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### **SCHOOL RENEWAL SYMPOSIUM**

#### **Presuming concurrence: The ideas of responsibility and consensus in models of educational change**

##### ***Abstract***

The aim of this paper is to examine the idea of consensus as perceived through the lens of personal responsibility offered in the educational change paradigm called school renewal. In previous work by the authors (Reynolds, Cavanagh and Dellar, 2003) personal responsibility was identified as the central, ontological construct of this model of change, although reservations were expressed as to its efficacy for dealing with the tendency toward dichotomous thinking associated with educational change. The current paper underscores the necessity for conceiving responsibility in broader ways, focussing on the ways in which consensus can be expressed recognised and attained. The situation described by Cuban (2003 and 2001) concerning teacher resistance to ICT integration in the classroom is examined so as to illustrate the manner in which ideas and concepts contained in this paper are interconnected

In his keynote address to the 2003 meeting of NZARE/AARE in Auckland New Zealand, Larry Cuban referred to computer education in the USA to present the point that educational policy is often made and continued upon assumptions at odds with the physical evidence. He noted that despite vast amounts of time, energy and money injected into this area of education during the past 20 years, there had been a remarkably low rate of integration of computer technology into classroom teaching and learning strategies by teachers. The expenditure of resources in this area he noted, was based upon three outcome-oriented assumptions: That computer technology enables students to learn more, better and faster than before; that computer technology facilitates active engagement in projects connected to ‘real life’; and that computer-literate graduates potentially gain access to a wider range of jobs. A key point he made however is that virtually no evidence exists to support such claims. Educational policy makers have simply assumed that these things will occur – given time, given the physical resources and given the mandated responsibility placed on teachers to make these things so.

In the context of educational change management, leadership and policy-making, Cuban’s presentation of this example can be interpreted at several levels. Whether or not the situation to which he refers is widespread throughout the industrialised world, overtly, the figures he employs to illustrate the situation point to a massive, costly failure in policy making and change management (Cuban, 2003 and 2001). If indeed only five percent of teachers use information technology on a regular basis in their classrooms – opting instead for more traditional learning aids such as textbooks and worksheets, television and videos, overhead projections and black/white boards – one draws inescapably toward a conclusion that a significant dysfunction exists in the way policy-makers conceive of educational change and the manner in which it is actually implemented and managed at the chalkface.

Similarly, the depth and extent of *historical* teacher resistance is startling. Twenty years is an extraordinarily long period of time for very little change to take place. There can be few instances where, in the face of such overwhelming, ongoing, apparently passive resistance and non-compliance by practitioners, that policy makers have not undertaken a thoroughgoing overhaul and rethink of an original policy position (Cuban 2001). In such a light, the continuing expense of vast amounts of resources on classroom computer technologies seems almost perverse – even pathological – in scope, persistence and intent.

Alternately however, the situation can be viewed, perhaps not so much as a triumph, but rather as a significant, successful example of ongoing consensus building among educational policy makers, change leaders and practitioners. Whilst from a statistical perspective the rate of integration of computer technological by teachers in classrooms looks woeful, there is little evidence to suggest that teachers actively oppose these kinds of learning strategies. On the contrary, at a time when information and the technology used for its access and utilisation is 'fetished' (Poster, 1990 & 1993; Standish, 2000) significant sections of the profession are currently actively engaged in documenting, conceiving and accommodating alternative approaches for constructing knowledge based upon the restrictions and opportunities afforded by 'ICT' or Information and Communication Technologies (see, for example: Lankshear, Peters & Knobel, 2000; and, *The Tavistock Institute Report*, 2001). Indeed, it appears that although teachers are reluctant to integrate ICT into the teaching-learning strategies used in their own classrooms they are not adverse to the technologies *per se* (Blyth, 2000; and Murphy & Beggs, 2003). Rather, it seems that a majority agree that it is necessary for students to become computer literate (*Tavistock Institute Report*, 2001) although a similar number are reticent as to the means for accomplishing this and the potential outcomes for students and themselves in the educational and wider workplaces (Farrell, 2003).

