**Presidential Address BERA Annual Conference**

**Leeds: September 2001**

# Responsible Research: Ways of Being a Researcher

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ABSTRACT *Being an educational researcher is not an easy option. We are practitioners in an engaged social science which makes particular demands on us. These include responsibility to our field of study. In this address I argue that close-to-the-field research, that can do justice to the meaning making that occurs there, is an important part of the responsibility of the educational research community. Research of this kind, sometimes called interpretative or transformative research, calls for a form of engagement with the field which could be termed responsible agency. Because examinations of individual agency and responsibility must take into account contexts, their values and opportunities, I also examine how BERA as a Learned Society can sustain the identities of engaged researchers and how their revelations from the field can inform educational policy and the methodologies which shape educational enquiry.*

**'Y're the deed's creature.'**

**Middleton and Rowley, *The Changeling***

## Introduction

I want to preface this address by stating that I'm proud to be an educational researcher. There are times when I hanker for the peaceful archives I inhabited when briefly a historical researcher. However, I do not want to return to the narrow academic community I knew as a social psychologist. There we seemed preoccupied with merely demonstrating our cleverness to each other.

Being an educational researcher demands a very different set of relationships with the field and with other researchers. These relationships have at their core a set of value-laden concerns about individual, community and societal well-being. These concerns mean that much of educational research is, and should be, a site of continual meaning-making and they mark educational research as an activity in which engagement with its fields of study is crucial. The educational research I shall be discussing is, therefore, not an activity in which one grows old gracefully, gathering respect. Instead, as educational researchers, we continue to struggle disgracefully to

understand our uncertain world in new ways and persistently demand to be heard when we share our, often disruptive, insights with those who are practitioners in, for example, policy and pedagogy. Educational researchers are practitioners in an engaged social science and it isn't an easy ride.

Part of such engagement involves looking to the future. That can be done in at least two ways. As educational researchers we can identify what seems to have been useful action across a number of settings, establish the degree of confidence we might have in it being useful action in similar settings and offer advice based on those predictions. I don't want to disregard the attraction of control and predict research, particularly for policy, but neither do I want to focus on it today. Rather, I want to examine the educational research that raises questions about educational practices (including policy making) and how we make sense of them. These questions are often future-oriented and aim at developing educational opportunities and practices. I'm thinking of big questions like 'what kinds of learners for what kinds of society?' which in turn lead to more focused research questions which might explore the potential of ICT and its impact on how we rethink teaching and learning. Educational research should not be limited to evaluating existing practices and identifying those which seem to be the most generally effective. The research I want to concentrate on today helps us get some purchase on complexity, informs our theoretical frameworks and is in constant and developmental iteration with the field. It may call for qualitative analyses such as Andrew Pollard and Ann Filer's work on pupil careers (Pollard and Filer, 1999). Or it might demand a more quantitative approach such as Steve Strand's analysis of pupil performance in one London Borough (Strand, 1997).

I'll call on some conceptual allies from outside education to prepare the ground before I start. First is Bruno Latour, who compares science as the established canon (accumulated using the methods deemed acceptable to the keepers of the canon at any point in time) with research as a dynamic and interactive process (Latour, 1979). It is the latter that will resonate with my argument. Second is Charles Taylor who, talking about psychology, makes a useful distinction between two models of science '……one of brute data and one that admits of interpretation' (Taylor, 1985, p. 124). For Taylor, research that deals with motivated action is best done within the hermeneutic or interpretative tradition. He doesn't rule out brute data science but regrets that the sciences of what he calls 'the correlators' and of the 'interpreters'

don't speak easily to each other. Indeed he terms their interaction 'the dialogue of the deaf' (p. 124).

The polarisation of these versions of science is unfortunate. Any propensity to deafness in educational research, which by necessity is close to both policy and practice, is particularly worrying. The interpreters, like the brute data scientists, may produce evidence that can be correlated and commodified. But the special contribution of the interpreters is their capacity to find evidence that disrupts the very assumptions about society upon which the brute data scientists are basing their hypotheses. Those studies where both versions of science are in conversation, such as the Effective Provision of Pre-school Education led by Kathy Sylva, Iram Siraj-Blatchford, Ed Melhuish and Pam Sammons (e.g. Sylva *et al,* 1999), are clearly strengthened by connecting correlational and interpretative analyses.

