

The Disciplines and Discipline of Educational Research

DAVID BRIDGES

This paper starts from the point in the early 1970s at which educational theory and research was temporarily structured under the 'foundation' disciplines of psychology, sociology, philosophy and history of education. It observes the way the intellectual resources of educational research have become enlarged and enriched and these disciplines themselves fragmented and hybridised to a degree that prompts talk not just of interdisciplinarity but of 'postdisciplinarity'. The paper argues, however, that without discipline, in the sense of a shared language, a rule governed structure of enquiry—something 'systematic'—we lose the conditions that make a community of arguers possible. Further, we lose the basis for the special claim which research might otherwise make on our attention and on our belief.

FROM FOUNDATION DISCIPLINES TO POSTDISCIPLINARITY

The organisation of educational theory and research under the 'foundation' disciplines of the philosophy, sociology, psychology and history of education dominated the functioning of teacher education and of the educational research community in the UK and in many other parts of the English speaking world in the 1960s and through to the 1980s (see Tibble, 1966 for a classic example and Bridges, 2003 for a more detailed account of this period). For a while these foundation disciplines appeared to offer: *differentiation* between different kinds of enquiry (R. S. Peters had recently complained of the current condition of educational theory as 'undifferentiated mush'); *coherence* in terms of the internal consistency of any one of these forms; and the '*systematic*' or rigour of enquiry, which raised such enquiry above the level of popular or received opinion—the discipline of the discipline.

However, these foundation disciplines only ever provided provisional forms of coherence, temporary alliances, between what were often radically different traditions. The sociology of education, for example, contained everything from traditional hard data survey people through ethnographers, neo Marxists and critical theorists to postmodernists and

social relativists. Psychology spanned neurophysiology, behaviourism, cognitivism and constructivism through to psychoanalysis. The ideological and methodological differences between these communities of scholars were at least as great as anything they might have in common. If philosophy of education retained for a while a slightly greater coherence in the UK around an analytic and Kantian tradition this was at the price of a period of virtual exclusion of some of the more extravagant alternatives available in continental Europe. Increasingly through the eighties and nineties these fault lines in the foundation disciplines became more evident and new, more segmented intellectual communities and practices emerged. New alliances were formed, as the links between some of these research practices were observed and built upon and new hybrids of research developed.

This diversification and hybridisation was encouraged too as the educational research community was enriched by people coming into it with a much wider repertoire of methodologies and informing theory, drawn from literary and cultural studies, ethnography, feminist and post colonial theory, etc., etc. The educational research community seems to have taken to heart Elliott Eisner's observation in his 1993 address to the American Educational Research Association:

If there are different ways to understand the world, and if there are different forms that make such understanding possible, then it would seem to follow that any comprehensive effort to understand the processes and outcomes of schooling would profit from a pluralistic rather than a monolithic approach to research (Eisner, 1993, p. 8).

In the field of educational research the returns to the 2001 Research Assessment Exercise provided clear evidence of creativeness (or recklessness) in combining, crossing over or perhaps transgressing traditional disciplinary structures in a context of what some have described as 'post-disciplinarity'. Among, admittedly, the less conventional descriptions I noted: 'New Paradigm/heuristic/dialogic methods'; 'historical political sociology'; 'ideological history, curriculum and cultural theory'; 'social constructionism—socio-philosophical analysis'; and 'Narcissus myth and deconstruction'. (The full data set for these Research Assessment Exercise submissions is available on www.hefce.ac.uk/rae and provides a fascinating insight into the diversity of practice in educational research in the UK.)

Not all of these developments necessarily challenge the idea that educational research is based on 'disciplined' enquiry. Commitment to a view of such enquiry as disciplined is entirely consistent with:

- (i) the desirability of drawing more fine grained distinctions between e.g. different kinds of psychological enquiry into human cognition or between the wide variety of different practices taking place under the umbrella of 'sociology'—this is more accurately to respect the principle of differentiation;

- (ii) the drawing into the field of educational enquiry of a wider variety of disciplinary resources (e.g. from anthropology, literary studies, economic theory) whose relevance was previously neglected;
- (iii) the combination of different disciplinary traditions in ‘multi-disciplinary’ or ‘inter-disciplinary’ enquiry to investigate a particular aspect of educational policy or practice.

