Insights into Teachers’ Thinking and Practice
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It is now six years since the formation of the International Study Association on Teacher Thinking (ISATT). If attendance at the fourth ISATT conference (September 1988) of delegates from eighteen different countries is one measure of activity then one can say that it is a progressive field of research. This book represents but a small selection of papers initially presented at the 1988 conference.

Clark (1986) demonstrated in his paper on the development of conceptions that have influenced research on teacher thinking that such research has a longer history than ISATT. Nevertheless the decade 1975–85 showed a period of rapid growth and the beginning of a new focus within the research field.

What then is the current focus within research on teacher thinking? For many researchers it is the teacher’s subjective school related knowledge. The following quote by Halkes and Olson (1984) from the first ISATT volume captures the views of many researchers on teacher thinking with respect to this focus.

Looking from a teacher thinking perspective at teaching and learning one is not so much striving for the disclosure of ‘the’ effective teacher, but for the explanation and understanding of teaching processes as they are. After all it’s the teacher’s subjective school related knowledge which determines for the most part what happens in the classroom; whether the teacher can articulate his/her knowledge or not. Instead of reducing the complexities of the teaching learning situations into a few manageable research variables, one tries to find out how teachers cope with these complexities (p. 1).

The thrust of much educational research in Britain and elsewhere is towards national criteria for selection and performance appraisal and creation of performance indicators for serving teachers. Much of the blame for ‘quality deficits’ is often placed on personal qualities of teachers, their lack of technical expertise or incompetence as a subject specialist. These do little to raise the morale of teachers and the emphasis seems misplaced. As far back as 1963 Getzels and Jackson noted that despite many decades of work on teacher personality ‘very little is known for certain about the nature and measurement of teacher personality or about the relation between teacher personality and teacher effectiveness’ (p. 547). Likewise, as Low yck (1984) suggests, correlational research aimed at isolating specific teaching
behaviours in effective teaching has had limited success. He claims that this was due not only to problems of methodology but to the concept of teaching behaviour in use.

Teaching cannot in its wholeness be conceived as the sum of a limited number of isolated effective teaching behaviours often called ‘skills’. Teaching behaviour has to be understood in relation to the intentions of the teacher and to the situational complexity (p. 9)

The chapters in this book essentially represent the efforts of the authors to present students’ and teachers’ lives and experiences in authentic ways. As expected, theoretical and empirical research is represented, and approaches range from the so-called scientific traditions of cognitive psychology to inductive approaches associated with phenomenographic naturalistic inquiry. The vast majority are small scale qualitative studies which rely upon combinations of interview, questionnaire, naturalistic observation, descriptive, biographical and autobiographical data presented as analytic description (case studies and vignettes).

All the authors affirm implicitly the continuing need for research to demonstrate a holistic view of teacher as person rather than teacher as segmented object, to bridge the descriptive-prescriptive divide. All are concerned with the nature, formation and use of teachers’ knowledge—the construction, reconstruction and reorganization of experience which adds to its meaning.

The current focus is therefore trying to understand and interpret the ways in which teachers make sense of and adjust to and create the educational environment within their schools and classrooms—not an easy endeavour and certainly one that has necessitated a shift in educational research thinking and practice.

Whilst sharing a focus and an ideological commitment to viewing teachers as active agents in the development of educative events, the field of teacher thinking research is diverse in terms of theoretical and methodological approaches. This is not surprising given the complexity of the phenomena to be studied and the diverse backgrounds of the researchers themselves. The community of teacher thinking scholars embraces a wide range including psychologists, sociologists, curriculum specialists, anthropologists, philosophers, linguists and ‘subject’ specialists for example, mathematicians, physicists.

Within teacher thinking research there has been a recognition of the complexity of the phenomena to be studied and the need for more qualitative data gathering processes.

Shifts in methodological perspective within teacher thinking research reflect those within social science generally. For example, Nagy (1984) referred to a ‘methodological crisis amongst those who are engaged in the task of deciphering the true meaning of cognitive structure’ (p. iii). This crisis was in part due to continued debate regarding the appropriateness of quantitative and qualitative research strategies and the diversity of assumptions regarding the nature of ‘cognitive structure’.

2 INSIGHTS INTO TEACHERS’ THINKING AND PRACTICE
Recent emphasis has been on research being of value to practitioners and the participants within the research. In order to enhance this within teacher thinking research a change of relationship between teachers and researchers is developing and the goal of teacher thinking research has become that of ‘portraying and understanding good teaching in all of its irreducible complexity and difficulty. Quality portraiture may be of more practical and inspirational value than reductionistic analysis and technical prescriptiveness’. (Clark, 1986: p. 4).

As in other fields of social enquiry methodological debates regarding appropriateness of particular paradigms exist within educational research, see for example Popkewitz (1984) Paradigm and Ideology in Educational Research. If one considers Habermas’s categories of positivist, interpretative, and critical research as applied to teacher thinking research all three forms can be identified within the field. The current scene is predominantly interpretative although one can detect more of the critical form in recent years.

Elbaz’s work in the first part of this volume adopts a critical stance. She challenges any tendency towards complacency amongst teacher thinking researchers by raising important issues such as non linearity of tacit knowledge, in-articulateness of ordinary folk, the difficulties of reporting on teachers’ narratives, the distortion in telling someone else’s stories. She advocates the development of new ways of disseminating such narratives if teacher thinking researchers truly aim at giving teachers ‘voice’ and wish to avoid the risk of ‘taking teachers’ stories out of their hands’. Buchman’s chapter raises a philosophical question regarding the relationship between thinking and action by considering the role of contemplation in teaching and its practical aspects. Elbaz and Buchman’s chapters open Part I which focuses on general methodological and theoretical debates within teacher thinking research.

Within pre and in-service professional development teachers are being encouraged to rethink the ‘metaphors they live by’ (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980). The reflective practitioner (Schön, 1983) needs to critically reflect on the meaning of his/her thoughts and actions as a route to the enhancement of professional practice. Teachers may find consideration of their current constructs threatening, especially if they deduce that change is needed. Threatening and revolutionary this may be but some teacher educators see this as empowering the teachers to make education a positive experience for learner and teacher. Haandal and Lauvas (1987) advocate the promotion of reflective teacher education and that within teaching practice ‘supervision’ the teachers’ ‘practical theory’ should be discussed given its role in practical classroom decision-making.

Kremer Hayon’s chapter challenges the notion of reflection and its relationship to the development of professional knowledge. In particular she expresses the need for greater conceptual clarity regarding ‘reflection’ and poses a potential conceptual framework for considering the processes involved. Olson adds an important dimension to the arena of discourse within teacher thinking—that of the moral. Using case studies of teachers’ responses to the implementation of new technology within the curriculum Olson traces the moral imperatives within teacher thinking, an issue developed in Massey’s chapter in Part II. No direct connection with
morality is implied in Brown and Kompf’s chapter on ‘Lies teachers tell’! These authors focus on the methodological dilemmas inherent in obtaining commentary from teachers and the importance of tools which allow for expression of teachers’ views in their own words. Their starting point embraces personal construct psychology but within the chapter they comment on the need to go beyond the repertory grid as a technique for gathering data about teachers’ intentions.