The situation highlighted by Cuban (2003 and 2001) therefore, holds deep, self-evident interest for educators worldwide involved in the field of ICT. Although, perhaps moreso, the significance of the situation is heightened for those concerned with the leadership and management of educational change. The situation seems to underscore a critical inconsistency in the literature on educational reform and renewal. This is particularly evident with the change paradigm called school renewal and the implicit demand in this model that for change to be effective, a high degree of consensus is required among participants as to the specific value of the change for students. Strikingly there *does* appear to be agreement as to the worth of the change. In general, teachers *do* seem convinced that ICT skills for students are worthwhile. However whilst a high level of consensus exists – not only among teachers but as well between students and policy-makers in the area – there remains a deep-seated, historical well of resistance toward the integration of ICT teaching learning strategies by classroom practitioners.

What has occurred here? Change management strategies such as educational reform and educational renewal each acknowledge the importance of gaining consensus among change

participants as to the purpose and value of a change in order for it to become worthwhile (Goodlad, 1999a & 1999b; Sirotnik, 1999; and Soder, 1999). Although, whereas broad agreement is viewed as desirable rather than totally necessary in reform models of change, the requirement for consensus in school renewal paradigms is considered paramount. Indeed, the dichotomous distinction drawn by advocates and adherents of renewal emphasise this requirement almost as an article of faith. Soder (1999) for example, in an introduction to a special series of seven articles that appear in the April 1999 edition of *Phi Delta Kappan*, summarises the tenor of past conceptualisations and establishes the tone for future perceptions concerning the importance of consensus. He notes that renewal is an "...alternative approach" to the more static concept of educational reform, "...which is more of a government approach to fix education with policies that do not account for economic and social factors of student populations" (Soder, 1999, p.568). He goes on to note that renewal seeks to take into account such (social and economic) factors by envisioning change as a continuing process that recognises the pre-eminent roles played by individuals and communities for bringing about lasting, meaningful change in educational organisations. This and other writers in the series, who individually draw similar key distinctions in various parts of their articles, continue the contrast. In effect, these state that whereas reform represents a model that is top-down, imposed (usually by politicians and bureaucrats), and essentially a short-term fix to problems and issues that arise, renewal is bottom-up, driven by communities of individuals and is ongoing (Clark & Wasley, 1999; Goodlad, 1999; Navarro & Natalicio, 1999; Noddings, 1999; Sirotnik, 1999; Soder, 1999; Theobald & Rochon, 1999). Thus, reform is conceived as autocratic in nature, a *diktat* imposed from above, with a definite endpoint in view. Renewal is more inclusive and by implication democratic – a sort of continuing, unfolding narrative, told and controlled by those involved.

It appears to the authors of this paper that a large part of the answer to this raised by the situation described issues from the idea of responsibility contained in the literature of school renewal approaches to educational change; *and as well*, may also have something to do with what amounts to a broad consensus occurring over what has been described as the modern misapprehension over the ancient concepts of *techne* and *praxis* – raised first by Aristotle in *Nichomachean Ethics*. The reasoning underpinning this surmise derives from discussion ensuing from the philosophical debates on this issue conducted between Hans-Georg Gadamer (1900-2002) the originator of philosophical hermeneutics, and Jurgen Habermas (1929-) the leading contemporary of the 'Frankfurt school' from whose work critical theory arises.

The nature of these debates are complicated and extensive (see Bernstein [2002] and Schwandt [2000] for brief but illuminating accounts of the chief constructs of the thoughts of Gadamer and Habermas) however both agree with and have criticised extensively the “...imperialistic tendencies of what they took to be misguided positivist and scientific epistemology – one that claimed that all *legitimate* knowledge had to satisfy the narrow criteria that the positivists set forth for empirical and analytic knowledge” (Bernstein, 2002, p. 268). A large part of this criticism consists in that both thinkers take as a modern deformation the original distinction drawn by Aristotle between *techne* and *praxis*. From the time of Aristotle (384-322BC) until the onset of industrial revolution the distinction conceived between the terms was relatively clear-cut. *Techne* (literally, ‘skill’, ‘art’, ‘craft’ – ‘knowing how’) and *praxis* (literally, ‘action’, ‘doing’, ‘activity - ‘practical wisdom’) however, have subsequently become closely associated in modern times; whereby the ‘technical’ and the ‘practical’ are currently employed as virtually interchangeable terms. The consequences of this conflation of meaning in the eyes of both Gadamer and Habermas have been disastrous because:

