

CRITICAL EDUCATION RESEARCH¹

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Abstract

This paper makes an argument that 'critical' educational research is oppositional in four senses: epistemological, cognitive, cultural and political. It utilises a critique of conventional approaches to educational research to outline five key requirements of an adequate educational science. These requirements provide a foundation for a critical approach to educational research. The paper distinguishes 'critical theory' from 'critical social science' and goes on to show how critical educational research is oppositional in the four senses outlined, and how it meets the suggested criteria for an adequate educational science. A program of educational research conducted by a group of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal researchers in North East Amheim Land (in Northern Australia) provides an example of critical educational research, in some ways demonstrating its promise in the development of educational theory and practice.

Résumé

Cet article soutient que la recherche «critique» en éducation présente des positions antagonistes au sens épistémologique, cognitif, culturel et politique. Suite à un examen critique des approches habituellement utilisées dans la recherche en éducation, l'article dégage cinq conditions essentielles à une véritable science de l'éducation. Ces conditions constituent les fondements d'une approche critique de la recherche en éducation. L'article distingue d'abord théorie critique et science de la critique sociale, puis il montre en quoi la recherche «critique» en éducation présente des positions antagonistes et en quoi elle satisfait aux conditions essentielles qui ont été dégagées. Un programme de recherche en éducation mené par un groupe de chercheurs/es aborigènes et non-aborigènes de North East Arnheim Land (au nord de l'Australie) donne un exemple de recherche critique en éducation tout en démontrant, d'une certaine façon, ce qu'elle a de

prometteur dans le développement de la théorie et de la pratique en éducation.

What is 'critical' educational research? One may like to think that the label is a kind of banner, proclaiming not only the distinctiveness of 'critical' research but also a kind of radicalism. For angry young men and women, critical social science is the place to be. But 'critical' research has also come to have a technical meaning which locates it in the charted and explored regions of philosophy and methodology in social and educational science. It has by now become familiar, institutionalised—perhaps domesticated. If not angry, then at least disgruntled old men and women can also find a place in its shade.

These two faces of being 'critical'—the oppositional and the domesticated—are, of course, interrelated in the life of critical science as it is lived by its practitioners. But who are its practitioners? They will be people for whom such questions are relevant—they are people who aim to be 'critical' in some sense, but they are also people who are in one way or another connected to the institutionalised traditions and practices of social and educational science, and with the state apparatus of educational research, policy and practice. Seen in this light, critical educational researchers may be, at one and the same time, both a part of the solution of the world's educational problems, but also a part of those problems. Whatever the achievements of critical educational researchers in finding an audience and a readership for the ideas of critical educational research, the actual achievements of critical research in resolving the world's educational problems remain infrequent, limited and precarious. As its school report card might say, critical educational research "can do better".

A way one can limit the role of critical research is through our language. There are those who can speak with confidence about 'revolutionary praxis' or about the role as 'transformative intellectuals'. As always, by creating such terms, one helps to create the possibility of living the new forms of life they invoke. But, equally, using such terms can be a way to mystify the processes of criticism and to limit the possibility of extending critical thought and action to new groups. A second way one can limit critical educational research is in one's relationship with the state machinery of educational policy and practice—relationships which are both necessary (to continue

one's work) and potentially compromising. Most of us remain at the margins of the culture and machinery of educational policy and practice, as nervous about cooption into the mainstream of the state machinery as we are about the kind of success that would institutionalise critical educational research as a 'methodology'.

This marginality, this tension, is a unique feature of critical educational research and researchers. It is the concrete expression of the dialectic of critical research—a dialectic which expresses itself in the forms of reasoning, the practices, and the forms of organisation of critical educational research. It is a tension which calls for acute self-awareness.

Like charity, criticism begins at home. It is legitimate, proper and necessary to develop models and approaches for kinds of educational research which can and will have an accumulating and accelerating impact on the world's educational problems; but it is equally necessary to be sober and cautious in evaluating the quality of one's work.

Critical Research, Opposition and Resistance

'Critical' social and educational research is 'critical' in the sense in which Marx spoke of criticism:

...we do not anticipate the world dogmatically, but rather wish to find the new world through criticism of the old; ...even though the construction of the future and its completion for all times is not our task, what we have to accomplish at this time is all the more clear: *relentless criticism of existing conditions*, relentless in the sense that the criticism is not afraid of its findings and just a little afraid of conflict with powers that be.²

It is a stirring call. Clearly, criticism requires courage, sometimes plain heroism. It must be conducted with wisdom and prudence or it cannot be conducted at all.

Critical educational research is oppositional. What it means to 'oppose', however, may need clarification. 'Opposition' is not a matter of attitude or personal style. The *task* of opposition is not necessarily guaranteed by adopting a *style* of opposition. Such personal styles as contrariness, negativism and radical triumphalism ("when the

revolution comes...”) are often eloquent indications of the alienation of those who adopt them; as styles of opposition, they are self-limiting, and impose sharp constraints on the task of opposition. Neither is criticism oppositional in a simply ‘theoretical’ sense, as if by establishing a better theory, practical and political consequences could flow as a matter of technical ‘application’ (whether achieved by ‘enlightenment’, political action or coercion). A critical social or educational science rejects as rationalistic this facile dualism of theory and practice.³

A critical social or educational science is oppositional in four senses.

First, at this time in history at least, it is *epistemologically* oppositional. It rejects empiricism and idealism, positivism and interpretivism. That is to say, it rejects the foundations upon which much social and educational research are based. I will have more to say on this matter when I return to the formal requirements of a critical educational science.

Second, a critical social or educational science is *cognitively* oppositional. It is alert to the possibility that our perceptions of the social world are socially-constructed, and open to distortion. The cognitive opposition of critical social and educational science consists in acknowledging and struggling to counter the tendency to interpret the world as ‘received’ and structured by our language, culture and traditions, and by our social and economic structures and the interests they serve. It is an opposition expressed in treating our familiar ways of understanding of the world, our activities and our social relationships as problematic. It is to acknowledge that the rationality of our understandings, the value of our productive activities, and the justice of our social relationships may be ideologically distorted in a first sense (false consciousness), so that they may be something other than what they appear to be.