These developments do indeed challenge the internal coherence of what were once presented as more or less monolithic disciplines (albeit ones with bitter internal disputes); they challenge the exclusive role of the four foundation disciplines; and they challenge their individual sufficiency. They do not, however, thus far necessarily challenge the requirement for such research to be ‘systematic and sustained’; to have its own means (methods?) to assist us in examining ideas which are put forward and judging what confidence to place in them—to be disciplined.

The literature on postdisciplinarity in the humanities and social sciences offers different messages on the place of disciplines or discipline in contemporary research. Some sources appear to use reference to multi-disciplinarity, interdisciplinarity and postdisciplinarity interchangeably, though, as Menand rightly observes ‘Interdisciplinarity is the institutional ratification of the logic of disciplinarity. The very term implies respect for the discrete perspectives of different disciplines. You can’t have interdisciplinarity, or multidisciplinarity, unless you have disciplines ... This is not the same phenomenon as postdisciplinarity’ (Menand, 2001, p. 11).

Other sources are at pains to insist that the discourse of post-disciplinarity is consistent with continuing respect for the discipline of the discipline. The project is rather to add to what discipline-based enquiry can offer than to replace it. In an editorial introducing the journal *Human Affairs: A Postdisciplinary Journal for Humanities and Social Sciences* Višňnovský and Bianchi explained: ‘Postdisciplinarity in our understanding does not mean that traditional disciplines have disappeared or indeed should disappear, but rather that they are changing and should change in order to solve complex issues of human affairs. It is not sufficient to approach such complex issues from any single discipline’ (Višňnovský and Bianchi, 2002, p. 2). Giroux was at pains to stress that ‘At issue here is neither ignoring the boundaries of discipline-based knowledge nor simply fusing different disciplines, but creating theoretical paradigms, questions and knowledge that cannot be taken up within the policed boundaries of the existing disciplines’ (Giroux, 1997, xii). Similarly, ‘The problem ... is how to construe and resituate the disciplines in a way that removes their effect as unnecessarily constraining foundational structures, while retaining the vitality of inquiry within them, so that the pursuit of knowledge is expanded, and the range of possibilities for what constitutes legitimate intellectual activity is broadened’ (Mourad, 1997, p. 86; see also Smith, 2003).

Some, however, seem bent on the destruction of the disciplinary structure of academic life. When Michael Crow became President of

Arizona State University he declared in his inaugural policy paper 'A New American University: The New Gold Standard' that: 'Knowledge does not fall within strict disciplinary categories . . . The New American University encourages teaching and research that is interdisciplinary, multidisciplinary, transdisciplinary and postdisciplinary, leading, where appropriate, to a convergence of the disciplines, an approach that might more accurately be described as intellectual fusion' (Crow, 2002, p. 2. Compare the mission statement of the Lancaster University Institute for Advanced Studies at: www.lancaster.ac.uk/ias/about/mission.htm).

I do not have space in this context to examine this expanding body of literature in detail. At the risk of oversimplification it seems to have a number of targets for critique or attack, and there are a number of these that I would not seek to defend. I am happy to acknowledge, for example, that the organisation of academic institutions into strongly bounded discipline-based departments can be an obstacle to fluid and imaginative intellectual endeavour (though most of the organisational alternatives have their problems too). Even when a university such as the University of East Anglia is founded on an organisational principle of interdisciplinarity, the interdisciplinary units themselves tend to establish new barriers to academic collaboration (e.g. between historians in the School of English and American Studies and those in European Studies) as well as new opportunities for collaboration.

I acknowledge, similarly, that the containment of research programmes within disciplinary boundaries, especially in fields such as education, which requires multiple approaches, is unhelpful (see Bridges, 2003 for illustrations of the role of the philosopher in interdisciplinary research environments).

I acknowledge that the view that any particular disciplinary structures are in some way 'essential' or ahistorical and unchanging is unsustainable. Any historical perspective on the evolution of human understanding can only confirm this evolutionary course. Phenix emphasised that: 'the concept of disciplines as species of knowledge is to be understood dynamically. The disciplines are not an array of fixed traditional ways of knowing that have been ordained at some special creation. They are structures of enquiry and understanding that emerge out of the continuous process of epistemic development' (Phenix, 1964, p. 49). The practice of one community of enquiry may become increasingly contested from within; distinctions within disciplinary frameworks become clearer and more significant; methods and methodologies more refined and new conversational communities established.

