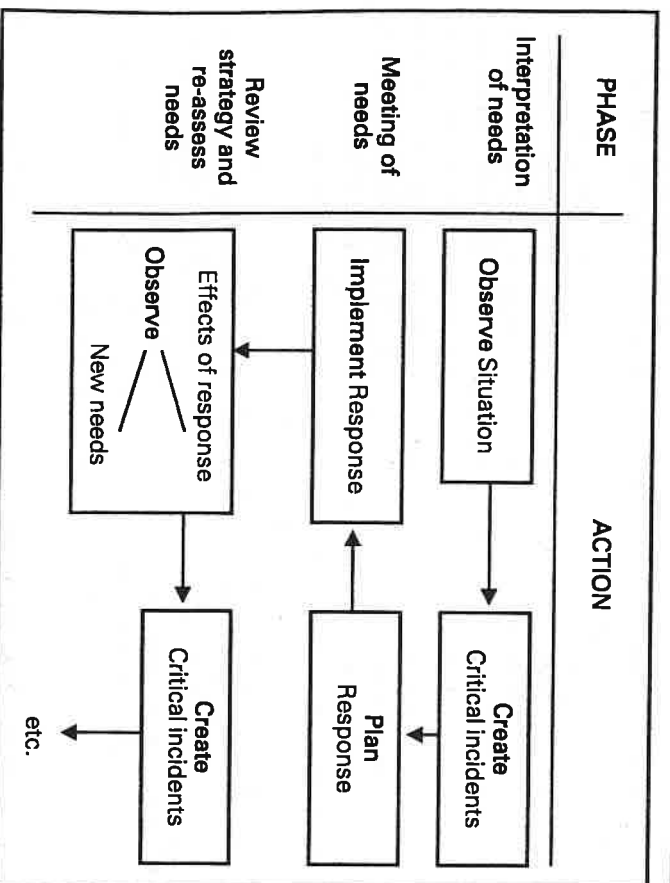


Figure 3 The diagnostic teaching cycle

I will exemplify points with actual incidents, mainly those described by teachers with whom I have worked over the past few years.

Most critical incidents begin with a concrete description of an event, or idea. Detail is a primary characteristic of incident descriptions because, when one is dealing with meaning in the wider contexts of a critical incident, one is inevitably dealing with generalities. In any case, critical incidents belong to the research journal tradition, and a fundamental characteristic of journals is that they should be more elaborate than a diary. I take that to mean both that critical incidents should be more detailed than diary entries, and a critical incident file should be more systematic. These are two basic criteria of quality, and as will become apparent, they are cardinal in determining the usefulness of a professional critical incident file. It is important to conceive detail and system as emerging, developing and continually shifting attributes, for it is neither desirable nor possible to have such qualities in every part of a critical incident file right from the outset: files need to be made to become detailed and systematic. Very few critical incidents will be 'fair copy' or 'final draft'; as in journals, the main characteristic of critical incident writing is lack of closure and continual revision. In fact, many of the entries will be actual events rather than critical incidents, simply because critique is a much slower and harder process than description of an event. Detail is important precisely

because it is important to have detailed and accurate incidents available for critique.

Leaving the matter of system aside for the chapter on the structure of critical incident files, detail in critical incidents tends to be developed in two different ways: through focus and enlargement. Focus is clarification of the whole picture by increasing the definition of the existing details to make it all clearer; and enlargement is changing the size of the things in the picture so we see more of the picture in less detail, or less of the picture in more. The former process is generally termed 'progressive focusing', the latter, to continue the photographic metaphor, 'cut back' and 'zoom'. The more one can emphasise both of these aspects of detail, the more comprehensive the final account of a phenomenon. Note how in interpreting Mary's hand-raising, 'cutting back' to include the broader context was essential in rendering the incident critical. But more detail is necessary to validate the interpretation that all the children in the class have to be asked to sharpen their pencils: we need to 'zoom in' on that aspect of the incident to make sure that it is not just Mary who has to ask (because she makes a mess).

The value of developing detail is well-illustrated in the following incident description:

Incident 10: Teaching rooms

Delamont proposes that the classroom setting and personal front has a bearing on how students assess their teachers as individuals. She compares the two Latin staff and suggests because one of them is consistently moving around the school and is not in one particular room, then this teacher is supposedly unorganised and not really on 'permanent' staff. I have found, in most Western Australian schools especially in senior high schools, you tend to get moved around a fair bit and unless you are in a specialist area such as science which requires certain forms of equipment then you expect not to have a permanent room as your base. This is often unsettling to students and most importantly to first-year out teachers who find it very much a disorientation.

In terms of the language (including constructions) this is typical of an initial incident description. It is not a 'bad' entry, for it is not possible to make such overall judgements. Critical incidents are more or less useful with regard to particular purposes. The purpose here was to generate a personal response to a research paper (Delamont 1976), which the teacher, having read, was then applying to his own classroom. In terms of professional development, the aim was for this teacher to think about his practice through making case to case generalisations. Inasmuch as he draws upon his own experience to exemplify Delamont's observation, it is a useful entry. As it stands, however, the picture presented lacks sufficient detail for any other interrogation to occur: there is very little other than the bare statement that he has had a similar experience and so he is endorsing Delamont's point. But

as the quality of a critical incident can only be judged according to the use to which it is put, the entry is quite effective.

However, if the teacher wanted to inform others about the matter, a more detailed and methodical kind of observation would be required. This could be done by 'zooming in' to enlarge upon some aspect of the picture, such as, for instance, on the teachers' responses to moving classrooms in terms of their use of resources; or the students' responses in terms of their sense of belonging to the school. We need some actual 'for instances'. The picture could also be made more 'focused' by clarification of what 'disorientation' actually means to him, or of just how much movement is involved in his teaching day. That should probably include examples of the effects of the teachers' being moved around, so the reader would know the kind of data upon which the judgement (that it is bad) was made.

The language of the original entry reveals where more precision in the recording of observations already made is required: words such as 'often' are used when it should not be difficult in this case to make an attempt at deciding how often, when and why. Observations (such as 'This is... unsettling to students' and 'Teachers... find it very... disorientating') remain merely personal judgements unless supported by actual incidents. To judge the validity of this teacher's opinion we need to know the ways in which and occasions when the phenomena ('unsettlement' and 'disorientation') do or could occur.

Having revised the entry through the addition of such information, the teacher might then use it with colleagues and students in order to discover their reactions and experiences. That information could then be used to further revise the entry, but it could also be used in other ways, such as in the design of a questionnaire on the matter to inform school policy.

We can now see why it is not possible to judge entries without regard to the purposes we wish them to fulfil. Simply to tell us nothing more than that his own experience makes him agree with Delamont's point, is a valid purpose for an entry, and it serves that purpose well. But if the teacher wishes to do anything other than register his opinion of the matter, then he will have to include a great deal more empirical detail to provide the reader (who may still be only himself) with a far clearer view of the whole picture.

With regard to methodology, this example shows how zoom and focus are progressive processes: one can always return to further develop an entry. One of the differences between the two, however, is that focusing normally occurs more or less constantly and evenly with each theme or issue as the teacher clarifies their observations and ideas and the way they express them. Cut-backs should also frequently occur as we should always be able to see an incident in its wider (social) context. Zooming, on the other hand, occurs spasmodically as enlargements are only necessary when a particularly useful or interesting facet needs to be verified. The point of the photographic metaphor is that one improves the actuality of an incident by 'focusing' and 'zooming' in on its details; and one makes it critical by 'cutting back' to see how it is significant to wider social contexts.

Overall, then, the main point to remember is that it is only worthwhile providing

very detailed descriptions for incidents that are important to us, and which we are going to analyse in some depth. So many incidents will and should remain 'notes towards an entry'. This means that it is not possible to say how much detail is necessary in critical incidents: we can only ask, 'Is this incident described in sufficient detail for me to analyse it in the way I wish?' As we shall see later, it is surprising just how much even fairly simple methods of analysis can produce from a few details.

NOTICING CRITICAL INCIDENTS

Attributes of events

Bearing in mind that many teachers, when they first embark on a diagnostic understanding of their teaching, have some difficulty in deciding what incidents to record for further analysis, it helps to use some techniques to assist observation. Most people find that the analysis of events is the best way to begin, and one of the easiest ways to generate critical incidents is to look for certain adjectives one could apply, such as interesting, funny, sad, silly, witty, violent, unfortunate, boring or good. If a teacher goes into a class having decided beforehand to make a note of anything funny or fortuitous which happens, they actually alert themselves to be more receptive to a whole range of incidents, because it is necessary to canvass everything in order to select the funny or fortuitous. The very act of deciding beforehand what is to be looked for, forces the question 'Is this what I'm looking for or not?', and to answer it one has to examine the whole range of incidents in order to discount most of them.

One particularly useful adjective is 'trivial'. Incidents which we recall only to dismiss as trivial are often a good indicator of criticality because the very fact that we have recalled them means that there is probably something important about them, something which has made them salient for us in one way or another. But it is our very judgement of them as trivial which can be a way by which to deceive ourselves into thinking we can legitimately dismiss them, when we should actually consider them in great depth. A good instance of that kind was Incident 7, about the boy who did not finish his work. In that case, the teacher at first refused to share the incident with the group, because, 'It's too trivial'. Another example that came in response to my asking a group of teachers to write about 'something trivial' was the following:

Incident 11: Getting started

I have this child in my class, Kate, who won't start what I've asked the class to do until she's called me over to explain some silly little thing. No sooner have I finished my instructions than up goes her hand. It really annoys me sometimes.

It did not take long for the group to suggest that here was a child who needed some

kind of help which the teacher hadn't been giving. Various hypotheses were put forward, such as, attention-seeking behaviour, lack of confidence, anxiety (to please, to get it right, to win, etc.), learned helplessness, lack of prior concentration, and inability. As we talked the matter over, the teacher clarified for herself that she probably over-emphasised the need to do things exactly as she asked, and she began to work on reducing dependency and increasing initiative and variety in her students' work. What had become salient as an emotional reaction (annoyance) but was ignored because it seemed so petty, became a matter of professional judgement and deliberate action. The matter was always there, it just needed to be exposed, which it was by looking for something that was thought to be too trivial for consideration.

Typical/atypical events

Another very straightforward way to generate critical incidents, is by looking for examples of two classes of event: those which we can term typical, and those that appear to us to be atypical or even unique. The second category includes events which appear to be counter-instances and exceptions to rules. Typical events are when something happens which the teacher expected to happen because it seems to them to be always happening. Incident 38, about the fact that students never seem to follow instructions in examinations, is a typical event.

Such events are worthwhile recording and then analysing in order to see what it is that tends to produce the event. Four possibilities are (a) that a particular sequence of events always precedes the typical event (trend or pattern); or (b) that a particular person is always involved in a particular (perhaps catalytic) way; or (c) that the incident always occurs in a particular relationship, when certain roles are played, or (d) that there are always certain constraints such as time, place, expectations, aims or demands.

Atypical, unique events, exceptions and counter-instances, enable one to work the other way round, by asking why an event is uncommon or why it did not happen as expected. It is often said that the exception proves the rule (because something can only be an exception if there is an already existing rule), so in a real way exceptions may be used to formulate and verify rules.

Examples of rules and exceptions could be the very routine aspects of running a classroom, such as asking for quiet in a particular way and getting or not getting it; speaking to a particular child in a particular way and getting a particular response; noting one's movements in the classroom, and looking for a factor which would explain why, at a particular point, the teacher was standing behind the desk rather than, for instance, at the back of the room.

Then there are the class rules themselves. The way in which these are implemented can be a rich source of exceptions.

Incident 12: Manners

We had been working on manners. I had suggested a few very basic ones, the first of which was knocking before entering the room. To encourage the students I had a daily 'Good Manners Award'.

After lunch on the day we started it, the first visitor was the Head. He just walked into our room without knocking, interrupting me to check on something (irrelevant) and Chris yelled out, 'He can't get our award. He didn't knock on the door, or wait till you had finished speaking.' How true. The kids thought they were wonderful picking someone up, but the principal didn't seem to appreciate it all that much as I did.

He shuffled out of the room and left me to explain that perhaps we might add to our list of good manners that we wait until the visitor leaves the room before we comment on their manners.

An amusing incident, though one which caused both teacher and principal some embarrassment. It is interesting how often, as soon as an apparently simple rule is set up to follow in school, the rule merely proves the world to be more complicated than anticipated. In fact, 'good manners' does not mean that everyone behaves in the same way. Manners are primarily codes by which we express relationships, particularly status, and are thus contingent upon power. There is nothing absolute about manners: doing or not doing something does not mean it is good or bad manners, but depends upon the people and the context. It is a good illustration of the point that only certain people are bound in certain ways and certain occasions by classroom rules, so all teachers have to constantly make exceptions.

Manners are a constantly repeated concern of teachers, but because there is no substantial and commonly available research on how children learn manners in different settings, or on how they may be taught, this entry on its own is difficult to analyse much further. But we can cut back from the particulars of such an incident to the underlying and more general social processes that are operating, by considering whether there is another (contradictory) rule of which this incident is an example, not an exception. Here, we know, for instance, that there is a nexus between privacy and intimacy, and status and power. In the school context, the degree of intimacy and amount of privacy depends upon status, bestowed by institutional role, which is hence a feature of power. This is clear when one considers that in this school, the Principal may go anywhere without knocking or waiting to speak, the teachers may go into most rooms in the school without knocking (though not into the Principal's study) and generally wait to speak, but the students may go almost nowhere without knocking and must always wait to be asked to speak.

We do not know much about what markers of power there are in our schools, how they support or contradict each other, to whom and in what ways they are beneficial or harmful, or whether there are procedures and rituals which teachers could and should operate upon. But once we have understood the general social significance of one such incident, it is possible to return to the specifics of our

practice by seeking other examples of the same general rules. These are often found in conventions such as modes of address, control of discussions, or allocation of tasks. The point is that incidents become critical incidents when one tries to explain an incident by locating it in a wider context, in this case, by forming a general rule from a single incident. One should always modify and verify the rule through searching for other examples of and exceptions to the rule.

Vicarious experience and research reports

Another way of generating critical incidents is to compare others' experience to our own, which is something we actually do quite naturally all the time. Staffroom discussion of a class or student generally consists of comments about their behaviour (appearance, personality, etc.) as they are with us, and we usually find that the behaviour varies considerably from class to class. This pooling of such experience may lead us to observe our own situation more carefully, to revise our opinions and judgements, even to behave differently ourselves. Such casual and specific comparisons are often too limited and unsystematic for the researching teacher, who needs to consider the broader implications and to collect more and better information. So one way to broaden and verify our experience is to compare it with the results of published research findings.

