

Like a Bridge over Troubled Water: realising the potential of educational research

Presidential Address to the British Educational Research Association given at the European Council for Educational Research Conference. University of Bath.

16 September 1995.

ROGER MURPHY, University of Nottingham

Introduction

The British Educational Research Association (BERA) was born as an association in 1974. That means that it is celebrating its twenty-first birthday this year, and what better way to mark that event than to hold a first ever joint conference with the newly formed European Educational Research Association here in the beautiful world heritage city of Bath. It is especially exciting for BERA that one of our members, Professor James Calderhead, is the first President of the European Educational Research Association, and he has played a key role in bringing the two associations here to Bath for this historic conference.

Despite the lowering of the age of majority in the UK, to 18, twenty-first birthdays still carry connotations of 'coming of age', 'getting the key to the door', and moving from 'youth to adulthood'. BERA has clearly gone through a highly formative developmental process, and Jean Rudduck (1995), very ably, in her presidential address last year looked back over the last 20 years, reminding us of various significant milestones and developmental phases. Each of those 21 years now has, I am sure, seemed like a very significant one for the Association, and much has been achieved over the years as it has grown, developed its identity, and expanded the range and the types of activities in which it is engaged. Nevertheless, twenty-first birthdays are still special, and I would like to take this opportunity to celebrate that milestone by looking back a little, but mostly by looking forward to the future that lies ahead for BERA and us as a community of educational researchers as we move steadily from a twenty-first birthday towards a twenty-first century.

BERA has undoubtedly come of age. About that there is, I think, no doubt, and Stones (1985), Rudduck (1995) and others have provided us with excellent records of some of that history. In this last year your BERA Council has been taking stock, and invited me to chair a small working group looking at the 'Future of BERA'. A discussion paper from that working group was published in the most recent edition of *Research Intelligence* (Murphy *et al.*; 1995), and has already been discussed in previous sessions at the conference.

I found the process of that review very exciting, as we looked forward to what I think it is right to see as BERA's adult years. BERA is doing much, and can in the future do much more, 'to sustain and promote a vital research culture in education' (our first new aim). Educational research is, I believe, a priceless asset for those who are concerned to foster, to understand better, and to improve educational opportunities and processes here

in the UK, and of course throughout Europe, and indeed throughout the world. It is especially poignant that at this time we are sharing this conference with the newly formed European Educational Research Association. This is a real landmark occasion, and in a year when Britain, in a highly symbolic way, really joined Europe. These are exciting times. We live increasingly in a global village, and are experiencing massive changes in the opportunities for communication and the exchange of information. Educators and educational researchers now have no need ever to be 'parochial' again—a condition that we may have suffered from in the past. Another of BERA's aims is for the Association to work increasingly to promote co-operation and discussion across national and international boundaries.

Later in this lecture I want to look at a few of the other ideas that have emerged from my small working group's consideration of the 'Future of BERA'.

First can I say what a great privilege it is for me to be invited to be this year's BERA President. It is an honour to follow so many talented individuals who have filled this role in previous years, and I hope that I can in some ways emulate their fine achievements. It seems, as they say, 'only like yesterday' that I attended my first BERA Conference (in Nottingham in 1977). I still remember arriving nervously at the conference desk, and the first anxious conversations over afternoon tea—wondering what I had let myself in for. Little did I know what actually lay in store! I have to say, that it is a special delight for me to be part of an organisation that in recent years has benefited regularly, and in new ways, from the leadership of women. Five of our last eight presidents have, as you are probably aware, been women. I would like to pay an especial tribute to them, for modelling excellent leadership within our Association.

Among the many things that BERA can now offer our increasingly confused world of education, is not just research pointing up the equal opportunities challenges that beset our UK education system, but a tangible role model of an educational organisation that has, at least in respect of its choice of presidents, broken that particular mould of male chauvinism. What single thing could, I often wonder, cause more positive change to occur within education, than to remove the barriers that have kept highly talented women out of the roles they should have been filling? BERA members have, I am delighted to say, been very active in the field of equal opportunities research, addressing issues including gender, ethnicity, and social class in a large range of studies, and of course in development work in various parts of the UK education system, as well as on the world stage. Mine, however, is not a message of complacency; as a white middle-class male, who suffered what I have come to see clearly as the early disadvantage of a highly elitist English public school education, I fervently hope that we together can continue to address equal opportunities issues within our Association, and not neglect to apply insights from our own research to our own behaviour and activities. As researchers we have, I think, an imperative to apply our research to ourselves, to our organisation, to our activities, in a way that we sometimes neglect as we seek to research other people's educational worlds and experiences.

