OFFICE FOR STANDARDS
IN EDUCATION

EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH

A critique

A survey of published educational research

Report presented to OFSTED by James Tooley,
University of Newcastle, with Doug Darby,
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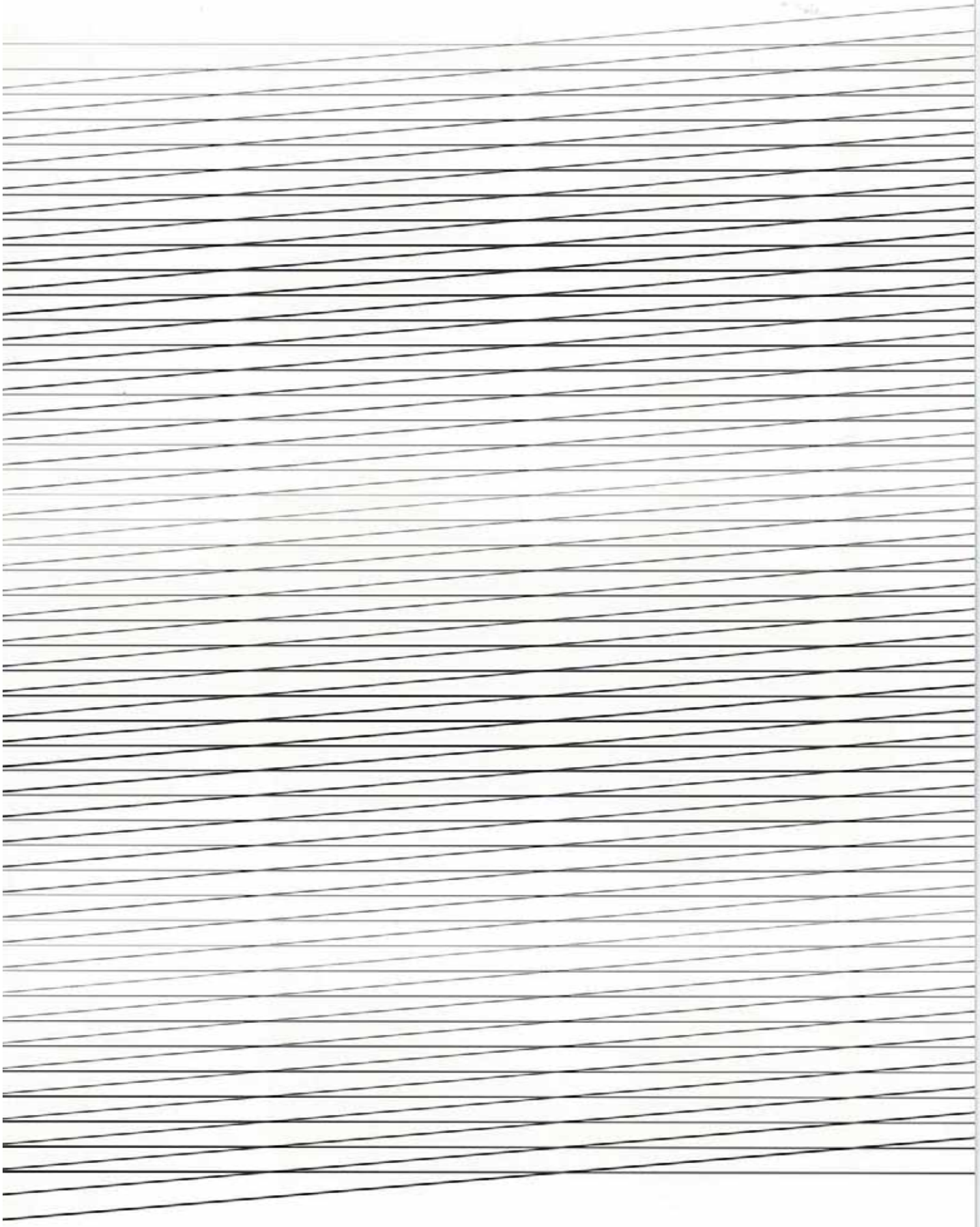

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Foreword

OFSTED inspection evidence confirms what common sense suggests: the better the teaching pupils receive, the more they will learn.

To a significant extent teachers' effectiveness depends, of course, upon their intellectual command of the subject discipline(s) they teach and ultimately their personality. The training they receive as student teachers and teachers in service can, however, have a profound influence on their beliefs about the nature of the educational enterprise and the appropriateness and effectiveness of different teaching methods. The findings of educational research are important because for better or for worse they shape these influences and, in doing so, help to define the intellectual context within which all involved in education work.

OFSTED has sponsored this study because we want above all else to help raise standards in the classroom. Eminent academics such as Professor David Hargreaves at Cambridge and Professor Richard Pring at Oxford have expressed their serious concerns about the quality of much educational research that is published today. This study suggests that they are right to be worried. Educational research is not making the contribution it should. Much that is published is, on this analysis, at best no more than an irrelevance and distraction. To justify the expenditure of significant sums of public money, research must both illuminate issues of importance to teachers and exemplify the intellectual integrity upon which the pursuit of excellence ultimately depends.

CHRIS WOODHEAD
HER MAJESTY'S CHIEF INSPECTOR OF SCHOOLS

Acknowledgements

We wish to thank many people who have helped in one way or another with the work reported here, in particular, Professors Michael Bassey, Harvey Goldstein, David Hargreaves, Richard Pring, Peter Pumfrey and Gajendra Verma, Dr Ivy Brember, Yvonne Salmons, Stephen Hewitt, Dr Tony Neasham, Andy Howes and Dr Bonnie Macmillan. Mrs J.C. Sen and John Lucas of John Rylands Library, University of Manchester, facilitated easy access to the journals. Two anonymous academic referees provided extremely helpful comments and suggestions, for which we are exceedingly grateful. We would also like to thank OFSTED for co-sponsoring this project. Finally, this work was conducted while James Tooley was a Research Fellow in the School of Education at the University of Manchester. He would like to note his special thanks and appreciation to Professor Tom Christie, Director of the School of Education, for all his support, guidance and friendship during this period.

Given the controversy that greeted the announcement of this research, we must add more emphatically than would normally be the case that our expression of gratitude to these colleagues in no way associates them with any of the findings or judgements expressed in this report, for which we alone take full responsibility.

James Tooley
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Contents

Figures and Tables

Executive summary

1. Professor David Hargreaves recently sparked off debate with his comments criticising educational research for being poor value for money, remote from educational practice, and often of indifferent quality (Hargreaves 1996a).
2. Prompted by this debate, this research set out to examine a small part of educational research to ascertain the extent to which some of these criticisms could be justified. Its focus was on *academic* educational research in journals, and aimed to provide, for the interested lay person as well as policy-makers and academics, a 'snapshot' of such research.
3. Through initial reading of journal articles and reflection on standards of good practice in educational research, some 30 research questions were posed, which fleshed out a small part of Hargreaves' critique. In particular, the research sought to address the concern that there is a considerable amount of 'frankly second-rate educational research which ... is irrelevant to practice ... and which clutters up academic journals that virtually nobody reads.' These 30 questions concerned the *focus, conduct* and *presentation* of research.
4. Four journals were selected for detailed scrutiny in the light of these questions. These were the top-rated British generic educational research journals in the SSCI's Journal Impact list, together with the journal of the British Educational Research Association.
5. All the 264 British research articles in these four journals were read in the light of a subset of the research questions, and coded in terms of how they fitted into categories and sub-categories of topics, using the machinery developed for this purpose by other researchers (Bassey and Constable, 1997).
6. A sub-sample of 41 articles was selected to be reported and analysed in detail, to ensure that full justice was given to the arguments in each paper. This sub-sample was selected by a counting method, to roughly match the proportion of articles in each journal falling under each of Bassey's and Constable's categories.
7. The four academic journals and the sub-sample of articles within them were selected to ensure that they were representative of at least a significant strand of academic educational research; triangulation of researchers' judgements also aimed to minimise partisanship in the conduct of this research.
8. From the analysis of these 41 articles in the light of the 30 questions, four major themes emerged as worthy of reporting: the partisan researcher, problems of methodology, non-empirical educational research, and the focus of educational research.
9. The first major theme concerned partisanship. There was partisanship in the *conduct* of research (e.g., in interpreting data to support the class-bound nature of choice in education, when the data would seem to undermine that claim); the *presentation* of research (e.g., by putting research findings into the context of contentious and unsupported remarks about political reform); and in the *argument* of non-empirical research (e.g., by subjecting one government's reforms to critical scrutiny while at the same time accepting at face value previous educational reforms). Not all research was partisan in this way: a minority of articles showed a detached, non-partisan approach to the subject studied. Three examples focused on the introduction of, and teachers' perceptions of, grant-maintained schools, and a defence of university-based teacher education.
10. The second major theme concerned methodological issues. This largely focused on problems arising from the *conduct* of qualitative research, which made up a large proportion of the empirical work surveyed. In particular, the issues of triangulation (or the lack of it) and sampling bias were noted. Other issues concerning methodology arose around the *presentation* of research, including

the lack of reporting of sample size and method of sample selection. Again, not all research showed these problems - although it must be said that examples of qualitative research which did not were very rare. But there was research which demonstrated good practice in quantitative and, sometimes, qualitative methods, and which reported on how sampling was undertaken and sample size.

11. The third theme focused on non-empirical research. This was a very large part of the research surveyed - covering a range of approaches and disciplines. There were many examples of good practice, for example, in the disciplines of sociology and philosophy of education, and education policy. However, other articles did not reach these standards, particularly in terms of arguments which introduced often contentious propositions without acknowledging their controversy, or which were logically incoherent. Another difficulty arose in the use of 'secondary sources', where a game of 'academic Chinese whispers' seemed to ensue, as researchers lifted summaries of controversial positions without consulting primary sources. An especially questionable practice - the 'adulation' of 'great' thinkers - was where educational episodes were examined in the light of the work of, in the sub-sample, Bourdieu, Lyotard and Foucault. It was not apparent, at least from the research reported, that these thinkers did have much to contribute to the educational enterprise, with the empirical and historical episodes either contradicting the work of the thinker, or the analysis arising from the theoretical interpretation at best being anodyne.

12. The fourth theme reported on the focus of educational research. It seemed that all the 41 articles in the sub-sample could be argued to be 'relevant' to policy and practice in some way, although sometimes the connection would be tenuous at best - this was particularly the case with some 'reflexive' accounts of educational research. But in general, as all the research could be said to be 'relevant', this did not seem to be a particularly useful spotlight in which to comment on the research. The issues of practitioners as researchers and relevance to practitioners' agendas were also discussed; with only one article by a teacher-as-researcher in the sub-sample, cautious conclusions were drawn suggesting doubts about the efficacy of teachers-as-researchers to solve any of the problems noted here. Finally, there were no examples of replication of research found in the sub-sample, and of critical challenges to earlier work only rare examples. The picture emerged of researchers doing their research largely in a vacuum, unnoticed and unheeded by anyone else.

13. In terms of the 41 articles in the sub-sample, 15 are highlighted as showing good practice, with 26 highlighted as not satisfying criteria of good practice, in terms of certain dimensions of the analysis. Given the seriousness of many of these weaknesses, the tentative conclusion is that there are rather worrying tendencies in a *majority* of the articles surveyed in the sub-sample, and that we can be reasonably confident that these tendencies will be found throughout this important strand of educational research.

14. These conclusions may be disturbing, in particular in terms of the general health of the academic education research community, and its potential influence in terms of the training and education of future teachers. All the papers discussed here have been accepted through the academic refereeing process, and questions are raised as to whether this this process is working adequately, and what can be done about it.

1 Introduction and background

At the University's Christmas party, a porter told one of the researchers about his unsatisfactory schooling experiences in Manchester. "But", he said, "that's what you educational researchers get up to, isn't it, trying to make schools better places for people like me?"

Some pleasantries were muttered, and the subject changed to more festive things. This report is an attempt to give a more honest answer. The question of what we as educational researchers *do* get up to is an important one for him and other citizens. He pays for educational research, through taxation. He has a right to know what our concerns and predilections are.

The in-house magazine of the British Educational Research Association (BERA), under the title 'Democracy needs research', expressed the importance of the work of educational researchers like this:

> 'Social research is essential for democracy. Government of the people, for the people, by the people requires research about the people ... democracy needs research.' (Editorial, *Research Intelligence*, 55, p. 2).

Perhaps this is true. But the converse is also the case, as the editorial goes on to state, that we have a duty to present what we do to 'the people' for them to 'ponder over, criticise, reflect on, argue about and build on' (p. 2). This report is a small contribution to the wider debate needed on this issue.

The initial impetus for this project came from Professor David Hargreaves' comments in his 1996 Teacher Training Agency (TTA) Annual Lecture. Hargreaves argues that educational research 'is poor value for money in terms of improving the quality of education provided in schools.' (Hargreaves 1996a p. 1). Unlike in fields such as medical research, it is 'non-cumulative' (p. 2). It is of little relevance to improving classroom practice, and often taken up with fashionable methodological quarrels which are baffling to anyone outside the academic community (p. 3). The 'gap between researchers and practitioners' is the 'fatal flaw in educational research' (p. 3), for 'the researchers, not the practitioners ... determine the agenda of educational research.' (p. 3). While some educational research has potential application to the raising of educational standards or the improvement of equality of opportunity, Hargreaves suggests that there is a considerable amount of:

> 'frankly second-rate educational research which does not make a serious contribution to fundamental theory or knowledge; which is irrelevant to practice; which is unco-ordinated with any preceding or follow-up research; and which clutters up academic journals that virtually nobody reads.' (p. 7).

His lecture in general provoked a lively public debate in the educational press and professional journals (see, e.g., Bassey 1996, Budge 1996, Hargreaves 1996b, Gray et al 1997). The debate was taken up at the Fifteenth International Conference of the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER), and by the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE), who brought together a group of researchers to discuss the future co-ordination and commissioning of educational research, to help inform policy. It was amidst this climate of growing concern that the DfEE commissioned a report on educationalists' perceptions of the value of educational research, and that OFSTED, which is also a major user of educational research, agreed to co-sponsor this project.

The problem which both these research projects set out to confront is the lack of adequate

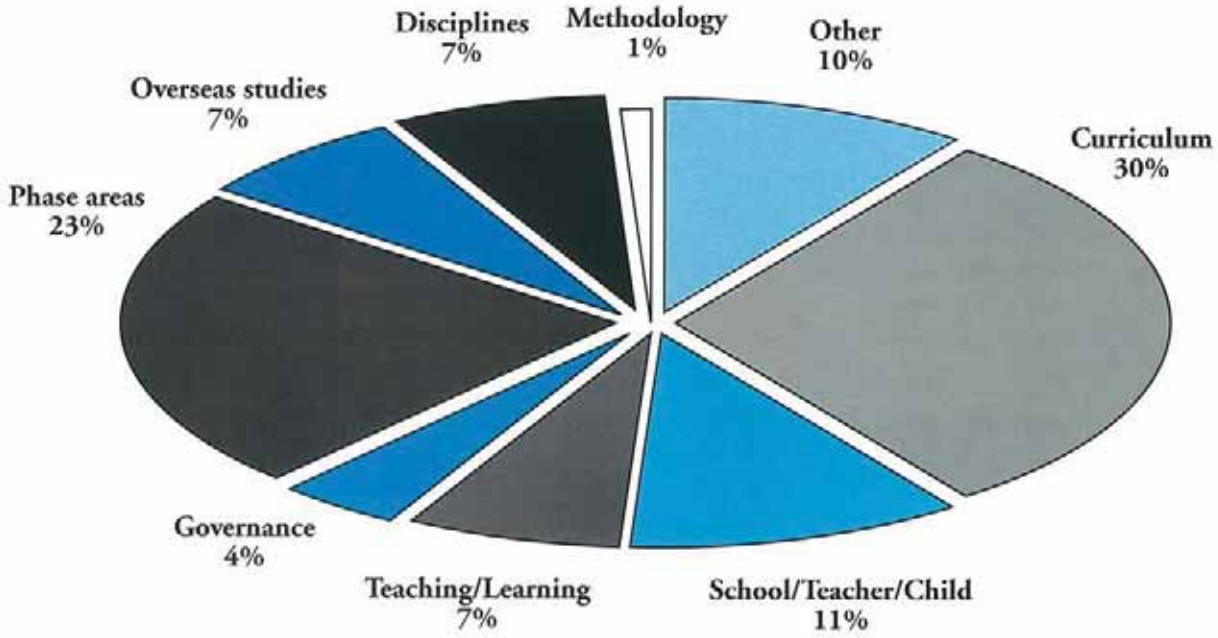
evidence about the state of educational research. As McIntyre, in his 1996 presidential address to BERA, notes:

> 'Much of our debate about what educational research in Britain is like, and what is, or is not wrong with it, is conducted on the basis of very limited and inadequate information.' (McIntyre 1997, p. 129)

This report aims to be a modest contribution to 'improve the quality of the evidence on which these debates depend' (p. 129). It does this, in part, by building on one of the limitations of an earlier piece of work examining the state of educational research, by Professors Michael Bassey - Executive Secretary and former president of the British Educational Research Association - and Hilary Constable. They undertook an analysis of the titles of the 12,000 or so educational research papers submitted to the Education Panel in the Higher Education Funding Council's 1996 Research Assessment Exercise, categorising them in terms of eight educational types. A summary of their findings is illustrated in graphical form in Figure 1.

They find, for example, that 'Curriculum issues' accounted for roughly one-third of the articles submitted, while a further one-fifth was devoted to school/teacher/child and teaching/learning issues combined. These findings are used by the authors to suggest that concerns about educational research are misplaced. Much of it, they reassure us, is clearly directly relevant to important issues in education.[1] The problem, says Bassey, is not the *quality* of educational research, but its 'isolation', its failure to reach the wider audience of classroom teachers (personal communication, 17 September 1997).

Figure 1 Bassey and Constable's Findings for the Research Assessment Exercise 1996



1 A similar point, based on the same evidence, was made by Professor David Halpin as this report was going to press (*Times Educational Supplement* 26 June 1998, Research Focus, p. 24).

We take issue with this here. Valuable though Bassey's and Constable's research is as an overall 'map' of the research terrain, their figures tell us *nothing* about the quality of the literature surveyed. For their work, as noted above, used only the *titles* of research papers, and hence they were not able to make *any* judgement concerning the quality of the research included under their headings.

Hence, this report aims to help provide some badly needed evidence to inform the debate about the quality of educational research by taking Bassey's and Constable's work a small step further, to look behind the titles at the *content* of the research articles. It aims to give a 'snapshot' of research in certain academic educational research journals, of interest, it is hoped, to the interested lay reader outside the research community, as well as to policy-makers and educational researchers themselves[2]. To this end, it reviews the *British* output of certain *key educational academic journals* during the period 1994-1996. There are many other journals - both academic and professional - which have not been covered, and the focus here is only on those years. Clearly, too, there is other educational research that takes place, published only in government or foundation reports. It may be that all this has a great impact on educational policy and practice, which would not be highlighted in this report. This review is only a modest, unambitious contribution to the debate.

Nevertheless, even if limited, it is still, we hope, an important contribution to the ongoing and wider debate. Articles in *academic* journals are a significant part of what educational researchers get up to. In the government's Research Assessment Exercise (RAE), evaluating the output of university research, they are, more than anything else, what defines us as researchers. They are pivotal indicators when researchers compete for promotion and public esteem. The journals chosen are also important ones - in particular, they include the *British Educational Research Journal*, the organ of the British Educational Research Association, and the highest-ranking British journals in the Social Science Citation Index (SSCI) Journal Impact list.

Is much educational research really of the 'second-rate' kind, as Hargreaves suggests, irrelevant to classroom practice and caught up in arcane disputes? Or are these criticisms seriously misrepresenting the work of researchers? Chapter 2 sets out how these questions are to be explored, and the research questions which arose from this discussion. Chapter 3 then gives the research method used, pointing to ways in which the researchers were 'kept at a distance' from the selection of journals, articles and analysis of these. Chapter 4 presents the main findings from this research, grouped under major themes that arose from the analysis, while Chapter 5 brings conclusions together, and raises questions for further examination.

2 By wanting to satisfy both lay and professional audiences it runs the risk of falling between two stools - of not giving enough detail to satisfy the research community, and of giving too much so that lay readers find it inaccessible.

2 Research questions

Hargreaves' TTA lecture provided the initial impetus for the research reported here. Given modest ambitions and the fact that other parts of his critique have been challenged in some detail (see e.g., Hammersley, 1997), it was decided to focus only on the particularly severe criticism, which had not been addressed seriously elsewhere, that there is a considerable amount of 'frankly second-rate educational research which does not make a serious contribution to fundamental theory or knowledge ...' (Hargreaves, 1996a, p. 7). It was also decided, as the field of educational research is vast, to focus on only a small subset of the larger field. Given our position as academic researchers, it was decided to focus only on *articles* published in *academic* journals.

Hargreaves does not spell out in detail what he means by his somewhat sweeping claim, although in the full paragraph quoted in Chapter 1 above he seems to suggest that the type of research he has in mind:

1. does not make a serious contribution to fundamental theory or knowledge;
2. is irrelevant to practice;
3. is uncoordinated with any preceding or follow-up research.

For the purposes of this research, each of these issues can be further 'fleshed out'[3] in terms of research questions with which to critically scrutinise articles in academic research journals. Before we turn to these, we need various working definitions to help with the discussion that follows, particularly aimed at clarifying issues for those not familiar with some of the terminology in this area.

Working definitions

First, the following distinction is important for the discussion:

- empirical research - i.e. collecting, using and interpreting data gained through, for example, observation, interviews, or experiments;
- non-empirical research - i.e. not based on gathering new empirical data but, for example, developing theoretical ideas, reflecting on one's own or others' experience, summarising, elaborating or critiquing earlier arguments and/or literature, policy analysis and historical research.

Clearly, much research will use both approaches - indeed, almost all of the empirical research will feature a small non-empirical part which focuses on a literature review.

Second, empirical work, in turn, can be divided into two main types:

- quantitative research - concerned with the acquisition and interpretation of data which can be analysed using statistical techniques;
- qualitative research - typically involving the gathering of evidence that explores the 'significance, meaning, impact, individual or collective interpretation of events' (Wragg, 1994, p. 9); it is an approach which attempts 'to probe beneath the surface of events, to elicit the meanings sometimes

3 These questions were actually 'fleshed out' during component 1 of the project described in the next chapter, motivated by Hargreaves' comments, building on the researchers' notions of good practice, and preliminary analysis of journal articles.

deeply buried, the interpretations and explanations, significance and impact of classroom life.' (p. 50).

It must be stressed that these categories are 'ideal types', and that it is sometimes the case that research uses both kinds of approach.

Third, a distinction must be made between the following three levels:

- *Focus of research*
- *Conduct of research*
- *Presentation of research*

This distinction is important because some elements of the model of good practice will apply specifically to one or more, but not necessarily all three, of these levels, as we see below. Moreover, the distinction has an importance because of a potential bias that may arise in *this* research, because of its dependence on the *reading* of journal articles for all its data. Logically, there could be high quality research (however defined) badly presented, or conversely, poor quality research reported rather well, and the whole range of possibilities in between. The research conducted here depended upon reading articles, and hence relied on the *presentation* of the research, from which assumptions had to be made about the *conduct* of the research itself. This approach was unavoidable given resource constraints, but does of course bring in the risk that such judgements were unfair, and that the conduct of particular research didn't itself suffer from defects that arose only in its presentation, or conversely that research praised actually reflected the skilful reporting of poor quality research.

With these definitions in mind, we turn to the 'fleshing out' of Hargreaves' contention that provides the springboard for this research.

A serious contribution to fundamental theory or knowledge?

First, for research to make a 'serious contribution to fundamental theory or knowledge', it would unambiguously need to satisfy certain criteria of 'good practice'. To this end, researchers should be concerned with what might be called the 'trustworthiness' of their method and presentation.

While any set of criteria will be controversial, we are hopeful that the set discussed here will find a wide range of agreement in the research community, based as they are on discussions with interested colleagues and informed by standard texts on educational research methodology (for example, Borg and Gall 1989, Cohen and Manion 1985, Wiersma 1986 and Wragg 1994). The criteria for assessing 'good practice' in educational research are here set out in the form of questions. If a piece of research does not satisfy these criteria, then it is unlikely to be able to make a 'serious contribution to fundamental theory or knowledge'. What these criteria of 'good practice' in educational research are depends, in part, on the type of research being considered, and the level at which it is being addressed - and hence the need for the three sets of working definitions given above.

For *empirical* research, we would expect the following questions to be answered in the affirmative concerning the *conduct* of the research:

- Does the research involve triangulation[4] in order to establish its trustworthiness?
- Does the research avoid sampling bias[4]?
- Does the research use primary sources[4] in the literature review?
- Does the research avoid partisanship[4] in the way it is carried out, and in the interpretation of the data?

4 More details are given on the notions of 'triangulation', 'sampling bias', 'primary sources' and 'partisanship' below.

Moreover, it is not just in the conduct of the research itself that criteria of 'good practice' must be satisfied, but also in the *presentation* of the research. A minimum requirement for good practice in research - *any* research - should be to be told enough information about the research methods to enable informed judgements to be made about the way it was conducted, and, if required, the research to be replicated. Hence, research presentations should include details of the sample size, how the sample was selected, and any limitations on interpretation of the results, given the sample size and selection process. Similarly, details of triangulation should be carefully reported, so that readers can make judgements about the reliability and validity of the research. If triangulation is not feasible, or is not undertaken for any reason, then this fact, and the reasons behind it, should be made explicit, so that, for example, the reader is aware that there may be biased views being presented. In other ways, too, the research should avoid partisanship in presentation. Hence, the following questions need to be answered in the affirmative:

- Is the presentation of the research such as to enable the above questions to be adequately explored?
- Does the presentation of the research avoid partisanship?

