Research that Counts:
Practitioner Research and the Academy

Susan Groundwater-Smith & Nicole Mockler
University of Sydney

This article will take up the matter of practitioner research as a shared enterprise between the academy and the field of practice and how little this work has been valued by those upon whom it impacts least. Partnerships between universities and schools in order to develop knowledge and insight about practice are not themselves new, as evidenced by the *Innovative Links between Universities and Schools for Teacher Professional Development Project* and the many programmes that have followed thereafter. What is new is the higher education context with its quality assessment exercises that scale and rank academic work such that authentic engagement with the cognate field is belittled and demeaned by counting for almost naught.

It is over a decade since Gibbons et al published *The New Production of Knowledge* and twenty years on from the powerful arguments of Carr and Kemmis, captured in *Becoming Critical*, both seminal works in terms of educational research that is truly educative. Our case will be grounded in a belief that the construction and distribution of professional knowledge, gained through systematic inquiry open to critical scrutiny and capable of effective translation into practice must now be acknowledged as an enterprise to be judged in its own terms rather than by quality standards that are neither enabling nor appropriate.

Professional learning and professional capacity building in education can and should occur across the linkages between universities and the field of practice, including schools, education employing authorities and the broader community with its interest in the development of social, cultural and human capital. Professional knowledge, built upon the collection, analysis and interpretation of evidence, should not be seen as a province for the elites inured to privilege and deferment. Instead, we argue, it should be seen as a public good which benefits and enhances practice. We do not eschew matters of quality, instead we wish to cast them into a new framework, one based upon an ethical platform that transcends the discourse of 'best practice' or 'what works'.

There is not an Australian government, State, Territory or Federal, that does not believe that teacher professional learning should be career-long, developmental and based upon sound principles, one of which is the notion of 'evidence-based practice'. How curious it is then that a powerful means for informing teacher professional learning, facilitated practitioner inquiry (Groundwater-Smith, 1998), should count for so little when it comes to acknowledging the work of education academics. Each year, those in the university sector who choose to work closely with the field of educational practice, in most instances the nation's schools, are faced with the Higher Education Research Data Collection (HERDC) exercise. There is an insistence upon publication in the form of scholarly books, book chapters, refereed articles in scholarly journals, and refereed conference publications. However there is no recognition of articles that might inform practice within a given professional field, and published in journals likely to be read by the profession; let alone reports of practitioner inquiry that may have an ongoing influence upon the development and improvement of practice. Little wonder that education academics feel devalued and frustrated by the lack of recognition of the important work that they may engage in when they work with the professional field (Gore & Gitlin, 2004, p. 47) even though there may be some universities who internally recognise the value of such enterprises.

The Higher Education Research Data Collection exercise uses the OECD definition of research which comprises, among other things:

> Creative work undertaken on a systematic basis in order to increase the stock of knowledge, including knowledge of man (sic), culture and society, and the use of this stock of knowledge to devise new applications.

There is nothing in this definition to suggest that academics and their practitioner colleagues cannot be engaged in such creative work and that indeed, 'stock' should perhaps be more properly perceived as 'stocks', as the inventory is considerable and broad. The particular HERDC interpretation, however, is rather based upon the need to create easily collected metrics and measures. Subtle and finely tuned judgements do not even enter the picture. An academic who chooses to work with schools facing the most difficult and challenging circumstances, for example, those in the New South Wales Priority Action Schools Program (Groundwater-Smith & Kemmis, 2004) may very well have assisted in the development of the stock of professional knowledge, but not have demonstrated this through publication in prestigious journals. Of course, the field of education is not alone in this perceived lack of congruence. A recent article by Elspeth Probyn in the *Higher Education Supplement* of *The Australian* focuses on similar (albeit different) incongruities within the humanities disciplines (Probyn 2005).

Curiously, and paradoxically, the major research funding agency, The Australian Research Council, clearly recognises the value of work in partnership with the cognate field through its Linkages Project Scheme, which is promoted as supporting collaborative research projects between higher education researchers and industry partners to acquire new knowledge that involves risk and innovation. The scheme is based upon ongoing interaction with the actual and potential users of the research outcomes and is designed to build long term strategic research alliances. To this end university academics are expected to work with an industry partner to investigate a practical question. The knowledge that is produced is knowledge designed to inform and improve the field of practice.