BERA is still growing rapidly as an Association, and our members come from an increasingly broad range of parts of the education system. Because of this we need to continue to evaluate how we do our business, how we welcome in new members, and how we deal with the danger of marginalising and disenfranchising minority groups and interests within our membership (and in our research). BERA has grown from a small

(friendly and comfortable) club in the early 1970s to become a fully fledged professional Association with approaching 1000 members by the end of 1995. We have much to do in the coming year to adapt and change our structures and practices in order to ensure that we can build effectively on the sterling achievements of the early years. Researchers, of course, have a passion for discovering new ways of doing things, to bring about change and improvement. BERA is currently examining itself, and that makes me optimistic about its future—we should never allow our Association to fall into comfortable complacency.

2. Like a Bridge over Troubled Water?

Those of you interested in popular music, especially from the 1960s and 1970s, will not need to be told where the inspiration for the title of my lecture comes from. Paul Simon and Art Garfunkel are not commonly referenced in BERA Presidential Addresses, although I commend them to aspiring future presidents, in the audience, as a likely source for the titles of future presidential addresses. Just consider the possibilities offered by the following:

Why Don't You Write Me?

Keep the Customer Satisfied

Sounds of Silence

We've All Gone to Look for America

The last title would be particularly handy if the Presidential Address ever comes to be given in April at around the time of AERA [the American Educational Research Association]. The second fits beautifully with an analysis of the Government's latest policy on education, and the other two have potential for analysing the situation when the Research Assessment Exercise drives everyone to the point where they feel the need to produce a further publication each day even before they have time for breakfast!

So why is educational research like a bridge over troubled water? The troubled water, to me, represents the stormy world of education. The bridge is educational research, standing in the water, immersed in it but not drowned by it. The bridge is especially useful when the waters are stormy, but remains a real asset even when they are calm. It represents something that is carefully constructed and of substance, which stands or falls on the basis of the original design and the core with which it has been constructed.

I have had a fascination with bridges as long as I have had a fascination with educational research. Today I want to bring the two together, in a way that I hope will illustrate a central message of my lecture, which is that education needs educational research in the way that rivers need bridges.

Most of the photographs I have taken of bridges show apparently calm waters. Indeed the beauty of bridges is in my view often enhanced by the reflections you can get of the bridge itself in calm waters. Educational research can, of course, be highly influential for educational policy and practice, so here too we can see a parallel as we see research evidence reflected in the waters of educational policy and practice. Education without educational research can be governed by dogma, superstition, tradition and other forms of prejudice about what will work well and be 'good for' those involved in the educational process.

Recently Smithers (1995) argued rather eccentrically that the only criterion for judging educational research is whether it is useful. Well of course we want educational research to be useful, but we also need to ensure that it is robust, dependable and built on solid foundations. What is needed is high-quality educational research, addressing not just the quick-fire pragmatic concerns of hard-pressed policy-makers, but also building up a body of knowledge, insight and theory, steadily over a period of time, which will allow all those interested in education to understand its processes better (Murphy, 1995).

Without pushing the analogy too far, let us look for a moment at some of the characteristics of bridges, of which there are many fine examples, not least here in the centre of Bath. According to the 1963 National Benzole handbook of UK bridges:

Everybody loves a bridge. They are essentially romantic objects—brave, adventurous, usually handsome or at least interesting to look at, often magnificently idiosyncratic ... But spectacular or modest, orthodox or bizarre, they all possess that sense of achievement—almost of conquest—born of daring and humility and thereby touched with magic. (Casson, 1963)

Or, as David Brown (1993) has it in his authoritative recent volume on bridges:

Few man-made structures combine the technical with the aesthetic in such an evocative way as bridges. From ancient times to the present day, bridges have exercised a unique pull on the human imagination, eliciting awe, wonder and passion. (Brown, 1993)

These are characteristics that I crave for our educational research. Daring, creative, interesting and adventurous; good to read, fascinating to listen to, based on sound principles of design but not overly constrained by a narrow application of those principles; based on humility but touched with magic; worthy in itself for what it represents, but also frequently needed for practical everyday uses.

Educational research, like a bridge over troubled water, should at its best hold out a vision of hope for all those concerned with education, and improving its quality. Educational research is not remote from the waters of education—it is rooted in a clear understanding of the practical issues facing students and teachers. In the last 20 years I believe that advances such as in action research and in both qualitative and quantitative methodologies have allowed many more useful bridges to be built that are relevant, practical, inspiring, and a credit to their architects. BERA has been at the centre of those advances here in the UK and I think that we should be proud of what has been achieved through them.