This is basically a way of linking theory to practice: we can read articles and then go back to observe our teaching looking for evidence as to whether the (necessarily generalised) conclusion of the article is true in our case. Whether it is true of our practice or not, we need to create data about the ways in which it is or is not true in order to explain why it is so. A teacher can read an article, on, for instance, competition and co-operation (Johnson and Johnson 1975), and then look at their class to see how these strategies are (or could be) used by him- or herself and the students, collecting some incidents to record in their critical incident file and using them for further analysis. Here is an example of my own thinking deriving from published research in this way:

Incident 13: Air pressure

Barnes (1969) shows how students don't so much just work together as work 'off' each other in the sense of learning occurring as an (inter)active social encounter between people who remain individuals.

When his students were looking at air pressure, he found that it was 'the social processes' which contributed most importantly to the level of understanding reached: without Steve's help, Glyn would not have represented to himself so clearly 'what made drinking possible'. This is obviously a very different dimension to group work from Britton's (1969: 98) 'group effort at understanding'.

In my STAR tutorial, I think I am managing that aspect OK, because they seem to pool their ideas well, but I think now I have also to enable them to use

the group to clarify and develop their own individual understandings and insights more. I think that occurred in Barnes' case because of the task: air pressure is not ultimately a matter of opinion and consensus like my group discussion topics. I need something more specific, and I think I'll try to look at defining some of the concepts like 'ideology' and 'culture' that we're using.

That entry is the result of reading some of the published literature and generalising it to my own practice. Note how it is possible to transfer the main idea (of socially mediated individual learning) from a science topic with school students to a history of ideas course in university. As I suggested earlier, there are difficulties with this approach, but when it does work it can be a very simple and efficient way of initiating observation and change.

From reflection to incident

In all the incidents we have considered so far, an incident has been recorded and then analysed. But very often we find that we have reached some kind of a conclusion in our thinking without having recorded or noted any actual instances: they have occurred, but the separate incidents have disappeared into a general sense of knowing. As I suggested in the example of Mary raising her hand, we often find we are acting from a value position which is not actually based upon the facts. We then need to examine our practice for data that will confirm, modify or challenge our existing values position. This means moving from a conclusion to data rather than the other way around. It was partly for this reason, and partly because we should consistently check our conclusions against the data, and re-analyse the data, that the relation between an actual event and a critical incident is shown as a two-way interaction in Figure 1.

The following entry is typical of someone thinking through an evaluation in the absence of any actual incidents.

Incident 14: Labelling

What is of some concern is having the labels of ESL and Remedial attached to the one teacher. I know the administration made the decision for the one person to do everything for economic and financial reasons, but I wonder what impact this has on the perceptions of students, parents and staff. Is a message being given that students from non-English speaking backgrounds are somehow less able than their monolingual counterparts?

When asked whether there were any incidents that might answer the question, the teacher could not think of any, but subsequently she observed one student ask another if they were 'spastics' because they were in a remedial group. This did not so much answer the question asked as pose another: did the very practice of withdrawing children for special attention categorise them as different and inferior regardless of the label attached? Both the research and further observation sug-

gested that this was so, with the result that the idea of changing the labels was dropped in favour of pushing the administration to allow all children at some time to be withdrawn for 'extension'.

So one can usefully work from analysis and questioning back to an incident, and in so doing, may change the conclusion previously reached. This process is a form of exemplification which is important in all theory building.

Re-reading incidents

Finally, a very important way of generating new critical incident file items is through reading earlier entries and writing about them.

Incident 15: Wilful blindness

I've just finished re-reading what I've written so far this term and what surprised me was how often Malcolm was mentioned. I didn't know I'd written about him much at all, and in one way I haven't: not one entry is devoted to him. But I've highlighted his name wherever it occurs in all the other entries, and it does in over a third of them! When I look at why his name occurs, it is always in the context of something bad: he can't keep control; he 'borrows' without asking and then doesn't return things; he doesn't do his programmes... and so on. I've been studiously ignoring the fact that Malcolm is involved in almost every incident I've written about. I'm now going to have to do some really deep thinking about him and our work.

The importance of re-reading is that it enables us to see such patterns and trends as they begin to emerge. If you look at Incident 26: *Reading 26 July*, you can see how the matter of reading was the real problem, though it was initially seen only as a symptom of difficulties in the children's attitudes and discipline. Looking back and realising that it was problems with the teaching of reading that caused the other difficulties, the teacher was able to regard herself and her teaching ability quite differently: she was not an incompetent disciplinarian, but lacked experience in teaching reading with an age group she had not taught before. Further discussion of this process of re-analysis occurs in Chapter 7 with regard to personal professional histories.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter I have tried to show how it is the unremarkable and everyday events that make up our routine professional lives that are often the best indicators of the patterns and values that underpin our practice. It is through rendering critical the incidents of normal everyday events that much personal-professional development can occur.

Although I have drawn attention to two different kinds of incident in this chapter,

the division between the two is, of course, not often clearcut. Seldom does one produce an entirely 'uncritical' incident, though I have taken some trouble to show that these are important in their own right. Equally seldom does one analyse a critical incident as far as one can, drawing from it all possible social significances. Most critical incidents are somewhere between these two extremes. As I showed, one begins to move from description when one asks questions about an incident and one often sees a single aspect of a deeper meaning indicated by it, without following all its ramifications through, or looking for other meanings.

In conclusion I would like to return to the idea that one of the occupational hazards of being a successful teacher in a system during a period of little growth or change is to become captured by one's own routines. Although routines are essential to all professional practice, when they dominate they can often make us lose sight of what we are trying to achieve. Punctuality, for instance, is a necessary routine, but Peter (of 'Peter's Principle') once found a manager who so insisted that his buses would always run on time that drivers were not allowed to stop to pick up passengers if they were running late. Less obviously contradictory, an important routine in creative writing is for children to draft their work, but always to insist on multiple drafts eventually reduces the number and type of pieces attempted. Recently, I made the following entry about a routine in my file:

Incident 16: Explaining readings

Still having real trouble getting the first years to do the reading. Before the lecture I gave them a quick seven-question test on the chapter on morphology I'd set them to read. 84 per cent didn't know what morphology meant; 19 per cent couldn't spell it. We talked it over and they said they weren't doing the readings because they were so difficult that they couldn't understand them and they got the main ideas from my lectures anyway. 'How do you know,' I asked, 'if you're not doing the readings?' In fact I don't cover all the main points in the lectures, so how can I help them to do them?

I decided that as the reading-lecture-workshop sequence I had always used was not working, I would try a lecture-reading-workshop sequence, using the lecture to reduce the difficulty of the reading and find workshop activities for which they would have to have done the reading. In terms of the number of students doing the reading, it worked much better.⁸

So teaching routines are essential, but to keep them successful, we must constantly challenge and monitor them. One of the aims of incident analysis is to scientifically and systematically initiate, assist and record the process of developing personally and professionally as a teacher. The point is that committing any incident to paper enables the writer to reflect upon the experience, and thus gain much more from it than if it were simply to pass unremarked and unconsidered in the routine of teaching which we constantly need to vary, develop and adapt to suit changing circumstances. To create critical incidents enables us to become aware

Introduction: Teaching and research

TEACHERS, RESEARCHERS AND THE MEDIA

In some ways this is a book about educational research. Teachers have very good reasons to mistrust such books and regard them with apprehension. Teachers' fears are not unfounded; so often educational research, by investigating and thereby exposing the problems of schools, has been instrumental in giving them the bad press that they so often receive these days. And all too often researchers have used their perceptions of teachers' inadequacies to gain grants, publicity and to further their careers. Take for example, the main argument that the editor of a new journal was quoted as giving as the reason for yet another new publication:

There has been a revolution in our knowledge about language in the past twenty years, and it's highly probable that lots of the practices that are being followed in schools in relation to developing children's language are quite wrong, misguided, even dangerous in their implications for the education of our kids.

So teachers are twenty years out of date and likely to be damaging children. Unsurprisingly, such attitudes make relationships between teachers and educational researchers very strained.¹ But even when a researcher goes out of their way to emphasise the achievements of an innovation, the press distort it to reflect poorly upon teachers.

For instance, in 1987 Colin Marsh, a colleague, evaluated initial progress on a new curriculum structure in a Western Australia school. His conclusion was that '... the introduction of the unit curriculum was a success... There were far more plusses than negatives...' and that overall, 'In a short period of time a number of notable successes have occurred... the few problems that were cited are not insurmountable.' However, under the headline, 'Schools' curriculum under fire', the state's only daily newspaper reported that 'big problems' had been found, which provoked further adverse comment from others in the media and community who had read only the newspaper report. The executive director of schools tried to set the record straight, but his response was made to appear subjective and partial by being published as a letter under the title, 'Support for the school curriculum',

thereby suggesting merely that the director supported the new curriculum (in spite of the problems), but not that misreporting had occurred. The newspaper not only never admitted its inaccurate reporting, but also refused to publish a piece by the evaluator in which he explained the report and his findings.

Such incidents indicate that the press are a real problem. This perception is reinforced by events such as the following in which three university students were caught withdrawing cash from other people's accounts on false credit cards manufactured by the budding criminals themselves. When the case came to court, the lawyer for the defence stated that,

Perhaps it is an indictment of our modern education system that it appears to have taught these three young men everything that is modern in technology but has failed to teach them anything correct in morality.

(*The Western Mail* 15 Aug 1987: 18)

Such statements portray in a few lines a common public view: teachers are to blame for the personal and social problems of students. This statement does this in four major ways. First, it was the only part of the defence argument to be selected for central placing on the newspaper in large, bold print, which suggests that it was the main, if not the only, cause of the problem. Nothing was said about any parental responsibility for moral matters, the bank's responsibility for their security systems, or the students' own responsibility for their deliberate criminal acts. Second, the article made only indirect reference to the fact that the youths actually got the idea from the media where the process they used was explained in all the necessary detail in a television programme. Third, the lawyer's comment was clearly approved of by the editorial staff, who obviously expected their readers to feel likewise. It also diverted readers' attention away from the media's part in the affair. Fourth, the comment managed to blame the education system for giving the students such highly sophisticated skills. One might be forgiven for imagining that giving students such skills was precisely what the education system should be doing, but the newspaper had managed to twist it so that a success of the education system actually discredited it.

So we are left with the obvious overall message that the thefts were not the fault of the young men themselves, their parents, the bank or the media, but solely the fault of the education system.

As a final irony, the article appeared in a paper that has consistently demanded the return of schools to a curriculum which concentrates more on basic technical skills and less on the humanities and social sciences; yet it is in these other subjects that one might expect moral education to occur. It was a contradiction of which neither the paper nor its readers seemed aware.

Such attitudes pervade the news media, so I have found it very difficult in my work to deal openly with the kind of problems that are an integral part of all professional practice. As an educator I have a duty to improve teachers' practice, a process that requires critique; as a member of the profession I also have a different duty to support those whose work I critique. I believe the way to achieve both is

always to place a problem in the broader context of teachers' professional practice. As in all professions, practitioners will always make mistakes occasionally; but too often people blame a teacher for what they see as an error of judgement because they do not know or understand the conditions under which the teachers have to make their professional judgements. Research that ignores the way in which the conditions of teachers' work affect their practices presents a highly simplified and very negatively biased picture of them and their work. So, although there are a number of incidents in this book in which teachers are shown to be less than perfect, I have always tried to show how more often than not it is a matter of their best intentions being thwarted or transformed by factors beyond their control. I have also tried to show how, in contrast to most media and many research reports, the professional norm is that teachers make excellent judgements in extremely complex and difficult circumstances. Typical evidence of this is given in the next section.

TEACHER EXPERTISE

Incident 1: Settling down 1

The first lesson of my first teaching experience. I pause outside the door to steel myself for the row going on inside. I walk in. A few heads turn, but if anything the noise increases. *Be confident: act as if you know you'll get what you want.* 'Alright then.' I say loudly. More heads turn. 'Hey, you lot, I said "be quiet".' 'No you didn't, you said it was alright.' An unidentifiable voice from the back. Tittering.

Well that's quietened them, anyhow. 'I meant you to be quiet', I say, seeking to identify the nuisance; but there are too many students still standing up for me to see every one.

'Why didn't you say so then?'

A voice from someplace I'm not looking at. Again I fail to identify it. I hesitate and stupidly notice I'm sweating. *This can't go on. The best defence is attack.* 'Who said that?' Total silence for the first time. All eyes brighten, as if something interesting's about to happen. *But who was it? Each of the many faces looks equally innocent and very unhelpful.* 'I want to know who spoke just then.'

'You did.' Laughter. Nasty raucous got-you-so-there type laughter. Aha, I saw that, a large fair-haired boy slouching against the back wall.

'Very clever. Remarkably clever for someone who finds the normal conventions of the English language so impenetrable.' *Sarcasm. You were never going to use sarcasm as a weapon when you became a teacher. You've opened your mouth just four times so far, and you're right into it. Try to find some common ground.* 'Look, whether you like it or not, we've no choice: we're going to be together five hours a week, so we might as well learn to get along. I can't carry on a conversation if I don't know who's talking to me. Besides which it's bad manners.'

of things we otherwise take for granted. And, having written them down we can then show and discuss that record with others, such as a teaching or research partner.

Of course, the methods described here of generating critical incidents are only some of the ways into the 'genre', and should not be taken as a closed formula for creating them. As outlined in Chapter 5, critical incidents should grow and develop a life of their own as themes emerge and our perception becomes more focused and controlled. But when one is well into the diagnosis and evaluation of professional practices through critical incidents, such methods are still useful as ways of opening up our minds again, so that the critical incident file does not become too narrowly focused on known issues. And one way of doing that is to take a new look at our routine practice.

Chapter 3

Four approaches to the analysis of incidents

INTRODUCTION

In analysing events to create critical incidents, we are usually trying to confirm (verify) something we already suspected (hypothesised), but analysis can also reveal something entirely new. Whatever the outcomes, thorough, systematic, accurate and clear analysis is essential to good professional practice because diagnosis and critique questions what is, and enables us to think of what might be.

As I suggested in the previous chapter, I find the simplest technique available for analysing incidents is to ask a series of different kinds of questions. In this chapter I want to go on from there to outline four other methods, all of which are more structured, even to the point of appearing to be rather algorithmic in style. Like all algorithms, there is a danger of over-reliance and mindless application, though they need not cause such problems unless they are the only kind of analysis done, or are treated as immutable 'right' ways of analysis. To the contrary, these methods are nothing more than a systematic way to begin: where the final analysis goes and what conclusions are reached should vary according to the intentions of the analyst and the nature of each case. We looked at the uses of different kinds of questions in the last chapter, and here we look at four other methods: thinking strategies, the *Why?* challenge, dilemma identification and personal theory analysis. The next chapter then deals with a fifth approach, ideology critique.