This view is also compatible with the idea that discipline and rule governed systems may emerge from practices of enquiry in which they are by no means clearly defined—Schön's 'swampy lowland' of research and practice (Schön, 1983, p. 42). Rule governed systems emerge out of research practice as well as being brought to it. Appignanesi and Garratt describe, for example, their experience of 'working without rules in order to find out the rules of what you've done' (Appignanesi and Garratt, 1995, p. 50). In *The Rise of the Network Society*, Manuel Castells writes of 'the

self-organising character of nature and society' but adds: 'Not that there are no rules, but rules are created, and changed, in a relentless process of deliberate actions and unique interactions' (Castells, 2000, p. 74). My only qualification to the literature that describes the evolutionary character of epistemic communities is to warn that one can underestimate the continuities in these communities as well as their capacity for change (see Toulmin, 1972).

Finally, I share the view in some of the literature that to maintain that particular disciplinary structures are in some way reflections of the way reality is ordered is mistaken: rather they play a central role in the way in which we order our experience of reality or order reality itself.

It is not, however, the disciplines as forms of academic organisation that I want to protect (though such organisation just may prove contingently important) but the discipline that they provide to intellectual enquiry. The notion of post-disciplinarity in educational research worries me in so far as it suggests that educational research cannot any longer be thought of as having any discipline. It is worrying because the loss of 'discipline' has two huge consequences. The first is that it totally undermines the basis of the special claim of educational research on our or anyone else's attention; the second is that it renders meaningful conversation within communities of arguers impossible. Let me explain these two consequences more fully.

'SYSTEMATIC AND SUSTAINED ENQUIRY MADE PUBLIC'

Why should we give attention to something claiming to be research? Why, more particularly should we perhaps give it special attention in comparison to e.g. popular belief, rumour, individual opinion or the latest newspaper story? What are the features of research which merit particular credence? The answer has to lie in the particular features of some kinds of enquiry—ones which satisfy the conditions that earn it its status as 'research'—over others. Research is in this sense I think an honorific concept that incorporates certain normative features. Peters and White suggested that the term research in academic communities was used to refer to 'systematic and sustained enquiry carried out by people well versed in some form of thinking in order to answer some specific type of question' (Peters and White, 1969, p. 2). They contrasted this with a broader definition employed by Mace who in his *Psychology of Study* maintained that 'research is, after all, just "search", looking for answers to questions and for solutions to problems' (quoted in Peters and White, 1969, p. 2). Stenhouse took up two of Peters' and White's characteristics and added a third, so that research was defined as 'systematic and sustained enquiry made public' (Stenhouse, 1980).

The requirement that research is *sustained* enquiry draws attention to its seriousness of commitment and has incidentally implications for the intellectual virtues of patience, industriousness, thoroughness and care which it calls into service. But it is the requirement that research is

systematic which is of particular relevance here. What might this mean? What is the ‘system’ in enquiry that deserves to be honoured as research?

First there is a fairly ordinary way in which we might talk about enquiry as systematic. Research can be contrasted with other forms of more casual enquiry which may make no demands on the enquirer to have concern for e.g. the comprehensiveness or representativeness of the information collected; the orderliness with which information is collected or stored; the thoroughness of the search; the care and accuracy with which information is translated, transferred or transcribed. Research calls all of these principles into play.

But, secondly, ‘systematic’ carries suggestions of a system of enquiry, of rule governed activity which embodies requirements about the relationship between evidence, analysis and interpretation; about the way in which inferences are drawn; about the ways in which the results of new enquiry may or may not confirm or refute previous sets of beliefs; about the kinds of claims which particular kinds of evidence or argument can support; and about the level of confidence with which they entitle one to hold certain beliefs. Even in our personal systems of beliefs we dispense with such ‘systems’, such rules, at some peril; but the notion of research picks out enquiry in which respect for such rules and systems and the discipline that they impose on the enquiry is a *sine qua non*. It is these that merit its honouring as research or, in the sense in which the French use the term, its claims to be ‘*scientifique*’.

The reason why we might give special attention to research—and urge others to do likewise—lies, on this view, in its claims (i) to be based on sustained enquiry; (ii) to be enquiry characterised by the qualities of care and thoroughness contained in the everyday sense of the systematic; and (iii) in its claims to be systematic in this slightly more technical sense of a rule governed system of enquiry. Such rule government constitutes the discipline of the form of enquiry—and when such discipline is sufficiently well developed and differentiated it enables us to refer to the system as a discipline. Discipline may of course be applied more or less rigorously or vigorously. On the whole in academic circles beliefs are seen to be more deserving of our belief to the extent that they are derived from enquiries that have been conducted with greater rigour. So there is a connection between these considerations of enquiry as systematic, disciplined and rigorous and considerations to do with the quality of the research (though this does not mean that these are the only relevant criteria of quality).