For *non-empirical* research, the distinction between the *conduct* and *presentation* of the research is clearly more difficult to work with, for it is not usually the case that we can have any access to, or make assumptions about, the conduct of the research over and above the information given in its presentation. Hence, when considering non-empirical research, or the non-empirical parts of empirical research papers, we focus on what we call the *argument* of the research, incorporating both of these levels. At a minimum, we would expect the following questions to be answered in the affirmative to satisfy the criteria for good practice:

- Is the argument coherent and lucidly expressed?
- Do the conclusions follow from the premises and argument?
- Are unfamiliar terms adequately defined and assumptions clearly set out?
- Are concepts used consistently?
- Are primary sources used?
- If empirical propositions are introduced, are references given for these?
- If controversial empirical and non-empirical propositions are introduced, is their controversy acknowledged?
- Is the relevant literature adequately surveyed?
- Is the argument free of partisanship?

As we shall note below, a feature of some of the articles surveyed was that they combined empirical and non-empirical approaches in the examination of the work of some 'great' figure, such as, in our sample, Lyotard, Bourdieu or Vygotsky, looking for its applicability to some educational setting. Work combining theoretical discussion of Foucault with exploration of historical episodes was also in a similar vein. Clearly the above questions concerning empirical and non-empirical questions would need to be addressed for this kind of research, but further ones also apply:

- Is the work of the 'great' figure *critically* examined?
- Does the non-empirical work add significantly to understanding of the empirical (or historical) work?
- If the empirical (or historical) work undermines the non-empirical position, is this noted? What conclusions are drawn from this?

Again, to satisfy good practice, it would be expected that these questions would also be answered in the affirmative.

Relevance to practice?

Second, Hargreaves' issue of 'relevance to practice' can also be fleshed out in questions reflecting current concerns about the *focus* of educational research. Here we have interpreted 'practice' broadly to include all of the following:

- Is the focus of the research on issues concerned with
  - classroom practice?
  - increasing educational attainment?
  - increasing educational opportunity?
  - developing effective school management and organisation?
  - education policy related to any of the above?
  - developing theoretical perspectives or methodology which move any of the above forward?

But it is not only in the *focus* of research that the issue of relevance arises; it could also arise in the areas of *conduct* and *presentation.* As we have noted above, Hargreaves suggests that the 'gap between researchers and practitioners' is of key concern (Hargreaves, 1996a, p. 3). By practitioners here, it is assumed we are referring to teachers, headteachers, advisory teachers, inspectors and similar. The following questions would seem to reflect these concerns in the context of the area of 'relevance to practice', with practitioners defined in the above fashion:

- Is the research conducted by practitioners, or informed by their agendas?
- Is the research presented in such a way as to be accessible to practitioners?

While all these questions concerning relevance to practice were posed during the course of this research, we leave it hanging at this point - to be taken up in Chapter 4.4 below - whether any of them have also to be answered in the affirmative in order to satisfy a model of good practice in educational research.

Co-ordinated with preceding or follow-up research?

The *third* issue deals with whether or not research is cumulative, that is, providing 'a corpus of reliable knowledge that has been tested and replicated across a variety of settings and situations' (Hargreaves, 1996b, p. 15). Again, while it was certainly possible to 'flesh out' some research questions on this issue, after some reflection, these questions appeared rather more difficult than the others to address simply by scrutinising articles in journals. The problem is that it became clear very early on that any one of the articles examined was cumulative in some sense, in that it referred to work by other researchers. Hence, it could be plausibly argued of any of the researchers that their work was attempting to *move towards* 'a corpus of reliable knowledge', or *moving towards* the 'testing and replicating' across 'a variety of settings and situations', even if the piece of research in question didn't actually achieve this end. But whether it was actually doing this would involve judgements about the contribution of the particular research within the whole corpus of relevant work, a judgement that was simply too difficult to make given resource constraints.

Although the 'global' judgement was too hard to make, certain questions could be asked which could help to provide some pointers. These were:

- Is the research a replication of earlier research (with perhaps some parameters changed)?
- Is the research a critical examination of an earlier research article?

The second question was aimed at locating articles which were challenging a particular piece

of work, critically analysing its strength and weakness, with the aim of moving the debate forward. These questions are included in the section on *focus* of research.

Good practice in educational research

Research which is to 'make a serious contribution to fundamental theory or knowledge' must satisfy, it is suggested, the criteria for good practice in educational research as set out in the research questions above. In this section, we explain in more detail some of the terms introduced there, which may be unfamiliar to some readers.

Does the research involve triangulation to establish its trustworthiness?

Triangulation is a way of cross-validating research. It uses methods of comparison, to help assess the validity and reliability of the data collected. It can use several data sources or several data collection procedures, or a combination of these. If the data collected in this way disagree, then there is a dilemma about which the researcher is to believe - but this should be then a matter for making explicit that there is this disagreement within the data.

For example, if a female teacher complains about sexism in the promotion of a male teacher above her, then a researcher doesn't have to rely on her viewpoint only, but can, for example, interview the headteacher, the male teacher, and members of the promotion panel to ascertain their reasons for the decision (i.e., using several data sources); and/or investigate the teachers' CVs (i.e., use several data collection procedures). Only in this way can the research community have confidence in the findings reported.

Does the research avoid sampling bias?

The selection of the sample for the research is a critical part of the conduct of research. If research is to provide us with a 'serious contribution to fundamental theory or knowledge', then it is in general desirable to be able to generalise in some way beyond the actual sample used in the study. Hence, *either* the sample should be selected by a process which enables us to make assumptions that it is representative of a wider population, *or* detailed consideration should be given as to why the sample otherwise opportunistically selected is likely to be representative of a wider population. Common problems with sampling bias militate against these. For example, if a researcher is examining homophobia in schools, and his sample is one lesbian teacher whom he knows personally, then unless he can point to ways in which her experiences are typical of a wider homosexual population, he cannot generalise; if he tries to do so, his work is suffering from sampling bias.

Does the research use primary sources in the literature review?

When reviewing literature, particularly on contentious issues, good practice requires that the researcher does not simply quote from other researchers of a known similar persuasion to him or herself, who have already summarised a particular author's views or piece of research. Instead, the research should go back to the original sources. If not, any bias or misunderstanding in the secondary interpretations will be perpetuated or exaggerated, leading to a game of 'academic Chinese whispers'.

Does the research avoid partisanship?

The issue here is whether the researcher attempts to avoid bringing his or her emotional or political judgements into the conduct and presentation of research. In a popular textbook for educational researchers, Borg and Gall (1989), cognisant of this danger, suggest that being 'emotionally involved' in one's research topic is undesirable: 'You should try to avoid working in such areas whenever possible.' (p. 179). This is probably going too far for most researchers, missing out on an important area of satisfaction which is precisely in working on issues to which one does have emotional or political commitment. Nevertheless, the important point is raised that researchers should be aware that their emotional or political commitments can cloud their research judgements - and that this is nothing to be ashamed of, merely that measures should be used to try to minimise this effect. Using triangulation and avoiding sample bias can help mitigate these biases, as well as avoiding using secondary sources, etc.

There is also the 'Pygmalion Effect' worth mentioning under this heading, named after the study by Rosenthal and Jackson (1968), where teachers' expectations of their students were reported to have raised their students' intelligence. While not all will agree that this did occur in this context, the point is that researchers should be aware of the dangers of conveying *their expectations* to their subjects, which may influence them in what they report. So, for example, if looking for examples of racism in the classroom, try not to convey that one is sure that these are occurring, or one's interviewees may be tempted to 'play to the gallery'.

The research questions: a summary

Using Hargreaves' (1996a) comments as a springboard, the research developed the following 30 questions with which to examine critically articles in the academic journals:

A Basic Questions

1. Name of journal?
2. Title of paper; Year/Volume/Page numbers in journal?
3. Name and affiliation of author(s) (specifying if education or other university department)?
4. Funding of research (if given)?
5. Topic of research?
6. Methodology of research?
7. What was the sample size?
8. How was the sample selected?

B Focus of Research

9. Is the focus of the research on issues concerned with
   - classroom practice?
   - increasing educational attainment?
   - increasing educational opportunity?
   - developing effective school management and organisation?
   - education policy related to any of the above?
   - developing theoretical perspectives or methodology which move any of the above forward?

10. Is the research conducted by practitioners, or informed by their agendas, and/or presented in such a way as to be accessible to them?
11. Is the research a replication of earlier research (with perhaps some parameters changed)?
12. Is the research a critical examination of an earlier research article?

C Conduct of Empirical Research

13. Does the research involve triangulation in order to establish its trustworthiness?
14. Does the research avoid sampling bias?
15. Does the research use primary sources in the literature review?
16. Does the research avoid partisanship in the way it is carried out and in the interpretation of data?

D Argument of Non-empirical Research

17. Is the argument coherent and lucidly expressed?
18. Do the conclusions follow from the premises and argument?
19. Are unfamiliar terms adequately defined and assumptions clearly set out?
20. Are concepts used consistently?
21. Are primary sources used?
22. If empirical propositions are introduced, are references given for these?
23. If controversial empirical and non-empirical propositions are introduced, is their controversy acknowledged and arguments given, or referred to, to justify supporting the proposition?
24. Is the relevant literature adequately surveyed?
25. Is the argument largely free of partisanship?
26. If addressing the work of a 'great figure', did the author critically examine this work?
27. If addressing the work of a 'great figure', did the non-empirical work add significantly to understanding of the empirical (or historical) work, if addressed?
28. If addressing the work of a 'great figure', when empirical (or historical) work seemed to undermine the non-empirical argument, was this noted?

E Presentation of Research

29. Is the presentation of the research such as to enable the questions about the *conduct of research* to be adequately explored?
30. Does the presentation of the research avoid partisanship?

Clearly, the great majority of these questions required the researchers to make judgements based on their reading of the articles. We turn now, in Chapter 3, to the ways in which the research was conducted, to illustrate in part methods used to mitigate the subjectivity of these judgements. The interesting question is also raised as to how many of these questions any piece of research would have to satisfy in order not to be classified as being 'second-rate'. This question can be kept in the background, to be returned to in the concluding chapter.

3 Research method

THREE COMPONENTS OF THE RESEARCH

The research reported here was conducted by James Tooley and Doug Darby[5]. The aim was to provide a 'snapshot' of academic education journals, accessible to lay readers as well as of interest to professionals, that would help provide some much needed evidence on the quality of academic educational research. In this chapter, the research method is set out.

Three components of the research are described here: the developing of the research questions; the selecting of journals and articles within these for scrutiny; and the analysis and reporting of these.

Component one: developing the research questions

The research questions outlined in Chapter 2 emerged during the research process, as the researchers read articles, reflected on their own criteria for good practice in educational research, discussed with colleagues and studied standard educational research handbooks. Research questions were gradually refined, eliminating some which proved too difficult to assess (such as the issue of whether or not research is 'cumulative', as noted above) until the final set of questions was ready for the sub-sample of articles selected (see below).

The process began with the two researchers reading through various selected papers from the *British Educational Research Journal*, scrutinising these in the light of the first draft of research questions posed. They met together to compare, argue over and, eventually, to standardise their judgements, to ensure a consistency of approach. Other journals were also read during this period, chosen to represent a range of academic journals so that different approaches and problems would be encountered, to ensure that the 'template' of questions catered for as many eventualities as were possible.

As questions emerged, clearly the great majority of them required the judgement of the researcher to be made, and the comparing of these judgements to reach consensus was an important part of the process - as discussed below in the third component. As regards the 'basic questions', question 5 in particular posed some initial problems. It seemed rather difficult for the researchers to arrive at a consensus on which 'topic' the research was focused on, there being almost as many possible topics as there were research articles. Hence it was decided to use the machinery mentioned above created by Bassey and Constable (1997) to adjudicate here. Through their analysis of the nearly 12,000 articles submitted to the 1996 Research Assessment Exercise (RAE), 'In conversation with the data' (Bassey and Constable, 1997, p. 6), they had divided the research output into 44 'fields of enquiry', and sorted these into eight categories 'felt to have a semblance of educational logic' (p. 6). These fields of enquiry and categories are set out in the table below.

5 Other research was conducted under the auspices of the same project using similar methods reporting on reading journals and others opportunistically selected from the John Rylands Library. We hope to report on this at a later stage.

Using these previously-established categories had the added advantage that it was an excellent way of avoiding bringing the researchers' own prejudices into the coding of the research topic. Note that it is not asserted that Bassey's and Constable's categories are flawless; the only assertion is that they are not the researchers' categories, and hence are not subject to any particular bias which they may bring to the research.

Indeed, as anyone who attempts coding using these categories will soon find out, it is sometimes difficult to decide into which category to put an article. In cases where two or more categories were suggested by the article, a judgement was made as to which was the more dominant - and the two researchers endeavoured to agree on the judgement here. Where agreement couldn't be reached, or where it was impossible to decide which was dominant, we exactly followed Bassey and Constable in their method - the *lowest* number was selected.

*Figure 2 Bassey and Constable's 'Fields of Enquiry'**

CURRICULUM ISSUES

1 Art education
2 Design and Technology Education
3 English education, including reading, writing, oracy, literacy
4 Geography education
5 History education
6 IT education
7 Modern and classical languages
8 Mathematics education
9 Music education
10 Physical education
11 Science education
12 Environmental education
13 Health education
14 Personal, social, moral education
15 Religious education

SCHOOL/TEACHER/CHILD ISSUES

16 School management, effectiveness, improvement; school development planning
17 Classroom management
18 Teacher issues: life-histories, career structures, workload, stress
19 Equal opportunities, gender, ethnic issues
20 Special educational needs

TEACHING/LEARNING ISSUES

21 Pedagogy in general
22 Assessment in general (not specific to a subject)
23 Curriculum in general (not specific to a subject)

GOVERNANCE

24 Governance - school governors, LMS, school finance, GM
25 Macro educational policy - national government, LEAs

PHASE AREAS

26 Nursery education (i.e. under 5 years)
27 Primary education (include KS1, KS2, infant, junior)
28 Secondary education (include KS3, KS4)
29 Post-compulsory education (i.e. post-16, but not obviously FE or Higher)
30 Higher education
31 Further education, vocational education, NVQ, etc.
32 Adult education, continuing education, life-long education
33 Teacher education - ITT
34 Teacher education - INSET, professional development of teachers

*From Bassey and Constable (1997).

35 Other profession education (nursing, police, etc.)

OVERSEAS STUDIES

36 Overseas studies - policy or practice

DISCIPLINES IN EDUCATIONAL SETTINGS

37 History of education
38 Philosophy of education
39 Sociological theory developed from educational settings
40 Psychological theory developed from educational settings

METHODOLOGY

41 Research methodology

OTHER

42 Other
43 Unclassified - impossible to decide
44 Seems not to be educational research in any recognisable form.

Component two: journal and article selection

Having timed how long it took to adequately read, code and write comments on each article, it was eventually estimated that there would be sufficient time to report in detail four educational research journals for the years 1994-1996, to give the intended 'snapshot' of academic educational research.

To ensure a transparent method of selection, the Social Science Citation Index (SSCI) Journal Impact List for 1996 was consulted. The top four British[6] education journals were the following:

British Journal of Sociology of Education (25th)
Journal of Geography in Higher Education (37th)
British Journal of Educational Studies (45th)
Oxford Review of Education (58th)

It was decided that the *Journal of Geography in Higher Education* was too specialised for the purposes at hand (i.e., it was not a 'generic' education journal), so the *British Educational Research Journal* was substituted in its place. Indeed, this made considerable sense, for this is the organ of the British Educational Research Association (BERA), and hence particularly important to consider because of that society's role in the promotion and conduct of educational research. It also transpired that this journal is not included in the SSCI, so the fact that it has not found its way to the top of the list is no indicator of lack of impact. Hence the four journals selected as case studies were:

British Journal of Sociology of Education
British Educational Research Journal
British Journal of Educational Studies
Oxford Review of Education

It is important to stress that it is not being argued that these *are* the 'best' British educational research journals. Although the SSCI is an important and widely-respected indicator, some do question the way in which the calculation of 'impact factor' - which leads to the journal ranking - is made. Moreover, as the case of the *British Educational Research Journal* shows, not all

6 i.e., with British editorship and with primarily British contributions. *School Effectiveness and School Improvement* did rank 24th , but this has a joint British/overseas editorship and only a small minority of British contributions.

British educational journals are incorporated in it, so it is not possible to predict how non-appearing journals would rank, had they been included. The crucial purpose of using the SSCI was to select journals by a method which was transparent, and which would avoid accusations of a biased selection process.

For the four 'case study' journals, *all* the research[7] articles with at least one British author in the period 1994-1996 were read and critically examined, in the light of the developing set of research questions. The number of articles read was as follows:

Table 1: Case Study Journals

Journal	***Number of articles***
British Educational Research Journal (BERJ)	101
British Journal of Sociology of Education (BJSE)	36
Oxford Review of Education	70
British Journal of Educational Studies (BJES)	57
Total	***264***

However, it soon became clear that, to do justice to each article read, a smaller sub-sample of articles would be needed in order to make sense of the data and adequately report the findings. It was decided that about 40 articles, or ten from each journal, could be adequately summarised in sufficient detail to convey the intended 'snapshot', while covering as comprehensive a range of research questions as possible. As one of the 'Basic questions' asked of each article was the *topic* of the research, with eight discrete categories coded for this, it was decided to select the sub-sample to roughly reflect the proportion of each of these categories found in each journal.

The topics in each category of Bassey's and Constable's typology are shown in the table below, with Bassey's and Constable's own results for comparison.

Table 2: Percentage of articles, rounded to the nearest whole number, under Bassey's and Constable's categories

Category	**BERJ** *n* = 101	**BJSE** *n* = 36	**Oxford Review** *n* = 70	**BJES** *n* = 57	**Bassey & Constable** *n* = 11,613
Curriculum	16	6	10	4	30[8]
School/Teacher/Child	35	22	14	7	11
Teaching/Learning	15	0	11	7	7
Governance	7	8	21	25	4
Phase Areas	12	11	14	21	23
Overseas	0	0	0	0	7
Disciplines	1	31	17	25	7
Methodology	13	11	1	9	1
Other	2	11	10	4	10

7 i.e., excluding review articles and, in the case of the *British Educational Research Journal*, presidential addresses to BERA.

8 It is likely that Bassey's and Constable's considerably higher figure for Curriculum Issues is a reflection of their coding method, as they themselves point out: when they were unable to decide between two or more categories, they selected the lowest number, hence the predominance of Curriculum Issues. We had access to the whole article, rather than just titles, so it was likely to be easier to decide which was the dominant category, and to resort less often to their default method.

The method of selecting the sub-sample of articles from each of the case study journals for detailed analysis and reporting was as follows. The method is illustrated in some detail for the *British Educational Research Journal*, with brief details given for the other three journals.

Every article in the four journals read was assigned a code number, unique within the journal under examination, depending on where it occurred *chronologically* under each of Bassey's and Constable's headings. So, for example, the first article appearing chronologically in the *British Educational Research Journal* under the heading 'School/Teacher/Child Issues' was that by Riseborough (1994), entitled "Teachers' Careers and Comprehensive School Closure: policy and professionalism in practice"; this was coded **S1**. The next was by Fraser (1994), on "Problems of Gender in University Mathematics", which was coded **S2**, while Hill (1994), on "Primary Headteachers' Careers: a survey of primary school heads with particular reference to women's career trajectories" was coded **S3**. And so on, with the codes being cumulative through the three volumes (1994, 1995, 1996) of each journal.

We wanted to select about ten articles from each journal, and for these to roughly reflect the proportion of articles in the total sample under each of Bassey and Constable's categories. Hence the percentage of articles (rounded to the nearest whole number) in each of their categories was calculated, multiplied by the number of articles sought (i.e. ten) and rounded to the nearest integer to obtain the number of articles to be selected from each of the categories. The calculations are shown in the first five columns of the table below. The method, because of the vagaries of rounding up, led to 11 articles being selected in this case.

Table 3: British Educational Research Journal: sub-sample selection

Category	Number of articles	% of articles *p* (nearest whole number)	*p*/100 x 10	Number of articles chosen	Code of articles selected
Curriculum	16	16	1.6	2	C1, C11
School/Teacher/Child	35	35	3.5	4	S1, S11, S21, S31
Teaching/Learning	15	15	1.5	2	T1, T11
Governance	7	7	0.7	1	G1
Phase Areas	12	12	1.2	1	P11*
Disciplines	1	1	0.1	0	-
Methodology	13	13	1.3	1	M11*
Other	2	2	0.2	0	-
Total	**101**			**11**	

We were then faced with a way of selecting, for example, four articles from the 35 under the 'School/Teacher/Child' heading, or one from the 13 under 'Methodology'. To ensure complete transparency of method, it was decided to opt for a uniform counting process, the same for each of the journals. For this purpose, we needed a 'counting marker'[9]. As we were seeking ten articles, we divided the total number of articles in the journal by ten; rounding this number to the nearest

9 A simpler method would have been to use the 'counting/selection marker' for the crude order of the articles found in the actual journals. However, as we had already conducted the coding of articles into Bassey's and Constable's categories, it was felt to be opportunistic to use these to obtain a sample which roughly reflected the proportion of articles in each category.

integer gave our 'counting marker'. For the *British Educational Research Journal*, this number was ten, (i.e., the nearest integer to 101/10);

This number was then used to select the articles from each category, starting from '1'. So, for example, under the heading 'School/Teacher/Child', the counting marker selected **S1**, counting on ten gave **S11**, another ten gave **S21**, and again to select **S31**. These were then the four articles selected in the stratified random selection.

Requiring one article from the 'Methodology' category led to a small problem. The 'counting marker' selected **M1** and **M11**, but we were only required to select *one* article from this category. Hence we decided, in such cases, to select the *higher* numbers, figuring that this would lead to more recent articles being selected for the sub-sample. (This issue only arose in five other places, noted by an asterisk (*) in the tables).

The final list of the codes of all articles selected from the *British Educational Research Journal* is shown in the sixth column in the table.

For the other journals we followed exactly the same method, as shown in the tables below. As far as the 'counting marker' is concerned, for the *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, as there were 36 articles in total, this gave a 'counting marker' of four (the nearest integer to 3.6); for the *Oxford Review of Education* it was seven (70/10); and for the *British Journal of Educational Studies* it was six, (i.e., the nearest integer to 57/10).

In the case of the *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, the process led to exactly ten articles being selected. In the case of the *British Journal of Educational Studies*, again the vagaries of rounding led to 11 articles being selected, while for the *Oxford Review of Education*, nine articles were selected using this method.

Table 4: British Journal of Sociology of Education: sub-sample selection

Category	**Number of articles**	**% of articles *p* (nearest whole number)**	***p*/100 x 10**	**Number of articles chosen**	**Code of articles selected**
Curriculum	2	6	0.6	1	C1
School/Teacher/Child	8	22	2.2	2	S1, S5
Teaching/Learning	0	0	0	0	-
Governance	3	8	0.8	1	G1
Phase Areas	4	11	1.1	1	P1
Disciplines	11	31	3.1	3	D1, D5, D9
Methodology	4	11	1.1	1	M1
Other	4	11	1.1	1	O1
Total	**36**			**10**	

Table 5: Oxford Review of Education: sub-sample selection

Category	Number of articles	% of articles *p* (nearest whole number)	*p*/100 x 10	Number of articles chosen	Code of articles selected
Curriculum	7	10	1.0	1	C1
School/Teacher/Child	10	14	1.4	1	S8*
Teaching/Learning	8	11	1.1	1	T8*
Governance	15	21	2.1	2	G8, G15*
Phase Areas	10	14	1.4	1	P8*
Disciplines	12	17	1.7	2	D1, D8
Methodology	1	1	0.1	0	-
Other	7	10	1.0	1	O1
Total	**70**			**9**	

Table 6: British Journal of Educational Studies: sub-sample selection

Category	Number of articles	% of articles *p* (nearest whole number)	*p*/100 x 10	Number of articles chosen	Code of articles selected
Curriculum	2	4	0.4	0	-
School/Teacher/Child	4	7	0.7	1	S1
Teaching/Learning	4	7	0.7	1	T1
Governance	14	25	2.5	3	G1, G7, G13
Phase Areas	12	21	2.1	2	P1, P7
Disciplines	14	25	2.5	3	D1, D7, D13
Methodology	5	9	0.9	1	M1
Other	2	4	0.4	0	-
Total	**57**			**11**	

The final complete list of the sub-sample of articles selected is given below. (The code for each article is in bold at the end of each reference). Because of the vagaries of the selection process, 41 articles were ultimately selected.