Before dealing with those techniques, however, I should make something of a confession: until recently I had always stressed that the single most important aspect of teachers' professional critical incidents was that they were for their own use. Recently, however, I discovered a contradiction: that whenever I have written a critical incident that I have found really useful, I have gotten as much excitement from sharing it directly with others as I have from the insights and understanding that I have developed for myself through writing it. I discovered that, rather than writing for myself, for myself I write for others. And when I reconsider the entries that I have included here, I can see that whilst I was enlightened by writing them, my enlightenment also enables my teaching of others.

Needless to say, when I reflected upon this phenomenon I found some aspects very worrying. In particular, when I looked at the teachers' critical incidents

contained in this book, I saw that the majority had been encapsulated within my writing: very few were left to stand entirely on their own. In one sense, I am not overly concerned that I had done that, for in creating critical incidents about teaching critical incident creation to teachers, it is inevitable and appropriate that I should use their work. What really did concern me about the course I was running, however, was that I was asking teachers only to write for themselves. I had thereby so limited the teachers' purposes in writing that I was in fact denying them the very purpose that I found most rewarding in my own work, namely writing for others. It was for this reason that I made it a course requirement that at least one critical incident was sufficiently developed so as to be suitable for publication. These critical incidents were then collected and circulated locally.

I learned two important things from this experience. First, many of the teachers found that they shared my paradoxical experience: that it is in writing for others that we learn most and gain the most satisfaction from our learning. Second, we found that the requirement to develop an entry for publication was an excellent way of learning how to write critical incidents: the discipline of anticipating what others would need to know, how they might react, what they could criticise, and so on, was an enormous stimulus to thoroughness in terms of precision, detail and the consideration of alternative hypotheses and points of view.

Bearing in mind, then, that perhaps the best way to learn how to create critical incidents is to write for others and to share one's writing with them, I have found the following suggestions helpful in getting started.

THINKING STRATEGIES

Thinking strategies are perhaps the most straightforward and least personally challenging method of analysis, but they do offer a process that helps frame the kind of questions that will begin to produce a deeper reading. Strategies are also useful in counteracting our habitual ways of thinking about things. For instance, one I often use I call non-events.

Non-events The fact that one thing has happened always means that some other things have not happened. But when something happens we tend only to ask why it happened; we do not naturally ask why what did not happen did not happen. Yet seeing what did not happen often reveals the significance of what happened. Asking what Mary did not do instead of asking the teacher if she could sharpen her pencil, shows the effect of the rule.

Making a note to ask that kind of question of an incident is a kind of thinking strategy. There are a number of different collections of thinking strategies available, but I find de Bono's (1987) 'CoRT Thinking' programme the most useful, partly because it has the added advantage of being packaged for use with students, which means one can also use it to elicit their view about what is happening in their classes. I find the following processes of the de Bono programme to be particularly useful,

but I summarise them here simply as examples of the kind of strategies that are available.

(a) Plus, minus and interesting Every situation or new idea has both good (plus) and bad (minus) points about it; there are also points which are neither good or bad, but simply appear to be relevant to the situation (interesting), such as new ideas sparked off by the original. Looking at an incident in this way also gives an idea of the general position taken, for it is a matter of viewpoint whether a particular point is classified as good rather than bad, or vice versa. Clarifying what we like or dislike about an incident is both a good way of evaluating it and how we relate to it.

(b) Alternatives, possibilities and choices There are always alternatives, though we don't always bother to create them. As the pro-active side of 'non-events' deliberately thinking of other things that could have happened and devising ways to make them happen is the creation of choice.

(c) Other point of view There is always more than one point of view, and it is important that we deliberately seek out other views, particularly those of both participants and informed non-participants. Generating another point of view is a two-stage process: we need first to analyse what we expect their point of view to be, and then we need to check it out with them. Very often the difference between the two will be most illuminating of our own assumptions and opinions!

(d) Parts and qualities Amongst all the ways of looking at something, two would seem to be most basic: we can look at it as a collection of parts, or we can look at it as a set of qualities. For instance a bicycle can be seen as wheels, handle-bars, chain, etc. and it can also be seen as red, fast, non-polluting, dangerous, expensive, liberating, etc. Modern Western rationality typically makes us break things down into their component parts and the relationships between them, without either our seeing that a structure amounts to a great deal more than the sum of its individual parts, or our examining our feelings and attitudes towards it. Because teaching is a social practice, we must examine our attitudes, values and judgements and work on those too.

(e) Reversal The opposite is always a possibility, whether it is looking at something from the opposite point of view, or simply turning it on its head. This can be a particularly challenging form of analysis, because it produces a new alternative for consideration. For instance, a teacher wrote, 'I cannot do drama with that class because I'd lose control'. Two rather different reversals present themselves: 'I can do drama with that class because I won't lose control', and 'I will do drama with that group because I'd lose control'. Both reversals shift attention from why we could not do something to how we could do it. It turns a justification for inaction into questions about it.

- How will I handle losing control?
- How will I regain it?
- How could I do drama without losing control?
- What kind of control would I be losing, and what other control could I replace it with?

Whether to do something or not is the basic dilemma of all our teaching decisions. The above example is merely a version of what may be said to be the fundamental curriculum question, namely, 'Should I not do that with this group because they cannot do it? Or should I do that with this group because they cannot yet do it?' Deliberately reversing our habitual answers to such (often unasked) questions, is a very powerful form of challenge.

(f) Omissions Finally, it is important to check our analysis of a critical incident to try to find out what we may have left out. Of course it is never possible to be sure that our thinking is complete in the sense that we have thought of everything, because we do not know what we've not thought of till we have thought of it, in which case we haven't not thought of it! But the point is we often tend to stop analysing as soon as we have understood one aspect, which is too soon in the sense that we have not considered all possibilities. So it's often useful to re-work an incident to see if we have considered all the ideas about it which we are capable of generating.

THE WHY? CHALLENGE

Another simple form of analysis that can be far-reaching and sometimes quite devastatingly dramatising in its effects, is, like Socrates, to ask, and go on asking, the question, *Why?* When we do this, we do not go on for ever, but we may go on for a long time before we find that underlying our action or idea is one of two things: a normative statement or some form of reification. In effect the end point is the same: we see that things are as they are because we choose to make them that way. In practical terms, if we ask *Why?* for long enough, we end up saying either, 'Because that's how it ought to be.' or, 'Because that's how it is.' In the former we have to recognise that we are operating from a deeply held belief which may or may not be appropriate to our work or consonant with our other beliefs; and in the latter that something we take for granted and as a part of the natural order of things and therefore unchangeable, may in fact be a social construct and therefore open to change. Either way, it is our responsibility. Different kinds of ideas and actions tend to go in different directions, and at certain points will often require something more than a plain *Why?*, such as *Why does it matter?* The following incident was handled in this way:

Incident 17: Plagiarism

Several of the students have taken my ideas from the readings and extensively used them in their essays. They've all acknowledged that they have used my work, but in none of the essays is it clear exactly where my ideas end and theirs begin. Is this a form a plagiarism? I'm not sure, and neither am I sure that it matters greatly to me: I'm pleased (and perhaps a bit flattered) that they have found the ideas useful. But the University has the most draconian rules and punishment for plagiarism. In the end I decided that what they'd done was typical of much academic practice: when we write about an idea we tend to acknowledge who else has dealt with it, but, unless we are simply citing the idea and the associated name, we often select only the bits we want to use (which may be a misrepresentation) and add our interpretation to the rest. In fact, we often just cite others who have had something to say on a matter to justify our own ideas on it. So why is plagiarism so important?

My first attempt at answering this question was as follows:

Why?

Because it's cheating.

Why?

Because it's not their work.

Why?

Because they've copied someone else's work.

Why?

Because they want to pretend it's their own.

Why?

Because they want to get out of doing the work or get a better mark.

Why?

Because a mark is an indication of how well you've done.

Why?

Because you have to have measures of how good people are, and that's one we happen to use.

But answers to *Why?* do not necessarily follow one path to a particular conclusion, particularly when we feel free to vary the straight *Why?* with something else. So a second questioning of plagiarism went as follows:

Why?

Because it's cheating.

Why?

Because it's not their work.

Why does that matter?

Because it's stealing.

Why?

Because it belongs to the original author.

Why?

Because when someone writes something it's theirs, it belongs to them.

Why?

Because that's the law.

Why?

Because it's only fair, that's all.

And we are back to a different value. In contrast to those outcomes, we could take another incident as an example of something that ended up as a reification:

Incident 18: Silent work

A teacher in my Wednesday group complained today that he could not get his 9-year-old children to stop talking while they wrote. 'What do you mean by not talking? Do you require all talking to cease?' I asked, 'Of course.' 'For how long?' 'About 20 minutes.' I asked why they had to write in utter silence for so long. He thought I was joking, so I asked him to tell me why.

Why?

Because you can't concentrate when you or others are making a noise.

Why?

Because you keep looking and listening to what the others are doing.

Why?

Because it's more interesting than writing, and not such hard work.

Why?

Because writing is less interesting than talking to people and it's hard work.

I chose commonly enforced rules in schools and colleges for these last two incidents. In the first case it becomes clear that plagiarism is wrong because it invalidates the competitive system of assessment which we have to have (normative statement: only because we believe it is necessary); and in the second case, that writing is necessarily less interesting work for students than talking (reification: only because we make it so). Note how the answers can include both normative statements and reifications; the *why?* challenge exposes both of them, making what has been clarified open to critique.

Looking at the two examples in practical terms, many teachers would wish to work on the matter of how to make writing more interesting; not only does it have more immediate and personal rewards, but it is also a great deal easier to change one's students' attitudes to writing than it is to shift the whole educational system away from competitive assessment, or to change the copyright laws. But that does not mean that questioning the last two ideas is not worthwhile: the more frequently and the more different ways in which it is raised, the more conscious of an issue one becomes. One does not have to disagree with something and wish to change it to make critique worthwhile: having worked out for oneself why it is that one believes something should be so makes one more committed to the position. Building and clarifying rationales for professional judgements is an important form of personal-professional development.

DILEMMA IDENTIFICATION

Incident 19: Non-communication

A teacher has a child in her class who will not talk to any adults in school, including in class; she won't even reply to a question requiring a single word affirmative. She'll talk to other children, however, and they talk for her. Either she tells them what she wants them to say, or they offer suggestions until she chooses one with a nod. On the one hand, the teacher could see that everyone could get along perfectly happily in this way, but on the other, she could see that the child would never learn to talk to adults or in public unless she were made to in one way or another. Any pressure in the form of attention or encouragement appeared to increase her withdrawal from communication. The problem was whether to intervene or to leave her alone.

It is surprising just how often incidents contain teachers' dilemmas, and it is important to recognise them as such for two reasons. First, recognising what may appear to be just another uncomfortable situation as a dilemma enables one to deal with it much more clearly; second, it is important to realise that the source of the discomfort is not due to any shortcoming of the teacher's, but is created for the teacher by the dilemma. I strongly recommend Ann and Harold Berlak's book, *The Dilemmas of Schooling* here, because their classification of dilemmas offers a very straightforward but powerful way of analysing and understanding certain kinds of incident.

Just to outline very briefly what they mean by teaching dilemmas, in their studies of teachers in England in the early 1980s, the Berlaks realised that the great stress of teaching comes both from the number of decisions teachers have to make every minute and from the nature of the decisions they have to take. Teaching decisions are, by and large, matters of choosing between mutually exclusive options; what they choose is a matter of professional judgement. A teacher cannot both intervene in and ignore a situation, for instance; nor can they always treat a child both as a whole person and as one of a group of learners; nor can they treat all students exactly the same and allow for individual differences. Teachers have to do one thing or the other, and a single decision may involve the resolution of several such dilemmas, which is necessarily very wearing and stressful.

The Berlaks, like others, point out that overall the schooling process contains a number of major contradictions which amount to what might be called an 'omni-dilemma': by taking control of the children's lives away from them, schools are supposed to prepare children to take control of their own lives. From this come other dilemmas, such as that teachers are expected to make children independent learners and thinkers by teaching them a prescribed curriculum of prescribed 'correct' answers; or that they are supposed to use extrinsic rewards and sanctions to develop intrinsic motivation. Behind all these dilemmas is the matter of control. As Barnes had put it a few years earlier:

At the heart of teaching as we know it in our culture lies this dilemma: every child learns best when he is finding out about something that interests him; children are compelled by law to attend school, and are in the charge of teachers who are employees responsible for large numbers of them. There is an implicit conflict between the teacher's responsibility for control and his responsibility for learning: the one treats students as receivers and the other treats them as makers.

(Barnes 1976: 176)

It is the way in which the aspect of control is inherent in and realised by the schooling process that is theorised by the Berlaks:

The dilemmas are intended to formulate the range of tensions 'in' teachers, 'in' the situation and 'in' society, over the nature of control teachers exert over children in school.

(Berlak and Berlak 1981: 135)

They divide these dilemmas into three sets and show how dilemmas often overlap more than one set, particularly how curriculum dilemmas have a social dimension, and *vice versa*. The point of their list of dilemmas is not, of course, to be able to classify a dilemma one has already recognised, but to check a situation to discover if any dilemmas are present in one form or another. The following is an example of an incident where the teacher thought that, however good her reasons, she had simply chosen the wrong option.

Incident 20: Star students

Katherine has always been by far the best student in her French class, but she has come to see me after the lesson, at recess-time and twice at lunch-time to ask me questions on the past tense – why wasn't she able to ask these questions in class? Her explanation was that she thought she understood in class, but then afterwards she realised that she wasn't really sure. In fact, although she made a few minor errors she really had grasped the basics – so why keep coming to see me?

Hypothesis Her 'position' in the class is being threatened by Sharon – the new girl who is better at grammar and who is able to answer every question correctly. Katherine wants to understand and learn everything, but won't ask questions in class because she sees this as an admission of ignorance, leading to a loss of face.

Inadvertently, in fact, I have exacerbated the situation in that I deliberately made a fuss of Sharon, asking her questions, praising her, etc., because I wanted to make her feel that whilst the lessons may seem terribly simple and perhaps boring to her, she is, in fact, playing an important role in helping the others in the class to understand the work, whilst she revises.