Both versions of science need to talk to each other and both demand attention. But today I'm focusing on the interpreters as they have perhaps had too little attention of late. I'm also doing it because interpretative research calls for a form of engagement with the field which make specific demands on educational researchers. Kenneth Howe has recently characterised the interpreters as transformationists (Howe, 1998). I'm happy with that label as it flags the moral purpose of responsible interpretative research.

Over the rest of the hour I shall try to tease out what these demands mean for the identities of interpretative researchers, how interpretative educational research contributes to educational policy and practice and how BERA, as our Learned Society, can foster that element of our activities. I want above all to explore interpretative research as responsible research. Responsibility here, of course, means responsibility to the field and as John Shotter suggests respecting 'the being of people' (Shotter, 1992, p. 148), responsibility to research partners and to the research community.

I'm particularly influenced by the way that Charles Taylor discusses responsibility and agency. For him these go hand in hand. We are agentic to the extent to which we are able to set our own goals and evaluate our actions, i.e. undertake deliberative action. But our deliberative action is also rooted in a responsibility to the common good (Taylor, 1977, 1985, 1991). Individual agency and responsibility cannot therefore be separated from context, its values and its opportunities. So while my theme is responsible action, my gaze is firmly fixed on the communities in which

we work as researchers, the relationships which enable our responsible action and how BERA can support them.

I feel confident that the research and policy communities are *en route* to more fruitful relationships than have been possible over the last few decades. I would like to think that our responsible agency can play into these relationships. This will happen if the relationships develop in conversations where the assumptions of both policy makers and researchers can be disrupted and research can responsibly support reflective and forward-looking policy making. We are educational researchers because education matters to us. We all work to enhance educational opportunities and we have a lot to offer.

## The Scope of Educational Research

I want to start with an ambitious claim for the scope of educational research. Learning happens in schools, colleges and universities. However, it also goes on in families, credit unions, health centres, drop in centres, play groups, parents' forums, gardeners' clubs. Parents, money advisers, social workers, lawyers, health and medical professionals, web-site designers, journalists, filmmakers all work pedagogically. Both educational and medical professionals are highlighting links between mental health and educational opportunity. At the same time the boundaries of formal educational settings are being eroded. Schools and colleges are starting to visualise themselves as sets of distributed but networked learning sites providing a dispersed system of learning opportunities for pupils and their families. City Learning Centres are simply the start of a blurring of the boundaries of school and community and of the school day and term. The cultural spaces within which educational research has been located are being disrupted. Unless educational research can encompass and inform more informal and dispersed educational opportunities it may find itself becoming an anachronism.

As we experience these disruptions and uncertainties typical of late capitalism it is important to assert a wider notion of educational research. It is not difficult to do in the learning society. Just four examples.

- Learning and hence education is at the centre of the broad discourses of social inclusion (Levitas, 1998).

- The success of the new knowledge economy will depend on our understanding how learners relate to knowledge as both users and producers (Bereiter, in preparation).
- Poverty interacts with educational opportunity to result in what Amatya Sen describes as capability poverty (Sen, 1999).
- New understandings of learning allow us to focus on organisational and community processes and identify and support what Yrjö Engeström calls the expansive transformation of activity systems (Engeström,1999).

Educational research is already a multidisciplinary field and educational researchers are at least more sensitive than most to key concepts and ways of enquiring across a range of contributing disciplines. Many of us find ourselves working at the margins of our first disciplines as we engage with educational issues and with colleagues from other disciplinary backgrounds. Our engagement with the world can sharpen the conceptual development of these disciplines (Edwards, Gilroy and Hartley, in press). And we are well-placed to bring our educational knowledge to bear in alliances with other social scientists in research beyond traditional educational sites.

In the last year a BERA Special Interest Group focusing on educational research in Higher Education has been established to capture the interest in teaching and learning in Higher Education encouraged by the HEFCE-funded subject teaching networks and growing interest in for example, medical and dental education. We need also to consider how BERA as a Learned Society can encourage and support multidisciplinary research in for example learning in informal and distributed settings and learning and social regeneration.

## Educational Research as Engaged Research

By arguing that educational research is an engaged social science I am claiming that educational research should be both relevant and robust. It should be relevant to long term societal well-being, and therefore not always immediately utilitarian, and robustly sustaining its own integrity and trustworthiness and therefore open to scrutiny. A primary function of interpretative educational research is to provide

insights into motivations and actions in policy and pedagogy. These insights will enrich understandings of accepted practices and may challenge them.