Table 7: The Sub-sample Articles

British Educational Research Journal

Curriculum Issues

Coe, Robert, and Ruthven, Kenneth (1994), Proof Practices and Constructs of Advanced Mathematics Students, *British Educational Research Journal* 1994, 20.1, 41-53. **C1**

Paechter, Carrie (1995), Subcultural Retreat: Negotiating the Design and Technology curriculum, *British Educational Research Journal*, 21.1, 75-87. **C11**

School/Teacher/Child

Riseborough, George F. (1994), Teachers' Careers and Comprehensive School Closure: policy and professionalism in practice, *British Educational Research Journal*, 20.1, 85-104. **S1**

Croxford, Linda (1994), Equal Opportunities in the Secondary-School Curriculum in Scotland, 1977-91 *British Educational Research Journal*, 20.4, 371-392. **S11**

Neal, Sarah (1995), Researching Powerful People from a Feminist and Anti-racist perspective: a note on gender, collusion and marginality, *British Educational Research Journal*, 21.4, 517-531. **S21**

Haw, Kaye F. (1996), Exploring the Educational Experiences of Muslim Girls: tales told to tourists - should the white researcher stay at home?, *British Educational Research Journal*, 22.3, 319-330. **S31**

Teaching/Learning

Davies, J., and Brember, I (1994), The First Mathematics Standard Assessment Tasks at Key Stage 1: issues raised by a five school study, *British Educational Research Journal*, 20.1, 35-40. **T1**

Chiswell, K. (1995), How is Action Research Helping to Develop my Role as a Communicator?, *British Educational Research Journal*, 21.3, 413-420. **T11**

Governance

Power, Sally, Halpin, David, and Fitz, John (1994), Parents, Pupils and Grant-maintained Schools, *British Educational Research Journal*, 20.2, 209-225. **G1**

Phase Areas

Rosie, Anthony (1996), Pagan Knowledge: a case study of post-modern theorising and youth work training, *British Educational Research Journal*, 22.3, 331-346. **P11**

Disciplines

None

Methodology

Troman, Geoff (1996), No Entry Signs: educational change and some problems encountered in negotiating entry to educational settings, *British Educational Research Journal*, 22.1, 71-88. **M11**

Other

None.

British Journal of Sociology of Education

Curriculum Issues

Shepherd, John, and Vulliamy, Graham (1994), The struggle for culture: a sociological case study of the development of a national music curriculum, *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 15.1, 27-40. **C1**

School/Teacher/Child

Sparkes, Andrew C. (1994), Self, silence and invisibility as a beginning teacher: a life history of lesbian experience, *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 15.1, 93-118. **S1**

Connolly, Paul (1995), Racism, Masculine Peer-group Relations and the Schooling of African/Caribbean Infant Boys, *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 16.1, 75-92. **S5**

Teaching/Learning

None

Governance

Hatcher, Richard (1994), Market relationships and the management of teachers, *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 15.1, 41-61. **G1**

Phase Areas

Sidgwick, Susan, Mahony, Pat, and Hextall, Ian (1994), A Gap in the market? A consideration of market relations in teacher education, *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 15.4, 467-479. **P1**

Disciplines

Davies, Brian (1994), Durkheim and the Sociology of Education in Britain, *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 15.1, 3-25. **D1**

Reay, Diane (1995), "They employ cleaners to do that": habitus in the primary classroom, *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 16.3, 353-371. **D5**

Moore, Rob (1996), Back to the Future: the problem of change and the possibilities of advance in the sociology of education, *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 7.2, 145-161. **D9**

Methodology

Abraham, John (1994), Positivism, structurationism and the Differentiation-Polarisation theory: a reconsideration of Shilling's novelty and primacy thesis, *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 15.2, 231-243. **M1**

Other

Siraj-Blatchford, Iram (1995), Critical Social Research and the Academy: the role of organic intellectuals in educational research, *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 16.2, 205-220. **O1**

Oxford Review of Education

Curriculum Issues

Osler, Audrey (1994), Still hidden from history? The representation of women in recently published history textbooks, *Oxford Review of Education*, 20.2, 219-235. **C1**

School/Teacher/Child

Wylie, E.C., Morrison, H.G., and Healy, J. (1995), The Progression of Pupils with Special Educational Needs: a comparison of standards, *Oxford Review of Education*, 21.3, 283-297. **S8**

Teaching/Learning

Goldstein, Harvey, and Cresswell, Michael (1996), The Comparability of Different Subjects in Public Examinations: a theoretical and practical critique, *Oxford Review of Education*, 22.4, 435-442. **T8**

Governance

Hartley, David (1995), The McDonaldisation of Higher Education: food for thought?, *Oxford Review of Education*, 21.4, 409-423. **G8**

Vincent, Carol (1996), Parent Empowerment? Collective action and inaction in education, *Oxford Review of Education*, 22.4, 465-482. **G15**

Phase Areas

Tomlinson, Peter (1995), Can Competence Profiling Work for Effective Teacher Preparation? Part II: pitfalls and principles, *Oxford Review of Education*, 21.3, 299-314. **P8**

Disciplines

Wilson, John (1994), First Steps in Governing Education, *Oxford Review of Education*, 20.1, 27-39. **D1**

Wood, David, and Wood, Heather (1996), Vygotsky, Tutoring and Learning, *Oxford Review of Education*, 22.1, 5-16. **D8**

Methodology

None

Other

Jackson, Sonia (1994), Educating Children in Residential and Foster Care, *Oxford Review of Education*, 20.3, 267-279. **O1**

British Journal of Educational Studies

Curriculum Issues

None

School/Teacher/Child

Cockburn, Anne D. (1994), Teachers' Experience of Time: some implications for future research, *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 42.4, 375-387. **S1**

Teaching/Learning

Clayden, Elizabeth, Desforges, Charles, Mills, Colin, and Rawson, William (1994), Authentic Activity and Learning, *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 42.2, 163-173. **T1**

Governance

Deem, Rosemary (1994), Free Marketeers or Good Citizens? Education policy and lay participation in the administration of schools, *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 42.1, 23-37. **G1**

Strain, Michael (1995), Autonomy, Schools and the Constitutive Role of Community: towards a new moral and political order for education, *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 43.1, 4-20. **G7**

Campbell, Jim, Halpin, David, and Neill, Sean (1996), Primary Schools and Opting Out: Some policy implications, *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 44.3, 246-259. **G13**

Phase Areas

Tasker, Mary and Packham, David (1994), Changing Cultures? Government Intervention in Higher Education 1987-1993, *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 42.2, 150-162. **P1**

McIntyre, Donald (1995), Initial Teacher Education as Practical Theorising: A response to Paul Hirst, *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 43.4, 365-383. **P7**

Disciplines

Darling, John, and Pijpekamp, Maaike Van De (1994), Rousseau on the Education, Domination and Violation of Women, *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 42.2, 115-132. **D1**

Tomlinson, John (1995), Teachers and Values: Courage Mes Braves! *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 43.3, 305-317. **D7**

Copeland, Ian (1996), The Making of the Dull, Deficient and Backward Pupil in British Elementary Education 1870-1914, *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 44.4, 377-394. **D13**

Methodology

Raab, Charles D. (1994), Theorising the Governance of Education, *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 42.1, 6-22. **M1**

Other

None

Component three: analysing and summarising journal articles

As already noted, all 264 of the British articles in the four journals were read and critically examined. However, it soon became clear as the set of questions grew in number and complexity, that it was simply taking on too much to hope to analyse *all* of these articles in depth. Hence, it was decided that, as a minimum, *all* the articles would need to be read in terms of the set of research questions labelled *'Basic questions'* on page 15 in Chapter 2 above, to ensure that some more quantitative judgements could be made about the range of articles in the journals, while the

41 articles in the sub-sample only would need to be scrutinised in the light of the whole range of questions.

We have already noted that the two researchers compared their judgements on the research questions, including these 'basic questions', as these were developed. In particular these judgements were compared to ensure consistency of approach with the application of Bassey's and Constable's categories, and in the judgement concerning the dominant approach of the methodology of the research reported - whether it was quantitative, qualitative, non-empirical, or other. Finally, a third researcher[10] was brought in to triangulate these judgements, by reading through the 41 original articles and the researchers' notes on the 'basic questions'.

For the 41 articles to be reported in detail, the researchers prepared and compared rough notes, examining them in the light of the full range of questions. A 400-600-word summary for each article was then prepared, giving a synopsis of the focus, conduct and presentation of the research, followed by a critical commentary, summarising answers to the relevant research questions. The judgements of the two researchers were compared, and agreement was reached, except for one article (as indicated on page 33 below) where the researchers were unable to agree on the interpretation.

KEY CAVEATS

Two key caveats must be emphasised at this point, and borne in mind throughout what follows. First, it is not intended that generalisations about educational research can be drawn from this work. However, the *selection* methods do mean that the researchers can at least be reasonably confident that (a) these journals represent an *important strand* of *academic* educational research more generally, and (b) the sub-sample is an adequate reflection of the journals selected. This said, it may be that, had other academic journals emerged in the selection process, then a different picture might have emerged, for better or worse. The researchers welcome debate along these lines, pointing to differences between other journals and those selected here.

Second, although the articles and journals were themselves selected 'at a distance', the commentary on them does, of course, bring in the judgements of the researchers. Some triangulation methods have been described to help ensure that these judgements were consistent. However, perhaps most crucially, it is fair to point out that the two researchers, James Tooley and Doug Darby, are of different political persuasions. Darby describes himself as 'Old Labour'; Tooley is often categorised as being 'New Right'. Darby has considerable experience in educational research, having worked in the field for 15 years alongside such notable figures as Professor Gajendra Verma. Notwithstanding these different perspectives - and even though we came into the research expecting to disagree with each other at every turn - we were able to arrive in almost all cases at a consensus on our judgements of the journal articles. The only exception concerned one article on race in the classroom, which is noted in the text.

With these key caveats in mind, having explained the research questions and method in detail, we now turn to the main findings of the research.

10 Andy Howes, an experienced graduate student at the University of Manchester.

4 Major themes

Through scrutiny of the 41 articles in the light of the research questions developed, within the context of the perusal of the 200-odd articles in the four case study journals, certain major themes arose as being of particular concern within this segment of academic educational research. The intention in this chapter is to distil the answers to the research questions into the themes that emerged from critical scrutiny of the articles, and to illustrate them with examples both of good practice and of where practice seems to fall short of desired standards.

The four themes that emerged were as follows:

1. The partisan researcher
2. Problems of methodology
3. Non-empirical educational research
4. The focus of educational research

Each of these is addressed in turn.

THE PARTISAN RESEARCHER

One of the most striking themes which emerged from our scrutiny was how partisan much of the educational research seemed to be. The research questions posed in Chapter 2 looked for evidence of partisanship in terms of the focus, conduct and presentation of empirical work, and in the 'argument' of non-empirical work. In each case, there were many examples of articles which exhibited partisan tendencies.

The articles are discussed under three headings: partisanship concerning political reform; partisanship in gender and race research; and pedagogical partisanship. A fourth category, defined as 'non-partisan', also emerged, showing that it was possible to avoid this particular shortcoming in educational research.

This section illustrates partisanship within these various categories, and points out the level at which the partisanship emerges - at the focus, conduct, presentation or argument of the research. All the examples are intended to give chapter and verse on where the partisanship occurs in the work of each researcher - so that others may judge if they agree with the researchers' judgements on the extent of the problem. Given this narrow intention, it must be made clear that the following vignettes are not intended to, and certainly do not, give a full picture of each article.

It is important to stress that **all** the examples given here emerged from the *sub-sample* of the 41 articles taken from case study journals. In other words, given the selection methods which kept the judgements of the researchers somewhat at a distance, these examples are likely to represent a typical strand of much of the literature - a finding which was reinforced by the wider reading undertaken by the researchers.

Partisanship concerning political reform

The five articles in this section are all concerned with the policy reforms introduced under the last (Conservative) government, and show various aspects of partisanship when reflecting on these reforms.

Research on disaffected teachers

Riseborough (1994) illustrates an example of partisanship in the *presentation* of empirical research. He describes the experiences of two teachers who have lost their jobs at one school after its closure due to 'falling rolls and monetarist state policy' (abstract, p. 85). In his summary of recent education policy to put these experiences into context, he categorises it as a 'regressive offensive":

> 'The policy agenda has shifted from "access" to "quality"; from "equality of opportunity" and "comprehensivisation" to "freedom of parental choice"; from "resources" to "value for money"; from teacher autonomy and professionalism to teacher accountability and appraisal... A pervasive tentacular and surveilling technology of state control has been put in place.' (p. 86).

Outside observers can make their own judgements as to whether aiming to provide quality education, giving parents choice, insisting on value for money, and making teachers accountable are really examples of a 'regressive offensive'. The problem is not that the author *holds* these views, but that he introduces them as if they are the only possible interpretation of events, without seeking to defend them or subject them to critical scrutiny.

More disaffected teachers

An example of partisanship in the *argument* of non-empirical research comes from Hatcher (1994). He again focuses on the policy changes introduced by the Conservative government in the context of their impact on teachers. His political bias is evident from the first line. 'It is widely agreed,' he writes, 'that the intention of Conservative education policies is that "Schools are to become businesses, run and managed like businesses *with a primary focus on the profit and loss account*"' (p. 41, emphasis added). Here he is favourably quoting Professor Stephen Ball, of King's College, London. But Ball's interpretation is *not* 'widely agreed', except perhaps in the pages of the educational research journals surveyed. It is at best a highly contentious statement. For arguably the 'primary focus of schools', even in Conservative circles, has never been the 'profit and loss account', but the promotion of education. Financial considerations do come into it, of course, with the awareness that schooling costs money; but under the Conservatives, no state school has ever been managed for *profit*.

Hatcher's bias is also evident when he writes that there is an *inevitable conflict of interest* between management and workers (p. 43). His evidence for this proposition consists of quotes from one disaffected engineering craftsman (p. 44), and from a Socialist Movement Trade Union Committee in London, July 1992, which showed how 'new management techniques represent an *attack* on workers' interests' (p. 44 emphasis in original). These are interesting viewpoints which could usefully have an airing, but the point is that the academic puts them across as if they are the only possible interpretation of events.

The introduction of the music national curriculum

Shepherd's and Vulliamy's (1994) article also illustrates partisanship in the 'argument' of a non-empirical piece of research. In their exploration of how 'school music' came to be of great significance in the debates around the introduction of the National Curriculum in Music, they do not wish to leave the audience in any doubt about their political bias. For example, they point out that two academics, Professors Scruton and O'Hear, were supporting the Secretary of State for Education in his policy. Now, one may not like their views, but the *fact* is that they were both then professors of philosophy in reputable universities (London and Bradford). But the authors characterise them differently. They point out that the parties debating these issues 'were made up, *not of academics*, but of musicians and music educators on the one hand and Conservative politicians *and their allies* on the other.' (p. 34 emphasis added).

The authors, presumably because they dislike their views, do not want to classify Professors Scruton and O'Hear as 'academics'. It may be thought that this was just an accidental slip, but it is reinforced a few lines later when we are told:

> 'That the debates were not among musicians, music educators and academics, but largely *between* this constituency and Conservative politicians suggests that they were of a heavily ideological character' (p. 34).

So now the debate has 'musicians, music educators and academics' on one side, and only Conservative politicians worth mentioning on the other. That is, Scruton and O'Hear, who have played a very important part in the debate, are no longer to be counted.

Another clear example of the bias intruding into the discussion comes in the following paragraph:

> 'The reactions of the music education and musical establishments in England *were clearly motivated by a concern for the very survival of a vibrant musical culture within the country*. The line taken by Clarke and the NCC was destined ... to seriously damage that culture. ... If the thesis that music is significantly social is to be accepted, then the conservative (sic) image comes across as being *exclusively white, upper-middle class and male*.' (p. 37, emphasis added).

Here we have the Working Party team presented only as pure, devoid of vested interests, set on doing good to the musical culture of England, while the conservatives/Conservatives are nasty, white, upper-class males who have a narrow and misguided view of culture. In an article which otherwise seems so willing to engage in cynicism about the motives of 'the right', (i.e. Scruton, O'Hear and the Conservatives), it is disappointing that they are not willing to engage in the same scepticism about the motives of all players. Perhaps the Working Party also have their own ideological predilections, such as anti-elitism, egalitarianism, in favour of progressive education, or whatever, which guide them? The article is not inclined to balance its discussion in this way. And why is the epithet 'white, upper-middle class and male' attached to the Conservatives, rather than the range of people on the Working Party and their allies, including Sir John Mauduell, Sir Colin Davis, Sir Simon Rattle, Andre Previn, Pierre Boulez, and Professor Keith Swanwick? It seems that the authors here are simply playing to the gallery, knowing that 'upper-middle class, white male' is a pejorative epithet, and so append it to their least favoured group, even if, on the face of it, it seems more applicable to their favoured group.

Parental choice

A popular theme of many papers was to look at the Conservatives' introduction of parental choice in education, with the intention of showing how class biased it was. Vincent's (1996) paper shows evidence of partisanship in both the *presentation* and the *conduct* (through her interpretation of the data) of the research. *First*, the bias in her presentation is revealed as she sets her empirical work in

the context of discussion of the 'New Centrists', Etzioni, Blair and Clinton. These figures are, she says, politically misguided because they emphasise 'self-help' and 'community self-help'. She writes that, with their 'clarion call of individual responsibility', their view of empowerment is 'a kind of self-empowerment that calls for grit, determination and commitment to American values, *all simpler remedies than those required to address entrenched racism, sexism or poverty.*' (p. 471 emphasis added). But no evidence is given for this remark, or further discussion of the arguments that may be given for it. It ignores the possibility, as Etzioni would say, that self-help and community self-help are precisely routes to escape racism, sexism and poverty. The point is not that the researcher has to agree with this, but that she should at least address the argument, rather than simply asserting its naïveté. By simply dismissing it, she shows herself unconcerned to protect the reader from her own political bias.

Second, there is apparently partisanship in the conduct of her work, namely in the interpretation of her findings. The piece is notable for the way Vincent interprets her findings in the light of her 'research paradigm', rather than looking for alternative explanations which may better fit the facts. In part, her argument is building up to show how the Conservative view of empowerment is completely untenable. In her empirical work looking at school choice, one class was sent home for *two months* because of the severe teacher shortage. The Conservative - and perhaps New Labour - argument would be that parents have been given the right to 'exit' from failing schools, so the power of this parental choice can help them to improve schools. Now, we don't suppose many Conservatives would have had the audacity to argue that, in the dire circumstances as presented in this paper, such choice would be of much immediate use. For the time span - two months - was very short in which parents could act, given the likely possibility that the school would find a teacher soon, so not wanting to disrupt their children's education unnecessarily with this possibility always in the back of their minds. The researcher argues that because only '*a few* parents' did choose to take their children elsewhere, this only goes to show that, '*as research on parental choice demonstrates,* the ability to access choice is mediated by families' social class position' (p. 477 emphasis added). Therefore, she writes, 'for many ... parents the idea of acting as a consumer of education on their children's behalf had little meaning or relevance.' (p. 477).

However, if we look again at her evidence, this conclusion seems rather suspect. For we had been told that *six* of the pupils had transferred to other schools (p. 473). This is a primary school, we are told, with 400 pupils and (normally) 20 teachers, so one would guess a class size of slightly more than 20 pupils. That is, in a period of just two months, these disempowered parents were sufficiently organised, and the local schooling system sufficiently flexible, that *between one-quarter and one-third of the class* had transferred to other schools! 'A few' parents is an odd way of describing a third of the class. Instead of taking cognizance of what actually happened in her sample, which seems to cry out for an alternative explanation, she instead anchors her own interpretation in the safety of other researchers' discussion of the subject ('as research on parental choice demonstrates'), whatever her own data suggest.

She concludes:

> 'Simplistic definitions of parental empowerment fail to acknowledge that "relations between families and school ... [are] organised and negotiated through hierarchies of power, structured by gender, race, cultural, religion *(sic)* and class differences' (pp. 477-78).

Parental participation in their children's education 'will remain minimal' if the discourse 'ignore[s] or only superficially alludes to the experiences of poverty, exclusion, professional domination, sexism and racism.' (p. 478). Between a quarter and a third of the parents removing their children from a disastrously chaotic situation within two months hardly seems 'minimal' participation. A less partisan researcher might have found something to celebrate here.

The commodification of higher education

The final example of partisanship concerning political reform concerns Hartley's (1995) argument on higher education reform. He draws upon the model of George Ritzer's 1993 book, *The McDonaldization of Society*, to illuminate what is happening in higher education policy. The book described a society in which 'people would move from rationalized educational institutions to rationalized workplaces and from rationalized recreational settings to rationalized homes' (quoted p. 409). There will be 'increasing emphasis given to *efficiency*, to *calculability*, to *predictability*, to *control* and to *fake fraternisation*.' (p. 410).

He argues that the process of *McDonaldization* is taking place in higher education, with the moves to find efficiencies and cost-effective teaching methods, to articulate what universities are for, to measure the value added by universities, and to control what goes on in them.

There are several examples of partisanship in the *argument* contained in this paper. *First*, the tone of the paper seems to take it for granted that the McDonald's model is undesirable, wherever it occurs. So the researcher does not seem to be countenancing the possibility that, even in the area of fast food, it may be what consumers want or find desirable, that it could be fitting in with a society in which, for example, people don't want to spend so much time in the kitchen. *McDonaldization* is not, it seems, to have a positive interpretation possible. Again, we are not saying that the researcher *should* adopt this other perspective, only that in the context of a learned journal, he should not be allowed to get away with presenting such a one-sided picture.

Second, when discussing higher education in particular, the argument is an interesting critique of government policy. What is odd, however, is that the *status quo ante* is not critically discussed. So the implication is that the government's quest is not justified, that universities should be able to spend tax-payers' money as they see fit, and not be accountable to them. Again, this is a position that could be argued, but again, in the context of the academic journal, it is odd that the researcher doesn't feel the need to do so. Similarly, *McDonaldization* is contrasted with an earlier golden age, that of the Robbins Report of 1963 - which 'established a system of higher education, but very much for egalitarian reasons' (p. 413). Interestingly, while everything that the Conservative government introduced in education is held up for critical examination - and there is nothing wrong with that - Robbins is *uncritically* held up for respect. Perhaps a similar critical perspective could also have been applied to that icon, perhaps showing that he was concerned with increasing the power of the state over the universities, *under the guise of egalitarianism*? Or that, even if egalitarianism was intended, Robbins' project failed, as the class intake of universities remains pretty much the same in 1990 as it did in 1960?

A similar partisanship is evident in Tasker and Packham (1994), in their paper which discusses the Conservative government's 'Enterprise in Higher Education' (EHE) initiative, the audit of 'quality' (their 'scare' quotes) in higher education, and the 1992 Further and Higher Education Act. Again, crucially, the paper doesn't describe the *status quo ante*, and hence we don't know whether they are looking at it through rose-coloured spectacles. It may be, for example, that academics, being free to determine their own curricula, to teach without being assessed for quality, and to do as much or as little research as they wished, were as much against the values of higher education as their own 'New Right' bugbears. Similarly, regarding the quality audit, they argue that they don't like 'the direct link between quality assessment and funding' (p. 158). However, they don't say whether they then think that poor quality should be rewarded, or what incentives there were to improve quality under the *status quo ante*.

Partisanship in gender and race research

Some of the areas which exhibited the most dramatic evidence of partisanship were research in gender and sexuality, and race and ethnicity. Many researchers seemed unable to tackle these issues in a manner which enabled one to be sure of their evidence and conclusions. Again, the articles reviewed here are *all* taken from the sub-sample, and were not especially selected to reveal *these* authors' bias. Hence, again, they are likely to be indicative of a much broader range of research in academic educational research journals.

Racism in primary schools[11]

Connolly's (1995) research seems to reveal evidence of partisanship in the *conduct* of research, in particular the interpretation of the data, as well as in the *presentation* of these findings. He looks at the schooling experiences of Black students in one primary school - where Black means African/Caribbean and South Asian, and mixed race students are also included as African/Caribbean. The key aspect of this experience which the article draws out is the experience of racism.

The format of the article is to point to key examples of this racism, and to put them into a broader theoretical context. For example, Connolly quotes from the school report comments of one of the primary school teachers who has allowed him into her classroom for a year, Mrs Scott. In order to avoid the danger of misrepresenting the author, we quote in full from Connolly's paper, so *these are the full records as in the article*, with passages omitted only as in the article. Connolly tells us that Mrs Scott writes of Jordan (of mixed parentage):

> 'Jordan's mother has just had a new baby - she was not very well during the past few months and this has shown in his behaviour - especially when out of an adult's sight. He persists in kicking and thumping other children despite the fact that he has been kept in at playtime frequently. He takes no notice at all [...] colouring seems to have a calming effect on him [...] I must add that Jordan's stubbornness prevents him from doing as well as he could; today he refused to look at the alphabet on the wall when trying to write about his new baby. He can be *extremely* difficult to deal with. [original emphasis]' (p. 78).

This example is used to illustrate

> 'the way in which Mrs Scott's individualised perceptions of the African/Caribbean boys exist alongside, and articulate with, more general racialised assumptions. Jordan's report is fairly representative, to varying degrees, of the three Reception/Year 1 class teachers' general perceptions of the African/Caribbean boys in their classes. In this instance, his perceived aggressive, stubborn and disobedient nature is located by Mrs Scott within the context of his mother's new baby.' (p. 78).

