

Introduction

I want to go on living my own intellectual project.

(Goodson, 2011, p. 8)

Ivor Goodson is one of the most important thinkers and researchers on education and schooling of our times. His paper “Life Histories and the Study of Schooling” (1980–1981) rehabilitated life history methodology, establishing it as a critical approach to educational research. His book on the social construction and social histories of the curriculum, *School Subjects and Curriculum Change*, first published in 1983, secured his immediate elevation to the rank of professor, the ink on his PhD being barely dry. Since then Ivor has worked continuously and with unwavering commitment as, to use his own terms, a public intellectual. His output is prodigious. His reach, both geographically and intellectually, is awe-inspiring. He has broken fresh ground theoretically, particularly but by no means exclusively in the areas of curriculum and narrative and in conceptualizing change. Methodologically he has revitalized research agendas, insisting, for example, that including teachers and other public service professionals, their lives, dreams, and politics, is crucial to formulating, implementing, and analyzing public, particularly educational, policy. Bringing his historian’s orientation to empirical research and his historian’s concern for context and supporting documentation to sociological perspectives, he argues that the success, but more often the failure, of educational reform is traceable in no small way to the people who are responsible for its implementation on a daily basis. Their mediating influence is what counts in evaluations of efficacy, rather than inherent weaknesses in the constitution of the reform itself, however real these may also be. He has collaborated with many other significant contributors to the study of education and its role in fostering just societies, and many important educationists have offered commentaries on Ivor’s work. He has also, in the prefaces and introductions to his works and in conversations with others, offered his own readings of his output. For all those reasons, providing (in the words of the general editors to this series) a “deeper, yet accessible conceptual framework in which to negotiate and expand” his work initially presented itself as frighteningly daunting. What could possibly be added to the enormous body of

interpretation and commentary that already exists? My fears were dispelled during a meeting with Ivor to discuss the possibility that (a) this was something that could be done, (b) I might be willing to take it on, and (c) Ivor would be happy for me to do so.

Although the first point is arguably the most important, I will deal with these issues in reverse order, because Ivor's being happy for me to take it on turned out to be the easiest one to resolve, and yet it is also central to understanding and addressing the other two. Ivor did not hesitate in expressing his confidence that I would do a sterling job, grounded in the fact that we had met briefly at a conference some months before and had immediately hit it off; the "chemistry" between us was good, and there was a bond. Now, it may seem foolhardy to assign the (re)interpretation of one's life/work to date on the basis of such unscientific reasoning. But this just highlights the limitations of such reasoning. For one thing, "shrewd" is a much more accurate description of Ivor's judgment. When Jess Moriarty (2012) interviewed him, he points out the obvious fact that he would not be where he is today if he had not been "canny." More importantly, he knew I was "getting" what he was about, despite considerable differences in our biographies and histories. That we are both from what is commonly understood as a working-class background provides a strong bond of mutual comprehensibility between us. Saying we are *working class* is risky here because the term encompasses a multiplicity of lived realities. There is a danger that it glosses over rather than facilitates understandings of what that means. But as Mahoney and Zmorczek (1997) claim:

(W)hat it means to have a working class background *is* different in each case. But not so different that we do not recognise each other and not so different that our connectedness (at least on this issue) disappears. (p. 5, original emphasis)

There are powerful and enduring influences from our backgrounds that are embedded deep in our bones and within our psyches—and our hearts. One of the ways in which this manifests itself is in our resilience, something that often presents itself as a combative approach. Metaphors of war, of battle, and of fighting are embedded in Ivor's writing. If either of us had ever tried to hide our backgrounds, this kind of fighting talk would be a dead giveaway. This is not to say that Ivor is in any way aggressive. In fact he is a great romantic, although he apologizes for it when he catches himself being that way. This is not so much because he wants to fit in and romanticism in scholarly circles is not the done thing. It is because he is in constant communica-

tion with imagined dialogic others of his original community, and here romanticism can easily slip into pretension. This would invite some not inconsiderable teasing from those to whom he still owes allegiance. Where we come from, if you act in ways that might be construed as pretentious, then you are inviting others to poke fun at you. In extremis this can be a mechanism of control, but it can also take the form of good-natured teasing, and that is something Ivor obviously does enjoy.

