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Avis, James

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Educational Research, the Teacher Researcher and Social Justice

James Avis

The paper examines a number of themes addressing the relationship between educational research and the teacher researcher in England. Whilst these issues are examined on a general level there is a particular interest in post compulsory education and training. The paper seeks to place the debate within its socio-economic context arguing that current conditions focusing upon 'what works' and an economistic logic has placed the teacher and educational researcher within an ideational context that lends itself to technicism and instrumentalism. It is argued that such a narrow view of educational and teacher research does nothing but impoverish itself and its contribution to society as a whole.

Education today exists within a particular social universe – the social universe of capital (Rikowski, 2001, p1).

In this paper I want to bring together and explore a number of themes that address the relationship between educational research and the teacher researcher. Whilst these issues are examined on a general level there is a particular interest in post compulsory education and training; that is to say the Learning and Skills sector of post-16 education. Recent education research conducted in universities has been criticised for its failure to address the real concerns of educational practitioners in the improvement and enhancement of classroom practice. At the Learning and Skills Sector conference, *Research for the New Learning and Skills Sector*, in December 2000, such views were expressed and were reflected in the emphasis placed on research for the 'real' world (Blackstone, 2000; Reid, 2000; Howard, 2000). A 'real' world construed as one in which the needs of the economy and learner are paramount, being based upon an acceptance of current economic relations in which the aim is to enhance the effectiveness of present arrangements. The paper commences with a discussion of educational research and is followed by a section which explores practice based and teacher research. These sections seek to locate the debate within a set of arguments as well as to indicate the way in which teacher research and practice based research has been viewed in recent decades. This is followed by an examination of the conditions in which educational research has been located and comments upon the shift from the social democratic

welfare state to that of post-Thatcherite New Labour state. New Labour's Durkheimian vision of the social formation is examined in relation to its notion of consensus and model of the economy.

Educational Research

Tooley and Darby (1998) as well as Hillgate *et al* (1998) suggest, for different reasons, that much educational research is inadequate. The former in their Ofsted study suggest that much educational research is seriously flawed as it lacks rigour and is marked by an unwarranted partisanship. Hillgate *et al* (1998) in their DfEE study argue that a significant amount of educational research is of such small scale that it is unable to establish generalisable findings and is therefore unlikely to advance the cumulative development of knowledge which is required if its results are to have a purchase on practice and to inform policy. In addition they suggest research is more often than not presented in a manner that is inaccessible to non-academics and fails to offer an interpretation of its significance for policy making or practitioner audiences. In some circles critiques such as these have acquired a hegemonic status being embedded within a set of taken for granted assumptions. For example, in 1999 David Blunkett, the then secretary of state for education, wrote in his ESRC speech:

> Can the social science community help to improve government or is it destined to be largely irrelevant to the real debates that affect people's life chances?... We really do have the opportunity

in the 21st century to transform both the standing of social science research and its relationship to policy development and implementation.

> But often in practice we have felt frustrated by a tendency for research either to address issues other than those directly relevant to the political and policy debate or, in a seemingly perverse way, to set out the collective evidence that will prove a policy wrong rather than genuinely seeking to evaluate it or interpret its impact. (Blunkett, 1999, 36)

David Blunkett along with a range of other critics calls for social and educational research that is relevant to practice thereby enhancing improvement, whether it be in relation to social policy or educational practice. Critiques such as these have led to a number of developments amongst which has been the establishment of the *National Education Research Forum* (NERF) as well a renewed interest in the teacher researcher. In the case of the former, building upon David Hargreaves Teacher Training Agency (TTA) speech (1996) and echoed in Hillgate *et al* (1998), the forum is to promote relevant educational research.

> Research and development has a major part to play in the formation of educational policy and the provision of educational services. Its task is to extend the knowledge base for education and to ensure that it can be drawn upon at the point of need, whether this is to inform policy, teaching or learning. The success of research and development will be measured by the extent to which education services reflect the use of research outcomes and are challenged to develop by the emergence of new evidence and new concepts. (NERF, 2001, p2)

The forum's interests sit comfortably with the desire to promote and cumulatively develop evidence based research that can inform practice. The forum in its consultative document set itself the task of developing a strategy:

> [the purpose of which] is to enable research to provide a sound, more comprehensive basis for high quality decision-making at national, local and classroom level to benefit learners, their families and wider society as well as practitioners, policy makers and researchers...