Third, a critical social or educational science is *culturally* oppositional. It recognises that the substantive modes of life of a culture can sustain irrationality, unsatisfying forms of life, and unjust social relationships. It recognises the possibility of ideological distortion in a second (hegemonic) sense—it recognises the possibility that certain modes of life of the culture are systematically structured to preserve the self-interests of some at the expense of others.

The cognitive and cultural senses of opposition are closely related. Together they create the fourth sense in which a critical social or educational science is oppositional—the *political* sense. It is in this sense that a critical social or educational science is most different than other forms of science—it engages the world through social and cultural action, not merely to interpret the world but to change it. A critical social or educational science creates conditions under which people can act together as knowing subjects, as products and producers of history who can help “to find the new world through criticism of the old” *and* who can act collaboratively, wisely and prudently, to bring the new world into being.

Especially in this sense, a critical social or educational science is more than just oppositional. It is a form of *resistance*. It is organised. It resists accepting the actual by systematically awakening a critical sense of the possible. More than this, it organises action to bring new possibilities into being—the possibility of more rational, more productive, more satisfying, more just and more humane forms of life for all. And, beyond even this, it aims to enact the new world through the way it organises its own work—through establishing self-critical communities committed to a rational, productive, satisfying, just and humane way of life in the educational research task.

The Critique of Conventional Approaches to Educational Research

In our critique of approaches to educational research, Wilfred Carr and I have argued⁴ that there five formal requirements which a properly justifiable approach to educational theory needs to accept. Together, these define a ‘critical’ perspective on educational theory and research. Such a perspective arises from the critique of the positivistic and interpretive approaches of conventional educational theory and research. Table 1 presents a classification of approaches to educational research based on distinctions between positivist (empirical-analytical), interpretive (historical-hermeneutic) and critical research.⁵

FORM OF RESEARCH			
	POSITIVIST (Empirical-analytic)	INTERPRETIVE (Historical-hermeneutic)	CRITICAL
PRESUMED NATURE OF EDUCATION AS AN OBJECT OF RESEARCH	Education as a 'phenomenon'; schooling as a delivery-system (technology)	Education as a developmental process; schooling as lived experience	Education as a social project; schooling as an institution for social and cultural reproduction and transformation
RESEARCH METHODS	Natural-scientific; experimental; 'quantitative'	Historical, interpretive; 'qualitative'; ethno-methodological; illuminative	Critical social science; emancipatory action research
FORM OF RESEARCH KNOWLEDGE	Objective; nomological causal explanation	Subjective; idiographic; interpretive understanding	Dialectical; reflexive understanding aimed at critical praxis
EXAMPLES OF SUBSTANTIVE THEORETICAL FORMS	Functionalist psychology; structure-functional sociology	Structuralism in Psychology, sociology, anthropology	Ideology-critique; critical curriculum theorising by collaborating teachers
HUMAN INTEREST	Technical	Practical	Emancipatory
PRACTICAL PURPOSE AND FORM OF REASONING	Improvement of the 'technology' of schooling; instrumental (means-ends) reasoning	Enlightenment of practitioners; practical-deliberative (informs judgement)	Rational transformation of education; critical reasoning (i.e., practical reasoning with emancipatory intent)
THEORY OF HUMAN NATURE	Deterministic	Humanistic	Historical-materialist
EDUCATIONAL PHILOSOPHY	Neo-classical, vocational	Liberal-progressive	Socially-critical, democratic
EDUCATIONAL VALUES	'Moulding' metaphor. Individuals prepared for a given form of social life	'Growth' metaphor. Self-actualisation of individuals within meritocratic forms of social life	'Empowerment' metaphor. Individuals collectively producing and transforming existing forms of social life through action in history
VIEW OF EDUCATIONAL REFORM	Research, development and dissemination; bureaucracy, corporate management	Enlightened action; liberal-individualist, reconstructionist	Contestational, communitarian; reproduction and transformation through collective action

Table 1: A Classification of Alternative Styles of Educational Research

The five formal requirements of an adequate educational science provide the terms in which a critical social of educational science can be characterised.

First, following the criticisms of positivism, it is apparent that any adequate approach to *educational theory must reject positivist notions of rationality, objectivity and truth*. In particular, it rejects the positivist idea that knowledge has a purely instrumental value in solving educational problems and the consequent tendency to see all educational issues as technical in character needs to be firmly resisted. Secondly, and accepting the interpretivist argument that educational research must grasp the meanings that educational practices have for those who perform them, any adequate approach to *educational theory must accept the need to employ the interpretive categories of teachers and other participants in the educational processes*. Indeed, for educational theory to have any subject-matter at all, it must be rooted in the self-understandings of educational practitioners.

However, the recognition that educational theory must be grounded in the interpretations of teachers and other participants in the educational process is not in itself sufficient. For while it may be true that consciousness 'defines reality', it is equally true that reality may systematically distort consciousness. Indeed, one of the major weaknesses of the interpretive approach to educational research is its failure to realise how the self-understandings of individuals may be shaped by illusory beliefs which sustain irrational and contradictory forms of social life. For this reason, a third feature of any adequate approach to educational theory is that *it must provide ways of distinguishing ideologically distorted interpretations from those that are not. It must also provide some view of how any distorted self-understanding is to be overcome*.

Another related weakness of the 'interpretive' approach is its failure to recognise that many of the aims and purposes that people pursue are not the result of conscious choice so much as the constraints contained in a social structure over which they have little, if any, direct control. A fourth requirement for educational theory, then, is that *it must be concerned to identify and expose those aspects of the existing social order which frustrate the pursuit of rational goals and must be able to offer theoretical accounts which make teachers and others aware of how they may be eliminated or overcome*.