Towards Katherine, on the other hand, I acted as I have always done, expecting her to know the answers and acknowledging the fact that she can cope perfectly well. On the rare occasion when her grasp of the concepts wasn't quite right, I explained her mistake, hoping that the others who were experiencing real difficulty might be encouraged by thinking that even the best students can ask for and receive help. In doing this, however, I heightened Katherine's awareness of her threatened status.

As suggested above, this example contains several dilemmas, most obviously whole child versus student, individual versus social learning, equal versus differential allocation of praise and attention, common culture versus sub-group consciousness. It is highly unlikely that any teacher, however experienced, would be able to get the balance between all those considerations exactly right from the start, especially considering the fact that Sharon was relatively unknown to the teacher. What is revealed when one looks at this as a dilemma, is not that the teacher had done the wrong thing, but that both the two right things she could have done had inherent detrimental side-effects. If she ignored Sharon's advanced knowledge of grammar, Katherine may have been less threatened but Sharon would have been bored and felt unwelcome; but if she used Sharon's knowledge, Katherine's self-esteem would suffer. The teacher really needed to find a non-threatening way of using Sharon's ability. This she did by continuing to ask Sharon orally, whilst asking students to prepare set grammar exercises, at which Katherine could shine too. Seeing it as a dilemma not only helped to clarify the situation and indicated the kind of resolution necessary, but it also enabled the teacher (and the present reader) to see how well she had done in such a difficult situation.

PERSONAL THEORY ANALYSIS

I use the term 'personal theory' here to refer to an articulated set of beliefs that informs our professional judgement and thereby our action in the material world. In this next example I want to show how values, as one set of beliefs, influence our judgement. Dilemma identification is useful here, because why we chose one resolution rather than another enables us to identify the values inherent in our professional judgement. Because underlying values are always present, they have already appeared in a number of incidents; but the following incident has been chosen to illustrate the way in which the choice of one dilemma resolution rather than another depends upon unstated values, how a set of values acts as a theory, and why it is important to analyse an incident in more than one way.

Incident 21: Waste

Whilst on duty I have noticed fairly frequently one girl continually putting her food into the bin. The child looks around to see if anyone is watching and if not, quickly pops the lunch into the bin. The first few times the incident was

overlooked or ignored but it being constantly repeated is causing me concern. The child is clearly being 'sneaky', so the problem is how to correct the whole situation rather than just make her devise more sneaky methods of lunch disposal.

Action A lesson on the importance and care of food was given in today's social studies lesson. Groups were set up to discuss amongst other things, 'wastage of food'. The child in question was made a group leader to report group's findings. Her group's findings sounded very convincing but must wait now for practical outcome.

An obvious dilemma here is 'the child as person versus child as student', not just whether to enforce the rule or not on this child (which this teacher has not done before now), but how to do so. Because one uses professional judgement to resolve a dilemma, recognising the values that inform our judgement is one way of understanding why we resolve a dilemma in the way that we do. Here there are a number of values embedded in the teacher's account of her action amongst which are the following: that knowledge affects values and values affect behaviour; that teachers can and ought to transmit values, particularly those enshrined in rules; that knowledge of values is best achieved through peer group exposition; that children will find 'the right' values for themselves when correctly 'set up' to do so, because certain moral imperatives are correct conclusions of rational discourse; and that procedural rules are legitimated by self-evidently 'right' moral values.

Taken together, these provide the kind of explanatory and predictive power of a theory. It explains the relationship between morals and rules, and how children best learn them, but it's not a public, empirically based theory: it's more an account of how this teacher sees the world. As such, it's private, discursive, constructed and coherent, and therefore a personal theory. It can even answer why the child would not waste food knowing it was bad to waste food though she would break a school rule knowing she should not.¹ Being a theory it is a complex web of ideas which includes a view of the nature of children, namely that children are less likely to break a procedural rule if they understand it as a moral imperative. In commenting on this incident to the teacher who wrote it, I did not disguise that fact that I had different values, but because there appeared to be no conflict between the teacher's personal values and her professional judgement, neither were they my concern.

What did concern me was that I felt the idea that children are simply 'sneaky' misinformed her professional judgement about what action was best for the child's long-term well-being. Sneakiness is a 'black box' term (like 'the weather' or 'dyslexia') which labels, but does not explain. I do not believe that children do 'sneaky' (meaning 'sly, deceitful, underhand') things just because they are inherently 'sneaky'; my experience is the opposite: children are naturally honest and open about what they do till they discover things they have to hide from adults. Children generally have good reasons for breaking such procedural rules, but

them, they are forced to hide their rule-breaking, as this child did. The child's behaviour was not autonomous, but a direct response to what was being done to her. Children have all sorts of reasons for not eating the lunch they are given: they do not like it but are not able to say so or are ignored when they do; it does not match up to their friends' lunches; they really are not hungry at that time; they are given too much, and so on. But because the idea that children are intrinsically sneaky explained her behaviour, it obviated finding out why the child actually behaved as she did.

Theories about children that prevent interpretative teaching are potentially abusive and professionally dysfunctional, and I felt moved to say so. I said that not telling the child that she had been observed breaking the rule or that the lesson was meant to change her behaviour, was in itself 'sneaky', and that I considered the idea that if a child eats food they are thereby not wasting it, irrational in any case. In discussing my views with the teacher it became clear that, although at a conscious level of thought she was merely reporting what she was doing, at a deeper level she had reported it because she was disquieted about it and knew she needed to reflect upon it. It was for her a disorientating dilemma of the kind that Mezirow (1981) suggests are a necessary precondition for critical self-examination. What she could not see by herself and at that time she recorded the incident was that she had reason not to be entirely happy about the incident. Thus, contrary to the negative impression that one might have received from my analysis of one aspect of her theories, this is a picture of a thinking teacher who is sufficiently concerned about what she is doing to commit it to paper, and in so doing to expose her very self to critique. That process is highly professional.

Such an example also shows how the dilemma decisions teachers make are as much based upon their unarticulated personal theories as upon outside constraints of the exigencies of the situation. There was a school rule that children must eat their own lunch, and not swap or dispose of it, so the compulsion to be a good teacher and enforce the rules was as strong as the sedimented value that eating everything that you were given to eat, even when it was more than you wanted, was good use of food. And these also conflicted with a number of other wholly laudable desires that informed her action:

- 1 To enable the child responsibly and independently to transfer knowledge from formal school learning to her own behaviour.
- 2 Not to embarrass the child in front of her peers.
- 3 To offer the child the opportunity to make up her own mind, rather than simply being told.
- 4 Not to make it a disciplinary matter, perhaps involving the parents and others.

So what appeared at first sight as a merely practical dilemma (to intervene or not) soon showed as one that went right to the heart of the theories upon which this teacher's professional judgement was based. Her articulated aims were undermined by an unrecognised, taken-for-granted idea. Teachers have to take hundreds of

against another to form a judgement and act upon it, depends upon their theories. Critical incidents can reveal these theories, but at the same time may also expose contradictions existing within and between different components of each theory, and between the theories themselves.

Overall, then, this example shows how even a very obvious dilemma such as whether to ignore rule breaking or enforce the rule is situated in a whole series of highly complex practical, theoretical, and moral judgements and decisions. Dilemmas unmask such problems and it takes a great deal of courage to face and deal with them openly.

CONCLUSION

As the next chapter continues the theme of this one by outlining another approach to analysis, all I would say in conclusion here is that all the critical incidents thus far show just how essential it is not to base global judgements of a teacher's professional competency upon a particular analysis of a single incident. In this last incident, for instance, how could anyone condemn the teacher's action, when, as a general rule, it is in the child's interest for the teacher to help her to change her own behaviour through helping her to change her ideas about the world? Certainly it is preferable to changing the child's behaviour by enforcing rules. Because there are always competing interests and values, it is seldom if ever possible to get everything entirely right in any one instance, let alone all the time.

Many times a day in their work teachers experience the feeling that if they had done what they chose not to do, things might have turned out even better. But they can never know for certain. That is one of the very stressful and often demoralising aspects of being a thinking, feeling teacher. The value of critical incidents is that they can reveal how the habits we have and the tendencies we form influence aspects of our teaching, thus increasing our understanding of our practice and informing our actions. Without knowing who we are and why we do things, we cannot develop professionally.

Chapter 4

Ideology critique in the analysis of critical incidents

INTRODUCTION

I have devoted a separate chapter to deal more fully with ideology critique, because ideology critique is fundamental to professional judgement in that ideology itself is inescapable; all we can do is to choose what ideologies we wish to adopt. Further, as a procedure, ideology critique is extremely productive: I recently read a 30-page analysis of the text of a lapel badge (Frow 1983). Although it is probably necessary to say something about the concept of ideology here, there is such a vast amount of literature on the topic that I do not pretend to have achieved any kind of a full summary even of my limited reading. What I want to do is to introduce some of the main ideas about ideology, and to explain some of the key terms one finds in the literature. I shall illustrate each theoretical point with a concrete example.

First, a simple definition of ideology that makes its importance to professional judgement clear is that it has to do with the way in which certain ideas represent the world to us and make us think and behave in certain ways. Many of those ideas are quite explicitly and consciously subscribed to, but are nevertheless pervasive and persuasive. For instance, a belief that life on earth is but a preparation for a longer life that extends beyond (but not before) it, will make people consider it wise to behave in ways that they would not consider wise if they believed that life spent on earth was the only form of existence. It makes more sense for a believer in life after death to seek martyrdom, for instance, than it does for someone who believes that death terminates existence.

Unfortunately, ideologies are usually more complex than that, because many of the ideas according to which we think and act have been instilled into us without our active participation or learning, and often without our even realising that we have accepted them. Thus, in a society in which all land is owned freehold by someone, few people will realise that individual land ownership is not necessary or natural, but is simply a way certain societies have found for organising and legitimating its use. Although a number of land-occupying people may realise that freehold land ownership is but one way of enabling people to occupy it, few will question whether it is a good idea, fewer still will formulate alternatives, and almost no one will operate according to an alternative.

Ideologies are such ideas: they legitimate what we do or is done to us by others, and they inform our judgement about what is normal, necessary and right; though they are often irrational, they act as rationales for the behaviour of individuals, groups and institutions. It is because we are subject to various ideologies that scholars tend to see and refer to people as 'subjects', rather than as free individuals; and it is because people are instrumental in regulating the behaviour of others according to ideologies, that people are also referred to as 'agents'. Women who believe that children are best brought up by their mother are likely to either bear children or have a career, but not to do both at once. Their behaviour is determined by their ideas about what is best and right. These subjectivities (such as what someone thinks it is to be a parent) are thus ideologically constructed and maintained. And because people's behaviour is subject to an ideology, inevitably they become agents of it: consciously or unconsciously, they act as approved or disapproved examples to others, or advise them on what to do and why.

Ideology's main function in society is to legitimate (or to explain to people's satisfaction) the way things are, especially when things are not to people's satisfaction. 'We cannot pay ourselves more than we earn', says the politician when defending wage restraint. Most workers agree with the 'logic' of the idea, and so accept a falling standard of living. 'As a registered welder I am not able to sharpen drills', says the employee, and the employer accepts the idea of speciality, and employs an engineer to do the job.

But ideologies also work at a hidden and unarticulated level, presenting one thing as another: as I write this, everyone in Australia, employers, employees, politicians, commentators, is talking about a national 4 per cent pay rise in return for productivity increases. The fact that there is an annual inflation rate of over 8 per cent, however, means that a 4 per cent 'increase' of wages in cash terms is, after deductions, a 6 per cent annual decrease in purchasing power. The actual value of a wage is not how big it is, but what can be purchased with it; because the value of wages is always presented as the amount of money received, it is possible to talk about a real wage decrease as an increase. Similarly, a productivity increase actually means working harder. An accepted way of thinking about wages has turned 'working harder for less money' into what I have heard people talk about as 'their' pay and productivity increase. Ideology is thus often associated with the suppression and distortion of ideas, or with 'false consciousness', as it is called. False consciousness is most frequently applied to a situation in which subordinated groups or individuals do not recognise how they are being manipulated and oppressed because they think about themselves with ideas that are supplied to them by their oppressors. Thus it is that people will accept what is actually a wage cut if they think about it as a wage rise.

Six characteristics of ideology

Ideology is about much more than simple false consciousness, however, and it is necessary to make first a few more points about ideology. First, the notion of 'false

one, ideologies do not spontaneously arise and autonomously maintain themselves: they are socially constructed and maintained, and they serve the interests of certain groups in society. Clearly the ideas of the rights of inheritance of goods and the rewarding of mental labour more than manual are not the only ways we could organise things, nor are they equally advantageous to all members of society.

Two, ideologies are not monolithic, which is to say that they are never fully integrated, seamless and independent wholes. Ideologies always contain (and exploit) contradictions, they have many different and distinct parts, and they connect with and depend upon each other. Business people who espouse a market economy will complain about health and safety regulations as government 'interference', but expect the government to protect them with tariffs, to subsidise a national minimum wage, and to prevent monopolies. Similarly, those who demand a close correspondence between school and work, expect schools to teach students to work, but not also how to avoid working.

Three, because a powerful ideology is often referred to as being 'dominant', people tend to think that it is irresistible. But ideologies are never without opposition, resistances and alternatives. They are dominant in the same way that a tennis or squash player might be said to dominate the game when they win most of the points, but the winner may still have been strongly resisted throughout the game, and they will not have won all the points. Similarly, the dominant ideology of modern consumerism is that 'newer is better'; but that does not stop people buying vintage cars, collecting antiques or having car boot sales. Indeed, the used goods industries are only possible if people are continually replacing still usable with new goods.

Four, as that example shows, all power tends to create the forms in which it is resisted, and ideology, being a form of power, is no exception. Needless to say, that is very obvious in school: children who are taught that work is something that one does in silence, immobile and alone, will resist work with noise, movement and communication.

Five, and further to the last point, the more detail in which an idea is spelled out, the more easily it is resisted, and the more obvious are the methods of resistance: if a requirement for each student to do a piece of work on their own is specifically made, students are not only tempted to ask 'Why?'; they are also alerted to the fact that it is much easier to do it together (for if work could not be avoided by collaboration, it would not be necessary to make that particular requirement).

Six, ideology itself is inescapable, but that fact does not mean that one cannot escape a particular set of ideas: one can always escape an ideology, but only into another. That's what makes ideology analysis so important: it makes us more (but never wholly) aware of what we do and why, and thus enables us to choose, control and modify the ideas that we wish to live by. Uncritically taking that very idea (that ideology critique is necessarily a 'good thing') is, of course, an ideology itself, and one to which many people do not subscribe. Judging those people to be evil, power seeking, unjust or just plain wrong, is another ideology. One can never actually 'touch bottom': as it were, no ideological as it is in teaching ideology analysis

enables us to make rational, informed and deliberate choices about our practice. Furthermore, by helping us to understand what happens to us and why, it enables us to act in an emancipatory way to improve the situation of subject people. Once we realise that we are operating a highly individualistic competitive classroom, we can choose to continue in the same way or to change it. If we are forced by an external examinations board into more competitive learning structures than we judge are conducive to learning, we know where and what kind of changes should be made.