The final chapter in Part I provides an overview of recent research in teacher thinking. Lowyck traces the development of theory and method in this field and raises questions as to the legitimate aims of such research. Should researchers seek to describe teaching situations and teachers’ views regarding their craft or should prescription as to good practice prevail? Lowyck advocates the need to form bridges between descriptive accounts and the implications of such results for practice. In order to effect such bridges within teacher thinking research new relationships with the teaching community need to develop. In seeking an integrative way of looking at the way teaching ‘is’ and ‘ought to be’ Lowyck suggests that teacher thinking researchers should attempt to integrate some of the findings of the process-product paradigm in order to avoid parallelism between various approaches in research on teaching. Lowyck also notes that if the descriptive research outcomes are to function as inspiration for practitioners there is a need to consider potential alienation due to ‘the transcoding inside scientific models’ of the concepts deduced from the real life of teachers. This echoes some of the concerns expressed by Elbaz in her chapter.

An attempt is made in Part II to illustrate some of the preceding points by including papers which describe current empirical work in the field. In terms of methodology, these papers demonstrate a range of divergence from or adherence to the traditional scientific research design. Indeed, for some the essence of the paper is a report on issues related to methods in use, for instance Denicolo and Pope are concerned with the epistemology of an approach and its ramifications, while others are concerned more with alerting readers to issues worthy of investigation because of their peculiar salience to particular groups of teachers, for example Massey, in addressing the roots of teachers’ perspectives, notes an ideological theme which emerged during the process of research.

Thus the reader will find that for some authors their fieldwork provides only the background to a discussion of issues emerging from it while for others the issue relates more strongly to the methods themselves as vehicles for the improvement of practice by promoting reflection on it. It is noteworthy that all the studies presented focus on the real life practice of teachers, mainly in the form of case studies, and each author has made an attempt to convey the participants’ perspectives as authentically as possible. Gudmundsdottir and Naeslund in particular provide us with some graphic insights into aspects of their participants’ worlds.

The section starts with a paper by Denicolo and Pope, the intent of which is not to present a formal report of a research project, thus avoiding the potential alienation as described by Lowyck, but which does seek to illustrate an approach grounded in a particular philosophy of teacher education. Although some research results are presented, they are included only as exemplars to support an evaluation
of an innovative research instrument. The main proposition discussed is that the subsuming approach, using similar complementary devices, is a fruitful tool for raising the awareness of both researchers and teachers alike, whatever their respective experience levels.

The professional experience of the teacher-participants in the research addressed in the subsequent papers moves along a continuum from that of student teachers and novice teachers to that of experienced teachers, reaffirming that development of professional practice is a continuous process.

Thus, the study in the second paper is set in a teacher-training context. Although a more traditional overall design is used by Huber and Roth, the case study presented incorporates the perspectives of student teachers and their teachers on a very relevant issue in teacher development, that is, orientation to aspects of uncertainty versus certainty of situations. It is proposed that this orientation is one of the determinants of teaching style which in turn interacts with the orientation in this dimension of the learners. This paper adds to the growing literature about the conflicts between teaching and learning styles and has particular relevance in educational settings in which independent, student-centred learning is promoted and non-traditional teaching methods advocated in counterpoint to the prior experience of either teachers or learners.

The arena of initial teacher education also forms the context of the case studies described in Massey’s paper in which the reflections of novice teachers on their practice are considered in conjunction with their presuppositions and their ideal or technological realities. An emergent issue to which our attention is directed is the moral base of teaching, an issue which has been sadly neglected in the past while the literature and research has been preoccupied with more overt indicators of professional skills development. Redressing the balance somewhat, this paper, like others in this section, addresses the concerns and dilemmas which occupy the practitioners and which, indeed, ultimately influence practice.

By contrasting case studies of novice and experienced teachers, Gudmundsdottir’s illustrative research illuminates differences in practice between the two groups in the realm of ability to communicate their subject knowledge. The central thesis is that the creation of meaning in a discipline area involves, within the curriculum, the making of a story by linking the ideas inherent in the continuing syllabus. From this paper we receive insights into the development of teachers-as-storytellers, addressing a skill related to their content knowledge but having a significant contribution to make to the development of pedagogical skill.

Continuing the shift of focus towards the practice of more experienced teachers, another author, Naeslund, redirects our attention to teaching style, this time with respect to the illusive concept of effectiveness. By using vignettes of teachers with very different styles, he demonstrates the variety of definition of effectiveness in terms of success in the teaching role while also delineating the consequences that different perspectives of this role have for individual teachers. In doing so, an argument is developed against too tight a prescription of role nature and performance by teacher educators or politicians. We are reminded that good
professional practice is neither simply definable in terms of descriptions of orientation and style of role enactment, nor is it necessarily something which can be attained by the elapse of time or confrontation by certain kinds of experience.

The theme of experienced professionals also needing opportunities to consider their practice is taken up in the next paper in which Ben Peretz et al provide us with a synopsis of their evaluation of some of the innovatory ways in which teachers in Israel are encouraged to do this. Of particular interest in this study is the range of motives that teachers have prior to engaging in these forms of professional development and the consequent relationship of intentions, choice of study programme and reflections on the value of that selected programme. This paper will serve not only to alert planners of in-service staff development programmes to considerations which deserve attention prior to implementation but may also encourage teachers to reflect on the limitations which they themselves impose on their possibilities for development.

The final paper in this section also considers a developmental tool for inservice work with teachers but in this case Hanke reports on an investigation of a method related to critical incident analysis which encourages teachers to consider, in conjunction with their own reflections, the perspectives of the other actors in the incident, that is, their pupils. ‘Structured dialogues’ concerning the interpretation of both parties and the consequent decisions taken enable teachers to become more alert to alternative perspectives and hence modes of reaction. It is of relevance to note that the research led in turn to the development of materials which may be used selectively for individual diagnosis and training, the selection being made by the teachers themselves. Thus, in this small way, they too can be self-directed learners, emancipated from externally generated criteria, an issue which is taken up in the next section.