Now, to the casual reader, this may seem a rather anodyne and inoffensive report. However, for Connolly, there is racism lurking here. For, as we noted, it is used to illustrate the 'general racialised assumptions' common in the school - and this, we emphasise, is the full record which shows these. However, we are not sure that an outside observer could know what these were. The only possibility, it seems, is that he is referring to the description of 'aggression, stubbornness and disobedience'. But, first, he has already told us that Mrs Scott puts this down to his mother having being ill, not to his race. Presumably the researcher knows better, and knows exactly what Mrs Scott means by this innocent remark. Second, a dispassionate observer may wonder whether it is also a possibility that Mrs Scott is just telling the truth about this boy, that he is aggressive,

11 Concerning this article, Darby and Tooley were unable to agree on the precise interpretation. Tooley's is reported here.

stubborn and disobedient, and that there is no racism anywhere here? Connolly seems to refuse to countenance such a possibility.

Perhaps Connolly recognises how weak this case is, for he tells us that 'the influence of racist discourses is *more evident* when Mrs Scott explains the origins of *Paul's* "disobedient" behaviour.' (p. 78, emphasis added). Again, we quote from Paul's report *in full exactly as in the article*, again with passages omitted only as in the article:

> 'Paul [...] is progressing well but needs to be guided [...] His mother is very keen that he should do well. I have had to guide his behaviour in the last few months, quite a lot, and explain to him the differences between right and wrong [...] He tends to "follow" instead of being an independent boy. This is a shame as he has a good brain of his own and should have his own ideas in future. Good at sport.' (p. 78).

Again, an outside observer may puzzle long and hard as to how this passage shows any evidence of 'racist discourse'. Trying to read between the lines as much as possible, all we can ascertain is that Paul is an intelligent boy, who sometimes goes astray and needs parental or teacher guidance. And he is good at sport - perhaps this is where the racism lies? Indeed, Connolly thinks so:

> 'Paul is also, according to Mrs Scott's report, "good at sport". This sporting and athletic image is, again, a common theme running through the teacher's views of African/Caribbean boys' (p. 79).

But perhaps it is simply true, Paul is good at sport, rather than being evidence of 'racist discourse'? Again Connolly doesn't seem to countenance such a possibility.

These examples set the tone for the rest of the paper. All the experiences of racism of the boys seem to be of the same kind. None stands out as at all obviously evidence of these boys' supposed racist experiences. We give one more example to illustrate the problems.

In a classroom extract, we are told that Mrs Scott has just moved Jordan to another table in class, and reprimanded him for 'messing about'. She is talking to Stephen, an African/Caribbean boy, about visiting his father in prison. Again we quote in full, to be sure that the strength of the evidence is not being misrepresented:

> *'Mrs Scott:* So you might be visiting him tonight?
>
> *Stephen:* *[nods]*
>
> *Mrs Scott:* You're good. I don't think you'll be going to prison *[louder, some children in the class look up]* You'll have to remember when you're a man not to fight, steal, throw bricks *[pause]* In fact even when you're ten.
>
> *Daniel (White):* Can you go to prison when you're ten?
>
> *Mrs Scott:* Well not prison but you can certainly be taken away.
>
> *Daniel:* Go to a naughty children's home eh?
>
> *Mrs Scott:* Something like that - a young offender's centre they call it, that's right; a young offender's centre *[She then looks over to Jordan on another table on the far side of the room who is busy with his head down, colouring in his picture and shouts over]* You'll have to remember that over there! *[most of children in class stop what they are doing and look over to Jordan's table]* If you kick and fight when you are over ten you'll have to go to a special school - a young offender's centre.' (p. 80).

This is the excerpt in full. Now, the discussion of it is as follows:

> 'The above incident illustrates two themes. Firstly, it alludes to Stephen's ambivalent position and contradictory identity. ... In this instance his ability to be "good" is placed

> within the shadow of him being Black and the inherent tendency that creates for a "deviant" way of life. Note how Mrs Scott does not think he will go to prison but on the proviso he makes a distinct effort not to "fight, steal, throw bricks".
>
> 'Secondly ... is the essentially *public* nature of Jordan's reprimand and vilification. Discipline, more generally within the school, was often public with children being made to stand up in assembly and come to the front; stand in the corner of classrooms or outside the door; and/or stand against the wall during playtimes. Within this African/Caribbean boys were more frequently picked out and chastised in this public manner compared to any other group. Their visibility as *Black* children, as located within the broader racist discourses touched upon earlier, [i.e., of the racism of Mrs Scott above] made them prime targets for the teacher's attention.' (p. 80).

This appears to be an odd two paragraphs of interpretation of what on the face of it seems to be a relatively innocent discipline matter. Where is the notion that there is any 'inherent' tendency for Stephen to be 'deviant' in what Mrs Scott says? Surely what has happened is that Jordan has kicked and fought and thrown bricks, and Mrs Scott is doing what any teacher could do, publicly punishing him for doing this, and using the example of his misdemeanours in her moral guidance to the other children?

And, again we would want to know - and Connolly provides us with no evidence, doesn't even consider it an issue worth addressing in his article - whether the fact that 'Black' children are more commonly picked out than others (if indeed it is a fact, for we only have Connolly's subjective impression that this is the case) could simply be because they *are* more naughty than others? How does the researcher know that it is their 'visibility as *Black* children, as located within .. broader racist discourses' which made them 'prime targets for the teacher's attention'?[12] What insights does he have into the teachers' intentions? Again, he knows best. He knows their racist false consciousness.

Perhaps it is poor Mrs Scott who is the subject of vilification in the author's concluding paragraph, when the researcher notes a teacher's opinion that 'most of the African/Caribbean boys that had come into her class during the last few years had unfortunately presented "behavioural problems".' (p. 90). At least Connolly notes that the 'over-representation of African/Caribbean boys' in, e.g., school fights, 'is not simply a figment *of her (racist) imagination*' (p. 90 emphasis added), but is also a product of racism amongst the children. However, he says, 'Focusing on her racism remains important ...' (p. 90).

Because the teacher thinks that African/Caribbean boys have more behavioural problems, she is labelled a racist, with racist thoughts; moreover, in the context of this article, she has no right of reply.

Gender inequality

Osler's (1994) paper illustrates partisanship in the *focus* and *conduct* (interpretation of data) of the research. She examines new history curriculum textbooks published during the period 1991-92, to look for gender bias. She first, however, points out that in 1991 more girls were gaining higher grades in GCSE history than boys, and that this gap had widened in favour of girls since 1981, as indeed it had at AS/A level (p. 220). Now, *prima facie*, one might think that these figures show that, if there is a problem as far as gender is concerned, then this concerns *boys'* underachievement in history. However, the researcher notes, 'While the figures demonstrate that more girls than boys are passing examinations in history, the differential is not as acute as in certain other subjects ...', (p. 220), where girls do even better than boys.

12 The issue of triangulation of course is raised here, as discussed in the next section.

This seems to be a rather weak apology for the focus of her research, and illustrates a common partisanship in the focus of educational research more generally in the period examined, where concern about gender is *only* concern about girls, and boys don't seem to matter at all. Osler feels able to propose reforms which would help make history more accessible to girls (seeming to ignore the fact that it is clearly already very accessible to them), which to an outsider would seem to have the potential to exacerbate inequality, by making boys *even less interested* in history. And, disturbingly, this doesn't seem to even occur to her as an issue - all that is of concern is that 'equity' for girls should be paramount. For example, she criticises one textbook for adopting 'a style reminiscent of traditional boys' comics, with cartoons and jokes presented from a male perspective, largely featuring male characters.' (p. 228). Although she doesn't tell us what is meant by the 'male perspective', it is clear that the researcher thinks it is not desirable, and publishers need 'to be vigilant' to avoid this sort of thing (p. 229) - even though it doesn't seem to have an effect on girls' interest in the subject, and changing it may make boys even less interested.

As far as partisanship in the *conduct* of the research is concerned, Osler argues that what is required is a 'shift in our perception about what is important in the past .. away from the public sphere which has pre-occupied men towards a focus on issues which concern women' (pp. 233-4 - approvingly quoting another writer). But she doesn't explore whether such a shift would be unfair to boys - or indeed to girls too. For the assumption is that girls are only interested in 'women's issues' about the past. The evidence of girls' achievement seems to cast doubt on that.

This approach is even more graphically illustrated when she tells us that 'since all history inevitably involves an interpretation of the past from today's perspective ... any group which has been made invisible in the historical record needs "special pleading" or advocacy in order to re-establish its place in history.' (p. 228). Because she doesn't spell out what this may involve in the case of women, there is a danger that she could be interpreted to mean that *any* interpretation of history is as good as any other, provided it meets our current political goals. So, for example, Osler praises the picture of a female blacksmith in one textbook. Now, it may be that what she meant to praise was the fact that this was historically accurate, because female blacksmiths played an important role in history. But the danger is that the lines quoted here would lead some to think that the praise is due because pictures of female blacksmiths promote our political egalitarian goals of today, irrespective of what the historical record actually shows.

More accusations of racism

Siraj-Blatchford (1995) explores:

> 'the methodological and epistemological implications of working as a black, female researcher studying issues of social justice and equality in a faculty of education' (abstract, p. 205).

She begins by pointing out that there is much racism in British schools and universities, and raises the issue of partisanship in her *argument*. To illustrate this, she gives the following example:

> 'My research into the experiences of Black and ethnic minority students in initial teacher education (ITE) ... showed that action was required by ITE departments to analyse, monitor and promote racial equality. The students who responded to my questionnaire describe their experiences of racism in ITE and these experiences were presented for publication. ... *it is significant and symptomatic of a wider malaise*, that one of our prestigious refereed educational journals insisted that only the students' *perceptions* of racism could be reported upon.' (p. 206, middle emphasis added).

However, an outside observer might be frankly relieved to hear this - and not think it a sign of 'malaise' at all. For is there any other reason why the journal's referees, apart from the implied racism Siraj-Blatchford invokes, would want the article to present *perceptions* rather than

experiences? Surely because of the nature of the research, the descriptions of a small sample of self-selected students cannot be corroborated, they could remain only as unverified, un-triangulated descriptions. So the referees, invoking what would seem to be respectable research methodology, may well have decided that the research methodology would only support 'perceptions' rather than actual 'experiences'. Curiously, the researcher does not even seem aware of this possibility in this context, but seems to see racism wherever she looks.

Homophobic schools

Sparkes (1994) explores the life experiences of *one* 'white, able-bodied, middle class, lesbian PE teacher in her late twenties' (p. 94). This paper illustrates partisanship in the interpretation of the research - as well as other problems discussed under the heading 'problems of methodology' below.

The paper sets out to show moments in Jessica's life to illustrate the oppression under which she lives. However, if readers had expected many graphic details, they will be disappointed. Hardly anything is related which could possibly qualify as homophobia and oppression.

She 'came out' to her parents and sisters when she was young and 'Her family have since been very supportive and Jessica's partners have been welcomed into the home.' (p. 100). She moved to London later with the explicit intention, she recalls, of 'establishing herself in a lesbian identified social group' (p. 101), an aim realised. Then off to America, to very much enjoy the open homosexuality of Key West.

Next she returns to England to do her PGCE, and then on to her first teaching post. However, in this she felt increasingly unhappy that she couldn't 'express her lesbian identity in the school' (p. 105). Eventually she does 'come out' to one teacher friend, Allison, who doesn't mind at all. However, Jessica is all the time afraid that something will happen if she 'comes out' more generally. Her comments expressing fears and paranoia are repeated at length. Because of her fears, Jessica has 'a sense of daily denial.' (p. 107). But she relates absolutely no evidence that anyone would do anything if she did 'come out'. In fact, in the London Borough where she was working we would have thought it would be an absolute anathema to dismiss her, as Sparkes says she fears, because of her sexual orientation.

In fact, in all these anecdotes from her life, we only have one actual incident, rather than her fears or paranoia, of anything that could resemble homophobia. This was when a new teacher related how she had spent her honeymoon in Key West, and didn't like it, because it was full of gay people (p. 106). The complete incident, as described by Jessica - so to be treated with the normal caution anyone would exercise when reading only one person's recollection of events - went like this:

> 'We were talking loads in the pub. She was like, "We went to Key West. We didn't like the place, there were gay people everywhere. I don't know why, it was just horrible."' (quoted p. 106)

Sparkes tells us:

> 'Such conversations confirmed Jessica's view that the teaching profession had a negative view of lesbian women and gay men in that there was "Still a lot of fear, derision and prejudice. There are still a lot of people I think who hold the views that anybody of a different sexual orientation is a child molester, which is totally laughable."' (p. 106)

We know homosexuals who agree with this opinion about Key West, that the sexuality is too open. So this one incident, *the only homophobic* incident described by Jessica, may not even have been anything more than her colleague's desire for public decency. 'Such conversations' do not confirm homophobia in schools at all, as Sparkes suggests.

Pedagogical partisanship

Many of the research articles reveal their bias as to preferred pedagogical approaches. It will be suggested in the discussion below, on the 'focus' of research, that there is nothing wrong with having preferred approaches, and arguing for these. The issue here is that the preferred approaches are brought into papers without discussion, skewing the presentation, and giving the impression that there are no alternative approaches which could also be valuable. Three examples are given here, all taken from the sub-sample - again, suggesting that these are typical of a broad category of educational research. To recall, the intention here again is to give chapter and verse to show where this type of partisanship is occurring, not necessarily to give a full flavour of each article.

Design and Technology curriculum

Paechter's (1995) work explores the introduction of the Design and Technology (DT) curriculum in schools, and how this led to 'contestation' about what should be included in its curriculum content. This was because DT was made up of what were previously separate subjects, such as Home Economics (HE), and Craft Design and Technology (CDT). With the bringing together of these disparate subjects into one new subject, there were the possibilities of rewards for promotion and also increased status (p. 78), but also for conflict over what should be taught and how. The researcher explores these conflicts. In doing so, she illustrates partisanship in the conduct and presentation of her research.

She notes how many of the teachers argue that design and technology must have a skills base, and are worried that the introduction of an integrated curriculum will lead to substantial 'dilution' of their subjects, 'leading to a loss of rigour' (p. 82). They worried that this would affect 'students' motivation and ... learning' (p. 82): 'if students were unable to produce a good artefact at the end of the process, this would eventually put them off design and technology' (p. 82), the head of CDT at one of the schools tells her.

However, instead of examining whether there is any justification in these complaints, the author decides that all these qualms are simply what she terms 'subcultural retreat'. Hence, those who are arguing for a different version of the design and technology curriculum have opinions which are simply not worth considering: Such 'retreat' 'militates against the possibilities ... for an open, student-centred curriculum' (p. 84).

Here what she is arguing is that the open, student-centred curriculum is the right way to go, and anyone who stands in the way can be dismissed. She has no sympathy with their position, but *doesn't even consider whether or not this more commonsensical interpretation* could be right, i.e. that there is a loss of skills to be feared.

Interestingly, there is a similar judgmental attitude brought in a related article by the same author, describing the same research (Paechter and Head, 1996). Here she notes the differences between male and female teachers: the women were willing to adapt to the new curriculum, whereas the men were 'defensive of the *status quo*.' (p. 67). This was particularly because the male teachers identified 'with the particular parts of the curriculum that were most under threat' (p. 67), that is, they identified with the craft skills which were being removed from the curriculum through integration: 'This was exacerbated by the association of the craft skills at which they particularly excelled with a particular form of hegemonic masculinity; in some cases their very maleness seemed to be under threat.' (p. 67). There is no entertaining of the possibility that the males could be *right* to question the moves away from skills-based curriculum to integrated technology; the assumption is that if they objected, it must be for these negative reasons, rather than because of a genuine sense that something important was being lost for students. Moreover,

> 'for almost all the female teachers, their professional identities and pride in their work were connected with their ability to teach, rather than their ability to carry out themselves the skills that they were teaching. In fact, because so many of them had transferred subject ... they were not highly skilled in all that they taught. Nevertheless, they felt competent and confident in their teaching.' (p. 62).

Perhaps some of the unhappy men were aware of their female colleagues' lack of skills and thought their confidence misplaced, and that the new curriculum let their students down. Such possibilities are not entertained here.

Constructivist maths and science

Clayden, Desforges, Mills, and Rawson (1994) explore the difference between the way knowledge is created and how it is taught. They note the arguments of those who suggest that 'knowledge' is 'socially situated', that it is 'an inseparable part of the activity, context and culture in which it is used and generated' (p. 166). This social constructivist view, they say, has 'important implications for our understanding of subject matter knowledge and for how classroom experience might be managed to help children acquire such knowledge' (p. 166). In this non-empirical research, they illustrate partisanship in the 'argument'.

For example, in their discussion of mathematics, they point to the philosopher Lakatos' view of mathematics (using a secondary source, not the original) as being 'a process of "conscious guessing" about relationships among quantities and shapes' (quoted p. 167), and contrast this with what happens in schools: 'doing mathematics means following the rules laid down by the teacher; knowing mathematics means remembering and applying the correct rule ...' (quoted p. 167). They say that 'If [this] view is accepted, then it seems clear that a serious attempt is necessary to modify instructional practices in the classroom in order to provide for authentic activity in mathematics' (p. 167), and they describe an event in the mathematical classroom which shows an example of 'engagement in authentic mathematical activity' (p. 169).

Similarly, they look at science, and note again how school lessons bear little 'relationship to the way in which scientists actually work' (p. 170), this time using comments from the scientist Medawar and the philosopher of science Karl Popper in support. Again, their conclusion is that this means that science teaching has to be changed to reflect this practice.

Two things must be noted about the argument when discussing their proposed changes to the mathematics and science curricula. *First*, true, they have conceded that moving towards such methods can only be justified if the social constructivist view is correct. That is, if the scholars they have quoted are *right* in their dismissal of the notion of 'objective' knowledge, which sits outside of certain 'activities, contexts and cultures'. However, the later tone of the paper suggests that this sometimes slips from view, and in any case, they do not attempt to explore the idea, or point to any literature which may suggest the view is controversial. This is a lacuna in the paper which seems odd.

Second, and most crucially, it is simply not the case that even if mathematics is socially constructed, *therefore the learning and teaching of mathematics must also follow this method.* This reveals their pedagogical bias. For completely consistent with this view of the creation of knowledge is that of *initiation of children into the disciplines that have already been created.* In this way, young people can then be in a position later on to be involved in the construction of further mathematics - or, if that is an aspiration that not all will share, to use the tools which multicultural humanity has developed over the millennia for their own less ambitious purposes. This is a pedagogical judgement which can be made completely independent of whether or not the social constructivist philosophy is correct. This distinction seems to be completely missed by the researchers.

Exactly parallel arguments apply when they look at science, and suggest transforming the curriculum to take into account 'the way in which scientists actually work' (p. 170). Again, their conclusion is that this means that science teaching has to be changed to reflect this practice; again, this is a *non sequitur.*

Progressive music

As noted above, Shepherd and Vulliamy (1994) explore the issue of how the nature of school music came to be of great significance in the debates around the introduction of the National Curriculum. The authors' normative position comes out strongly: both authors, in the context of British and Canadian education policy, have argued that

> 'curriculum reform in favour of popular music would make classes more relevant to the cultural capital that students brought with them to the classroom, would result inevitably in the teacher becoming more of a guide and less of an authority figure ... would make music a less boring and more useful subject for students, and would generally result in a better educational experience for all.' (p. 29)

In the context of their handbooks for teachers, *Pop Music in School* and *Pop, Rock and Ethnic Music in School,* this would be unremarkable. But in the context of this educational research article, their bias intrudes and changes the article from being an interesting article in educational research, to what might seem as an exercise in polemics. They present the 'progressive' educational view as if it is unremarkable, as the correct standard from which government policy has deviated.

The non-partisan researcher

Is it possible to conduct 'non-partisan' research? There were a few examples in the sub-sample which came across as being in stark contrast to those articles examined above, which could be described as 'non-partisan' research. Three examples are given from our sub-sample to show some of the characteristics of this kind of approach. Again, they are not intended to give a full picture of each article, but only chapter-and-verse to support the claims of non-partisanship, to allow others to agree or disagree on the researchers' judgements.

The introduction of grant-maintained schools

The paper by Power, Halpin and Fitz (1994) gives evidence of non-partisanship in the *presentation* of the research. It aims to assess 'the extent to which grant-maintained (GM) schools' have extended 'parental choice and involvement' (p. 209).

As far as the *presentation* of the research is concerned, although from other contexts one may be aware of the researchers' political beliefs, these do not come across at all in the work. For example, when they set out their description of government policy, and the motivation behind it, they do this fairly, using the voices of the proponents of the scheme, rather than using critical secondary sources, as was commonly the case in other research reviewed (see below). Indeed, reading the first page of this description one would not know what the political beliefs of the researchers are. Of course this is not to say that such research is not political in some sense. It is no doubt inspired by political beliefs and values. But in the presentation they do not allow these values and beliefs to colour their work.

When it comes to the findings of the research, the researchers present these calmly, without, as in other research we have reviewed, feeling the need to reinterpret these comments in the light of their own ideological perspectives. For example, the researchers point out the common

objection to choice in schools: that it will increase class divisions, and exacerbate inequality (p. 219). From an inside perspective, one knows that the researchers are probably sympathetic to this claim, and, indeed, to explore this issue is likely to have been one of the motivations for doing this research. But *none of this comes through* in the article. They look coolly at the evidence and conclude that they did not observe this phenomenon. They report on what the evidence shows, not on what they wanted to find.

Teachers' perceptions of grant-maintained schools

A similar example of non-partisan *presentation* of research, and from which we can infer non-partisan *conduct* of research, is found in Campbell, Halpin, and Neill (1996). The researchers look at 'teachers' perceptions of the impact of grant-maintained status on the management of schools' (p. 246). The authors conclude their paper with an acknowledgement which is unusually drawn into the full text, that the NUT gave the researchers 'total academic independence in carrying out the study' (p. 257), and the views or conclusions must not be taken as representing the official view of the NUT. The reason for this statement is clear - the researchers came up with results which their sponsors may not have wanted, and perhaps the researchers would not have wanted either. From this we can infer that their method was not partisan - otherwise they might have been able to contrive whatever conclusions they wanted!

Their non-partisan presentation is clear as the researchers present their conclusions and draw policy implications from them. For example, as funds for GM schools are so clearly diverted into classrooms in primary schools, it would be difficult to see how opponents of opting out could object to this process. From a party-political perspective, they note that 'it is easy to envisage how evidence such as ours could be used by the Conservative Party in order to encourage primary schools to opt out, given that the benefits are those known to be most attractive to parents and teachers.' (p. 257).

Similarly, when giving the background to the grant maintained schools policy, they note the benefits as predicted by the policy's advocates:

> 'first, it will help to diversify local school provision and thus increase parental choice; second, it will encourage competition between schools, including those in the private sector, and therefore help to raise standards; and third, it will locate key decision-making at the level of the school rather than the LEA and consequently foster greater managerial efficiency' (p. 247).

These purported benefits are reported *without any comment* - it not being the place of this research to do that. The authors do not feel compelled all the time to bring their political beliefs and arguments into their presentation.

Defence of university teacher education

The final example of non-partisan research suggests again that it is not partisanship in the *focus* of research which need be a problem, only that the researcher should leave this partisanship 'at the door' when arguing and analysing.

McIntyre's (1995) paper seeks to defend the Oxford Internship Scheme, a method of teacher education used at Oxford University's department of educational studies. The author is explicit about his motives in writing the paper: It is particularly timely, he says, because of the government's moves towards school-based teacher training/education, and the paper can be seen as part of the process whereby 'university departments rightly seek to defend their place in the education of beginning teachers against populist claims that schools can do the whole job' (p. 365). But this 'partisan' concern does not then infect his argument. He is genuinely interested

to explore how the scheme has been criticised, presenting these criticisms in the best possible light, not seeking to belittle them, or accuse them of 'ideological' motivation, or other common ploys of the partisan researcher. He concedes some points, and addresses all others in detail, to seek to arrive at a justified defence of his work at Oxford. Again, this is a notable example of non-partisan research in action.

PROBLEMS OF METHODOLOGY

The second major theme that arose from the critical scrutiny of the journal articles in the light of the research questions concerned methodological issues.

The table below shows the figures for the 264 articles in the case study journals, for non-empirical studies, qualitative and quantitative research. As noted above, the researchers decided which was the dominant of these approaches, and where agreement couldn't be reached, the articles were categorised as 'other'.

Table 8: Case study journals: research methodology

Journal	Non-empirical %	Quantitative %	Qualitative %	Other %
BERJ	24	25	50	2
Oxford Review	51	23	26	0
BJSE	55	6	36	3
BJES	86	5	9	0

As can be seen from this table, of the *empirical* work, qualitative studies were in the majority in all of our case study journals. In the *British Educational Research Journal*, for example, they represented two-thirds of the empirical studies (and half of all articles surveyed); in the *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, qualitative studies made up nearly 85% of the empirical studies. In the *Oxford Review of Education*, there was a closer balance of qualitative and quantitative research; in the *British Journal of Educational Studies*, the overwhelming majority of articles were theoretical[13].

In the case study journal sub-sample of articles, there were particular problems arising with the conduct and presentation of *qualitative* research, which provides the main focus for this section, although issues arising from the conduct and presentation of quantitative research are also mentioned.