In its issues paper *Research Quality Framework* (Commonwealth of Australia, 2005) the Expert Advisory Group noted that the Australian Government is committed to "ensuring that resources provided to carry out research are directed to areas of research excellence and the impacts and benefits that result from the public investment in that research" (p.10). How will such excellence be recognised in the case of developing practical knowledge that will enhance teacher professional learning? The paper sees "impact" may be well beyond that upon the academic community and should be of economic, environmental and social benefit. Under a subheading "Encouraging Positive Behaviours" appear a number of bullet points, among them:

- Promoting collaborative linkages with industry/end-users
- Enhancing the impact of research on policy and practice (p.14)

2

Drawing upon international experiences of research assessment it suggests that there are lessons to be learned such as "the need for research assessment exercises to be sufficiently flexible to accommodate the breadth of different fields of study" and "A 'one-size fits all' approach is likely to be deemed inappropriate for dealing with the complexity of the research undertaken by Australia's publicly funded research institutions" (p.16).

The purpose of this article is to make a case for acknowledging and respecting the generation of knowledge produced by the work undertaken by those in the field and those in the academy as a shared and collegial enterprise and that the current "one size fits all" policy of the HERDC as it is understood by most universities is both unjust and inappropriate, particularly if we wish to see a genuine impact upon deep and systemic change in education. For as Seymour Sarason has so clearly put it:

> What finally convinced me [that change is unlikely] was the recognition that no one—not teachers, not administrators, not researchers, not politicians or policymakers, and certainly not students—willed the present state of affairs. They were all caught up in a system that had no self-correcting features, a system *utterly unable to create and sustain contexts of productive learning*. . . . There are no villains. There is a system. You can see and touch villains, you cannot see a system. . . . The reform movement has been about parts, not about the system, not about how the purposes of parts are at cross-purposes to each other, not about how the concept of purpose loses both meaning and force in a system that is amazingly uncoordinated and that has more adversarial than cooperative features. (Sarason, 1998, p. 141, emphasis added)

We shall explore the nature of the knowledge that is produced when the academy and the field join forces; we shall examine the challenges and difficulties that partnership inquiry can bring to the surface; we shall make the case for enhanced professional learning for both academics and field based professionals in education and we shall re-cast matters of quality based upon an ethical platform rather than a restrictive, even banal, set of quantifiable indicators.

We wish to be clear at this point that in our view the knowledge that drives professional practice and the 'theoretical' knowledge valued by the academy are not mutually exclusive. We argue, like others who have written about the interface between practitioner research and the academy, that this dichotomy is a limiting one for both practitioners and academics. Noffke (1994) surveys the historical landscape of teacher research in order to identify the multiple purposes to which it is applied. She argues that 'action research' is employed for a variety of purposes throughout the western world, ranging broadly from the education of teachers in conducting and applying research in their work to challenging and arresting the systemic status quo. Noffke clearly sees teacher research as placed within a discourse of social reform, calling for scholars to address what is for her a key issue: "Placing action research into existing frames for epistemology may also lead to new ways of maintaining privilege systems as they are. Here the works of feminist and post-colonialist scholars… may be particularly helpful"

(p.16) Her argument here is essentially that the teacher research movement can be seen to parallel the women's movement in terms of the creation of alternate forms of scholarly discourse which reach different levels of acceptance within the academy. In the enactment of rigorous practitioner inquiry, practitioners enter into this process of knowledge creation, cogniscent of the complexities and richness of the fields within which they operate.

Indeed, those involved in practitioner inquiry are bound to engage with both 'theoretical' and 'practical' knowledge, moving seamlessly between the two through, for example, a review and appraisal of research literature normally made available through academic journals, research reports and the like (Groundwater-Smith & Mockler, 2003).