In Part III, which reports research into recent developments in thinking and practice, in her paper entitled ‘Relations Between Thinking and Acting in Teachers in Innovative Work’ Ingrid Carlgren describes Swedish teachers’ perceptions of the implementation of externally generated innovation through the implementation of school-based curriculum development. The research provides useful empirical data which demonstrates the ways in which teachers modify externally generated innovation to their own individually perceived needs. Although in doing so the original intentions of the innovation may become ‘contaminated’ or ‘distorted’, the benefits of transfer of ownership are that new practices may be adopted, developed, and tested to greater or lesser degrees. Carlgren posits three relationships between means and ends which may result from innovation: a taken-for-granted relationship in which innovations are adopted; a theoretical relationship in which innovations are developed by teachers; and an empirical relationship in which innovations are tested by teachers. She uses this analysis as a means of exploring the significancies of different relationships between teachers’ thinking and acting. In a sense the research is an investigation of the limitations on the development of teachers’ thinking and acting of external innovation which fails to provide as an integral part of the design the appropriate means of support for the process of implementation. Thus,
innovation which only extends current thinking and practice is likely to produce only ‘surface’ change. Neither innovation itself, nor its application to school-based curriculum development work will necessarily contribute to the development of teachers as reflective practitioners.

In contrast, Lynne Hannay and Wayne Seller’s work in Canada on ‘The Influence of Teachers’ Thinking on Curriculum Development Decisions’ reports on researcher facilitated processes of deliberation and change. Their report focuses on the work processes of a school-based curriculum development committee over one school year. One of the researchers was involved in a participant-as-observer role, facilitating and encouraging the curriculum deliberations of the committee, whilst the second acted in a non-participant observer role. They suggest that curriculum deliberation, defined as an exploration of what is in order to examine what should be, results in individuals taking decisions and sharing them with others. Their research examines the thinking and action processes which contribute to these results and in particular how they are influenced by previously held practical knowledge, personal and professional beliefs, rules of practice, image, and the environment in which teachers work. The research demonstrates how teachers’ images of themselves as (in this case geography) teachers, teaching itself, students, rules of practice and the curriculum development process itself affected significantly their deliberations and shows how these images were modified as a direct result of participation in curriculum development discussions which took place over time with the facilitation of an external agent. In this sense, the paper, like Day’s, reports a research and development project which provides opportunities for teachers to engage in systematic reflection on personal practical knowledge. The motivation for the meetings was the need to respond to externally proposed innovation from the Ministry of Education. The initial response of token change and minimum participation gradually changed as its members began to feel ownership of and responsibility for their own decisions within the framework of Ministry imposed guidelines—further empirical evidence which, whilst supporting the findings of Carlgren’s research that school-based curriculum development in response to external innovation may be at surface level only, implicitly takes this into account through the provision of external intervention strategies, critical support for what might be described as ‘emancipatory’ curriculum discussion amongst equals which re-empowered them as curriculum decision takers. Hannay and Seller identified three phases in the development of curriculum decision making—‘cut and paste’, ‘cognitive dissonance’ and ‘assimilation’ and found that factors which facilitated the curriculum development process included the particular nature of the deliberative process itself, facilitative leadership of these processes by one of the researchers, and a supportive group climate in which public reflection was accepted and encouraged.

These factors are further examined by Christopher Day in ‘The Development of Teachers’ Personal Practical Knowledge through School-Based Curriculum Development Projects’. This paper reports and evaluates the impact on teachers’ thinking and practice of active involvement over time in five school initiated school-based curriculum development projects which were managed, like that described in
Hannay and Seller’s paper by ‘communities of equals’, groups of like-minded people, on a voluntary basis. However, in the work described by Day, the teachers were participants in the action of curriculum development as well as its formulation, and the researcher took an observer-as-non-participant role. The work, like that described by Carlgren, was intended to lead to change. Unlike the Swedish experience, however, it was initiated by management inside rather than outside of the school. Nevertheless, problems of commitment and ownership were identified in those projects which were intended to implement rather than critically consider policy issues determined by management. Essentially, the paper provides empirical evidence which supports the views of teachers as potential reflective practitioners (Schön, 1983) active meaning makers, connoisseurs and researchers, expressed over the years by Stenhouse (1975) in England, Eisner (1983) and Schön (1983) in America, Smyth (1987) in Australia, and Connelly and Clandinin (1985) in Canada among others.

Potential for the development of personal practical knowledge does, it seems, in order to be realized, need certain conditions, identified in the paper as being positive school climate, tangible, planned opportunities for self reflection, defined as a dialectical process of reflection both in and on the action, peer support and collaboration, ownership and control of learning, and the support by the institution for locking into institutional practice the learning achieved. However, reflecting in and on the action is not simply a matter of providing optimum conditions. It must be recognized that each teacher’s motivation and learning commitment will vary in intensity because of personal and professional developmental and socialization factors—and that each will be at a different stage of development.

As in Letiche’s paper, Day’s study reveals that the development of personal practical knowledge must take into account all of these factors. Research on teacher thinking must continue to seek to identify developmental stages in teachers’ professional growth and conceptualize these in terms of both psychological, sociological and environmental factors.

In, ‘Teachers Never Stop Thinking About Teaching: Sharing Classroom Constructs with Expert Volunteers’, Michael Kompf and Donald Dworet test the hypothesis that constructs about teaching remain constant in inactive teachers by placing them for three months as ‘expert volunteers’ alongside practising teachers in elementary school classrooms. Volunteers and hosts were matched according to experience, qualifications and preferences. Although initially both groups expressed concerns, the learning results perceived by both exceeded expectations. All the participants perceived this to be due to the construct match between teachers and expert volunteers, and the authors argue for a ‘permanent corps’ of volunteers within interested boards of education as a means of adding to classroom teaching quality. Like Day, Kompf and Dworet recognize the need for occasional but significant intellectual and effective challenge and support for teachers in classrooms, and their research emphasizes that in achieving this there is much to be gained by paying careful attention to matching of teachers’ personal professional constructs.
Hugo Letiche’s paper on ‘Polytechnic Careers: Development in Instructor Thinking’ reports on the results of research aimed at discovering if effective instructors use certain patterns of meaning making in their work with students in order to move towards the development of a theory of personal development. He presents a critique of Torbert’s (1987) six stages of development—impulsive, opportunistic, diplomatic, technician, achiever, and strategist, within three (‘I/me’, ‘self/other’, ‘beliefs/reality’) levels of the teacher’s belief systems as his initial analytic framework. Through data on career history (collected through interviewing), he analyzes teachers’ belief systems, their tacit assumptions about interaction, authority and expression and uses these empirical data to present his own seven stages of personal development. He then analyzes, within what he describes as ‘situational conflict psychology’ the forces that lead to lecturer change.

Using case studies as apt illustrations, he concludes that for the polytechnic lecturer to develop more insight into her career she must have ‘sufficient personal, collegial, institutional and social commitment’, and that if career development is to occur, ‘the process of reflective critical self-definition has to be strengthened and the movement into dialogical inclusive insight has to be facilitated’. Although writing in a different context from Hannay and Seller, Letiche identifies the significant effect that existing practical knowledge and the environment have upon teachers’ development, and the need for facilitative intervention which provides support for reflection and environments in which (vide Day) self and other confrontation may occur.

