'AN INQUIRY INTO THE EFFECTIVENESS OF MY PRACTICE AS A LEARNING PRACTITIONER-RESEARCHER IN RURAL COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT'

by

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Glossary

Key expressions in this dissertation are:
(1) Action Research, (2) Community Development and (3) Practitioner.

My understanding of each of these terms has grown as the work progressed. In this glossary I endeavour to provide my grasp of each at the conclusion of the research in September 2001; however I expect these insights to continue growing.

In the text I am at pains to emphasise that each community is idiosyncratic. Our understandings of particular communities are affected by the contextual, relational and practice-driven characteristics of each community.

All other expressions in the text conform to common usage.

(1) Action Research

I look to Carr and Kemis (1986:162) for a widely accepted description of action research:

> "Action research is simply a form of self reflective enquiry undertaken by participants in social situations in order to improve the rationality and justice of their own practices, their understanding of these practices, and the situations in which these practices are carried out."

This thesis is about improving practice through action research.

(2) Community Development

I have a preference for Professor Kimball's (1994) description: "Community development can be defined as intricate networks of purposeful conversations about the issues that matter most to people".

Implicit for me in the word 'purposeful' is action; without action there can be no action research.

(3) Practitioner

The earliest ascribable meaning of the word 'practitioner' is 'one who practices' (Webster 1963: 667); it is the definition I prefer. Later interpretations favour the practice of professions, implying expertise. I see the practitioner in community development as a systemic learner, researcher, philosopher and servant leader - all aspects of the community development experience, which every participant in community development might model.

ABSTRACT

In this study I research my practice in rural community development with a view to improving it.

The study reconceptualises the nature of rural community development by shifting perceptions of development as an externalised focus of study - which may be theorised about by detached 'outside' experts - to focusing on the insights from participants' experiences. These experiential insights facilitate a process where practitioners, other stakeholders and I can generate our own theories of how rural community development is advanced.

Long-established empirical approaches are effective in probing traditional technical, economic, practical, social and political characteristics of rural community development. But I wish to investigate the full range of the factors affecting rural communities, particularly ethical, aesthetic, spiritual, cultural and ecological influences. Here empirically based methodologies are less effective. This insight is developed in a series of three tables in chapter three, which describe the appropriate application of technical rational approaches to agricultural development (Table 1), action research approaches to rural development (Table 2) and what happens when - inappropriately - traditional technical rational methodologies are applied to rural development (Table 3).

I therefore chose action research as my working methodology of choice. Furthermore, action research is sensitive to the emergent nature of community development, to its contextual, practice-based and relational characteristics. The study therefore is located in the new scholarship of the post-modern era of scientific paradigms.

The study's findings question the appropriateness of traditional approaches to training in community development and highlight the 'knowledge in community' or wisdom shared by established communities' participants. As a teacher and advisor in horticulture, I mediated prescriptive technical expertise to farming clients. This approach did not help advance rural community development. This was a key discovery. I recount how, as a consequence, I changed and became a learning practitioner-researcher and how that stance advances my practice. In modelling this experience through examining my own practice, I provide an imitable pattern for other practitioners.

My findings are validated through critical thinking, through the critique of colleagues and scholars, through reflecting on successive drafts of this script, through support from the literature and through invited formal comment.

CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

[1] Full reference is in the bibliography

CHAPTER 1

BEGINNINGS

"Knowledge emerges only through invention and reinvention, through the restless, impatient, continuing hopeful inquiry men pursue in the world, and with each other."

Freire, 1974:58

Foreword

In this dissertation I present myself as a community development practitioner, a learner, researcher, facilitator and teacher. These pursuits combine to comprise the responsibility of a practitioner in rural community development. My awareness of effective rural community development arose during a series of visits to the Ballintubber community in County Mayo.

My first visit to Ballintubber Abbey was on a summer's day in the late nineteen eighties. I then had no knowledge or interest in community development. Founded nearly eight hundred years after Saint Patrick's arrival, the abbey church is approaching its eighth hundredth birthday. The building is impressive. Restored in recent years, it had won an award for European heritage.

My impressions were mixed. There was a sense of reserve and of silence, except for the chirping of swallows nesting beside the altar. The experience was one of being in a sacred place, hallowed by some twenty generations of spiritual encountering and now restored to liturgical use. The abbey was one of only three such reinstated medieval churches of the Roman Catholic faith in the Republic of Ireland. This contrasts with their prevalence in Continental Europe. How had the restoration come about?

A local woman, who had completed her devotions, charged me with the responsibility of leaving the entrance door ajar; otherwise the parenting swallows could not come and go.

The abbey's location was hardly imposing. It was situated at the bottom of a hill, near a lake. It did not dominate the countryside. Yet it was at a crossroads of two significant routes. The most efficient transport available at the time of its foundation was by boat on the lake. This remained so for virtually the next seven hundred years. It was the best way to access other monastic foundations, the Irish countryside and wider Continental Europe.

The other route was a different matter. It was four thousand years old, predating Christianity by about two thousand years. It had been the superhighway for the ancient kings of Connaught, living some fifty miles away near Tulsk, to make their pilgrimages to what was then known as Cruach an Aille, now Croagh Patrick, the pre-Christian abode of influential Celtic gods. After Patrick, it had served Christian pilgrims right up to the mid-eighteen hundreds. It is arguably the oldest pilgrim route in Europe, certainly older than Santiago de Compostella, a parvenu not yet a thousand years old. The remains of a hostel - with foot washing facilities for these pilgrims - are to be seen in the abbey's grounds. It also shelters the mausoleum of Tiobóid na Long, who was murdered nearby. He was the son of Grace O'Malley, the pirate queen.

As a casual visitor, I knew nothing of these routes. All the graves face east, eloquent testimony of this community's traditions and their expectation that Christ would greet them from the east. I failed to notice the one grave facing north. The grounds were disappointing. The dominant trees were cypresses and poplars. Neither was a native species, a discordant choice. There was however one specimen ash tree. Again, to my disapproving horticultural eye, there appeared to be some enthusiastic and major relocation of rocks, an implausible waterfall, some empty braziers and three unappealing huts or shelters. I thought the abbey was superb but was decidedly compromised by its surroundings.

I have deliberately begun my narrative of this experience of community development by emphasising the background of its emergence. I met nobody, except the lady who wished that the swallows would not be frustrated. Effectively I had seen the abbey and observed little. The stone furnishings were an enigma; I had failed to notice the Tóchar. Virtually nobody was there and the community appeared committed to a low profile.

I failed to appreciate what was the local community's architecture. They had restored the abbey. The grounds and its artefacts were the props of the community's joint activities - to be understood in subsequent visits. This emergent clarification is recounted in chapter five.

Introduction

This study is about my research in relation to practice in the domain of rural community development. It is also concerned with the type of research that makes a difference to me and to other practitioners in the ways in which we might work, think about our practice and how we might relate our ideas or theories to other interested parties. Furthermore it is my intention to discuss the methodology of this research, i.e. its internal process - a resource in its own right - in terms of equal significance to my consideration of the substantive issue, rural community development, that constitutes the setting for this research.

At the outset, I state unambiguously that I am about the creation of my own professional identity (Connelly and Clandinin 1999) as a research practitioner in rural community development. A significant preoccupation of the research is to demonstrate that my epistemology of practice very closely parallels what could be a useful epistemology of practice for communities themselves to adopt and develop.

There are many descriptions of rural community development. The description that most appeals to me is that given by Kimball (1994) who suggests that a human community is a network of purposeful conversations about issues that concern them. This description is what is at the core of all aspects of community. I view community development as being organic, systemic and continually developing. Consequently theories that would explain community development are also likely to be organic and developmental, and not static or moribund. Theories must attend to the relational character of community development. Put another way, the process of effective community development requires an appropriate epistemology of practice. Arguably it also requires appropriate training approaches. When community development processes are being researched, the methodology should take its relational character into account. This has not always happened in Ireland. I think that the traditional positivist / technical rational paradigm cannot accommodate community development's relational and contextual characteristics

I hold that it is for communities themselves to develop their own autonomy, to grow in their practice of community development and to conduct research on issues that challenge them. Communities should be encouraged in this understanding of themselves. Practitioners in rural community development are not essential to the well-being of mature communities. Community development commonly justifies itself on the grounds of its developmental process. The purpose here is to engage with that developmental process and explain it in terms of my own practice. In doing this I hope to furnish a theory that will have emerged from my self-study as a research practitioner.

The thesis begins with an overview of its aims and purposes. The concerns that motivated me to undertake this research are recounted as are the contexts that affect this research. The research design is outlined. The conduct of the research and the maintenance of acceptable ethical standards are described.

The generation of data and their transformation evidence in the light of specified guiding criteria are recounted. The choice of action research as the appropriate methodology is briefly introduced. I say why it is consistent with my aims and concerns. The funding that made this work possible is acknowledged and the obligations that funding imposes are highlighted. The

original contributions I make to the scholarship of the theory and the practice of the rural community development practitioner are set out.

There is a recurring dilemma in this undertaking. I have some difficulty with the prevailing positivist methodology. It has served agriculture well in terms of production and of productivity. Its traditions, conventions and objectivity however are at odds with the relational nature of rural community development and the knowledge in use by its participants. In opting for action research as my preferred methodology, I seek to conduct this research along lines that are congruent with that methodology. The work is marked from time to time by pauses for reflection, conversation, revision and input from others. On these occasions it reflects the critical reflective and dialectical processes through which ideas are clarified. In this way, the methodology reflects best practice in the learning conversations that typify real community development practice.

In a particular way this dissertation describes my journey from an early training in agriculture into rural development. In this the experience of many colleagues who have found the positivist methodology to be inadequate in the realm of community development is represented. These colleagues are in my mind as I relate how I changed and developed new theories from my practice. I hope this dissertation makes sense for them and for others in the field of community development.

Aims and Purposes of this Research

In undertaking this research, I hope to gain a deeper understanding of my work as a practitioner. I wish to demonstrate the development of personal theories of community development through researching my own practice, thinking and learning as a practitioner. I hope too to develop my educational values in the context of community development. In doing this I hope to generate a theory of community development, which arises from my experience of the learning opportunities that collaboration with practitioners from Michigan State University provided. This theory will also be influenced by the accounts of other practitioners, of relevant researchers in the literature and from my thinking about this emergent theory. The validation of the epistemological basis of my theories will rest on two principal measures. These are through discourse with validators (participants, academics and other practitioners) and by critically testing my theories against theories in the literature.

My involvement in rural community development is not solely that of bystander or observer. It is focused in the first instance on improving my practice as a research practitioner. Thus the pre-eminent research question is " How do I, a practitioner and researcher, improve my practice?" (see Whitehead 1989) or 'How can I come to a new conceptualisation of rural development and show the process in action?' I am asking the question,

'How can I do this?' I anticipate that part of the solution will lie in improving my learning about the nature of community development and about the nature of the work of practitioners.

In Search of a Methodology

The substantive issue of this thesis is rural community development. There are its processes, the ways it does the business and there is I, the learning, researching, facilitating and teaching practitioner. The intent is on interpreting the substantive issue, its processes and their effects on my learning so that the result may influence approaches to rural community development for the better. My access to the substantive issue is mediated by my choice of methodology. There are aspects of rural community development that I wish to examine. Many of these aspects are not scrutinised by the dominant methodologies. I believe that action research will facilitate what I wish to achieve. The principles, which inform action research, are evident throughout. They permeate the whole work, its approach, its structure, its author, its findings and its legacy.

This methodology has perturbed me and some of my validators - those who generously read the emerging work and provided critique. Nevertheless the enticement to seek refuge in the positivist methodologies of my undergraduate and post-graduate training is resisted. My professional colleagues and I are more familiar with positivist methodologies. The original proposal for funding indicated the intention to conduct this investigation through action research. Action research is a methodology that is sensitive to the contextual, relational and practice-driven characteristics of community development and to its emergent developments.

It is not that I perceive the positivists' approach to be wrong; it is that, for this task, it is inappropriate and limited. This is so because those of us, whose training is in the empirical sciences, tend to persist in bringing our empirical approaches to rural community development. I hope to demonstrate that this approach is restrictive and less than fully defensible.

The kind of theory that I wish to discover is based on the premise that knowledge of community development is creative, emergent, spontaneous, surprising, advantageous, illuminating and transformatory. In the everyday business of effective communities, knowledge of their practice is the indispensable resource upon which communities rely to achieve their goals. Much of this knowledge is tacit (Polanyi, M. 1965). It arises from the lived experience of the practice of community development.

This research is based in a knowledge base of practice that is to be found within the practice of community development. Theory about this practice is

generated from experiential interactions within the practice. I would cite Schön's (1987, 1994, 1995 and 1996) seminal work. The endorsement of personal practical theories by practitioners and participants, unmediated by third parties, is a means of validating this work. It is more than that however. The process itself that brings this validation about contains the seeds of dispersing the practice of action research in rural communities.

The structures and processes of an action research enquiry and of practice-based community development are in mutual support. I hope to communicate the value of this epistemology of practice to other stakeholders in rural community development. Thus part of the legacy of the work is set to be action research itself, a methodology I perceive as capable of effectively addressing the ongoing localised research challenges of rural communities.

I believe that this approach responds effectively to the test provided by Schratz and Walker (1995:8) when they say: 'What's the point of doing research there if it does not have any effect on the immediate situation?'

Rationale for the Work - My Concerns

There were several reasons for undertaking this research. My opening grounds for concern can be traced to the last assignment in my public service career as a specialist in leadership and community development in Teagasc, Ireland's Agriculture and Food Development Authority. In fulfilling this remit, there was an inherent, emerging contradiction. I was coming to this assignment from a background of traditional propositional thinking, where I had been an advisor and teacher in a farming community. There I represented myself as an expert in horticulture. I communicated expertise, with that expertise coming from outside agencies, on crop production to growers and young farm inheritors. I quickly realised that outside expertise would not work in community development. This discovery is more fully described in chapter two.

Many Teagasc rural development colleagues continued to rely on the practices of their advisory days. They acted out of the paradigm that, what had always worked for them with farmers, would succeed too with rural people. They actively sought out projects such as tourism, alternative agricultural enterprises and farm foods, which could be shaped to their paradigm of practice; a paradigm I suspected had been superseded. In their practice, they could claim to be expert with justification. But they unwittingly curtailed their clients' choice. They confined their clients' right to decide on the generative issue(s) for their communities, which they might wish to pursue. Unintentionally my colleagues frustrated the emergent nature of community development by setting down a circumscribed agenda within which the business would be done. My concern was that this approach confined the new rural development service to 'product' or 'packaged' topics

like the dominant enterprises in agriculture and excluded dealings with the relational processes of rural community development.

This undertaking was well advanced before I fully grasped that we were using a paradigm unsuited to all the dimensions of rural community development. To begin with, I had some inkling, born of dissatisfaction with my professional life's dominant methodology. This I describe as a technical-rational approach. At a superficial level I could practise the relational nature of community development. However, at times of uncertainty, I regressed to more established approaches with their empirical roots. This work relates my critical thinking around that stumbling block and my determination to both learn from it and to try once again.

This work is about that journey.

The whole work is born of a more pressing concern that rural community development in Ireland lacks an epistemology that expresses best practice in this field. I am concerned too because most research has tended to be conducted in the dominant methodologies associated with agriculture. That practice has curtailed our appreciation and expectations of the dynamics of rural community development. I felt we could do better. As a practitioner little of traditional research helped my work situation; it tended to be too general. I worked in isolation from colleagues. We did not communicate our knowledge among ourselves.

I perceived myself as what Whitehead (1989) calls 'a living contradiction'. There were areas of my work as a community development practitioner where I held values, which I wasn't able to live out in practice. Few other sources could help me with this dilemma. There was no shortage of guidelines on the skills involved in community development. These include Batten (1957), Biddle and Biddle (1965), Cary (1970) Cook (1994) Jouen (1995), Mc Call (1988), Phillips (1991), Robinson et al (1991), Robinson et al (1991a), Schaffer (1987), Schaffer and Anundenson (1993), Theobold (1991) and Wall 1989. But the conflict I experienced between the wishes of communities and my employer's stemmed from a clash of values, mine, communities, my employer and, occasionally, funding agencies.

Other factors contributed to my concerns. The whole notion of rural development, espoused by the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), meant that money and grants would influence participation. Because of historical agricultural approaches to grant assistance, there was a precedent to be followed by dominantly agricultural administrators to treat rural development in no different way. There was no evidence of any necessary paradigm shift by the leading agencies involved. Measurable product - not different to the concept of Gross Agricultural Output - at the year's end was in danger of

becoming the overriding catch-phrase justification for community development endeavour.