Of course our research will not always be popular with policy-makers and practitioners. In other areas such as health and social policy, researchers are used, like us, to being unpopular. We, like them, need to guard our independence and make sure that our research is credible and well founded. We want it to be useful, but we are not just here to provide a service to those who hold the power in educational decision-making. Our role in the system will frequently be as an irritant—raising uncomfortable questions, which need to be addressed. That will not always make us popular!

Henry Levin (1991) commenting on the distinctive role of educational research, wrote the following:

I am arguing that there should be a tension between educational policy and research. They represent two different cultures with different requirements.

The former is restrictive and decision oriented with an emphasis on the short run. The latter is much less restrictive and can provide the types of information needed for moulding the more visionary world of the future. (Levin, 1991, p. 77)

In Nisbet & Broadfoot's (1980) important book on the impact of educational research, there is a clear analysis of the tensions between the agenda of policy-makers and the essential features of an educational research culture, which must retain in much of its work independence, freedom of thought, an opportunity to challenge the unchallengeable. There will never be a shortage of unsupported dogma in educational thinking. What we need to ensure is that there is never a shortage of good quality, inspired, independent and creative educational research to challenge and confront policy, practice and empty rhetoric.

Educational policy-makers and politicians have frequently been frustrated by the independence of educational researchers, and our relative freedom to look at what we want to, and draw whatever conclusions our data suggest. In the last 15 years we have seen more commissioned research following statements in the 1970s from key figures such as Margaret Thatcher, when she was Secretary of State for Education and Sheila Browne, when she was a Senior HMI [Her Majesty's Inspector], calling for the agenda of research to be more closely controlled. They, too, said they wanted research to be more useful, and their solution was for policy-makers to tell researchers much more clearly what they should be doing.

There is, I think, a place for commissioned research, which is policy directed, and I think we should welcome the fact that many policy-making bodies in education see the need to fund research to support their planning and decision-making. Caroline Gipps (1993), however, in her 1992 presidential address, rightly pointed to the dangers inherent in that process, as contracts for such research become more and more prescribed, and educational researchers stand in danger of being used to support educational dogma rather than put it to the test. In this context I am glad that BERA has agreed a new aim that relates specifically to the conditions of work and rights of educational researchers, and is continuing to address the ethical issues confronting our members.

We in BERA need to strive to monitor the arrangements relating to contracted research. Researchers needing to stay in work can easily become ensnared in double bind situations with funding agencies who can expect to pay the piper and call the tune. Educational research, if it is to be worthy of that description, must be able to challenge common assumptions, received wisdom, and the imperatives of policy-makers and funding bodies with vested interests.

Earlier this year Patricia Broadfoot and I completed a volume (Murphy & Broadfoot, 1995) containing a selection of the most outstanding papers produced by the late Desmond Nuttall. Desmond Nuttall's work has been an inspiration to many of us, and he was, I believe, an excellent role model as a committed and highly professional educational researcher, who was able to combine his flair for designing exciting and innovative research studies, with a passion to see research being translated into improvements in educational opportunities and practices. In amongst all of the tributes fittingly paid to Desmond, since his death in October 1993, some words from an obituary written by Neil Fletcher stand out in my mind:

Although always softly spoken, he presented his findings with clarity and force. With Desmond, patience came as a standard accessory. Although the facts were always sacred, Desmond was always capable of focusing upon the clear, unambiguous and irrefutable case that his figures made.

Educational research was always, in the best sense, subversive. He shared in the pleasure we all gained when the figures undermined the common consensus. His research was political, in the sense that he always knew those common assumptions that his research was going to shatter. (Fletcher, 1993, p. 347)

All of our research should in the best sense be subversive. It should have the ability to challenge the *status quo*, where evidence is assembled to justify that. It should, if it is any good, at times shock people, surprise people, get people out of their seats to debate educational issues, consider change, explore and experiment with new ways of doing things. Education, I believe, needs educational research, and potentially stands to benefit enormously from it.

Simon and Garfunkel's 'Bridge over Troubled Water' starts with the verse, 'When you're weary. Feeling small. When tears are in your eyes. I will dry them all. I'm on your side. When times get rough and friends just can't be found. Like a bridge over troubled water, I will lay me down'. It is a poignant message of distress and hope, Education and educational researchers could, I think, easily echo some of those words. But we come to another BERA conference to recharge our batteries, to compare notes, and seek inspiration for the research we will be doing in the coming year. Times have been rough but one of BERA's assets is to provide a community for educational researchers within which we can support and encourage each other in our important work.