“...we are no longer able to distinguish practical from technical power... a civilisation that has been rendered scientific is not granted dispensation from practical questions. Therefore a peculiar danger arises when the process of scientification transgresses the limit of technical questions, without, however, departing from the level of rationality confined to the technological horizon. For then no attempt is made to attain a rational consensus on the part of citizens concerning the practical control of their destiny. Its place is taken by the attempt to attain technical control over history by perfecting the administration of society, an attempt that is just as impractical as it is unhistorical.” (Habermas, 1973, p.255).

How Gadamer and Habermas interrogate and ascribe conclusions to this conflation of meaning for *techne* and *praxis* subsequently forms the core of philosophical disagreements between the two. However their concurrence on this point and its possible implications regarding the apparent consensus between policy makers, teachers and presumably students and related educational stakeholders over the value of computer technology over the past two decades, gives fuel for educational thought.

The first, philosophical implication arising, is that educational stakeholders – whether knowingly or through ignorance – are complicit through their consensus over the value of ICT, in the

imposition of a narrow, positivist, scientific epistemological grid that, in Gadamerian terms (Gadamer, 1960/2002) may well be distorting the forms of everyday life or our 'being-in-the-world'. In educational terms, what this means is that whilst our traditional conception of education has been dualistic (i.e. 'intrinsic and instrumental', 'humanist and technical', 'belles lettres and professional' etc.) the conflation of *techne* and *praxis* actually leads to the privileging of one over the other and subsequently, their further dichotomisation. In other words, *techne* (knowing how) is not the same as *praxis* (practical wisdom) and the current, general failure to distinguish between the two has led to a loss of the subtler meanings and educational significance of the latter. Aristotle (like Gadamer and Habermas) associated *praxis* closely with *phronesis* (literally, 'intelligence', 'prudence', 'wisdom', 'good sense', 'good judgement') and *techne* with *eidos* (literally, 'shape' or 'guiding image'). The favouring of the technical over the humanist dimension of education may thus be considered tantamount to conflating means and ends – a potentially disastrous scenario whether one's ontological standpoint is positivist, interpretivist or deconstructionist.

The second implication concerns educational change management and the propensity in discussions about educational change is that toward dichotomous thinking. This may be observed, not at a single level, but at several levels simultaneously. It has been observed for example (Reynolds, Cavanagh & Dellar, 2003) that the act of defining a word such as education can become muddled and create fertile ground for conceiving the resulting definition in dichotomous terms by adopting uncritically one or the other principal means for doing so (i.e. by adopting either the *definienda* or *definientia* approaches). Secondly, it can be seen that the word 'education' itself carries with it an embedded dualism resulting from the twin aims education conceives for itself. These instrumental and intrinsic aims almost inevitably lead participants in educational debate toward privileging one or the other, depending upon the context, subject matter and purpose of conversation in the first place. Finally and perhaps most fundamentally however, it can be seen that the ways in which time is perceived and conceived to operate in the processes of education (Reynolds, Cavanagh & Dellar, 2003), serves to compound the difficulties inherent at the first two levels, merely by virtue of the fact that the subject matter being discussed is itself about change.