This tension provides a starting point for my research. I started to mull over ideas of professional knowledge in community development.

Chapter two treats of the historical neglect of community development approaches by the state. The state left communities to their own devices. Arguably the greatest need for emergent communities was to learn how to function effectively. A consequence of official neglect was a lack of understanding within the public sector of the processes of community development.

The association between rural development and agriculture is not based on any particularly cogent rationale. Had rural development been affiliated to any other departments of state, the current paradigms of practice might be different.

My dilemma is that there is little evidence of impending change in approaches to rural development training. It is difficult to find official training curricula that do not favour the objective, quantifiable aspects of development, treating community development participants as resources and objects of the process. In short, approaches to training in rural development are difficult to distinguish from approaches to training for agriculture. In chapter four, the teaching of such a traditional curriculum, 'Profile of Rural Ireland' on a rural development programme meant to meet the needs of young entrants is recounted

That teaching experience denies my values. I wish to make the case for a better approach. I am concerned therefore with discerning the most appropriate paradigm of practice for rural community development, by reliably representing its epistemology from the perspective of a practitioner.

Research Design

The focus of my research is my practice as a rural community development practitioner. This focus is evident throughout the text. As a practitioner - particularly in chapters four, less so in chapter five - I have undertaken two action research episodes. These projects have helped clarify and confirm my ideas about many aspects of the work of the practitioner. I tested these ideas for myself in chapter four - through teaching 'Profile of Rural Ireland' to would-be new entrants - and learned from the practice of other stakeholders, as narrated in chapter five. I demonstrate and clarify what works for me and I support my claim to knowledge with validated evidence.

This research has had a long period of incubation. My quest for clarity and effectiveness around my work began many years ago. It predates this research. My autobiographical sketch relates this pursuit, born of disquiet with my practice. The overall outcome aims to show an improvement in my practice and the development and explanation of the theory that sustains that better practice.

Research Experiences

As stated above, there are two research episodes. The first (reported in chapter four) was conducted in a boarding agricultural college. There I taught a module of an official programme in community development - 'Profile of Rural Ireland' - to prospective participants in rural development. In the second, related in chapter five, I situated myself as a learner/observer in the Tóchar Valley Network. This is an association of some twelve communities, located in rural County Mayo, which endeavoured to produce a common development strategy. Chapter four tends to concentrate on the practising practitioner; chapter five on the learning practitioner.

The two experiences were selected as being typical of effective practitioners' activities, who continuously act and learn. Both allowed me to put my theories to the test. They concentrate respectively on involving the next generation in community development and on more mature communities working out their destiny. In the first, I teach and I act; in the second I am a learner and I reflect.

1. Teaching Community Development

As a result of my teaching experience with 'Profile of Rural Ireland' I developed new insights into the nature of community education. These insights are appropriate for a form of theory that captures the transformative, developmental nature of community development. An opportunity to deliver the new official programme, devised for new entrants to living in rural Ireland was deliberately sought. I prepared the classes. I discussed on an individual basis with the participants their readiness to participate, their future plans and the difficulties they experienced with the course. The data collated included the class teaching material, a diary record of the classes and of the interaction I had encouraged, my conversations with the headmaster and teaching colleagues, students' work and house tests, projects, public examinations and homework.

The account (chapter four) is critical in that the curriculum, the boarding school environment and some of my teaching approach frustrated the proclaimed purposes of the programme. I was teaching out of a mismatched paradigm. Despite this, all students passed their examinations. Therefore officially, the programme was rated a success. Yet the participants themselves claim to have virtually no knowledge - experiential or otherwise -

of community development. Insights and theories relate to what is needed to make sense of and to effectively address this paradox.

2. Tóchar Valley Network

The Tóchar Valley Network is an affiliation of twelve rural communities located on or near the ancient causeway (or in Irish, tóchar) associated with commemorating Saint Patrick but having a history traceable to prehistoric times. This network of communities supports a population of some 10,000 people. It is centred on the abbey at Ballintubber, County Mayo. This second project was instigated by me and advanced through my involvement with Michigan State University, particularly its Bailey scholars programme and through the generosity of the W. K. Kellogg Foundation. The purpose was to assist the communities develop together and to meet the challenges inherent in advancing jointly. I was an observer-learner.

The project afforded the opportunity to record the events as they occurred, to reflect on those events and on my own transforming thinking, to interview some of the stakeholders, to write up reflections, to develop my theory of community development and to test that emergent theory in dialogue with others against the background reality of rural communities. The involvement of Michigan State University was an original obligation inherent in the terms of my funding. This shortly became a most stimulating and enjoyable episode. The terms of the obligation were fulfilled in having Professor Frank Fear, Professor, Community Resource Development, and his team, work in the Tóchar Valley on some four occasions.

The thesis dwells on two aspects of these occasions; the significance of what is referred to as 'in-community knowledge' and the contribution of values to rural community development. I relate how I learned and how my practice was enhanced through this experience.

Ethical Standards

Webb (1995:73) underscores the prerequisite for ethical standards. His field is staff development. He maintains that the interrelational character of work similar to his is profound, 'in terms of legitimising a humanistic approach,' which can make for thoughtful and original insights. But he warns that it is also profound:

> 'in terms of the possibility for mischief, in the hands of a staff developer with manipulative, exploitative or abusive intent.'

This impacts on the importance of values and ethics. McKernan (1996: 241-2) is my primary reference to ethical standards. He wrote in the context of an educational institution. Most of what he says is pertinent to my obligations as a researcher:

'1 All those affected by an action research study have a right to be informed, consulted and advised about the object of the enquiry.
2 Action research should not proceed unless permission has been received from parents, administrators and others concerned.
3 No individual participant will have unilateral rights to veto the content of any project report.
4 All documentary evidence should not be examined without official permission.
5 Copyright law should always be strictly observed.
6 The researcher is responsible for the confidentiality of the data.
7 Researchers are obliged to keep efficient records of the project and make these available to participants and authorities on demand.
8 The researcher will be accountable to the school community who impact on the project, i.e. other teachers, parents and pupils.
9 The researcher is accountable to report the progress of the project at periodic intervals. This criterion will also help satisfy the need for ongoing formative evaluation to determine new lines of interest and problem redefinition.
10 Research should never be undertaken which could cause physical or mental harm to any of the subjects concerned, e.g. administering drugs to unknowing participants would count as an extreme example of such a violation.
11 The researcher has the right to report the project fairly.
12 The researcher must make the ethical contractual criteria known to all involved.
13 Researchers have the right to have their name on any publication resulting from the project. This will help answer the delicate ethical question of ' Who gets credit for publications?' That is, whose name will appear on the report?'

Bearing the foregoing in mind, the overriding concern is that collaborators are:

1 Clear about what is being proposed,
2 That their anonymity - should they so desire - is guaranteed,
3 That they can see and comment on and adjust reports of discussions, particularly on the grounds of further reflection or inspiration,
4 That the final or 'to be published' versions of their contributions are signed off and cleared with them,
5 That care is taken to comply with the confidentiality requirements practitioners and participants may stipulate in regard to their participation,
6 That they are free to withdraw,
7 That these obligations are observed not only by me but also by all others on an agreed list of persons who are/must be circulated with the material for the purposes of validation and supervision; this list may not be extended without prior negotiation and agreement.
8 That copyright law is observed by all.

These considerations comprise the ethical considerations governing this research.

Guiding Criteria

In chapter three, I explain how I devised the following principal guiding criteria, which influence my choice of methodology. The methodology must facilitate the following eight criteria:

i. It must allow me access to the practice of rural community development.
ii. It must accommodate the characteristics of community development viz. that it is context grounded, practice driven and highly relational.
iii. It must be able to accommodate the inimitability of each community.
iv. It must accommodate my participation as community development activity emerges.
v. It must facilitate my individual quest to improve my practice.
vi. It must adjust to the emergent nature of community development practice.
vii. It must admit of challenges of an ethical nature.
viii. It must afford me a convincing means of validating my findings.

These are criteria that I plan to demonstrate are appropriate to a methodology to examine the practice of community development. Where the methodology cannot fully take these criteria into account, as is the case with the dominant positivist research approaches, whole aspects of rural community development processes would continue to be inaccessible.

Choosing Action Research

In chapter three and in its appendix, appendix three, the rationale for choosing action research as the principal methodology of this research is explained. It was selected because of its convergence with the process of community development and because it can be easily adopted by practitioners and participants alike. Furthermore it accommodates my concerns and allows me to improve my practice by learning from practice. It allows me to relate the story of my findings to other practitioners. It facilitates my developing insights and theories about my findings. It acknowledges that these need not come all at once, but can be the product of a piecemeal process, with epiphanies and regression. It accommodates the eight criteria above.

At an early stage of this research there was a dilemma. I had a hunch that the significant place to learn and develop theories about communities was from within those communities. Or put another way, learning in community about community was likely to be a richer and more authentic experience than from opportunities that appeared to lie elsewhere. So companionable

conversation with community activists on the journey that led to this dissertation was a welcome source of learning.

Action research facilitates the consideration of rural community development as a holistic system. In this it accommodates the reservation expressed by Bohm (1996) that modern science had tended to focus on the components rather than on the totality of phenomena. This reluctance is re-echoed by Collins (2000: 96) and is at the heart of systems theories. Moreover if community development is viewed as a living, working system, to fragment it in order to examine it carries the risk that the fragments may not function reliably, when re-assembled - and re-assembly is presumed possible. Indeed Bohm (op.cit.) thinks that reassembly is not always guaranteed. The fate of geese with a dependable output of golden eggs comes to mind.

Furthermore, the everyday knowledge that facilitates the work of communities is continuously varying and changing in a dialectical form, particularly within an action research methodology. This knowledge is not immediately apparent. But this very methodology makes this tacit knowledge accessible and communicable out of the communities in which it is situated, ever changing and concealed. It is the very engagement with the processes of action research that helps improve practice, outcomes, process, practitioner and participant. These goals are congruent with the aspirations of all effective communities.

This enquiry is dialectical in its form. It relates how I reflected on, obtained, suggested responses to challenges that transpired and how I garnered second opinions from validators. I like MacIntyre's view (1990: 196), quoted in Eames (1996) that saw dialectics as a conversation:

> '...extended in time in which participants revisit earlier moments ... with a variety of purposes: to evaluate what has only emerged cumulatively, to examine the consistency of what has been said, to put a new point in an old light, or vice versa.'

This work aspires to do just that. It incorporates from time to time a 'conversation' with myself that arises from a revisiting and a questioning of earlier drafts of this work. Gadamer (1975) supports this aspiration. As I reflect on my earlier writing, as I discuss it with others, as I learn from observation and reflection on my practice and the practice of others, I endeavour to call attention to my growing understanding of my research for my epistemology of practice. This impacts on the work in making the thesis non-linear and less fragmented. Because through redrafting, I revisit the emergent themes and because of the discursive nature of the dialectical approach, the product reflects this reflexive input. Again Schratz and Walker (1995:13) support this point:

> “A central problem we face in writing about research methods in a way that draws attention to the methodological issues is that of finding a form that is reflexive. Reflexive in the sense that it provides us with ways of talking about research on practice. We need to find ways of turning our approach back on itself so that it becomes critically discursive....”

Thus action research gives rise to an emergent understanding of my professional knowledge, to the ideas that constitute my theory of practice. 'Emergent' is a deliberate choice of words. This work does not presume to be the last word on this topic, nor does it come to a sense of closure or finality. For the purposes of expediting this research and to meet conditions implicit in its funding, I have largely ceased practising as a community development practitioner for the three-year duration of the study. Much of my learning awaits implementation from September 2001. But this delay also signals and emphasises the commitment to the ongoing captivation with action research.

The advance of community development itself is emergent and unpredictable. This account captures emerging views on the theory and practice of the practitioner, in the course of this investigation. These are views that were shared with others and whose critiques inform my thinking. That thinking is informed by both my practice as a practitioner/participant in rural community development and the theory that supports or is relevant to that practice. Topics and roles tend not to be defined; once 'defined' further emergence and clarification are thereby inhibited.

This account has contexts, described more fully in chapter two, that relate to the history of rural community development, to my own professional experience and to the contexts of this particular work. Conversations with varying groups of fellow action-researchers, community development participants and collaborating academics gave rise to moments of discovery and of frustration, of enlightenment and of being misunderstood, of companionable support, isolation, serendipity, enchantment and vulnerability. It brought for me, a profound reassessment of long-held beliefs and practices. This process of reassessment in a sense becomes, is the methodology.

The Journey Metaphor

The metaphor of 'journey' is pertinent. The story - and that is largely what this account is - comprises several journeys:

- There is the journey of my professional life until now (chapter two).
- The journeys in my early training in both empirical and some qualitative approaches to research and knowledge; the more recent discovery of action research and the ongoing capability to draw on all three (chapters - all).
- There are the ongoing lapses from the resolve to leave behind the interaction with participants from a didactic stance and moving to learn

how to accompany them as fellow-discoverers and explorers, (particularly chapters four and five).

- There is the sojourn with ten students of rural community development, their study of the 'Profile of Rural Ireland' curriculum, their grappling with their prejudices and my experience of conflict of values as I struggled to be true to principles of a dialectical approach to preparing new entrants for community development, while at the same time preparing them for a public examination (chapter four).
- I walked with the participants of the Tochar Valley Network in every sense of the word and learned from them (chapter five).
- The journeys of greatest distances took me to the United States (chapter two).
- It took the United States to rural Ireland (chapter five).
- I set off on many inward reflective expeditions, sometimes alone, at times accompanied by others, as we attempted to make sense of what it was I was uncovering.

These journeys contribute to this work and are recounted throughout. They had a historical backdrop or context of benign neglect of community development since the foundation of the state. The journeyman's story (Lillis 2000) is not bounded by this account, for these journeys in a sense are only a beginning. I embarked on this odyssey obliviously, long before I re-enrolled as a student for this research. My quest began with of a sense of dissatisfaction with my practice, not only as a consultant in rural community development, but with the earlier relational aspects of my career as an advisor and teacher. There had to be better ways of being effective. There was an earlier unacknowledged journey, of which at the time I was barely aware. Polanyi (1983) supports this view. Without that niggling curiosity and discontent, I would not have embarked on the current journeys. Now the reflecting on, the retracing steps, the conversations with well-wishing practitioners and validators on the way, and the retelling of the pilgrim tale, as I moved forwards, are what enriched my practice.

As part of good research practice, the advice of Ghaye et al. 1998, Lukinskey (1990: 213 - 234), McNiff (1988:83) and Ranier (1978: 72) was followed and a reflective diary was kept where I have pondered over the events and conversations of the day's travel. This diary is a valuable source of data.

The whole thesis is a reflective discourse on my practice as a rural community development practitioner, as I strive to better understand that practice and to improve it. It is emergent as I journey forwards.

Dissemination of Findings

By describing experiences as a research-practitioner and efforts to learn and to improve practice through an action research approach, I am producing a text with which I hope other practitioners can identify. They then have a number of options. They can react to the findings. They can adopt my

approach and apply it to their own practice in their particular context and write and share their own reports. They can build on this approach. They can undertake similar research in their individual circumstance, not necessarily focused on their own practice. They might encourage participants in their communities to undertake action research addressing the challenges and problems they face. They can dismiss this work.

So this work is not only an account but also an invitation to contribute to the advancement of the theory and practice of rural community development as an organic process and of action research itself. I am pleased that the invitation is being taken up - particularly through the validation process. This involvement means that all are engaged as scholars in a learning community. While this contributes to the goal of involving Michigan State University, it carries the potential of garnering the best thinking of academics on this side of the Atlantic as well. The situated-ness of the action as a response to emergent challenges in real, un-contrived rural community development episodes characterises this research.

The work already engages with other practitioners, participants and academics in that they have been requested to appraise the work in progress. Their assessments are continually incorporated throughout as corroborating or dissenting from my findings. Differences of opinion, even those influenced by a committed adherence to paradigms that I perceive now as no longer appropriate to community development generally, are welcome harbingers of new insights. This dialectical consultation is but a beginning. I note Covey's advice (2000 pp 73 - 75) specifically to his Irish audience, drawn from his earlier works of 1989 and 1996, that practitioners and participants should rely, not so much on their concern but on their circle of influence. They should build a consensus from the bottom up for desirable change. This advice converges with the obligations of effective action researchers to publish their work and communicate their findings so that society benefits.

I am a private consultant in rural and community development. I wish to improve my learning and practice as a practitioner in rural community development. My learning how to improve and enrich my practice is a product of my practice to a significant degree. It is a shareable resource and is pertinent to other practitioners in this field. It begins a process that goes beyond this work.