The pervasiveness of ideology

This last point shows that, although ideology is not escapable, it is also very necessary: we could not do without ideology, because the ideas act as reference points by which we can make judgements about what to do. It is our ideology that allows us to decide what, in terms of social justice, is a 'fair' way of sharing scarce resources. Consider a simple everyday problem, that of having to share something fairly between several people because there was not enough for everyone to have as much of it as they would like. Apart from 'per capita' allocation (equal amounts to each person), so called 'fairness' of distribution can be achieved in at least the following twelve ways:

- (a) to each person according to their 'needs';
- (b) to each person according to intrinsic personal differences (merit/gender/age/...);
- (c) to each person according to extrinsic personal differences (status);
- (d) to each person according to what they (say they) will do with it;
- (e) to each person according to how much of it they've already got (per cent);
- (f) to each person according to how much of something else they have already got (land, money, education);
- (g) to each person according to what they have previously had (tradition);
- (h) to each person according to what certain other people have (relativities/inheritance);
- (i) to each person according to what they demand;
- (j) to each person according to what they can take (power);
- (k) to each person according to the judgement or preferences of the distributor;
- (l) to just one person alone (lottery/ballot).

The point is that the twelve methods suggested are generated and informed by ideologies, so that whenever we use one of them we are in effect operating according to the ideology that justifies the method. As I said above, ideologies are not simple or coherent affairs, but one can see in broad terms that socialist ideology, for instance, would probably favour giving to each person according to their needs and to each person according to intrinsic personal differences (such as merit, gender or age). A liberal ideology would probably favour allocating to each person according to extrinsic personal differences (such as status) to each person accord-

ing to what they (say they) will do with it, and to each person according to how much of it they've already got (as a percentage wage increase). A feudal ideology would think it right for each person to have the same as their parents had. And a free market ideology would tend to favour allowing each person to take what they can get others to give them.

Apart from the 'per capita' method, all the other ways of dividing something involve giving different amounts to different people which are all considered to be 'fair' by different people with regard to different things. What might seem surprising is that there are so many ways of achieving 'fairness' other than by 'equality'. So in the normal allocation of scarce resources, the way we often operate is to achieve fairness through unequal allocation. If, as I suspect they do, most people believe 'fair' always means 'equal', the term 'fair' will often effectively disguise unequal distribution ('It is only fair that the best business people should keep what they can earn'). Second, the synonymy would tend to make people see a particular instance of unequal distribution as an exception ('You will never get everything fair for everyone'). And third, because each of these unequal methods of division is 'fair' according to different sets of ideas, attention is turned away from the idea of equality ('People should be given as much education as they can use', versus 'People should pay for their education', rather than, 'All people should be entitled to the same amount of education').

The example illustrates three ideas: first it shows how society could not function unless it were able to generate and use such sets of ideas. But second, that these ideas then pervade our thinking and tend to become uncritically accepted. Third, it shows how ideologies can control our behaviour by suggesting and favouring certain courses of action over others.

AN APPROACH TO IDEOLOGY CRITIQUE

There are many different approaches to ideology critique, but perhaps the simplest involves a sequential examination of at least four different aspects which can be done in the following way:

- (a) Describe the phenomenon, and attribute meaning and significance to it in terms of the accepted (dominant) view.
- (b) Analyse and examine that view for internal inconsistencies, paradoxes, contradictions and counter-instances, including what is being omitted from the viewpoint, the structured silences and absences.
- (c) Look for reasons to explain why the dominant view (a) ignored or excluded what you found in (b); attribute agency, and suggest whose interests are best served by (a), and who is most disadvantaged by (b).
- (d) Search for an existing or create a new alternative structure which is more rational and socially just than (a), by utilising what you found in (b) and (c).

Clearly, it is much easier said than done, so it might help to take as a very simple example the way I used the technique on the problem of why a teacher thought it

necessary to make students finish their work, which was the example discussed in Chapter 1 (pp. 18–22). Working through it step by step, (a) first of all in the tutorial group, we analysed the accepted point of view. In it we found that making students finish one thing before going on to the next taught students to value products above processes, and to become obedient and diligent workers by finishing their work. These points I then tied in to correspondence theory in curriculum about school as preparation for employment and life as a consumer of products.

Under (b) we dealt only with the first aspect, for which the kind of inconsistencies to emerge were that the rule made certain students so bored that they actually did very little work, but learned more about how to avoid it. It also ran counter to methods theory that there should be variety in the class, and democratic notions about the rights of students to be treated as individuals to enable them to fulfil their potential, and to have some say in and responsibility for their own learning.

Thus it became apparent (c) that the reason for ignoring the way in which we operate in everyday life where we seldom finish what we have begun before doing other things, was because schools were seen to be places set apart from everyday life where, according to the current received view, different rules ought to apply. That not only advantaged teachers as the custodians of school knowledge and the abiders and ministers of justice, but it also served the interests of future employers who could expect children to be thus accepting and docile workers. Those most disadvantaged were children who wanted to do things in their own way in their own time.

With regard to (d), the new structure that the teacher adopted was that school should be made to correspond more to everyday life outside the work place, and a more appropriate structure was one in which it would be legitimate to scrutinise and call into question certain classroom practices if they appeared to be counter-productive in the classroom, particularly with regard to certain students' learning, and run against the continuity between school and home so necessary for a secure environment. An obvious choice of an already existing alternative structure was a negotiated curriculum (Boomer 1982) in which a few tasks and activities were designated 'core' and 'essential', and the majority were 'open', where students could do as much as they wanted, or rotate between several different things without necessarily finishing each thing first, or indeed, at all.

It is very important to realise that there is not a single 'right' answer in ideology critique: it is necessary rather to develop a number of different readings. In that regard, it is obvious that we could have analysed the incident quite differently, perhaps from the point of view of a power struggle in which the teacher used that particular constraint in order to assert authority over a bored student, not in order to ensure learning about completion of work, but to prove to the student that teachers can and will make students do what they do not wish to do, or to develop perseverance in the student. One only has to choose between such different viewpoints, though not necessarily decide which is 'more correct', when action is to be based upon it. Any explanation which fits the data is a useful hypothesis worth exploring, and even if it is later rejected, it can be used again on another occasion.

One need not necessarily follow the four questions above, but they are there as a framework for raising the right kind of questions to expose ideology in a practice.

Incident 22: Mat time

(a) The accepted view A traditional and accepted part of the pre-primary day is a time when teachers, children and usually helping parents gather together for the 'mat session'. A supposedly informal gathering, the daily mat session is valued as a strategy for socialisation of the group. In my case I use it to give the children practice in reading one another's names, to sing, do finger plays, action rhymes and dances. They all sit in a circle while this happens, having first found their allotted place in the circle by finding their own names on a card. The reverse side of the card has either their address and telephone number or a birth date and each child reads, or tells the information to me or a helping adult. Then we have 'news', a sharing time where a maximum of six children show and tell about something that has been brought in for this purpose.

It is a time for participation, for listening, for imparting 'gems of knowledge', a time to 'do something' about science and a great opportunity to have auditory and visual memory and discrimination games, and to work on everyday concepts. As long as it is kept moving along a lot of ground is covered. It is viewed by me as a 'teaching time' for the whole class. The rest of the day is perceived as 'interaction' time.

(b) Analysis of the phenomenon In fact, the mat session has become a daily 'hurdle' to be jumped before I can relax and enjoy the day. It has been used by me as a useful vehicle to 'snow' the group with 'knowledge', get through the curriculum requirements in the shortest possible time, teach songs and finger plays and get the dancing done. It is supposed to be an exercise in socialisation for group awareness, but that means listen to me instead of talking to one another.

This is a power play. While paying lip service to treating each child as an individual in school, we first of all have our indoctrinational session of 'group-ism', so any individual who demonstrates individualism is brought to heel by the implicit parameters of 'group' interaction. After this session they are 'allowed' to be individualists, after the daily reminder of where they belong in the power hierarchy.

Individual children are assigned positions through the name placings and are expected to like the person sitting alongside, even if the normal pattern of interaction is to fight on sight. Free socialisation is not allowed, because everyone is learning to 'take turns', even in talking and answering questions. The person answering the question may not have a clue, but to call out the right answer is 'rude'. If you have something really exciting and interesting to show the group, you have to wait your turn (which may not be until Thursday) while another child shows the same horrible old car they had before. The need to dance

with the allotted partner, ostensibly for including the 'isolates' and shy ones, is really a strategy to separate the noisy boys and thus avoid the resultant chaos.

I often suffer feelings of guilt because the constraints of 'news giving' and showing things have eaten into the precious five minutes set aside for 'Where water comes from', or 'How people use (?)abuse the environment' and I know that the group are so bored and restless by this time we must do a dance instead to release pent-up energies. However, as well as releasing pent-up energies it also releases any vestige of concentration that was left and 'Social Studies/Science' must be deferred to another day because they have all been conditioned to expect 'activities' after dancing.

We usually end the 'mat session' on a note of mutual relief. I then break the group into smaller groups and interact individually on different tasks and be 'me' not 'teacher'.

(c) Rationalisation of the dominant view The dominant view does not acknowledge the problems because there is covert pressure to limit the degree of individualism. Otherwise, why the need to take a group of innately individualistic and egocentric beings and stress the virtues of co-operation and altruistic behaviour? 'Treat each child as an individual' has been an early childhood slogan for years, but what about the hidden curriculum? At the end of the slogan is a silent 'within your system' as all teaching is encapsulated within a system of curriculum guidelines, physical and demographic constraints and the overarching 'cultural umbrella'. We are becoming an increasingly multi-racial society, but those unfortunate Chinese or Vietnamese children must be part of this exercise in groupism so they more quickly learn the language and how to get along with Australians in Australia. All children must learn to 'get along with other children'. Be individualistic as long as you are also conforming, compliant and obedient.

Whose interests are being served? The teacher's, as this session gives her the 'stage' for convincing the captive audience of what is right and wrong and imparting 'knowledge'. It is a chance to quickly checklist cognitive skill areas and find who is and who isn't receiving the messages in this area.

The physical arrangement of the children in a group, or circle, sitting on the floor is a physical constraint through both peer conformity pressure and the teacher's position, in a chair, facing all the group. This places the child at a disadvantage both physically and socially. A single protesting voice is soon drowned in disapproval. If there is further resistance the ultimate weapon is used against them – the threat or act of withdrawal – being a pariah.

As the year progresses, these happy, outgoing and friendly little beings become so well indoctrinated to the norms of conformity that 'removal from the group' is accepted by almost all as the ultimate punishment. When it happens the other children are reminded, by implication, that they have failed their task of peer pressure.

(d) Some possibilities for an alternative I don't believe this can be changed within our existing schooling system because teachers do not really determine educational outcomes. Modifications can be made, curriculum changed, innovators can be heard, seen and publicised, but the educational process is still determined by societal forces and fiscal constraints. Schools are the most successful means of occupying our young for the required ten-plus years. Schools are staffed by the products of schools and almost every teacher has experienced the early socialising experience of 'the mat session', or an equivalent 'whole class' teacher directed learning and interaction session.

If we were to open up the system and allow each child to directly interact with the environment in a free and exploratory way, who would be used to monitor the process? Who would be on hand to mend the broken equipment, replace the lost puzzle pieces, clean the walls, tend the injuries and how many children would be allowed to attend such a free-for-all by their conventionally socialised parents who expect children to 'learn' at school?

Even if we found sufficient individualistic teachers to staff the centres, who will fund them? There are private systems, some community schools where the philosophy of individualised learning and freedom of action is encouraged, but these depend on parental support, both practical and financial. How many parents in the wider community would have the time, resources or interest to involve themselves in what they would probably perceive as a dangerous experiment with their children's future?

In spite of the shortcomings and limitations on personal liberties and individualism, I do not see any viable alternative to this type of group teaching for a short session in each day. As an exponent of the Vygotskian view, there is still a place for the teacher to teach, to act in a more affirmative role than a facilitator who structures a learning environment and hopes something will happen. Children have interacted with authority figures since birth, to them the schooling experience involves interaction with a different set of authority figures and same age peers – whatever the teacher does is accepted by them as the norm.

I can use the mat session for developing important cognitive and social skills, whilst maintaining a constant awareness of and receptivity to the problems. I must be flexible enough to modify and rethink the daily format when the session has become so routinised it is a bore for all concerned. In this way, by a process of evolutionary change, I can meet the changing needs of a group of individuals in the best interests of the group, even if not of every individual all the time.

That analysis is typical in that the end result was not to abandon the practice, but to seek ways of mitigating the problems inherent in it. It is a typical outcome because most practices of most teachers are valuable and effective overall. Of course there are dilemmas: if we decide that all children should speak to the group, we deny them the right of choosing not to. What the analysis does is to enable the teacher to decide where contradictions occur, how important they are, and what to do about them.

As one gains experience of this kind of analysis, one may find such a sequential approach rather too limiting. The last example in this section is a more critical analysis of a more traditionally ideological concern: the teaching of history. Here is a teacher using the questions in a fairly algorithmic fashion. They did not follow the algorithm step by step, but, having explored and challenged a certain practice, wrote in a more narrative fashion. It was written for two purposes: one to show the way in which the hidden curriculum is structured to reinforce certain cultural values; and two, to show how the analysis of incidents that happen within the confines of a particular lesson on a particular day with a particular teacher, have very general implications: it is a truly critical incident.

AN IMPLICIT HISTORY LESSON

Incident 23: Cultural history

In Social Studies we have just started a topic on Early Settlement in Australia. We started the course by looking at how Aborigines may have arrived in Australia many thousands of years ago. It was an interesting lesson judging by the number and form of questions from the children. Our next lesson was to do with early European contact with Australia.

This incident was written by a teacher in a remote, limited-access Aboriginal community. To an outsider, there is a values issue here which is very difficult for the writer to spot, precisely because, as a skilled and experienced teacher of the centrally developed state-wide syllabus, what is to be taught has been so taken for granted for so long. The crucial point is that, in the syllabus, the ratio of content about the coming to this continent of the Aborigines versus its colonisation by the Europeans, is about 1:9. That balance alone should make it very clear to the students what constitutes valuable and important knowledge in school because we tend to spend more time on things we think are more important. So the differential allocation of time probably teaches the students more about the value of their history and culture in a European's estimation than it does about their origins, which, anyway, is a much disputed topic only amongst Western scholars: all aborigines have their own accounts of their origins.