Finally, in ‘Social Aspects of Teacher Creativity’, Peter Woods investigates the possibilities for creative teaching in a context which has been described as giving ‘little encouragement for teachers to view themselves as originators of knowledge’. He identifies four basic criteria associated with his use of the term ‘creativity’ in relation to teachers whom he regards as connoisseurs rather than technicians—innovation, ownership, control and relevance. He reports research in primary schools in England in which teachers are in control of innovations which belong to them, and in which they are culturally attuned to pupils and able to adapt to unexpected classroom responses to their planned programmes. He presents observed examples of creative teaching, ‘round a structural base’, ‘breakthroughs’ and ‘creative projects’; and he argues that time, resources, supportive school ethos and appropriate pupil culture are necessary for inspiration and incubation of ideas which will not only be produced but also take root. There is a sense in which Wood’s views on the need for establishing conditions which will optimize opportunities for teacher creativity links directly with the research and development projects presented in this section. Certainly deliberative reflection, the development of teachers’ personal practical knowledge described by Day, Hannay and Seller, and Letiche require conditions to be negotiated in which teachers do have time to reflect in a supportive environment and challenge their own and colleagues’ existing thinking and practices.

Although this book is presented in three sections which move from mainly methodological and theoretical discussions through case studies of professional practice towards teacher thinking within the context of innovations several major
themes recur throughout, namely, teachers’ belief systems and thought processes, their personal and professional knowledge in action and the relationships between espoused theories, theories-in-use, ideals and actual behaviour.

Much of the research considers the role and significance of contemplation in teaching, through investigations of reflection ‘in’ and reflection ‘on’ action, for example influences on teacher decision-making processes, teacher practitioner perspectives, the use by teachers of objective-based and practice-based language, teachers’ innovative strategies, life-cycle research, logs and diaries, school-based work, curriculum development, uncertainty-certainty orientations of teachers; guiding metaphors, aspects of student-teacher thinking and relationships between them.

All recognize implicitly the dynamic between theory and action, and together they demonstrate a rich and complex tapestry of research which represents a real evolution of a perspective on teacher thinking and action.

Christopher Day
Maureen Pope
Pam Denicolo

References


Part I

Reflections on Teachers’ Thinking and Action
Chapter 1

Knowledge and Discourse: The Evolution of Research on Teacher Thinking

Freema Elbaz

This chapter will examine the evolving discourse of teacher thinking research with a view to discerning the directions in which it has been developing. Three themes will be treated: voice, the opposition of the ordinary and the extraordinary, and story. ‘Voice’ is a term used increasingly by researchers concerned with teacher empowerment; the term expresses an implicit critique of the prevailing tendency in earlier studies of teaching to reduce the complexity of teachers’ work, and to privilege theoretical formulations over the concerns of teachers themselves. The second theme picks up on a tension between the concern to give an account of good teaching, the ‘extraordinary’ work of the master or expert teacher, and to find what is special in the ‘ordinary’, the work of every teacher in all its familiarity. Finally, ‘story’ is another important focus: as researchers try to present teachers’ work and experience in authentic ways, they make use of accounts, portrayals, narratives, biographies, portraits, conversations; the term ‘story’ seems to me to be particularly appropriate to our methodological and epistemological search.

The chapter deals with the language of teacher thinking research, and does so in terms of the perspective elaborated by post-structuralist theoreticians such as Foucault (1970, 1979) and Reiss (1982). On this view one looks at the ongoing praxis of a given community or cultural group through the various forms of discourse which make up the social text of that group; the particular signifying practices of a given group are both constituted by and constitutive of the discursive field within which members of the group live and function. Another way of putting it is that ‘language provides the conceptual categories which organize thought into predetermined patterns and set the boundaries on discourse’ (Bowers, 1987). Further, the ability to determine these conceptual categories constitutes power, and groups who have the possibility of ensuring that significant aspects of their own reality are reflected in prevailing conceptual categories thereby exercise power over other groups whose situation and experience does not have this legitimacy as
expressed in names, concepts and definitions of their reality. This perspective was
drawn upon by Bowers in an important study of the conceptual underpinnings of
liberal educational thought, a philosophical work which has implications for our
own concerns since Bowers sees the teacher as potentially exercising ‘a significant
form of control over the language process (over how initial conceptual maps are
constituted and thus will influence subsequent thought and political behavior)’, and
thus considers that teachers ‘have a responsibility for contributing to the conceptual
foundations of communicative competence’ (p. 154). Thus the perspective I invoke
here has a bearing not only on our understanding of what we have been up to as
researchers but also on our educational purposes generally. The chapter will be
looking at some of the categories in terms of which research in our field has been
organized, and will ask where these categories come from and what part of reality—
whose reality—they reflect. The chapter does not, however, constitute a review of
the research; rather, the three themes were chosen because they seemed to be both
interesting and important, and to make it possible to look at a fair selection of
examples from the research (though some areas within the research on teacher
thinking have not been attended to).

The analysis of discursive practices calls for different kinds of questions from those
we are accustomed to asking. First of all we need to ask quite directly about the
mode of discourse in the field: around what concepts and distinctions is the field
organized, what terms are used and what assumptions, commitments and values
underlie this choice of terms? Second, what places are available in the discourse for
possible subjects, and who can assume these various subject functions (Foucault,
1979)? Third, what can we say about the way that this discourse is produced and
about how it exists in the world: in what situations do we as researchers work with
teachers, in what forms do we publish our work and where does it circulate, what is
the impact of the particular institutional practices which attend it, and what
consequences are there to its presence, whether in book, article, conference
presentation or report form?

Each of the three themes would allow us to raise a variety of questions, but they
nevertheless seem to map on, in a rough way, to the three sets of questions. Under
the theme of ‘voice’ I will be looking at the way that the language of research on
teacher thinking allows us to examine and present the concern of teachers in their
own terms. The second theme, ‘ordinary versus extraordinary’, brings into focus the
teacher as subject. The third theme, ‘story’, relates to the various forms in which we
carry out and present our work.

**Voice**

Town maps registered the street as Mains Avenue, but the only colored
doctor in the city had lived and died on that street, and when he moved
there in 1896 his patients took to calling the street, which none of them
lived in or near, Doctor Street. Later, when other Negroes moved there...
envelopes from Louisiana, Virginia, Alabama, and Georgia began to arrive addressed to people at house numbers on Doctor Street. The post office workers returned these envelopes or passed them on to the Dead Letter Office. Then in 1918, when colored men were being drafted, a few gave their address at the recruitment office as Doctor Street. In that way, the name acquired a quasi-official status. But not for long. Some of the city legislators...had notices posted in the stores, barber shops, and restaurants in that part of the city saying that the avenue running northerly and southerly from Shore Road fronting the lake to the junction of routes 6 and 2 leading to Pennsylvania, and also running parallel to and between Rutherford Avenue and Broadway, had always been and would always be known as Mains Avenue and not Doctor Street.