> The forum is aware of the interest that exists among teachers in research and development, particularly the use of research to inform their professional practice. The task is to enable them

to acquire the opportunities, confidence and capacity to participate in and enact the principles of evidence-informed practice. (NERF, 2001, p3)

In a number of respects this remit has an affinity with the evidence based research group at the London Institute of Education which seeks to develop protocols whereby empirical and non-empirical research can be evaluated against rigorous standards (Gough, 2000). There is an echo here of Tooley and Darby's (1998) work and their attempt to formulate criteria against which educational research can be judged (and see Tooley, 1999). These attempts rest comfortably with the orientation of NERF. Such work carries with it the danger of prescription and technicism which could lead to educational research becoming locked into a particular formulaic framework, acceptance of which determines funding, substantive focus, assessment of worth, as well as publication (NFER, 2001).

Teacher Research

Central to the critique of educational research is the distance of academic research from the immediacy of practice. However in these critiques the emphasis is placed upon the development of practice based research that can lead to educational improvement and it is at this juncture that the teacher researcher has a part to play. The interest in the teacher researcher is exemplified by the DfEE's Best Practice Research Scholarships (BPRS) and on a more modest scale by the Learning Skills Development Agency's (formerly FEDA) interest in funding practitioner research. Paradoxically, for some years now, there has been an interest in developing practitioner research in FE colleges and in some instances colleges have personnel who have designated research posts. There has also been a significant body of work conducted collaboratively with the then Further Education Development Agency (now LSDA) as well as partnerships with higher education institutions (see for example Elliott, 1996). In some respects further education has a more developed research culture and sensibilities than the school sector. It is also characterised by a greater level of autonomy from higher education in its research activities. For example, in the DfEEs Best Practice Research Scholarships school teacher researchers are normally mentored and steered by research staff located within higher education institutions.

There are a number of points that need to be made about criticisms of educational research conducted in the academy, as well as the interest in practitioner research. These arguments are not new and in some

> ...a particular formulaic framework, acceptance of which determines funding, substantive focus, assessment of worth, as well as publication.

respects represent a return to those present in the decades following the 1950s (see for example, Hammersley, 1993; Pring, 2000). At that time, Hammersley suggests:

> We can identify several criticisms of conventional educational research deployed by advocates of TR [teacher research] e.g. Stenhouse, 1975; Carr and Kemmis, 1986], though these are given varying emphasis by different critics:
>
> 1. That it is largely irrelevant to the practical concerns of teachers.
>
> 2. That it is often invalid because it is separated from the object that it claims to understand: notably, the classroom practice of teachers.
>
> 3. That it is undemocratic in that it allows the views of educational researchers to define the reality in which teachers are forced to work.
>
> 4. That it amounts to exploitation. (Hammersley, 1993, p215)

What is notable about these criticisms is that there is a similarity between these and those currently emphasised, particularly in relation to the relevance of research for practitioners, albeit that they are located in qualitatively different social conditions – the former within the social democratic state and latter within the new Labour contracting state. However beyond the interest in relevance there is a rather different focus in that the earlier critique addressed large scale research projects which were distanced from practice and tended to reify classroom relations (see Pring, 2000 for discussion). There is also a concern, as expressed in the work of Carr and Kemmis (1986), with the deepening of democratic relations whereby teachers become engaged participants in educational research along with other constituencies. There is a clear argument here that draws upon Habermasian critical theory and makes a strong link between these and social and economic transformation towards greater social justice. The critique in this case is directed against instrumental reason that technicises educational processes and that reduces these to means-ends relations. The teacher researcher becomes pivotal in unseating unwarranted claims to expertise as well as becoming a focal point for the development of radical educational practices that challenge hierarchical and oppressive social relations. It is here we encounter an interest in human emancipation and the development of a related praxis. Whilst Carr and Kemmis represent a Habermasian view of the teacher researcher; this is not so far from the position espoused by Richard Pring (2000) who calls for collaborative relations and reasserts the specificity of classroom practices, pointing out both the complexity of educational processes and therefore the difficulty of

applying external prescriptions to classroom practices. It is for these reasons that Pring supports the professional development of teachers as well as the centrality of classroom research to that process (but see Hammersley, 1993 for a critique). Pring's recent work seeks to resurrects the Stenhouse tradition of teacher research (Pring, 2001, and see particularly chapter 8).