Elsewhere (Tripp 1991a) I have argued that curriculum, and hence the implicit (or hidden) curriculum, is systematic. Assuming that to be the case, we should be able to see aspects of the pattern of that structure begin to emerge through an analysis of incidents such as this one. Structural analysis means that we must regard any particular incident as an instance of wider attitudes and values, and not merely as an isolated and coincidental side effect of essentially neutral curriculum decisions. That means that we should find within this incident other aspects which reinforce a devaluing of Aboriginal culture. And when one searches the account, two fairly obvious aspects which appear to work to reinforce that attitude emerge. First, there is the use of the simple word 'Early' to cover, and thereby to bracket

both the Aboriginal and European settlement phases, which were in reality thousands of years apart. That disparages Aboriginal culture by implying that whatever happened between the two was of no historical importance. Second, and this point is really an explanation of the first, by dealing with the event of settlement rather than with the routine of life, history is portrayed as consisting of a collection of corroborated facts about unique people and events. This may not seem remarkable, but it does account for the 'non-history' of the Aborigines in European scholarship. A major effect of a factually constructed history is that the more unique people and events there are, the more potential history there is. A largely oral culture which emphasises the unchanging nature of its traditions, thereby has no 'history', because each year of the lives of each generation has been much the same as every other throughout the millennia. That is why all that is taught about Aboriginal history in school is the theories of their migration.

But a history constituted of corroborated facts is not the only or indeed the most common way of dealing with one's past: it is rather the exception. In common with many other cultures, much of the substance of Aboriginal history is a number of very rich and varied myths narrated orally, and in other media such as song, dance, painting, naming, ritual and craft. To a European scholar, however, myths are merely 'fantastic stories', however powerful and meaningful are their metaphors and truths about the human condition. Simply because myths are not 'factual', they are discounted in European history. But because history is culturally produced, it must be structurally related to key features of the culture. It is no accident, therefore, that European history is thus constituted, for to value that form is to value change above stability, innovation above tradition and development above conservation. In other words, the very form of European history, quite apart from the massive partiality of its content, is part of a complex, powerful and highly culture specific value system which opposes any other. As dominant forms marginalise and de-legitimate other forms, the nature of European history thereby excludes Aboriginal.

So, along with the superficial appearance of the presentation of a common Australian substance to the history of the Australian people, these students also learn that school history is actually European history, that history is solely a matter of facts, and that the Aboriginal form of dealing with the past is not important. Because it was not this, nor I presume any other teacher's conscious intent to teach such matters to these students, such learning must be part of an implicit curriculum, and furthermore, an implicit curriculum which has not been generated by the individual teacher, but has been imposed on all teachers by the administration.

Because teachers' performance is often judged in relation to their ability to teach particular learnings, their critical incidents frequently reflect their difficulties in that regard. Reflecting back to teachers personally and privately, and collectively and publicly to the administration, the ways in which the problems teachers encounter are often produced by the unintended effects of what they are expected to teach, serves both to support teachers' professional judgement and assist the curriculum development process.

In that respect, this incident makes two important theoretical points: first, that because teaching is a cultural activity, values are inevitably taught; second, that because the curriculum is an enacted cultural structure, there will always be a number of overt and covert features supporting and reinforcing any particular values position. In this case, the analysis shows just how systematic, far-reaching and thorough values positions really are: they actively construct the curriculum. Such findings have clear and important consequences for educational administrators as much as for the teachers concerned. With regard to core curriculum, for instance, in a state like Western Australia where a centrally developed curriculum is fairly closely adhered to by the majority of teachers, such values must thus be reproduced throughout the state system. In a situation where individual teachers are responsible for developing their own syllabus and materials, although there will always be a hidden curriculum, there would be a far wider range of values transmitted through it. This incident should raise serious questions, therefore, about the advisability of core curricula. If teachers were in command of the kind of empirical evidence produced by the analysis of incidents such as this one, they might then be able to make a stronger contribution to such an issue, increasing their professional autonomy.

CONCLUSION

In these last three chapters I have tried to outline and illustrate some of the ways in which to analyse critical incidents. Many readers will find my account unsatisfactory because it is so general in some respects, and so much my own way of working with others. But in the end, analysis is a very personal affair. I find it is impossible to give an exhaustive account of what one does in analysing data, and I think it would be counter-productive in any case. In using data to inform professional judgement and action, one is more interested in the meanings one can produce and which one adopts rather than in constructing a single preferred meaning. That is to say, we should interrogate our conclusions, not in terms of the extent to which it is possible to get others to agree with us, but in terms of the questions, 'Why do I see it like that? How else could I see it?' and 'What do I consider the right way(s) of seeing it?'

Of course, when it comes to analysing critical incidents all approaches are much enhanced by getting other points of view. People tend to think that incidents should be analysed by the person who first describes them; but it is always useful, and often much easier, to include the ideas of others. The two most obvious possibilities here are the views of those with whom we can come into contact, and the views of others that we can read in published work. In the literature, the former category are generally known as 'critical friends' (Ingvarson 1986), and will include our colleagues, partners, tutors, advisers, supervisors, and so on; and the latter category is mainly composed of research reports, though, of course, we take on ideas from many other sources in other media which we adapt in one way or another to our own situation

I do not intend to elaborate on these sources of alternative analysis, as how who is invited to do what is a matter of personal preference, tolerance and negotiation. It is perhaps worthwhile just pointing out that the best analysis may come from those whom we do not usually invite to comment upon our professional practice, such as parents, and (dare I say it?) our students. But though it is necessary and useful to have our analyses evaluated and verified by others, as autonomous professional practitioners it is we who have to act upon and bear responsibility for our own perceptions of our practice. It is for this reason that I have, against my better judgement in some respects, gone as far as I have towards an algorithmic approach to the generation and analysis of critical incidents. It is most important that teachers are involved in all the phases and processes of classroom research, and to do that, they have to be able to do more than simply provide professional educational researchers with data for their projects. Simple step-by-step approaches are helpful initially, but they should be customised and relinquished as soon as possible.

So finally, and from my own experience again, the only way to learn to analyse critical incidents is to do it, and if the techniques I have outlined are one way of beginning to do it, then these chapters have served their main function.

Critical incidents and professional judgement

Country people are often portrayed as gullible and more easily intimidated by qualified professionals than city people. But when my father, who was a general practitioner, moved from the city to a seaside village, he had rather a different experience. The first patient he treated was a local fisherman. It was a complaint called though not a serious ailment. Deciding on the best course of treatment, my father wrote out the prescription. 'If it's not improved by next week, you'd better come to see me again', he said as he handed it to the patient. 'Oh yes', the fisherman replied, 'and how many guesses will you want, doctor?'

INTRODUCTION: PROFESSIONAL JUDGEMENT

People sometimes ask what teachers get from the analysis of critical incidents, to which the broad answer is 'improved professional judgement'. It is a term which I have frequently used without having described in much detail what I mean by it or why I think it so important, so that is the task of this chapter.

Most people think that the difficult thing about being a member of the high-status professions such as law and medicine is mastering large amounts of academically difficult specialist knowledge. But the high value ascribed to members of the professions by society comes more from other aspects of their work. They protect, maintain and improve peoples' physical and material well-being. But so do other occupations. A profession is not much valued for helping others or for the sheer amount of essential expert knowledge that its members have to acquire. Rather, members of a profession are valued for their ability to act in situations where a lack of knowledge (there not being a 'the right answer') demands sound judgement (Schön 1983).

Professional judgement is thus a matter of 'expert guesses' and has more to do with reflection, interpretation, opinion and wisdom, than with the mere acquisition of facts and prescribed 'right answers'. Whether to sue or not, for how much and on what grounds; or precisely what is wrong with a patient and whether to treat the illness with drugs, diet, lifestyle changes, surgery or a combination of all of them, are massively complicated decisions that have enormous impact upon the client's well-being. So, although the vast majority of practice in the high-status professions

actually involves the repeated execution of many similarly relatively low-level technical skills, value is produced as much by the judgement of uncertain possibilities as upon certain factual knowledge; and as much upon the importance of the consequences of those choices for the client's well-being as upon the efficient performance of skilled routines.

One of the reasons that teaching is not a high-status profession is that few people realise just how incessantly teachers have to make professional judgements, nor do they recognise the tremendous impact those judgements have upon the well-being of students. The strong tradition of technical approaches to 'teacher development' show just how few people realise how teaching is characterised by the need to determine courses of action in situations where knowledge is too limited for there to be a single or obvious 'right answer'. Put another way, teaching is a very indeterminate practice (Pratte 1986).

To demonstrate this aspect of teaching I shall analyse some more incidents, and in so doing explore the kinds of knowledge that teachers use in some of the judgements that they have to make. The incidents have been chosen to show how the different kinds of professional judgement already suggested (practical, diagnostic, reflective and critical) are all essential to teaching, particularly to the life-long well-being of children.

We shall begin by looking at a teacher using practical judgement to inform her action.

PRACTICAL AND DIAGNOSTIC JUDGEMENT

Laughter occurs surprisingly frequently in most classrooms, and most teachers recognise its importance and power. This is one such teacher.

Incident 52: The whole class laughed

Troy said he was sometimes too scared to sleep in case something bad might happen. The teacher suggested in reply, 'So what do you do? Sleep with your eyes open?' The class laughed at this and the teacher continued, 'Don't laugh, I have an aunt who sleeps with her eyes open!' The class laughed some more and the teacher went on, 'She does! She used to frighten the daylight out of us. We'd take her in a cup of tea in the morning and she'd be lying there staring at nothing (the teacher gave a wide-eyed stare); we thought she was dead!' The class laughed some more, along with the Team Teacher and myself at the back of the room.

(Hall 1989)

This incident occurred with a class of 12–13-year-olds. As an introduction to a story about fear, the children were being asked by the teacher to talk about things that frightened them. The plot may be summarised as follows.

Mistake

- (a) Troy spoke of something he feared;
- (b) the teacher responded with an apparently absurd suggestion;
- (c) the whole class laughed.

Recovery

- (d) The teacher told them to stop laughing;
- (e) she told them a story about her aunt at which they all laughed.

Laughter is both a joyous unifying experience and also a devastatingly destructive weapon. What makes it one or the other is often a matter of who is laughing at what. So what was being laughed at here?

On the surface, the class were laughing at what the teacher said. But, because she was making a joke out of Troy's contribution, and Troy was talking about himself, it was actually Troy who was being laughed at. The laughter was probably mixed (because when teacher makes a joke, everyone laughs), but the underlying message of the teacher's comment was that Troy's fears, and therefore Troy himself as the owner of those fears, were not to be taken seriously. In that sense, the laughter was a humiliation for Troy.

So the first part of the incident shows an unfair attack on Troy which would not only cause him some distress, but would also discourage other children from making further contributions to the discussion. That must, by any account, have been a fairly serious practical mistake on the part of a teacher.

It is, of course, inevitable that we all make such mistakes occasionally, whether we make them as a teacher, parent, spouse or friend. The difference between most people and a really professional and experienced teacher, however, is that the teacher recognises such mistakes even as they occur, and is able to act swiftly and effectively to undo them before any (more) damage is done to anyone. This is such a teacher, and it is worthwhile examining the incident in some detail so that we can admire the way she recovered the situation.

Having made an inappropriate response, the teacher had to do two things: first she had to stop the class laughing at Troy; and second, she had to transform the incident, so that neither the class nor the boy would read or remember it as an occasion when they all laughed at Troy. The way she achieved the first was by telling them not to laugh at the idea that Troy should sleep with his eyes open; and the second by then deliberately making them all laugh at the idea that someone else did sleep with her eyes open. So the real meaning of her first telling them not to laugh, was not that the class must not laugh – period, but that they had misunderstood her, so that their laughter was inappropriate in some way, and that they must therefore stop laughing at what it was they were laughing at. Without actually explicitly saying so, she had guided them to the only other possibility: that, contrary to their immediate reaction, they were to take Troy's problem seriously.

But because that was contrary to the class's initial reaction, it reinforced...

kind of justification. To justify and explain why Troy's comment was to be taken seriously, she made out that what they had taken to be a laughable suggestion could in fact be perfectly reasonable. Superficially, that was achieved by the story of her aunt. But the story also achieved much more than that. First, it effectively put Troy onto an equal footing with her aunt, and therefore not only in a close relationship to herself, but in a relationship where Troy had the higher status (Troy = aunt; teacher = niece. ∴ aunt → niece = Troy → teacher). That alone was an elevation which more than recompensed Troy for his momentary humiliation. Second, because the story was about an unknown and unelaborated (and therefore archetypical) aunt, the laughter was changed from, 'we laugh at one of us' to 'we laugh at one of them'. It is very difficult to instantly stop a whole class laughing at something they find genuinely funny; it is far more effective to deflect it, covering the move with other laughter. But, third, her story did more than simply deflect the laughter of the class from Troy: it transformed it from dividing and humiliating laughter to a joyous laughter which reunified them all in shared pleasure again. Under such expert professional guidance, the class continued smoothly on its way.

Finally, a couple of more general points about the incident may be worth making with regard to the professional responsibilities and practical skills of teachers. First, it is a good example of the way in which behaviour and values are continuously taught in classrooms. Here the teacher was implicitly (but nevertheless actively) teaching two messages: first, that it was alright to laugh at the same thing in certain circumstances, but not in others; and second, that who was being laughed at by whom was crucial in determining whether it was appropriate (personally and socially acceptable) or not. How teachers deal with such issues, and thereby shape children's views of themselves and the world, do not reduce to simple facts or routines, but ought surely to be matters for the exercise of professional judgement. Second, and with regard to the practical skills displayed by this teacher, note that the story of the aunt did not employ logical argument to undo the potential for damage. Troy said he was 'too scared to sleep in case something bad might happen', but the teacher's suggestion that he keep his eyes open when asleep would not enable him to prevent anything bad happening, for he would still be unconscious. But the point of the story was that the aunt was actually asleep with her eyes open. So the class was encouraged to laugh at the aunt for exactly the same reason that they had been told not to laugh at Troy: because it is peculiar to go to sleep with open eyes. So rather than render their laughter at her original response to Troy inappropriate, on logical grounds it should have reinforced it.