It was a genuinely clarifying public notice because it gave Southside residents a way to keep their memories alive and please the city legislators as well. They called it Not Doctor Street, and were inclined to call the charity hospital at its northern end No Mercy Hospital since it was 1931...before the first colored expectant mother was allowed to give birth inside its wards and not on its steps. (Morrison, 1977, 3–4)

The notion of ‘voice’ has been central to the development of teacher thinking research. The term itself does not appear all that often; Butt and Raymond (1987), for example, speak of facilitating ‘the expression of the teacher’s perspective and voice’ Others are interested in ‘The teacher’s perspective’ (Janesick, 1982; Tabachnick and Zeichner, 1986), the teacher’s point of view or ‘frame of reference’ (Clark and Peterson, 1986); Feiman-Nemser and Floden (1986) identify this area of research in terms of a concern with getting ‘inside teachers’ heads’. The concern with voice is also implicit in the work of all those who are committed to the empowerment of teachers (Smyth, 1987). As in other areas where the notion of ‘voice’ is used (feminist research, Gilligan’s 1982 redrawing of the terms of moral development), the term is always used against the background of a previous silence, and it is a political usage as well as an epistemological one. Teacher thinking researchers have all been concerned to redress an imbalance which had in the past given us knowledge of teaching from the outside only; many have also been committed to return to teachers the right to speak for and about teaching. In the passage quoted above, Morrison brings into focus several aspects that are central to our concern with the teacher’s voice: the first is the power to name, to define one’s own reality and to determine, at least in part, the way the rest of the world must relate to that reality; the second is the power to care for and sustain oneself and others, to maintain the dignity and integrity of those named. Having ‘voice’ implies that one has a language in which to give expression to one’s authentic concerns, that one is able to recognize those concerns, and further that there is an audience of significant others who will listen. The passage also underlines a sense in which voice is already there, already critical, regardless of whether the outside world allows it
expression; this should be borne in mind lest we lose sight of the fact that our role as researchers is primarily to remove the obstacles to the expression of teachers’ concerns.

In the effort to allow for the expression of the teacher’s voice and point of view, researchers have experimented with methodological innovations such as joint writing (Butt et al., 1988), interviews followed by mutual construction of a narrative (Connelly and Clandinin 1986, 1987), collaborative analysis of teachers’ journals (Tripp, 1987) as well as more familiar methods such as those of personal construct theory (Pope and Scott 1984). While these directions are both interesting and fruitful, it is important to realize that ‘who writes’, whether it is biography or autobiography, joint authorship or negotiated accounts, is only one aspect of the issue. The more basic question is, what kind of discourse is being used, and to what extent does it make possible the authentic expression of teachers’ experiences and concerns. The issue of ‘voice’ should not be reduced to the question of who speaks, nor should we be satisfied with a superficial impression that the concerns of teachers are being expressed. If it has been difficult for teachers to voice their own concerns, this is primarily because the discourse of teaching, and of educational research generally, does not allow for the formulation of these concerns. Lampert (1985) provides an example of this when she suggests that teachers do not deal with problems to be solved but rather confront dilemmas, and that any teaching situation simultaneously presents a number of conflicting issues with which the teacher must find a way to live. This formulation underlines the fact that the teaching situation is not in any sense linear, and it is difficult in educational talk, influenced as it is by liberal, western assumptions that problems have solutions and progress is an unquestionable good, to talk about functioning in a complex setting where problems do not have single solutions towards which one moves in a linear fashion.

Thus to a considerable degree the language we have had available to talk about teaching has been both inadequate and systematically biased against the faithful expression of the teacher’s voice. In recognition of this inadequacy, researchers have shifted their concern from accounting for the mere complexity of teaching to a concern for the authenticity of our accounts of teachers’ knowledge, in short with a concern for voice. This has generated efforts to present the teacher’s knowledge in its own terms, as it is embedded in the teachers’ and the school’s culture. Much of the search for terms by means of which to conceptualize teachers’ knowledge is a series of compromises in which the researcher proposes terms that do some justice to teachers’ knowledge while still being acceptable in the academic context with its requirement of explicit context-free rational discourse. In a sense much of the research on teacher thinking has been a series of developments towards an adequate conception of voice and an ongoing attempt to give voice to teachers.

Looking back over the research as it has evolved, what can we now say about the teacher’s voice, and about the way that the language of teacher thinking research gives expression to the teacher’s voice?

One starting point for almost all teacher thinking research has been the concern for the tacit aspect of teachers’ knowledge and for the paradox implied by this
quality: while knowledge must be made explicit if the teacher’s voice is to be heard, we thus risk turning teachers’ knowledge into researchers’ knowledge, colonizing it and thus silencing the voice of the teacher. Some of this risk is voiced by researchers. Brown and McIntyre (1986) write, ‘Although we started from the assumption that there is such a thing as teachers’ professional craft knowledge, we knew that for the most part this knowledge is not articulated. Was it sensible, therefore, to plan to undertake an investigation of what pupils and teachers construed as good teaching?’ And Yinger (1987) asks, ‘What would become of efforts to codify this knowledge, to write it down? Would the form of written language distort and destroy its character, stripping it of its meaning and vitality?’ (p. 309). Despite the risks, many researchers have made the effort to uncover the tacit dimension, and have attended to a number of aspects of the tacitness of teachers’ knowledge: it is nonlinear, it has a holistic, integrated quality, it is at least partly patterned or organized, and it is imbued with personal meaning.

**Non-linearity**

Since tacit knowledge is not always coherent and consistent, the teacher’s voice ought to be able to speak in several registers at once; teachers’ knowledge is not logically sequenced and many concerns are being entertained at any given moment. Psychological models of problem-solving or decision-making seem to make it particularly difficult to account, except in negative terms, for this non-linearity of teacher thinking. For example, it is claimed that ‘the ability of teachers…to process all of the information in their environment is limited…people tend to process information sequentially (i.e. step by step) rather than simultaneously…Teachers appeared to lack information-processing strategies to make complete, specific diagnoses’ (Shavelson and Stern 1981). Yet when research begins from an examination of the teaching situation itself rather than from a theoretical position, this non-linear quality of teacher thought comes to the fore quickly. For example, Lowyck (1986) suggests that the distinction between preactive, interactive and post-active teaching does not fit the way teachers view their work. As suggested above, the notion of ‘dilemma’ (Lampert, 1985) is a useful term to reflect the dialectical quality of teachers’ knowledge.