To overcome difficulties operating at the first two levels, it has been suggested that in both instances, a pluralist approach to issues involved in debate about educational change would

be useful, it not wholly necessary. With the first, adoption of the inherently risky ‘redefinition’ approach seems more likely to produce an acceptable basis for conducting discussion about ‘education’. With the second, again a pluralist approach to the dual aims of education is recommended. Here, both aims should be allocated equivalent validity and consideration, irrespective of the context, subject matter and purpose of the conversation. At the final, more fundamental level, a similar pluralist approach to resolving issues associated with the perception and conception of time can be suggested. However it is evident that in order to do so, the entire basis for debate concerning educational change, educational reform and renewal, needs to be reoriented to take into consideration perspectives of time and its operational qualities and the three features – people, structure and technology – which organisational change involves.

In this final respect the authors anticipate little dissent from the view that of the three elements identified as requiring ‘an alteration’ in order to bring about organisational change (i.e. people, structure and technology), that involving people poses the most difficulty. Indeed, there is abundant evidence to suggest that alterations in structure and technology are in large measure contingent on the extent to which managers of change can facilitate acceptance and involvement by humans involved in processes of change (Fullan, 2001). So, how to bring about ‘an alteration’ in people?

Sirotnik (1999) tackles this question from the eminently sensible perspective of invoking the accumulated wisdom of Sarason (1998, 1990 & 1989). This author has called repeatedly for the need to “...create and sustain new settings” in order to facilitate long-term renewal (Sarason, 1990). Sirotnik’s (1999) subsequent contribution to this call is to change the primary metaphor of educational change from reform to renewal by replacing the concept of ‘accountability’ with that of ‘responsibility’. The following illustrates his rationale:

“‘Reform’ typically breeds ‘accountability’ as the primary evaluative medium. Although important distinctions can be made between accountability and evaluation, they tend to blur in high-stakes reform environments seeking to reward or punish institutions and their members. ...Lee Cronbach...asserted that ‘a demand for accountability is a sign of pathology in the political system...Accountability emphasises looking back in order to assign praise or blame; evaluation is better used to understand events and processes for the sake of guiding future activities’.



“...thinking about renewal rather than reform as the operative change model suggests a major deconstruction of traditional notions of accountability. Responsibility is a more useful concept than accountability; it suggests, for example, the moral obligations of educators as stewards of their schools to create and nurture learning environments for their students as well as for themselves. And it suggests that educational and political leaders should provide the necessary resources and time to make this happen. In a renewing educational organisation, then, the ‘program’ to be ‘evaluated’ becomes the renewal process itself, and ‘evaluation’ becomes the ongoing process of rigorous and active self-examination, reflection, and critical inquiry.”

All of which seems very reasonable – until one applies the ‘test’ suggested above by Scriven (1988): To query whether ‘responsibility’ is a better, more suitable concept than that (i.e. ‘accountability’) which it seeks to replace.

Given the negative, somewhat punitive tenor of what Leithwood, Jantzi & Mascall (2002) have recently identified as the four basic assumptions underlying accountability approaches to large-scale reform, this would appear to be the case. These authors note that accountability approaches are essentially predicated on beliefs that: a) various things are wrong with schools; and that, b) these need to be fixed. The four approaches identified by Leithwood et al. (2002, p.9) are:

“...choice approaches which assume that schools are monopolistic bureaucracies likely to improve when forced to compete for their clients; decentralisation approaches which assume that schools are too distant from those they serve and will improve when their clients are given a greater voice in decision making; professionalisation approaches which assume that typical professional practices in schools do not reflect best available knowledge and will improve when held to higher standards; and management approaches which assume that schools are not sufficiently rational and will improve when they become clearer about their goals and more systemic about the strategies used to pursue them”.

To the authors of the current paper, it appears that readers with any rudimentary grasp of motivational theory will agree that such approaches would generally fail to inspire educational stakeholders toward change freely; except perhaps insofar that they provide a stick with which to



drive the unwilling toward the short-term goals identified in each. The assumption in each case is that something is wrong, something needs to be fixed, that the solution proposed is applicable in all instances irrespective of individual circumstance, and that only an imposed methodology has any guarantee of success. It is ironic that (as alluded to by Eden, Hult and Gallini [1999] in their brief review of reform rhetoric) such approaches are often couched in terms that suggest that they represent an ‘opportunity’ for change at systemic levels, rather than individual changes aimed at particular aspects of an organisation.