Problems of qualitative methodology

In the case study journals, the qualitative studies were commonly studies of individual teachers or students, groups of the same, whole classes or institutions. Often these used semi-structured interviews and observation as the main data-gathering technique. This is a well-established practice and it has many advantages. For example, it makes it possible to gather data that are inaccessible in

13 In passing, it is worth comparing this with the figure found in the project's survey of specialised journals, not reported here. The key reading research journals surveyed, for example, were *Reading Research Quarterly, Journal of Reading Behaviour, Journal of Literacy Research, Reading and Writing: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, and *Journal of Research in Reading*. In these, the picture was very different. Of the British articles surveyed around 85% of the articles were based on research using a quantitative methodology.

any other way and the data gathered can be very rich and fine-grained. In the hands of a skilled interviewer followed by sensitive and perceptive analysis, they are capable of providing insights and glimpses of reality obtainable in no other way. It would be wrong to assume that the discussion here reflects criticism of small-scale, qualitative studies *per se*. They have an important place in educational research and this research report, of course, is an example of a small-scale case-study approach which, it is hoped, may be of some value in policy debates. However, from this research, many of the articles examined gave rise to serious concern.

The key problem here lies in the subjectivity of qualitative research: Wragg (1994) notes that this subjectivity 'can become compounded, with judgement and assertion repeated and reinforced until they become reified ... We often interpret events as we wish to see them, not as they are.' (p. 50). He notes that 'Good qualitative analysis' requires that we have 'rigorous scrutiny' of the 'barriers to accurate perception' (p. 50). The research questions set out in Chapter 2 in part build in these methods of 'rigorous scrutiny'; their absence was noted in many of the articles critically scrutinised. Given the subjectivity of qualitative research, and the way the reader is so dependent upon the researcher for all the information about the data, the ways in which the researchers' judgements can be mitigated are of paramount importance. Of particular concern in this section will be the lack of triangulation and the problem of sampling bias.

From the discussion of 'partisan research', some of the problems underlying qualitative methodology may already have become apparent. Indeed, partisanship and the issue of triangulation and avoidance of sample bias are linked in an intricate way. For it is readily apparent that if a researcher wishes to promote a particular partisan position, then he or she would be best-advised *not* to use triangulation, and to make sure that there was bias in the sample! For concerns about triangulation and sampling bias are precisely in part to bring checks and balances in the way of subjectivity and bias in qualitative research. It is not surprising then, that we find these problems arising in some of the research already classified as partisan.

For example, in the illustration of the 'racist' primary school (Connolly, 1995), one problem in the reading of the research was the apparent lack of triangulation of the researcher's judgements[14]. When he suggests that there is racism underlying the fact that a teacher perceives a particular Black child is 'good at sport', it would have helped matters if he had examined whether the child really was good at sport or not - by consulting other teachers, the parents, the make-up of sporting teams in the school, or whatever. Similarly, when casting judgement on the teacher regarding African/Caribbean boys' behaviour, it would have helped matters if the researcher had given us some evidence to show that the teacher's perception of this was a matter of her racism, and not anything to do with their actual behavioural problems.

The problem of lack of triangulation again looms large in the discussion above of the lesbian PE teacher (Sparkes 1994). The complete 'homophobic' incident was described above, where it was noted that this was 'as described by Jessica', and that it should be treated with caution. But more than this, in the context of a research article, it would have been particularly valuable to attempt to triangulate the evidence. For example, the research could have located the teacher accused of homophobia, and other colleagues who had been gathered together in the pub, and asked for their recollection of the incident. Without these sort of steps, readers can have no faith in the judgements made in the article.

The issue of sampling bias is more subtle - because it all depends on what the researcher wishes to do with the research findings. We have noted that Sparkes (1994) explores the life experiences of *one* teacher. If he had simply wanted to describe her experiences, and not make any generalisations, then the problem of sampling bias would not have arisen, although the value of the research itself would have been questionable, of course. But Sparkes wishes to do more than

14 The 'apparent' is significant, for this goes back to the distinction earlier between the quality of the *conduct* of the research and its *presentation*. Perhaps the researcher did use triangulation but just omitted to tell us.

this, it seems. The author points out that the motivation for his work is to present 'the struggles Jessica faces on a daily basis to construct her life, and maintain her sense of self, in the public spaces that the school provides' (p. 95). This is

> 'to provide insights into how schools, as patriarchal institutions that are ideologically and culturally heterosexual, create and maintain a set of inequitable circumstances that exercise a level of control over the "private" lives of lesbian teachers.' (p. 95).

From these and similar comments it would seem that Sparkes' intention is to *generalise* his findings. But his sampling method completely militates against this possibility. He does not tell us how his sample of one is in any way representative of the wider population of homosexual teachers - indeed, the more one reads of her account, the more unlikely this seems. Given his desire to generalise, he thus shows sampling bias.

Other examples of the problems of qualitative methodology appeared in our sub-sample. Again, these are illustrated here to provide chapter and verse on how these issues arose - not to give a full picture of each article.

Misogynous headteachers

Riseborough, (1994) in his paper reviewing the experience of two disaffected teachers in a school which was to be closed, illustrates many of the problems of having to rely on the researcher's reporting and interpretation of events. For example, he reports on the headteacher's 'strategies for order and excellence' and adds his own twist:

> 'These strategies for order and excellence were *necessarily* misogynous' (p. 88).

In what ways did they show this necessary hatred of women? First, 'Mr Hardman' (the pseudonym for the headteacher),

> 'was not just a headteacher but a *headmaster*' (p. 88 emphasis in original).

This seems rather flimsy evidence for misogyny. However, the researcher continues in this vein, arguing that '*Schoolmasters* ... prospered but most women teachers were marginalised' (p. 88, emphasis in the original). There is no evidence given for this whatsoever, it is apparently based solely on the totally unsupported comments of the disaffected teachers:

> 'He surrounded himself with a lot of the blokes who had survived from the boys' school and none of the women *apart from two he liked*. He said, "You need certain women teachers ... for girls' PE and ... to tell the girls about the menstrual cycle and that's it. The rest of the women teachers can go"' (quoted p. 88, emphasis added).

Perhaps the teacher himself feels this might seem rather flimsy evidence for the researcher, so he continues, protesting much: 'Honestly, that is not a word of a lie ...' (quoted p. 88). But as readers we don't know whether it was a word of a lie or not, for there is no attempted triangulation of the data: we don't hear the headmaster's voice, or see the researcher searching the records of the gender of teachers employed, or investigating reasons for non-employment. All we have is that this is *evidence* to support the claim of 'necessary misogyny'[15].

Moreover, given the researcher's desire to generalise from his findings to arrive at policy prescriptions (see page 64 below), the research also suffers from sampling bias. The two teachers in his sample were 'very well known to the researcher' (p. 86) and were 'more-than-willing-to-reveal' (p. 86). He does not then go on to tell us whether these characteristics mean that they are

15 One difficulty the researcher may have had in conducting triangulation is that the article is based on interviews conducted in 1984, the year after the school's closure. No explanation is given as to why the researcher has waited ten years to report these issues.

representative of the larger population of teachers, and hence his generalisations cannot be drawn from the sample.

Sexist heads of department

As noted, Paechter (1995) explores the way teachers reacted to the new technology curriculum introduced under the National Curriculum. Her work illustrates the problem of lack of triangulation. She tells us of 'the importance and ferocity of subcultural struggle' (p. 79); this was manifest, for example, in one of the schools with the (female) head of the old Home Economics department not being awarded the job of head of the new Design and Technology department, which instead went to the (male) head of the old Craft Design and Technology department. The researcher's tone in describing this makes us realise we are to believe that this is an injustice, although we are told nothing about the respective qualifications for the job of the two possible candidates. Moreover, the woman in question says she is unhappy because there are 'particular problems' caused by the fact that the new head 'did not understand the way her department's finances worked' (p. 80). However, we are not told whether the new head concurs with this or not. We are given the impression that her gripes are well-founded, to support the case of injustice.

The point is, again, that here we are totally dependent on the researcher's views of what happened, there is no triangulation, and so absolutely no way of knowing how well-founded are these claims.

Racist pro-vice-chancellors

Neal's (1995) research is a 'reflexive' account of the problems she has had as a researcher of powerful people. She gives a description of a *racist incident* which again illustrates some of the problems of qualitative methodology. The incident was at the conclusion of an interview with a Pro-Vice-Chancellor, as he showed her to the door, after a particularly co-operative and friendly interview. He had said:

> 'we've had difficulties in the library ... We have Asian students who are quiet and want to work hard and they get upset when the silence in the library gets disrupted by Afro-Caribbean *(sic)* students. They (Asian students) don't understand that it's their [African-Caribbean students] nature to be happy and exuberant'. (quoted p. 528).

She goes on to report:

> '... I quickly realised that he was giving me anecdotal evidence of his own theory that it is culture that leads to misunderstanding and racialised problems and conflicts. When I did realise this my first reaction, despite being shocked and outraged, was not immediately to challenge this notion but memorise what he had said in order that I could go and record it accurately.' (p. 528).

Now, for those who share the researcher's 'shock and outrage' at this suggestion, the need for some common-sense caution can be noted: as they were in the Pro-Vice-Chancellor's doorway, her tape-recorder had been switched off, so this is only what she has recalled he had said sometime later. However, we all know that verbatim comments are hard to remember, particularly once we've been 'shocked' and 'outraged', so a cautious researcher would not be willing to report such a statement without further triangulation. Did she phone his office, and ask for clarification? No. Did she check up on the behaviour of groups of students in the library? No. She simply reports what she has remembered, and it is published in a learned journal as if it is incontrovertible evidence. But without triangulation, its credibility is questionable.

Sampling issues

Further issues arose concerning sampling in the sub-sample, particularly the issue of the *presentation* of how the sample was selected and problems likely to arise because of this.

Some of the 'basic' research questions outlined in chapter 2 concerned the issue of the reporting of sample size and how the sample was selected. It was noted that one of the criteria for good practice in educational research should be to be told enough information about the research conducted to enable informed judgements to be made about its conduct and reporting of results, or to allow it to be, where appropriate, replicated and tested. It was indicative of the cavalier approach of many researchers that *even simple factual details such as the sample size and how it was selected* were often considered to be irrelevant to the reader. (The figures given below refer to the total number of articles in the four case study journals, not just to the sub-sample.)

- In the *Oxford Review of Education*, of all those articles reporting empirical research, almost a third did not give details of the sample size. Slightly more than a third gave no details at all as to how the sample was selected, with a similar fraction giving inadequate, although some, information about this.
- The picture for the *British Educational Research Journal* was slightly better, but still not good, with about 10% of articles reporting empirical research not giving sample size. Roughly a fifth give no details at all of how the sample was selected, and about 40% gave inadequate, although some, information about this.
- The *British Journal of Sociology of Education* had sample size details for about 70% of the relevant articles. About one-third of the articles had no details given as to how the sample was selected, with a further half giving some, although not full, details.
- In the *British Journal of Educational Studies* there was only a very small number (eight) of articles reporting empirical research; for these, two had no information given about how the sample was selected, three had partial information, and three had more or less full details given; the sample size was not given for three of these articles.

This does mean that readers are at a complete loss in many instances to make their own judgements about the conduct of the research, and to build on it in terms of critique and replication. This is a very disappointing finding, and reflects badly on the quality of the research in general. It was even more unusual for the researchers to reflect upon limitations of their sampling. If full details of sample size and selection are given, then this may not be such a problem for discerning readers - they can often work this out for themselves - although it would still be desirable to know that the researchers are aware of these limitations, and draw appropriate conclusions in the light of them.

Examples of good practice in methodology

It must be stressed that not all of the research featured the problems noted above. In particular, looking to our sub-sample, some of the articles did report sample size and how this was selected and did undertake triangulation and/or report on the limitations of the sample and potential sampling bias. For example, in the article already discussed above on grant-maintained schools, Power, Halpin and Fitz (1994) give full details of how their interviews were conducted with randomly selected pupils in the full range of schools covered by the grant-maintained policy. And we are given the caveat - only rarely found in such research papers - that

> 'It is always difficult to ascertain the representativeness of one's sample. As both sets of interviews required parental permission and accessibility, the samples are to some extent

> "opportunistic" and thus likely to suffer from distortion ... In the case of the parental interviews ... the sample is skewed towards an over-representation of service and intermediate class households. Despite such limitations, a wealth of data were gathered which we have used to evaluate the early impact of GM schools on parental and pupil perceptions of GM status.' (p. 212).

This is an example of good practice in sampling methods and their presentation which others could do well to learn from. Other examples of good practice in methodology follow.

Students' understanding of mathematical proof

Coe and Ruthven (1994) explore A-level students' understanding of the concept of proof. Their study was motivated by a particular problem in mathematics teaching, and by a recent policy shift in the way mathematics should be taught. Background ideas on the importance of proof in mathematics are clearly and comprehensively explored. The research is a small-scale qualitative study, but the authors do not make unwarranted generalisations from it. They treat it in the vein of a pilot study, pointing out how the methodology could be used for a larger study from which generalisations could be made.

The value of SATs

Davies and Brember (1994) assess the value parents can put on the mathematical Standard Assessment Task score as an indicator of what children are achieving in mathematics. They are motivated by concerns 'about standards' (p. 35), noting that 'It was the desire to raise standards which was the motivation behind the introduction of the National Curriculum' (p. 35). The aim was to compare a sample of 7-year-olds' SAT results with those on an NFER standardised mathematics test. The researchers randomly selected five out of 85 schools from one LEA, and then chose all Year 2 children within those schools. The NFER test was administered by the children's teacher after the SATs had been administered.

The key result reported is that there was considerable overlap in NFER scores between children who were assigned to different SATs levels. For example, '89% of children at SAT Level 1 had NFER scores within the NFER scores of the children at SAT Level 2' (p. 38). The problem here is that, although if children are to be classified into just three levels, as the SATs try to do, 'there is bound to be some overlap' with standardised scores, the overlap seems far too great: hence, 'one is bound to question the validity of the SAT level.' (p. 38).

The article concludes by examining whether this discrepancy could have arisen because of problems with the NFER test, but suggests that its reliability is not up for question:

> 'The NFER test ... was constructed using the generally accepted procedure for test construction. The same can hardly be said of the SATs' (p. 39).

The recommendation is that 'the SAT results in mathematics should be viewed with a degree of caution as summative indicators of children's mathematical attainments' (p. 39).

The research takes a topical issue of national importance - that of the reliability of national assessment tasks being developed. It should be added that Sainsbury, Schagan and Whetton (1995) were unhappy with the approach taken by Davies and Brember, and set out to critique their model; the key point here is that they were able to do this as the authors had set out the details of their method for public scrutiny.

Measures of special needs' children

Wylie, Morrison, and Healy (1995) are concerned with the introduction of the 10-level hierarchical scale in National Curriculum subjects, and whether the same standards apply for special needs and mainstream students. Consider, they say, for example, a 'child who transfers from special to mainstream schooling having been assessed as having mastered level 2 mathematics. Can the teacher who receives the child assume, with some measure of confidence, that the special school teacher's perception of what constitutes level 2 mastery accords with the mainstream interpretation?' (p. 286). Three groups of teachers (mainstream, special unit, and special school) all concerned with teaching children with moderate learning difficulties, were identified, and the research set out to answer the following questions:

- 'Do these three groups interpret the "standard" associated with level 2 mathematics similarly?
- Are the three groups equally consistent in their interpretations of the level 2 standard?
- Are the three groups equally confident when making judgements about the level 2 'standard' in mathematics?' (p. 290).

The researchers used a method called the 'Angoff standard-setting' procedure to assess these questions. Basically, this first involved asking each teacher to identify pupils in their class who were 'just competent' at level 2 in Number, by first eliminating all those they thought had mastered level 2, and those who definitely had not. They then were asked to imagine a typical 'just competent' pupil from this group, and, in their professional judgement, assess the probability that this pupil would achieve certain marks on the tests they were reviewing. Using technical procedures, the researchers were then able to obtain a figure which could 'be associated with a professional judgement of the level 2 standard' on the mathematics tests used. They then did a similar procedure but working with colleagues, to discuss their judgements, and to see if these were changed from their judgements when working alone. Finally, they were given a questionnaire which asked them to describe the confidence they felt in making their judgements of mathematical ability in their pupils.

They present an analysis of their findings which show that the three groups 'did set similar standards' for level 2 mathematics (p. 292). However, there was some degree of inconsistency on these amongst special unit teachers, and so the answer to their second question is negative. Finally, the three groups did not differ in the 'confidence with which they render professional judgements at level 2 in mathematics' (p. 293).

The research addresses a very real issue of concern to practising teachers and policy-makers and one which needs answering. While the authors 'are at pains to point out that this research is in no way a whole-hearted endorsement of the use of the 10-level scale in special education' (p. 286), they pragmatically recognise that parents and government are likely to seek its use in special education. So while their own bias is made clear, this doesn't stop them from addressing this important issue in as neutral a way as possible. Their method is open to scrutiny in all but one respect - we are not told how the sample was selected, beyond having roughly equal numbers of teachers in the three groups. They tell us exactly how they went about their research, using the 'Angoff' procedure, and the methods of triangulation used. The subjectivity of the judgements in this approach is not discussed - but at least the method itself is open to scrutiny, and other researchers can criticise them on this level.

NON-EMPIRICAL EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH

The third theme to be discussed is non-empirical research. This is considered within a separate section here because

(a) there was a considerable amount of it in the case study journals - as can be seen from Table 8 on page 42, non-empirical work made up a significant proportion of the total number of papers surveyed in the four case study journals[16];

(b) because different questions are raised concerning non-empirical research, which are of special interest.

It is worth reminding ourselves of the research questions posed of non-empirical research before continuing. First, recall that the distinction between the *conduct* and *presentation* of the research is less clear here, and hence the focus is on what is defined as the *argument* of the research. This is addressed in terms of the following questions:

- Is the argument coherent and lucidly expressed?
- Do the conclusions follow from the premises and argument?
- Are unfamiliar terms adequately defined and assumptions clearly set out?
- Are concepts used consistently?
- Are primary sources used?
- If empirical propositions are introduced, are references given for these?
- If controversial empirical and non-empirical propositions are introduced, is their controversy acknowledged and arguments given, or referred to, to justify supporting the proposition?
- Is the relevant literature adequately surveyed?
- Is the argument free of partisanship?

In this section, we reflect on how the papers in the sub-sample fared against the critical scrutiny of those questions.

It must be made clear at the outset, *pace* some of the press reports that greeted the announcement of this research, that we have no prejudice against non-empirical educational research. For example, research in the disciplines of philosophy, sociology, history, politics and psychology of education seems valuable for academic interest alone, as well as for the light it can shed on concerns of policy and pedagogical practice.

In this section, *first*, some examples of non-empirical research are illustrated which would seem to satisfy many of the questions laid out above; *second*, other work which does not seem to have this merit is examined. *Third*, some issues surrounding the non-empirical parts of articles reporting empirical research are raised. *Fourth*, a questionable practice in educational research, where the ideas of named 'great thinkers' are taken and empirical or historical findings used to show the correctness of the great thinker's thoughts, is explored. An alternative approach is also illustrated in that section. *Finally*, a common practice in some of the non-empirical research (and in the literature review sections of some empirical work too) of using secondary rather than primary sources as the basis for an argument is illustrated.

All the examples given are, as usual, taken from the sub-sample, so it is suggested that they reflect broader trends in the educational journals selected.

16 In passing, it can be noted that for the five reading research journals examined during the project, as mentioned in footnote 13 on page 42, non-empirical articles made up just 13% of the British contributions.

Good practice in non-empirical research

Theorising methodology of educational research

The writings of Abraham (1994), Hammersley, (1995) and Abraham (1996) illustrate a valuable debate in research methodology. They are part of an ongoing debate between these authors, and the first of these was part of our sub-sample. Despite the formidable titles of some of the papers, they do address an important issue for researchers and policy-makers, viz., what is the role of *values* in educational research - an issue of great importance which we have already touched upon in our discussion of the partisan researcher. Together they provide an interesting example of concerned academics genuinely thrashing out ideas about research methodology which could have genuine impact, and ensuring that their arguments do have concern for rigour, consistent use of concepts, and lucid expression.

Theorising education policy

Raab's (1994) theoretical writings on education policy again exhibit concern for rigour in argument, lack of partisanship, clear referencing to relevant literature - which is clearly reviewed, and, in general, shows clarity of argument. He notes that there are many competing ways of viewing and theorising education policy, and this article attempts to clarify pros and cons of each method. For example, he notes that there are three analytical tools for approaching education policy, viz., those using 'network, market and hierarchy concepts' (p. 15). 'Policy networks' describe the 'different types of relationship between the state and interest groups in the policy process' (p. 13). Markets are also a 'basic mode ... of social co-ordination' (p. 15). On the other hand, 'the state's relation to society is only one instance of a more general type of hierarchical relationship' (p. 15), giving us our third 'analytical category'. He then shows how education policies can be analysed in these three ways: recent policies 'rely heavily upon hierarchical measures of control as seen in the enlargement of central government's legal powers over a wide range, and in the details of central specifications with which those lower down, in schools or education authorities, must comply' (p. 15). However, government also claims that it is decentralising power to schools, and 'Whether or not this decentralising claim is wholly valid, it rests heavily upon elements of market co-ordination and resource-allocation ... in an attempt to have the market do the work that politicians and bureaucrats have hitherto done' (p. 16). Finally, networks can also be analysed, to 'highlight the interconnections between state and other actors in education policy formulation and implementation' (p. 16).

All these three approaches lead naturally for the author to consider 'the governance perspective'. This 'draws upon systems theory, theories of inter-organisational networks, public management, communication theory and state theory.' (p. 17). The governance approach does not give 'practical solutions' but gives 'categories and insights drawn from a variety of theoretical perspectives' (p. 18). It gives 'novel abstractions, but perhaps at the cost of relevance to concrete situations.' (p. 18). However, it is arguable, he says, that this approach 'serves a critical evaluative purpose, for it encourages questions about the necessity of new forms of interactive governance and networking for stable, satisfactory solutions to complex, diverse, and dynamic problems.' (p. 18). The sort of question he has in mind is: 'can the combination of strong state, market forces and fragile networks of consensus achieve government's own objectives in education, let alone cope with the unanticipated and unintended consequences of these instruments, without innovating new forms of interaction?' (p. 18).

Similarly, Peter Tomlinson (1995) builds on the work of an earlier paper by the same author, which examined the recent controversy over the introduction by the government of competence specification in Initial Teacher Training/Education. Again the argument is clear,

concepts are well defined and consistently used, careful referencing is given, and there is a non-partisan approach. His paper addresses an important theme of relevance to policy-makers and those engaged in teacher education. It is offered as a contribution to showing how the government's approach can be modified in order to make it effective and acceptable. Of particular interest is the way he carefully challenges the logic of other arguments. He agrees with critics that 'teaching must be one of the most complex and open forms of skilful activity known to humans.' (p. 300). Considering only what happens in the classroom, 'the context of teaching is particularly dynamic and complex, consisting, as it does, of relatively large numbers of human beings with their own moment-to-moment agendas, which may or may not include learning. Both the immediate process aims and eventual outcome objectives of teaching are second-order, involving others' learning, so that teaching is among the more contestable and contested of human endeavours.' (p. 300). However, this only rules out the possibility of 'a total specification' (p. 300) of what teaching is. It does not rule out that there can still be a role for an 'explicit' profiling of teaching functions and strategies. In other words, he is arguing that the objection to competencies for teaching assumes that they are intended to be *sufficient* for good teaching to take place, while he is only arguing that they are *necessary*. So he argues that competence profiling must only be 'an aspect of teacher training', and other things are required as well, such as 'a pedagogy of pupil learning, together with further aspects of teaching including the sociological, economic, legal, historical and so forth' (p. 309).

Philosophical perspectives

There were two contributions by philosophers of education in the sub-sample, both of which exhibited carefully crafted arguments, setting these out clearly and consistently, and with conclusions following from the premises and argument given. For example, Wilson (1994) looks at the preconditions for successful education policy. He suggests that governments need to be clear about what education is, before they can start making policy. However, Wilson suggests that much in education in the UK and similar societies is misguided, and has been so for the last few decades. He lists 20 propositions which are indicative of beliefs held by educationalists which reflect the problem with education. These propositions include things such as:

> 'that "education" is a "contestable concept", without any fixed definition or meaning and without specific values of its own'; 'that there are no innate, basic or non-negotiable differences between people of different sexes, races, cultures, colours, classes, etc.: all such differences are due to "society" or social conditioning.'; 'that "competition" is bad' and 'that examinations are bad because they brand pupils as "failures" ' (p. 29).

These are simplifications, and obviously, he argues, require further clarification of what is meant in each case, but he suggests that 'a considerable number of people (i) say things of which the above ... sentences are fair summaries, (ii) are willing to give a general assent, even without elaboration, to such brief sentences, and (iii) appear to engage in and support educational practices which are based on them' (p. 30).

He then sets about looking at the question of what governments can achieve, and how they should proceed in policy, given the 'conceptual muddle' we are in about education, and suggests caution about how they should proceed: 'Governments have constantly found ... that they start with certain, usually somewhat inchoate, ideas which they wish to turn into practice: these ideas are then delegated through the hands of various commissions and committees or working-parties, and finally rest in the hand of teachers: and unsurprisingly, they find that the ideas lose their original shape or thrust ... or even get turned on their heads.' (p. 33).

The second philosophical perspective on education policy in the sub-sample was by Darling and Pijpekamp (1994). This presented a particularly clear and illuminating account of Rousseau's philosophy of education, concerning the 'education, domination and violation of women' (p. 115).

It set out to debunk some of the 'unsatisfactory twentieth century commentary' on Rousseau (p. 122), which had either given his attitude towards women 'insufficient attention', totally avoided addressing it, or actively misrepresented it. The article stands out as lucid and uncluttered with terms and concepts that have not been well-defined. It also pays careful attention to the preceding historical and philosophical literature.