BERA enjoys a strong tradition as a home for interpretative researchers who are engaged social scientists. Here I'm particularly thinking of the platform that BERA has provided for antiracist and antisexist research. We should continue to build on that tradition. But arguably we have not done enough to explore how poverty shapes educational opportunity, how race interacts with gender and how these interactions are amplified by poverty. We certainly have not done enough to encourage and enable non-white and non-Anglo Saxon researchers to contribute as interpretative researchers. I remember well the BERA symposium at the 1996 American Educational Research Association (AERA) conference in New York where the work of Barry Troyna as a partisan anti-racist researcher was celebrated. We must continue to find space in BERA for the kind of disruptively interpretative research that Barry undertook (Troyna, 1995).

Responsible interpretative research is therefore not necessarily problem-solving research. But it can be very good at shedding light on the problem, teasing out the complexities and pointing towards how it might be tackled by practitioners in policy and pedagogy. The strength of interpretative research is particularly evident when we look at how British educational researchers have engaged with practice and practitioners. The recent successes in England of the DfES best practice awards and the TTA research consortia have built on more than thirty years of strong relationships between university researchers and teachers.

But if we look for simple linear links between research and practice success is less clear-cut. (Hargreaves, 2000; Kennedy, 1997; Schoenfeld, 1999). David Hargreaves has proposed that the quality of educational research is to blame for the research-practice impasse. Mary Kennedy has suggested that we have all expected too much. Alan Schoenfeld's conclusion in his 1999 AERA presidential address is that research and its applications should not be seen in binary opposition. I'm with Schoenfeld. The relationship between research and practice is not simply a matter of the appliance of science. The separations of research and practice, knowledge and action, theory and practice are unnecessary and unhelpful. These separations have long been challenged within the social sciences.

The challenge from psychology comes from connectionist versions of mind, which see it as an outward-looking mechanism which constantly seeks meanings as it

acts on the world (Clark, 1997). This is a very different architecture of mind from that of mind as a storehouse of efficiently encoded interpretations of the environment. It is also a different view of action. Action here is not simply the capacity to call up necessary knowledge from a mental filing cabinet and apply it. Instead the connectionist mind uses concepts as a way of decoding the environment and of seeking patterns in it. In the connectionist model our concepts work as meaning-making tools as we operate in and on the world and they develop in interaction with the world. These meaning-making tools help us to interpret new settings, to identify possibilities for action in them and to assist our action.

I'm labouring this description because the connectionist version of mind helps us see that informing the conceptual tools of practitioners will enrich their capacity to interpret and respond to the demands of practice. But informing occurs most fruitfully when actually dealing with these demands. This is where I reveal my Vygotskian affiliations. A Vygotskian or sociocultural take on learning and the contexts in which learning occurs (Daniels, 1996) supports Schoenfeld's claim that research and its applications should not be separated. Which is unsurprising given Schoenfeld's own line on mathematics education.

The sociocultural arguments which outline how new-found meanings in familiar objects and events are incorporated into the complexities of our changing interactions with them deserve more time than I can give them here (Bakhurst, 2001). But they are important because they direct us away from expecting research-based knowledge to be applied to practice like paint to a wall. Three key features of these arguments are as follows.

- The argument, following Bakhurst, is interestingly as much a realist as a constructivist one. As learners we try to act on a world that is not of our own making and do so using the conceptual tools available in our cultures. Different cultures enable different ways of thinking and different ways of interpreting objects and events. To change interpretations and explore what writers in the field refer to as the immanence or multiple possible meanings of objects (Bakhurst, 2001; Bronckart, 2000), interventions need to be made at the level of culture.
- Learning, from such a sociocultural perspective, therefore means an ability to see more in familiar objects and events and to respond to these new interpretations. Learning happens when we try to make sense in our worlds. It is evident in how

we see possibilities for action with new clarity and in changes in how we position ourselves our worlds (Cole, 1996; Greeno, 1997). There are clear links here with established work on expertise. Sternberg and Horvath, for example, describe expert teachers as people who seek 'to complicate the picture, continually working on the leading edge of their knowledge and skill' (Sternberg and Horvath, 1997).

- Mind and world are not distinct. In shorthand, mind is socially formed, shaped by the possibilities for action available to it. But this is not a deterministic formulation. Learning in its most evolved form involves a recursive, reflexive questioning of ourselves and contexts in order to see more of the possibilities available (Bateson, 1972).