However, does all of this make responsibility a better way to think about educational change than the concept of accountability? The short answer seems to be, ‘not necessarily’. Certainly, any educator – with or without practical experience – can relate to the necessity for accountability in certain situations based on the scenarios outlined by Leithwood et al. (2002). Such situations do exist and will probably continue to exist. Even Sirotnik (1999) is loath to condemn –at least *in toto* – all reform approaches with their inextricable links to evaluation and accountability. He explains (Sirotnik, 1999, p.4):

“The fault is not necessarily with the reform ideas ... there is considerable merit in many of them...however we would never know, because they never get implemented with the kind of fidelity required in a long-term process of innovation and renewal with a critical, reflective inquiry process to match. Instead, the reform agenda often becomes immediately politicised and polarised...Moreover, the agenda (and necessarily, any traditional evaluation design) is complicated no end by myriad other pressures, activities and programs that are part of educational organisations.”

Thus, he adds the proviso that the usefulness of reform projects would serve best if they were directed toward the interests of advancing renewal (Sirotnik, 1999, p.7):

“I do not want these comments to suggest that well-designed, conventional research studies are impossible or of no value in understanding educational renewal. I believe that there are, in fact, good examples of evaluative studies that, although not definitive, are certainly informative regarding the possible effects of major renewal efforts”.

Indeed, with respect to certain structural and technological aspects of organisational change, reform approaches would seem entirely appropriate in certain circumstances. For example, the implementation of top-down reform by a charismatic rather than collegial leader in a

dysfunctional or moribund organisation may well be greeted positively by a majority of educational stakeholders (Grundy, 1999). Similarly, introducing (say) a new computer system that streamlines administrative systems – one that brings increased efficiency, effectiveness and accountability to an organisation – could also conceivably require an initial radical, unpopular, but ultimately worthwhile and acceptable imposition ‘from above’. The point, it seems, is to ensure that the approach brings long-term benefits to the organisation rather than a mere short-term fix (Goodlad, 1999; Sirotnik, 1999; and, Soder, 1999). Undoubtedly, a pluralist approach such as that suggested above is capable of handling these difficult, if not altogether intractable features of the renewal approach to organisational change. Although, it also seems that there may be a better way – a way to deal with this question of when reform approaches would be better than renewal approaches – not so much by ‘creating a new setting’, but rather, by ‘tweaking’ the setting offered by Sirotnik (1999).

It occurs to the authors that possibly a more useful concept than ‘responsibility’ is that of ‘Bildung’, proffered in the philosophical hermeneutics of Hans-Georg Gadamer. Explicated in 1960 with the publication of his masterwork *Truth and Method (Warheit und Methode, 1960; Weinsheimer & Marshall [Transl.], 1975; 2<sup>nd</sup> revised edition, 2002)*, Gadamer spent much of the rest of his long life seeking to clarify the many-hued features of this central pillar of his philosophy. Drawn from earlier hermeneutic ideas by his mentor Martin Heidegger (1889-1976), it is a concept that draws immediate comparison with the notion of responsibility used by Sirotnik (1999). It also appears to carry with it a capacity to explain and navigate in a more thoroughgoing, pluralist way, some of the difficulties encountered by Sirotnik when tackling exceptional cases such as those posed by structural and technological change, the circumstances which give rise to these, and the subsequent occasional desirability of reform rather than renewal approaches to resolve these.

By way of understanding the concept, it needs to be explained that in the first instance, Bildung draws upon an understanding of what is termed the hermeneutic circle or cycle; or more precisely, what Gadamer sees as the cyclical nature of time and the way we understand the temporal conditions in which our own understanding takes place. Warnke (2002) has provided a crafted summary in this respect:

“...the hermeneutic situation signals the way in which, as human beings, we are ‘thrown’ into a history or set of histories that we did not start and cannot finish,

but which we must continue in one way or another. We must always act in one way or another, because not acting or acting to end the necessity to act is itself a form of action. Yet, in order to determine how to act, we must also understand ourselves and the set of stories in which we find ourselves. If we have to act, we have to understand, in some better or worse way, who and where we are and who and where we want to be. From the beginning then, we are involved in the practical task of deciphering the story or stories of which we are a part so that we know how to go on...Put otherwise, we live or write our lives according to the meaning we think they have possessed and understand those meanings according to the ways we continue to live and write our lives...The texts we most fundamentally need to understand, in one way or another, are the narratives in which we find ourselves.”