The fifth requirement of an adequate approach to educational theory and research is that it be practical, in the sense that *the question of its educational status will be determined by the ways in which it relates to practice*. For this reason, educational theory cannot simply explain the source of the problems that practitioners face. Nor can it rest content with trying to solve problems by getting teachers to adopt or apply any solutions it may produce. Rather, its purpose is to inform and guide the practices of participants in education by indicating the actions that they need to take if they are to overcome their problems and eliminate their difficulties. In this sense, educational theory must always be orientated towards transforming the ways in which participants see themselves and their situation so that the factors frustrating their educational goals and purposes can be recognised and eliminated. Equally, it must be oriented towards transforming the situations which place obstacles in the way of achieving educational goals, perpetuate ideological distortions, and impede rational and critical work in educational situations.

One view of theory and research that incorporates these five requirements has been developed and articulated by the 'Frankfurt School' of philosophers and social scientists.⁶ What, in general terms, unites these people is the belief that the all-pervading influence of positivism has resulted in a widespread growth of instrumental rationality and a tendency to see all practical problems as technical issues. This has created the illusion of an 'objective reality' over which the individual has no control, and hence to a decline in the capacity of individuals to reflect upon their own situations and change them through their own actions. An overriding concern of the Frankfurt School, therefore, has been to articulate a view of theory that has the central task of emancipating people from the positivist 'domination of thought' through their own understandings and actions.

This view of theory is usually labelled 'critical theory'. It is clear, however, that the term 'critical theory' can be interpreted in various ways. To some, critical theory is primarily an attempt to overcome some of the weaknesses of orthodox Marxism. To others, it is a part of a long-standing dispute about hermeneutic philosophy. Yet others see it as an attempt to synthesise neo-Wittgensteinian philosophy with European philosophy. In our own view, we have given primary emphasis to the aspect of critical theory which has generated what Habermas referred to as *critical social science* and we have begun to explore the ways in which a critical social science addresses the

theory-practice relationship in education—a way very different from that suggested by positivist and interpretive social sciences. Among other things, we have therefore concerned ourselves with forms of educational theory and research aimed at changing the work of schools and educational systems—forms of research whose aim is not merely to interpret the world but to change it.

Critical Theory and Critical Social Science

A distinction can be made between '*critical theory*' as it is frequently practised and '*critical social (or educational) science*'.⁷ A first understanding of critical theory is as a product—the product of a critical science. A second understanding of critical theory seems to me more general, however—it is of a way of doing social science which is *critical of things as they stand*. Understood in this way, *critical theory* may simply be a species of interpretive social science. The commitment of a critical social science to organised, active resistance to existing forms of life which perpetuate irrationality and injustice marks a major distinction between the work of '*critical social and educational science*' and that of much '*critical theory*' in social science and education.

In practice, much of what passes as critical theory fulfils only a first condition of criticism—it contributes to changing the world primarily through reinterpreting it, through changing the way in which individuals see the world, and, therefore, how they orient themselves in their action to it. That is, of course, a substantial, significant and necessary element of changing the world. It is a great part of the achievement of any great social theorist who gives us new ways of understanding social life. But, in practice, the work of (interpretive) critical theory is completed when the new perspective has been offered. Its own enactment of the relationship between theory and practice is the same as that of other interpretive social science: it aims to educate the perceptions of people (frequently only the perceptions of an elite and highly educated group of people) but leaves it unclear as to how they might themselves participate in changing the social realities of which they are part.

This is a familiar role for most of us. Yet more can be done. The lesson was forcibly driven home once when I was lecturing a group of teachers on the role of IQ testing in maintaining the meritocratic order of society. When I concluded, my audience sat paralysed and,

worse than that, ashamed of themselves and angry with me. They felt disempowered. I had 'demonstrated' that they were cogs in the meritocratic machine, a machine which they felt powerless to challenge, let alone to change. Of course, such lessons are significant and important in learning to see the world differently and in creating reasons for action; my point is that it is possible not only to identify contradictions and injustices in social life but also to help people find ways of overcoming them.⁸ Criticism can be more direct in empowering people.

Unlike more passive, interpretive forms of critical theory, critical social or educational science fulfils a second condition : it is directed towards action and it takes action. More than this, it is organised to produce collaborative action which can then be submitted to reflection and evaluation, and produce further action. It is learning by doing in collaborative groups—'critical and self-critical communities'—whose aim is to improve their understandings of the world, their practices, *and* their organisation as groups committed to the development of more rational, productive, satisfying, just and humane forms of life.

Yet even commitment to action is not without problems. A critical social or educational science must be wary of generating *mere* activism.⁹ Mere activism can be naive and, at worst, dangerous. A critical social or educational science engages in changing the world within the limits of possibility. Of course this raises a spectre of tinkering at the edges of needed social change, leaving social, economic and cultural structures unchanged. In that sense, it runs the risk of being conservative or at least prudent.

The radical possibilities of a critical social or educational science do not necessarily lie outside the critical and self-critical community of participants in the research process. They lie within the process itself. If the process is 'successful' in creating groups that can organise themselves to learn systematically about how to improve their understandings, their practices and their social organisation, then it has created groups in which an alternative possible form of social life is already being realised. This turns out to be an extraordinarily difficult lesson to grasp. In a culture increasingly inured to the possibility of authentic, collaborative decision making and increasingly accustomed to comply with short-term, narrow views of productivity and accountability—a culture which affects most of our institutions, including universities and schools of education—there is a simple

conflict between, on the one hand, members' expectations about the familiar (irrational, unjust and unsatisfying) ways in which their work and world is organised and, on the other, the group's specific 'rules' for collaboration in critical research. Creating and exploiting this tension—between the work of the group and the culture in which and through which it normally operates—is the task of critical social and educational science. It is what teaches the group about the power of criticism and about its own power as a group, but it also teaches about the power which is locked within the existing forms of the culture and the state.

A critical social or educational science, through establishing itself on collaborative principles, brings the group into opposition with the culture and the state, and it provides a form of organisation through which that power can be resisted. It is oppositional and organises itself to resist the dominant forms of contemporary culture in each of the four senses outlined earlier.