Reflecting on sociology of education

Two examples reflecting from within the field of sociology of education also seemed to satisfy many of the conditions for good practice in theoretical research - although both did suffer from a lack of lucidity at times which made the argument hard to follow. Moore (1996) seeks to 'reflect upon the current condition of the sociology of education in Britain by focusing upon a fundamental problem in accounting for change in education and its relationship to social change more generally.' (p. 145). This is an example of healthy critical research in action. The researcher points to inadequacies in past sociology of education, and suggests ways in which it may become more supportive of classroom improvements in the future.

The researcher points to the *failures* of the paradigms of sociology of education to do much for the position of women or ethnic minorities. In the past, he points out, 'a major concern has been with issue of *differentiation* among class, gender and ethnic lines, emphasising the role of education as an agent of social reproduction' (p. 145). However, sociology of education failed to predict the changes that actually did occur in practice: 'progressive changes *expected* to follow from social democratic educational reforms failed to occur, and ... *unanticipated* improvements in the relative attainments of girls and blacks *have* occurred' (abstract, p. 145).

In particular, sociology of education failed to predict the achievement of black girls, and indeed, made it almost 'invisible' in the literature: 'This neglect is by workers in the "race" field who, intuitively, might be expected to draw attention to the fact that black pupils do well' (p. 148). He comments wryly on the feminist researcher Gaby Weiner's work, which bemoans the 'relatively modest' gains for feminism: 'However modest the gains for feminists, those of girls have been impressive.' (p. 158).

Similarly, Davies (1994) presents a lively and erudite account of Durkheim's place in the sociology of education, and his influence therein. It explores the content of sociology of education, how different generations of students have tackled different aspects, but how, almost universally, they have neglected Durkheim's place in the subject.

Difficulties within non-empirical research

Other non-empirical work did not satisfy the criteria for good practice - as set out in the research questions above - so well.

Controversial propositions and insubstantial literature review

Strain (1995) engages in an exegesis of Conservative government policy. However, his argument suggests an inadequate literature review, failure to acknowledge controversy behind statements, and the need to justify controversial positions. The author writes as if many academic and educational debates have never happened. For example, he is glowing in his tribute to 'The Plowden Report'. This, he writes, 'remains *one of the most unchallenged* educational documents to have been commissioned and accepted by a national government in the twentieth century.' (pp. 7-8 emphasis

added). There is, in fact, a large literature challenging it. Moreover, when the researcher addresses philosophical issues, a similar ignoring of debates is encountered. For example, in the section on 'Positive and negative freedom', the researcher uses Isaiah Berlin's argument, mentions Nozick in passing, but doesn't look at the *vast* literature which engages with Berlin's argument. Hence, he is able to make statements such as 'Negative freedom enlarges and glorifies opportunism; positive freedom introduces and necessitates a consideration of purposes and appropriate moral criteria' (p. 13), which would appear contentious at best in the context of these philosophical debates.

Similarly, John Tomlinson (1995) on "Teachers and Values: Courage Mes Braves!" engages, yet again, with Conservative government policy. This paper was based on a lecture given by the researcher at the Annual Conference of International Schools in Hamburg. If this had just been a public lecture, criticisms of it would be muted. But as it is also published as an article in a learned journal, the sense is that it has made inadequate use of references to support its case. For example, the author writes that the 'New Right projects ... transferred the basis of civil society from person back to property.' (p. 309), and gives as support for this assertion the following:

> 'The first theorists believed that everyone in society would become better off, even though divisions between rich and poor would widen. We now know, fifteen years later, that the "trickle-down theory" was mistaken. The poor have become not only relatively but *absolutely* poorer and an underclass of the excluded has been enlarged and entrenched' (pp. 309-310).

He gives no references for this claim. The issues raised here are the subject of fierce debates in economics and social theory, with some writers both questioning these facts and putting the blame for the 'underclass' on the very welfare state which Tomlinson praises (see, for example, Murray, 1984, and Dennis 1993). It is not our place to get involved with these debates here, but only to point out that it is not good enough in the context of an academic article to present this position as uncontentious, without the need to point to references and further discussion.

Similarly, he comments, without references:

> 'The reification of the self in the form of competitive, self-seeking and ultimately selfish, individualism which is required by the application of the market to economic and social goods has had a devastating effect on schools and teachers' (p. 310).

But this raises the questions of whether (a) the Conservative government reforms really did introduce this 'self-seeking and ultimately selfish individualism'? and (b) there really has been this impact on schools and teachers? Both of these need elaborate defence, not statement as if they are undisputed fact.

Contradictory arguments

Siraj-Blatchford (1995) in her 'reflexive account' of race and gender research seems to be an example of an argument which is contradictory in places, i.e., not satisfying the criteria concerning coherence, consistency and conclusions following from the premises and argument. To illustrate this, let us follow her argument. She begins:

> 'all research is inevitably politically committed and yet it is not equally valid. I conclude that its validity is ultimately dependent upon communicative competence.' (p. 209).

The truth of research comes out in how well it is argued for. There is only an 'apparent contradiction between a commitment to producing objective, value-free research' and a 'commitment to equality and justice' (abstract, p. 205). The contradiction is resolved, it seems, through 'communicative competence' deciding on what is 'truth'.

In this context, the author examines the notion of whether non-blacks, or non-women, can research the issues confronting black people or women. In the discussion of these issues it would

appear she contradicts herself on consecutive pages. First, she seems to quote approvingly bell hooks' *(sic)* notion that 'the ideal situation for learning is always one where there is diversity and dialogue, where there would be women and men from various groups.' (quoted, p. 210) - so, there are, she suggests, 'some white males who would argue that they have achieved a credible anti-sexist/anti-racist standpoint or perspective' (p. 210), so can be given a hearing. What she seems to be leading up to is that:

> 'what is important here is not whether one is "outside" or "inside" a particular group, but rather whether one is party to, "inside" or "outside" a particular discourse.' (p. 211).

This seems encouraging. However, on the very next page, she tells us:

> 'Membership of an ethnic minority may, however unpalatable a fact this may be to the majority of professional researchers, be a *necessary* qualification for the adequate study of that same group's reality, but it is not *sufficient* in studying racism and sexism' (p. 212, first emphasis added[17]).

Perhaps the apparent contradiction here is resolved by realising that on the previous page she was referring to the fact that white men couldn't study the white man's 'racism, colonialism, paternalism and imperialism', because 'white men may often be quite incapable of recognising or acknowledging these dominating relationships' (p. 211). So, if we want to study 'white supremacy ... to study white racist reality in white racist institutions' then what we actually need is a 'Black and ethnic minority' viewpoint (p. 212). It seems as if white men have really had it, they can't even study their own society, let alone anyone else's. Still it is odd that as she continues her elaboration of this theme she seems to contradict herself *again*, in the same paragraph. For she continues:

> '..while our ethnic group background or gender status may provide a qualification, the arguments presented so far do not suggest that this would represent a *necessary or sufficient* quality in its own right.' (p. 212).

But hasn't she has told us that it *was* a *necessary* condition, although not sufficient? This seems very odd. Perhaps it doesn't matter, if truth is all a matter of 'communicative competence'?

Non-empirical parts of articles reporting empirical research

Finally in this section it is worth mentioning how (predominantly) empirical researchers fare in the *non*-empirical parts of their research papers. *Three* issues are noted. *One* common shortcoming found in the sub-sample was for the researchers to go beyond their findings in their conclusions to other issues which were not supported by the evidence, and which were not argued for or defended, simply asserted. A *second* problem was where researchers would introduce controversial positions in their introduction or discussion without noting the controversy, or without pointing to the appropriate literature. This phenomenon has already been noted above in other contexts above (e.g., Riseborough 1994 and Vincent 1996 in the section on political partisanship[18]), and another example is given here. *Finally*, there were some distinctly flimsy arguments given to defend rather controversial empirical statements. An example of each of these is given, each taken from the sub-sample.

17 It is not *sufficient*, she concedes, because not all blacks are anti-racist, nor all women feminists (p. 212).

18 Of course, the examples given here could also be used to illustrate political partisanship.

Going beyond the evidence

Croxford (1994) presents a solid example of research using a quantitative methodology to review the issue of gender equity. She reviews evidence from the Scottish Young People's Survey from 1977-91, and seeks to answer questions concerning gender and the curriculum using this data. The paper finds that, in spite of the recommendations of the curriculum framework, and the Sex Discrimination Act, inequality of access to some modes has persisted. Within comprehensive schools there is differentiation by ability, social class and gender. Gender differences have been shown to be small but significant but differences within modes are greater (e.g., boys take physics, girls take biology; boys take engineering and girls take home economics). These quantitative conclusions are supported by the data, and she presents a useful and thorough discussion of these. However, it is interesting that she is not content to leave it with this analysis, but couches it all in a particular egalitarian perspective, which shows partisanship but, more importantly, is not defended in terms of any evidence or argument. For example, she notes that

> 'Within comprehensive schools there is differentiation by ability, social class and gender. *None* of these sources of inequality are (*sic*) justifiable within the spirit of equal entitlement.' (p. 388-389, emphasis added).

This is going beyond the research to her own views, and one which many may find controversial, for she is suggesting that 'ability' should not be used as a source of differentiated curriculum. She does not justify this position in any way. She also goes for a standard 'social construction' position on gender and class differences:

> 'Pupils, parents and teachers are influenced by their stereotyped expectations of the roles of women and men in society. The notion of 'free choice' is not meaningful if the choice is influenced by gender-stereotyped assumptions and reinforced by socialisation, peer group pressure and teachers' expectations' (p. 373).

She gives five references for this claim, although it is hard to see how the empirical research she refers to could possibly support the claim about free choice not being 'meaningful'. Similarly, she notes "Pupils learn their 'place' in the ability range through the experience of schooling. They learn the expected behaviour for their social class and gender through their childhood socialisation, and this is reinforced by the attitudes of teachers and their peer groups." (p. 389). There is no evidence for this from the study. Presumably it is introduced as a truism.

Politicising the context of research

Jackson (1994) puts her own research into the context of a thorough review of other empirical data on the education of children in care. Its careful discussion of the data cannot be faulted. She reveals that there are approximately 63,000 young people who are looked after by local authorities, of which two-thirds are in foster care, and the other third in residential care. The evidence from the studies is that their education has been shockingly neglected. The small apprehension about the paper is that, while reviewing the evidence, it keeps on bringing in the author's political perspective, which she does not attempt to argue for or point to other references to support. It is an example of rather 'low level' political bias. For example, the problem of exclusion, the researcher informs, 'has been much increased by the government's education policies.' (p. 273), in particular, because schools must compete with each other in league tables, which 'reduces children to "commodities" and makes those from stigmatised groups even less attractive than they were before.' (p. 273). The use of the word 'commodity' is very politically and ideologically loaded, and surely demands an explanation.

Similarly, we have the notion that, while there were 'good intentions' behind the Children Act, this has largely been 'negated by the erosion of the role of local education authorities and the introduction of market principles which make avoidance of expenditure a top priority.' (pp. 273-4).

And, in conclusion, she reiterates her claim that 'the introduction of market principles into the education system has certainly made matters worse for many of our most vulnerable children.' (p. 278). None of these arguments is defended in her paper, all are contentious, and none makes a difference to the otherwise carefully presented discussion.

Thin arguments

Deem (1994) presents a rather thinly argued position in her non-empirical argument, which does not do justice to some of the controversial claims she brings out, i.e., it fails to acknowledge their controversy and engage in an adequate literature review of the issues. Her paper is concerned to examine the 'involvement of lay people in the administration of state schools' (p. 23), and does so by examining reforms in five countries. The comparison is given between England, New Zealand and USA, as exhibiting one form of reform, compared with Scotland and Catalunya (Spain). The purpose of these comparisons, the researcher notes, is to show that relatively similar phenomena - in this case, lay participation on governing bodies - can occur for completely different reasons. In England, New Zealand and the USA, it occurs for political reasons to do with moves towards markets. In Catalunya and Scotland, however, it is to do with moves towards democratisation. While these claims may be plausible, the author offers very little in evidence to show that this is in fact the case. For example, she tells us of the Spanish situation, the 'emphases on internal education markets, individual parental choice and consumers ... are not merely resisted, as in Scotland, but altogether absent' (p. 32). In their place is a 'strong belief in democratic participation in schooling for its own sake, closely linked to a classical notion of citizenship as involving civic duties and responsibilities' (p. 32). As support for this bold claim, she says

> 'Some indication of the commitment of democratisation in Spain may be gathered from the fact that, although the procedure for qualifying as a teacher involves a difficult and competitive national examination, headteachers in state schools are drawn from the ranks of ordinary teachers and there is no special training; they serve a three year term and are nominated and may be dismissed by their school council.' (p. 33).

In case the reader may think this is rather similar to the situation in England, USA and New Zealand, the author concedes that this is in fact true, but 'Although governors in England, Chicago, and New Zealand also have similar powers over heads, these powers have been developed in a political context which emphasises efficiency and a free market rather than democratic values *per se*.' (p. 33). This hardly seems evidence enough to support this crucial plank of her argument that there are these important differences.

She goes on to say that another major difference is that the school councils in Spain 'are enthusiastic about their democratic involvement in the process of education as an end in itself.' (p. 34). The reference for this claim is to an unrefereed BERA conference paper. No reference is given to show how this is different from the situation in other countries, and no exploration of the method by which the quoted researcher arrived at this extravagant claim.

Adulation of great thinkers

A feature of some of the articles in the sub-sample - reflecting many more in the case study journals - was the combination of empirical (or historical) and non-empirical approaches to examine the work of a 'great' figure, such as, in our sample, Lyotard, Bourdieu, Foucault and Vygotsky, looking for its applicability to education. The particular research questions under which such articles were examined include the following:

- Is the work of the 'great' figure *critically* examined?

- Does the non-empirical work add significantly to understanding of the empirical (or historical) work?
- If the empirical (or historical) work undermines the non-empirical position, is this noted? What conclusions are drawn from this?

Four articles are reviewed in this section, to examine how they fared under the scrutiny of these questions. For three of these papers - the first three examples in this section - the approach seemed to be to take the ideas of these thinkers, explain them in some detail, then take some empirical work or historical episode, and show how this could be interpreted in the light of the great thinker's framework. *Two* things can be said about this method. *Firstly,* it does seem to be an odd way of approaching a theoretical model - trying to demonstrate that it is the best model by which to interpret the evidence, especially without considering alternative explanations. An alternative approach would be to see if, or to what extent, the model *does actually* fit the evidence, and perhaps then seek to adjust the model if and where appropriate. *Secondly,* we question in any case the value of the interpretations thus obtained for the enterprise of education. The fourth example considered shows that such an approach is not inevitable in the discussion of these 'great' figures.

Lyotard and youth workers

Rosie's (1996) paper sets out to see if the postmodern ideas of the French intellectual Lyotard 'can illuminate the experiences of youth workers in training' (p. 331). We explore the two incidents presented by the researcher, to see if Lyotard's model really does help us understand what is going on, i.e., if the non-empirical work adds significantly to the understanding of the empirical situation.

The first example shows 'Phil' (all names are pseudonyms), one of the students on the course, reacting against the lengthy processes of 'ice-breaking', i.e., getting to know each other. Phil says:

> 'I'm here because I want to learn. Now I'm not sure what I'm going to learn if we all trot stuff out ... I'd rather spend the time in the library.' (quoted pp. 336-7).

Now many of us might sympathise with this, having sat through similarly embarrassing ice-breaking exercises. But rather than take this at face value, and accept that he may have a point, Rosie - who is the course leader/participant observer - tells us that, in this comment, Phil is being, in Lyotard's terminology, a 'pagan' and introducing the 'figural'. In plainer language, which, to his credit, Rosie does introduce to help us with these terms, Phil is using his ability to participate in the 'dominant discourse' to attempt to undermine it from within.

The second incident described by the researcher is where there are complaints from two students. We'll examine one. Phil again, at the beginning of the second year of the course, complains:

> 'The whole thing has been a mess ... The whole course should have been properly planned from the beginning ... conditions, rooms, access, it stinks.' (quoted p. 339).

The course tutor's response was to try and defuse this, by suggesting various courses of action. Phil's response was:

> 'I'm still not happy about this ...' (quoted p. 340).

Rosie writes:

> 'Lyotard's categories can assist in an understanding of ... not finding tutor explanations adequate ... the student challenge does not result in a new discourse that is separate and distinct from that of the tutors. The students' figural response emerges from a calling

> out of the tutors' knowledge and perceptions and exists in and through that discourse. The move towards pagan knowledge involves a reworking of the discourse and its figurality ... The challenge[ ] from ... Phil can now be seen as an expression of pagan knowledge' (p. 341).

And the judge of all this (in Lyotard's helpful terminology, the "agon") was 'the group itself. The group had the task of seeing how far our accounts were commensurable' (p. 342).

So we have (at least) one student who is not happy about the course, and the way it is being 'taught', who thinks he can learn more from experience and the library, but his criticisms are not taken at face value, they are merely all part of an intellectual game. What is the outcome?

> 'This case-study has taken narratives from tutors who were committed to participative, shared approaches to learning and who shared the value base of their students, yet they produced narratives that were contradictory and unhelpful. But because the tutors were committed to bringing about change, their work eventually led to new forms of understanding within the group. This resulted in a form of pagan knowledge that was rooted in the experience of the participants.' (p. 344).

What are these 'new forms of understanding'? We are given a fascinating insight, and perhaps further evidence to help clarify the nature of Phil's unhappiness, with the following extract:

> 'The tutors and the group had a problem they had to resolve. *The tutors agreed to withdraw completely from the course for 3 weeks* and to leave the group to decide how it wished the course to proceed. ... by the end of the third week we were asked to take responsibility for certain aspects ... , *including, interestingly, all details of course content.*' (p. 343, emphasis added).

The 'new form of understanding' within the group, prompted in part by Phil's unhappiness, was that the course tutors agreed to teach, albeit after a three-week holiday.

A cynical reading of this article might suggest that if you are a course leader on a youth worker training programme, and one of your students tells you the course is badly organised and time-wasting, it would seem you have two options. One, you could take the complaint seriously and explore whether or not it is true and what can be done about it. Alternatively, you could dress up his complaint in terms of Lyotardian postmodernism, and write an article about it for an educational research journal.

Bourdieu and primary schoolchildren

Reay (1995) attempts to link Bourdieu's notion of *habitus* with her qualitative research in two schools. Here there seem to be shortcomings in the *critical* analysis of the writings of the great thinker, and questions raised about whether these writings do really illuminate the empirical findings, or whether, indeed, they detract from the value of the educational research conducted.

First, Reay seeks to see the 'extent to which the habitus of the classroom reflected the habitus of the home.' (p. 353), by looking at pupil interactions in a 'largely white and middle-class' primary classroom alongside those of a 'predominantly working-class ... multi-ethnic' primary classroom. Second, she wants to 'expand understandings of habitus to include the influences of "race" and gender alongside those of social class.' (p. 353).

Reay first explains what 'habitus' is:

> 'habitus can be viewed as a complex internalised core from which everyday experiences emanate. It is the source of day to day practices.' (p. 357).

> 'Habitus is primarily a method for analysing the dominance of dominant groups in society

and the domination of subordinate groups.' (p. 359).

However, on the positive side, Reay is unusually candid (for this genre of articles) about the problems of indeterminacy in Bourdieu's writings: Bourdieu is quoted as saying: 'I do not like definitions much' (p. 357), and the concept of habitus is pointed out as not intended to be 'precise or unambiguous' (p. 357). 'This results in problems of indeterminacy and changing notions of habitus within Bourdieu's writing.' (p. 357). This much is helpful. She does then go on to say that

> 'Paradoxically, the conceptual looseness of habitus also constitutes a potential strength. It makes possible adaptation rather than the more constricting straightforward adoption of the concept within empirical work. There is also a "messiness" about the concept that fits in well with the complex messiness of the real world.' (p. 357).

An outside observer may wonder whether such a messy concept could be much use in analysing and clarifying the issue. Why refer to habitus at all? The researcher seems to be aware of this objection, because she gives us plenty of examples to show why she thinks it worthwhile. For example:

> 'Female habitus can be surmised as a complex interlacing of the dispositions, which are the consequences of gender oppression, with those that are the product of varying levels of social privilege. Similarly, a recognition of racial oppression would inform understandings of racialised habitus. Prejudices and racial stereotypes ingrained in the habitus of members of dominant groups can affect the life chances of any group who are clearly different in some way.' (p. 360).

Would this explanation be any different without the concept 'habitus'? For in the first part of this paragraph she is talking about what it is to be female. In the second part she is talking about the habits, prejudices and predilections of a dominant group. Perhaps habitus could be a shorthand for that? But then it can't mean everything, and what about the notion that she seemed to have settled on, which said that it is actually a *method*? More and more the concept seems so slippery as to be useless, and the researcher's critical examination seems to have turned once again to uncritical acceptance.

The reader can judge the usefulness of the concept to move educational debates forward when we explore how it is used by the researcher in analysing interactions in her two schools. Her first example concerns the finding that, in the 'middle-class' classroom, some girls are using a computer programme and take on the role of the mistress, rather than the servant girl, although the converse had been true in the working-class classroom. This is fitted into the previously elaborated discussion on Bourdieu as follows:

> 'Bourdieu writes in terms of habitus as "the internalisation of the probabilities of access to goods, services and powers".' (Bourdieu, 1992, p. 60).

Hence the responses of the children in the two schools to the computer programme illustrated very different relationships to "goods, services and powers". (p. 362).

This is *the extent* to which Bourdieu's habitus is used to 'illuminate' the behaviour of the children in the two schools - we are quoting in full. An outside observer may wonder whether it is all worth the candle.

Reay's second example concerns the difference in 'tidying up' behaviour in the two classrooms. The 'working-class' girls get on with it, while the 'middle-class' girls thought that this was a job for the cleaners, hence the title of the paper, "They employ cleaners to do that". Again, Bourdieu is used to interpret these findings:

> 'Tidying up and helping generally were activities working-class girls in Milner [the working-class school] felt "at home with" (Bourdieu, 1981, p. 308). In Oak Park [the middle-class school] such activities were both actively and passively resisted not only by the boys but by many of the girls as well. What we learn from these two lengthy

> vignettes is that the process of cultural capital production generated by habitus is not only a process of generating educational attainment. It is also one of producing social distinction ... They were working on their social status in the classroom alongside, and even in the process of attending to the school curriculum. They were constructing themselves as the kind of people who are different to either 'Bess' [the computer programme servant] or the cleaners' (pp. 363-4).

Again, one wonders whether this complicated machinery of habitus has actually been at all illuminating here. Moreover, one is struck, as noted above, how the researcher is not seeking to explore *whether or not* the concept applies to the situation, but simply to show that *it does* fit.

Her final example uses habitus in the service of 'racism': 'habitus is not only shaped by class and gender, it is also shaped by "race".' (p. 366). Reay tells us a story of how Temi- who is presumably a black girl, although we are kept guessing about all sorts of details like this by the researcher - arrives unannounced in the middle of term and is shunned by all the other girls for the rest of the two years that the class is observed. This is racism:

> 'these privileged white children in Oak Park have a habitus which has been, and continues to be, powerfully structured by their "race" as well as their social class. ... Thus the peer group habitus operated to keep Temi invisible through processes so subtle they were barely discernible. For weeks I puzzled over what was, or rather, was not happening. There were no tangible signs of discrimination. ... The racism of these middle-class children was not manifested in any action, rather it lay in the absences.' (p. 367).

So we have that racism is manifest in the classroom, only this time even the disappointed researcher cannot find it; only through her use of Bourdieu's habitus does it come to light ('Habitus is a way of looking at data which renders the "taken-for-granted" problematic', p. 369). But was there racism? Again, in common with much of this type of qualitative research, we don't actually know. We can think of many other explanations for Temi's exclusion - first, she was a working class girl in the middle class school, so it could have been this which caused her to be shunned. She arrived late in the term, when friendships had been already formed, so may have simply suffered from that. Perhaps she just wasn't a very sociable young person? There may have been any number of other factors about her which are not recorded but which may have led to this peer indifference. All we have, however, is the researcher's subjective interpretation of racism, another account to add to the others of those racist, sexist institutions that schools are. The fear is that it is the putting of the empirical work into the context of this exploration of Bourdieu that has removed any need for this sort of triangulation.

She concludes the article

> 'In this study of two primary classrooms I believe the evidence of my analysis illustrates some of the potential of habitus for demonstrating the ways in which individuals continually make and remake structure through their activities (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 140).
>
> 'Reading children's peer group practices through the lens of habitus allows for a conceptualisation of their interaction as both rooted in social location and powered by complex motivations and desires that are generated through the interplay between dispositions and social context. Habitus as method with its emphasis on domination in everyday practices and subjective vocations can provide valuable insights into the power dynamics of gender, class and "race" relations within classrooms. Children's work in the classroom is much broader than the academic curriculum (Reay, 1991)[19]. From the evidence of the helping behaviour of black and white working-class girls in Milner, the exclusionary practices of white middle-class children in Oak Park, and Temi's powerful, self-reliant determination to succeed educationally, they are simultaneously working on

19 Do we really need a reference for this? Cynics might wonder if this is simply an opportunity for self-reference.

> constructing their own particular brand of social "distinction". Habitus helps to make visible the taken-for-granted inequalities of gender, "race" and class embedded in such social processes.' (p. 369).