Thus, Schwandt (2000, p.196) can observe:

“Philosophical hermeneutics is not a methodology for ‘solving problems’ of misunderstanding or problems concerned with the correct meaning of human action. Gadamer (1975) has repeatedly emphasised that the work of hermeneutics ‘...is not to develop a procedure of understanding but to clarify the conditions in which understanding takes place. But these conditions are not of the nature of a *procedure* or a method which the interpreter must of himself bring to bear on the text’ (p.263). The goal of philosophical hermeneutics is philosophical – that is, to understand what is involved in the process of understanding itself (Madison, 1991).”

It can be seen then, that Gadamer’s attitude toward time, understanding, methodology – indeed, his denial of methodologically guaranteed endpoints – speaks of the problems discussed in the preceding which seem to arise when talking about topics such as educational renewal. It recommends a thoroughgoing pluralism in an effort to overcome these. Gadamer’s own description of what philosophical hermeneutics actually is encourages this view:

“Hermeneutic philosophy, as I envision it, does not understand itself as an absolute position but as a path of experiencing. Its modesty consists in the fact that there is no higher principle than this: Holding oneself open to the conversation. This means, however, constantly recognising in advance the

possibility that your partner is right, even recognising the possible superiority of your partner” (Gadamer, 1996; cited in Hogan & Cleary, 2001, p.527).

The ‘methodology’ in question therefore, is fundamentally *self-critical* conversation between an interpreter and a subject (i.e. an actor[s], a text, an action[s] performed, or an idea formulated and presented) entered into in a spirit of trust, generosity and goodwill. The primary aim of the conversation is to draw participants progressively closer – toward a clearer understanding of actions, ideas and/or textual references – through progressively more acute and focussed interplay and questioning.

Inevitably, this statement of ‘methodology’ will convey a sense, probably of wishfulness, possibly of shallowness, to ‘serious’ researchers working within the many qualitative and quantitative paradigms. ‘Conversation’ – irrespective of whether it is open-ended/minded, friendly, generous, trusting, inclusive (etc.) – sits uncomfortably with rigorous characterisations and standardisations for hypothesising, verifiability, generalisability and so forth identified with C.21<sup>st</sup> research processes (Denzin & Lincoln, 2001; and Bernstein, 1992). Yet, for a range of reasons, a self-conscious conversational process appears entirely apposite as a basis for investigating and understanding difficult ontological and epistemological issues associated with research processes in general and educational change in particular. Certainly, as a means for addressing difficult concepts such as educational renewal, philosophical hermeneutics seems not only temperamentally well-suited, but perhaps one of the few really incisive ways of dealing with the ontological and epistemological difficulties involved.

Central to the task of attempting to substantiate the veracity or otherwise of this somewhat declarative statement, is Gadamer’s own representation of the concept of ‘Bildung’. A definitive translation of the term from German is difficult owing in part to its meaning being best understood as a contraction of its closest English equivalents – ‘education’ (in German, *Erziehung*) and ‘culture’ (*Kultur*) – and the fact that Gadamer’s *Truth and Method* (2002) devotes its entire first chapter toward explicating the multiple esoteric aspects of the concept. Here, for example, Gadamer traces the roots of Bildung from mediaeval mysticism (i.e. *Bild* as an image of God), through the Enlightenment; where it develops more earthly, humanist dimensions, and finally, to the Hegelian conception as ‘the duty to cultivate oneself’ or, “...to keep oneself open to what is other, to other, more universal points of view” (Gadamer, 1975, p.17; cited in Cleary and Hogan, 2001, p.526). Thus, in the Gadamerian sense, Bildung may be