I perceive rural community development as practice based, characterised by relationships and it is context grounded; hypothetical communities are illusory. Kelso's view (Kelso 2000) of reality as an 'eclectic synthesis of science, philosophy and the subjective insights yielded by art, music, poetry, reflection and shared human experience' is shared. All these elements are to be discovered in communities. Storytelling might be added to his list, because it

is a feature of the second project of this work in the Tóchar Valley and because it complements well a principal underlying process of community development, i.e. conversational learning.

CHAPTER 2

CONTEXTS AND VALUES

> *"To undertake a pilgrimage is to place yourself at risk...the risk that you might not return as the same person who set out. The risk that all that you had thought that you knew, understood, had perhaps carefully constructed in your mind, might be blown apart."*
>
> (Martin Palmer in Westwood, 1997:8)

This work has a number of contexts, of which the following three dominate:

1. The Practice of Rural Development in Ireland.
2. My Background.
3. The Settings of my Research Projects.

I add a description of the contribution of Michigan State University

1. The Practice of Rural Development in Ireland.

I begin by examining the following aspects of official rural development policy that I have researched in the literature. These are:

1. Discouraging rural demographics.
2. Ambiguous terminology.
3. Choosing to advance urban growth instead of rural development.
4. Rigidity of policy.
5. Poor integration of measures/policies.
6. Scepticism re bottom up approaches.
7. Conflation with agricultural problems.
8. Democratic deficit.
9. Acquiescent rural development?
9. Domination by agriculture.
10. Outcomes of dependency.
11. Outcomes of unjust distribution of benefits.
12. Historical lack of community development policy.
13. Unresponsive departmental structures.
14. Instability of the country's regions.
15. Dearth of official expertise.
16. Role confusion.
17. Ambivalence about community empowerment.
18. Lack of long-term commitment.

Evidence is provided in the pages that follow. While I happily acknowledge recent progress, that progress has followed a long period of disengagement by the state. The prevailing approach is changing and much of it is for the

better. My inquisitiveness about alternative paradigms and /or the improvement of current approaches motivates me to seek more effective ways of advancing rural development.

Evidence

Official policy on rural development in Ireland is ambiguous. This ambiguity is due to the lack of official policy for the most of the last century. The reform of the Common Agriculture Policy (Commission of the European Communities 1988) reawakened interest in rural development.

1. Rural Demographics

The demographic trends in rural Ireland provide little pretext for satisfaction. Lee (1993:108) shows that we had the lowest population density of the inhabitable European Union. He argues that had we the Union's average population density in 1993, our population would be 12 millions, over three times our present population. Our low density is traceable to the Famine, emigration and being by-passed by the Industrial Revolution. Given that one third of the population lives in metropolitan Dublin, Lee wondered why we did not cite our sparse rural population as a centre plank of our application for membership of the European Economic Union. Subsequent events and the current regional dispensation support Lee's observations. Leavy (2001: 3) says that the decline in population continued over the period 1971 - 1976, particularly in the border and western counties where 'average population declined by 19 per cent and average employment by 24 per cent.' This continued decline right up to the last census, 1996, does not diminish the stark reproach of our rural demographics and their implications for sustaining commerce and services. To an extent they reflect impoverished resources but they also reflect the impoverished thinking of our public policy. They draw attention to the limitations of the paradigms in use for rural development.

2. Ambiguous Terminology

Officialdom uses the expression 'rural development' ambiguously. The expression is used to embrace alternative enterprises, rural initiatives taken at Government or European Union prompting, conventional farming, rurally based initiatives and development controlled by rural communities. Official usage has devalued the clear meaning of 'rural development', as was demonstrated in publications of the Stationery Office, (December 1994 and November 2000). These describe the official investment programmes for farmers and give the impression that these programmes deal predominantly with rural development. Instead they are dominated by agriculture. The misleading use of 'rural development' is not auspicious for clarity in rural development policy.

3. Choosing to Advance Urban Growth instead of Rural Development

The National Economic and Social Council (NESC) (1994:6) gives the impression of a preference for urban growth as the effective means of policy

implementation and admits to a rural development policy only in so far as the former is marginally ineffective. It defines the remit of rural development as an addendum to urban policy:

> '…as all those economic and social problems found in rural areas, except those which will be dealt with by autonomous urban growth and those which can best be dealt with by undifferentiated national policies. This definition is pragmatic and it is important to appreciate that it defines a shifting boundary between rural development and other policy areas.'

It diminishes rurality in favour of urban dominance and uniform national policies.

4. Rigidity of Policy

'Undifferentiated national policies' that work in urban areas but in rural contexts have limited effectiveness should not be acceptable as the State's best endeavour to serve rural citizens. The NESC report approves the inflexibility of policies and ignores the tradition of Plunkett (the founder of the Department of Agriculture) that - in policy implementation - "Elasticity is dictated by the variety of local conditions to be met within Ireland - a variety remarkable in proportion to the size of the country." (Plunkett 1902:648) Where policies do not reflect the variation of needs, abilities, and resources, they are less likely to succeed.

Accepting for the sake of argument, that so many national policy areas - in the estimation of the NESC (Op. cit.) - were to have such a significant effect of solving rural problems, what was it relying on to deliver relevant solutions, with (at their time of writing, pre 1994) scarce resources? The report championed balanced regional development, a reviewed national settlement policy involving the growth of selected towns, animation, reduction of social exclusion and enterprise development. It advocated single locations for provision of public services and had reservations about county enterprise boards. It recommended decentralised and area-based approaches, both dependent on partnership of state, statutory, voluntary, private and community groups. It was concerned with the balance of power in the partnerships, but not with flexibility of policies so that they might meet people's needs and capacities.

5. Poor Integration of Policies

There seems little point in a rural development division within the Department of Agriculture facilitating development in rural villages and creating a demand for housing for new employees, if another department were to veto public housing there. When the Departments of Education, Communications, Justice and Health close the local school, post office, Gárda station and dispensary, this undermines the work of rural development.

6. Scepticism re 'Bottom-up' Approaches.

The NESC Report found that 'Rural Development from Below' (Op. cit.: 102 - 103) was '…associated with low value added goods and services, and unattractive employment conditions.' It also required a lengthy period of capacity building. The overall finding was unenthusiastic.

7. Conflation with Agricultural Problems

Irish rural development has recently been closely associated with agriculture. Commins and Keane (1994:117) advert to this (mentioned at 2 - ambiguous terminology - above) and to the marginalisation of rural development policies:

> '…Although it is recognised that many measures can contribute to rural development (e.g. the Operational Programme for Tourism) the conceptualisation of the rural development problem is still strongly identified with, and indeed conflated with, the country's agricultural problems. In the Programme for Economic and Social Progress (PESP, 1991) rural development as a specific theme is subsumed under agricultural development (within the same set of topics as disease eradication, horticulture and forestry, etc). The one clearly stated aim for rural development in the Programme, viz., that of stabilising the rural population by appropriate integration of agricultural, industrial and other policies, is expressed within the context of the need to promote structural change in farming. Clearly, agricultural adjustment is facilitated by non-farm policies but rural development or area based development has its own rationale, and needs its own agenda of aims and measures.'

8. Democratic Deficit

There is no democratic, representative forum for conferring with rural people. This needs to be put right. Of a population of 3.6 million, 1.5 million live in the countryside. (Stationery Office November 2000:19). Yet there is no satisfactory way to consult them. They have not formed, nor have they been encouraged to form, representative organisations with which the state might deliberate. Farming organisations - whose constituents number less than 10% of this 1.5 million - have solely occupied this role. This they are entitled to do to the extent of their representative support, but not in the pretence that there are no other stakeholders there.

It is widely acknowledged in several reports (see Area Development Management 1995; Collins 1991; Department of Agriculture Food and Forestry 1966; Government Publications Office 1999; Government Publications Office Undated; Management November 1994 pp 13 – 15 and

National Economic and Social Council 1997) that some of the country's most disadvantaged citizens live on farms in rural Ireland. A similar situation is reported in America (see Lichter et al 1994 and Galston 1992). This deprivation already presents special challenges to participation in rural development programmes. It is difficult to discover evidence of any mechanism that effectively allows the opinions of disadvantaged rural citizens here or those of their more fortunate non-farming neighbours to be heard. This is not the situation in Northern Ireland.

9. Acquiescent Rural Development?

Several other factors converge to subordinate rural development to a dominant agriculture. These include:

- The European Union's rural development budget is subservient to the Common Agricultural Policy's funding.
- Teagasc and the Department of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development have significant functions in rural development. Traditionally they have been dominated by agricultural concerns, which tend to downgrade rural development to a secondary significance.
- A dominant proportion of the professional staff of these organisations was primarily trained in agricultural production, which justifiably relies on the dominant empirical approach to problem solving.
- The very reforms of the Common Agricultural Policy that gave rise to the renewed interest in rural development were rooted in the European agricultural politics.

All this combines to foster a disproportionate influence for agriculturists. The current situation leads to a distorted form of rural development. It has resulted in the state favouring landowners through its programmes on rural development and sidelining other rural dwellers, who constitute the majority of rural people. Resultant working groups can be unrepresentative. The Programme Evaluation Unit of the European Social Fund (1997:100) has protested that Teagasc '…has never seriously grappled with rural development or enterprise and, inasmuch as it is now so doing, the primary focus is still on the farming community.'

10 Outcomes of Dependency, 11 Outcomes of Unjust Distribution of Benefits

What of the effectiveness of policies that purport to advance agriculture and rural development? O'Hara and Commins (1998:263) report dependency with cheques in the post accounting for over 40% of aggregate farm income. Despite a clear commitment to favour smaller farmers, they quote Fingleton's (1995) prediction that by the year 2005, the numbers of dairy herds would have fallen by 13,000, from 43,00 in 1993 to 30,000. Larger farmers benefited disproportionately through the linkage of premia to production scale (op cit: 266). They record lost opportunity, venal gains for those already endowed and confirmation that

the policy itself has directly contributed to accelerating depopulation of the farming community. The challenge for rural development was therefore made all the greater.

Efforts are being made to proof future policies' development against outcomes with further adverse implications for the disadvantaged, especially since the publication of 'Ensuring the Future - A Strategy for Rural Development in Ireland: a White Paper on Rural Development' in 1999. However, no retrospection is contemplated.

O' Hara and Commins (1998: 267) point out that wealthy farmers can diversify. All new enterprises need investment and lead in time. They are not for the poor (op cit: 268). Benefits of retirement schemes favour whole-time and larger farmers. They conclude by calling for a clear and coherent rural development policy (op cit: 279 –281), the acknowledgement of the variety of contexts in rural Ireland and, shades of Plunkett (1902), the adaptation of all policies in the light of diversity. These observations support a principle, viz. that rural development is always context grounded and these contexts vary. Ignoring the variety of contexts is a recipe for ineffective rural development.

12 Historical Lack of a Community Development Policy

The earlier history of the State's involvement with local community partnership was the subject of a singularly critical review by Varley (1991: 84). However Curtin and Varley - by 1995 - observed the beginnings of communities' advancement but still hamstrung by the state's wish to dominate the relationship with communities. Despite continuing reservations Varley, by 1998 (1988: 398) admits that state attitudes were improving:

> "…the official climate has begun to change in a way that has left some sections of the state better disposed to viewing community actors as partnership material."

He notes the increasing role of the community and voluntary sector at national level (op cit: 399) but is not without reservation. The task force on agricultural education and training, reporting as recently as July 2000 (see Stationery Office (b) July 2000), confines rural community development to the context of rural tourism.

13. Unresponsive Departmental Structures

No one department of state could address community development's many issues, when taken as a whole. Most issues were likely to require an interdepartmental response. The public service structures, until very recently, did not permit such a response to rural communities.

14 Instability of the Country's Regions

The Irish Government is one of the most centralised in Europe and the powers of local government are among the weakest (Barrington 1993). The changing of the country's regions has been unparalleled. This contrasts with the stability of regions in other continental countries.

15 Dearth of Official Expertise

There is little evidence of a pre-EU rural development policy here. Hoctor (1971), whose history of the Department of Agriculture covers nearly seven decades, makes no significant comment on it. The Official Handbook published in 1932 (see Saorstát Éireann 1932:147) relates a little of the legacy of the Congested Districts Board, founded in 1891 (Needham 1994). Roinn na Gaeltachta[2], provided what Curtin (1995:382) admits was a rural development policy to the Irish speaking areas of the country.

One of the consequences of this neglect was that there was little or no expertise in rural development in the mainstream public service, when rural development became a focus of the EU reform in 1988 (Commission of the European Communities, 1988).

16 Role Confusion

Rural community development is context grounded; no two communities are the same. Working from a paradigm that displayed due regard to this was a new experience for public servants, more accustomed to promoting 'undifferentiated national policies'. It was even more challenging for agriculturists, who justifiably trusted to reliable, universal blueprints of dependable and replicable agricultural production methods. They and I shared a training that depended on empirical research as the foundation of the blueprint approach of universal applicability. Empirical research underpinned approaches to research, training and development. Public servants, accustomed to implementing undifferentiated policies, were slow to recognise the significance of context variation and the repercussions this would have on effective policy implementation.

17 Ambivalence about Community Empowerment

There is evidence that a strategy that empowers communities to take responsibility for their future -as opposed to one that controls or provides incentives in order to get people to do what they would not otherwise do - is

[2] Later subsumed into the Department of Arts, Heritage, Gaeltacht and the Islands

not being actively followed by our public servants. This statement can be substantiated, firstly by the absence of any recorded policy on rural development for over 70 years of the Department's existence (Hoctor 1971). Secondly, when the LEADER 1 Programme with European monies was inaugurated, there was an opportunity for member states to provide exchequer funding to unsuccessful groups. This opportunity, implemented in other member states, was passed up here.

18 Lack of Long-term Commitment

The amount of European funding for rural development is set to decrease. Were the public service to continue in its current narrow interpretation of its role, it would have little to offer in the post European funding era.

Reflection

I find the foregoing account of rural development in Ireland discouraging. My litany of limitations focuses on the political and official arrangements made for the advancement of rural development in the Republic of Ireland. In Northern Ireland a better dispensation pertains, at least in theory where, through the Rural Development Council an unambiguous programme is delivered. This was clearly set out nearly a decade ago:

> "The new rural development initiative assists community-led regeneration projects, contributing social as well as economic benefits and helping to alleviate problems in the most deprived rural areas of Northern Ireland. Rural communities are addressing their needs at local level and bringing forward plans to regenerate their own localities."
>
> (Department of Agriculture Northern Ireland 1992:61)

A listening ear to a more representative organisation of rural dwellers is provided through the Rural Community Network of Northern Ireland.
Had rural development been assigned to a different department of state a different - though not necessarily better - ethos would pertain. What this highlights is that there are other ways and that the inherent limitation of a particular administrative tradition can be improved. Any department of state, through its traditions, its staff's background and experience, and its dominant paradigms delivers a framework that influences the process and outcomes of rural community development policy.

Progress?

Nevertheless there is evidence of progress. The National Development Plan 1989 – 1993, (1989:65) and the Programme for Economic and Social Progress, (the PESP), (1991: 75) assigned significant responsibility to local communities. Some involvement of local communities was expected in EU initiatives such as the Third Programme to Combat Poverty, LEADER I (and

II) and the first INTERREG Programme. By late 1996, in 'Partnership 2000 for Inclusion Employment and Competitiveness' the Irish Government and its Social Partners 'committed to…consider, among other things how greater encouragement can be given to the development of groups and community based projects;' and 'an effective, multi-sectoral, integrated, area-based, participative rural development policy'. (Government Publication Office 1996: 58). The appropriate strategy was coming together. The OECD praised the Area Partnerships approach (Sabel, 1996). Local communities, engaged in working to create improved conditions for themselves, might be described as the ultimate in subsidiarity, a desire of the European Union.

That said, the course of reform of local government in Ireland is a matter of concern for community development. After some 25 years gestation (Stationery Office 1996: foreword) the Government signalled its reforming intentions in "Better Local Government: A Programme for Change". This publication aspired to enhance local democracy, envisioning a greater role for councillors (op cit: 17) the establishment of 'Strategic Policy Committees' (op cit 18) and Area Committees (op cit 22). Of particular interest for this study are the arrangements for local development systems (see Stationery Office (b) 1999; and Stationery Office (a) 2000). These publications represent some steadfast work by civil servants drawn from most departments of state. The social partners were consulted and some state agencies, but again, it was not possible to consult local people. This might seem to be a petty observation, given that the whole purpose aspired to bring about greater democratic participation by these same local people. Overall it is to be welcomed, even if it is very late in the day and almost eighty years after independence.