**Integration**

Polanyi tells us that tacit knowing is ‘an act of indwelling’; for example, in using a stick to feel one’s way in the dark, ‘we attend subsidiarily to the feeling of holding the probe in the hand…The sensation of the probe pressing on fingers and palm, and of the muscles guiding the probe, is lost, and instead we feel the point of the probe as it touches an object’ (Polanyi and Prosch, 1975, p. 36). In some such way, it may be that a teacher concerned with, say, the emotional climate of the classroom, becomes unaware of the specific actions taken to enhance the climate yet feels what is happening in the classroom and thus reads the emotional barometer
most carefully from moment to moment. This integrated quality of tacit knowing may of course mask errors in the teacher’s reading of situations. Olson (1986) gives the example of a group of teachers who seemed to be systematically unaware that their loose, pupil-directed strategy for teaching computer literacy was not working as well as they thought, but suggests that there is no paradox in this: the teachers’ concern with the ‘expressive’ domain took priority, and their sense of pupil enthusiasm and their own enhanced image were integrated to give a tacit view of a successful program.

**Patterning of Complexity**

The concern with the complexity of teachers’ knowledge leads to the search for a ‘language of practice’ which will allow us to understand how teachers cope with the complexity of their work (Yinger, 1987). This concern for and appreciation of complexity could be seen as simply a matter of identifying all the variables, but it seems more fruitful to look at it in terms of how the whole performance is organized: some of it is ‘scripted’, i.e. ordered in terms of patterns (Yinger, 1987), routines (Leinhardt *et al.*, 1987), or cycles (Connelly and Clandinin 1985).

**Personal Meaning**

One of the guiding questions of much research has had to do with the sense-making processes by which teachers invest their work with personal meaning. What is interesting is how teachers come by particular conflicts or dilemmas rather than others, and how they come to elaborate the particular scripts and routines they do use, what meaning these structures have for them. While teachers probably have explicit knowledge of some or even most of their routines, they are less likely to have explicit knowledge of all the meanings attached to the routines or of their sources. Giving expression to the personal quality of teachers’ knowledge has not been a simple matter; as Eisner (1988) points out, ‘the research language that has dominated educational inquiry has been one that has attempted to bifurcate the knower and the known’ (p. 18), such that teachers’ concerns come to be spoken of in a detached and dispassionate way: coping with the lively business of the classroom becomes ‘classroom management’, caring for the welfare and development of each child becomes ‘individualization of instruction’, and virtually every aspect of teaching has been similarly subjected to some form of labelling that empties the teaching act of any personal significance.

The means deployed to handle the tacit quality of teachers’ knowledge, in all of its aspects, have varied considerably; some have already been alluded to. ‘Dilemma’ addresses the non-linear, dialectical character of tacit knowledge; further, a use of dilemmas in the sense of Berlak and Berlak (1981) also touches on the patterned nature of teachers’ knowledge since it helps to show underlying consistencies in pedagogic choices (Tabachnick and Zeichner, 1986). A concept such as ‘image’ (Elbaz, 1983; Clandinin, 1985) speaks particularly to the integrated nature of
teachers’ knowledge in its simultaneously emotional, evaluative and cognitive nature, and also conveys the personal meanings which permeate this knowledge. One teacher’s sense of her ‘classroom as home’, another teacher’s view of her subject matter sometimes as a barrier ‘to hide behind’, other times as ‘a window on what students are thinking’, both provide us with immediate contact with the teacher’s experience precisely as she sees fit to express it. Other terms which seem to give us a direct insight into teachers’ experience are ‘rhythm, cycle, habit and ritual’ (Clandinin and Connelly 1985) insofar as these terms allow the researcher to provide an almost physical sense of what the teacher feels, thinks, believes, wants. Other terms, while helpful to us in organizing our own understanding of the tacit, seem to be a step away from the teacher’s immediate experience: Yinger’s (1987) ‘pattern language’ is as yet a hypothetical construct which, by analogy with a pattern language in architecture, might allow us to explain how teachers order complexity; the notion of ‘routines’, and of the teacher as choreographer who selects and rehearses the steps with pupils (Leinhardt et al., 1987) accounts for the order in some classrooms but does not bring us close to the moment at which the teacher creates one particular routine rather than another.

Beyond the specific terms used to generate a discourse on teacher thinking, we also need to look at the discursive strategies by which researchers give a hearing to teachers’ immediate concerns. These will be discussed more fully later in this chapter. Here, I want simply to mention an example which brings out the tacitness of teacher knowledge. Connelly and Clandinin’s (1986) presentation of ‘narrative fragments’ in the teaching of a science teacher named Bruce shows how the teacher’s understanding of science teaching is tied to, and made comprehensible only with reference to, his tacit sense of what pupils need, what they are learning and will learn later in this and other subjects.

Teachers’ concerns are not only complex, multi-faceted and non-linear; they are also heavily dependent on context, as Clark (1986) reminds us. Thus the teacher’s voice must speak from an embeddedness within the culture of the particular school, school system, and society the teacher lives and works in. The difficulties this entails are brought into focus by drawing on a distinction made by Hall (1977) between high and low context thinking. Looking at culture with the tools of an anthropologist, Hall suggests that every culture has to work out a balance, within the communication process, between the explicit linguistic code, context, and meaning: a high-context form of communication is one in which ‘most of the information is either in the physical context or internalized in the person, while very little is in the coded, explicit, transmitted part of the message’, whereas a low-context form of communication is one where information is conveyed primarily via the explicit language code. We can see that teachers’ knowledge is primarily high-context, whereas researchers’ knowledge is low context. Further, researchers participate in a ‘culture of critical discourse’ (Gouldner, 1979), a decontextualized discourse in which everything is explicit, and there is no appeal to authority except the authority of reason.
The narrative of Bruce cited above illustrates well what is meant by ‘high context’: in order to construct a narrative that makes sense, the researchers have to provide an understanding of the pupils’ working class background and language, the limited expectations both they and their families share, of the school science program in the given grade level as well as later on, and particularly about the teacher’s own position as an inner-city school teacher, given his own background and experience. Without this detail, we cannot understand how a teacher whose classroom strategies appear to be quite traditional (he has students copy notes from the board, for example) has in fact managed to create an environment where the students’ own dialect is respected, and where they are enabled gradually to realize that they must acquire the middle-class language in order to succeed. Furthermore, not only do we need to have this context filled in in order to ‘hear’ the teacher clearly; we need to become aware of context as context, that is, not in the form of abstract explanations of Bruce’s background and the like, but in terms of the matters that are important to him: his account of a student named Ken who succeeded, his complaint about lack of time to cover all the material, his amusing way of treating science terms and, eventually, his sense of the time frame within which he thinks about his students, such that distortions in scientific language today make sense in terms of keeping them interested and tuned in until the time when they will be ready to take responsibility for their own language.