But what else could she do (from within the practice in which she was already located)?¹ She had responded 'wrongly', and could only have 'corrected' it logically with an apology. The problem there was that to make an apology would only make a major issue of the matter, the very thing she wished to avoid. So the teacher chose not to operate through syllogistic reasoning; she used instead the logic of dramatic action. She involved them in a performance, carrying them along with what was actually a distraction. By her action she was able to make the whole

the exchange was inappropriate to another. Thus the net effect of her performance was to transform a possibly harmful initial mistake into an incident more likely to benefit Troy. And it was so well done that it was only under subsequent examination that the incident emerged from the lesson transcript; so well-performed was it, that at the time no one present even registered what the drama of the mistake and recovery really involved. So whilst a teacher's role is never beyond critique (what is it about the teacher that she made that kind of a mistake, and why was it she turned somersaults instead of simply apologising?) it is surely the kind of skilled performance which Shulman had in mind when he referred to the unarticulated 'wisdom of practice' (1987: 11).

I have already suggested that a key characteristic of a profession is that there is more than merely a body of specialist knowledge, though it is still very important. Professional specialist knowledge is scientifically verified and formally transmitted to initiates who are certified as having mastered it. There are also various forms of 'internship' in which they are required to successfully apply that knowledge in the best interests of their clients. Clearly this teacher is a successful practitioner in terms of her acquired expertise, but in what sense does that expertise meet those criteria? It is difficult to see the scientific basis of her knowledge, how it could be proven or generalised, or in what sense it is academic knowledge that could be transmitted to initiates. Is this not expertise which comes from intuition, experience and 'rightmindedness' rather than scholarly disciplinary knowledge? Certainly it is not obvious that to perform in that manner requires the kind of understanding which the professional practitioner could master either through the use of highly developed academic skills or practical 'competencies'. In fact it is hard to categorise the knowledge used here by this teacher as anything other than tacitly held practical conduct knowledge (Polanyi and Prosch 1975). For such reasons teaching has often been characterised as being more of an art than a science.

There is, of course, nothing wrong with characterising teaching as an art: the problem is that it has been characterised as an art like gardening or cookery, not like the art of surgery, design or money-lending. The reason for this is that the artistry of teaching has not been much documented by researchers, and so is not generally recognised.² It is necessary therefore, first to document the kind of practical knowledge displayed by such teachers through performing research of a sufficiently pure and micro-nature on teachers' practical skills. Second it is necessary to transform the knowledge into more institutionalised academic knowledge, so that it could be publicly recognised as being different, but of similar status, to the kind of knowledge used in the major professions. And third, teachers need to learn, understand and use that knowledge in planning, implementing and evaluating their practice. In short, teachers need to take a diagnostic approach to teaching, which means that they have to understand what happens in classrooms and why, using that knowledge both to choose what action to take, and to justify and learn from their action and its outcomes.

Recent advances in the study of classrooms and teacher thinking suggest that the production of the necessary knowledge base is already well underway, though

few teachers have yet taken up and used that knowledge. It is the fact that this teacher, though she is clearly highly skilled at instantly recognising, analysing and dealing with a potentially damaging situation, cannot explain her practice,³ which leads me to classify this incident as an example of practical professionalism. It is the difference between recognition and the development of a considered diagnosis. To use interpretation in the manner of the major professions teachers would have to be able to deal with their practice at a discursive level; that is, they would need to be able to perform for themselves the kind of diagnosis illustrated above.

These, then, are two kinds of knowledge and expertise necessary to practice in a profession: the practical is that which is fundamental to expert performance of relatively routine technical tasks, and is primarily acquired through learning from practical experience. It involves noticing a situation and responding appropriately to it, which, commonplace as it sounds, is the basis of professional teaching. Diagnosis is another set of skills and knowledge necessary to understand, explain and be able to justify the practical judgement. It explains the practical action taken, and so is more discursive, academic and theoretical, though they are both forms of interpretation. All good teachers have acquired the former, very few the latter.

Returning to the issue of professionalism, we can categorise this incident as an example of teaching which in some ways is excellent, but professional only in the technical sense of the experienced practitioner doing a better job than an untrained or inexperienced person would. Although such technical expertise is the bulk of work in high-status professional practice, on its own I believe it is an insufficient basis for professional judgement. If teachers are to understand and explain their technical expertise in an informed fashion that will enable them to control, develop and justify their practice, they will also need a more obviously analytic and interpretive approach such as that advocated here.

REFLECTIVE JUDGEMENT

Thus far I have argued that a teacher who can change the nature and direction of students' laughter is acting professionally, but merely in the same sense that the golfer who drives a ball much further and more accurately than a recreational player, or the mechanic who quickly and correctly diagnoses and rectifies a fault in a car engine in a way which drivers of the cars could not do for themselves, are acting professionally. To do so, however, is to miss the important point that, even at this very practical level, the teacher was discharging a moral responsibility in her attempt to care for the feelings of a client. She was also informing that caring with expert knowledge about those feelings, how they would affect learning performance and cultivate attitudes towards self and society. Her practical action thus had far wider and more enduring consequences for her clients than ever could the work of golfers and mechanics.

In teaching, other kinds of professional judgement are also necessary, and there is more to these than carrying out in a professional fashion certain routines acquired through natural aptitude and experience. These kinds of professional judgement

are characteristic of the professions, and the difference between doing something professionally and being in a profession lies in the range of choices that must be made about how to achieve a particular end, and the importance of the service offered to a client's well-being. The consequences for the well-being of the clients of how well things are done are very much more serious in a profession than in most other occupations. Also, in the professions there is a great deal of choice about how to achieve the clearly stated ends, and in teaching there is also a wide choice of ends. Very little judgement about what is best for the client enters into getting a car engine running well; failure to do so will cause little more than annoyance, and matters can always be corrected in a later attempt. Further, there are only about a dozen things that cause loss of power or difficulty in starting a car, for instance, and there is no choice about how best to do it: the mechanic follows a diagnostic algorithm to find and correct the fault. Little interpretation and judgement are required: if the points are burnt, they must be replaced. Similarly in teaching, very little interpretation or judgement enters into whether or not to silence a class of students so that they can listen to the teacher, and, as we have seen, it is a relatively easy matter for a skilled practitioner to achieve. Just one kind of professional judgement is necessary when a definite answer is known for a certain problem.

But situations often arise in teaching for which there is no known appropriate course of action, let alone an approved solution which can simply be recalled from a stock of professional knowledge. And rather than being the exception, as they are in general medicine, these situations are the norm in classroom teaching. As almost every incident has demonstrated, in teaching many decisions are not simple matters in which the teacher can identify a situation and recall and apply the correct course of action. And as in law and medicine, the judgements teachers have to make concern the well-being of their students, so are not merely epistemological, but also ethical decisions Lyons (1990). Contrary to law and medicine, however, teaching judgements cannot be made on an individual basis: every dealing a teacher has with one student will affect the other students in the class in one way or another, which vastly increases the complexity and stress of the situation. This next incident is about just such a dilemma: when a student misbehaves, how does one judge who should suffer and in what way? It illustrates how thinking teachers exercise much the same kind of judgement as do lawyers and doctors, but they do so with a specifically moral orientation. Because it was such a dramatic incident there was no difficulty in recognising the problems with the outcome. Although the teacher was not diagnosing the matter, she was thinking in a reflective fashion that involved judging the effects of her action and weighing up (future) alternative strategies. This process suggests a third kind of interpretation, personal reflection:

Incident 53: Spitting

A secondary science teacher in one of my groups told us how, when she asked a class to line up outside the laboratory before a lesson, one boy at the front of

you want to clear your throat' she said, 'it is usual to use a hanky'. Everyone laughed. 'OK. In you go,' she said, and they all filed in. The boy who spat then spent the whole lesson writing over and over again in his science book, 'I hate (name of the) school'. The teacher ignored him, quite pleased that he was keeping to himself and not needing further discipline. During recess, however, he was involved in a serious fight, and had to be suspended from the school. The teacher then felt she was partly responsible. On the one hand she felt she had quietly and effectively controlled the boy in a way that only capable and experienced teachers are so effortlessly able to do, but on the other she felt that the effect of her having done so had led the boy to seek some other outlet for his fury.

There are a number of dilemmas here that are of the same order with regard to the client's well-being as are found in the major professions. The one which really bothered this teacher (and which her reflective skills had led her to articulate) was whether she should have accepted his challenge, thus dealing with him much less effectively with regard to her discipline, but meeting at not inconsiderable personal expense his need to be seen as an effective troublemaker. As she put it,

If I'd said to him, 'How dare you spit at me? Stand outside until I can take you straight to the deputy principal', would he still be at the school? And if he were, how would I deal with him next time, how would the others' learning suffer from the constant interruptions, and might others follow his lead more easily?⁴

It is the nature of teaching that one has to act instantly and ask such questions afterwards (which is why judgement of the instant and practical kind is so important), and it is also the nature of teaching that there are no correct answers to such questions: they are always matters of professional judgement. A more discursive and overtly 'academic' diagnostic analysis of this incident can achieve two purposes, however: first, it demonstrates the complex, stressful and problematic nature of teaching, which is a vital first step towards public recognition of the professional nature of teaching. And second, it provides the teacher with a better understanding of the 'how' and 'why' of what happened. This is necessary for two aspects of professional development. First, a diagnostic understanding would have enabled this teacher to learn from her professional practice and thereby increase her control over it; second, any moral deliberation that might have occurred, would depend upon a sound diagnosis of the incident.

So what did happen? First, it was clear that the teacher had in fact administered a massive put-down to the boy when he spat. Spitting is perhaps the most abusive form of challenge the boy could offer her, but she had simply pretended to read the action publicly as evidence of the unmannerly and ignorant qualities of the challenger. Spitting must always be dealt with because it is never tolerated; but coughing, sneezing, throat-clearing and even flatulence often pass entirely unnoticed, or they occasionally merit a mild and often humorous reproach. In reading

could not accept that the boy spat at her because there was no way in which he could seriously challenge her. Denying that he spat denied his ability to challenge her. The boy, expecting to be dealt with for spitting at a teacher, was too taken aback to respond. Capitalising on the laughter to move the class into the laboratory and thus terminating the exchange, the teacher then took away any opportunity the boy might have had to mount another challenge.

In one sense, the teacher had thus very adroitly dealt with the challenge, not by ignoring it, but by pretending there was no challenge. At the most practical level, this was done 'professionally', but it produced serious problems with regard to the well-being of the student.

In my analysis⁵ she had downgraded the boy in at least four important aspects of his self-esteem. First, she had proved him to be so socially backward that he had not yet learned the basic manners of how people managed their bodily fluids in public; second and consequently, she had shown him to be so low in status that when he issued a challenge it would not be recognised as such; third, he had failed to make trouble for the teacher, but instead brought it upon himself, so he was not even successful in ways that he and everyone else always expected him to be. Finally, for a black, authority defeating, chauvinistic young male, all this had been quickly and effortlessly done to him by a white, middle-aged, middle-class woman.

This teacher was operating at a level of concern that is well beyond the purely practical. In contrast to the previous teacher, she made an interpretation of the nature and effects of her actions that questioned her judgement and habitual practice. It was not simply a matter of registering the fact that her action had upset the boy, but of reflecting upon the priorities she had assigned in the incident, and, in a more general sense, the professional values she had espoused and which therefore led her to do certain things in particular ways. So although she did not have the level of expertise necessary to analyse it in the same detail that I did, her recognition of the dilemma did not depend on that analysis, though any subsequent moral deliberation of the particular incident would have. Overall, then, this is an example of professional judgement quite different from anything encountered in golf or motor mechanics, and probably more difficult (in the sense that there is less proven knowledge about it) than many of the more difficult situations in medicine or law. The ability to identify and reflect upon such situations therefore represents a third kind of interpretation, one which is found in all the major professions, but which is actually more frequent and complex in teaching. This I will term 'reflective' interpretation, and, to be a professional characteristic, it would have to be practised through expertise in moral deliberation of the kind Tom (1984) and Lister and Zeichner (1987) for instance, have advocated.

THE IMPORTANCE OF SIDE-EFFECTS

Throughout this book I have stressed the importance of teaching decisions, and the last example indicated just how far-reaching the effects of a single utterance from

seldom so obvious and immediate, but are almost invariably very diffuse and long-term affairs. Whereas one sees the results of law and medicine immediately and experiences them obviously and directly (people get better or avoid jail), the main effects of teaching are often produced by the hidden curriculum, and as such would be classified as 'side-effects' in medicine. Furthermore the majority of teaching decisions are especially invisible to the clients at the time. The next example is included to show the importance of teachers having the expert knowledge to be able to work at the necessarily high level demanded. It is an extract from part of an interview with an intelligent 11-year-old girl.

Incident 54: Place value

We were going over Katie's weekly test in which the following was written:

14. 4.96	=	P 1s	M 4s	✓
15. 18726	=	P 100ths	M 200ths	✓
16. 376.275	=	P 10s	M 7s	X

I: What do the P and M stand for?

K: The P's the place, and the M's ... I don't know, I think it means how much or something.

I: (*Pointing to Question 15*) What does the 200ths mean then?

K: It's two hundredths.

I: Do you mean it's two one-hundredths, or one two-hundredths?

K: It's two hundredths.

I: We'll have to work on that.

* * *

I: (*Pointing to Question 16*) Why was the 7s marked wrong?

K: It should have been sevenies.

L: Why is that?

K: Because it's sevenies.

L: So what's this 's' bit?

K: That's how we do them.

I: But what does it mean?

K: I don't know.

I: Shouldn't it have been 70?

K: Look, leave me alone will you? That's how we do them, and I usually get them right, don't I?

the importance of setting similar standards for teaching as are current for practice in the major professions. With regard to the first aspect, if one goes by the test results, as most parents, teachers and administrators do, then this child is doing well because she did indeed get the correct answer to 95 per cent of the questions. So any general reflection on this would be more likely to conclude with a congratulation than with further inquiry. It is for that reason that diagnosis prior to reflection is so important. Analysis of my interview shows that she is neither learning much mathematics, nor developing an interest in understanding it. She is instead learning how to get the right answers, which is a very different thing.

The cause for concern is not that Katie does not understand the hundredth/two hundredth or the seventy/seventies distinctions, for those will indeed come in time; the problem is the side effect of her lack of understanding. She has learned two things: first, that in order to do well in mathematics it is not necessary to think about or to try to understand what one is required to do; and second, all that matters is 'getting it right', even if it does not even make sense. As these are hardly what the teacher or anyone else intended her to learn, they are side-effects of the way in which she has been taught. This particular child had ambitions to be a vet. To do that she would need to study mathematics to a fairly high level. It would not be likely that she would make it from her current understanding. Is this not as serious an effect on a person's life as a chronic ailment or law suit?