Professional Knowledge and Practitioner Research

Anderson & Herr (1999) introduce their discussion of the value and valuing (or non-valuing) of practitioner research with a quote from Donald Schon:

> Introducing the new scholarship into institutions of higher education means becoming involved in an epistemological battle. It is a battle of snails, proceeding so slowly that you have to look very carefully in order to see it going on. But it is happening nonetheless. (Schon, 1995, in Anderson & Herr, 1999 p. 12)

The 'new scholarship' is taken to mean the kind of inquiry that recognises the distinctiveness of participatory research in which all of the key agents can play a part (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2000). The case made by Anderson & Herr is one that is clearly recognisable in the Australian context, in that we are faced with simultaneous and often contradictory arguments regarding the worth of collaborative research that engages both the academy and the field. They note that on the one hand administrators and professional development specialists see practitioner research "as the new silver bullet" that they wish to control and domesticate, on the other hand academics see the value of such inquiry as a "form of knowledge that leads to change within the practice setting itself, but are less comfortable when it is presented as public knowledge with epistemic claims beyond the practice setting" (p.14).

In part, we see, the snail-like progress described by Schon as attributable to the academy's determination to hold onto its elite status that will brook no intrusion by the messy and indeterminate world of practice. Practice should remain subordinate to traditional academic discourse. Indeed, we would go so far as to say, the academy, in the main, has been quite complicit with the ways in which research assessment exercises have been conducted.

Educators in schools, be they teachers, administrators or ancillary staff, are daily confronted by ongoing and relentless demands: demands upon their time; their pedagogical content knowledge; their emotional resilience; their capacity to solve complex problems; the list goes on and on. Of course the divide between the academy and the field is not only one that is experienced in education. Professional practice has

been the poor cousin to the disciplinary sciences in our universities since their very inception.

In a general, rather than a specifically educational sense, a most significant intrusion into the elite world of academia came about with the work of Gibbons *et al* (1994) who developed our understanding that knowledge creation is not exclusively a matter for scientists and academics working in institutions but may be socially produced and distributed in the form of what they coined as "Mode 2 Knowledge". Such knowledge production is concerned with the identification and solution of practical problems in the lived professional lives of practitioners and organizations who are not encircled by the boundaries of single disciplines with their conventions and orthodoxies. It is reflexive knowledge in that it results from a dialogic process as conversations in the field.

More recently Nowotny, Scott & Gibbons (2003) have argued that judging the worth of the Mode 2 Knowledge is no longer the exclusive province of the academy "because there is no longer a stable taxonomy of codified disciplines from which 'peers' can be drawn (p.187). They continue by asserting that the 'research game' is being joined by more and more players. Problem generation and problem solving are contextualised within professional practice in the face of "variously jostling publics" (Nowotny, Scott & Gibbons, 2003, p. 192).

We contend that professional knowledge in education will be better served by drawing upon such diverse, rather than narrowly specialised sources. Diversity can more broadly and richly inform and strengthen the educational experience for all who participate in it. Of course, that does not mean that we eschew quality, but that quality should be determined on ethical rather than technical criteria – a matter to which we return at a later point in this article.

In their discussion aimed toward aligning quality outcomes with improved classroom practices in developing countries (Schubert & Vanbella-Prouty, 2001) argued that programme developers require information that derives from practice, in other words Mode 2 Knowledge:

> It is not possible to develop and implement interventions or legislate policies – all of which are designed to ultimately improve pupils' performance – unless there is initial, ongoing feedback about the learning environment, the skills, knowledge and performance of teachers and pupils and other factors that influence learning. (p.1)

They argue that the knowledge which is required should be based upon "the findings by educators at all levels of system who are positioned to effect improvements of teacher and pupil performance" (p.2) and that may include the insights of practitioners as they go about their work in schools. While their paper focuses upon the improvement of educational practices in developing countries their maxims apply equally well to (over) developed countries such as Australia.

So what is the knowledge that facilitated practitioner inquiry can build and disseminate? We believe that the notion of communities of practice will serve us well. Thirty years ago Lawrence Stenhouse advocated teacher professional autonomy and suggested it could be achieved by:

> autonomous professional development through systematic self study, … and through questioning and testing of ideas by classroom research procedures (Stenhouse, 1975, p.144)

As we understand it, autonomy should not be taken to mean teachers exercising professional judgement in isolation from their peers, but rather that they develop their professional learning through systematic investigation, and that the investigation can occur in partnerships with university colleagues. While the term 'community of practice' had not been coined at the time of his writing Stenhouse strongly subscribed to the notion of 'self-study', or what we refer to as 'practitioner research', as being conducted in the company of others.