The Vygotskian view of the social formation of mind reminds us that that conceptual tools develop when we participate in activities with others and that new understandings are the result of engagement in activities. According to this view if research is to impact on practice, a valuing of research needs to be integrated into resources, goals, histories and role structures of organisations. Evaluations of the impact of research on practice which ask individual teachers or policy makers about research that has influenced them are bound to underestimate the actual impact of research. Research has most impact when it is allowed to help practitioners identify the possibilities available to them.

Here I'm aligning myself with a social practice-driven view of innovation rather than a simple knowledge-driven one (Muller, 2000) and am seeing engagement with research as a necessary social practice in educational settings. (Though I'm not arguing that knowledge and practice are mutually exclusive.) Innovation through changing social practices involves the careful manipulation of the environment, which in turn produces new knowledge in the actions of practitioners. It demands a particular version of engaged research which can support educational institutions as learning organisations (Chaiklin, 1993). My own experience with one of the TTA-funded research consortia here in Leeds suggests that schools should have permanent call on professional researchers as resources for school development.

But BERA cannot arrange that. However, a recent report from Australia points to the need for some structural changes to make research more available to practitioners. The Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs in Australia concluded its summary of five studies of the impact of educational research with the following statement.

> There is a subtle, complex and productive relationship between researcher and educator developed through a wide range of education processes both formal and informal. This fragile relationship depends on policies and structures that provide incentives and strengthen the capacity for communication. Governments, universities and schools have roles in that regard. (DETYA, 2001)

These subtle relationships are discussed in the report as a 'connecting web' the nodes of which are both formal and informal. The authors note that if teachers are to enter the web, they must need to seek a solution for a professional problem. In sociocultural terms they must at least have recognised the need for a change in practices. They must be interpreting the familiar in disconcertingly fresh ways.

Educational research as an engaged social science is therefore not merely concerned with solving problems of practice and communicating its findings simply. Nor is it only a matter of field-testing ideas and calculating their likely efficacy across settings. Indeed I would argue both of these versions of educational research are not unproblematic (see for example Barbara Adam's stimulating and disruptive analyses of how context interacts with time to undermine strong beliefs in causal chains – Adam, 1999). If we see schools, universities, civil service departments and so on as places which allow particular ways of thinking and recognise possibilities for action and not others, it follows that research needs to be played into these sites as activity systems with histories and goals (Cole and Engeström, 1993; Engeström, 1999) to enrich the interpretations and responses of practitioners. BERA needs to think about its role in relation to educational institutions which are using research as a basis for their own learning.

## Ways of being a Responsible Researcher

As researchers we also interpret and respond in ways that are permitted in our own research cultures. And as Peter Mortimore pointed out two years ago we too need to learn (Mortimore, 2000). I want, therefore, to consider how our identities as engaged and responsible researchers are shaped. I'm focusing on identity because I see it as the driver of action. In brief we do what we think we will be able to do. That is we try to do what we are personally capable of and what is possible in the situation in which we

are to act. But, as Jaan Valsiner explains, some situations are more conducive to intentional action than are others (Valsiner, 1998).

When trying to understand what forms of practice are possible the term 'community of practice' is probably overworked. However it is worth staying with the basic idea offered by Lave and Wenger that knowledge and possibilities for action are distributed within communities which share common histories and goals and are revealed in the actions taken (Lave and Wenger, 1991). The practices of these communities, as I've already outlined, permit particular ways of being and acting. But any community, even a research community, can become narrow, self-serving and stuck. There are at least two ways of avoiding intellectual paralysis as a researcher. Firstly by contact with other communities and secondly by reflectively examining the purposes and actions that are taken for granted in one's own community. I want to look at both options while considering how BERA can support them.

***Contact with other communities*** I've already argued for stronger relationships between researchers and practitioners and have elsewhere outlined the advantages to be gained by contriving ways of over-lapping the communities of practice that are schools and university departments of education so won't elaborate here (Edwards 1996; 2001). Instead I'll start with the diverse set of communities that comprise BERA. BERA properly operates as a space in which different research tribes can co-exist. (I'm aware that I'm about to paint a somewhat idealised picture of the Association.) Here new researchers can talk with old hands; correlators with interpreters; researchers with those who want to make use of the research; and Northern Irish, Scots and Welsh researchers with those of us who have not experienced the turbulence of new forms of governance.