- It is epistemologically oppositional. Its form of reasoning is dialectical. Critical educational research rejects the dualisms characteristic of positivist and interpretivist research, such as subject and object, individual and society, theory and practice. It sees each of these pairs of terms as mutually-constituted in the practice of reasoning. In its productive practices, it similarly rejects means-ends instrumentation and idealist, rationalistic forms of action. Instead, it adopts forms of action which aim to achieve progressively more satisfactory resolutions of the actual and the possible.
- It is cognitively oppositional. It is organised as a process of enlightenment for its participants. It aims to recover and analyse the formation of participants' values, understandings, activities and social relationships, relating their autobiographies to broaden the historical processes at work in society, the economy and culture.
- It is culturally oppositional. It is organised to identify and expose those aspects of the social order which frustrate the pursuit of rational goals, through analyses of the processes of contestation through which particular ideas and modes of language become institutionalised in taken-for-granted discourses, particular activities become institutionalised in

established practices, and particular social relationships are institutionalised in the power structures of the organisations.¹⁰

- It is politically oppositional. In its forms of organisation, it rejects, on the one side, hierarchy, bureaucracy, and coercion, and, on the other, liberal individualism and libertarianism. Instead, it uses such communitarian values as social equity and symmetrical communication as critical concept against which social action can continuously be evaluated.

Role for Critical Researchers: Lessons from Experience

It was suggested earlier that we might learn something about critical educational research by identifying it through its practitioners. Practitioners might include people able to answer the question "what is 'critical' education research?" But its practitioners should include far more people than just these. It includes people who do critical education research without the benefit of a distinctive label for it, and who rely as much on their own capacities to learn as a basis for their judgements about how the world can be changed as upon any formal theory of science.¹¹

With the best intentions and a familiar kind of academic self-importance, my colleagues and I at Deakin University began our work in educational action research by offering a kind of technical support service to teachers and others interested in researching their own practices. We saw ourselves as agents of change made by others. We helped teachers and parents to form questions about the problems and issues confronting them in their own situations, and offered advice on techniques of data-gathering which they could use in their investigations. In this phase of our work, we were inclined to regard ourselves as interfering if we intervened too much to shape the enquiries undertaken by teachers and others. In this role, we tried to leave all the power over the substance and direction of investigations with practitioners. We regarded any attempt to direct their action as implicit disempowerment of those with whom we worked—the 'real' researchers. We discovered that our 'non-intervention' frequently deprived the teacher-researchers of relevant sources of theory in the research literature. Substantively speaking, the researchers had to learn everything for themselves, our approach seemed to say, or else they would learn nothing worth knowing at all. In this way, we had

structured the work so that it became excessively pragmatic—a kind of trial and error learning that refused to acknowledge the structures that deprived these teachers of intellectual resources for change and, worse still, of an understanding of the ideological structures (including false consciousness) that made it difficult for them to reconstruct their understandings of their situations. The social and political limits on what they could achieve seemed arbitrary; they frequently described themselves as prevented from transforming their work and their situations by arbitrary ‘politics’ rather than by ideological structure (hegemony). We had made them acutely aware of the limits of their power to change things; at worst, confronting them with their alienation without offering an analysis of how it was produced by wider historical, social and political dynamics.

A second phase of the work entailed taking a more active educative role. We saw ourselves as ‘facilitators’ and then ‘moderators’ of the action research process, again offering advice and support on research techniques, but also beginning to offer theoretical perspectives which could link the work the researchers were doing to relevant literatures about their substantive problems and about ideology. We still believed that we should not intervene too strongly lest the researchers lose intellectual control of their own research work. In the final analysis, it was to be their work and not ours. Our language of ‘empowerment’ rested heavily on an individualistic theory of empowerment as authentic understanding which could underpin *individual* praxis. We saw ourselves as making a commitment to the work of these researchers, but we knew that, in their own situations, they would have to be able to justify their understandings and their action for themselves—so we left the responsibility for final decisions with them. In this phase, we found ourselves in a difficult and somewhat hypocritical position—we wanted to share the commitment, but we did not share final responsibility for the action taken by the researchers as they learned by doing.

Each of these two phases of the work was marked by an ‘us-them’ relationship between our Deakin group and the teachers and other researchers with whom we worked. At the risk of putting it too picturesquely, one could say that our theory of the relationship was one in which we were the avant-garde and they were the masses, we were the enlighteners and they were the ones to be enlightened. At a seminar at Deakin University in 1986¹² in which the Deakin group and some colleagues from elsewhere reviewed our theory and practice

of the previous six or seven years, participants finally penetrated the deception (and self-deception) involved in our understanding of our research relationships ('us-them') during these first two phases. We began to understand more clearly what it means to say that in the process of critical action research, there is room for only participants. In genuinely critical and self-critical research, *all participants* must take on genuinely collaborative roles, as members of, not outsiders to, the research work, even if roles within the group are differentiated. The projects should be collaborative projects governed by open decision making in a group committed to examining its own values, understandings, practices, forms of organisation and situation.

In this third phase, we have placed far greater emphasis on communitarian values and the importance of the research collective. Taylor¹³ suggest that a community exists when (1) people hold in common shared beliefs and values, (2) relationships between people are direct and many-sided, not indirect as between people isolated from one another, nor role-specialised and narrow, and (3) the relationships between people are characterised by balanced reciprocity, in which there is a direct two-way flow of action in which individual actions are seen as benefitting all, and in which there is a sense of solidarity, fraternity and mutual concern. To be a *critical* community, a group of people would first of all strive to meet these conditions; in doing so it would come to understand how contemporary culture operates from without to mitigate against the formation and maintenance of communities; and in doing so, it would also become self-critical, discovering how the habits and expectations of its members, learned in cultures decreasingly characterised by these features of 'community', operate from within to prevent a group from establishing itself as a community in Taylor's sense.