Conditions

Marx once commented:

> Hegel remarked somewhere that all facts and personages of great importance in world history occur, as it were twice. He forgot to add: the first time as tragedy, the second as farce. (Marx and Engels, 1973, p96)

Although it is somewhat mischievous to use this quote it serves to draw attention to the new conditions in which the debate surrounding educational research is located. Pat Ainley (2000) in his reply to *Professor Pring* locates the early work concerned with the teacher researcher within the classic post-war welfare state and sets this against the current policy context of the post-welfare/workfare contracting state (and see Pring, 2000). The earlier period was based on local autonomy and partnership that was free of heavy-handed state direction whereas the latter is marked by increased central direction, control and surveillance which seeks to dictate the terrain on which educational research is carried out. Much has been written about the development and the characteristics of the social democratic education settlement which corresponds to Ainley's classic welfare state (see, for example, Education Group, 1981; Avis, 1993). However it is worthwhile drawing out a number of the distinctive features of this settlement, key amongst which was legitimated teacher professionalism (Lawn, 1997, Lawn and Grace, 1987). This model of professionalism gave teachers autonomy in the classroom. The classroom was construed as their sphere of operation which they legitimately controlled, drawing upon their professional skills and expertise. They were the curriculum and pedagogic experts who understood the needs of learners. Teacher research located within this set of ideas is reflected in work of Pring, Carr and Kemmis, with research seen as both an extension of and central to professionalism.

Legitimated teacher professionalism and the social democratic settlement was undermined by the ideological work of the new right and its allies being reflected in the educational reforms enacted by the Thatcher ascendancy following the electoral victory of 1979 and subsequent Conservative governments. The critique is well enough known but again there are several features that can be usefully explored: the

notion of professional capture, the critique of bureaucracy and the lack of flexibility. The notion of professional capture suggests that teachers and other similarly placed welfare workers have abused their positions in order to secure their own interests. This argument also rests with a similar though differently accented critique that suggested teachers had introduced their own radical politics into classroom teaching. That is to say they had become involved in indoctrination rather than education which contributed to an apparent fall in educational standards. Critiques such as these undermined teachers claims to expertise and professional authority. In this New Right critique the bureaucratic context of education colluded with the preceding problems creating an education system that was cumbersome and lacked responsiveness.

The Thatcherite critique sought to and succeeded in transforming the social democratic educational settlement, setting in its place the disciplines of the market, centralised curriculum provision and the growth of managerialism. Although Thatcherite policies failed to gain the ascendancy and consensual authority characterised by social democracy, they did however transform the context in which schools and colleges operated. This was the heritage that New Labour built upon in the years following their 1997 electoral victory.

New Labour welfare settlement

A significant body of literature addresses New Labour's impact on the welfare system and underlines the continuities with the previous Conservative regime (see for example, Avis, 2000; Hatcher and Hirtt, 1999; Cole, 1999). New Labour has adopted and re-accented elements of the Thatcherite period; market concerns, as well as questions of educational effectiveness and centralisation. This is set within an educational settlement organised around the notion of competitiveness which sees the economy as pivotal to the health of wider society. Indeed society as a whole must struggle to enhance the competitiveness of the economy so that success can be attained in the global market place. It is within such a framework that the education system operates. Although New Labour has a commitment towards widening participation and the creation of a society marked by social inclusion and cohesion, this is driven by economic interests. It is assumed that a socially inclusive and cohesive society will make the best use of its human and social capital and that the move towards widening participation and inclusion will in effect generate the economic resources that will secure the well being of the population in general. That is to say, through the development of human and social capital economic competitiveness will be secured through value added waged labour.