We also knew on an intuitive level and in a visceral way that neither of us had sold out. To translate, we knew without much in the way of discussion that our loyalties were with the communities into which we were born (Ivor calls this loyalty to his “tribe”), that our life project was to address the injustices with which these communities deal on a daily basis and that even though this project takes the form of an intellectual engagement, an exercise of the mind, it is driven by the heart. The fact that I have not been as impervious to the external forces that reposition and distort the expression of those loyalties in their realization in scholarship and elsewhere, nor as steadfast in my resistance to the temptation to wander off track, only makes me appreciate all the more the achievement of someone who has remained resolutely and unwaveringly on message throughout. Establishing cause and effect is often a doomed project but I would venture to say here that Ivor’s fortitude is explained by his designation of his project as a mission.

Again, even writing the word *mission* inspires uncomfortable feelings of embarrassment and self-consciousness in me. I also know that Ivor has an abhorrence of sounding “holier than thou,” of pretension and pomposity, for reasons already mentioned. And yet, it is striking that when he speaks from the heart, when he sets out the fundamentals of what has motivated his life’s work, he uses elevated terms and language that rarely has currency in the academy. Consider the following example taken from a conversation Ivor had with Ragna Adlandsvik, which is set out in *Life Politics: Conversations About Education and Culture* (Goodson, 2011):

Bring back the poetic, the joy, which should be crucially part of education above all. It should be audacious, exciting, lively, vivid, vital, and all those things will make it emancipating. (p. 9)

This hardly echoes the measured language and subdued tones usually associated with academic writing and shortly after this utterance Ivor states, “I can be pompous, but I try not to be, and that is important” (p. 12). To reiterate, this abhorrence of pomposity must be read here not as an individualized

predilection. Beverley Skeggs's (1997) study of working-class girls on "caring" courses in a college of further education revealed how this aversion to pretension is ingrained in working-class psyches. So the work Ivor is doing is imbued with a missionary purpose and therefore requires committed, engaged, and passionate language, but at the same time he is at pains to clarify that this does not signify his wholesale embrace of a world in which this is the lingua franca, a world that would be rejected by his tribe for its ostentation and affectedness.

Turning now to my willingness to take it on, I was torn. On the one hand I could hardly believe my luck. I had taken a special interest in Ivor's work since my first attempt at writing a life history of my own educational experiences and trajectories. I was only weeks into an MA in educational research at the University of Sheffield and had the huge good fortune to be taught by Pat Sikes, who had coauthored with Ivor a book on doing life history in educational settings (Goodson & Sikes, 2001). Pat marked my assignment, noting that "this is a good example of a life history according to the sort of model that Ivor Goodson advocates." I had not intentionally followed his lead. My approach had been more informed by Charles Wright Mills's (1959) *The Sociological Imagination* and the linking of personal biography to history because at the time I could not afford to buy the Goodson and Sikes text and the library copy was already out on loan. But I needed no persuasion that we are "in history."

My parents told me that if it had not been for "the war" (World War II) I would not be here. After the war, they had both come to work in the woolen textile mills of Huddersfield, in what was then the West Riding of Yorkshire, my Serbian dad as a displaced person and later a "naturalized" British citizen and my Austrian mum as an economic migrant. Their arguments were also explicitly framed by my dad as reenactments of Serbian struggles to throw off the yoke of Hapsburg imperialist oppression. History is air to me and so Ivor's insistence on folding history into otherwise ahistorical sociological accounts did more than strike a chord. I felt fortunate that I had a space in which to engage with his work more deeply and then, importantly, to share fresh and new understandings with others.