This third phase of work has allowed us to reconcile our interests in participatory action research with broader questions of ideology-critique in curriculum studies, especially theories of social and cultural reproduction and transformation in education. Defining our conception of critical theorising in curriculum, Lindsay Fitzclarence and I wrote:¹⁴

The mode of curriculum theorising we envisage can be realised in a participatory democratic process of collaborative research undertaken by local communities (of teachers and other participants in the educational

process) who aim, on the one hand, to relate their theory and practice in constructive and cumulative cycles of action and reflection, and, on the other, to locate the specific educational values and practices of their schools and classrooms within the wider history, traditions and forms of organisation of their society. These two aspects of collaborative critical curriculum theorising are integrated in the work of emancipatory action research which sustains the critical and self-critical analysis of concrete and particular cases of the curriculum and curriculum development work (in classrooms, schools and in society generally) in a particular community as manifestations of more general historical processes of social and cultural reproduction. The products of this work, generated and continually revised as it proceeds, emerge in the form of ideology-critiques which dialectically incorporate a shared 'autobiography' of the local community of participant researchers within a wider history, locating collaborative self-reflection interpretively in more general social analysis, and locating the shared human agency of political action in a deepening analysis of social structure.

Now these values are not easily realised. In our work at Deakin, we have begun to do less of the kind of 'facilitatory' work we used to do with groups of teachers and others, 'teaching' them about action research and techniques for gathering and analysing data from their own settings. We have attempted to work in situations where the role distinction between 'facilitator' and 'researcher' can be transcended, where we can be co-researchers with others on problems and issues we share.¹⁵ This shift in roles can be illustrated through the history of a series of projects undertaken in Aboriginal education and teacher education.

From Facilitation to Collaboration

Since 1983, work with Deakin colleagues¹⁶ has been on-going with a series of projects in Aboriginal education and teacher education in the Northern Territory. The first of these projects involved acting as 'facilitators' to staff of Batchelor College, a teacher education institution preparing Aboriginal teachers. The college wished to

undertake a self-evaluation as a preliminary step in the development of a new curriculum for accreditation. The project had two faces: first, it entailed making the existing curriculum problematic through collection of disparate staff and student views about it and through the exploration of the nature and effects of teaching and learning in the college through action research; and second, it involved the articulation of principles (critical theorems, perhaps) upon which the new curriculum could be based.¹⁷ In this assisted self-evaluation, facilitators worked at the problematising and action research process, helping the staff collect views (their own views, students' views, and the views of senior members of some of the students' communities) on the nature and effects of the existing curriculum, and helping staff investigate the potential and limitations of new teaching-learning methods through action research into their own teaching. These investigations frequently involved testing out possible new approaches to teaching and learning which could provide new bases of principles for the new curriculum (for example, the principle of active respect for students' first languages, knowledge, culture and communities; negotiations of the curriculum between teachers and students to determine the specific content of teaching and learning within a framework of non-negotiable course requirements). Throughout, the role of the facilitators was as 'outsiders', 'moderating' and mediating the concerns and interests of different groups, providing technical support and substantive independence on the issues. This role was premised on the view that the staff would only become committed to developing and sustaining a new curriculum if they took all the major and substantive decisions about how the new curriculum could and should develop.

The contradiction implicit in such a role soon became apparent. As articulators of emerging principles and supporters of innovative approaches to teaching and learning, the facilitators not only confronted college staff with their own differences and competing and conflicting interests, but, based on discussions with students and members of their communities, they also became identified with certain kinds of innovative approaches. Increasingly, the facilitators were perceived as spokespersons for particular approaches, not as acting neutrally to any and all suggestions. Increasingly they were perceived as 'captured' by a specific group on the staff. And, although they took no part in writing or presenting it, the new curriculum reflected many of their preferences formed in the assisted self-evaluation process.

During the assisted self-evaluation, the Principal of the College suggested the facilitators visit some of the tradition-oriented Aboriginal communities who sent students to Batchelor for teacher education. They were invited to work with Aboriginal teachers and assistant teachers in some community schools—normally small schools serving remote communities, and staffed by a majority of non-Aboriginal teachers assisted by a number of Aboriginal ‘teaching assistants’. They helped organise ‘action groups’ of Aboriginal staff—groups who could organise their own professional development activities as part of a systematic process of their teaching and learning—and as a means of stimulating stronger community participation in school decision making. The Aboriginal staff involved made organisational links to community councils, and explored ways of improving the work of the schools so that it would more nearly reflect the culture and aspirations of their communities. While only occasional visitors to these schools, in three schools, the action groups thrived, exerting strong influence on the schools themselves. In these cases, Aboriginal teachers and their communities took clear responsibility for their developments, and began to relate the role of the action groups to clan structures and patterns of interaction in ways we could only begin to understand.

This pattern of activity suggested that Batchelor and the community schools could together explore the power and limitations of a concept of ‘both ways’ education¹⁸—education which would help aboriginal students to gain access to non-Aboriginal knowledge and culture, and to the ‘mainstream’ economy, while also actively respecting and nurturing the dynamically-evolving and changing traditional culture and economy of these communities. In the schools and in some aspects of the College’s work (notably through its Remote Area Teacher Education program¹⁹ which provided external studies in community schools for Aboriginal assistant teachers) this possibility was enthusiastically received, and investigations began into how ‘both ways’ education might be articulated, understood and realised.²⁰

But this possibility required quite dramatically changed research relationships. In a culture and economy like Australia’s, in which non-Aboriginal modes of life and being are too readily understood as ‘the dominant culture’, non-Aboriginal researchers have only a very limited understanding of Aboriginal knowledge and culture, and are poorly equipped to articulate the relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal modes of understanding and being. On the other hand,

most Aboriginal teachers have a good understanding of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal modes of life and being. Their 'bi-cultural' experience equips them far better for investigating the potential and limitations of 'both ways' education. In order to explore the concept, it was necessary for those non-Aboriginal researchers to develop a new humility about how data could and should be gathered, and about what was important for the development of the community and its educational needs. Much of the research could only be undertaken by Aboriginal men and women with standing in their clan and family groups. At the same time, non-Aboriginal researchers were in some ways better equipped to deal with some of the administrative relationships of the non-Aboriginal education systems governing the schools, with aspects of curriculum, and with the history and character of schooling as understood from a non-Aboriginal perspective. The project has required coordinating enquires across the cultural 'divide', drawing a widening range of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people into the enquiry process.