Education is to play a key role in this process as it is thought to be a central site for the development of human capital. It is therefore necessary to ensure that it operates effectively. It is important to recognise that within this ideational framework there is a happy coincidence between the needs of those stakeholders who have an interest in education. Thus parents and families have a vested interest in the full development of learner potential at whatever level, whether this be in the education of those with learning difficulties or the gifted and talented (DfEE, 2001a). The employer has an interest in the development of a labour force that is suitably skilled and possesses the appropriate dispositions. For the wider society there is an interest in the development of a prosperous and socially cohesive social formation. In this argument economic success is presumed to be a necessary precondition for the creation of a fair and just society.

> We are living in a fast changing world. British businesses can no longer compete on the basis of low cost, low value added activity. To be successful, businesses and individuals need to learn new skills and use their knowledge to produce higher value added goods and services. (DtI DfEE, 2001, summary, unnumbered)

I am reminded of Christopher Ball's (1991) 'virtuous circle' which sits alongside this type of argument and sees economic success enabling a more inclusive and therefore socially cohesive society which in turn provides the precondition for economic success. These are the sorts of arguments that underpin lifelong learning and the call for the creation of a learning society. The difficulty is that they often view waged labour as being the key to social inclusion and cohesion and work within an instrumentalist model of education. In the current economic conditions waged labour as a vehicle towards social justice is something of a chimera.

The context in which educational and teacher researchers are placed is significantly different to that found within the social democratic settlement. There has been a significant transformation of the welfare state and its relation to the economy. The welfare state and the services it provides, rather than being seen as a measure of the good society in which the economy provides for the well being of its citizens, has been reconfigured.

> The image of the well-ordered national economy providing resources for the national state and society is now replaced by the image of the extravagant 'big government' state and society undermining efficient national economic performance. This shift helps account for the seemingly paradoxical situation in which

governmental discourses in the wealthiest nations on earth contains an assumption that social welfare regimes are no longer affordable in the forms we have come to know them. (Du Gay, 2000, p 117)

Economic as opposed to social interests have become hegemonic with the institutions of state operating on a terrain which sees the pursuit of competitiveness as pivotal. Some years ago Rustin wrote:

The fundamental assumption of the Blair project is that unless Britain can reach the standard of performance of its global competitors, in virtually every aspect of life, there is no hope of achieving lasting improvements in well-being. 'Getting competitive is the name of the game'. (Rustin, 1998, p7)

In the current conditions notions of teacher expertise have been undermined and replaced by greater managerial surveillance as well as centralised control orchestrated around the pursuit of competitiveness. In some respects teachers work has been redefined so that they become functionaries whose labour is to be directed in line with the central state. These ideas set the terrain on which education institutions operate and are perhaps more pronounced within the Learning and Skills sector which is seen as having an intimate relation with employers and the satisfaction of labour market needs.

> The Governments aims in creating the LSC [Learning and Skills Council] are clear. We want to create a new system of post-16 learning in this country which is coherent and accessible and is notably responsive to the needs of individuals, business and communities. In putting the needs of learners firmly at the centre of our proposals for reform, it is also our unswerving aim that the LSC and all post-16 learning in this country should manifest the highest standards of provision and achievement. *In this way, we intend that the LSC should make a significant contribution to upskilling the nation, increasing the employability of individuals and securing the competitiveness of UK business.* [my emphasis] (DfEE, 1999, p2)

Given the above context how should we make sense of the relations that surround educational research and the teacher researcher? For Stephen Ball the proposals embodied in NERF are deeply problematic. He writes in his *'brief and bilious response'*

> [NERF] writes about educational research as though this were not part of and strongly related to the general field of social sciences and the disputes and diversities that animate and develop social research. It is difficult to think about educational research in any meaningful way in isolation from its foundations in sociology, psychology, history, economics and philosophy. But this is exactly what the Paper does. Here educational research is simply a set of technical rational procedures un-beset by uncertainty and unmarked by any kind of epistemological reflexivity (Ball, 2001, p266).

In part the separation of educational research from its foundations in the social sciences and humanities means that the wider context of educational processes may be ignored. This may arise through the marginalisation of history or of the wider structural context in which education is placed. A recognition of the foundations of educational research serves to problematise any one approach. For example, a narrow focus on educational research may examine classroom processes or managerial effectiveness within schools but may fail to historicize or set such processes within their wider context. There is a real and dangerous tendency that education research that is orientated towards practice will move towards an instrumental and technicist understanding of research processes. Such a view is not only present in NERF but also in the focus upon evidence based and practitioner research. These developments rest within a context in which the pursuit of economic success is seen as axiomatic. Such a standpoint is reflected in New Labour's concern with 'joined-up' thinking as well as its interest in 'what works'.