However, guidelines tend to become rigid and controlling. There already is evidence in at least one county where area committees have been established which ignore the area of influence of pre-existing community development bodies. There is some foreboding about access by such communities to strategic planning, when the guidelines do not appear to permit such an input in anything more than a desultory consultation. This would be a serious step to hampering local communities in their business of developing their own resources and empowering themselves to deliver their own future. These communities may well find access to funding will be limited, on the grounds that it is pre-committed to county strategy plans.

Perhaps a real test of this strategy will be its attention to rural poverty. The Government's objective to reduce poverty is set out in "Sharing in Progress – National Anti-Poverty Strategy" (Government Publications Office, undated). The general anti poverty strategy is being implemented well according to the Combat Poverty Agency latest report (June 2001), "Combat Poverty Agency, Annual Report 1999" (1999: 19 - 21). However, the Combat Poverty Agency has found it necessary to make a submission to the Minister for the Environment and Local Government (Farrell 2001: 6) where Farrell calls for the promotion of social inclusion in the Minister's Local Government Bill, 2000.

In this context, rural poverty is a challenge, because of its dispersed and hidden nature in rural Ireland and the particular difficulties of accessibility to services that confront the rural poor. Yet at local level, local government is best placed to respond.

Notable Official Reports Influencing Irish Rural Development

A range of reports, dating from the nineties has informed progress. I am commenting on the following, in chronological order, as being the more consequential:

1 'Strategy for Rural Development Training' (June 1993);

Teagasc (June 1993) in a commendable initiative, convened a committee to make recommendations on how training for rural development might best be organised and delivered. The report recommended three distinct training programmes:

(i) The Certificate in Rural Enterprise, aimed at providing rural school leavers with appropriate training for multi-skill employment. (This is a focus of one of my investigations – see chapter four).
(ii) Diploma in Rural Enterprise, aimed at those seeking to establish or expand rural commercial enterprises or 'become involved in community - based projects.' (Teagasc 1993: 40)
(iii) Diploma in Rural Development, 'is a programme designed for potential animators and others with the promotion of rural development in a voluntary or professional capacity.' (op cit: 42)

The major achievement was the commitment of hitherto autonomous and separate training agencies to collaborate in collectively delivering a range of validatable training for rural people. The report did not go very far in recommending how these programmes might be implemented. Having decided who might do what, it left training approaches to the various agencies. It was assumed that the dominant paradigm of 'top-down' imparting of information was suited to rural community development training. This was the approach that Teagasc implemented. The more recent research of Phelan et al. (2001) implies that some change in this approach should follow.

2 'EU LEADER 1 Initiative in Ireland: Evaluation and Recommendations'

The first LEADER Programme was assessed in a report (Kearney, et al, 1994). This was a largely positive report. It highlighted the programme's achievements, the voluntary efforts, the more effective use and involvement of statutory agencies and LEADER groups' appreciation of the potential of their respective areas.

The report's long-term significance was in its recommendations around training of board members and that animation towards rural community

development be introduced. In LEADER II, most of the recommendations were implemented. This report, together with the Teagasc Report on Training, indicated an eloquent commitment on the part of the authorities to the prospect of a consolidated modus operandi through comprehensive training programmes for advancing rural development, albeit at the prompting of a European Union programme.

3 The Cork Declaration - a Living Countryside, 1996

The Cork Declaration was a proclamation by the delegates at the European Conference on Rural Development, in Cork, during Ireland's presidency of the European Union. It was a ten-point plan, which called for the following: Rural Preference, Integrated Approach, Diversification, Sustainability, Subsidiarity, Simplification, Programming, Finance, Management and Evaluation and Research.

This plan set the course of European policy on rural development. One notable disclosure, on the part of the European Conference participants was set out in the Declaration's 5th paragraph (p 1) as part of the rationale of its submission:

> ' Recalling that agriculture and forestry are no longer predominant in Europe's economies; that their relative economic weight continues to decline, and that consequently, rural development must address all socio-economic sectors in the countryside;'

I interpret this as Europe setting a marker to signal that rural development would overshadow agriculture.

4. 'Ensuring the Future - A Strategy for Rural Development in Ireland: a White Paper on Rural Development'

This paper represented 'for the first time…a comprehensive and integrated expression of Government policy on the many elements pertinent to the needs of rural communities.' (Press Release, Department of Agriculture and Food, Dublin, 17 August 1999). It set out 'a new approach and commitment by Government to rural development.' It drew heavily on the findings of its precursor, the "Report of the Rural Development Policy Advisory Group." (Stationery Office Dublin 1997). Unfortunately it failed to endorse that report's call for research (p83) to assess "...the effectiveness of institutional and organisational arrangements for the stimulation of integrated rural development", a serious omission, given the unfamiliarity with rural development. The document concentrates on 'defining an overall, strategic direction for Government Policy'. The strategy's ultimate objective is '…to ensure the maintenance of vibrant, sustainable rural communities.' (Foreword).

The White Paper outlines current trends and challenges for rural areas, providing details of a vision, a policy agenda, a strategic policy framework, policy focus and institutional arrangements. One each of three chapters is devoted to (I) balanced regional development, (ii) employment maintenance and creation and (iii) human resources. The three concluding chapters treat of social inclusion, culture and the environment.

Reflection

In my view the White Paper's singular achievement is the commitment of all departments of state to collaborate under the lead of the rural development division of the Department of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development. This welcome achievement offsets the historic inability of state departments to come together on issues that require an inter-departmental commitment. Rural development may be seen as a holistic system, with which interdepartmental piece-meal responses could not engage hitherto effectively.

In a sense there was nothing unexpected in the White Paper. Its contents were well signalled from Cork (pp 1-2) and incorporated in the recent European Union Agenda 2000. Apart from its excellent assessment of Irish rural conditions, it conforms to European expectations. It advances the thinking of the last two decades.

On the broader issues I have outlined my interpretation of the state of rural development. The evidence of outcomes (poor demographics, dependency on external grant funding, injustice, lack of expertise in rural development, domination by agriculture) and of misguided approaches (advocating urban growth, poor integration of and inflexibility of policies, democratic deficit, shifting regions, ambivalence on community empowerment and long-term commitment), suggest that rural development works below par.

Contribution of Non – Government Organisations

The voluntary sector contributes to communities. Collins and Ryan (1996) identify the earlier significant contributors as Muintir na Tire, the Irish Housewives Association, the Irish Countrywomen's Association, Macra na Feirme and Macra na Tuaithe, laterally Foróige. As facilitators to the evolution of rural community development, these organisations were significant contributors. From the perspective of what went before, which was little to nothing, their contribution was enormous.

Of the organisations listed, Macra na Feirme is now making the more significant contribution. This is recognised by the Government in accepting it as a social partner. Often wrongly perceived as a farmers' organisation, its youthful membership spans the urban - rural divide. Its burning issues at the time of first drafting included shortcomings of agricultural education, sexual orientation, suicide and employment opportunities in rural Ireland. Collins and

Ryan (1996) rightly chide it for not performing to anything like its potential on issues of justice, empowerment and democracy.

Macra na Feirme (and the other organisations listed by Collins and Ryan 1996) has consistently brought forward programmes and stratagems that advanced understanding and practice of community development. They have done so at a time when the State could not (for lack of experience) or as we have seen in Varley's view (1991, 1998), would not.

Rural Development in a Wider Context

Bawden (1999) in a personal communication helped me see that modern agriculture requires a paradigm shift. This shift would have repercussions in research, training and development. There were four eras in the development of agriculture. These eras are successively: the pioneering, production, productivity and persistence or the age of sustainability. This last is the current or postmodern era. Each of these periods reflected changes in paradigms of rural/agricultural development. Paradigms best suited to development have often lagged behind the actual change from one period to the next. This is helpful when I attempt to locate my theories in their appropriate era. I locate rural community development in the emergent era of persistence or sustainability.

The era of production was characterised by a techno-centric paradigm with a focus on advancing the physical, quantitative performance of the enterprise or farm activity. This started in earnest after the Second World War. The methodologies relied on empiricism. This linked to the aims of the advisory service, quoted further on (p 38). The production-centred paradigm hinged on a direct correlation between increasing production and increasing income.

Productivity, the next era, concentrated on the economic performance of agriculture. Occasionally it focused on ecological considerations. Again it relied on empirical approaches. There was a level of holism, where the performance of the enterprise was examined as a whole. The dominant methodology was one of the quantitative schools of either economics or ecology or, infrequently, of emergent ecological economics. The thrust of productivity came to agriculture here through the Treaty of Rome (see Article 39) and subsequent measures of the European Union. This presented particular problems for the advisor whose reliance on expanding production was challenged by economic productivity, particularly that of labour, and laterally ecological sustainability.

Sustainability, the current era, is newly arrived here and perhaps not widely acknowledged. Bawden (1984) suggests that it is typified by a holocentric paradigm. The focus is on the entire relationship between rural people and their environment. The approach to development is based on concepts that

see the relationship between enterprise and culture as two facets of the same reality. They are not enhanced by separate scrutiny. Knowledge is determined by its contextuality to the situation under examination. The methodologies of development in this era are accordingly based on interpretative, participative, systemic methods (Op cit: 4). Because this approach involves the entire relationship with rural people, it is affected by their values and principles. These are the values, according to Bawden that:

> 'prevail, reflect a focused concern for the well-being of the relationships between people and their environments as evaluated as much by ethical, aesthetic spiritual, cultural and ecological concerns, as by technical, economic, practical, social and political ones.'

This is a significant insight for this research and for me. Firstly, my values in my advisory capacity or those of my clients were of little interest. In my relationship with my students they played perhaps a greater but background part. Values centred on reliability and relevance of technical content of the curriculum, good order, fairness in my dealings with them and a general standard of acceptable behaviour. Values tended not to be central to our transactions. Secondly traditional methodologies ignored them. But this necessary paradigm shift requires that values, ethics, culture, aesthetics and spiritual concerns be included. This has implications for this work.

As a result of this insight, I wished to explore my understanding of the influence of values. The second part of chapter five focuses on the values or 'the ethical, aesthetic spiritual, cultural and ecological concerns' of the communities of the Tóchar Valley Network. I expand on paradigms further on, particularly in the next chapter.

My Background - Personal and Professional Contexts

Introduction

The second contextual influence is my personal and professional background. It explains why I engaged in this research. I use action research as my preferred methodology. I focus on improvement of my practice, through practice itself (chapter four) and through improving my own learning about the nature of rural community development. I justify this choice more fully in chapter three. Carr and Kemis (1986:162) provide a description of the potential of action research. It summarises the purposes of this undertaking:

> “Action research is simply a form of self reflective enquiry undertaken by participants in social situations in order to improve the rationality and justice of their own practices, their understanding of these practices, and the situations in which these practices are carried out.”

Because I am at the centre of this enquiry, and because I will be holding out an account of my reflections as a basis of this work, a description of my background, values and experience is relevant.

I am motivated by my concern that the potential of community development is interpreted in a restricted way. I think we have not mastered community development nor fully understood its ways. The dominant research methodologies fail to engage participants and practitioners in research affecting their experience of community development. These research methodologies have not been able to relate to its contextual character or its emergent nature. Prevalent pedagogy in training participants is not working.

Approach to this Section

My approach is autobiographical. I tell the story of my career in the extension services and in private consultancy. I intersperse this account with my reflections. I highlight paradoxical situations where there was a gap between what I could do and what I delivered. I emphasise the occasions where my learning was advancing. Thus I lay foundations for my theory of rural community development.

I graduated with a Bachelor of Agricultural Science degree taken in horticulture from University College Dublin in 1968. Until 1994, I worked in the agricultural advisory services, in Northern Ireland and in the Republic of Ireland. This had three phases: 1 Advisory, 2 Teaching and 3 Rural Development.

1. My Advisory Employment: 1969 - 1986

In this position I first experienced contradiction between the production and the productivity phases of agriculture. My advisory role required that I provide technical information on the production of commercial horticultural crops to growers. The rationale for this was set out in the Department of Agriculture's Scheme 8, (undated) *'Scheme of Instruction in Agriculture'* (of the Republic of Ireland). Much of this was subsequently incorporated into the National Agricultural Advisory Education and Research Act, 1977, the precursor of An Chomhairle Oilliúna Talamhaíochta, (ACOT) and of Teagasc, the National Agriculture and Food Authority. The legislation, which is pivotal to the Republic of Ireland's extension approaches, requires the authority to:

> "(a) provide in each county an advisory service designed to assist farm families and others engaged in agriculture to make the best use of their resources, and to encourage them, through the adoption of better practices and improved management to increase output and income and to raise their standard of living generally; …" (Section 15).

This is a close paraphrase of Scheme 8. As an approach, it belongs to the production phase of agriculture, described above. It did not facilitate measures promoting the Common Agricultural Policy. With agricultural prices destined to fall towards world prices, as GATT agreements would obligate, the link between 'increasing output' and 'raising their standard of living generally' became tenuous.

My role as an advisor was one of conveying crop production information and the farmers' role was assumed to be one of listening and learning. We concentrated our dealings on the production phase of the enterprise. In theory, I held the full jug of information and poured some for farmers; I was the expert, they, the learners. In practice, I learned a lot from farmers' experience and their crops' performance. This information exchange with farmer-clients was an unacknowledged two-way information interchange.

2. My Teaching Service: 1986 -1991

I first experienced how official curricula fail to meet the needs and capacities of students during my teaching career. I taught the Certificate in Farming, Option 2, a perceptive provision by Teagasc, targeted at farm inheritors, who could not attend the full-time programme conducted in agricultural colleges. Students attended local education centres on a day release basis between October and March over a three-year period. I was the education officer in County Dublin.

I began teaching by using the same approach as when I was an advisor. The same legislation was pertinent. The improvement in living standards was thought to be directly linked to increasing output. County Dublin offered the programme in commercial horticulture. This allowed me more latitude than my colleagues. They taught the programme in agriculture, implementing a nation-wide, ‘ one-size-fits-all ‘ prescribed and modularised curriculum. Tully (1994: 84 - 92) describing Teagasc’s view, reflects the organisations’ pre-occupation with certification and with making its graduates employable by off-farm employers.

I first compiled a comprehensive curriculum on commercial horticulture. Again the jug was in evidence. I concentrated on crop production. I was the teacher, they the pupils. The curriculum would be fragmented into traditional subjects, botany, zoology, soils pathology and so on. Horticulture was not treated as a holistic system. My future farmers would learn how to increase output. Progress was scored on students' ability to recollect details in an examination, not on their successful performance as farmers.

Students were free to farm regardless of whether or not they completed the Certificate in Farming. Teagasc held little means of control. All participants,

as inheritors, had access to family land and to the assets required to farm successfully. This allowed students to experiment with the implementation of the course content, which I deliberately encouraged. I got feedback. The students and I could reflect on this experiential activity. But this resource was officially ignored.

A class exercise on the challenges facing horticulture identified unreliable prices as the greatest threat to secure futures. Being a price-taker, not a price-maker, disadvantaged growers. They paid 12.5% of gross turnover in commission to their agents. Often they got a poor return. Their agents were free to import produce and, because the agents' money was tied up in those perishable imports, they would not favour the growers' produce over their own. These findings put the curriculum in the dock. What was the point in addressing crop husbandry if horticulture was likely to be intrinsically unprofitable? To continue to avoid this challenge would be as untenable as it would be dishonest.

This was the beginning of wisdom for me. I decided on major changes. I gave participants a significant say on the curriculum's content. Each topic would be tested for relevance. I invited them in year two, as a major project, to plan their future use of their inheritance. The documentary outcome would be a comprehensive business plan. In year three, they agreed to review this plan and devise the best alternative use of their resources. Without realising it I had entered the field of systemic planning. The students presented their plans to a local bank manager for realistic critique. They were treated as adults and to a significant degree, were in charge of their own learning. In this I was influenced by Carl Rogers' classic, 'Freedom to Learn' (1983).

I launched my “Agribusiness Enterprise Development Programme” in 1988. It required participants to examine their career opportunities with a view to setting up secure enterprises, within the resources they could realistically access. This programme taught them how to access other markets. It helped them forge networks that remain closed to their peers. It broke the isolation of production agriculture. It addressed effectively all aspects of setting up a business. It went further in facilitating unconventional alternative business ideas. It challenged their narrow preconceptions. It interpreted the ‘resources’ of scheme 8, the Scheme of Instruction in Agriculture, as including brainpower, assets, networks and ingenuity. It required participants to become self-reliant in ferreting out relevant information. But it lacked any significant dimension of interpersonal development. I was convinced at the time that the next generation of farmers could rely solely on self-reliance as a core principle for success. (See O’Leary 1994 for an assessment of this programme.)