The argument goes further however. For though research may require periods of isolated and individual study, it rests essentially on and in communities of enquirers, and such communities owe their identity to ‘commonly understood norms of enquiry’ (Shulman 1999, p. 164), a shared discourse, shared discipline, shared ‘systematics’. As Hunt argues, ‘the discipline of a discipline, by which I mean the rules of conduct governing argument within a discipline, does have a worthy function. Such rules make a community of arguers possible’ (Hunt, 1991, p. 104). The conditions for both the production and validation of research require communities of arguers, enquirers and critics—and a condition for the

possibility of such communities of arguers is their sharing in a common language and their shared recognition and reference to some common rules of (in this case) intellectual and creative behaviour. Popkewitz emphasises the importance of these rules, not only in allowing communication and argument but also in developing ‘standards of enquiry’: ‘Research exists within communities of discourse which maintain and develop standards of enquiry ... Scientific communities involve commitments to certain lines of reasoning and premises for certifying knowledge. Each scientific field has particular constellations of questions, methods and procedures. These constellations provide shared ways of “seeing” the world, of working, of testing each others’ beliefs’ (Popkewitz, 1984, pp. 2–3). McCarthy (1982) articulates a Habermasian view of both the epistemological and social conditions for such communities of arguers:

Communication that is oriented towards reaching understanding inevitably involves reciprocal raising and recognition of validity claims. Claims to truth and rightness, if radically challenged, can be redeemed only through argumentative discourse leading to rationally motivated consensus. Universal-pragmatic analysis of the conditions of discourse and rational consensus show these to rest on the supposition of an ‘ideal speech situation’ characterised by an effective equality of chances to assume dialogue roles (McCarthy, 1982, pp. 255–6).

The rules that I refer to and the intellectual, moral and institutional props which maintain them, constitute the discipline of the discipline, of the tradition of thought and representation with which they are associated. It is in this sense that I suggest that discipline is a *sine qua non* of research. ‘Disciplines,’ argues Lenoir with perhaps surprising lack of qualification in a sociological analysis, ‘are *essential* structures for systematising, organizing, and embodying the social and institutional practices upon which both coherent discourse and legitimate exercise of power depend’ (Lenoir, 1993, p. 73, my italics).

RESEARCH AS A RULE GOVERNED ACTIVITY

It is a common feature of human rule governed practices that the rules are inexplicit, uncodified, tacitly understood. There is no rulebook. Epistemologically functional rules (e.g. governing the relationship between specific cases and general theories) may easily get blurred with social conventions attached to a discipline (e.g. regarding the use or non use of the first person in research reports). They tend to become more explicit when they are transgressed and critics point to the transgression. Eisner argued that: ‘When research methods are stable and canonized, the rules of the game are relatively clear. With new games, new rules’ (Eisner, 1993, p. 8). I tend to think that it works almost the other way round. The more firmly established a discipline the less explicit is people’s awareness of its rules. It is in the formation and development of new patterns of

enquiry that people are especially aware of what is distinctive about it. It goes with my acknowledgement of the diversity of the intellectual resources that are today brought to the field of educational research that there are some significantly different rule governed systems in play. But let me at least illustrate the sort of rules that I have in mind—i.e. the kind of rules that shape the shared meaning and understanding that underpins research enquiry and its claims on our credibility.

1. *Rules that link the methods appropriate to the research task or conclusion to particular ontologies and epistemologies and hence shape the character of the truth claims*—so for example someone who employed or offered three case studies as an attempt to answer a question about the scale of pupil disaffection in a given country would have made a kind of category mistake. Equally, someone offering a set of statistical tables in answer to a question about students' experience of disaffection may (perhaps less obviously) have done the same.
2. *Rules that shape the way in which appropriate inferences can be drawn from the evidence or indicate the impossibility of such inferences.* Part of what defines a disciplined form of enquiry are the rules which govern the movement (or lack of it) between evidence/data and analysis, generalization, theory building. Examples would include the level of probability one could extract from an analysis of statistical correlations or the kind of movement one might make (or not make) from an individual case study to e.g. grounded theory or general policy.
3. *Rules that indicate what are the analytic and explanatory concepts appropriate to the research task and evidence*—understanding (and reflecting in one's research) e.g. an appropriate perspective on the ways in which questions to do with how certain educational goods are distributed; questions of whether or not such distribution is fair; questions to do with the role of capitalism in shaping this distribution and questions of God's will with respect to such distribution may or may not be distinguished and inter-related. This is not to suppose that these questions are simply resolved or resolvable: it is rather to make the point that part of the discipline of educational enquiry and part of what constitutes the shared understanding of different elements within that community consists in either having a view of this relationship or in sharing a language in which different views of this relationship can be intelligently explored.