Would an outside observer agree with this upbeat assessment of the usefulness of this particular theoretical perspective? One fear may be that writing about Bourdieu removes any onus on the researcher to look for anything which could be useful for classroom practice, extending educational access, raising achievement, etc., because she always has the consolation that she is making a contribution to the development of theory. Others must judge whether this development of theory is in itself valuable.

Foucault and an episode in English history of education

Copeland (1996) interprets, through the writings of Michel Foucault, an episode in English education, and points to a interesting answer to the third of the specific research questions raised about this kind of work - as the historical work does seem to present problems for Foucault's theory, how does the researcher react to this?

Copeland's article shows how Foucault's model of 'normalisation' is applicable to educational history. He gives two case studies, of Leicester and London. These are to illustrate two distinct 'norms' which emerged in the education of 'dull and backward pupils' in the 1890s. London's model 'aptly illustrates the features of Foucault's normalisation. The norms of intellect and classification are informed and supported by medical science. The Medical Officer conducts and confirms the examination ... this process objectifies its subjects. *Here pupils are transformed into cases with files.* The subsystem is suffused with the processes of comparison, differentiation, hierarchisation, exclusion and homogenisation' (p. 388 emphasis added).

In Leicester on the other hand, there was a much less formal, bureaucratic approach. For example, 'The Leicester Board's norm for distributing and dividing pupils was clearly based upon education principles. The tests for admission to the special class were based upon skills in literacy and numeracy coupled with those of conversation and awareness of personal circumstances.' (p. 389).

This article illustrates the approach discussed here in a particularly graphic way, because in fact it shows only that the situation in London could be fitted into Foucault's framework, but that in Leicester could not. But this does not make the author then question the value of the Foucauldian model. This remains untouched by his findings. An alternative approach might be to say that Foucault has described this model, we have seen that it applies to London, not to Leicester, so perhaps it isn't very useful as a model? However, even if Foucault's model *had* applied to both Leicester and London, it is not clear what, apart from a new name, would be established through describing it in this way. Nowhere are we told what the naming is for, or how it enhances our understanding of the historical situation.

Vygotsky and ways of learning

Finally, we show an example of an alternative approach to the works of a 'great thinker', in the discussion of Vygotsky's ideas by Wood and Wood (1996). Their work does seem to examine critically Vygotsky's work, and, where their findings seem to be in conflict with his position, they point to ways in which the theory can be improved.

Their paper begins with a brief summary of Vygotsky's ideas on the *Zone of Proximal Development* (ZPD), which 'refers to the gap between what a given child can achieve alone ... and what they can achieve "through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers."' (p. 5). Having outlined the theory, the researchers subject that work to

critique, not trying to show that it does fit their findings, but seeking to explore *whether or not* it does, and eventually showing that it needs to be modified. Indeed, this article is included in a special edition of the journal 'to celebrate the hundredth anniversary of the birth of Lev Vygotsky.' The editors tell us that 'The papers in this issue question the popular assumption that Vygotsky's work can underpin ordinary classroom practice.' (Editorial Note, *Oxford Review of Education*, 22.1, p. 4, 1996).

Secondary sources - academic Chinese whispers

A common problem with the methodology of many of the non-empirical papers, or of the non-empirical parts of the reporting of empirical research, was in the use of secondary sources. Rather than focus on primary sources the researchers refer to secondary summaries of complex and often controversial positions by previous authors. The problem here is that it has to be taken on trust that the secondary sources do accurately summarise the original author, and this trust often seems mistaken. This leads to a game of 'Academic Chinese Whispers', where arguments get distorted and misrepresented, and can bear very little resemblance to the original source. Worse still, it was sometimes the case that researchers used secondary sources which themselves used other secondary sources.

We have already noted the problem above, when discussing the review of Lakatos' ideas on philosophy of mathematics, and the issue also arose in the papers on 'great thinkers'. It was also a particular problem in our sub-sample when researchers criticised the ideas and policies of what they termed the 'New Right'.

For example, Sidgwick, Mahony and Hextall (1994) explore recent government policy in teacher education. Their attack on the 'New Right' is entirely based on secondary sources from well known sociologists of education who are themselves critical of the 'New Right'. There is only one author in the bibliography who could be described as 'New Right', Shirley Letwin, and she is simply quoted in passing and does not inform any of the more detailed discussion. Because of this lack of familiarity with original sources, they fall into the danger of caricaturing the ideas presented. For example, they write:

> 'The model of the market for post-Thatcherism remains rooted in a fiction, namely, the ideal-type market of perfect competition where consumer choice and the price-mechanism weave the alchemy of optimum efficiency in combination with ultimate individual freedom. This is a warm, cosy and highly plausible bed-time story.' (p. 471).

Unfortunately, it is only *their* bed-time story. The anti-'New Right' position is adopted *without any reference* to actual New Right figures, or those who influence them. Perhaps if they had read any, such as Hayek or Friedman, say, then they might have discovered that such a caricature is unfair and misguided. For example, on the notion of the 'ideal-type market of perfect competition', the *crux* of Hayek's arguments in defence of markets is that they are the best ways in which humans can capitalise on *imperfect* information; a sub-title in one of his books is that *'The advantages of competition do not depend on it being "perfect"'* (Hayek 1982, Vol. III p. 65). He continues:

> 'This model of perfect competition rests on assumptions of facts which do not exist except in a few sectors of economic life and which in many sectors it is not in our power to create and would sometimes not even be desirable to create if we could.' (pp. 65-61).

In other words, the authors are here in agreement with one of the major influences on New Right thinking, Hayek, on this issue, but, because they haven't read his work and base their discussion on secondary sources, they purport to be in disagreement. The story of what the New

Right does or does not believe gets distorted in this game of academic Chinese whispers, to the detriment of scholarly discourse.

THE FOCUS OF EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH

Under the three general themes above, many examples have been given to illustrate findings at the level of the *conduct* and *presentation* (or *argument*, in the case of non-empirical work) of academic educational research, but not much has been said about its *focus*. As this seemed to play a major part in Hargreaves' concerns, this aspect is the subject of this final 'major theme'.

The research questions developed on this issue, set out in chapter 2 above, were as follows:

- Is the *focus* of the research on issues concerned with
  - classroom practice?
  - increasing educational attainment?
  - increasing educational opportunity?
  - developing effective school management and organisation?
  - education policy related to any of the above?
  - developing theoretical perspectives or methodology which move any of the above forward?
- Is the research conducted by practitioners, or informed by their agendas?
- Is the research presented in such a way as to be accessible to practitioners?
- Is the research a replication of earlier research (with perhaps some parameters changed)?
- Is the research a critical examination of an earlier research article?

Relevance to practice and policy

The first method of approaching these questions within the research was to put the articles into Bassey and Constable's eight categories and 44 sub-categories. The findings *for all 264 articles* in the four case study journals are set out in Table 2 on page 20. By itself, this information seems to convey a fairly positive picture of educational research - just as Bassey and Constable's similar larger scale survey was able to do. So, for example, the fact that the *British Educational Research Journal* devotes over a third of its articles to 'School/Teacher/Child Issues', and nearly a third to 'Curriculum Issues' and 'Teaching and Learning' combined, seems to be a positive reflection on the output of educational research in terms of our research questions. Articles coming under these headings, it would seem, would very likely have implications for classroom practice, increasing educational attainment or educational opportunity, and so on. The sub-sample of articles from the case studies was used to provide further evidence on which to assess this first impression. What can be said in the light of this more detailed analysis?

At first glance, some readers may be less sanguine about the relevance of the research, now that they have seen more details on the articles fitting into Bassey and Constable's categories. For example, the articles on the lesbian PE teacher, racism in primary schools, and disaffected teachers, noted above under the theme of partisanship, were all included under the 'School/Teacher/Child' rubric. But the discussion of these may have made some readers wonder whether this research could possibly contribute to educational practice or policy.

If any readers are tempted to make such a judgement, however, this could not be made within the parameters of the research questions outlined above. The research questions defined a model of good practice in *educational research* only, one aspect of which was relevance to practice

and policy. But for these particular articles, however doubtful their methodology, or suspect their partisanship, it would have to be agreed that they *did* satisfy the criteria of relevance in terms of the research questions. Two of these three particular articles, for example, *explicitly* make clear their implications for policy. Sparkes (1994), for instance, concludes with clearly laid out implications for schools. These include the need for teachers to 'systematically monitor[...] the school curriculum and institutional policy for homophobic and heterosexist bias, so that a safe and affirming climate is developed which is based on an acceptance, and celebration of difference, for all members of the educational community.' (p. 114).

Similarly, Riseborough (1994) concludes his article with the policy recommendation:

> 'The state, if it wishes to use teachers to achieve its ends, cannot simultaneously *abuse* them in the mobilisation of means. ... The New Right has attempted massive transplants with arrant and arrogant disregard for the very immunological response from teachers it engenders.' (p. 102).

Connolly (1995), too, would presumably want his research on racism to inform practice such as equal opportunities courses for new teachers, consciousness-raising of existing racism in teachers and ways of combating it.

If any readers wished to object to such research on the grounds that they don't like these particular implications for policy and practice, then they would have to go beyond the model of good practice in educational research, to a theory of good practice in *education* itself. This is beyond the remit of this research, and no further comments can be made here on this issue. However, the vignettes of the articles given throughout this report may be helpful for all readers in making their decisions about the relevance of the research in the light of their own particular theory or philosophy of the educational enterprise.

Indeed, this conclusion can be strengthened. Examining the 41 articles in the sub-sample it became rather difficult to point to any one article and say categorically that it did not have *any* potential implications for education practice or policy, or theoretical approaches that would move these forward i.e., that it would *not* answer the research questions in the affirmative. Even those articles apparently very distant from these questions could have a plausible case made out for them. For example, the article on 'Durkheim and the Sociology of Education in Britain' (Davies 1994) could be presented as helping to inform the discipline of sociology of education, which in turn would help sociologists to better research educational issues, to the benefit of practice and policy. Similarly, research which has been rather unsympathetically reviewed above, such as Rosie (1996) on Lyotard, or Reay (1995) on Bourdieu, could also be said to have intended relevance to policy and practice, by helping to create these theoretical edifices which will one day better inform our understanding of educational issues.

The only possible exceptions to this conclusion, where the positive judgement seemed the most tenuous, concerned the articles in the sub-sample describing themselves as 'reflexive' research, that is, where the researcher him- or, more usually, herself reflects on the experience of conducting the research. Two of these have already been mentioned briefly in the context of other problems (Siraj-Blatchford 1995 and Neal 1995). Of course, even here, researchers could argue that, by reflecting on their work, they would be able to help others better conduct other research, and that this other research could then be used to help improve policy and practice. But, as here we are well within the realms of the model of good practice in educational research rather than straying outside our remit, some further comments can be made and illustrative examples given of this genre of research, under a separate sub-heading on page 68 below.

It is also worth stressing another point that emerges strongly from the analysis of these articles. Earlier, 'partisanship' was encountered as a major theme chiefly in the context of the *conduct*, *presentation* and *argument* of the research. Some readers might think that it might also arise as an issue concerning the *focus* of research. Only in one place did we note this as a concern

above, in connection with an article on gender, which ignored the plight of boys, preferring to focus on girls. But, in general, it did not seem to be an issue of concern, for two main reasons. *First*, of course, it is rather hard to locate partisanship in the focus of research, for this would boil down to knowing why certain areas of work were studied rather than others, and in general, researchers' intentions are not known from reading their work. *Second*, and most significantly, it does seem perfectly possible to be 'partisan' in one's choice of focus, but still *conduct* and *present* non-partisan educational research, as demonstrated perhaps by the articles by McIntyre (1995) and Campbell, Halpin and Neill (1996) above. The motives for choosing a particular research area are far less important than how one carries out the work.

Educational research and practitioners

What of the research questions under the 'focus' rubric concerning practitioners, viz., whether educational research is conducted by practitioners (teachers) and informed by their agenda, and whether it is presented in such a way as to be accessible to practitioners? Concerning the latter, the parallel DfEE project is looking carefully at practitioners' views on this, and this is perhaps the most fruitful way of addressing this question. But, for what it is worth, it was our impression that the majority of the research was either reported in language which would alienate many practitioners, or concerned topics which would not capture their interest. However, this then raises the important question of whether academic educational research *should* be immediately accessible to practitioners, or whether it can help inform practice and policy without being thus accessible. For example, it may be the case that inaccessible research can be written up in other, more popular organs, such as the *Times Educational Supplement*, or professional journals, specifically to inform a wider practitioner or policy-making readership. Or that researchers can write textbooks or guidance materials for practitioners and policy-makers, intended to convey in a less alienating fashion the findings of their research. In which case, academic journals could be argued to fulfil only the function of academics informing each other of the state of the art, and the fact of their inaccessibility would become irrelevant. These questions are raised as fruitful ways forward for discussion, but no further conclusions can be drawn here.

Concerning the first question, not surprisingly, given that these were academic journals, the number of papers published by practising teachers or with a practising teacher as equal co-author was found to be very small in the four case-study journals. Moreover, in the sub-sample, there was only *one* article by a teacher-researcher. Given the topical relevance of the notion of teachers-as-researchers, and that many welcome the TTA's (1996) decision - reported in *Research Intelligence 57* - to award grants to 33 teachers totalling £60,000 for them to carry out classroom research, and also Hargreaves' comments about the 'fatal flaw' of educational research being the 'gap between researchers and practitioners' (Hargreaves 1996a, p. 3), it is worth examining this article in more detail. It is argued by the TTA, for example, that such a move will afford opportunities to the successful applicants to devise and execute their own studies which will carry the impress of their own professional concerns. The one article in the sub-sample raised questions about this approach - although clearly, more than usual, caution must be exercised when interpreting this discussion, as the sample was so small. At most the discussion raises questions which need further investigation.

The article was by Chiswell (1995). This teacher-as-researcher describes how she has been teaching using a 'formal' method for the past 26 years. On attending a course of study with the University of Birmingham School of Education, however, she was encouraged to think critically about her teaching methods, to 'reflect upon my teaching in a critical way, to analyse my strengths and weaknesses, and by implementing action steps, provide the means of altering or improving my teaching practices.' (p. 413).

So the teacher changed her teaching style from 'formal, didactic' to a more 'progressive' route. She notes:

> 'This first analysis of my teaching practices, although late in my career, prompted me to change the situation in which I taught *and, hopefully, the learning opportunities of my class.*' (p. 415, emphasis added).

The italicised section is surely the key, for this is action research, and so presumably the educationalists at the School of Education, University of Birmingham would be keen on seeing that this was more than a vague 'hope', and that the children's learning did *actually* improve? Unfortunately not: for although she does note that the children's 'talk' seemed to improve, in terms of fluency and articulacy, she conducted no formal tests to show this. Moreover, she does note other downsides of her change of teaching:

> 'With the change from formal methods of teaching and learning, the noise level rose and I had difficulty accepting this at first. I assumed that talking, moving about and general classroom noise indicated a lack of learning.' (p. 415).

But, she realised, on the strength of listening to some tapes of her children, that she was wrong. This seems rather weak evidence on which to so drastically alter her teaching methods, and it is disturbing that the supervising educationalists were happy for this weak evidence to be enough.

She tries to reassure us and herself that her decision to change her ways of teaching

> 'were subject to two safeguards: (a) they were made as a result of critical educational research, and (b) they were guided by a commitment to the well-being of the children.' (p. 415).

The commitment may be real, but without a better way of testing if real learning had been improved, it may be an empty hope that their well-being *was* promoted. And it is not clear what she means by 'critical educational research'. From the context, it seems that she means that she believes there is research which shows that these new teaching methods are better. It is not clear that there is such research, and maybe she has taken too much on trust from the academics at the University of Birmingham.

As has been noted, and is worth repeating, this was the only paper in the sub-sample by a teacher-as-researcher, and so no generalised comments can be made about it. However, it can act as a useful warning to those who think that, if teachers are given research opportunities, the quality and/or relevance of research will *necessarily* improve. A lot would seem to depend on what support such teachers are getting from other researchers. Other examples need to be examined more closely, to ascertain whether or not the findings here are typical of what goes on in this kind of research.

Finally, there is also the issue of relevance to practitioners' agendas - are these informing the conduct of research? From the reading of the sub-sample, only some of the research could be said to be informed by the agendas of practitioners. Of the 41 articles, perhaps nine could be said to be thus informed[20] - although too much shouldn't be made of this particular judgement. However, again, caution must be exercised when thinking that research focused on the agendas of practitioners will necessarily be a panacea for problems discussed here. One example not already discussed illuminates some of the issues.

Cockburn (1994) focuses on an extremely important issue to practitioners, that of how teachers' time is spent. However, it is not clear that this article itself could move the debate forward. The researcher interviewed 21 teachers who were volunteers, although it is not known

20 Coe and Ruthven (1994), Riseborough (1994), Davies and Brember (1994), Chiswell (1995), Cockburn (1994), Power, Halpin and Fitz (1994), Osler (1994), Wylie and Healy (1995), Goldstein and Cresswell (1996).

more specifically how they were selected. The tone of the discussion is set at a strangely low level throughout. For example, the researcher notes that

> 'To optimise pupil learning it is generally recognised that teachers need to prepare and clearly present the appropriate material; motivate and monitor pupil learning; provide suitable feedback on performance and make use of all the relevant information to enhance further planning. *Obviously some of this necessitates time in the classroom with the children*' (p. 376 emphasis added).

Or, the researcher points out that, although 'Teachers vary as to how they spend their time before school starts', the moment the children arrive 'some sort of timetable comes into force.' (pp. 378-9). But as she notes, 'This is not surprising when you have a large group of people to organise for school assemblies, lunches, physical education and so on' (p. 379). Surprising or not, the existence of the timetable can 'prove an added burden to the teachers' (p. 379). One teacher, for example, is quoting as saying 'It would be nice, for example, to have breaktime when you feel like it.' (p. 379).

The point being made in general in this chapter so far is that questions concerning the focus of educational research, addressed within the confines of the model of good practice in educational research, were not a very productive way forward for the research here. In most cases, a larger perspective on education is needed in order to make judgements about the relevance of educational research. To summarise: a good proportion of the research was concerned with practitioners' agendas, but this didn't assure good quality research; moreover, almost without exception, the research reviewed here was relevant to practice and/or policy, even though some readers might not be happy with the ways in which this relevance panned out - but such considerations are beyond the remit of this research to examine. The only possible exceptions concerned the 'reflexive' research, to which we turn shortly at the conclusion of this chapter.

Replication and cumulative research

It was noted in chapter 2 above that the 'global' question of whether research was cumulative or not could not usefully be examined within the context of this research. However, the two slightly less ambitious questions concerning whether the research was a replication of earlier research (perhaps with some parameters changed), or whether it was a critical examination of an earlier research article, could be usefully examined.

Hargreaves (1996a) notes the following problems in educational research:

> 'A few small-scale investigations of an issue which are never followed up inevitably produce inconclusive and contestable findings of little practical relevance. Replications, which are more necessary in the social than the natural sciences because of the importance of contextual and cultural variations, are astonishingly rare.' (p. 2).

The findings here concur with this. In our sub-sample of 41 articles there were no replications of earlier research of any description, and, indeed, this was also true within the larger sample of 264 articles. Researchers clearly did not feel that it was part of their brief to be engaged in this way.

Concerning the critical examination of earlier research, there were two articles in the sub-sample which could be said to be doing this with the clear intention of moving the debate forward. These were Abraham (1994), examined above as an example of good practice in sociology of education, and the article by Goldstein and Cresswell (1996).

The latter article is an important contribution to the debate on standards in public examinations, and in particular, on whether there is comparability in standards between different

subjects. The researchers address the work of other academics, FitzGibbon and Vincent, who published a widely noted report on this issue in 1994, which suggested, they report, that mathematics and science subjects were in general harder than non-mathematics or science (p. 437). FitzGibbon and Vincent used the methods of 'subject pairs analysis' and 'reference test procedures'. The first method finds students who have taken two subjects - say mathematics and French: 'if the mathematics grade, on average, is lower than the French grade then the mathematics is deemed to have been graded more severely' (p. 437). Goldstein and Cresswell point out major difficulties with this approach: the major 'technical difficulty' being that 'those students who happen to take particular pairs ... of subjects are not typical of either subject so that any conclusion is problematical.' (p. 438). Even assuming that this difficulty could be overcome by judicious sampling, the problem still remains that there may be many reasons why mathematics grades, say, are lower than French grades on average for this sample: One of the three difficulties they pick up is the following:

> 'Quality of teaching and general educational provision in a subject influence examination results ... Students may develop interests, for example in foreign languages, which provide extra motivation for learning, or there may be some kind of cognitive maturational effect at work in some subjects more than in others.' (p. 438).

The second procedure uses a 'reference test' measure for each student - in FitzGibbon and Vincent's case, they used the individual student's average GCSE grade and a test taken in the same school year as A-level - and then 'to compare, for each reference test value, average scores in each of the MSc [mathematics and science] and non-MSc subjects' (p. 438). Resulting differences 'can be attributed to variations in the grading standards on the assumption that all other relevant differences have been allowed for' (p. 438).

The problem with this method, for Goldstein and Cresswell, is that 'Once it is admitted that some students find one subject most difficult but other students find another subject harder' then 'we have accepted that performance is determined by at least two dimensions'. Moreover, 'All the evidence suggests that achievement across subjects is multidimensional' (p. 439) - although they give no references for this assertion here. 'In such a situation, one single reference measure can allow appropriately for achievement in every subject'. Other, more technical difficulties are also explored.

Apart from these articles, there was one which took a whole corpus of work to summarise it, perhaps with a view to moving debates forward (i.e., Jackson 1994); on the whole, though, these research questions exposed in a dramatic way what many will consider to be a severe weakness in this strand of educational research, namely, that it does consist of researchers by and large doing their research in a vacuum, unnoticed and unheeded by anyone else in their field.

'Reflexive' accounts of educational researchers

A significant focus of educational research found in the sub-sample was what the authors described as 'reflexive' accounts of doing their own research, or indeed, other work as academics. Three examples are given below which raise the issue of the relevance of educational research in a particularly acute way. It has been noted that there could be an argument made for relevance, in terms of the research questions of chapter 2, along the lines that such reflection will be valuable to others conducting other research, which could then itself better inform policy or practice. The examples in the sub-sample raised doubts as to whether there could possibly be any constructive influence in this way.

The entry negotiator

Troman (1996) is a 'reflexive' account of being an ethnographic researcher and gaining access to schools. The researcher notes a lacuna in the sociology of education literature, that the process of negotiating entry into places has not got the attention it deserves. He fills this gap. The basic question is: Why do some schools refuse entry to ethnographic researchers?

He discusses various reasons which he has come across in his work in 11 schools. The reasons are:

1. teachers are increasingly very busy
2. teachers don't want 'experts' prying into the classroom;
3. teachers don't like being used as guinea pigs by educational researchers;
4. other researchers are already in the school, or had been badly behaved on previous occasions in the school
5. trainee teachers are in the school
6. local authorities no longer impose the researchers' visits onto schools
7. schools are now aware that visiting researchers take up valuable time
8. headteachers are ill or 'burnt out' or envious of the researcher[21]
9. the problem of the 'Temporal Phenomenology of the School'[22] (p. 74).

As summarised above, this is the full extent of the article. It has given these nine reasons why schools have refused entry, for other researchers to look out for or to take into account when they plan their work. However, it is hard to imagine that any researcher would have had much difficulty in constructing such a list for him or herself. It is doubtful whether this article could possibly contribute to the educational research endeavour in any useful way.

Moreover, the underlying assumption in the article is that researchers, at least of his ilk, have a right to be in schools, and that those objecting within the schools are in the wrong:

> 'the reluctance of schools to collaborate with an academic ethnographic researcher could be a yet further indication of the *increasing technification of teaching* ... This situation is *unfortunate in the extreme* for it coincides with a time when researchers working in the ethnographic tradition are only just beginning to develop and support collaborative forms of "educative" research involving coalitions of teachers and researchers' (p. 85 emphasis added).

Furthermore, it is precisely those headteachers and teachers who are

> 'deskilled in the sense that they no longer engage in critical reflection on the very measures which disempower them' (p. 85)

who are most likely to refuse entry to ethnographic researchers. Would they agree with this assessment of their behaviour? Or would they feel that this reflects exactly the arrogant attitude that they wish to avoid having in their schools?

The feminist Foucauldian post-structuralist researcher

Haw (1996) is another 'reflexive' account of gender and race research. The author is reflecting on her qualitative research which looked at the experiences of 'Muslim girls, women and both Muslim

21 'The headteacher who broke down during interview ... considered being paid to do research for 3 years was a "luxury" and something he wished he had the opportunity to do (he said this with a cynical tone)' (p. 83);

22 This means that the school is sometimes too busy with other things, like school plays and exams. For example, 'the autumn term, which concludes in December with Christmas celebrations, is a notoriously busy term for the primary school.' (p. 83).

and non-Muslim teachers', and the girls' parents. The key research issue is 'the question of whether or not white researchers should attempt to work with and interview black people' (p. 322).

Now, she notes that this is similar to the question of whether or not 'a man can do a piece of *feminist* research', and she argues 'I believe not' (p. 322). However, the conclusion of the review of various literature is that it is after all possible for her as a white woman to do research on Muslim women. This is for the reason that we aren't just black or white, that we can find 'commonalities' of shared experience. So, for example, she tells us how she was able to get on with the Asian women because 'we had the experiences of *being women* in common' (p. 328, emphasis added); with the Muslim teachers, she had 'common teaching experiences' (p. 526), and even with the Muslim men, she was treated as an honorary male, because she shared with them the common experience of treating people like academics with respect.