Within Wenger's well known model (1998), communities of practice evolve from how professionals work together to develop shared meaning through the exercise of joint enterprise, shared repertoire and mutual engagement which in turn impacts on the development and evolution of identity. However it is essential to acknowledge that different communities such as professional, educational or school-based communities may have different norms and modes of operation. As Longino (1993) has argued, regardless of the form of knowledge being proposed, mechanisms for scrutiny and challenge must be warranted and justified.

We note that many writers have similarly recognised the need to develop professional knowledge *with* the field of practice, rather than *for* the field of practice. The prepositional change is not one to be taken lightly. As Gore & Gitlin (2004) claim "We need to work with teachers to explore the limits and possibilities of research for their work as teachers" (p.52). Furthermore, they believe that this is achieved, not only by engaging in joint research activities but also by exposing and analysing the politics of research and the power relations therein. In this way a genuine parity of esteem within the community of practice, with the purpose of improving learning for all, can be achieved.

Many writers quite properly focus upon the benefits that can flow to the consequential stakeholders, the students themselves, as a result of research conducted as facilitated practitioner inquiry. It is also essential that teacher learning is clearly recognised as the critical intervening variable. Borko (2004) concludes

> We have much work to do and many questions to answer in order to provide high quality professional development to all teachers. It will take many different types of inquiries and a vast array of research tools to generate the rich source of knowledge needed to achieve this goal (p. 13).

While we would debate the lack of research agency suggested by Borko, we clearly agree with her assertion that it will take much in the way of research "types" to assist in and improve practice in ways that have eluded us in the past. Hargreaves, a long advocate of practice based research (2002) notes that:

> …professional learning communities lead to strong and measurable improvements in students' learning. Instead of bringing about 'quick fixes' or superficial change, they create and support sustainable improvements that last over time because they build professional skill and the capacity to keep the school progressing. (p. 3)

Mitchell & Sackney (2000) have made the case for school improvement that is founded upon capacity building that "occurs from an internal search for meaning, relevance and connection" (p.139). Schools that see themselves as knowledge building enterprises that work in partnership with academic colleagues are in a stronger position to operationalise the outcomes of local inquiries and, indeed, develop authentic contexts for the positive reforms sought for but not found by Sarason whose lament was quoted in the length at the beginning of this piece of writing.

We turn, then, to the ways in which partnerships, that are generative for all participants, may be established and nurtured, even in the face of the lack of generosity and recognition on the part of university hierarchies.

Partnerships – Transcending the Devil's Bargain

In an early chapter in his book *Professional Knowledge, Professional Lives* Goodson (2003) argues that:

> Schools of education may have entered into a devil's bargain when they entered the university milieu. The result was that their mission changed from being primarily concerned with matters central to the practice of schooling, towards issues of status passage through more conventional university scholarship. (p.12)

What Goodson does not say is that all too often, in this rather misty-eyed view of the past, research, of any kind, was not used as a basis for teaching, but practice was founded upon easily-followed recipes and nostrums. It would seem that today, teacher education sits on the horns of a dilemma that needs to be resolved in the interests of a scholarship of teaching. Difficult as they may be partnerships between academia and the field hold the promise of being genuinely transformational. Certainly this is the view held by Sachs (2003) in her evocation of the activist professional:

> Often [practitioner research] is seen as a significant form of *teacher* professional development, and it is. What I have been suggesting here is that teacher research undertaken with academic colleagues is also a significant form of *academic* professional development. Seen as such, academics can learn a great deal which contributes to the broader goal of improving their own practice and also that of

their students, many of whom will become the next generation of teachers. (p.93, emphasis in original)

Before progressing to discuss either macro-policy or local benefits we would first like to make more transparent a particular partnership – that is the one being played out by the authors of this article. It would be indeed ironic if a discussion about the notion of collaborative inquiry between academia and the field were to be wholly conducted by members of the former group. Therefore, we choose, at this moment in the text, to disclose something of our own biographies, our own narratives of practice. We could both be characterised as 'cross-over' academics. Susan has been located, in one way or another, in the higher education sector for the past thirty years. However, she also works within schools, often with the students themselves, to build research capacity. Nicole's most recent appointment was as the Director of Professional Learning in a large independent girls school, a sector in which she has worked from some fifteen years. She has only this year moved out of this role to work as an education consultant and PhD candidate. Recently, at a forum conducted by the University of Technology, Sydney a school principal reflected on the need for academics willing to "get their hands dirty" and nominated us and our mode of working as falling into that category.