We are already very good at enabling new researchers. Indeed I would argue that BERA has done much unsung work in developing educational research and scholarship since 1992 when many new universities were obliged to develop a research mission. I was then grandly called 'Director of Research' in a College and found BERA events to be excellent resources for research development. And with the appointment of a training officer this Autumn we will be able to do even more for both new and established but over-stretched researchers. We do need to ensure that the development of SIGs does not lead to a compartmentalising of research activities at our annual conference and that we continue to offer a broad programme which encourages our multidisciplinarity and a wide range of concerns. I'm clearly no post-

modernist but do value being pulled up by the cross-grain readings they offer (Stronach, 1999). This year we are pleased to host a presentation by the National Educational Research Forum at the conference and look forward to more contact with the Forum, the Department and others who are interested in research conversations. Finally, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales now have formal representation on BERA Council and we must continue to find ways of ensuring that BERA meets different national needs.

But there are more communities. Academic communities include other social sciences such as anthropology, psychology and sociology, subject communities such as history, mathematics and philosophy and policy areas such as health and social policy. Alliances here can strengthen our theoretical base, sharpen our understandings of what is distinct about educational research and enable an expansion of the scope of educational research.

We also need to strengthen our links with educational researchers beyond the UK. We should do this for at least two reasons. Firstly to place UK concerns within wider global trends. BERA has tried to avoid isolationism and to foster conversations with researchers elsewhere. It is a founder member of the European Educational Research Association and is represented at each AERA conference. We are also pleased to see so many people from outside the UK at this conference. The *British Educational Research Journal* is now recognised by the US-based Social Science Citation Index as an international journal. But we need to do more if we are to enable UK based researchers, at all stages of their careers, to see beyond the sometimes narrow communities that develop through our preoccupation with national educational policy.

The second reason returns us to the shifts and uncertainties outlined when discussing the scope of educational research. Civil society is changing and many of the changes are prompted by economic globalisation which obliges us to think beyond our nation states. Will Hutton and Tony Giddens in their recent analysis of the effects of globalisation argued for 'a more effective economic and social governance around social-democratic values, passionate belief in democracy and an intense concern with human rights.' (Hutton and Giddens, 2001, p. 217). Theirs is primarily an economic argument which echoes Sen's proposal that we should see individual freedom across the world as a 'social commitment' (Sen, 1999, p. xii). But educational researchers should respond to Hutton and Giddens' call for new cosmopolitan communities and

intellectual frameworks to provide a counter weight to a neo-liberalism which emphasises individual over community. Their cosmopolitan communities need educational researchers who are able to enrich the economic argument with an educational perspective and are willing to think globally.

Educational researchers have been placed for too long on the defensive and forced to justify their position within the UK on terms that are not of their making. In Taylor's terms agency has been weakened. We need to position ourselves differently. In our communities there are certainly those who can take on the role of public intellectual and lead as well as respond to debate. BERJ ran a series of articles on educational researcher as public intellectual a year or so ago (Fuller, 1999; Smyth and Hattam, 2000; Strathern, 2000). We need to pursue that theme in other settings and consider how BERA can support it.

***Participating and reflecting*** Contributing to educational debates outside the field of traditional education and beyond the borders of the UK enhances the 'funds of knowledge' (Moll and Greenberg, 1990) of UK educational research and brings us new allies. But it is also important that at least some of us try to capture and share the complexities of educational practices and their contexts. Engaged researchers learn while trying to make sense of the world. Again I'm not doing justice to sociocultural discussions of how the world is revealed in our interactions with it (see e.g. Bakhurst, 2001; Derry, 2000; Jones, 2001). But research communities need researchers who try to make sense of the world by being close to it and who can disrupt assumptions about, for example, the motivations and actions of disadvantaged groups.

Communities of research practice are unlikely to become stuck in a regurgitation of familiar ideas if they find the space to reflect on what can be learnt from researchers who are close to the field and to consider the implications of what the field reveals for their goals and practices as researchers. Reflection is another overworked word. For a socioculturalist it is an essential part of learning through engagement with the world. Firstly reflection enables us to label concepts (sometimes called scientific or scholarly concepts, Wardekker, 1998) which demonstrate our meaning making and enable us to share our meanings. Secondly, following Bateson, reflection allows our learning to impact on the world through our reflexive examination of the taken for granted (Bateson, 1972).

Being an engaged educational researcher is not a comfortable option. It is not surprising that educational researchers have been encouraged towards 'brute data'

science by a series of criticisms of late. I won't reiterate these as Peter rehearsed them two years ago. I, of course, agree with his advice that we should take them seriously. However, I do invite you to substitute the word feminist or antiracist for educational in some of the statements made about educational research over the last five years. An immediate response then would be to ask why feminist or antiracist research is being derided. We should ask that question of some of the statements made about educational research. Interpretative research is not only uncomfortable for the researchers.