Reflection on Advisory and Teaching Practice

I trace the beginning of my unease with my practice to my advisory and teaching years in the public service. This unease led to a questioning about the relevance of what I was accomplishing. I enjoyed a greater freedom to be innovative in my teaching job. I could check that what I was doing was relevant to my students' needs and capabilities. But, even with that freedom and feedback, I was aware of friction between what I could demonstrate was relevant for my students and what my employers wished. Teagasc was preoccupied with certification and standardisation. These goals would not accommodate my wish that each student would achieve his potential. I was left with a sense of contradiction, particularly when my work was evaluated officially.

What I lacked was evidence to support what I was doing. I regret that I did not then see it as advantageous to write an account of my innovative programmes. Though I did not realise it at the time, I was instinctively implementing significant steps of the action research process. It was a turning point in the growth of my own educative practice. I experienced dissonance between my professional values and the values implicit in my employers' prescribed role for me (Whitehead's 1993). In implementing initiatives and in testing whether they worked, I was securing incontrovertible evidence that might have supported my claims to understand my practice. The insights I experienced remained with me in my approach to rural community development. I wish to acknowledge the support of Lorcan O'Toole, my chief agricultural officer. He appreciated what I was doing by his personal support and by ensuring the necessary resources were made available.

The aims of the advisory service made sense on an individual farmer basis. I could sensibly encourage any specific farm family to increase output and income. This fitted with the production era. But I was aware that my efforts and those of my colleagues, taken cumulatively, diluted the thrust of the Common Agricultural Policy. These efforts, suited to the production era, clashed with the productivity era. I did not begin to address the implications of the persistence era as an advisor and teacher.

3. Specialist in Rural Community Development 1991 - 1994

I was re-assigned as a resource specialist in leadership and community development in the new rural development division of Teagasc in autumn 1991. I was to prepare myself as a resource for rural development officers. Local communities would be involved with a state agency, Teagasc, virtually for the first time. Practitioners would require skills, knowledge and values, or so I thought, that would make for proficiency. My job description foresaw that I would:

> "…develop models of successful community development projects so that this information can be delivered to other communities who are starting out on similar type projects. The successful applicant will be expected to operate through LEADER projects and through the Teagasc training programme to further this blueprint for rural development…"
>
> (Teagasc 1991)

A blueprint was foreseen. Launching the service on June 29th, 1992, Dr Liam Downey, then director designate of Teagasc, saw the new service providing (P 2):

> "...vital assistance to local groups in the preparation of plans and in the assessment of the technical and economic feasibility of community development projects."

It was assumed such community groups existed and that they would share this view of what Teagasc might do for them. The approach was dissemination of blueprints. One size would fit all. Neither party had told the other what they expected. By implication, all communities were essentially the same. The approach to development would be top-down. Teagasc could modify the arrangement. It would be little different to Teagasc's interaction practice with farming clients. There was no mention of a pro-active approach, leading to the creation of independent, effective rural communities. This was my introductory background to the then practice of rural community development.

Searching for Integration

In community development, many additional and significant factors beyond mere shortfall of knowledge are at play. These include the community's concern, their values, convictions, principles and attitudes, the changes and transformation they might bring about or undergo themselves, leadership, capacity of participants, their ways of learning as adults. All needed to be synthesised and understood in a pertinent philosophy that would appeal to and better serve rural community development players. My earlier empirical training in fragmenting these factors into manageable components, so that I might better understand them, would not serve. But I did not yet realise it.

Rural Development - Extension's Dilemma?

Practitioners could not wing it by passing on research findings in this setting. Were they to do so, they would ignore key characteristics of community development. It is context based and practice grounded. It is highly relational. In this advisors would also be ignoring the second precept of their service's founder, Horace Plunkett, who advised that their approach embrace

firstly uniformity in principle and, secondly, variety and elasticity in delivery. He was very clear:

> "In thus insisting that the principle upon which we proceed must be uniform let me make it quite clear that there will be equal necessity for the greatest elasticity in the practical application. Elasticity is dictated by the variety of local conditions to be met within Ireland – a variety remarkable in proportion to the size of the country."
>
> (Plunkett, 1902:648)

He understood the importance of recognising the diversity of local contexts.

Early Training in Community Development

I had few ideas on how I might develop my specialist assignment. I was not offered any pertinent training. Having hitherto believed in personal effort, I thought it more efficient than depending on others. During this time I produced a prescriptive blueprint on "The Role of Teagasc's Rural Development Officer" (Lillis 1993). Community development had had little official support in Ireland. I was both floundering and paradoxically responding to the challenge. If this 'community' development process had validity, I was determined to uncover its secret ways.

Carmel, my wife, was training to become a home-school-community teacher. She had enrolled in "Training for Transformation". This is a foundation course for community workers. It is based on the philosophy of Paulo Freire. An experiential programme, it is conducted by an organisation called Partners. It seemed to address my needs. I joined. It was indeed a transformation, a shift of a lifetime's paradigm.

Firstly I learned to listen to others, not just hear and not heed, but to attend. A lifetime's experience of being listened and deferred to as an expert was set at naught. Hitherto I would have seen myself as working for people. In authentic community development, I had only one option – to work with people. This change in prepositions was to have transforming and challenging repercussions. The practice of first drawing up a programme of what would be 'good' for others, of subsequently recruiting the participants and confronting them with my acumen, would cease.

Nothing in my career had prepared me for this. It required a re-evaluation of my philosophy, skills, values, methods and priorities. Perhaps its profoundest effect was the insight into adult education. Its experiential method, its reliance on psychosocial analysis and on participants' forthright evaluation and participation in determining what was relevant for them to learn, brought valuable awareness of the potential of these approaches. It went a long way in getting me to question my dependence on the expertise implicit in my

earlier profession. My outlook on knowledge as an exclusive product of academia survived unchanged at the time. I used 'wisdom' to describe then what I now call 'in community knowledge'. I did not re-assess this view until last year (2000).

The effect of the reconstruction that is required by extension staff moving from agriculture to rural development is not appreciated. Flood (undated) relates some of her personal experiences in making this transition. Some do not see a need for adjustment and carry on as experts and sources of answers. They still carry the jug of personal expertise, referred to earlier. This reluctance to change leaves them unprotected. The challenge they face touches on what is feasible, on community's capability and their state of readiness. The challenge seeks a response from the practitioner that facilitates the community's competence. A centrally devised blueprint is inappropriate. Empirical facts, the propositional approach, those dependable supports on which, as an advisor and teacher, I had relied, were not now going to be as relevant as they had been. Ignoring the ethical, emotional, spiritual, aesthetic or cultural facets of a community was not a foundation for success.

For the extension agent or public servant making the journey from advisor to practitioner, the interplay of additional principles, values and practices is involved. For me it was an experience in growth, development, challenges and assertion. It was the beginning of a journey of discovery, vulnerability, discomfort, breakthrough, regression, frustration, contradiction, integration, excitement and obstruction. It is still ongoing.

My First Rural Community Development Programme

In the winter of 1992 – 1993, I conducted my first community development programme for farm families with close guidance from the staff of Partners. I attach an edited version of a diary I kept at the time:

> 'It is only now, some eight years later that I am able to express in words what annoyed the participants. The focus of our discussion had moved from objective problems of agricultural production and productivity to the personal challenges faced by participants within the context of their rural lives. The basis of our joint search for solutions had moved too. I could not rely on a pedagogic approach, which would allow me to offer solutions, distilled from my expertise. My paradigm of techno-science was redundant. I had shifted paradigms without fully appreciating that I had done so. Participants were at sea. I had, without adequate explanation, vacated my reliable role as advisor / teacher and had moved to one of facilitation where the answer was to be found within the group. I had - without fully appreciating the evolution - moved to a holocentric perspective where the contextual issues of the participants were the focus of our discussion. Outcomes were to be entirely less predictable. They could be conjectural, covert ,

ambivalent, delayed. They would have moved far away from the reliable 'cause and effect' dynamic of production agriculture.'

I can trace supporting evidence for these insights to the minutes of this programme, held at the Teagasc Offices, Corduff Lusk, County Dublin in the winter of 1993 to 1994.

I still find it difficult to capture the change that went on. Out of play - without due acknowledgement - were the objective, quantifiable aspects of development associated with production and productivity eras of agriculture. Redundant too was the treatment of participants as resources, as objects or as not being relevant to the outcome. The participants moved centre stage as agents and as determinators of their futures. Our discourse dealt with whole systems, rather than aspects (e.g. prices, crop conditions). Our values came to the fore (e.g. 'the greater good'). Process - which was unpredictable - came to characterise what was going on. What was new to me was that it required a synthesis of reason and spirituality. I was inexperienced in the contribution of spirituality.

I also see this as somewhat of a resolution of my dilemma arising from the contradiction inherent in the Teagasc legislation. I felt that I should make explicit my perceptions of the inconsistency between what I had been charged to do as an advisor and what the government was acquiescing to, and invite critical discourse as to the possible sources of the contradiction. I felt it necessary to challenge the participants with the implications for their futures.

Communities do not necessarily develop when an outsider gives them ‘answers’ or solutions. The acceptance and relevance of the answer seems to depend more on the community being part of the process of discovering the answer and claiming it for themselves. This quest for answers applies to the point of their doing their own research on the challenges that face them in their particular context. Why not? Who else will do it?’

I want to draw together the convictions, insights, and inspiration I have accumulated. I test their reliability in communities through a dependable methodology, which would anchor my findings in my improving practice in rural community development. My community development programme in County Dublin, just described, was a forerunner of a reflection on practice. Through reflection on this particular practice I had my first experience of improving my learning about the nature of community development, based on reflection on my practice.

My Accumulated Knowledge of Community Development

The 'Training for Transformation' programme re-introduced me to Paulo Freire and his philosophy. The programme gave me interdependent building blocks in community development viz.: 1) personal development, 2) interpersonal skills and 3) effective decision-making. These I regard as basic requirements for becoming an effective player in community development. Serious deficiency in any one thwarts community development. I observed these in practice in my County Dublin community development programme.

For a considerable period I believed that these were all the elements of community development. When I read Professor Frank Fear's (1997) account of his journey towards effective community development, I admitted to three more: 4) leadership, 5) community resource development and 6) community organisation development. These would be essential in establishing less dependent communities.

Paulo Freire's psycho -social method (Freire 1974, chapters two and three; Hope and Timmel 1995, part one, pp 14 -26) bears a striking similarity to action research. Its requirements that we seek out solutions for our concerns, that we reflect on our activities and reassess them and allow the outcome to influence our next endeavour, become a building block in community development. So I add: 7) action research.

I do not assert that these seven competencies listed above complete the community development process. I do assert that their inclusion advances our competence with the process. Their exclusion diminishes it. There are two further considerations, 'inclusiveness' and 'needs versus capacities', which strongly affect the well being of communities. They relate to values and practices.

Inclusiveness

Community development is a principal means used in Ireland to address disadvantage. This characterises Irish community development. The Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs, Area Development Management and its satellite partnerships, Non-Government Organisations and some semi-state bodies confine community development to the disadvantaged. This practice is a paradoxical form of exclusion because it invites only those who are disadvantaged to participate. It ordinarily excludes others. By isolating disadvantaged people, we institutionalise them as separate and apart from society. We do so for no good reason. Given that they are in this process to improve their opportunities and to (re-) join the workforce, it is illogical to exclude representatives of the workforce. The advantaged do not get to practise community development officially. Exclusion impoverishes the process in terms of experience, resources, networks, acumen and opportunities. Excluding potential participants smacks of manipulation and contravenes inclusiveness, the hallmark of authentic community development.

Needs versus Capacities

I think that disproportionate reliance is placed on meeting needs. This is not balanced by advancing communities' capacities. We risk building on nothing. Kretzmann (1993), Mc Knight and Kretzmann (1990), and Mc Knight (1989: 40 -50) advise against this practice. Community resource development or community capacity building is about securing awareness and deployment of all that the local community can offer. These resources vary within communities. Each community - no matter how disadvantaged - has people with skills, networks, experience and potential. This human resource base, commonly disowned, is the foundation on which deliberate construction ought to be advanced.

Communities' human resources can be eclipsed by community needs. The opportunity for self-reliance is sacrificed to dependency. Drawing down grant aid becomes a priority. Grant aid often is dependent on demonstrating need. This approach inculcates neglect of community capacity building. The matching of projects to community's abilities is not a priority. This carries negative consequences for sustainability, ownership of the project and community involvement.

Exclusive reliance on needs in time governs the local political process. McKnight and Kretzman (1990) say that this reliance endorses a value system that requires the maintenance of protracted needs. In this approach, continuing assistance can only be triggered by demonstrating continuing need. This practice is sustained because initially it was demonstrated that needs brought rewards. Ergo, extending needs brings further rewards. These communities commit to valuing activities that amplify their needs. Public assistance agencies then prime themselves to respond to need and neglect capacity building in communities. These agencies and communities can come to believe that their futures are tied to confirmation of continuing needs.

Values

Values are implicit in human living, including the paradigm shift that I wrote about earlier. They summarise the ethical, aesthetic spiritual, cultural and ecological concerns of communities (Bawden 1984: 4). Engaging with all the dimensions of a rural community requires that their effects be included. The effects of values are pervasive in rural community development. Their significance is a focus of concern in chapter five. Community development involves deciding and changing. These decisions have repercussions for communities and practitioners. Practitioners are from time to time positioned as leaders in rural community development. Different theories of leadership are informed by different sets of values. Schön (1996: 11) suggests that the value base of professional practice is systematically ignored:

> "In public outcry, in social criticism, and in the complaints of the professionals themselves, the long-standing professional claim to a monopoly of knowledge and social control is challenged - first, because professionals do not live up to the values and norms which they espouse, and second, because they are ineffective."

Effective practitioners in community development are called on by their communities to uphold values in the domains of care, human relations, development and affirmation.

I cite a job description for practitioners, written by Jerry Apps (1991). He supports a call to regeneration succinctly:

> "Leaders who reflect on and examine old strategies of leadership pass through a transformation process…. They see their lives differently, they view their organization differently, and they develop the self-confidence to evoke change in themselves and in their organisations." (op cit: 2)

He highlights the role of beliefs and values and calls on practitioners to become reflective:

> "…leadership is based on a core set of beliefs and values that the individual leader has examined, and continues to examine. Each leader has a working philosophy of leadership that includes an understanding of beliefs and values about: (1) leaders (2) people, (3) direction for leadership, (4) approach to leadership, and (5) purpose, content and process of education. Leaders as they lead, share their beliefs and values openly with others to help build a foundation for honest and open communication." (Op cit: 2)

He obliquely suggests action research as a means of sustaining practitioners. I agree with Apps and Schön that values and beliefs are fundamental in human transactions. I cannot perform when my values are consistently denied nor can I encourage others to do likewise. Apps's views on leadership and his summons to the practitioner, who might release the creative spirit, are interesting:

> "There is a strong spiritual dimension to leadership. That is, leadership is a way for leaders to assist people in discovering a creative potential, often crying out to be released that is buried deep within everyone. This creative spirit, when released, is the stuff of creative problem solving, and the development of new perspectives and approaches to life itself." (Op. cit.: 3)

I accept that this creative potential is realisable and that I have observed it in action in the Tóchar Valley Network. However, that said, I have a reservation about Apps; he tends to be prescriptive. In this he mirrors the very process that I have earlier criticised. In telling me how to behave, he deprives me of the journey of finding out for myself. His text is the outcome of his reflections on changes he has presumably wrought in himself. If I were to short-circuit the process by re-incarnating myself to his satisfaction, I impoverish myself. The values he promotes are his values, I must freely discover and espouse my own.

To an extent this work is shaped by the divergence between my principles and the reality of what is practised, between 'what is' and 'what might be'. I mentioned the paradox I experienced in trying to fulfil my obligations to help farm families increase output under the Common Agricultural Policy. In chapter four, the first project, I describe the experience of living a contradiction in trying to impart a module on rural community development to candidates for the certificate in rural enterprise. I recall feeling challenged as I first watched an effective practitioner in rural community development, in action with a community in West Cork in 1992. I felt I had a lot to learn. I felt instinctively that her theories, values and practice of rural community were a living microcosm of what the effective practitioner was about. I knew that what she brought to community development could not be acquired solely through academic study but might be mediated to me through observation, description, reflection, endeavour, interpretation and action, i.e. through action research.

I thought it revealing, when interacting with staff of Michigan State University how forthright they were about their values, in contrast to the reserve of Irish extension agents. As I write, the Irish political system is marked by the ongoing findings of five tribunals. Each was established because of a perceived lapse in values. Yet there had been little prior public debate on values in Ireland. Principles and values, from whatever source, must be owned and acknowledged; what Said (1994) calls the creation and influence of non-coercive knowledge.

Kluckhohn (1954:395) defines values:

> "A value is a conception, explicit or implicit, distinctive of an individual or characteristic of a group, of the desirable which influences the selection from available modes, means and ends of action."