On one level New Labours focus upon widening participation and the pursuit of excellence can be interpreted as part of a democratising process concerned with the empowerment of the marginalised and disadvantaged. As such New Labour's project can be seen as fundamentally linked to a deep and abiding concern with social justice. In this case social justice is conceived of as an extension of opportunity, whether this be in terms of education or employment for previously excluded groups. However it is at this juncture that such an orientation meets its own contradictions, key amongst which is the assumption that the economy can deliver forms of employment that are compatible with the extension of opportunities throughout the population. In other words it is unlikely that empowering and well paid employment that utilises the individuals potential will become available to all who have the requisite skills. For example, Gorz has written:

> A new system has been established which is abolishing 'work' on a massive scale. It is restoring the worst forms of domination, subjugation and exploitation by forcing each to fight against all in order to obtain the 'work' it is abolishing. It is not this abolition we should object to, but its claiming to perpetuate that same work, the norms, dignity and availability of which

it is abolishing, as an obligation, as a norm, and as the irreplaceable foundation of the rights and dignity of all. (Gorz, 1999, p1)

Bowring (2000), developing this line of argument, suggests that the form of waged labour in capitalist societies has been fundamentally transformed so that the wage nexus characteristic of earlier forms of capitalist development has been displaced. This means that a clearly definable relationship between waged labour and remuneration has become ruptured. For the current discussion the point is that a research strategy predicated upon the development of competitiveness and orchestrated on behalf of capitalist needs misses the point and will not be able to develop the forms of active citizenship required within a post-capitalist society. A preoccupation with meeting the needs of capitalism and developing the appropriate subject dispositions amongst learners will not necessarily align with those found within in a society that is seeking to transcend those very relations. A research strategy that misrecognises capitalist needs as those of the individual will be unlikely to prefigure changed social relations (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977). However, having said this it should be noted that teachers will undoubtedly work within the interstices of research policy and practice with a view to empower and develop their learners (see Bowe et al, 1992). An educational strategy that prioritises the development of competitiveness and that construes success in this pursuit as leading towards a society based on social justice is ultimately flawed. This is because such a pursuit is framed by the logic of capitalist competition which is indifferent to questions of social justice or human emancipation in any thing other than an instrumental and transient way.

Professionalism and the teacher researcher
It might be suggested that the previous argument forwards an unwarranted and unsustainable claim, linking the reproduction of capitalist relations to educational research and school processes. Clearly there are all sorts of ruptures and tensions in these relations. However, it should be noted that education policy is currently predicated on an economic logic. In addition New Labour's preferred construction of education research is classroom-based and orientated towards raising standards. For example, the guidance for the Best Practice Research Scholarships states:

The scholarships are to enable teachers to undertake classroom-based and sharply focused small-scale studies in priority areas, and to apply and disseminate their findings. Using research processes to investigate classroom practice is a good way of increasing understanding about to how to raise standards of teaching and learning. It

can have benefits for the individual teacher and their school, and for other schools through sharing lessons learned. (DfEE, 2001b, p1).