Having, both of us, worked in partnership arrangements between schools and universities we concede to Rudduck's point (1992) that these can be liaisons dangereuses with different institutions growing from different cultures and values. Schools can often prefer the celebratory to the critical; universities can be insensitive to the micro-politics of the schools. Of course partnerships themselves vary in terms of the relationships between the different stakeholders. McLaughlin & Black-Hawkins (2004) have developed a typology of school/university partnerships in this way:

1. School bound – individual teachers mentored by university 'research experts';
2. School wide – supported by a university facilitator or critical friend;
3. University as 'expert bringer of research to the school(s);
4. Across schools – individual teachers mentored by university 'research experts';
5. Within and between schools – supported by university facilitators and/or critical friends; and
6. Within and between institutions – all partners are experts, facilitators and critical friends to one another. (pp. 276 – 277)

Clearly these different partnership arrangements will produce different professional learning. What is important to note is that productive learning should be an outcome for all participants, irrespective of the degree of parity in the partnership. In this sense quality is linked to professionalism and its development.

How then are we to judge the value of inquiry conducted by university based academics and their partners in the field if we are to eschew the conventional orthodoxies of what counts as 'quality' in educational research? We believe that by turning to considerations of ethical professionalism we can build a new and different platform for the examination of what is worthwhile.

Ethical Professionalism as a Platform for 'Quality' in Practitioner Research

The notion of 'ethical professionalism' is steeped within broader discussions of teacher professionalism and teacher professional identity. While more conventional conceptualisations of teacher professionalism (Shulman 1987; Hargreaves 1996, 1998) have sought to codify, quantify and otherwise classify teachers' professional knowledge and practice into a form which can easily be used to justify that teaching does indeed 'measure up' to the standards set by the 'real professions' such as law and medicine, a range of alternative conceptualisations have been offered by scholars intent on drawing a portrait of teacher professionalism which focuses more explicitly on broader issues of perspective and approach, learning and ethics.

In providing a rationale for the development of a 'new teacher professionalism' which transcends the inwardly-focused and reactionary nature of the 'old', Sachs (2003) argues

> The organisation of work practices, the use of technology and the types of students that teachers find in front of them in their classrooms require alternative ways of thinking about the teaching profession. Furthermore, the rapid rate of change and the increasing access that students have to knowledge and information through the use of information communication technologies require a different type of teacher professionalism that is more outward looking and responsive than the old formations of teacher professionalism. (p.12)

Notions of 'ethical teacher professionalism' (Campbell 2003), 'activist professionalism' (Sachs 2000, 2003) and 'transformative professionalism' (Sachs, 2003) grow partially from understandings of the changing nature of teachers' professional practice such as these and partly from a growing attention to the enactment of the 'common good' through teachers' work.

Michael Bottery (1996) nominates five ethical dimensions of new teacher professionalism (a group within which we would include teacher educators) which he argues are essential in the formation of authentic professional practice. They are:

- An ethic of truth disclosure which must override personal advantage;
- An ethic of subjectivity, for each in dividual must recognise the limits of his or her perceptions, the individuality of his or her values;
- An ethic of reflective integrity, as each professional recognises the limits of personal perception, of the need to incorporate many understandings of a situation;
- An ethic of humility as each professional recognises that such subjectivity means that personal fallibility is not a failing but a condition of being human; and
- An ethic of humanistic education of the duty to help the client help themselves.