The process has been richly realised in the work of Helen Watson, who, working with Aboriginal teachers and communities in the desert community of Lajamanu and the coastal community at Yirrkala in North East Arnhem Land in the Northern Territory, has begun to explore the problems and possibilities of 'both ways' education in mathematics.²¹ For example, she has shown that the epistemological and ontological presumptions of Aboriginal languages and English are quite different, and that, as a consequence, the teaching of number presents special difficulties. On the side of the conventional school curriculum, her Aboriginal co-researchers have therefore decided to try teaching number only after children have a reasonable grasp of English—as late as the fifth grade of primary schooling. Watson has now become an active participant in a long-term development project assisting the staff at Yirrkala community school to develop a 'both ways' curriculum, and, along with other Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal members of the school staff and the community,²² has helped to establish a lively community of researchers exploring the possibilities of 'both ways' education in the school.

At the same time Watson and I have been consultants to projects conducted by the Laynhapuy Community Council in North East Arnhem Land, aimed to support the development of Homelands Centres Schools, away from 'artificial' settlements created by missions or governments. In these schools, the communities argue, it is possible

to retain and develop the traditional modes of life of Aboriginal clans and families, while at the same time conducting non-Aboriginal schooling. Our role in the Homelands Centres project was not the collection of data; that was the responsibility of an Aboriginal research team, with Bakamana Yunupinga as the primary data-gatherer, under the supervision of Daymbalupa Munungurr (an elder of one of the clans and a senior member of the Laynhapuy Council) and Wulyanbuma Wunungmurra (the School Council Chairperson). Our role was to help relate the views of the clans involved to the concerns of non-Aboriginal authorities, and to help with the editing of the final report of the project.

This example of the development of 'both ways' education offers interesting insights into the nature of critical educational research. Because it is 'cross-cultural', it admits that researchers from two cultures have more or less limited understandings of one another's knowledge and cultures. The 'both ways' education project can be treated as a limiting case of critical research which admits that one's own understandings, practices and modes of life and those of others are different. It therefore requires a collaborative effort which actively respects differences and attempts to locate them with respect to one another in a cognitive, social, cultural, economic and political framework. Yet it is neither assimilationist (reducing one culture to the terms of the other) nor relativist (adopting a static view of the two cultures as different but, in some ahistorical apolitical sense, 'equal'). It adopts a dialectical stance, attempting to understand the epistemological bases, the history and the political economies of the two cultures in relation to one another, and to find means by which the two can be mutually-generative (generative both for themselves and each other).

This work seems to meet the five formal requirements of a critical educational science outlined earlier. First, it rejects positivist notions of rationality and truth in favour of a dialectical view. In particular, it does so by recognising and exploring Aboriginal epistemology and its relationships with non-Aboriginal epistemology. Moreover, it explores the dialectical thinking within Aboriginal knowledge and culture—a notion which is at its most explicit in moiety and gender relations in Aboriginal culture, but also can be found in the modes of life through which Aboriginal law is lived (for example, in relationships between clans in ceremonial matters).

Second, it employs the interpretive categories of those involved—both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal participants. These concepts include notions drawn from the non-Aboriginal language of schooling ('curriculum', 'teaching', etc.) and notions drawn from Aboriginal languages (in the case of the Yirrkala projects, a concept like 'ganma' which has explicit sacred and secular references but which can also be used to refer to the relationships between different ways of life and different kinds of knowing). It also employs the interpretive categories of those involved in a more usual sense—the sense of treating as problematic the key ideas used by participants in the projects in their own language and discourses about schooling, education, community development and the like.

Third, the projects attempt to identify and overcome distorted self-understandings through seeing how the work and life of the schools involved are shaped by broader cultural, economic and political conditions. In relation to understanding schooling, for example, this has entailed seeing how the conventional non-Aboriginal language and practices of schooling serve particularly non-Aboriginal educational purposes, and how the language of schooling has frequently caused Aboriginal people to understand themselves in distorted ways (for example, as lacking mathematical ability or even the ability to form hypotheses, or as preferring modes of learning which exclude the possibility of attaining the levels of schooling necessary if Aboriginal people are to achieve full professional roles and responsibilities in their own communities and community schools). The projects have also suggested ways in which participants could overcome such distorted self-understandings (for example, by recognising the cultural location of non-Aboriginal 'school knowledge', by demonstrating the power of high level Aboriginal knowledge in reaching understandings of education and schooling, by locating non-Aboriginal knowledge in relation to Aboriginal knowledge, by showing how the use of Aboriginal ideas can lead to productive and valued changes in the organisation of teaching and learning, and the like).

Fourth, the projects identify aspects of the social order which frustrate change and the pursuit of rational goals. In particular, they have demonstrated how the imposition of non-Aboriginal views of schooling on Aboriginal people has actually limited the achievement of the educational aspirations of Aboriginal students and communities. By relativising these non-Aboriginal views (comparing and contrasting them with Aboriginal views), it has been possible to identify ways that

the educational aspirations of Aboriginal people can be made more achievable (for example, by delaying the teaching of number until the upper grades of primary school, or by supporting the development of bilingual programs and the development of Homelands Centres education).

And finally, the projects recognise that the truth status of the developing educational theory—the theory of ‘both ways’ education—is tested in practice. The projects proceed through action research investigations which explore new possibilities and take a critical view of how they turn out in practice. Indeed, Wulanybuma Wunungmurra, the Yirrkala School Council Chairperson, is so committed to this principle that he is reluctant to allow the structure of the School Council (developed through an association between action groups and men and women elders of the clans in the community) to be seen as a model for development by Aboriginal communities elsewhere, because it will take at least five years for the power and limitations of the model to be tested in practice.