And one of the key assessment criteria is; 'how will your research help you to raise standards? Successful candidates will need to clearly explain the relationship between their research and the task of raising standards' (DfEE, 2001c, p2). Interest in raising educational standards and improving classroom processes are similarly reflected in the NERF proposals as well as in Tooley's work. However in the case of the BPRS there appears to be a reductionist and simplifying logic. Given the extreme complexities of classroom relations it would seem problematic for a lone researcher to be able to single-handedly raise standards. It seems that the model of teacher research is different to that characterised in the work of Carr and Kemmis (1986), Pring (2001) and many others. In this work there is a dialectical relationship between teachers professional role and the research process derived immediately from practice which is embodied in a form of praxis. In the case of BPRS, research is to be orientated towards a set of predefined research priorities. This prioritisation could be seen as reflecting an attempt to develop cumulative research evidence that could be used to inform policy and practice, along the lines suggested by Hillage et al (1998). In a similar vein Reid (2000) of the Learning and Skills Agency calls for evidence based research that focuses upon 'real' policy and delivery issues and addresses individual learner and employer needs. Blackstone (2000) at the same conference called for systematic research in the Learning and Skills sector that would provide evidence for policy and practice but which would also require strategic co-ordination. Such research would offer findings rooted in the 'real' world, accessible and supported by effective research networks and that would address priority areas. Whilst teacher research may be thought of as contributing cumulatively to evidence based research, particularly in the Learning and Skills sector; at the same time these interventions can be thought of as an attempt to sensitise teachers to the insights of evidence based research. Such sensitisation serves to refigure teacher professionalism. In this model teacher research plays a significant role but this will not necessarily be that of the active researcher, rather the teacher will use evidence based research to inform their practice. This shift is significant in that such a re-organisation focused on 'what works' seems to have an affinity with technicisation as well as with the early research on education that the first wave of teacher research was a reaction against. Scott and Usher write in relation to action research:

Its origins, in the educational world at least, lie in a curriculum reform that sought to make

academic research relevant to practitioners' problems. With this came the recognition that teachers could themselves be researchers, doing research, geared to their practice of a kind radically different from the dominant 'scientific' research of the time. (Scott and Usher, 1999, p36)

Paradoxically the current attention given to teacher research can be linked to the state's interest in controlling and directing professional labour. However such a state project will be doomed to failure not only because of the complexity of classroom and teaching processes but also because of the inevitable ability of professional labour to appropriate state intervention and to manipulate this, at least in part, for their own professional purposes (Bowe, Ball and Gold, 1992). Gleeson and Shain's research on managers and teachers in further education identified three orientations to the context in which participants were located: unwilling, willing and strategic compliance. The latter is important for the current discussion as it is indicative of the way in which professionals can work with the grain of educational reform whilst sustaining and developing a progressive practice. For example, Gleeson and Shain's work emphasises the possibilities offered by Seddon's (1997) notion of strategic compliance. In relation to middle managers they write:

> This response [strategic compliance] is perhaps best explained as a form of artful pragmatism which reconciles professional and managerial interests (1999, p.482)

Strategic compliers work with the progressive possibilities that change opens up and are characterised by a form of pragmatism that accepts some aspects of the new conditions as non-negotiable whilst others can be worked on progressively. For example, moves towards cross-institutional partnerships, the use of new teaching technologies, co-operative team working that shares resources and develop teaching materials, are all thought to offer progressive possibilities. Strategic compliance may be the way in which lecturers and others within further education can struggle to improve both the conditions in which they labour and the quality of what they deliver.

However it should be noted that within the previous analysis there is a danger of reifying state relations and failing to recognise the contradictions and sites of struggle that exist within and across the instruments of state and their ongoing mediation.

Social antagonism
A silenced feature in New Labour's response to educational research and the role of teacher researchers derives from an implicit model of the

social formation and the nature of economic relations present within society. Levitas has referred to a new Durkheimian hegemony underpinning New Labour's social policy.

> The character of the new political discourse very clearly reflects the language of Durkheim, with its appeal to social integration, solidarity and social cohesion. What is less immediately obvious is that the model of social process embedded in contemporary political thought is also fundamentally Durkheimian; in a deep, as well as superficial way, we live in a new Durkheimian hegemony. (Levitas, 1998, p178)

These Durkheimian themes are intimately related to the competitiveness settlement which is to be achieved through the development of a successful economy, one able to secure wider participation and social inclusion into the economic and social life of society. A successful economy, it is claimed, will benefit all and thus economic development becomes a key political goal. Unlike earlier epochs a strong economy offers opportunity to all in a very real sense. Szreter reflects this type of argument when he suggests:

> ... the critical question of the most effective means through which – once it has been 'produced' through the education and training systems – human capital (skills and expertise) can be combined in the market economy into creative and productive commercial partnerships and teams. This is where social capital is of crucial significance. Social capital is the result of the maximum diversity and density of positive social relationships between individuals in the market place of work and production. This in turn permits human capital to achieve its most productive combinations and outcomes for the economy...
>
> The social capital perspective emphasizes that only mutually trusting human relations permits the most efficient and transparent communication of the most relevant and valuable information to occur between workers engaged in production... (Szreter, 1999, p39)