(Bottery 1996, p. 193)

Similarly, in her work on 'the ethical teacher', Elizabeth Campbell (2003) makes a case for the use of ethics as a primary framework for thinking about teachers and teachers' work. Such a framework, she posits, has the potential to provide a renewed sense of professionalism (through providing a focal point for the rethinking of the profession in ethical terms), a basis for renewed school cultures (through using the moral basis of teachers' work as a 'touchstone' for school reform, and a catalyst for renewed teacher education and professional learning. For Campbell, the project of developing ethical teacher professionalism relates closely to the greater project of working towards civil society, through the harnessing of the 'moral purpose' (Fullan, 1993) implicit in the teaching enterprise. In this, she echoes Sachs' (2000, 2003) conceptualisation of an 'activist teaching profession', where the aim is to "improve all aspects of the education enterprise at the macro level and student learning outcomes and teachers' status in the eyes of the community at the micro level" (Sachs 2000, p. 77).

The notion of ethical teacher professionalism holds a number of important implications for practitioner research. In the first place, it sits well with Lewin's assertion that the defining characteristic of such research that he characterises as "Action Research" should be that it is "research leading to social action" (Lewin 1946, p. 203), and subsequent conceptualisations of the emancipatory nature of practitioner research represented in the work of scholars such as Stenhouse (1981) and Carr and Kemmis (1986). Indeed, the enterprise of practitioner research has a reflexive relationship with the ethical or activist professional in that it both provides a tool for engaging with the larger goal of such professionalism and "can contribute to the larger political project of creating an activist [and ethical] teaching profession" (Sachs 2003, p.92). Bottery emphasises this reflexive relationship when he writes of the importance of professional self-knowledge:

> [Self-knowledge] allows professionals to assess their weaknesses and strengths that much better. It allows them to appreciate that some justifications are valid, others are little more than rationalisations for historical accident. It allows them to place themselves within a wider picture, and see that sometimes (perhaps often) legislative change my not be aimed at them specifically, but has a wider target, and that they happen to be in the way. It gives them the opportunity to see that they do not necessarily occupy the centre of any occupational universe, but are part of a much more complex ecology of occupations. Professional action can only be enhanced by such understandings. (1996, p. 191)

Ethical or transformative professionalism, then, provides a context for the enactment of quality practitioner research, on the part of both the teachers and academics involved. Elsewhere we have written of ethics as one of the "three basic tests" of quality for any practitioner research project (Groundwater-Smith and Mockler, 2002). While there has been a significant spotlight shone on the connection between (and indeed, interweaving of) ethics and quality in qualitative research generally over the past ten years (for example, Lincoln 1995, Olesen 2003), particularly with regard to feminist and participatory research paradigms, relatively little has been produced relating specifically to the issue of ethics in practitioner research.

A variety of scholars writing about the enactment of practitioner research have offered a set of 'quality criteria' to practitioners and academics engaged in such work. In their introduction to practitioner research methods, for example, Altrichter, Posch and Somekh (1993) establish four criteria for evaluating the quality of action research. They are:

1. Considering alternative perspectives: Have the understandings gained from research been cross-checked against the perspectives of those concerned and/or other researchers?
2. Testing through practical action: Have the understandings gained from research been tested through practical action?
3. Ethical justification: Are the research methods compatible with both educational aims and democratic human values?
4. Practicality: Are the research design and data collection methods compatible with the demands of teaching? (pp. 74-81)

In a similar vein, Anderson & Herr (1999) have suggested that we consider five validity criteria: Outcome validity; process validity; democratic validity; catalytic validity and dialogic validity. Outcome validity refers to the impact that the inquiry has on practice – has it led to a resolution or re-framing of the problem? Process validity points to the appropriateness of the methods that have been adopted to the question being investigated. Democratic validity, as the name suggests, refers to the extent that all stakeholders are consulted and engaged in the inquiry. Catalytic validity points to the transformative potential of the research, while dialogic validity refers to the kind of intersubjectivity upon which Stenhouse insisted. It is in relation to the last of these that Mishler (1990) develops his considerable and powerful arguments in that he forcefully puts the case that "trustworthiness" must be a central tenet of research, in his case in medical and mental health studies, and that such trustworthiness is best tested through ongoing discourse among those who participate in it.