Perhaps O'Brien, quoted in Senge (1997: 140), is describing the concept of servant leadership when he suggests:"…managers must redefine their job. They must give up "the old dogma of planning, organising and controlling," and realize "the almost sacredness of their responsibility for the lives of so many people." Managers fundamental task …is "providing the enabling conditions for people to lead the most enriching lives they can." (O'Brien: op

cit.). Senge, in chapter nine, builds his case for personal mastery, based on personal values. Benson (1996:159) picks up on this:

> ” Values are really what are most important to people and will exert influence on group members to act in their direction…They provide a vision of what is possible; of what we may be. If you have what appears to be an intractable problem, participation in a carefully constructed group experience with its promise of support, care, and opportunities to learn, can provide you with the hope that things may be different and stimulate more creative coping and management behaviours. Frequently the major inducement which a group can offer its members is the opportunity to select and engage with values which will assist and motivate them to change.”

I have seen the people of the Tochar Valley Network "select and engage with" their values through the facilitation of Michigan State University. But it reflected the promise of 'support, care, and opportunities to learn' which are not necessarily ubiquitously found in communities. How they come to be is the other focus of my search to attain my educational values. (See chapter five). Three additional sources, two of which are ‘best sellers’, come to mind, where values, principles and ethics are highlighted as crucial to effectiveness: Covey (1989) Covey (1996) and Scott –Peck (1988***).***

Personal Values

Values undoubtedly influence this work. The pre-eminent values, associated with community development and which I try to hold, are justice, esteem for others and personal regard for oneself. I think that to hold the antithesis of these values would subvert the substance, outcomes and conduct of community development. These values find their roots for me in an elucidation of Micah Chapter 6, v 8. This is the 'vision' statement of Partners, the group who conduct the Training for Transformation Programme, the programme that influenced me. These words encouraged me in the early stages, primarily because they integrated elements that I had kept apart:

> "This is all that is required of you, nothing else,
> That you act justly,
> That you love tenderly and
> That you walk humbly with your God."

This, taken in order, underpins the values that inform and pervade in three significant and fundamental dimensions: democratic decision-making, interpersonal relations and personal development. These are all participative competencies. From these core values complementary values for community development are rooted. These comprise:

- Inclusiveness (from 'act justly' or justice),
- Sustainability (from personal development or recognising one's dependence on the cosmos, because as long as we live we 'walk

humbly with God' only on the earth and nowhere else; the word 'humbly' is derived from the Latin 'humus': earth, soil, suggesting we should have our feet on the ground),

- Independence (ditto and justice),
- Participation (from esteem for others, 'love tenderly'), and
- Integration (all three).

In the quest for coherence between power, influence, control, methodologies, knowledge and values, my reflective learning is the driving machine. It is the prevailing mediating process. It is itself a significant outcome of the work. The goal of this learning is to improve my practice, to build my own theory, to increase my effectiveness as a rural community development practitioner. Reflective learning is the only vehicle I use in chapter five, the report on the Tóchar Valley Network; in chapter four I additionally draw on my practice. In publishing these findings, I do so - not so as to recommend my findings to others - but to bring about a situation where others commit to do and share their own research and the theories of their own practice

Personal Views

I accept that humanity and I are unreliable, that aspiration is not always matched with performance and that frailty is a human characteristic. This weakness has the potential of immobilising us and leaves us vulnerable to the ridicule of some who would concentrate on highlighting our failure to bridge the gap between aspirations and attainments. Development in community is also subject to deceit, betrayal, dissension and many expressions of human failing. These reversals can strengthen the case of those who hold that personal development - with the exclusion of other considerations - is the hassle-free way to progress and development.

I value the Christian vision of community, its predominant message of forgiveness and its notion of sharing in the Divine life. Dorr (1990: 52 - 57) and Hope et al. (1995: 33 - 41 of part one and throughout) cite spiritual concepts, largely of the Judaeo-Christian tradition, as one of five streams that inform community development. The Judaeo-Christian resource, if ignored entirely, impoverishes and limits potential.

In citing a gap between the current practice of rural community development and what I believe to be its potential, the nature of the gap and of what could be done about it, is determined to a great extent by my perceptions, experience, interpretations and values.

I agree with Daloz et al (1996: 140) where they make two points; that religion ‘always has an ethical valence, because it is a response to the ancient moral

question, "How are we to live?"'. His second point is that it is the tendency on regrettable occasions to be excluding that damages religious advancement and undermines its relevance (op cit: 140 -142). Collins (2001: 79) on the other hand, holds the view that modern religious practice 'is only superficially about God, the character of the world and how we should be living in it.' He says that religious knowledge has been dumbed down into social knowledge or opinions, what he calls practical atheism. He concludes (op cit: 79):

> 'On this reading of the meaning of practical atheism, religion should have little, if any, bearing on the reality of any community-wide problem, and any realistic resolution of such problems must eventually come to terms with practical realities of day-today life, which are for the most part ultimately referable, depending upon the character and scope of the problem, to the collective resources of the community, that is, to the State.'

Victor Frankl quoted in Covey (p74) suggests that there are three central components underlying our values system:

1. The experiential, or that which happens to us;
2. The creative, or that which we bring into existence and forms our legacy, and
3. The attitudinal, or our response to challenging circumstances.

Values for rural community development are born of all three domains. This research involves me in all three. Here are some examples: This chapter, in its autobiographical detail, shares my experiences (Frankl's experiential) and recounts occasions where I have been creative. This creativity led to collaboration between the Tóchar Valley Network and Michigan State University (Frankl's creativity). My greatest recent challenge was teaching the curriculum " Profile of Rural Ireland " to a group of young rural men. I relate how I was tempted to resign from that assignment; yet persisted. I report how I worked out my own theory on a more appropriate epistemology for new entrants in rural community development (Frankl's creativity and response to challenge).

Additional Turning Points

This story of my career draws to a close. There were more landmarks along my way. Some were simple events, such as the clarity with which Professor Kimball of Michigan State University explained community development in the Moy Valley, County Mayo in the summer of 1992. There was a meeting of thirteen Mid-West States' extension services that together make up the North Central Regional Center for Rural Development (November 2 – 4, 1993) in Ohio that I attended. There I realised that no colleague in Teagasc would experience the collaboration and challenge of engaging with the autonomous extension services of thirteen separate states. Our island status isolated us in that we rarely met colleagues from neighbouring services in a forum where our core and cherished beliefs might be questioned or defended. That insight was significant.

I visited Santiago de Compostella to work with practitioners devoted to the medieval pilgrim paths from all over Europe to the shrine of Saint James, which was subsequently overshadowed by my discovering an even older pilgrim path at home. The communities on this latter path, the Tóchar Phádraig, are the focus of my second project (chapter five).

Leaving the Public Service

Teagasc and I parted in December 1994. What I wanted to do in rural community development could not be accommodated in Teagasc. Teagasc now promotes alternative rural enterprises, concentrating on tourism, food and organic farming, in my view a narrow interpretation of rural development. However it is a rational outcome for an organisation committed to traditional methodologies. Subsequently I worked with community development organisations, here and in Europe and built up a practice of diverse activities. Assignments included lecturing, facilitation, fundraising, drawing up curricula, evaluating community development programmes, instigating cross-border peace initiatives, promoting the social economy and organising specialised educational tours in rural development. The two enquiries I report on in this work are typical of the kind of work that comes my way as a practitioner.

3. The Settings of my Research Projects

I have described the current perception of rural development in Ireland. In the next chapter I make the case for action research that I believe facilitates a better understanding of the process that is rural community development. In itself it serves to demonstrate how research on local issues might be addressed, where research constitutes practice, as does practice constitute research.

I, a student, consultant, researcher, teacher, learner and practitioner in rural development, am - for reasons stated earlier - inquisitive about the application and potential of other paradigms to rural community development. The current paradigms are based on technical rational epistemologies, a form of epistemology that has served agriculture well. In these projects I plan to immerse myself in authentic community development opportunities that allow me to write about experiences from within my practice.

I have planned two experiences or projects that offer clear examples of this emerging epistemology. They serve to show my practice in practice. They serve too as contexts wherein theory is generated, through reflection on my learning and on my practice and on the practice of others. I think that I have made significant discoveries in both locations. These discoveries, together with other unfolding understandings in this text, build up support for judgement or a form of wisdom, the basis of praxis. It is on this insight and on its processes of creation that I plan to rely for guidance in my future career

beyond the confines of this work. Because I interpret action research as being about reflection on action, seeking out reliable support for those reflections and culminating in a wisdom that informs better actions in future. In support of this position I look to Argyris and Schön, (1974); Atweh and Kemmis (1998); Bawden (1984), (1999); Dick (1993); Elliott (1991); Freire (1974); Gladwell (2000); Kolb, (1984); Lewin (1946), (1948); McNiff (1988), (1995); McNiff and Whitehead (2000); Mc Taggart (1991); Said (1994); Schön (1983), (1987), (1994) and (1995); Senge (1990); Whitehead (1993); Zohar (2000) and Zuber-Skerritt (1993).

The first project focuses on facilitating new entrants in rural community development. It is about coming to understand my practice. As a consultant I sought out the opportunity of delivering a module of the national Certificate in Rural Enterprise, entitled “Profile of Rural Ireland". I taught this module in an agricultural college to ten boarding students from differing locations in rural Ireland. This exercise was representative of what practitioners in Teagasc do. Basically I tell how I fared, what I thought about the experience and how it might be improved. I formulate my own theory of a ways of learning, better suited to new entrants to rural community development as a result of this experience.

In the second project I set out to improve my own learning about the nature of community development. I share the experiences of representatives of community groups in preparing the groundwork to plan their future. I focus on 'in community knowledge' and on values.

A team from Michigan State University under the leadership of Professor Frank Fear assisted this experience. This project is located in the Tóchar Valley Network (TVN), a network of twelve communities situated on the Tóchar Phádraig (literally: Patrick's causeway), a pre-Christian, recently restored, fifty-five kilometre pilgrim path. It runs through rural townlands of unspoiled countryside from the village of Balla in the east to Croagh Patrick Mountain, in west County Mayo.

The Celts were sun worshippers. From two separate townlands close by the Tóchar - at the spring and autumn equinoxes - the setting sun appears to roll down the side of Croagh Patrick Mountain. I mention this as an aside; I am captivated by the contribution of cosmic physics to current understanding of systems thinking; see for example Capra (1982 1987 a & b). I wonder if these Celts had a clearer understanding of the interdependence of ecological systems than we do.

The oak beam remains of the pilgrim causeway, dating back some 2,000 years before Christ, have been uncovered in the grounds of Ballintubber Abbey. This prehistoric 'highway' originally ran from Tulsk in County Roscommon, the seat of the kings of the province of Connaught, to Cruagh an

Aille, the former name for Croagh Patrick. It must be one of Europe's oldest pilgrim ways. MacNeill (1962:78) claims that after the reformation:

> "No longer did the proud bearers of ancient names dismount to pass the night at wayside abbeys on their journey to Saint Patrick's mountain. The unroofed abbeys stood open to the sky, and the pilgrims were henceforth the poor and the outlawed making their way by foot to perform the pilgrimage shorn now of ecclesiastical ceremony".

Christian pilgrimage finds its roots in the original Passover of the Old Testament, in the refugee Christ in Egypt, in His Passover journey to Jerusalem and His describing Himself as 'the way' (Webb 2001). Add to this the tradition of the Celtic monks 'who embarked on the quest to find God with no final destination in sight' (Green 2001:455), O'Donohue's (1997) revival of Celtic spirituality, O'Donohue's (2000: 1) grumbling 'that there is no time for critical reflection' on spiritual issues and an imperative for an enriching experience is created. The Tóchar Valley Network is aware of this richness that arises from the uniqueness of this ancient route. It is aware too of the renewal of interest in a more personal type of pilgrimage to this sacred place of power, ancient ethnic wisdom, spirituality and culture (Westwood1997: 10 - 15). It forms the backdrop for a unique form of tourism.

This path had remained closed for more than a hundred years. It was restored to use at the instigation of the community of Ballintubber. It serves as the symbolic connecting theme for this mature rural community network, embodying their history, values, interconnectedness and interdependence. The following sources give an account of the history of this mountain pilgrim route: Fahey (1989), Healy (1905: 238-242), Knox (1903: 111) and MacNeill (1962: 77-80).

As will become evident in chapter five, the rural communities that live along this route are concerned for their future well-being. They value their way of life and they seek ways in which they might sustain and develop it.

My contribution as a teacher in the first project, teaching the module 'Profile of Rural Ireland' is unambiguous. In the second project, the Tóchar Valley Network, my position is at first sight less transparent. I would describe myself as primarily a learner. To some who view the practitioner as primarily a specialist or expert, this is incongruous. From my perspective, there may be little to be expert about as a practitioner to a mature community. I have also asserted that what I am about is improving my practice. Implicit in this is that I learn. I think that the only singular feature for some may be that I elect to conduct significant parts of my learning alongside participants in a rural community. I have done this for two reasons.

1. I think this approach sits more authentically with the realities of my

stance.

2. It is consistent with my view that the practice itself of community development is a valuable source of information.

In this approach I overtly do what is often covertly done and I model for others the practice of learning. I acknowledge my debt to this community for the learning opportunity they gave me. In conveying my appreciation I disclose that I have learned from and with them through action research. In doing this I hope to bring to their attention the usefulness of action research as a means of improving - not only my practice - but theirs as well.

Michigan State University's Contribution and Role

Background

Michigan State University (MSU) has long been involved in rural community development. For a full account of the history of the association between MSU and Irish agriculture and rural development, please see Brewer and Lillis (2001).

MSU and this Study

Professor Frank Brewer, Co-ordinator of International Programs, applied for co-funding on behalf of Michigan State University (MSU) to the United States Department of Agriculture for this study. This matched a corresponding submission made by Professor Joseph Mannion, Dean of the Faculty of Agriculture of University College Dublin. These applications were successful. The International Collaborative Research Committee of the US - Ireland Co-operation in Agricultural Science and Technology Programme awarded a scholarship in 1998 so that this study might be pursued. This committee envisaged the facilitation of exchanges of information in areas of joint concern around rural community development.

A significant number of MSU academic and extension staffs are contributing to this study by acting as validators and making suggestions as the account progresses. Professor Fear takes a particular interest, has shared resources, suggested sources in the literature and reviewed the text. With Professor Bawden and others, he has committed to four visits to the site of my second investigation, the twelve communities residing along Tóchar Phádraig, in Mayo. He takes a lead role in helping them with the groundwork to set their own future plans. This emergent opportunity has meant that the goals of the US/Ireland Co-operation Programme in Agricultural Science and Technology will be more fully realised in Ireland than might originally have been anticipated. This reflects the serendipitous and accommodating flexibility of action research.

Collaboration with MSU is co-ordinated through Professor Frank Brewer.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Doras Feasa Fiafraighe[3]

INTRODUCTION

This thesis addresses research-based professional development, focused on the effective rural community development practitioner, where I am that practitioner.

The connecting thread in this work is the emerging account of the development of my thinking. The theme of my research is my developing practice and the theories I generate about it. I have experienced the aloneness of rurally isolated practitioners, their disconnection from academia and their need for an effective epistemology of practice. These conditions, under which significant numbers of my fellow practitioners practise, permeate this dissertation. The account is about my experiences in self-discovery and in changing my worldview. This is my research.

I hope to make a claim to original knowledge and to show that I have exercised critical judgement. I aspire to carry out my enquiry analytically, systematically and self-critically. I share with Pusey (1987: 22-23) the opinion that Habermas (1971) holds: 'all knowledge is mediated through social experience'. This insight is relevant to the social entity that is rural community development. Pusey (op cit) goes on to say that the culture of science that is rooted in positivism cannot bring itself to be reflective, as Habermas demands, without abandoning its objectivity. Dryzek in Whyte (1995: 107 - 108) endorses this interpretation of Habermas's thinking. For me the activity implicit in community development is always a source of knowledge, both when community development is successful and when it is not. The practice gives rise to the theory. This contrasts with my experience in my earlier career in agriculture, where I perceived theory, or the outcome of empirical research, to be the enhancer of practice. I, as Habermas suggests, learn by reflecting on experience. I mean reflecting on my own experience of my practice, as is the case of my teaching experience in chapter four, and by observing the experiences of myself as a learner/participant and others, the prevailing situation in the Tóchar Valley Network, as described in chapter five. I improve my practice in this way. I therefore strive to follow a reflective practice in my learning. This in essence is what Schön has written about and what Peters (1991: 95) describes as "...a special kind of practice [that} involves a systematic inquiry into the practice itself."