The song ends with a more hopeful verse: 'Sail on silver girl, sail on by. Your time has come to shine. All your dreams are on their way. See how they shine'—a vision for me of the educational waters being much calmer and flowing past the bridge in much greater harmony with it. Indeed, in my image of this tranquil scene bits of the bridge are reflected beautifully in the waters, illustrating vividly the benefits the bridge has added. Educational research has made major contributions to policy and practice in education, and the volume of research summaries that accompanied the report of the National Commission on Education illustrated both the range and the importance of that work

(NCE, 1993). Educational research will seldom provide instant answers to new challenges and dilemmas facing educators, but it has a crucial role in informing educational debates, and decision-making. Crucially it can put issues on the policy-makers' agenda or contribute to the general climate of opinion. As John Powell put it in an editorial of a SCRE [Scottish Council for Research in Education] newsletter:

It is through its contribution to this *climate of opinion* that educational research probably has its most profound effect. Thus, though an individual piece of research may have little effect, research cumulatively may have a great deal.
(Powell, 1980, p. 2)

In this section of my lecture I have moved into a discussion of the impact of educational research. It is clear to me that it can have an impact, but like Caroline Gipps (1993) and others I am not convinced that it is currently having the impact that it should. I want, therefore, to move on to consider the new aims of BERA and think with you about how we along with our Association can realise a fuller potential for educational research. First, however. I would like to illustrate my concerns with a specific example.

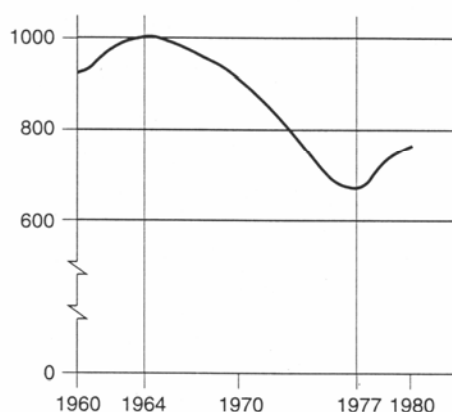


FIG. I. UK live births (thousands), 1960-80 (source: Birth Statistics, OPCS, 1981).

3. The Ill-informed Nature of Many Current Educational Debates

In an educational world driven by a philosophy of market forces, performance indicators have become a common accessory, often feeding heated debates as they fluctuate up and down. At times this has led to empty debates about educational standards that go round and round in circles and lead nowhere (Cohen, 1990).

In amongst all of this a new national sport has grown up in relation to the annual release of public examination results. It appears to matter little whether the overall results are better or worse than the previous year, sensational headlines are always possible. For example the recent GCSE [General Certificate of Secondary Education] results, which were fairly similar to those for 1994, gathered a clutch of headlines suggesting all sorts of calamities. Newspaper education correspondents short of news-

worthy stories during August appear to be forced into producing eye-catching falling standards stories. If the results are better than the previous year then the stories are often about the standard of the examinations themselves falling. If the results, however, are worse, say in certain subjects at GCSE, as they were this year, the standards in schools, they say, have fallen.

What we as researchers know is that drawing conclusions from an indicator such as the examination results of different cohorts of pupils is not straightforward. A particular interest I have had in this area has been to reflect upon this changing demography of GCSE candidates over the last 8 years. These candidates were mostly 15 and 16 year-olds born during a period when marked changes were occurring in the population of the UK. Firstly they were born at a time when the birth rate was plummeting to an all time low (Fig. 1). Secondly, we know from OPCS [Office of Population Censuses and Surveys] data that the demographic changes caused shifts to occur in the social class characteristics of successive cohorts (Fig. 2). This phenomenon is well known to researchers in a number of areas (Dennison, 1979; Holt, 1983) and was mentioned in several places in the reports of the National Commission on Education. It is crazy to draw conclusions from national changes in GCSE results without attending to such issues, especially as we know that social class background is such a potent indicator of educational success (Douglas, 1964; Rutter & Madge, 1976; Mortimore & Blackstone, 1982; Sammons, 1995).