On the other hand, I had reservations because I was not sure there was anything fresh or new left to say to those already familiar with his work and I was concerned that this volume would have appeal only to those coming new to it, as vital as these readers are. To my mind Ivor has been absolutely consistent from the start of his intellectual involvement in the field of education,

has been totally on message, in words I used earlier. In his own words, those of the quotation that opens this chapter, he has lived his intellectual project. His role as a public intellectual is profoundly informed by the person he is, which in turn reflects his continued commitment to his tribe. He alludes to loyalty to his tribe in some way in almost everything he writes. For me a striking example is when he tells Ragna Adlandsvik (Goodson, 2011) about meeting his wife, Mary, in the book *Life Politics*, which he dedicates to Mary. I was left with the strong impression that only their son had forged a stronger bond between them than their commitment to public service (Mary was a nurse dedicated to working for the National Health Service).

However, I was also aware that Ivor's work might be *misread*, even in ways that contradict each other (as overly deterministic, for example, or as relativist and uncritically postmodern, or too liberally humanist and so on). Ivor took Barry Troyna to task for just this:

(I)n some ways you want it both ways there. Which is that you're saying that you want us to get at this sense of otherness and that it hasn't come out yet, and then you are turning around and telling me that I'm strengthening their sense of otherness. (cited in Sikes, 2011, pp. 27–28)

In some respects this kind of misreading is understandable. Although I most readily detect a social constructionist perspective in his work, Ivor works in complex and nuanced, interdisciplinary ways and is respectful of other scholarly genres and traditions; he rarely dismisses them out of hand and seeks instead to understand how and where they connect and how each might support the other, which is not to say he shies away from intellectual dispute. As Andy Hargreaves (1994) has pointed out, Ivor's "intellectual style" does not "easily wince at criticism, in jest or in earnest either in the giving or in the receipt" (p. 1). Nevertheless, part of the purpose of this book is to leave no room for doubt that Ivor's focus has always been to set "stories of action within theories of context," a phrase that he has borrowed from Lawrence Stenhouse (1975) and that he uses often.

This brings me now to the first and most important reason for our meeting, which addressed the possibility of providing a "deeper, yet accessible conceptual framework in which to negotiate and expand" understanding of his work. Could this be done? The fact that this book is now in production clearly demonstrates that we thought it could. However, in line with the need to bring some aspects of his work into sharper focus, I am presenting readers not with a framework but with a conceptual lens, produced from what I have

taken to be the foundational and constitutional elements of Ivor's scholarship. This is not a matter of semantics alone. The main advantage of a lens over a framework is that it cannot easily be reassembled or reconfigured or tinkered with in some other way, at least not without fundamentally changing its constitution. Even if it is made dull it can be reground and repolished.

I have still taken equally seriously the requirements of interpretive depth and accessibility. The latter task is made less challenging by the fact that, first, Ivor has written much in very accessible ways (interviews, stories, biographical and autobiographical material). Second, the motivation for his prolific output is to act as scribe for the community from which he comes, and for other similar communities. This is not to say that Ivor thinks only some people can speak for themselves. On the contrary, he has repeatedly expressed his love of and respect for oral traditions and has strongly linked such traditions with the community, particularly the family, into which he was born. He has emphasized that oral expressions are in no way innately inferior to written forms of expression. His grandfather Jim could not read or write, and yet he left an enduring legacy as a storyteller, for example. My view is that anyone who has read Ivor's work and would still argue otherwise is out to make mischief.

But oral storytelling communities are disadvantaged, particularly in societies where the written word holds sway, their stories and histories more vulnerable to extinction. Thus acting as a scribe is not a matter of putting words into someone's mouth, but of recording words uttered. The scribe is merely an instrument for converting words into a form that cannot be lost to time, or be redefined by more powerful constituencies, at least not as easily. To be a scribe is therefore to perform a service. Being of service is fundamental to the concept of the public intellectual and this in turn is fundamental to understanding Ivor's life and work.