Following Hall and Bowers, another feature of the teachers’ voice insofar as it speaks in a ‘high-context’ mode, is the fact that the traditions of the school and the culture are a source of authority for what the teacher does and says. I believe that the place of tradition in teacher thinking is a matter we have tended to treat poorly. When a teacher tells us of a particular innovation ‘that won’t work in my school’, we are likely, as educators interested in progress and improvement, to hear this as the voice of teacher conservatism. However, it is just as likely to be the expression of the teacher’s tacit understanding of school tradition and culture. Buchmann (1986) argues that in our concern for the personal aspects of teacher thinking we have set aside the importance of role and community:

In teaching these communities include the profession, the public, and the disciplines of knowledge…while it is important to communicate the fact that disciplinary knowledge is not absolute, teachers have to recognize and respect the constraints imposed by the structure of different disciplines…they are not free to choose methods, content, or classroom organization for psychological, social or personal reasons alone. (p. 57)

I believe our difficulty in finding a place for tradition in our own conceptualizations of teacher thinking has to do with the conceptual maps we have ourselves acquired from liberal theories of education according to which progress and change based on dispassionate criticism of the outmoded ways of the past are unquestioned goods, and the traditional is seen as equivalent to the conservative and the archaic. Indeed, when we talk about that which has been handed on to teachers by culture this is usually
seen in a negative light; for example, Britzman (1986) talks about ‘cultural myths’ in teaching such as the myth that ‘everything depends on the teacher’. While I acknowledge that these particular bits of tradition do seem to have a negative impact on the work of teachers, I do not believe we have looked hard enough to find positive traditions informing the work of teachers. For example, might there not be a tradition, in elementary schools, of ‘the teacher as maker’ which underlies the image identified by Clandinin (1985) for one of the teachers she worked with; such a tradition might be a way to understand many forms of teacher activity from crafts and classroom decoration to involvement in school-based development.

The teacher’s voice is always a moral voice, always concerned with the good of pupils, as Noddings (1987) so eloquently argues. Sockett (1987) adds an important point regarding the place of the moral: it is not confined to expressions of goals or ideals but pervades every aspect of teaching; ‘the language of the means of teaching is as much a moral language as the language of educational ends.’ This is well illustrated by Brown and McIntyre’s (1986) examination of professional craft knowledge: one might have expected craft knowledge to be largely technical, but in fact much of what teachers talk about has to do with their ways of caring for pupils. Of a list of twelve areas of concern which they identified in teachers’ accounts of themselves and of what they do well in teaching, more than half are directly related to teachers’ caring for the good of pupils:

Their approaches to taking account of differences among their pupils; … attempts to build up confidence and trust…concerns for the characteristics of individual pupils; their strategies for…making sure that recalcitrant pupils do not become alienated from the work…; efforts to ensure that everyone is involved in the work and all achievements are recognized; …how they endeavour to ensure that pupils’ creative efforts will not be hindered by technical expertise that is lacking; the ways in which they create a relaxed and enjoyable but, nevertheless, disciplined atmosphere. (pp. 40–1)

Although it is tacit, not elaborated and tied to tradition, it does not follow that the teacher’s voice is an uncritical one; rather, being a moral voice, the teacher’s voice may be implicitly critical like the voices in the quote which began this section. For example, Sarah, the teacher with whom I worked (Elbaz, 1983) expressed her criticism of the school system, and the particular school in which she worked, through an imagery of conflict that pervaded our discussions. In work with a group of teachers she perceived problems that ‘erupted’ all at once; the prospect of working with a new group of teachers was ‘a whole new potentially dangerous situation’, and the work of the group seemed ‘like horses, all running on the same track at the same speed’, with each teacher concerned to protect her own ‘territory’. In the school as a whole Sarah perceived ‘occupational hazards’ such as the lack of time to reflect, and felt she was ‘challenged by people who are suspicious of what I’m doing’; in her work in a reading centre she was ‘on trial for the future’ and expected to have to ‘fight for staffing’. Further, she felt that teachers as a group were vulnerable;
following an unpopular strike they had been attacked in the press and ‘as a profession we felt completely emasculated’. The cumulative effect of such imagery, in the context of one teacher’s particular story, is no less powerful than that of a careful theoretical critique of schooling.

The final point I want to make about the teacher’s voice is one on which the field is not in agreement. For many researchers on teacher thinking, there is a direct relationship between thought and action seen as two separate domains; we study teacher thinking, listen to the teacher’s voice, in order to learn more about teacher action since the teacher’s thought is assumed to direct her teaching (Clark and Peterson, 1986). For others, however, the distinction between thought and action is not valid since a dialectical relationship between thought and action is assumed (Clandinin and Connelly 1987); for example, Tabachnick and Zeichner (1986) studied teacher perspectives under the assumption that ‘teacher behavior and thought are inseparable and part of the same event.’

I will expand on this matter further in a later section.

In 1986, Clark gave an account of progress in the study of teacher thinking in terms of increased conceptual sophistication in several areas—the view of teachers and of students, of curriculum and of context, and of research. His analysis also bears on the notion of voice. The field has indeed evolved in terms of giving a more adequate and fair expression to the teacher’s voice: (1) the increased attention given to teachers’ concerns as they themselves present them indicates that we have been paying attention to the expression of teachers’ tacit knowledge, in its complexity, in its embeddedness in context and, to a lesser degree, in a way that shows respect for those traditions that teachers consider meaningful and important. (2) The development of a more complex view of students indicates that we have been paying attention to the moral dimension of teaching in which both teachers and pupils are seen as agents. (3) Attention to curriculum, and to the specifics of particular subject matters, allows us to hear the teacher as talking about something of substantive importance. (4) The increased attention to context in itself has given us a greater ability to allow expression to the teacher’s voice, and perhaps will also make us more sensitive in the future to the importance of tradition. (5) Methodological advances, and in particular the increasing role of teachers as partners in research indicates clearly that, however we may conceive and understand teacher thought, we are willing to hear the teacher’s version of it, and to admit their critical input as well.

We have been attending to the expression of the teacher’s concerns and voice as a discursive phenomenon; the other side of this matter is the nature of the role which teachers play as subjects of the discourse on teacher thinking. To this we turn in the next section.

The Ordinary and the Extraordinary

The second issue to which we will now attend concerns the kind of place which the discourse of teacher thinking research allows for possible subjects, and who can assume these subject functions.
Jackson described the teacher who played a role in earlier research on teaching in a way that underlines our problem. ‘Not only is the classroom a relatively stable physical environment, it also provides a fairly constant social context. Behind the same old desks sit the same old students, in front of the familiar blackboard stands the familiar teacher’ (quoted in Goodson, 1980). Goodson points out that this way of viewing the teacher represents a subject who is, on the one hand, depersonalized, that is, essentially interchangeable with other subjects, and on the other hand static, seen as existing outside of time or unchanging. That the tendency to view teaching in this way is prevalent does not, I think, require argument: all of us recognize the portrait, and all of us are bothered by it. We are bothered, I believe, for two kinds of reasons: first because we can all bring to mind images of lively, interesting teachers in dynamic classrooms where students are actively engaged in learning, so we know that, at least some of the time, the picture of institutionalized boredom is inaccurate. The second reason is that we would prefer to be associated with a more dynamic image; our ‘conceptual map’ is one which puts a positive value on progress and change, and whatever does not change is seen as stagnant, as stultified, rather than as simply enduring or stable.