Fig. 3 shows how changes in the GCSE results, in terms of the percentage of students

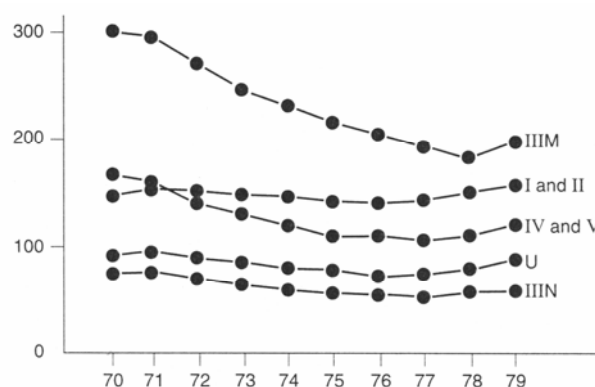


FIG. 2. UK live births (thousands) by social class, 1970-79 (source: *Birth Statistics, OPCS, 1981*).

gaining Grades A-C, have been mirrored in some way by changes in the proportion of middle-class children eligible to enter for that examination. Now of course this strikingly similar pattern of change in these two measures does not tell the whole story about what has caused the changes to occur, and I am not suggesting that it does. It is, however, a pretty important feature of the situation that needs to be brought into the debate.

This example illustrates one of the many ways in which educational researchers have a duty to raise the level of the debate about education in the UK. My example is based

largely upon utilising existing secondary data to shed some light on a puzzling phenomenon. It also draws upon a knowledge gleaned from trends emerging from educational research over a number of years.

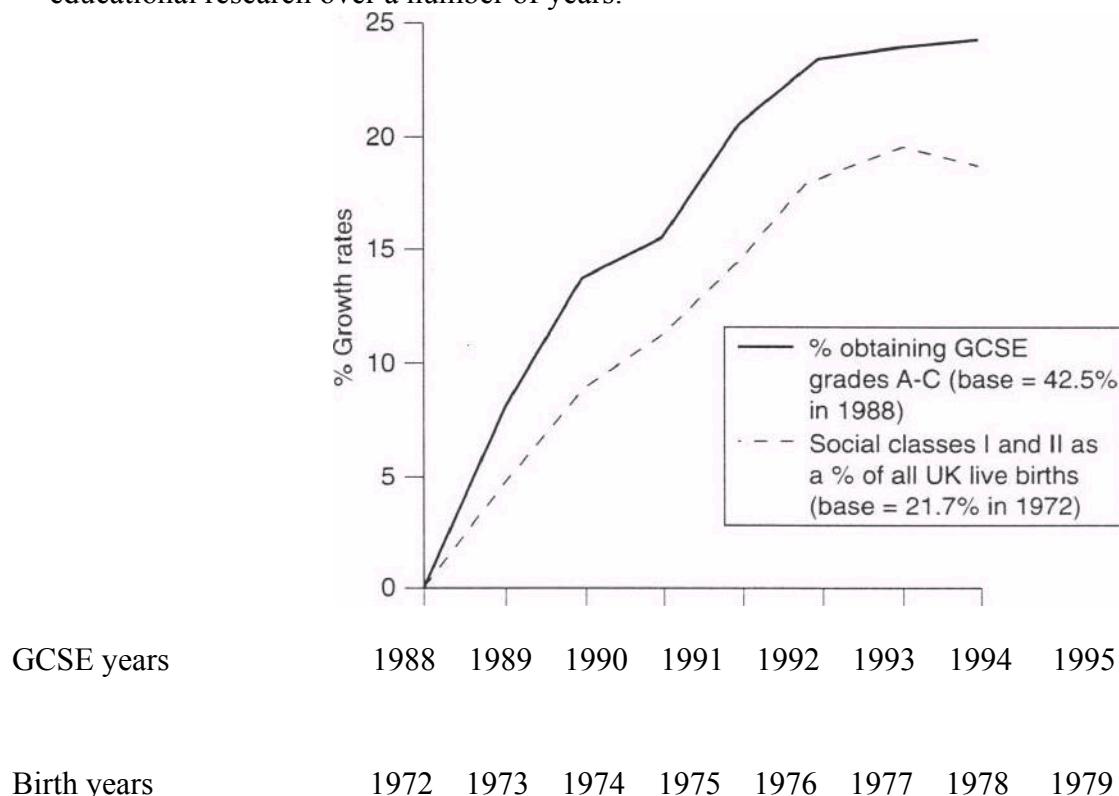


FIG. 3. Percentage growth rates for social classes I and II as a proportion of all UK live births, 1972-79 (source: Office of Population Censuses and Surveys Birth Statistics: England and Wales [HMSO, 1980]) and for the percentage of candidates obtaining GCSE grades A-C in National Curriculum subjects, 1988-95 (source: Joint Council for GCSE Annual Statistics 1988-95. Bristol).

The general level of debate about education in the UK is often surprisingly shallow, and we as educational researchers need to continue to face the challenge of raising that level. That partly relates to the quality of our research, but also relates to us becoming more worldly-wise about how to engage in fast-moving policy debates. There are some BERA members who are very skilled in that art, there are others of us who have much to learn.