Some Conclusions

The projects in Aboriginal education and teacher education undertaken in the Northern Territory exemplify the shift from ‘facilitatory’ roles to collaborative ones. They have shown how one can establish modes of work which recognise and respect different interests. These projects were described as a kind of “limiting case” for critical research, in which the difference between interests is marked by a kind of cultural divide. In a sense, however, these are also easier cases, where it is easier to understand that one does not fully understand the culture and the interests of the ‘other’. It is easier, too, to know that one stands in opposition to established modes of interaction between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in these communities, and in opposition to entrenched interests in the assimilation of Aboriginal culture to the dominant culture of Anglo-Australia.

These projects also demonstrate that it is possible to be a critical educational researcher without a view on what critical educational research is. Contrary to my earlier suggestion, its practitioners are not only those who can answer the question “what is ‘critical’ educational research?”

What is encouraging about these projects is that they have made a substantive contribution to Aboriginal education and teacher education. They have given Aboriginal teachers and their communities a central role in their own professional development. They have changed the work of the community schools involved, in ways endorsed by Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal teachers and by the schools' communities. But they have also provided tangible benefits to non-Aboriginal people working in these settings. For example, they have offered models to Batchelor College for the development of its curriculum as a 'both ways' curriculum (for example, in its developing Remote Area Teacher Education program). And the notion of 'both ways' education has provided both form and substance to the Deakin University Aboriginal Teacher Education programs (one offered in association with Batchelor College in the Northern Territory, and another offered to Aboriginal students at Deakin in Victoria) through which Deakin has been able to explore and develop the practice of Aboriginal teacher education.

While promising, these are small and precarious steps. They are also double-edged. These projects also demonstrate the dangers of compromise and cooption. They make teacher education institutions more accessible and acceptable to tradition-oriented Aboriginal people, but in doing so make the impact of those institutions on Aboriginal communities the more powerful and pervasive. It is significant that some of our most promising examples of critical educational research are in Aboriginal education and teacher education—widely regarded by teacher educationists in Australia as marginal to 'mainstream' education and teacher education. The experience of the conventional teacher education program at Deakin has been that it is much more difficult to overturn the assumptions, expectations, habits and traditions which support conventional teacher education as a process of transmitting a 'craft' to student teachers. While some successes in the mainstream program has been possible the record is far from satisfactory. Since a conspicuous record of success in changing our own 'mainstream' programs is lacking, does this suggest that we have merely elaborated the educational machinery of the state to incorporate Aboriginal people and communities which the institutions were previously unable to accommodate?

The argument presented at the beginning of this article was that critical educational research is both oppositional and "domesticated". One should not conclude that it is just one of these or the other. It is

both. It challenges existing presuppositions about education and educational research. But it has also established a place for itself in the institutions (and the literature) of education and educational research. It is the critical awareness of this tension, of the potential and limitations of critical research as it is practised, of the historical dialectic of the actual and the possible, which sustains one's reasonable hope as critical educational researchers that it is possible to "find a new world through criticism of the old".

Reference Notes

1. This article was prepared as a paper for a meeting of the Critical Theory PreConference of the North American Adult Education Association Research Conference, University of Calgary, May 5-6, 1988.
2. Marx, K. (1967) *Writings of the Young Marx on Philosophy and Society*, ed. and trans. L.D. Easton and K.H. Guddat, New York, Anchor Books, p. 212.
3. On the limits of the rationalistic theory of action implied by this view of "theory", see Hindess, B. (1977) *Philosophy and Methodology in the Social Sciences*, Hassocks, Sussex, Harvester Press. Hindess writes: "Rational epistemology conceives of the world as a rational order in the sense that its parts and the relations between them conform to concepts and the relations between them, the concept giving the essence of the real. Where rationalist epistemology presupposes an a priori correspondence, a pre-given harmony, the rationalist conception of action postulates a mechanism of the realization of ideas. For example, in Weber's conception of action as 'oriented in its course' by meanings the relation between action and its meaning is one of coherence and logical consistency: the action realizes the logical consequences of its meaning. Is it necessary to point out the theological affinities of this conception of action? While theology postulates God as the mechanism par excellence of the realisation of the world, the rationalist conception of action conceives of a lesser but not essentially dissimilar mechanism." (p.8). On the relationships between the development of critical theorems, the organization of enlightenment and the organization of action, see Habermas, J. (1974) *Theory and Practice*, trans. J. Viertel, London, Heinemann. On the relationship between theory and practice in educational research, see Carr, W. and Kemmis, S. (1986) *Becoming Critical: Education, Knowledge and Action Research*. London, Falmer (and Geelong, Victoria, Deakin University Press).
4. In *Becoming Critical*, *ibid.* pp. 129-130 (where the argument of earlier chapters is summarised).
5. The classification is based on the arguments in Carr, W. and Kemmis, S. (1986) *ibid.* See also Bredo, E. and Feinberg, W. (1982) (Eds.) *Knowledge and Values in Social and Educational Research*. Philadelphia, Temple University Press, and Popkewitz, T. (1984) *Paradigm and Ideology in Educational Research*, Lewes, Sussex, Falmer Press.
6. See, for introductions, Jay, M. (1973) *The Dialectical Imagination: The History of the Institute for Social Research and the Frankfurt School, 1923-50*, Boston, Little, Brown & Co, and Held, D. (1980) *An Introduction to Critical Theory*, London, Hutchinson.

7. See Carr and Kemmis (1986), *ibid.*, p. 144 ff. The account of critical educational science (in Chapter 6) draws upon Habermas's arguments (in Theory and Practice, *ibid.*) for a critical social science in general, as well as on our critique on the presuppositions of different forms of educational research about the relationship between educational theory and educational practice.

8. Though it was only a small advance on the first occasion, the next time I lectured on ideas of ability and the meritocracy I suggested to my audience that they attempt to expunge words relating to 'ability' (for example, 'bright', 'less able', 'dull', 'clever' etc.) from their language for a week, to discover the kinds of situations in which they made recourse to the term, so they could reflect on its social functions.