Schwab drew these three types of rules together into what he referred to as the 'syntactical structure' of each discipline:

There is, then, the problem of determining for each discipline what it does by way of discovery and proof, what criteria it uses for measuring the quality of its data, how strictly it can apply its canons of evidence, and, in general, to determine the pathway by which the discipline moves from its

raw data to its conclusion. This cluster of problems I shall call the problem of the *syntactical structure* of each discipline (Schwab, 1964, p. 11).

It is the elements of this 'syntactical structure' that provide the rules or systematic nature—the discipline—of a discipline. In principle at least, it is the discipline in research that renders its outcomes especially worthy of our attention and credulity.

This last claim is especially important. The rules that go at least partly to constitute a discipline have a purpose, which is to contribute to the greater illumination and understanding of different aspects of our experience and our world. Phenix asks: 'How . . . can we be sure that the concept of a discipline is definite and significant enough to serve as a basis for the organization of knowledge? The answer,' says Phenix, 'is empirical and pragmatic: disciplines prove themselves by their productiveness. They are the visible evidence of ways of thinking that have proven fruitful. They have arisen by the use of concepts and methods that have generative power' (Phenix, 1964, p. 48). There is, perhaps, the risk of either a certain circularity in this position or of an internal contradiction. If we can know the value of beliefs (generated by the disciplines) 'empirically and pragmatically' then presumably we do not need the disciplines as means of discriminating the wheat from the chaff of belief. Alternatively, if it is through the disciplines (alone) that we can distinguish the wheat from the chaff of belief, then we cannot determine their value 'empirically and pragmatically'. Phenix, however, places the onus on the creative function of disciplines as generators of ideas, which could go some way to get round this problem.

Such rule-governed systems are not necessarily obstacles to innovation or creativity. Popkewitz stresses the paradoxical way in which these rule governed systems provide, nevertheless, the conditions for challenge, creativity and dissent: 'Science exists in the preparedness of individuals to think up, explore and criticise new concepts, techniques of representation, and arguments . . . While it may seem paradoxical, the procedures, norms and interactions of the scientific community maintain a form of anarchy which encourages individual creativity' (Popkewitz, 1984, pp. 3 and 6). Such controversy sometimes confronts us with seemingly intractable problems of jurisdiction. Where are the rules or seats of adjudication that enable us to decide between contesting views? Meta-discourses such as philosophy and history provide a resource for such argumentation up to a point, but I do not claim that they can always offer a resolution—especially when they are themselves at the centre of the controversy. Writing with respect to controversy around the rules governing historical enquiry, Spitzer argues that, 'stories about the past will continue to command our assent when they proceed from shared assumptions as to relevant evidence, legitimate inference, and coherent logic. We cannot validate these standards by appealing to them, but there is no need to validate them if the parties to the conversation share them' (Spitzer, 1996, pp. 120–121). Spitzer adopts an interesting and persuasive approach to the

question of veridicality in history by examining a number of case studies of debates around attempts at historical deception—and observes the standards to which all parties to these debates are appealing. He concludes ‘this is to say not that we can stipulate the universal standards of historical truth but that we can identify the specific standards that are assumed to legitimate a given claim’ (Spitzer, 1996, p. 12).

All this movement is, nevertheless, movement around a notion in which the idea of a set of rule governed practices in a community with at least some basis of a shared discourse is pivotal and indispensable. In this sense educational research may fruitfully and creatively reach out to the wealth of intellectual and representational resources available to it inside and outside the academy, but to do so is to grasp and to apply the particular discipline which characterises any of these traditions and whose rigorous application renders their products worthy of greater attention and more confident belief.