4. Realising the Potential of Educational Research

There is a real danger of being simplistic when one comes to the question of improving the impact of educational research. There is a nice quote in the Nisbet & Broadfoot (1980) book about 'the ritual tut-tuting about the communication gap between researchers and others'. I do not want to sink to that, and in that respect I have always liked Fisk's analogy, which is quoted in Nisbet & Broadfoot (1980). He states that research is not like a parcel being delivered to the post-room neatly wrapped, but is more like a canister of gas being released. As the gas wafts around different people are

affected by it.

How then can we realise more effectively the potential of educational research—here in the United Kingdom? How also can we get others to realise (in the other sense) what potential it has? In this final section of my lecture I would like to highlight a few thoughts of my own, but also draw on some of the ideas that emerged from the 'Future of BERA' working group. I will present these under three abbreviated headings from our newly worded aims.

(a) Promoting, Co-operation and Discussion with Policy-makers

Our research is relevant to many people—students, teachers, parents, politicians, governors, administrators—I could go on and on. They won't, however, benefit from our research unless they hear about it! How good are we at getting the messages out from our research? Are we in danger of becoming so obsessed by things like the Research Assessment Exercise that all we wish to do is clock up a good rate of publications in refereed journals with high international standing? Is that what we mean by dissemination?

The Government, in its recent White Paper on Science has placed great stress on the impact of research on so-called 'end-users'. That should be meat and drink for us educational researchers, as our research is so often highly relevant to the millions of people participating in one way or another in the process of education.

One form of high exposure dissemination occurs through the national media: television, radio, national newspapers. How good are we at getting our messages out through those channels? It is a rare thing, I think, to see educational researchers prominently in the media, and we have, much to learn from colleagues in disciplines which have become more media-wise. We also need to learn from each other, and there are a few helpful articles, written by those in our number who are experienced in these matters. I am thinking of Neville Bennett's (1978) article reflecting on the media responses to his infamous *Teaching Styles and Pupil Progress* (1976) research, and Peter Mortimore's (1991) excellent chapter in Geoffrey Walford's (1991) edited collection entitled *Doing Educational Research*. Peter Mortimore's chapter entitled, 'The front page or yesterday's news: the reception of educational research' is characteristically insightful and practical. In one of the 10 recommendations he states:

If your planned study is likely to lead to controversy decide if you have the temperament to cope with it: seeing your name in the papers can be stressful, especially when it is the subject of a vitriolic or personalised attack. (Mortimore, 1991, p. 228)

This warning is echoed by Bennett (1978) and chimes with an earlier quote from Kay (1979):

The publicity that may follow wider dissemination of research findings carries risk since it often distorts in an attempt to simplify. Nevertheless the risks must

be taken if the general public is either to recognise the potential importance of educational research or to be influenced by it.

The cost of not disseminating our research findings at all is far too high to pay. I hope that we can in the coming year become more media-wise in our dissemination, as well as continuing to attend to other equally important types of dissemination to each other, to practitioners, to those participating in our research. The working group has already encouraged the executive committee to concentrate on that issue, and perhaps some ideas for workshops or round-table sessions could be developed in time for our next conference in Lancaster next year.

Lastly under that heading I want to mention overviews of research—meta analyses if you like. We could do with more of those I think, as policy-makers are rightly going to be cautious about reacting to a single research study, but where there is a body of research succinctly drawn together and pointing up certain issues then that can be very powerful. Eleanor Chelimsky's (1995) keynote address at a National Conference on Research Synthesis in Washington DC, in June 1994, which was published recently in the first edition of yet another excellent new journal entitled *Evaluation*, makes a strong case for 'research synthesis', highlighting how effective it has been in dealing with policy questions arising in the US Congress. At the current time it is also noticeable how much NHS [National Health Service] funding is going into funding research syntheses on health research topics.

(b) Developing and Defending an Independent Research Culture

What we have is very valuable. Most of us work in a situation where we have freedom to work on research, which is genuinely seeking to produce new knowledge. There is much genuinely independent research going on. There is also other research that is constrained by the conditions laid down by sponsors with vested interests to protect. Educational research needs to continue to be subversive in the best sense. We need to take on the 'taboo subjects'. We can think the unthinkable. We need to challenge the unchallengeable.

The question I want to ask now is, 'How well are we doing with all of that?' Are we colluding in a process governed by an establishment position, whereby nothing much is allowed to change? Are our research masters successfully manipulating us to conform within an education system that is governed by tradition and ideological interest? What would you like to be researching? What are the deep questions that are crucial, but which we shy away from?