These notions are spelled out as follows:

> 'the educational experiences of the Muslim students and their teachers in each school could be seen as a set of discursive relationships (discursive fields) consisting of a number of different and *sometimes* contradictory discourses, such as those of "race", gender, class and religion. Further, each of these discourses can themselves be considered as a discursive field, consisting of its own different discourses. Impacting on these discourses are other discourses to do with, for example, age, competence, physical ability and sexuality. At any one time these discourses can shift and change places rather as the pattern shifts and changes as you twist the eyepiece of a kaleidoscope so that the combination of pieces which go to make up its pattern are altered. ... In my work with Muslim girls, women and both Muslim and non-Muslim teachers, we converge and diverge along any of the interstices of these patterns...' (p. 327).

Or:

> '... a framework constructed from post-structuralism and feminism moves us away from crude dichotomies constructed around notions of similarities and differences and opens up the way to explore critically the commonalities and differences inherent in any researcher/participant relationship. It allows for hybridity and fragmentation.' (pp. 328-9).

The finding that at least the white *female* researcher does not have to 'stay at home', seems a positive one. However, what seem to be very simple notions - that people have things in common with each other, as well as differences, which might have been of value to other researchers - are spelled out in such convoluted passages, that they fall into the danger of obscuring the issues raised. Is it not possible for even 'Feminist Foucauldian post-structuralism' to be described in a way which is accessible to a wider audience?

The marginal researcher

Finally, Neal's (1995) research is a 'reflexive' account of issues that arose as she went about researching powerful people. To justify her research, she notes that

> 'while black people (and poor people) have been constructed as problematic and as a potential threat to social cohesion and control, *women as a whole, have been rendered invisible* by social research and excluded from its agendas.' (p. 519 emphasis added).

She intends to fill this void. It does seem a bit odd, though, reading this comment in a journal where 65% of the articles are written by women, either alone or with men[23]. Much of her paper is taken up with descriptions of her experiences and the way these impacted on her sense of

23 The figures for the *British Educational Research Journal* are, out of 101 articles, 37 were by women, 32 by men, 22 by joint men and women authors, and 10 unclassified (first name not specified and not known to the researchers). Hence, 65% of articles where gender of author is known had at least one woman author.

'marginality'. It is worth giving a long quote of one of these, to give a flavour of her approach:

> 'My awareness of my marginality was reinforced by the environment in which the interviews were conducted; overwhelmingly this would be in the respondents' own offices, a spatial symbol of professionalism. I would often have to announce my arrival for an arranged interview to a secretary or personal assistant. An interview would often be interrupted by seemingly urgent telephone calls or a secretary or personal assistant coming in and reminding the respondent that they had a meeting to go to directly after their interview with me. If I was offered coffee it was sent for and brought in by the secretary or assistant. This intimidating milieu intensified the experience of interviewing powerful people. Before such an interview I would be acutely anxious and would check my tape-recorder many times to make sure it was set up correctly and check my interview schedule simply to make sure I had it to hand. ... To discover that the tape was in the wrong way round or if I had to search all through my bag to find my interview schedule in front of the respondent were trivial situations that I dreaded happening. Being offered (the served) coffee, which I always felt I should accept, not only made me uncomfortably aware that it was made and brought to me by a (female) secretary, but it also presented particular ordeals simply in terms of drinking it at the right intervals, not rattling the cup in the saucer and not spilling it. When interviewing one Vice-Chancellor in a midday slot he ordered that lunch should be brought up to his office for both of us. Negotiating eating the food, asking the interview questions and presenting myself as a professional was a particular ordeal. *It is difficult to convey these anxieties ... They can ... be clearly interpreted in the gendered context of my marginality...*' (p. 523 emphasis added).

Why does she say that these experiences are to do with 'the gendered context of her marginality'? Surely, *all* researchers, irrespective of their gender or supposed marginality, suffer from similar anxieties - it is not 'difficult to convey the anxieties' at all, one can clearly identify with everything she writes. What might have surfaced as useful tips for a researcher become submerged in this quagmire of her marginality.

But she continues with this discussion at length. She realises that, when interviewing Vice-chancellors and the like, she shouldn't wear her normal uniform of 'bright red lipstick, bird's-nest hair, torn Levis and eight-hole Dr Marten boots' (p. 524), but instead has to sport 'an innocuous dress code of skirts, blouses, shoes, tidy hair and pale make-up' (p. 524).

This young self-styled 'marginal' researcher had interviews with all the powerful people she asked. Is she grateful? No, she complains that 'I would often be kept waiting for an interview' (p. 526). Moreover, further evidence of her oppressive treatment ('hostility and resistance') is that it was not unusual for her to

> 'be treated patronisingly, with seeming indifference, or with the respondent continually looking at his watch. I often felt I was being only barely tolerated and that my questions were answered as if they were faintly ridiculous. ... Occasionally a respondent would directly challenge me about the questions I was asking - why did I need to know that, how was it relevant ...' (p. 526).

Now, similar experiences have happened to many researchers. Without the alibi of oppressed marginality, however, many of us look over our questions and try to clarify them, eliminate or modify ones that did come across as 'faintly ridiculous', and so on. Ways of doing this might have been useful to help other researchers conduct relevant research. But Neal doesn't seem to have the humility to wonder whether any of these criticisms could actually be the case. She does seem to concede it for a moment, then withdraws to the safer ground of her victimhood:

> 'I am not arguing that such questions should not be asked of a researcher but that in the context in which I was being asked them they took on different, even sinister, connotations.' (p. 526).

Finally, we can note that after one particularly uncomfortable interview with a busy Vice-

chancellor she tells us:

> 'After this interview I went and sat, significantly, in the women's toilets to recover.' (p. 527).

The significance was lost on these researchers.

5 Conclusions

It has been estimated that £70 million is spent on educational research per annum, of which about 90% is government funded (Hargreaves, 1996a, 1997, Bassey, 1997[24]). This is not an insignificant amount - enough funds to employ 2,800 teachers, say, or to equip 70 secondary schools with a networked computer for every child - although it is true that it makes up only a tiny proportion (less than 0.2%) of total government spending on education (Bassey, 1997). However, it also has potentially wider influence than this figure suggests, for the educational research community is also, by and large, the group currently entrusted with the training and education of future teachers. It is also one of the key communities to whom the media turns when reporting educational events and policy. The concerns of educational researchers, then, are likely to be reflected in the culture of teacher education institutions and educational debates more generally, and influence the ethos of schooling for generations to come. All these factors make it highly desirable for our activities to be scrutinised, for our work to be explored within the public domain.

The research reported here was prompted initially by Hargreaves' critique of the state of educational research in his 1996 TTA lecture. In particular, his acerbic comment that much of it is 'frankly second-rate' provided an impetus to examine its quality. Given the vast area, a narrow subset, viz., academic educational research, as published in journals, was focused upon. The aim was to give a 'snapshot' of this section of educational research which could be accessible to those unfamiliar with this enterprise, as well as of interest to those within the research community.

Hargreaves' criticism pointed to the need to lay out a model of good practice of educational research, so that it could be ascertained whether or not research was of a 'second-rate' kind. This model was laid out as a series of thirty research questions, covering the levels of the focus, conduct and presentation of research, and formulated through examination of key journals and reflection on notions of good practice. Four important academic educational research journals were selected: the top three British 'generic' education journals in the SSCI Journal Impact list (*British Journal of Sociology of Education, British Journal of Educational Studies* and *Oxford Review of Education*), together with BERA's journal, the *British Educational Research Journal*. These were analysed against the background of a core set of questions, and a further sub-sample of 41 of the articles was selected, reflecting categories of topics in rough proportion to the way they occurred within each journal. This sub-sample then was analysed under the scrutiny of the full range of questions.

From analysis of this sub-sample, four major themes emerged as worthy of reporting:

1. The partisan researcher
2. Problems of methodology
3. Non-empirical educational research
4. The focus of educational research

In the report, the aim has been to give 'vignettes' from each article (i.e., *all* of the 41 articles in the sub-sample have been mentioned under one or more of these headings) to illustrate various strong and weak points of the research, and hence to give an overall 'snapshot' of the educational

24 Hargreaves (1996a) originally estimated that the figure was some £50-60 million. Bassey (1997), on closer inspection of the data, suggested an estimate of £66.1 million for 1994/5. Of this, about £8 million is estimated to be from private sources, e.g., UK charities and industry. Hargreaves (1997) notes that this figure excludes aspects of his original estimate, such as the £5 million annual cost of higher degree students doing research (fn 15, p. 418). This would bring the figure to over £70 million per year, and hence the estimate of roughly 90% spent by government sources.

research contained in the case study journals. (Because of the selection method, it is hoped that this can also be interpreted as a snapshot of a broader range of academic educational research, as is discussed below).

First, the issue of partisanship was perhaps the most pronounced difficulty which emerged in the research analysis. There was partisanship in the *conduct* of research (e.g., in interpreting data to support the class-bound nature of choice in education, when the data would seem to undermine that claim); the *presentation* of research (e.g., by putting research findings into the context of contentious and unsupported remarks about political reform); and in the *argument* of non-empirical research (e.g., by subjecting one government's reforms to critical scrutiny while at the same time accepting at face value previous educational reforms). On one occasion, too, we noted apparent partisanship in the *focus* of research (when focusing on gender, the researcher simply ignored boys' concerns), although in general this was not an issue of concern.

Not all research was partisan in this way: a minority of articles showed a detached, non-partisan approach to the subject studied (even if the *focus* of the research had been chosen for particular partisan reasons). Three notable examples focused on the introduction, and teachers' perceptions, of grant-maintained schools, and a defence of university-based teacher education.

The second theme, that of methodological concerns, largely focused on problems arising from the *conduct* of qualitative research, which made up a large proportion of the empirical work surveyed. In particular, the issues of triangulation (or the lack of it) and sampling bias were noted. Indeed, the intimate connection between these methodological problems and the issue of partisanship became clear - if a researcher wished for a particular partisan position to come across, then he or she would be well advised to steer clear of triangulation and not worry about sampling bias! There were other issues concerning methodology which arose around the *presentation* of research. At a minimum it would be expected that researchers should report basic features of their sample size and method of sample selection, to enable judgements about the research to be made and replication carried out if appropriate. In a disturbingly large number of cases this was not done, which suggested a cavalier disregard for good practice by the researchers.

Again, not all research showed these problems - although it must be said that examples of qualitative research which did not were very rare. So there was research which demonstrated good practice in quantitative and, sometimes, qualitative methods, and which reported on how sampling was achieved and sample size.

The third theme focused on non-empirical research. This was a very large part of the research surveyed - covering a range of approaches and disciplines. There were many examples of good practice - in terms of the research questions set out - in this area, for example, in the disciplines of sociology and philosophy of education, and education policy. Assumptions were clearly laid out, concepts defined where appropriate, and conclusions followed from premises and the ensuing argument. There were also examples of good practice concerning the non-empirical parts of empirical research articles. However, many articles did not reach these standards, particularly in respect of arguments which introduced often contentious propositions without acknowledging their controversy, or which didn't carry out thorough literature reviews, or which had logically incoherent arguments. Other difficulties arose concerning the use of secondary sources, where a game of 'academic Chinese whispers' seemed to ensue, as researchers lifted summaries of controversial positions from the descriptions of other researchers, without apparently any need to consult the primary sources to discover what authors had really said or meant.

There also was an especially questionable practice which we have dubbed the 'adulation' of 'great' thinkers, whereby certain educational episodes were examined in the light of the work of, in the sub-sample, Bourdieu, Lyotard and Foucault. It was not apparent, at least from the research reported, that these thinkers did have much to contribute to the educational enterprise, with the empirical and historical episodes either contradicting the work of the thinker, or the theoretical interpretation apparently adding at best what could be described as an anodyne analysis. One

example concerning Vygotsky illustrated an alternative approach to the work of a great thinker, whereby the researcher set out to critically examine the position, and use empirical work to this end.

Finally, the fourth theme reported the focus of educational research. It emerged strongly that the research questions asked, concerning the relevance of the research to practice, policy or theoretical approaches which could inform these, could all be answered in the affirmative as regards the 41 articles in the sub-sample. For all of them, a case could be made to suggest that they were relevant to policy and practice. However, that said, it was clear that some of the arguments made in this respect would have to be tenuous, none more so than in the case of certain 'reflexive' accounts of educational research. But the general point remained - as all the research could be said to be 'relevant', this did not seem to be a particularly useful spotlight in which to comment on the research. Only within particular philosophies of education could the argument be made that the relevance discovered in the research articles was undesirable, and this went beyond the remit of the research - although it is hoped that the 'snapshot' given here will help others reach conclusions concerning the research's relevance.

Also in the context of the focus of research, the questions of practitioners as researchers and relevance to practitioners' agendas were discussed; with only one article by a teacher-as-researcher in the sub-sample, not much in the way of conclusions could be drawn here, but the article did raise serious doubts about the efficacy of teachers-as-researchers to solve any of the problems noted above, a question to take forward for further research.

Finally, in the section on research focus, the issues of replication and cumulative research were addressed, albeit in a modest way. The findings here concurred with those of Hargreaves (1996a), who suggested that replications were 'astonishingly rare' in educational research, even though they might be even more necessary than in other social and natural sciences, 'because of the importance of contextual and cultural variations' (p. 2): we found none. Even as regards the less ambitious critical challenge to earlier work, with the aim of moving the debate forward, there were very few articles engaged in this type of critique. The picture emerged of researchers largely doing their research in a vacuum, unnoticed and unheeded by anyone else.

One hopes a sense of balance is achieved from reading the 'vignettes' in the whole report, which may be difficult to convey adequately in this conclusion, that there were many articles which did satisfy the criteria of good practice, as well as many that did not. Can we say any more than this, and, in particular, can we make some judgement about the overall quality of the research? Is Hargreaves vindicated in his judgement about 'second-rate' educational research, at least as applied to academic educational research?

This question must be approached by reflecting on the research method used here. *First*, it was endeavoured in the selection of the four case study journals that these were selected 'at a distance' from the researchers, so that accusations of selection bias could not be brought in here. Hence we can be fairly confident that these journals do represent *an important strand* of academic educational research. That said, we are aware that, had other journals been selected, other important strands of academic educational research might have been located. It has been pointed out to me, for example, that the *British Journal of Psychology of Education* and the NFER's *Educational Research* contain far more quantitative empirical research, which may lead to different judgements from those found here. But equally, we were aware from our broader initial reading of journals that there were others that came out far worse in terms of our criteria than the *Oxford Review of Education* or the *British Journal of Educational Studies*. We welcome discussion along these lines, pointing to other important strands of academic educational research that may have been neglected in our research. But the key point remains: the four journals were not chosen in a partisan way, to illustrate partisan points concerning educational research (there were many other journals that could have been selected if this had been our intention) and hence the research here can be considered more widely applicable than to just those four particular journals.

Second, a transparent method for selecting the sub-sample of articles within these case-study journals for more detailed analysis and reporting was used, again to distance the researchers from the selection process. Other academics' categories were also used to categorise the topics of articles - again, to distance the researchers from the judgements made. That said, the judgements of the researchers did come into this process, and it is conceivable that others would have arrived at a different selection of articles using precisely the same method. However, given that a 'counting' procedure was also adopted to make the final selection of articles, this again distanced the researchers from the selection process, and so it seems unlikely that this would have made much difference to the final balance of articles selected and analysed.

Third, it is clear that the judgements of the researchers emerge frequently in the commentary on the research articles read, and hence in the discussion of the four major themes outlined above. However, this potential source of bias was at least somewhat mitigated by the two researchers reaching consensus on their judgements[25], with judgements on the 'basic questions' also assessed by a third researcher. In particular, given the controversy that surrounded the announcement of this research, it must be noted that the two researchers were of radically different political and philosophical persuasions. But, of course, others may disagree with the conclusions reached here, and suggestions are welcome as to how the judgements may be misguided, to further this debate.

Finally, there is the caveat noted on page 11 in chapter 2, that we only had access to the research articles, and from these were making judgements about the research itself, which *may* be unfair for the reasons given earlier.

Hence, it can be said with reasonable confidence that the findings reported here are based on articles which represent an important strand of academic educational research, and that the interpretation of these findings is not a wholly idiosyncratic interpretation from one partisan perspective.

Given this, what can be said in general terms about the quality of this important strand of academic educational research? While the research reported here used a qualitative methodology in general, and featured a rather small sample of articles, the question is bound to be asked: how many of the articles surveyed did satisfy the criteria of good practice, and how many did not? It would be unwise to make too much of the numbers, but to satisfy this curiosity, here are some considerations. In terms of the 41 articles, in the discussion above 15 have been highlighted as showing good practice, and 26 highlighted to show less good practice, in terms of certain dimensions of the analysis. In terms of the four journals, this figure can be broken down as follows:

Table 9: Case study sub-sample: reporting of articles

Journal	As satisfying 'good practice' (%)	As not satisfying 'good practice' (%)
British Educational Research Journal	27	73
British Journal of Sociology of Education	30	70
British Journal of Educational Studies	36	64
Oxford Review of Education	56	44
Total	**37**	**63**

25 Except in the one case noted in the text.

It must be stressed that this table shows how articles were reported, in general, in terms of showing good or bad practice along *certain dimensions* of the analysis only, e.g., in terms of partisanship, or sampling bias, or lack of triangulation, etc., although some articles were reported more than once as failing to satisfy good practice in several of these dimensions. It will also be noted that some journals fared better than others in the judgements of this report, although the small size of the sample means that these figures must be interpreted with caution.

Can we go further than this, and say that a particular percentage of the research fails to satisfy enough categories to be judged as being 'second-rate' (for this is what the model of good practice was designed to capture)? In other words, can Hargreaves' judgement about educational research be vindicated? We have deliberately shied away from pointing to how many of the research questions must be answered in the affirmative in order to satisfy the model of good practice. The judgement is perhaps simply too difficult to make in general. However, the tentative suggestion here is that the individual shortcomings in particular facets of the research articles noted above are, in general, serious enough to raise grave misgivings about the quality of the research surveyed. The important point is that there are rather worrying tendencies in a *majority* of the articles in the sub-sample, and that we can be reasonably confident that these tendencies will be found throughout this important strand of educational research.

These conclusions may be disquieting to some, in particular in terms of the general health of the academic education research community, and its potential influence as outlined at the beginning of this chapter. All the papers discussed here have been accepted through the academic refereeing process. For readers unfamiliar with this process, this means that they will have been sent out, anonymously, to two or three academic readers who are experts in the field, who will then pass judgement on the papers. They will either reject them, or permit them to be published as they stand, or request certain changes to improve them. These subsequent changes will then need to be approved by the editor and, if they are serious enough, by the referees who demanded the changes in the first place, before publication is agreed. Such a method of course is explicitly designed to ensure that the quality of research remains high, and that the criteria for good practice agreed by the journal are maintained. The process is essential to the maintenance of standards within educational research[26].

If the reader concurs with even some of the judgements made about the research in this report, then this must raise serious questions about whether the peer refereeing process is working in educational research. As Hargreaves notes[27],

> 'In a research field that is successful and healthy, peer review works well. But educational research is not in a healthy state ... In these circumstances peer review serves to perpetuate a very unsatisfactory *status quo*.' (Hargreaves 1996a, p. 5).

Perhaps addressing this problem could help raise the standards of educational research? To this end, it may be that professional bodies such as BERA could be proactive in developing a voluntary code of practice for educational researchers and journals to subscribe to, to try to avoid some of the worst excesses catalogued here. For example, BERA could actively encourage journals only to select articles which adopt standard research procedures such as reporting sample size and selection of sample, and which use triangulation where appropriate, and maintain as far as possible political neutrality in the conduct and reporting of research - and which fulfil any of the other criteria raised in chapter 2 above deemed suitably important for this end.

26 For even with the best-intentioned researchers, just as it is often impossible to find typographical errors in a piece one has written oneself, so it is also very difficult to locate shortcomings in the presentation of a piece of research. One is usually so close to the work that it is difficult to recognise what detail has not been conveyed, or what relevant factors one has missed out in the description of methods and findings.

27 He is actually referring to peer review of *funding* of educational research, but his comments would seem to be relevant to the case in hand.

If the findings here could be replicated across a broader field of academic educational research, what would be their implications? In the remainder of this chapter, we take the liberty to speculate on a few such implications, strictly speaking going beyond the scope of our research, and raising three questions which have been prompted by some of the findings here, and which can be taken further in future rounds of this debate.

What is the optimum funding mechanism for educational research?

A striking feature of the papers reviewed was the small proportion which reported research that had been funded from outside sources. For the *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, the ESRC was the only funding source given - in about one-fifth of the articles surveyed. The other four-fifths had no source given, so we can assume that they were funded out of normal HEFC funds to the university, and undertaken as part of the normal research duties of the university academics. Similarly, the *Oxford Review of Education*, again, had four-fifths of the articles funded, we assume, out of normal HEFC funds[28]. This lack of outside funding means that the majority of authors will have undertaken the research reported in the case studies and sub-sample as an ordinary part of their contract of employment, and hence studies would have to be undertaken that would make little or no demand on resources beyond those normally available to academics. The question is then raised whether high-quality educational research can flourish with such limited resources. The often-quoted Tennessee Project on class-size, for example, cost $12 million alone (Prais 1996). The *first* question to carry forward is whether an alternative to the literally thousands of small-scale research projects undertaken using HEFC money would be to put the same funds into servicing, say, a dozen carefully focused, major educational research projects, in order to raise the quality of educational research.

Does the research assessment exercise militate against high-quality educational research?

A related question is raised concerning the Research Assessment Exercise. Professor Richard Pring has suggested that the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) conducted in universities may have had an unhelpful impact on the quality of educational research:

> 'By their fruits you shall know them. Has the frenzied attempt to produce more books, more articles, more reports necessarily brought an improvement in educational literature? Has the emphasis on *more* research in *every* institution encouraged *better* research? Are we now better informed, or is policy carried out more intelligently, as a result of the multi-fold increase in investigations? Do schools feel that they are benefiting from all that theoretical work about schools?' (Pring, 1995, p. 122);
>
> 'The result [of the RAE], however, is that so much of the educational bookshelves is covered with the kind of dross which a decade ago would never have seen the light of day.' (Pring, 1995, p. 123)

If we look at the way the RAE is conducted, it does not stretch credulity to see that it may have a detrimental impact on the quality of educational research, as Pring suggests. Part of the problem reflects the pressure on academic staff in education departments in universities to publish in academic journals. In the last RAE, each department was free to nominate the proportion of

28 Incidentally, the picture was slightly different in the reading journals surveyed in the research project but not reported here: of the British contributions to the reading journals, about one-third was funded by outside government and charitable bodies.

staff considered 'research active'; it is not clear that the same freedom will be tolerated in the next exercise. Given this uncertainty, and given the financial penalties (as well as loss of reputation) for having less than 100 per cent of academic staff put forward for consideration in the RAE, academics are pressurised to publish four research articles for purposes of the RAE over a four-year period - and this was true for similar reasons in the period from which the sub-sample of articles was drawn. However, many do not see themselves primarily as researchers, but as teachers of new teachers; many have not had any specific training or experience in educational research or in educational and related disciplines. The pressure to publish for the RAE could lead these academics to produce many small-scale, non-cumulative, and not carefully thought-through research projects, contributing to low standards.

In support of this contention is the simple fact that the great majority of the papers reviewed were by single authors (29 out of 41 in the sub-sample). Bassey (1993) suggests - and it is a view with which we strongly concur - that researchers working in isolation cannot, in general, generate the research data necessary to make a significant impact on the practice of education. He goes further and argues that lone education researchers are often pursuing insignificant ends and engaged in the production of trivia. Deem (1996) makes a number of objections to this, arguing that 'Lone does not necessarily equal "trivial" and insignificant research results are not unknown in team-based studies.' (p. 150). However, this does not dispose of the fact that a lone researcher (given the pressure to publish four high quality papers for inclusion in the next RAE) is adopting a high risk strategy if he or she embarks on a substantial data-collection exercise as part of an investigation, the results of which will be uncertain and the benefits in terms of publication long-delayed. The more rational response to the situation, far better for the researcher and the Faculty, is to glean and use data already collected by others, or address theoretical or methodological issues which are going to be cheaper to pursue, quicker to accomplish and under the researcher's control from inception to completion.

Hence the *second* question to carry forward is whether the RAE is likely to succeed in raising standards in educational research? The *third*, related question is whether it benefits either educational research or the teaching of teachers to require of all teacher educators that they also be educational researchers?

Concluding remark

What of the university porter mentioned at the beginning of this report? He thought he had some idea of what educational researchers got up to, and that it was of benefit to the educationally disadvantaged, as he himself had been. Our guess is that he would be somewhat disturbed by the 'snapshot' of educational research presented here. True, he might be encouraged by some of the articles, sound in method and focused on issues clearly of concern to raising standards and improving classroom practice. But he would surely wonder about the majority, in terms of their focus, the sloppy methodology employed, and the partisanship deployed. Would he, reflecting on the dreadful educational experiences endured by many around him, wonder whether the work of some educational researchers is akin to Nero fiddling while Rome burns?

6 References

SUB-SAMPLE

(The code for each article is in bold at the end of each reference. These are unique codes within each of the four journals studied.)

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