9. When it does so, it is doubtful whether it can claim to be theorising, let alone critically theorising.

10. For further discussions on contestation and institutionalisation, see Kemmis, S. and Fitzclarence, L. (1986) *Curriculum Theorising: Beyond Reproduction Theory*, Geelong, Victoria, Deakin University Press; Kemmis, S. and McTaggart, R. (1988) *The Action Research Planner*, Geelong, Victoria, Deakin University Press; and Rixvi, F. and Kemmis, S. (1988) *Dilemmas of Reform: The Participation and Equity Program in Victorian Schools*, Geelong, Victoria, Deakin Institute for Studies in Education.

11. For a sophisticated account of the tension between North American action research and the possibility of a science of the proletariat, see Fals Borda, O. (1979) Investigating reality in order to transform it: the Columbian Experience, *Dialectical Anthropology*, vol. 4, March, pp. 33-55 (Reprinted in McTaggart, R. et al. [Eds.] *The Action Research Reader*, Geelong, Victoria, Deakin University Press, pp. 291-313).

12. See McTaggart, R. and Garbutcheon-Singh, M. (1988) "A Fourth Generation of Action Research: Notes on the Deakin Seminar" in McTaggart, R. et al. [Eds.] *The Action Research Reader*, Geelong, Victoria, Deakin University Press, pp. 409-428.

13. Taylor, M. (1982) *Community, Anarchy, and Liberty*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

14. Kemmis, S. with Fitzclarence, L. (1986) *Curriculum Theorising: Beyond Reproduction Theory*, Geelong, Victoria, Deakin University Press, p. 129.

15. A recent example was in a course on school self-evaluation in which Robin McTaggart, Ian Robottom and I worked with teachers, education consultants and others to prepare materials for teacher and parent organizations confronted with retrogressive proposals (from a project team of the Victorian State School Board of Education) for intrusive mechanisms for school monitoring and accountability. In this case, we were course organisers, but we worked collaboratively with the group as a whole to define the problems and issues through reference to relevant literature, try out approaches in their own work settings, and (ultimately) produce a resource pack of materials to inform debate about school monitoring among affected groups.

16. Including Rhonda Bunbury, Frances Christie, Jenny Grenfell, Warren Hastings, John Henry, Robin McTaggart, Neil Pateman, and Helen Watson.

17. The following are example of the kinds of principles or theorems we strove to develop:

- Aboriginal self-determination is of fundamental importance politically, socially, historically, and culturally;
- Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians have different ways of life and different ways of understanding the world, and schooling should actively respect both ways;
- Aboriginal languages are fundamental and must be maintained and supported in schooling (as well as by other means available by government);

- Aboriginal people are, by in large, better equipped by their experience to be interpreters of bi-culturality than Anglo-Australians and are likely to be able to use this knowledge more tellingly in research into bi-culturality and “both ways education”;

- schooling has been an instrument of white colonialism and the destruction of Aboriginal culture and society; policies of “assimilation” and “integration”, while less overt and more respectful of Aboriginal persons than the practices of cultural supremacy they replaced, may ultimately have the same practical effect (the destruction of Aboriginal cultures and communities).

18. The concept of “both ways” education was offered by the Aboriginal teachers. As far as we are aware, it developed from the concept of “both ways” religion developed by some missionaries in North East Arnhem Land in the 1960s. According to this view, communities could retain their own religious beliefs while also adopting Christianity. This possibility seemed somewhat remote to the non-Aboriginal observer familiar with the history of “modernisation” and “development” (see, for example, Berger, P., Berger, B. and Kellner, H. [1973] *The Homeless Mind: Modernisation and Consciousness*, New York, Random House). The problem, however, is more acute for the Western observer accustomed to thinking in terms of dualisms—either Aboriginal or non-Aboriginal but not both. From an Aboriginal perspective, however, the possibility of strengthening and retaining two alternative modes of life in relation to one another is not remote or unlikely—indeed moiety and gender relationships express and engender a highly dialectical notion of the unity of opposites through which opposed categories retain and develop their own integrity and regenerate each other through interaction. Thus, from an Aboriginal perspective, “both ways” religion could have the potential for strengthening traditional religion as well as offering new modes of religious life (though this potential may not be realised, or it may be denied through discovering a hidden assimilationist motive). Similarly, “both ways” education could have the potential for offering access to new modes of life while retaining and developing traditional modes of life, including traditional modes of education.

19. Leon White, Glenda Livett (now Schopen), Richard Geeves and Vicki Shardlow of Batchelor College’s Remote Area Teacher Education (RATE) program and Bakamana Yunupinga of Yirrkala Community School took special responsibility for developing the idea of “both ways” education in the context of RATE.

20. The principles for the operation of RATE were articulated by the Batchelor RATE staff in July 1987 as follows:

1. RATE programs should only operate with the full support and involvement of the local community.
2. RATE programs should only operate with the full support and involvement of the local Principal and the staff at the local community school.
3. RATE programs should only operate in schools in Regions where the Regional Superintendent has supported the establishment and operation of programs.
4. In accordance with the Batchelor College 1985 Reaccreditation Document, RATE programs primarily operate to increase the confidence and contribution of the Aboriginal participants as educators in and for their communities.
5. In accordance with the Batchelor College 1985 Reaccreditation Document, RATE programs require a commitment by all of the involved non-Aboriginal staff to the goal of self management and self determination for aboriginal communities.
6. In accordance with the Batchelor College 1985 Reaccreditation Document, RATE programs are required to implement stage 1 of the Batchelor College teacher education program.

7. After negotiation for the commencement of a Program, RATE programs require schools to undertake to release RATE tutors for activities that relate to their roles as RATE tutors.

8. RATE programs, by their very nature must provide for the Aboriginal educators who are participants in the programs to develop strategies to deal with a wide range of issues concerned with the delivery of educational services in their communities.

21. Watson's work in this field began in explorations into language and mathematics among the Yoruba in Nigeria.

22. Notably Leon White, a Batchelor College staff member offering a Remote Area Teacher Education program at Yirrkala, and Bakamana Yunupingu and Greg Wearne, Co-Principals of Yirrkala Community School.