[3] Inquiry is the door to knowledge.

But this work goes beyond presenting theories that explain the observable facts of my journey of experience. I believe that it transforms the way I work, think about, act and relate to community development. Mezirow (1997: 5) supports my view that this kind of thinking that I now practise is transformative learning. Because it goes on developing through autonomous thinking, I believe that my practice and I have changed for the better. I think this journey of discovery is shareable. I think that the methodology that delivers it is advantageous both for me and for other practitioners in rural community development. I also believe this change is observable and the letters of validation, outlined in appendix 6.1, go to support this statement.

IN SEARCH OF A METHODOLOGY

Practitioners practise in their rural communities. I seek a methodology that gives me access to their practice and to my own, as they take place. I hold that community development is context grounded, practice driven and highly relational. Community development is also marked by change, decision-making, spirituality, (Bawden 1994) conscientisation (Freire 1974, 1996; Hope and Timmel 1984) and inclusion (Daloz 1996:140 et seq.). I seek a methodology that accommodates these facets.

Why is the study focused on my experience of practice? I thought of three significant approaches to examining community development:

Option 1	I can examine the outcomes of community development activities for evidence of worthwhile performance, the empirical/quantitative tradition.
Option 2	I can access from others an account of what happened, the interpretative/qualitative tradition.
Option 3	I participate in / access the unfolding event as it occurs; research my actions, (action research). This is my preferred option.

Option 1 is the dominant means of providing evidence of the impact of development programmes. It does not tell much about the process. Since effectiveness of players is manifest in process, it does not assist me.

If I ask other practitioners post-factum to share their account of what happened, (option 2), I deprive the study of an easily available richness. I deprive it of the more compelling case that is part of and mediates an account of change, as it happens. I would settle for a third-party account, instead of undergoing the shared experience, an experience that would educate me. It is like settling for a travelogue when one could travel.

My preferred option, option 3, is to examine my experience as a practitioner within the reality of community development. I share my experiences as I participate and reassess that participation in two projects in rural community development. I wish to conduct and share the reflective thinking that supports that activity. That reflective thinking is of a different and, I think is of an inferior order, if I can only reflect on 'accounts' of what took place. In this option, option 3, I indicate the potential for both practitioners and participants doing likewise. This is a unique benefit.

In chapter one, I set criteria to be met by the methodology for this research. These criteria read:

> The methodology should allow me access to the practice of rural community development. It should take on board the principal characteristics of community development viz. that it is context grounded, practice driven and highly relational in its dealings. It is sensitive to the uniqueness of each community. It accommodates my participation as community development activity emerges. It advances my quest to improve my practice. It adjusts to the emergent nature of community development. It admits to ethical challenges. It affords a convincing validation of my findings.

I selected action research. I turned down other methodologies because they do not adequately facilitate discovery of a personal theory that helps me understand my practice and become more effective as a practitioner. My reasons are based *inter alia* on two perceptions:

(1) Traditional methodologies exclude significant characteristics of rural community development from consideration (Bawden 1984: 4);

(2) The post-modern phase or age of sustainability of agriculture obligates a change of methodology.

Tarnas (1991: 70) credits the legacy of classical Hellenic thought to ‘the exercise of plurality of human cognitive faculties – rational, empirical, intuitive, aesthetic, mnemonic, and moral.’ Current dominant research methodologies largely ignore the last four aptitudes. Action research reinstates them.

Capra (1997: 19; 1982: 55) supports Tarnas, citing psychiatrist R.D Laing’s (1982) description of the shortcomings of the Cartesian tradition:

> 'Out go sight, sound, taste, touch, and smell and along with them has since gone aesthetics and ethical sensibility, values, quality, form; all feelings, motives, intentions, soul, consciousness, spirit. Experience

> as such is cast out of the realm of scientific discourse. Hardly anything has changed our world more during the past four hundred years than Galileo's audacious programme. We had to destroy the world in theory before we could destroy it in practice.'

Schön(1983), (1987), (1994) and (1995) is critical of technical rationality as are Cresswell (1994), Greenwood and Levin (2000) and Kuhn (1962). Schön (1983: 42) sets out his case against the exclusive use of technical rationality:

> "We can readily understand, therefore, not only why uncertainty, uniqueness, instability, and value conflict are so troublesome to the positivist epistemology of practice, but also why practitioners bound by this epistemology find themselves caught in a dilemma. Their definition of rigorous professional knowledge excludes phenomena they have learned to see as central to their practice. And artistic ways of coping with these phenomena do not qualify, for them, as rigorous professional knowledge."

But 'uncertainty, uniqueness, instability, and value conflict' are sometime descriptions of stakeholders' experiences of rural community development. In the last two sentences of this quotation, Schön provides an example of the living contradiction (Whitehead 1989) lived by practitioners between what they are taught to think and what they find useful to think. These words of Schön's highlight the seclusion of practitioners. Conventional science will not address their experience of practice, because it does not deal with change.

Very little is produced through technical rationality that challenges and informs the experience of an individual's practice. Nor does technical rationality address the tacit knowledge of practice that Schön (1983: 49) would make explicit:

> " Let us search, instead, for an epistemology of practice implicit in the artistic, intuitive process which some practitioners do bring to situations of uncertainty, instability, uniqueness, and value conflict...Often we cannot say what it is that we know… our knowing is ordinarily tacit, implicit in our patterns of action and in our feel for the stuff with which we are dealing. It seems right to say that our knowing is *in* our action."

My experience of seeing expert practitioners in action in community development obliges me to agree with Schön's insight here. Accessing this tacit wisdom is what fires me. I believe this tacit wisdom is not the exclusive resource of Schön's professional practitioners but is an underestimated resource of mature communities. I hope to demonstrate this in chapter five in the mature communities of the Tóchar Valley Network. Drawing on my reflections of what it is I do, what it is I learn, how I might improve and how I can say I have improved is the stuff of this action research.

Two commentators on early drafts of chapter four, my class work on "profile of Rural Ireland" suggested that I should:

(1) Replicate my teaching classes of rural community development if I wished to sustain a claim to validity;
(2) Consider screening the class participants with a view to selecting more collaborative students.

I found this advice impractical. Yet it goes to the heart of the practitioner's dilemma. Practitioners' practices - geographically restricted and bound not to exclude any rural participant from their programmes - remain excluded from traditional methodologies' consideration because their dilemmas cannot be framed to the requirements of these methodologies in ways that amount to an adequate response to all their individual needs. Yet these dilemmas deserve the curiosity of research. As a practitioner, I deliberately shared with colleagues the circumstance that none of us has the necessary discretion to follow either suggestion from my commentators. A task I set myself is to look at the practice of practitioners from the standpoint of research. I must find a research methodology that is meaningful and effective for practitioners. If judged successful I stand to make a difference.

WELL-MATCHED PARADIGMS?

In my diary extract in appendix 3, I draw attention to Professor Bawden's report that a paradigm shift had been missed in Ireland in methodological responses to the post-modern phase of agricultural development. I begin by speculating how such a paradigm shift - had it happened - would have affected rural community development. I look too at the consequences of persisting with current practice. In three tables I outline the effects of two methodologies in differing phases of Rural[4] Development:

- **Table 1** indicates the accomplishments of technical rationality in the production and productivity phases of agriculture.
- **Table 2** seeks to demonstrate the potential of action research in rural community development.
- **Table 3** points to what happens when we persist in deploying technical rationality in rural community development.

All tables explore development, training and research, the interdependent activities of agriculture / rural development, in terms of outcomes, the bases for these outcomes and the processes involved. The tables do not aspire to be comprehensive.

Nevertheless, taken together, they persuasively set out the appropriate use of both technical rational approaches for the development of agriculture (Table

[4] In this instance I use 'Rural Development' to include agriculture and use capital letters to indicate this.

1) and action research for rural development (Table 2). The third table (Table 3) illustrates the shortcomings arising when the technical rational approaches are persistently applied to rural community development. The significance or these tables lies in highlighting a significant shortcoming in our current delivery of development, training and research in the contemporary practice of rural community development. This I attribute to the continuing use of an unsuitable methodology.

Table 1 reflects the situation in the production and productivity phases of Irish agriculture, described in chapter two, where technical rationality was the dominant methodology in use. The production phase reflected an era where increases in agricultural incomes correlated directly to increases in production. This dispensation was in tune with the aims and legislation of the advisory service. It relied on technical rational forms of knowledge.

Upon European Union membership and starting with the Mansholt Plan, (Mansholt: 1970), advisory practice focused on productivity, particularly productivity of labour. It commenced with the implementation of European Economic Community Directives 72/159/EEC, 72/160/EEC, 72/161/EEC and 73/440/EEC. I see the productivity phase ending with Commissioner Mc Sharry (1988) advocating rural development.

Table 1: Agriculture: A comparison of the outcomes, basis and process for Agriculture's (1) development, (2) training and (3) research from a Technical Rational perspective.

Aspects	***Outcomes***	***Basis***	***Process***
Development	Increase in products Increase in productivity	Supply of production /best practices information	Application of scientific production information
Training	Technically effective farmers, managers, operatives	Delivery of production information & skills	Assimilation of information & skills
Research	Bankable, piecemeal information / knowledge	Technical rationality	Hypothesis testing. Technical rationality

These achievements held good for the production and productivity phases of agriculture and were very much to the credit of empirical and qualitative methodologies. They did not affect rural development, which was not then a concern in these phases.

In Table 2, I seek to delineate the equivalent situation for rural community development, using action research. In this phase - the post-modern phase - I perceive Rural Development to be the as yet unrecognised, prevailing movement in rural Europe. In this particular instance it includes agriculture. By that I mean that the overall thrust of official policy will have developed to address rural development as its principal focus and that the measures of this policy will treat of agriculture as a subsystem within the broader field of rural development.

As this comes to pass, the traditional paradigm in use will come to be questioned, in a manner not dissimilar to what I am addressing in this dissertation.

Table 2: Rural Community Development: A comparison of the outcomes, basis and process for rural community development's (1) development, (2) training and (3) research, using Action Research

Aspects	***Outcomes***	***Basis***	***Process***
Development	Self-determining communities	Relational	Conversational learning
Training	Effective participants	Apprenticeship	Observation, attempt, review & practice
Research	Improved practices and understanding	Action research	Formulation of theory in action.

These achievements hold good for this post-modern phase. They are attributable to action research. The relational aspect of rural community development is central. This approach fosters independence, values and interpersonal relations, which are foundations for community development. Knowledge and expertise are acknowledged to be also found within the community and not solely mediated from outside by the practitioner. While teaching is a practitioner function in this paradigm, it is not the dominant focus of interactions. Learning is. Participants know, teach one another and learn.

Learning for community purposes is the preoccupation. However that knowledge may be tacit.

The new paradigm of the post modern era can be seen as holistic and ecological, seeing the world as integrated in all its aspects as opposed to fragmented or dissociated, (Capra 1997:6).

The necessary paradigm shift in methodology did not happen in Ireland. Consequently the practices that served our progression out of the pioneering phase of agriculture into agriculture's production and productivity phases continued to be deployed in rural development. The appropriateness of the traditional methodology was not questioned. The consequences of this practice are explored in Table 3, which follows.

Table 3: Rural Community Development (RCD): A comparison of the outcomes, basis and process for rural community development's (1) development, (2) training and (3) research using Technical Rationality:

Aspects	***Outcomes***	***Basis***	***Process***
Development	Increased products and increased productivity *but for suitable products only.*	Supply of production information *Indifferent to relational and other characteristics of RCD*[5]	Application of scientific production information *Didactic, treats people as objects, needing to be told*
Training[6]	Effective managers, operatives, *but not able to participate in RCD*.	Supply of production / best practices information. *Ill-equipped student.*	Assimilation of information. *Can be entirely non-interactive e.g. by correspondence*
Research	Bankable, piecemeal Information, *relevant only to peripheral production activities of RCD*	Technical Rationality, *sacrificing relational, contextual nature and other facets of RCD*	Hypothesis Testing. P*articipation limited to experts in research.*

Here the limitations of traditional methodologies become apparent and are highlighted in *italics*. The relational aspect of rural community development is ignored. This approach excludes independence, values and interpersonal

[5] RCD: Rural Community Development

[6] Chapter four describes my struggle to teach rural community development in an environment that fostered the technical rationality approach and details the outcomes.

relations from consideration. It does so on the legitimate grounds of objectivity, a core attribute of Cartesian technical rational approaches.

More significantly it excludes change and transformation. Culture and aesthetics are also proscribed. Experts, commonly located outside the community, are perceived to generate knowledge and expertise. It is an easy step from there to suggest that knowledge too - along with the experts is to be found only outside communities. The practitioner, under this traditional paradigm, mediates externally located knowledge inwards. Teaching is a practitioner function in this paradigm - it tends to become a dominant focus and purpose of their interactions - and participants are to preoccupy themselves with learning extrinsic and exogenous facts.

Teagasc's rural development programme at the time of writing, concentrates on conveying information on products or 'packages'. Examples include farm foods, rural tourism and alternative farm enterprises. Community development is avoided. Teagasc's practice conforms to my premise that the organisation, not having made the necessary paradigm shift, has rationalised its situation by concentrating on those aspects of rural development that it has been able to frame in terms of traditional methodologies.

Knowledge here is predicated upon a dominant teaching theory and less on a theory of learning. This distinction is subtle. Fear (1997: 17 - 18) suggests what ought to happen:

> 'As we think about moving across the paradigms – from knowing to teaching to learning – it is important for us to appreciate an important point: namely, that as we experience the transitions from knowing to learning, we really do not leave anything behind. We still recognize and fundamentally respect the importance of knowing about the content of our area(s) of expertise; we just do not emphasize our knowing as primary. We still recognize and fundamentally respect the importance of teaching the content associated with our areas of expertise; we just do not emphasize our teaching as primary. We do, though, recognize and fundamentally respect learning as our primary focus. It becomes our center of gravity.
>
> However, in offering this, we face a dilemma. Words often carry with them multiple meanings and those meanings can reside in multiple paradigms. Consequently, we have to be careful about not falling victim to what I call *cross-paradigm confusion*. This happens when we "talk the talk" of one paradigm but "walk the walk" of one or more other paradigms."

I find this helpful, particularly because it puts into words what I portray from time to time, when in this journey of discovery, I regress to the practices of

technical rationality (see chapters four and five and Lally validation letter in appendix six). It helps explain my paradoxical experience. This case is strengthened later in chapter five when the embedded knowledge in more mature communities is explored. And this has consequences, for it raises the question as to whether or not the exogenous knowledge brought to communities by external experts fits well or at all with the needs and competencies of these communities.

Again, the tables support the view that the methodologies - so often linked exclusively with research - also affect training and development.

Paradigm Shifts

The hypothetical technical rationality of practitioners I portray in Table 3 has not accepted the case for a paradigm shift. Earlier I cited Capra's account (1997: 6 –7) of physicists being more or less compelled into a paradigm shift. Bohm (1996) also a physicist, and Mingers (1995) share Capra's conviction that a parallel change has occurred in society.

Kuhn (1962) suggests that most scientific knowledge requires paradigms that permit data identification, theory description and the solution of problems. Kuhn in Capra (1997: 5) describes a paradigm as:

> " A constellation of achievements – concepts, values, techniques etc. – shared by a scientific community and used by that community to define legitimate problems and solutions."

I understand Kuhn's use of 'legitimate' to mean justifiable enquiry, falling within the competence of the paradigm in use by the scientific community. Fear cites Barker (1993: 32) who defines a paradigm succinctly as:

> " …a set of rules and regulations (written or unwritten) that does two things: (1) it establishes or defines boundaries; and (2) it tells you how to behave inside the boundaries in order to be successful."

A boundary suggests a limitation of function. A boundary is a characteristic of systems theory. It infers restriction on potential and the possibility of breaching that restriction.

Barker helpfully compares a paradigm to a game; a paradigm advises what the game is, what the rules are and how to play it successfully. For him a paradigm shift arises from a change of game or a significant change in the rules (Barker 1993: 32). Without forcing the analogy, one can clearly see the potential for paradigm havoc caused by fielding a rugby squad to play against a hurling team.

So why should the game change? Indeed, has it changed here in rural development to the extent that the rules are different, not just amended?

In replying to these questions, I have a particular opportunity to draw on my learning, on the theory I generate in support of that knowledge and on my experience. The answer is a personal view, backed up by evidence. It represents my theory. It informs my activity and my research. Put simply, I find it makes sense.

I believe the game has changed and that a paradigm shift is needed for several reasons:

- To begin, there are the repercussions arising from the developmental phases in Agriculture, particularly the move from the productivity to the post-modern phase. The focus of official policy has extended from conventional agricultural production to include rural development. This is a shift from research on products and productivity in agriculture to research on human relationships. The latter do not respond to the technical rational methodologies of agriculture.