There is a third aspect to Ivor's accessibility. Andrew Sayer (2011) has argued convincingly that sociologists too readily dismiss the idea that there are things about which people care very much, real things about which it is entirely understandable to care, where not caring would be incomprehensible. He maintains that accounting for this in terms of socialization and other sociological concepts is reductive and dehumanizing. Ivor's intellectual project and his work connect with Sayer's argument. At its heart is the conviction that people do care about things, that we do theorize about our own lives, and that these lay theories and practical reasonings do count, albeit in ways that also need to be interrogated and contextualized. So his writing makes sense

because it connects with life events and with feelings about them. In support of this contention I will give the example of my own decision to leave teaching.

I got my first job teaching German and French in a comprehensive school in 1983. I had become a teacher for many reasons, some selfish, some pragmatic, some idealistic, and not least because it made my parents proud of me. But I had joined the profession in turbulent times and over the years I became more and more dissatisfied with the changes being driven through, which I thought reduced the meaning and purpose of education to something that could be checked against a list of skills and competencies. What is more, I did take in a personal way some of the anti-teacher rhetoric that was being employed to garner public support for ideologically motivated change (that would nevertheless have such far-reaching and real consequences for the majority of the nation's children). How could I not? When I left teaching and went to work, for rather more money, in the financial services industry my mother was still not to be persuaded I had made the right move. "But Yvonne. You were a teacher!" she cried, paying little heed to the fact that public respect for teachers was no longer something that could be taken for granted. Having two children also brought many changes to my personal and professional life, but the tipping point was the prospect of the National Curriculum. The passage of time has dulled my recollection of my specific objections to it but I do recall lamenting, "We may as well just give them a phrase book and tell them to learn that."

So I finally made a decision to leave teaching in 1995. I last set foot in a comprehensive classroom in 2002 and I am still teaching now, albeit very little and in a university rather than a comprehensive school. This signals, I think, how conflicted I was about my decision. Reading Ivor's work, which recognizes the centrality of teachers to curriculum reform, helped me to appreciate the interplay of what I was doing and feeling—lesson after lesson, day after day, term after term, and year after year—and what was happening on the broader stage. I wish I had read it at the time. It would have saved me a lot of heartache and soul searching. Despite the obvious implication of political interventions in education in my decision to go, and relieved as I was to be out of it, leaving the profession felt more like desertion, dereliction of duty, and personal failure rather than a response to those interventions.

The book, as the title indicates, is organized into two broad sections. The first section, "Reading Ivor Goodson," starts by outlining the fundamental and constitutional elements of the conceptual lens, and these will be gathered

under three organizing principles: “holding on,” “the public intellectual,” and “stories of action in theories of context.” The interplay of the personal and the political sits at the heart of all three, but has a different inflection for each. Holding on focuses on the role of continuity and consistency in Ivor as a person and in his life and work and why it is apposite to use the expression *life/work* in this connection. The public intellectual sets out what Ivor himself has said about what it means to be a public intellectual and why it is unwise to proceed with your own intellectual projects without due consideration of the way external influences, particularly but not exclusively political forces, can position and reposition the meaning of what you are about. Stories of action in theories of context traces the contours of Ivor’s commitment to projects of social justice, locating it in the social and historical conditions of his own biography: his background, his training as a historian and career as a teacher, and his subsequent return to academe.

A bridging chapter, “Life Politics,” marks the transition from the development of the conceptual lens and its deployment in a reading of his substantive contribution. We will then move in largely chronological order from the publication of *School Subjects and Curriculum Change* in 1983 to his most recent publications in the field of narrative. These chapters are headed “Curriculum,” “Teachers’ Lives and Professional Knowledge,” and “Narrative,” but, in view of the sheer volume of his publications, they cannot take the form of a detailed or even a brief explication of each of his works. I do focus on some key texts, but in the main *reading* here is to be taken in the meta sense of coming to the overarching and underlying ideas and motivations they reflect.