Most people think that the worst result of poor teaching is merely a failure to learn something at a particular time. But the important and generally totally unrecognised point demonstrated here, is that children do not simply fail to learn something; every time learning or 'not learning' occurs, they learn something about learning or not learning. Children who fail to learn something often learn from that failure that they cannot learn that thing, an experience which is often compounded into learning that they cannot learn, period. Again, professional judgement in teaching is more difficult in this respect than in medicine where a failure to cure does not always aggravate the disease; more often it simply leaves it unchanged.

So what children learn about learning in school is of great consequence to both the individual and society. In this case, for instance, there is currently great concern about the lack of mathematicians, and consequently of maths teachers. Yet here we have a child who has been taught by six different teachers, none of whom had a mathematical background themselves, but who need to be able to communicate to students understandings and attitudes towards the subject which they themselves do not have.

In view of my concern with the poor image that teaching is given by the media and others working in education, it is unfortunate that the example illustrates a negative side-effect, but, as is so often the case, we are much better able to recognise when something has gone wrong than we are able to see that it is going or might go wrong. Therefore the question is, just how do children come to learn such things as that mathematics is a matter of correct recall and not understanding? For many such side-effects the answer is that we simply do not know. For most of the time

in which the processes involved are very explicit, and shortly after the above incident I was working with a teacher who had discovered through diagnosing an incident that he was inadvertently communicating just such messages about mathematics to his class.

In this case the incident was unintentionally reported to me by a teacher during a university course for in-service teachers. The teacher, John, was concerned about the behaviour of Chris, a 12-year-old boy in his class. John had found Chris very annoying in various ways, and thought he was underachieving. John had been observing Chris's behaviour in order to plan some kind of an intervention, and he was now reporting a 'typical' exchange. The following account is a shortened version of what John had written in his critical incident research file:

Incident 55: Fractions

I began the day by marking the maths homework which was five division of fractions problems of the kind: $\frac{3}{5} \div \frac{3}{10}$. My method was to ask one student for the answer, and then go through it on the board.

$$\frac{3}{5} \div \frac{3}{10}$$

'You write down $\frac{3}{5}$, then there are three steps to solving the problem. First you change the sign (i.e. $\frac{3}{5} \times \frac{3}{10}$).

Then you inverse [sic] (or turn up the other way) the second fraction (i.e. $\frac{3}{5} \times \frac{10}{3}$).

The third step is to see if you can cancel. Always try to cancel the biggest numbers first (i.e. $\frac{3}{5} \times \frac{10}{3}$ then, $\frac{3}{1} \times \frac{2}{5}$).

Now multiply out across on both sides of the fraction (i.e. $\frac{3}{1} \times \frac{2}{5} = \frac{6}{5} = \frac{6}{5} = 2$). Who got that? Good! Now the others are done exactly the same.'

After doing them all and explaining the three major steps in each, I turned to the class and asked in a very quiet concerned tone: 'Now, does anyone not understand any of these three steps?'

Chris, who I'd identified as lacking confidence in his own abilities and who I later decided is hampered by his poor concentration (he doesn't listen closely to instructions) — put his hand up and said: 'I don't understand what you do there', and pointed to the first step of changing the sign. Then I hit the roof. 'Well it's no wonder you don't understand, because you don't listen! This is the first of three easy steps.' Then, turning to the class, I said, 'This boy has a problem. He doesn't listen. It's not that he can't learn. It's that he won't listen and that stops him from learning.' I then got from the class the steps of solving these problems and went through the last five asking Chris what to do next. He was able to tell me each step without much hesitation. I congratulated him then and reminded him of the need to listen and concentrate — 'That's how you learn'.

As gently as I could, I pointed out what I thought might be happening. No child could have 'understood' the first step because John had simply repeated an

confusing because the three steps' were presented as four. John wasn't sure whether Chris could do the sums or not, but that is not the point: John conflated knowing to change the sign with understanding why it is that one does it, and gave the whole class a very important lesson on the greater importance of the former. So here was an example of the kind of process that had probably formed Katie's attitudes to mathematics revealed by the previous incident. John's students were not only learning how to do the division of fractions; they were learning that mathematics is something you should memorise rather than try to understand, and furthermore, that you should always pretend to have understood it. The incident explained something about why Chris might be under-achieving.

As we talked around the problem, John reflected upon why the incident had occurred:

Incident 56: Maths memory

I thought back further to my high school mathematics classes, and from Year 9 onwards this was the reason I did not do well. I was always looking for a formula to solve the problems, rather than understanding what the problem meant and what was actually happening to the numbers and why. And here I am, more than 15 years later trying to get my Grade 6 students to 'remember 3 easy steps' and not to consider the 'why' of mathematics. It never occurred to me to show them 'why' the problems are done in these 3 steps. I've yet to work that out for myself. How guilty I feel. It wasn't even laziness, just sheer lack of understanding and foresight on my behalf.

Tomorrow I am spending the time until recess on mathematics, having children working in groups to discuss and work out the 'why' for these fraction problems.

Having seen and accepted the implications of what he had done, John was changing his teaching in order to overcome the problem. If he had not been a dedicated teacher, he would not have been attending the course in his own time and at his own expense, let alone willingly suffering such challenges to his professional self-esteem. John is known to be a very good teacher, but when I showed 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 to 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 interventionist research strategies. It is well-illustrated in the following example which is based upon an extract from a teacher's professional critical incident research file. The teacher is beginning action research on tale-telling.

Incident 57: Tale-telling

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

perceive the different role of a teacher from an aide? ... Does the same child come to all three of us, or do certain children find it easier to interact with certain adults? If a child does go to all three of us, why? ... Is it just attention seeking, or are there other causal factors?

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

This teacher's critical incidents also demonstrate a level of professionalism considerably beyond the practical. First, although certain kinds of frequencies of tale-telling may cause annoyance, it is by no means clear that tale-telling is a problem as such: it may just be an integral and necessary part of social development which, like children's addiction to cartoons at certain ages, is normally grown through to more adult behaviour. Whether it is a problem or not depends almost entirely upon one's knowledge of social development and conception of acceptable behaviour. Whether one knows something or not is the result of a skilling process; but judgements about socially acceptable behaviour are a matter of a teacher's professional value system, and the 'correctness' of the choices they are led to make about what action to take will be judged according to that system, and not according to any purely technical standards about what might be a single 'right answer'. In terms of the complexity and necessity for judgement, then, the 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 labeled 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 legal 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 merely follow a technical routine, she recognises how it is actually herself, as one who 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 reaches right into her consciousness, a very different process from the kind of quality control expected of other than professional occupations. Furthermore, in writing a professional critical incident research file to document, explore and question her 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 judgements 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 hierarchical 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 of 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

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 competencies are a necessary but not sufficient condition for a professional approach to teaching. In 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 they make. And in outlining that theory of professionalism I stressed that the judgements teachers make come more from their understanding of the situation and who they are than from any set of teaching procedures that they may follow. I did 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 two 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 and unique set of experiences, interests, values, circumstances and such, that go to make 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 us 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 into different teachers who will make quite different judgements about the same things. One can imagine serious conflict occurring when teachers are told that 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 differences, 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 (Lai) 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 as well. I will be coming round to see all your work and I will be looking for all the people who have improved. Now see if you can 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 with 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 for 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 so 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 when 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 of 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.

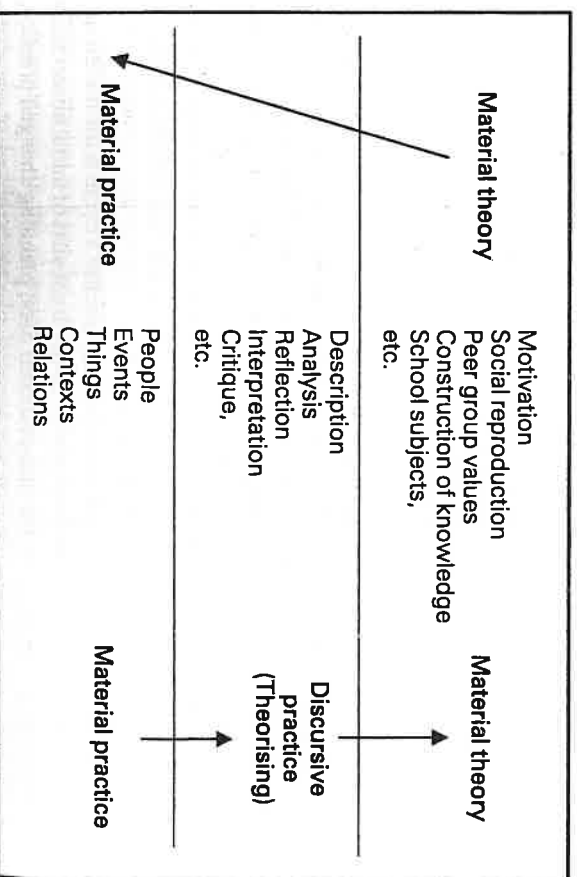
In some ways, then, what both of these teachers were doing was 'good practice' for which they had good reasons. But it was not an easy situation. All teachers experience difficulty balancing conflicting cultural values in class, whether they are due to differences in race or language, class or gender. 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, that they had had different experience in life, and so

Those differences in the teachers' being and value could only be revealed and 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 how the way each regarded the culture of her Aboriginal children was informing her 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.

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.

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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 changed practice, and evaluation of the new practice... etc. It is that over which the

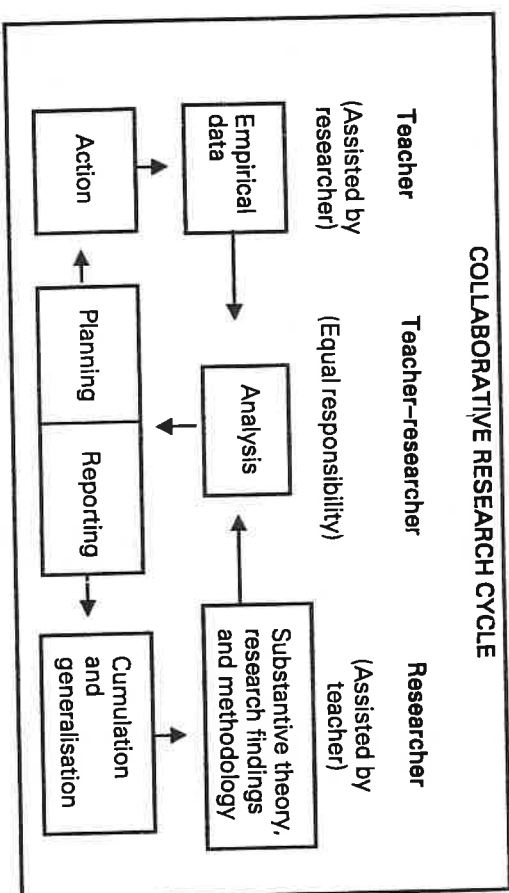


Figure 5 A model for collaborative action research

searcher'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.

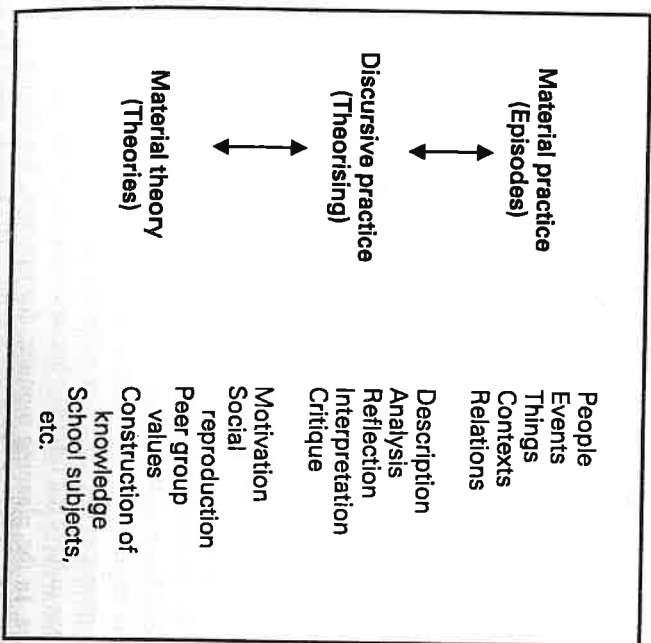
In this approach, collaboration in terms of equality of input is probably at its strongest in the moment of analysis. Although collaboration means that the value for both parties should be mutual and symmetrical, it does not mean that they have to contribute in the same way, or gain the same outcome. 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. Similarly, 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 the practitioners to set the collaborative research agenda because, though it is the teachers' choice of what items to record in their critical incident research files, experienced critical friends and trained researchers are also necessary in this 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 as the research object of an outside 'professional' researcher, teachers make their own choices and are active, self-reflective researchers into their own practice and situation.

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

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 the 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.

Notes

AFTERTHOUGHT

- 1 Following common colloquial usage, I use 'their' and 'they' as ungendered singular and plural pronouns throughout this book.

INTRODUCTION

- 1 For a more detailed treatment of this issue, see Tripp 1990a.
- 2 The use of critical incidents as a means of raising issues for collaborative classroom action and other kinds of research will be the subject of a companion volume expected to be completed in 1993.

1 PROBLEMATIC AND PRACTICE

- 1 My thanks to my colleague, Bob Hodge for pointing out that the difficulty here is that 'problematic' is a transliteration of the French noun *la problématique* which sounds like an English adjective ('symptomatic', 'emphatic', etc.).
- 2 As Althusser and Balibar (1977) put it: '[science] ... can only pose problems on the terrain and within the horizon of a definite theoretical structure, its problematic, which constitutes its absolute and definite condition of possibility, and hence the absolute determination of the forms in which all problems must be posed, at any given moment in the science.'
- 3 This conclusion is not excepted, for a reading of Althusser and Balibar reveals that the analysis of problematic has its own problematic, which informs the kind of information one has to collect, and the kind of analysis that is necessary in order to perceive problematics.
- 4 Note that I am registering the presence of this problematic, not judging it. On certain grounds one can argue that a message about gender differences is appropriate. The same division is made in most sports for the same reason. The real danger is that it can become over-generalised so that girls come to believe that they cannot compete with boys – period. This works to the disadvantage of girls when, for instance, girls and boys perceive maths and science to be 'boys' subjects'. But to teach students to recognise discrimination and to judge whether it is just or not, can be useful.
- 5 He knew both his and her view of the situation; she knew only hers. Whilst knowledge is power, not knowing is one of the more devious hallmarks of power. If the powerful do not know that the powerless has another, different view of the matter, then they do