While we agree that such criteria are both sensible and effective, we wish to argue here for the intrinsic and fundamental relationship between ethics and quality within practitioner research aiming towards an emancipatory goal. Indeed we suggest an approach where ethical issues form the primary criteria for quality in practitioner research, and the establishment of a number of 'implications for quality' which naturally flow from a framework of ethics. Clearly ethics are informed by values which assemble into a values system. On the one hand, in our view, values are those constructs held by individuals, they may differ from person to person, move towards stability and indeed become habitual; they are personal and influenced by social context. On the other hand, ethics are part of a broader social discourse governing the rightness or wrongness of action, and as such belong in the realm of the collective and the public. We should not confuse ethics with efficiency. In the end, ethics is associated with morality, which again is informed by values.

Thus, we wish to pose here a series of broad, over-riding 'ethical' guidelines for practitioner research, some of which are linked to a traditional conceptualisation of research ethics, while others flow from the discourse of the 'ethical professional':

- *That it should observe ethical protocols and processes*: Practitioner research is subject to the same ethical protocols as other social research. Informed consent should be sought from participants, whether students, teachers, parents or others, and an earnest attempt should be made to 'do no harm'.

- *That it should be transparent in its processes*: One of the broader aims of practitioner research lies in the building of community and the sharing of knowledge and ideas. To this end, practitioner research should be 'transparent' in its enactment, and practitioner researchers accountable to their community for the processes and products of their research. Publication (whether to the 'village' or to the 'world' (Stenhouse, 1981:17)) is part of this transparency, as is the opening of the research to vigorous dialogue and debate.

- *That it should be collaborative in its nature*: Practitioner research should aim to provide opportunities for colleagues to share, discuss and debate aspects of their practice in the name of improvement and development. The responsible 'making sense' of data collected from within the field of one's own practice (through triangulation of evidence and other means) relies heavily on these opportunities.

- *That it should be able to justify itself to its community of practice:* Engaging in practitioner research involves an opportunity cost to the community. To do well, requires time and energy that cannot be spent in other professional ways. The benefits must be commensurable with the effort and resources expended in the course of the work which necessarily will require collaboration and communication.

- *That it should be transformative in its intent and action*: Practitioner researchers engage in an enterprise which is, in essence, about contributing to both transformation of practice and transformation of society. As Marion Dadds (1998) writes:
    > "At the heart of every practitioner research project there is a significant job of work to be done that will make a small contribution to the improvement of the human condition in that context. Good practitioner research, I believe, helps to develop life for others in caring, equitable, humanising ways."

Responsible and ethical practitioner research operates in such a way as to create actionable, actioned outcomes.

These then are the criteria by which practitioner research should be judged; while they may appear ineffable when set against the highly defining metrics and measure preferred in research assessment exercises we would argue that they are critical to intelligent and generative educational relationships whose purpose is genuine improvement.

Conclusion:

Trustworthiness in facilitated practitioner inquiry is an important consideration (*cf* Mischler 1990) but there also needs to be an investment in trust on the part of those who count what counts as educational research. The erosion of social trust has been well documented and debated by scholars (see, for example (Cvetkovich and Lofstedt 1999; Fukuyama 1999; Misztal 1996). On a macro or societal level, the rise of the 'network society' (Castells 1997), the development of 'manufactured uncertainty' (Giddens 1994) and the growth in global terrorism (Combs 2003) are seen, among many other elements, to be related to the crisis of social trust. In addition, the growing popularity of fundamentalism in varied religious, economic and social forms can be seen as representative of a culture of instrumentalism which seeks to eradicate nuance and provide 'common sense' and simple answers to complex questions.

Within education, this erosion of trust can be seen in the current fixation on 'standards', measurement and accountability to a set of rather narrow parameters and 'norms', both in schools and Higher Education. Indeed we would argue that the limited focus of the HERDC exercise discussed in the first section of this paper is representative of this fixation. Within educational institutions individually and systemically, an increase in managerialism and the appropriation of commercial language and values can be observed, both of which are in some way representative of this erosion of trust.

Giddens (1994) points to the need for the development of what he terms 'active trust' in response to the 'detraditionalising' of social institutions where the expectation that processes will unfold in age-old ways can no longer be met. Active trust is defined by Giddens as "trust in others or in institutions that has to be actively produced and negotiated". An investment of trust on the part of those who count what counts as educational research in the first place relies on a willingness to enter into the production and negotiation of active trust in ways which are generative and altruistic. It requires an investment in the transformative agenda itself.

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