Such a framework comes up against its own contradictions and whilst apologists would argue that economic relations have been fundamentally transformed so that the inequalities of the past have been, or at least are being undermined by the need to develop human and social capital, this is not necessarily the case. The prevalence of neo-fordist labour processes, credentialism and the insecurities surrounding work intimate that the forms of social solidarity promised are far from being achieved. In addition these arguments operate with a benign

understanding of competition. Competition is almost construed as a win win situation rather than one in which failure is endemic and unevenly distributed. The new Durkheimian hegemony ignores and plays down the existence of the patterning of social antagonisms as these crisis cross society – whether these be in terms of the structures of race, class, gender and so on. By failing to recognise these a politics is constructed that is deeply conservative in as much as it works within the grain of existing economic relations. These ideas may seem somewhat distanced from education and teacher research, however a consensual and benign model of society lies behind the ideational framework in which such research is to take place. The focus upon school improvement, leadership and the like sees itself as attempting to interrupt disadvantage. However disadvantage is seen as only partly attributable to structural relations and is rather more attached to cultural phenomena – that is to say the orientations and responses of the dispossessed, allied to the sorts of expectations held by educators. This means that the conflicts and antagonisms present within society that frame the patterning of advantage and disadvantage are discursively silenced. To paraphrase Rikowski (2001), through processes such as these education works within the social universe of capital, by marginalizing these issues research operates with a narrow view of educational processes. Thus research becomes orientated to the improvement of educational practices and their enhanced effectiveness. Such a standpoint lends itself to technicisation and may also ignore the social and ideational context within which educational research takes place.

Where to now

James Tooley argues that funding for educational research should no longer be provided by the state but should rather be sourced by the private sector. However he doubts that all the research that is currently funded would receive support in this way and for this he has no regrets.

> But could private funding be found for, say, the kind of work on Bourdieu, Lyotard and Foucault which received criticisms in my Ofsted report and which would seem rather removed from the concerns of teachers and pupils?

> ... much of the theoretical and philosophical work which may not easily find funders does not need large amounts of money to be undertaken. Such research can always be conducted by the committed amateur, writing about whatever he or she wants to write about, in his or her own time, without funding from anyone. (Tooley, 1999, p178)

In previous sections of this paper I have discussed the relationship between research and its policy context, a context that prioritises educational achievement lodged within a competitiveness logic. In part such a logic is reflected in Tooley's arguments that educational research should become more rigorous and be focused upon the concerns of teachers and pupils. Such a position sits with New Labour's desire to enhance educational standards. The difficulty is that this desire is intimately related to the pursuit of competitiveness which of itself will be unlikely to enable the forms of social solidarity that Labour seeks. This standpoint seems out of kilter with social and economic change, the transformation of work and the extension of lifelong learning. Whatever position we hold in relation to work whether it will be upskilled, deskilled or an occasional activity, has a profound impact on the way in which we should think about its relation to education and lifelong learning. Paradoxically, it is the very uncertainties that surround the transformation of work which means that an educational system predicated upon economic need is flawed. It also seems odd that the focus for educational research remains institutionally based in spite of the emphasis upon lifelong learning and the development of University for Industry, Learning Direct and so on. There are nevertheless a series of concerns and interests that are located within the current conjuncture that can inform progressive educational and research processes. For example, an interest in active citizenship, social justice, as well as lifelong learning in relation to the development of skills and understandings that could have a purchase on wider society. These educational and research interests need to be placed within a framework that transcends a narrow view of education that locates this within formal institutions and that also refuses an instrumentalist connection between education and economic relations. Such a standpoint would re-introduce educative and political values to educational relations, valuing humanity and working towards human emancipation. Part of such a project would be to draw on the sensibilities of critical theory as expressed in the work of Carr and Kemmis, or the humanism of writers such as Pring. Educational research formed by a narrow instrumental technicism does nothing but impoverish itself and its contribution to wider society.®

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■ **James Avis**, School of Education, The University of Wolverhampton, Gorway Road, Walsall WS1 8BD, England