To address a possible criticism from a different standpoint, however, neither any conversational community, nor even any rule governed conversation constitutes a discipline for the purposes of educational or any other kind of research. The conversation and the rules have to be constructed in some sense on the basis of their functionality in stronger rather than weaker warrant for belief (or disbelief). A conversation aimed at demonstrating mutual admiration or affection, asserting dominance or achieving reconciliation may be rule governed at least in the anthropological sense or in terms of linguistic moves—it may in this sense be ‘disciplined’—but it only becomes disciplined in the academic and epistemological sense of the term if it is constructed to serve this epistemological purpose. It may, as sociologists of knowledge often point out, serve other social functions (‘privileging’ particular individuals or communities, reinforcing particular social hierarchies) and the need may arise to address these social consequences, but these should not entirely distract attention from the matter of whether or not it does indeed serve its epistemological purpose.

DISCIPLINE AS AN OBSTACLE TO ENQUIRY?

This pragmatic principle of whether or not particular rule governed demands on a conversational community serve their epistemological purpose is a critical one. Rules, of course, both open up possibilities (e.g. enabling the social processes that produce meaning) and close them down e.g. by disallowing discursive forms which do not conform but which may nevertheless have the potential to reveal something interesting. Foucault writes of discourse as ‘a stumbling block, a point of resistance and a starting point for an opposing strategy’ (Foucault, 1982, p. 101). Stephen Ball explains: ‘Discourses constrain the possibilities of thought. They order and combine words in particular ways and exclude or displace other combinations. However, in so far as discourses are constituted by exclusions as well as inclusions, by what cannot be said as well as what

can be said, they stand in antagonistic relations to other discourses, other possibilities of meaning, other claims, rights and positions' (Ball, 1990, p. 2).

The notion of 'discourse' that is employed here is in many ways a more substantive one than 'discipline' as I am employing it. I have in mind a system which is primarily procedural, methodological and which frames the form of an enquiry rather than its content. 'Discourse' usually indicates something more heavily ideological characterised by theories and concepts which come to frame how people think about e.g. educational practice—notions like 'educationally disadvantaged'; 'special needs'; 'giftedness'; 'marketisation'; 'inclusive education'; 'under achievement' and their attendant ideological and theoretical baggage. In so far as it is part of the neo-Foucaultian project to examine critically the genealogy of these ideas, the power relations that they serve and the subtle ways in which they support e.g. docility and self-policing compliance under particular regimes, then this presents no threat to the notion of discipline as I have articulated it. Indeed this critical activity might, I assume, require its own discipline if it is to be conducted rigorously and successfully. 'Discourse analysis' has its own place among the range of contemporary disciplined practices in social science and, more narrowly, educational research.

No one imagines the disciplined pursuit of knowledge and understanding to be entirely free from entanglement with structures designed or developed to maintain and legitimate certain orders of power. This is precisely why its more sophisticated practitioners seek to operate under conditions which reduce these influence to a minimum e.g. by defending the autonomy of their institutions against political interference or fighting off institutional attempts to suppress research which might be damaging to the interests of the institution itself; by submitting to ethical codes which govern their rights in relation to the powerful and their obligations in their relations with the weak; by submitting to methodological and epistemological requirements which force critique of their taken-for-granted assumptions, expose the ideological underpinnings of their work and enable non-participants to challenge structural bias in the enquiry or in its conclusions.

In his classic study of the inter-relationships between the social and epistemological practices of 'academic tribes' Becher argues—and evidences on the basis of his empirical work—the claim that 'the ways in which particular groups of academics organise their professional lives are intimately related to the intellectual tasks on which they are engaged. In practice,' he acknowledges, 'the two would seem to be inseparably intertwined; but in attempting to explore the characteristic features of the relationship it is necessary to separate the first analytically from the second' (Becher, 1989, p. 1). Importantly he goes on to describe the way in which epistemological considerations come to drive social and cultural relationships rather than vice versa: 'It is crucial to my argument that, once such a field (of enquiry) becomes identified in terms of certain characteristics . . . a whole set of properties inherent in that identification

come into play—properties which can profoundly affect the way of life of those engaged in the exploration of the field. *The cultural consequences in these instances have to be seen as closely derived from epistemological considerations*' (ibid, p. 4—my italics).