Thus much of our research is motivated in two ways: by a desire to recover and make evident what is alive and interesting about teaching, and by a desire to improve schooling, to find ways of making good teaching more prevalent. These desires are reflected in the discourse of teacher thinking by the provision of several different kinds of positions in which the teacher can be a subject. One such position is that of the ‘exemplar’: the ‘veteran’ teacher or the ‘expert pedagogue’ as studied by Leinhardt and Smith (1985), Berliner (1986), and Shulman (1987); her counterpart is the ‘novice’. In other areas of the discourse on teacher thinking, the prevailing subject position is filled by a teacher whom I will call the ‘ordinary teacher’.

The Exemplar

In the discourse of expert/novice research, the position of the expert teacher is indeed, in part, that of a subject in the sense that the researcher gives a portrayal of the teacher’s work from the teacher’s point of view. It is usually a portrait in the language of research, emphasizing explicit rather than tacit knowledge: ‘tacit knowledge among teachers is of limited value if the teachers are held responsible for explaining what they do and why,’ argues Shulman (1987); Berliner (1986) on the other hand, accepts Buchmann’s (1983) point that ‘we have no reason to assume that premises that need to be guessed at, terms without clear definition, oblique references, and beliefs that are debatable must be associated with wrong headed ideas or indefensible lines of action.’ Further, the subject is present in the discourse primarily as someone on whom other teachers may model their teaching. Thus if we understand how the expert teacher conducts a rapid and efficient homework review, or how she diagnoses a student’s problems in a way that zeroes in on strengths and needs, we can use this knowledge to guide and teach the beginner; the expert’s performance ‘provides us…with a temporary pedagogical theory, a temporary
scaffolding from which novices may learn to be more expert.’ (Berliner, 1986, p. 6)

It also follows from such a position that we will be interested in the teacher as subject only insofar as what she does, or thinks, can be replicated: we would have no reason to be interested in the idiosyncratic or spontaneous aspects of her knowledge. Thus much of what is personal and context-bound, like what is tacit and difficult to formulate, ceases to concern us and in large measure the teacher’s voice as characterized in the previous section is muted. The modelling process itself is undoubtedly important, and unexceptionable as such. It begins to be problematic when we find it suggested that the performance of expert teachers be used to serve ‘as sufficient guides to the design of better education’ (Shulman, 1987), to allow us to ‘codify, formalize, and systematize the knowledge of expert teachers’ (Berliner, 1986), or to elaborate and illustrate a ‘conception of pedagogical reasoning and action’ that is normative insofar as it both defines ‘a complete act of pedagogy’ and lays out a series of processes in which every teacher should be able to engage (Shulman, 1987, p. 1). Shulman’s particular conception of pedagogical reasoning and action is not the object of my criticism here (it is criticized by Sockett (1987), on the grounds that it splits reason and action and that it is formulated in a technical language which masks the moral character of teaching), nor is the truth that beginning teachers can learn, in a variety of interesting ways, from those more experienced. Rather, the point is that the researcher has used these teachers, defined as experts by their success within a given school system, to generate a theoretical and normative conception of pedagogy to which other teachers may eventually be expected to conform; the expert teacher occupies a subject position in this discourse, but in this role she risks becoming an instrument of bureaucracy in controlling the work of other teachers. (Shulman is aware of the potential danger in using empirically derived criteria of teaching effectiveness to judge teaching, but fails to see that the same risks are attached to his goal of developing ‘codified representations of the practical pedagogical wisdom of able teachers’.)

The Novice

What of the position in this particular discourse of the novice teacher, whose main function is to become like the model? In effect her position is hardly that of a subject at all. To Shulman (1987), for example, the novice teacher is of interest insofar as she allows us to observe how pedagogical knowledge develops; but the emphasis is on the knowledge base, a given if not absolutely fixed body of understandings, and how it comes into being (pp. 14–19). The novice herself has no contribution to make to the knowledge base, and in this respect she is treated as an object of research. Berliner (1986), for example, tells us that ‘because these kinds of studies give us information about the routines, scripts, and schema used by experts, we are helped in identifying the buggy routine or script, or the ill-formed schemata, that might be characteristic of less expert or novice teachers.’ (p. 6). The thought that the ‘buggy routine’ of the novice might teach us something new about what is possible within the constraints and pressures of schooling, that we might learn from
the struggle of the beginning teacher to realize something different, that the novice’s view of her cooperating teacher’s classroom might enlighten the latter, all these possibilities are foreign to a discourse which places educators in a clear hierarchy with the scholar above the expert teacher, who is in turn above the novice.

The Subject as Expert

The hierarchization of expertise in teaching is itself another feature of our western discourse which values expertise, in any domain, where expertise is defined as the ‘ability to put skills and knowledge to work in the service of achieving certain ends.’ (MacIntyre, 1984, p. 75) In effect, educational research in the past has allowed a subject role only to those persons who are considered experts; only experts are considered to have the understanding and ability to determine ends and to carry them out. This is reflected in Shulman’s (1987) statement, ‘We believe that scholars and expert teachers are able to define, describe, and reproduce good teaching.’ (p. 12) This conception of expertise, however, is highly problematic since it involves us in a circular form of reasoning whereby experts are those who are able to define good teaching, and good teaching is the teaching of those whom the experts identify. Teachers are expected to engage in reasoning about purposes, but since no substantive criteria are offered for doing so, the good teacher is, by default, the one who is effective in achieving the ends defined by the system.

It is difficult for us to break out of this circle because ‘effectiveness’ is a built-in feature of the conceptual maps with which we view the world; our acceptance of a notion like efficiency influences not only the way we speak but also the way we observe everyday phenomena. Thus we probably have some shared images of poor teaching—the lesson that drones on and on, the chaos of poor discipline—and we do find poor teaching boring, but it is important to understand to what extent this is a matter of perspective. The lesson that does not seem to be going anywhere, the apparently aimless behaviour of disorderly students, are indeed uninteresting if we do not know what the teacher is trying to accomplish, if we do not know why the students are misbehaving. However, if we can stop separating means and ends, and listen to the teacher’s own view, the dull or disastrous lesson often becomes interesting.

The point then, is that what we consider interesting or dull, the teacher we recognize as an ‘expert teacher’ or a novice, are so only by virtue of the bringing to bear of a complex set of schemata which organize our understanding of the phenomena of teaching. And unless we first bring these schemata to awareness, discuss them and come to agreement about our criteria for employing them, it is virtually meaningless to talk about expertise in teaching. Thus, to confine our view to a few teachers whom somebody has given a seal of approval is to restrict our data and impoverish our understanding of teaching.