taken, not so much as ‘education’, but rather, as the processes of questioning, self-criticism and *self-education* that lead one toward a more cultured state of mind; or, as Hogan and Cleary (in Gadamer, 1999; Hogan & Cleary [Transl.], 2002, p.538) put it, the “...practices of human learning which become increasingly refined, nuanced and self-sustaining” owing to the processes involved. In this light therefore, possibly the nearest equivalent for *Bildung* in English can be given as ‘liberal’ or ‘intrinsic’ education – which, as has been noted in the preceding, is distinguishable (although not necessarily in productive or desirable ways) from ‘vocational’ or ‘instrumental’ education in both modern and ancient educational terminology. A key point to remember when deploying the term however, is that it is not precisely a noun, but rather a verbal noun or noun of process whereby the properties of *Bildung*, are comprehensible chiefly within a context of conveying or transferring something to the possessor and thereby being transformed in the process.

The relevance of *Bildung* to the ‘methods’ of philosophical hermeneutics, to educational change and to the orientation of dialogue concerning renewal and reform can be identified at three levels. Firstly, it represents an ontological perspective that rejects relativism on one hand and foundationalisms on the other, in favour of a pluralism which (owing to the linguistic and historical difficulties involved in reaching completely objective interpretations as to the meaning of actions, ideas and texts) recommends a variety of irreducible views for interpreting in provisional ways the nature of knowledge, being, meaning, understanding, society and social theory, learning, morality, ethics, politics and so forth. Secondly, the epistemology it constructs for investigating the nature, types, what is known and the origins of phenomena (i.e. for asking questions about and investigating and interpreting actions, ideas and texts) is grounded in theories about hermeneutics and education; whereby learning through self-critical reflection concerning the processes of understanding, forms the central construct for framing ‘increasingly refined, nuanced and self-sustaining questions’ about the phenomenon under investigation. Finally, *Bildung* may be viewed as constituting, not so much a methodology, as a set of guidelines and practices for understanding the ‘why’, ‘what’ and ‘how’ of human existence; albeit, only marginally better than they may have been previously understood.

For each of these reasons – methodological, epistemological and ontological – the authors of this essay consider *Bildung* a more suitable ‘setting’ for orienting dialogue than that offered by the concept of responsibility. This is not to say however, that we are under any

illusions as to the degree of acceptance it may receive from researchers looking at educational renewal, reform and change. It is a difficult idea to assimilate requiring a substantial propaedeutic in hermeneutical thought. Moreover perhaps, it offers neither an endpoint for change processes nor any hope of sighting one. Simply, it presents itself as a normative, ongoing condition for thinking about, interpreting and understanding difficult ideas about education and educational change in particular, and the processes of understanding in general. Furthermore, the same features that highlight the strengths of the concept can also be seen to emphasise its weaknesses.

These 'weaknesses' of Bildung as a concept for guiding dialogue concerning change consist, on one hand, with respect to the denial of methodologically guaranteed endpoints; and on the other, with respect to its apparently hostile attitude toward technology. At first glance, the first of these may be viewed in a positive rather than negative way: Change is ongoing; why should not thinking about change also be ongoing? However, as Sirotnik (1999) correctly points out when discussing the concept of responsibility, we live in an age that expects defined outcomes to issue from given actions (hence the privileging of the instrumental over humanist aims in education and the preference of policy makers to talk of reform and accountability rather than renewal and responsibility and so on). Thus, as Palmer (1988, p.134) observes:

“Method is basic and indispensable to every area of human investigation. (Gadamer) recognises this. The problem arises when method is used as the best and only avenue for obtaining knowledge. Here, hermeneutics attempts to show through philosophical analysis *the limits and liabilities of method, its non-universality*. It is hermeneutics which is universal, according to Gadamer, not method. Methodologically generated truth closes the investigator to other forms of truth and thus, Gadamer's title, *Truth and Method*”.