One response to all this (and perhaps this is the Foucaultian response) is to say that any attempt to separate the epistemic from the political is in vain. Each attempt to escape from or find a position outside the power-knowledge nexus is doomed to fail. One perhaps rather waspish reply to this is to ask what, then, is the point of Foucault's own writing and the intellectual industry that this itself has spawned? Is this not in some sense contributing to our illumination of the conditions under which we engage in our different discourses and of the limitations and dangers which lie in them? Foucault himself would suggest that this is the case: 'Power-knowledge . . . is not for me the fundamental problem but an instrument allowing the analysis—in a way which seems to me to be the most exact—of the problem of the relationship between subject and games of truth' (from a 1988 interview cited by Marshall, 1990, p. 23). More sympathetic, however, is the reply that the relationship between intellectual enquiry in its 'disciplined' forms and structures of power is an interminable wrestling match. We can observe over time both (i) challenges to our systems of enquiry by those observing the ways in which these become distorted by structures of power and (ii) challenges to those systems of power and the constructions of the natural and social world they support by those vigorous in deploying forms of enquiry—enquiry which can illuminate both the operation of those 'knowledge-power' systems and the world over which they seek to exercise control. Of course, this last possibility could be a complete conceit, but it is a conceit which stands alongside the possibility that I am alone in the universe or that all my thoughts and actions are pre-determined: it is equally intriguing but provides no basis for the way in which one might actually conduct one's life or that small part of it which is occupied with educational enquiry and research.

CONCLUSION

The last twenty-five years have seen a huge and bewildering enlargement in the intellectual resources from which educational researchers have drawn. They have also seen a preoccupation with the *diversification* of method perhaps over the *development* of method in ways that strengthen its capacity to contribute to the epistemological project that it serves. Developing and refining the discipline of any form of enquiry must surely be a central concern for any research community in so far as this is a project which has to do with (i) *understanding* the credibility and illumination that are associated with the beliefs that issue from the research and (ii) *enhancing* the credibility that we are entitled to attach to the beliefs that issue from the research. So also must the cultivation among novices to the rigours of such enquiry of the understanding, skill and

virtue that it demands.¹ For Kuhn (1977) intellectual progress requires a context in which there is relatively close agreement on theories, methods of enquiry and the requirements for the initiation of newcomers into the discipline. Where there is the kind of pluralism and dissension that characterises science discourses and more specifically educational research, ‘systematic advances in knowledge’ as Becher puts it, ‘must await the onset of maturity and the emergence of a developed paradigm’ (Becher, 1989, p. 10). The educational research community has taken on board in the last twenty-five years a rich repertoire of forms of enquiry and representation. Perhaps in the next phase of the development of educational enquiry, we should focus on understanding and refining the conditions—the discipline—under which these are conducted.

I may, of course, have reached the wrong conclusion from my own argument, so let me return to the simplest statement of the issue that I have been trying to address to assist in its refutation. The claim of enquiry which is honoured as research is that there are features of the conduct of the enquiry which ought to command greater confidence in the beliefs which issue from it than would be expected, other things being equal, from enquiry which lacked these features.² I refer to these features at different times as the ‘systematics’, the ‘rule governed systems’ and the ‘disciplines’ of educational enquiry. Is this right? If not, what construction are we to put on whatever is going on in educational research? And if it is, should we not be seeking their functional and qualitative improvement rather than their displacement?

Correspondence: David Bridges, Centre for Applied Research in Education, University of East Anglia, Norwich NR4 7TJ, UK.
Email: d.bridges@uea.ac.uk

NOTES

1. The notion that initiation into a research community consists simply in training in methods and techniques seems to me to be a severely limited one. Underlying all this is the cultivation of, among other things, intellectual virtue.
2. Having greater confidence in what *not* to believe is in my terms included in this aspiration.

REFERENCES

- Appignanesi, R. and Garratt, C. (1995) *Post-modernism for Beginners* (Cambridge, Icon Books).
- Ball, S. J. (1990) Introducing Monsieur Foucault, in: S. J. Ball (ed.) *Foucault and Education: Disciplines and knowledge* (London, Routledge), pp. 1–8.
- Becher, T. (1989) *Academic Tribes and Territories: Intellectual enquiry and the culture of disciplines* (Milton Keynes, SRHE and the Open University Press).
- Bridges, D. (2003) *Fiction Written Under Oath? Essay in philosophy and educational research* (Dordrecht, Kluwer).
- Bridges, D. (2003) Six Stories in Search of a Character? ‘The philosopher’ in an educational research group, in P. Smeyers and M. Depaepe (eds) *Beyond Empiricism: On criteria for educational research* (Leuven, Leuven University Press).