Although my approach is chronological, I have not been concerned to sequence my narrative. Each chapter is intended to stand in its own corner, but there are three broad reasons for taking a chronological approach nonetheless. The first arises out of Ivor’s conviction that covering topics chronologically pays due regard to the importance of historical context. In other words, ordering the material in this way is consistent with the importance of historical and social context, a mainstay of Ivor’s conceptualization of the life history approach. Thus, the changing political scene in the UK produced a substantive shift in focus in his work at the start of the 1990s. The second is that it makes explicit Ivor’s “intellectual journey” and states the importance of the personal significance of events in the evolution of his thinking and the focus of his interests: the fact he did not learn to read until he was 8, his leaving school at the age of 15 and subsequent return to education after the inter-

vention of a teacher, breaking off an academic career teaching undergraduate history to become a teacher in comprehensive schools, his efforts to teach things that engaged his pupils, his return to the academy, leaving the UK to work in Canada and the US before returning to the UK, to what was clearly the immense relief of his wife and son. All these events have been personally significant but have also affected his scholarly concerns.

A third advantage of the chronological approach is that it obviates the need to group topics thematically (the headings I have used are more in the way of umbrella terms). I will expand on this statement in the next chapter, but in short, a chronological approach releases the material to a greater extent from the influence of my organizing principles and allows the underlying and overarching *raison d'être* for Ivor's unrelenting work rate and his total commitment to social justice to do most of the talking.

The second section is titled "Teaching Ivor Goodson." If the first section broadly focuses on substance, the second broadly focuses on methodology, although the way in which each has informed the other will be emphasized, because as William Pinar (1995) points out:

Goodson's historical focus is unique, informed by life history and politics. His interest in life history is informed by politics and history. And his political theory is embedded in history and life history. (p. xxi)

The consistency, coherence, and harmony of Ivor's ideas are an essential aspect of the conceptual lens that is being applied. The borders between the private individual and the public intellectual are nebulous. Indeed, Ivor's tireless intellectual and academic endeavors can be seen as a means of actualizing many of his private hopes, dreams, and desires. He also works in a modality of "holding on" not only to the formative experiences of his own childhood but to a longer family history of "independent thinking" (2005a). He emphasizes to Jess Moriarty (2012) that he does "applied writing," linked to "probably the overarching concern, which is with social justice generally and that goes back to my background." This section therefore takes as its starting point a conversation I had with Ivor as "Reading Ivor Goodson" neared completion. After trying a number of approaches, this best addressed the challenge of not creating false divisions between substance and methodology and between the different aspects of his life/work. What is more, a central tenet, if not *the* central tenet, of Ivor's approach to pedagogy is that teaching and learning is an interactive enterprise. He regards "dialogic en-

counters” such as conversations and interviews also as “pedagogic encounters” and a conversation performs each of these imperatives of his thinking.

In the introduction to a volume of his collected works (2005a), Ivor also writes that one never knows which lines of thought will become fruitful and which turn out to be a cul-de-sac. There is a tension therefore between this sense of organic development and the necessary reviewing, abridging, and appraisal that had to go on in this volume. With this in mind I have been at pains to avoid bringing a sense of closure and completeness to the reading of his work or to reduce it to a bland and indifferent account from which all passion is absent and which is at odds with the vibrancy of the originals. In other words, I have tried, despite all the cherry-picking and summarizing and sound-biting, to retain the “Ivor-ness” of what I have written about. This book is about a morally inflected approach to scholarship, one dedicated to a politics of transformation, driven by a practical, passionate, principled humanity. The proposition that Ivor Goodson is concerned with lived realities and the processes of their production and that his theories articulate that which is common sense to those who live them on a daily basis sits at the heart of the continuing relevance of his work, not just to academics, students, and those in or entering the teaching profession, but also to anyone with an interest in a more just society.