One of the big educational stories of the past few weeks has been Prince William starting at Eton College. I am sure you have all been fascinated by this! Apparently his father was unhappy at Gordonstoun so chose Eton as a radical alternative. Public boarding school education has for a long time played an important role in British society. What do we know about it other than the ridiculous conclusions often drawn from league tables of examination results? What do we know about its impact on the lives, the personalities and the inner emotional world of the students, who 'benefit' from this form

of education? A recent BBC documentary entitled 'Boarding School Survivors' raised in a powerful way some hugely important questions, which I think are under-researched, about the long-term psychological effects of a system that places young boys and girls in what are often hostile environments over extended periods away from their families. Where are the emotional damage league tables, and where are the research studies to inform those that think that the more money you pay for education the better value you get?

That is just one example of what is, I think, an area of education, heavily guarded by vested interests, which has been seriously under-researched. Another rather different example, close to another set of my own interests, is the assessment of PhD theses. The PhD stands as a hallmark qualification in many areas of academic research, but do we know what standards it really represents? What would happen if we subjected PhD examining to the same scrutiny that other assessment systems connected with schools have come under? Also, why is it that that particular assessment system appears to be exempt from scrutiny, when there is open season on things like GCSE course work, and the newly emerging vocational qualifications.

A third under-researched area is decision-making bodies and educational institutions other than schools. Is it healthy that so much educational research is focused on state schools in the UK? Why is there such a paucity of good research into decision-making bodies, when so many of us have such ready access to them. Meg Stacey's (1994) fascinating study of the General Medical Council provides an example, again from the health field, of a researcher who can participate in a decision-making body's activities and research them at the same time. Why not attempt similar studies within some of the powerful decision-making bodies in education? If we want to have a better understanding of education, then they surely are vital

Our independent research culture needs developing and defending. We need courage to take on some of the unaskable questions in our education system. We need to encourage each other to strive to do research that is at the cutting edge of educational knowledge and thinking, and avoid being seduced into harmless backwaters.

(c) Improving the Training and Education of Educational Researchers

There has rightly been a great deal of stress on the training and education of new researchers in recent years. BERA has played its part in this, and there are many opportunities now for this that didn't exist even 10 years ago.

Much of what I have said today relates to the continuing professional development of educational researchers. We are all lifelong, learners, living in a learning society and I hope that we can continue to reflect upon our own learning. This is important for how we organise our Association, our Special Interest Groups, and even our annual conference.

We need, I think, to attend diligently to our own professional development needs, which are varied and probably quite dissimilar. Good professional development for

educational researchers isn't just gathering information and knowledge about new methodologies, new journals, new individuals to network with, and new findings from research studies—although that is part of it. We need to push the limits of our own personal development needs, if we are to improve our effectiveness at whatever stage in our career we are at.

We have, I have argued, much to learn, many of us about simple things like writing press releases, handling media interviews. We also have, I think, even more to learn about using BERA, and now EERA, as a means to promote a vital research culture in education.

Conclusion

The skills of the researcher are to ask challenging and sometimes uncomfortable questions. We are all busy with those in our research. In this lecture I have argued for us to reflect even more on the processes that we are involved in. There is now more encouragement for educational researchers to take a reflexive view of what they are doing (Walford, 1991). There are also a growing number of accounts from those who have been able to reflect on the experience of being an educational researcher (e.g. Brown, 1994), and publications that incorporate personal biographies into analyses of research (Lomax, 1994).

In a very early issue of *Research Intelligence* Gabriel Chanon (1977), responding in a hard-hitting way to some points made by Jack Wrigley in his 1975 BERA Presidential Address (Wrigley, 1976), wrote that: 'A researcher who fails to ask questions about his own role will be imprisoned by it This means that our own roles are also part of the inquiry. There can be no really incisive objective inquiry without subjective inquiry too' (Chanon, 1977, pp. 8 and 9). BERA has come a long way since then, but we have still a great deal to learn about being effective as educational researchers. Some of the questions being asked in the 1970s about impact are still with us, but in the meantime many bridges have been built and much has been learned about methodology and different styles of research. We have also come to a place where the individual values and the personal biographies of researchers can be addressed and treated as valuable information (Ball, 1990).

Congratulations on your twenty-first birthday **BERA**. We have exciting adult years ahead of us. We have already built some fabulous bridges and I am looking forward to working with you to build some more—utilising the knowledge, the experience, and wisdom, as well as the inspiration, courage and passion, which we already have in good measure.

Correspondence: Professor Roger Murphy, Faculty of Education, University of Nottingham, University Park, Nottingham NG7 2RD, UK.