Richard Bates made a similar point in his 1994 presidential address to the Australian Association for Research in Education. Drawing on Adam Smith's ambitions for *Commonwealth* and for education as a moral counterweight to commercialism in society, he argued of the situation in Australia that

> The integrity of educational research lies ….. only partly in our methodologies. It also lies in the empirical veracity of the information we provide to support the educational enterprise. Despite the attempts of government to define the educational enterprise in narrow economistic terms, the reality of educational activity is broader, more complex and more paradoxical. It is the job of educational researchers to tell this rich, complex story in ways that support the work and aspirations of students, teachers, administrators and schools and restrain the ideological construction of a false, restrictive and deformed model of education.
> (Bates, 1995)

Relationships between researchers and government are not always smooth. I agree with Tony Edwards' analysis of David Blunkett's 2000 speech on the relevance of social science (Blunkett, 2000; Edwards, 2000). Particularly that it was more balanced than previous pronouncements from the DfEE in acknowledging that government should take seriously 'difficult' research findings, but that it also revealed the complexity of relationships between researchers and government. These relationships will not necessarily be comfortable, important ones rarely are. However, if we are to continue to offer what David Blunkett termed 'a coherent picture of how society works' we need to undertake research that also captures the complexity of society.

But reflection on revelations from the field does also involve the critical analysis of methodology, the contesting and building of theory and the anchoring of meaning making in theoretical frameworks. Peter Mortimore in the last BERA presidential address observed that educational researchers often ignore theory even if they appear to 'dutifully regret its absence'. There are weaknesses to be found in research which lacks analytic frameworks, and these weaknesses are most evident in matters of design and analysis (and here I'm using these terms inclusively and broadly).

I'm not arguing for blind adherence to static versions of grand narratives and the methodologies associated with them. But am suggesting we should reflect more overtly on relationships between epistemology, methodology and evidence. We are uniquely positioned between educational practice and the theoretical frameworks available within the broad academic community. Engaged educational researchers are therefore well-placed to question the methodological assumptions upon which the research canon has been built and to develop ways of researching education that are sensitive to what the field can reveal. We spend too little time at BERA conferences discussing epistemology and methodology and how educational research can do justice to the field and respect the being of people. We can perhaps do more.

These are old concerns. Vygotsky before his death in 1934 was preoccupied with what he termed the 'crisis in psychology' (Vygotsky, 1987). In the late 1980s Rieber and Wollock summarised the crisis in the following way. In the 1930s it was because psychology 'was everywhere underdeveloped though full of brilliant possibilities' and today it is because 'the field is overdeveloped and its general level is mediocre' (Rieber and Wollock, 1987, p. x). Psychology's current problems were predicted by Vygotsky in the early 1930s. For him the problem lay with the discipline's distance from the field and from its lack of reflective awareness of the theoretical frameworks it used. He believed that the gradual accumulation of knowledge that was preoccupying the discipline in Russia in the 1920s and 30s was proving pointless. He argued that psychology should seek a theoretical core which was underpinned by a philosophy which would allow the discipline to become self-critical and for the emergence of different versions of psychology appropriate to their purposes around that core. There are messages here for us. Vygotsky's own work was close to the field and driven by educational concerns. It was so ground-breaking because his methodology allowed him to surprised by evidence as, in his terms, he

limped towards the truth seeking to understand traces, influences and meanings (Vygotsky, 1987).

John Shotter has more recently picked up on Vygotsky's preoccupations and tentativeness. Shotter argues that research should be future-oriented, that we should look closely at the everyday, be open to new language games, their ambiguities and their origins in joint action (Shotter, 2001). He is calling attention to the indeterminacy of our worlds, the shifting nature of our practices and to the need for methodologies which involve looking closely at the everyday to examine how it is being constructed. Educational research is arguably still underdeveloped though full of brilliant possibilities. We need to learn from Vygotsky's analysis of psychology and remain reflectively in touch with our field of study in order to serve it well.

## Concluding Thoughts

We are our deeds' creatures. Our identities as researchers are created in our actions and in the meanings made of them. Meanings are constructed and given value in the communities to which we belong. BERA as our Learned Society is an important community. Together must ensure that it provides a space for reflection, debate and learning and supports us as engaged researchers in working responsibly for educational opportunities.

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