Which brings one to the second apparent weakness in arguments for the adoption of Bildung as a means for orienting dialogue about educational change. This involves Gadamer's apparently hostile view of technology, which, along with people and structure, require 'an alteration' if change is to be considered successful. The hostility seems to stem from the preceding point concerning methodology. Gadamer (1989) rejects methodologically 'guaranteed' endpoints on grounds that in conceiving of practical usages for a thing, one forms a guiding image (in Greek, the *eidos*) which ultimately contains a potential to conflate the ends and means

of inquiry. As Blacker (1993, p.5) explains, this leads to a situation whereby the “...parameters of understanding are drawn tightly, like a noose, around what Gadamer calls the thing itself [*die Sache selbst*]”. Any such conflation would serve to constrain the possibilities of future interpretation – which in turn, would conceivably undermine the conceptual foundations of philosophical hermeneutics itself as a ‘radically undogmatic’ way of thinking. For Gadamer (1989, p.30) there is not an endpoint – a ‘best interpretation’ of a given case – but rather, a “...range of vision that includes everything that can be seen from a given point”. Thus, Davidow’s (2002, p.2) explanation, that what Gadamer is proposing is not a method toward an endpoint, but a description as to what is *presently* the case; which is “...that historically effected consciousness fuse *horizons* of the past”.

Thus, one may observe that in order to deal with this apparent inconsistency represented by the consequences of interpretation and understanding, Gadamer’s approach is to differentiate hermeneutical interpretation and understanding from the practical techniques used for its attainment. As Blacker (1993, p.5) goes on to explain, to do otherwise would be to suppress the “...attitude of (open) questioning...in favour of the norms of a purely instrumental rationality”. Thus, following Heidegger, Gadamer proceeds to identify these practices – which he brackets neatly under the heading ‘technology’ – as the ‘extreme danger’ threatening the very possibility of achieving ever more plausible interpretations of actions, ideas and texts; with the implication being that technology actually constitutes a threat to human being itself. He states that the virtual deification of technology and its attendant methodologies (especially during the C.20<sup>th</sup>) must necessarily shape the future endeavours of hermeneutics in particular and philosophy in general. This, he considers is the only real hope to reconnect the objective world represented by technology to “...the fundamental orders of our being which are neither arbitrary nor manipulable by us, but simply demand our respect” (Gadamer, 1966; cited in, Blacker, 1993, p.5).

Undoubtedly, the arguments warning of the dangers of technology are compelling. However there is also a sense here, that Gadamer’s suspicion of technology’s objectivist perspective and its conflationary, problem-strewn predilection for methodologically guaranteed endpoints, is mere Luddism by another name. Indeed, in some ways there arises in Gadamer’s exhortation an almost comic book quality as to the mission he assigns hermeneutics in particular and philosophy in general. Is he seriously suggesting for example that only philosophical



hermeneutics can preserve a future human race from the villainous influences of technology? Perhaps not; although the problems and dangers perceived by Gadamer posed by embracing unquestioningly technological change will demand serious consideration at some future time.

In the present however, two final questions remain to be put. Firstly, does Bildung create a better setting for orienting dialogue about educational change than the concept of responsibility that has been proposed it replace? Certainly, it seems to represent a more encompassing perspective, embracing definitional issues, problem cases, dualisms and dichotomies associated with debate about education and its aims. But does it serve to facilitate dialogue about change in a thoroughgoing, conclusive way? This depends upon one's view as to whether talk of endpoints is desirable or not when discussing something like change. For all intents and purposes, change is continuous. It can be conceived in different ways, but the passage of time is the defining, decisive factor in its progression. A concept such as Bildung enables us to focus attention on educational matters as well as the passage of time simultaneously. It enables us, if not to avoid the tendency toward dichotomous thinking entirely, then at least to recognise its origins and the ongoing potential for it to occur. And in this respect if no other, Bildung seems to bear the hallmarks of a surer footing by which to orient debate about a concept that combines words such as 'education' and 'change'.

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