- Castells, M. (2000) *The Rise of the Network Society, Volume I: The rise of the network society*, 2nd edn. (Malden and Oxford, Blackwell).
- Crow, M. (2002) A New American University: The new gold standard (Arizona State University at www.asu.edu/president/library/whitepapers/designimperatives.doc).
- Eisner, E. (1993) Forms of Understanding and the Future of Research, *Educational Researcher*, 22.7, pp. 5–11.
- Foucault, M. (1982) The Subject and Power, in: H. L. Dreyfus and P. Rabinow (eds) *Michel Foucault: Beyond structuralism and hermeneutics* (Brighton, Harvester Press).
- Giroux, H. (1997) Series Forward, in: R. P. Mourad, *Postmodern Philosophical Critique and the Pursuit of Knowledge in Higher Education* (Westport, CT and London, Bergin and Garvey).
- Hunt, L. History as Gesture; or the scandal of history, in: J. Arac and B. Johnston (eds) *Consequences of Theory* (Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press).
- Lancaster University Institute for Advanced Studies (2005 downloaded) Mission of the Institute of Advanced Studies at www.lancaster.ac.uk/ias/about/mission.htm
- Kuhn, T. (1977) *The Essential Tension* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press).
- Lenoir, T. (1993) The Discipline of Nature and the Nature of Disciplines, in: E. Messer-Davidow and D. R. Shumway (eds) , *Knowledges: Historical and critical studies of disciplinarity* (Charlottesville, VA, University Press of Virginia), pp. 70–102.
- Marshall, J. D. (1990) Foucault and Educational Research, in: S. J. Ball (ed.) *Foucault and Education: Disciplines and knowledge* (London, Routledge), pp. 11–28.
- McCarthy, T. (1982) Rationality and Relativism, in: J. B. Thompson and D. Held (eds) *Habermas—Critical Debates* (London, Macmillan).
- Menand, L. (2001) *The Marketplace of Ideas* (American Council of Learned Societies: Occasional Paper no. 49).
- Mourad, R. P. (1997) *Postmodern Philosophical Critique and the Pursuit of Knowledge in Higher Education* (Westport, CT and London, Bergin and Garvey).
- Peters, R. S. and White, J. P. (1969) The Philosopher's Contribution to Educational Research, *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, 1, pp. 1–15.
- Phenix, P. (1964) The Architectonics of Knowledge, in: S. Elam (ed.) *Education and the Structure of Knowledge* (Chicago, IL, Rand McNally).
- Popkewitz, T. S. (1984) *Paradigm and Ideology in Educational Research: The social functions of the intellectual* (London and New York, Falmer).
- Powell, A. G. (1980) *The Uncertain Profession: Harvard and the search for educational authority* (Cambridge MA, Harvard University Press).
- Schön, D. (1983) *The Reflective Practitioner* (New York, Basic Books).
- Schwab, J. J. (1964) Problems, Topics and Issues, in: S. Elam (ed.) *Education and the Structure of Knowledge* (Chicago, IL, Rand McNally).
- Shulman, L. (1999) Professing Educational Research, in: E. Lageman and L. Shulman (eds) *Issues in Educational Research: Problems and possibilities* (San Francisco, Jossey and Bass), pp. 159–165.
- Sizer, T. R. and Powell, A. G. (1969) Changing Conceptions of the Professor of Education, in: J. S. Counelis (ed.) *To Be a Phoenix: the education professoriate* (Bloomington, IN, Phi Delta Kappa) chapter 3.
- Smith, M. J. (2003) *Producing and Consuming Knowledge: The relevance of the 'new production of knowledge debate' for disciplinary and transdisciplinary social science* at www.sppp.us/protected-essays/2003-SPEP-Smith.doc
- Spitzer, A. B. (1996) *Historical Truth and Lies About the Past: Reflections on Dewey, Dreyfus, De Man and Regan* (Chapel Hill, NC, University of North Carolina Press).
- Stenhouse, L. (1980) *What Counts as Research?* Unpublished mimeo, CARE Archive, University of East Anglia.
- Tibble, J. W. (ed.) (1966) *The Study of Education* (London, Routledge and Kegan Paul).
- Toulmin, S. (1972) *Human Understanding*, Volume 1 (Oxford, Clarendon Press).
- Višňnovský, E. and Bianchi, G. (2002) Editorial, *Human Affairs*, vol. 12.
- Wilson, J. (1972) *Philosophy and Educational Research* (Slough, National Foundation for Educational Research).
- Woods, R. G. (1971) *Education and its Disciplines* (London, University of London Press).

Copyright of Journal of Philosophy of Education is the property of Blackwell Publishing Limited and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.