REFERENCES

- BALL, S. J. (1990) *Self-doubt and soft data: social and technical trajectories in ethnographic fieldwork*, *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 3, pp. 157—171.
- BENNETT, N. (1976) *Teaching Styles and Pupil Progress* (London, Open Books).
- BENNETT, N. (1978) Educational research and the media, *Westminster Studies in Education*, 1, pp. 23-30.
- BROWN, A. (1994) Being a researcher. *Studies in Qualitative Methodology*, 4, pp. 29-51.
- BROWN, D. J. (1993) *Bridges, Three Thousand Years of Defying Nature* (London, Mitchell Beazley).
- CASSON, H. (Ed.) (1963) *Bridges*, National Benzole Books (London, Chatto & Windus).
- CHANON, G. (1977) Pitfalls or a poor tradition?. *Research Intelligence*, 3, pp. 8-9.
- CHELIMSKY, E. (1995) Politics, policy and research synthesis. *Evaluation*, 1, pp. 97-104.
- COHEN, D. (1990) Reshaping the standards agenda: from an Australian's perspective of curriculum and assessment, in: P. BROADFOOT, R. MURPHY & H. TORRANCE *Changing Educational Assessment: international perspectives and trends* (London, Routledge).-
- DENNISON, W. F. (1979) Teachers and shrinking schools, *Durham and Newcastle Research Review*, 9 (43), pp. 37-45.
- DOUGLAS, J. W. B. (1964) *The Home and the School: the study of ability and attainment in the primary school* (London, MacGibbon & Kee).
- FLETCHER, N. (1993) Obituary to Desmond Nuttall, *Education*, 5 November.
- GIPPS, C. (1993) The profession of educational research, *British Educational Research Journal*, 19, pp. 3-15.
- HOLT, J. (1983) Living with a model. Inaugural Professorial Lecture, University of Southampton.
- KAY, B. (1979) The DES and educational research, *Trends*, Autumn.
- LEVIN, H. M. (1991) Why isn't educational research more useful?, in: D. S. ANDERSON & B. J. BIDDLE (Eds) *Knowledge for Policy: improving education through research* (London, Falmer Press).
- LOMAX, P. (1994) The narrative of an educational journey or crossing the track. Inaugural Professorial Address, Kingston University.
- MORTIMORE, J. & BLACKSTONE, T. (1982) *Disadvantage and Education* (London, Heinemann).
- MORTIMORE, P. (1991) The front page or yesterday's news: the reception of educational research, in: G. WALFORD (Ed.) *Doing Educational Research* (London, Routledge).
- MURPHY, R. J. L. & BROADFOOT, P. (1995) *Effective Assessment and the Improvement of Education—a tribute to Desmond Nuttall* (London, Falmer Press).
- MURPHY, R. J. L., ELWOOD, J., LAWN, M. & POWNEY, J. (1995) BERA: an agenda for the future, and suggested revision of the purposes of BERA, *Research Intelligence*, 53, pp. 7-12.
- MURPHY, R. J. L. (1995) Research is rooted in the real world. *Times Educational Supplement*, 15 September.
- NATIONAL COMMISSION ON EDUCATION (1993) *Briefings for the National Commission on Education* (London, Heinemann).
- NISBET, J. & BROADFOOT, P. (1980) *The Impact of Research on Policy and Practice in Education* (Aberdeen, Aberdeen University Press).
- POWELL, J. (1980) The impact of research, SCRE Research in Education Bulletin, 25, pp. 1-2.
- RUDDUCK, J. (1995) Enlarging the democratic promise of education ..., *British Educational Research Journal*, 21, pp. 3-14.
- RUTTER, M. & MADGE, N. (1976) *Cycles of Disadvantage* (London, Heinemann).
- SAMMONS, P. (1995) Gender, ethnic and socio-economic differences in attainment and progress: a longitudinal analysis of student achievement over 9 years, *British Educational Research Journal*, 21, pp. 465-485.
- SMITHERS, A. (1995) Let usefulness be our yardstick for research, *Times Educational Supplement*, 8 September.
- STACEY, M. (1994) From being a native to becoming a researcher: Meg Stacey and the General Medical Council, *Studies in Qualitative Methodology*, 4, pp. 53-80.
- STONES, E. (1985) The development of the British Educational Research Association, *British Educational Research Journal*, 11, pp. 85-90.
- WALFORD, G. (Ed.) (1991) *Doing Educational Research* (London, Routledge).
- WRIGLEY, J. (1976) Pitfalls in educational research. *Research Intelligence*. Autumn. DD. 2-4.