- Typically traditional research in agriculture relies on reductionism. This breaks down problems into parts. But community development as a system, does not function in parts. Bertalanffy, the biologist and the father of systems theory, held the view, according to Capra (1997: 49) that living systems span a wide range of phenomena, involving individual organisms and their parts, their social systems and ecosystems. Systems theory therefore would be:"…an important means of controlling and instigating the transfer of principles from one field to another …"

- Moving from reductionism to systems' approaches is changing the game and the rules. Moreover one of Capra's principal themes (1982) is that the paradigm that dominated science since Newton is challenged universally. It is giving way to additional approaches. The technical rational paradigm encouraged a view of the world as a mechanical system, capable of reduction to its elemental building blocks. It viewed the human body as a machine and life in society as a struggle for survival of the fittest. Unlimited material growth would attend economic and technological progress and the female was generally inferior to the male. A significant paradigm shift was under way. (Op cit. 1997(a): 6).

- The rural community development practitioner cannot rely on blueprints. This is because replicability and universality of traditional methodologies do not subsist in diverse rural communities. The ubiquitous application of a 'one-size-fits-all' solution cannot connect.

- I believe current dominant methodologies do not help me understand the nature of rural community development.

My contention is that traditional methodologies do not work for me as a community development practitioner. They exclude the possibility of practitioners examining their practice, with a view to improving it. Yet this is a commendable and socially desirable exercise. But it is unachievable when the methodology's requirements of objectivity will not permit. A function of research such as mine is to increase understanding. The game has changed.

Reflection

Reflecting on the foregoing after about a two week interval, I recalled an insight from Professor Frank Fear, sent me by e-mail:

> "The problem, I think, is that the intellectual foundation of CD[7] has been (and continues to be) weak. The scholarship on community is stagnant, I think. And, interestingly enough, some of the best work in organizations is now coming OUTSIDE of social science. There is a strong contribution being made by physicists, those attempting to take their understanding of the natural world and applying it to the social world. Fritjof Capra's work is wonderful."

So I revisited Capra (1982); (1997 a); and (1997 b). There is no gainsaying Fear's view that progressive thought is coming from physicists, unlikely pioneers in this area of scholarship. Capra (1982) claims that there has been a synthesis of several systemic theories, developed only in the preceding quarter century. Relatively recent insights in ecology are a prime mover. Ecology facilitates our understanding of people in community. As a result ecology will treat of humanity in community, where that community takes on the attributes of living networks. This implies a broader elucidation of the concept 'rural community development'. Taking its ecological hinterlands into account, rural community development is poorly served when it is described solely in contrasting terms to urban community development. Ecology colours and permeates our insight of rural community development. It has pressing implications for the concept of sustainable agriculture.

Capra promotes a model of interdependence of all natural systems. He, with Kimball (1994) cited earlier, suggests that a human community is a network of purposeful conversations about issues that concern them. But dialogue, the preoccupation of philosophers such as Bohm, lies at the core of the process. The facilitating of such conversations is key. Chapter four, which deals with the 'teaching' of community development, underlines what the consequences are when such conversation is precluded.

[7] Community Development

Capra (1997 (b): 7) goes on to say that lessons may be learned from the emergent nature of natural systems, where 'the spontaneous emergence of order - of new structures and new forms of behaviour - is one of the hallmarks of life.' This is to be encouraged in the system that is rural community. He cautions against the stultifying effects of over-planning:

> "If we think of the relationship between emergence and design in terms of a continuum, we can say that a system drifting too far toward design will become overly rigid, unable to adapt to changing conditions."
> (Op cit: 8).

Capra continues by suggesting that facilitating this emergence is a new form of leadership, which should be encouraged. Doing so means that mistakes are permitted and regarded as opportunities for new learning to emerge. They are used as sources of experiential learning. In this call for reflexivity, for learning from mistakes, he is at one with the practice of action research. Hock (2000) supports this view. He sees the leadership role bringing order to the chaos that accompanies emergence. What seems to be at stake is the active encouragement of and reaction to emergence.

I think it fair to say that emergence can be pre-empted by planning, with an inhibition of creativity and an inability to respond to unplanned events. A change in the dominance of planning has significant repercussions. In teaching the prescribed curriculum (chapter four) there was little evidence of emergence. Wheatley (1992: 41 - 42) complains of the cramping influence of Newton that tempts us into mapping prediction through fragmentation, instead of seeing the interconnections through webs and weaving.

In my opinion Capra and others are emphasising the failure of traditional methodologies to promote new thinking or adequate explanation of the metaphors that describe the processes of rural community development. His perceptiveness contrasts with the stranded condition of rural development under traditional methodologies.

I see myself, like Rowan (1981), quoted in Reason (1998:29) raising fundamental questions about current research in rural community development, ‘not just about truth, but about authenticity, alienation, power, patriarchy, legitimacy and relevance.’

ACTION RESEARCH

Introduction

Traditional methodologies call for objectivity in the relational engagement between the researcher and those being researched. A process that

promotes change remains outside their scope. Robson (1997: 438) confirms this:

> 'This falls foul of much that is known about the change process, and of conditions facilitating change. The discrepancy is not surprising, as the task of pure conventional scientific research is to describe, understand and explain - not to promote change.'

Desirable change and improvement are primary concerns of both action research and community development. Carr and Kemmis (1986: 165) see that improvement benefiting three areas:

> '...firstly, the improvement of a practice of some kind; secondly, the improvement of the understanding of a practice by its practitioners; and thirdly, the improvement of the situation in which the practice takes place.'

It is noteworthy that Carr and Kemmis highlight the three key areas where the goals of action research, of community development and of this thesis coincide.

History of Action Research

Many researchers (Chein et al.1948;Corey 1953; Elliott 1991; Kemmis 1980) attribute the origins of action research to Kurt Lewin, through his work in America on group dynamics in the nineteen forties. Bawden (1984: 154) holds that Lewin's work reflects the pragmatism of John Dewey. The early contribution of Collier (Collier 1945) as United States Commissioner for Indian Affairs from 1933 to 1945 is also seen as significant (Noffke 1997: 3- 5). Mc Kernan (1996: 8) states: “action research is a root derivative of the 'scientific method' reaching back to the Science in Education Movement of the late nineteenth century.” He adds (op cit: 8 - 12*)* that five significant movements have influenced action research. These are:

1. The Science in Education Movement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.

2. Experimentalist and progressive educational thought - in particular Dewey (1910; 1929; 1938), whose stages of reflective thinking contain seeds of action research. These foundations were built on three decades later by Corey (1953). The American initiative known as 'The Southern Study' (Jenkins et al., 1946) where teacher practitioners adopted an action research approach to solve curriculum problems made a significant contribution.

3. The Group Dynamics Movement addressed social problems. This was the era of Kurt Lewin (1946; 1948).

4. The Teacher - Researcher Movement that was largely focused on curriculum and responded to Stenhouse's (1975) view that teaching should be based on research and that research and curriculum development are the preserve of teachers. He took issue with the then current trend of judging educational merit through measurable outcomes, linked to curricula specially created to bring about those outcomes, a complaint I echo in chapter four. Stenhouse shared Peters' (1959) view, quoted in Elliott (1991:136):

> 'our everyday discourse about the aims of education does not assume that we are talking about the extrinsic outcomes of a process. Rather...we are referring to values and principles which constitute a process as an *educational* one.'
>
> (*Italics* are Elliott's).

Stenhouse (1983:163) wished participants in action research to be emancipated and in this emphasises the potential and appropriateness of this methodology to community development:

> 'My theme is an old-fashioned one - emancipation ... The essence of emancipation as I conceive it is intellectual, moral and spiritual autonomy which we recognise when we eschew paternalism and the role of authority and hold ourselves obliged to appeal to judgment.'

5. Stenhouse (1975) and Elliott's (1991) joint contributions were that teachers should take charge of their own action research. In this they found support from the writings of Carr and Kemmis (1986). The publications of the 'Collaborative Action Research Network' (CARN) (Ghaye and Wakefield (Editors) 1993, Ghaye (Editor) 1995) are examples of what teachers might do together.

If teachers could conduct their own research, why could not participants in rural community development? Arguably there is a comparable need and less alternative opportunities in communities.

Contemporary action research in the United Kingdom and Ireland reflects the pioneering contributions of teachers. Other professions, such as nursing, business consultancy, banking, public administration, psychotherapy and psychology, have joined. While it is probably true to say that very little action research has been conducted in Irish rural community development, this is not the case in other countries. The Food and Agriculture Organisation (1991: paragraphs 39 and 54) used action research. Considerable work has been done in America and in Australia, both of which favour participatory action research.

CHOOSING ACTION RESEARCH - THE RATIONALE

The principal methodology of this dissertation is action research. I have chosen it for several reasons:

- It engages with the characteristics of community development. Traditional approaches marginalize them. It delivers validated information on best practices. It helps improve my practice. It provides reliable guidance to practitioners on their practice. It accommodates my concerns. It facilitates my generating insights and theories about my findings. It acknowledges the emergent nature of this discernment. It is the means through which I encountered, reflected on and suggested responses to challenges that transpired. It is through its application that I make tacit knowledge communicable out of communities and from the classroom.

- Practitioners and participants alike can easily adopt it as a way of working. The practitioner's knowing in action is affected and changes dialectically within this methodology. Engagement through action research can improve practitioner, practice, outcomes, process and participant.

- Through action research I am able to reflect on my emerging understanding of my practice and of the practice of other practitioners. I can advance my theories based on these experiences. This work is emergent. It is not the last word.

- It responded to all the criteria I set. It allowed me access to the practice of rural community development. It took on board the inimitability of each community. It accommodated my participation as it occurred as a practitioner and observer. It adjusted to the emergent nature of community development practice. It admitted challenges of an ethical nature and it afforded me a convincing means of validating my findings.

- Action research is holistic. It is suited to the explication of systems. It is collaborative, contextual, and always potentially emancipatory. It is practice based. It mediates the scholarship of practice. It helps solve problems. It can be a moral force for good, a harbinger of improvement and increased effectiveness. It is concerned with change.

- Action research can link research to action, and practice to theory (and vice versa) through a process that reports the lived experience of collaborators, my participants, and myself as it transpires. It accesses the 'in community knowledge' (chapter five) or wisdom or knowledge in action of participants.

An Alternative Path to Action Research

Greenwood and Levin (2000:85 - 98) arrive to action research from a different perspective when they challenge American universities' adherence to dominant methodologies. They expand on why current needs are not being met:

> " We are deeply concerned that critical and socially engaged research efforts are being undermined by autopoetic and self-referential academic activities in universities dominated by career opportunism and by students who are treated as imitators of their teachers rather than original thinkers in the making" (Op cit: 86).

They take researchers in the social sciences to task for failing to address society's needs effectively. Root causes of their dissatisfaction include usurping the autonomy of universities, manipulation of their internal administration and powerful peer review structures that determine what will be researched and taught (op cit: 87 - 88). This 'opens the door to useless research and academic careerism divorced from attention to important public social issues.' (Op cit: 88). American business and government find universities' research attractive - despite universities' independent stance - because universities are cheaper in their use of post-graduates than any alternative. Business and Government use universities' dispositions to compete and monitor one another as a means of getting their way and ensuring value for money and high academic standards.

Greenwood et al. cite Freidson (1985) and Kuhn (1962) in support of their contention that:

> "Within each discipline there are dominant paradigms and methods, key actors, and powerful schools. Research proposals that do not match these paradigms will not receive funding, and so, under current conditions, the peer review system mainly guarantees that research will be kept fully under control of the elite (and older) members of academic professions"
>
> (Op cit: 88 - 89).

This situation has led to disaffection, particularly of society's less powerful members and smaller corporations (op cit: 89). Problems that do not get attention include: 'Poverty, addiction, racism, environmental degradation' (op cit: 90). Community organisations are well down the list of priorities. They have few connections with universities and may not be represented at the table when research decisions are made.

Greenwood et al. then say that business and government are beginning to look elsewhere - particularly for staff-training requirements (op cit: 90); that universities are in danger of being sidelined (op cit: 91). Unless universities respond effectively, public and private 'funding for them not only will but should dry up.' (Op cit: 91). This is their preamble to introducing the redeeming contribution universities would find in adopting action research (op cit: 92).

I include Greenwood because it is a contribution to a standard handbook influencing the thinking of contemporary American post-graduate students. I have reservations; in chapter two of this dissertation, I outlined the Irish experience, affected by three influences:

1) A lack of engagement by government and researchers with rural community development for most of the last century, coinciding with the peasant/pioneering, production and productivity phases of agriculture;

2) Reconnection arising from the reform of the Common Agricultural Policy, on foot of Commissioner Mc Sharry's 'Future of Rural Society' (Commission of the European Communities 1988) which hailed the beginning of the post-modern phase; and

3) An inappropriate methodology dominating access to our understanding of rural community development.

The outcomes described by Greenwood et al. are similar to the Irish experience, that is a serious reservation about the relevance of dominant methodologies to challenges of a social nature. However, I think Greenwood et al. may be mistaken in attributing the exclusion of community organisations from research in the United States to the dominance of big business and government. They fail to take account of the nature of community development.

My contention - which Greenwood et al. overlook - is that the dominant methodologies deliver poorly in community development. I surmise that American community organisations already know this and do not seek a place at the decision-table.

The solution advocated by Greenwood et al. to the American universities' predicament is based on converting to action research. They argue cogently for that. What bothers me is their context, i.e. citing the in-house practices of American universities as their basis for this change of methodology and not emphasising the fact that the methodologies in use are not the most suitable.

RESEARCH DESIGN

The focus of my research is my future practice. This pervades the work, from the beginning. There are six chapters:

- Chapter one introduces the work.
- Chapter two sets the backgrounds of rural development in Ireland, my professional background, the backgrounds of the two projects, and it explains the Michigan State University participation.
- Chapter three deals with the methodology.

- Chapter four reports on my investigation of my practice, that of teaching the official rural development curriculum ‘Profile of Rural Ireland’.
- Chapter five reports on my reflections on action research in the Tóchar Valley Network.
- Chapter six sets out the conclusions of the work.

There are in addition three appendices, numbered according to the numbers of the chapters with which they are associated.

I have developed my reasons for rejecting the methodologies associated with the quantitative and qualitative approaches to research and placed them in appendix three. As action research begins to prove itself effective in the broad field of community development and elsewhere, my line of reasoning as set out in appendix three will become redundant. I would not expect subsequent action researchers to continue justifying their rejection of technical rational methodologies in all subsequent studies.

The following materials are to be found in this same appendix, appendix three:

1. Reservations about reductionism.
2. Further notes on paradigm shifts and the paradox of personal contradiction.
3. I add the evidence of Schön's support for action research.

Appendix three also sets out material related to an overall assessment of the influences at work around action research. This data are provided in Table 4 "Action Research: An Influence Map" drawn on insights provided by Bawden (2001).

My concern in chapter three, and throughout, has been to preserve a robust and concise account of the study's methodology within the body of chapter three.

Appendix four contains a copy of the official curriculum "Profile of Rural Ireland" and a questionnaire set for the student participants. Appendix six holds letters of validation, supporting my findings.

The study also describes two projects or episodes. These have already been referred to in chapter two. One was deliberately set in the context of a real, developing rural community, located in the Tóchar Valley Network, a network of twelve communities living along the Tóchar Phádraig, in the West of Ireland. In this I am cast principally - though not exclusively - as the learning practitioner. I wished to discover if communities have knowledge and wisdom, and what was their significance to my learning and practice. I also

wished to learn what the impact of communities' values might be for my practice.

The decision to locate this project in the Tóchar Valley Network has three additional reasons:

1. It is focused on me, the practitioner/participant within that process.

2. It highlights the intrinsically contextual nature of all rural communities.

3. In this project it is evident that rural community development is practice-based; it has no meaningful existence in a theoretical format.

The other enquiry relates my experiences of teaching a community development curriculum. It is, in contrast, located in a boarding college. While it too is focused on the repercussions of these experiences for my practice, because of its unsuited environment, it fails to demonstrate the contextual and experiential nature of rural community development.

My earliest interpretation of the potential contribution of these episodes was that these would be the 'core experiments', the ‘real’ research. But as I began writing, reflecting and keeping a diary, I made a number of discoveries that were not consistent with this view. Firstly, while the focus remained on my practice and on improving my learning about the nature of rural community development, the account I was writing described how my thinking was changing in all kinds of ways and certainly in ways broader than the confines of my two investigations. Secondly, the research had not begun just three years ago, when I first registered as a student. It began earlier in my professional life as an advisor, teacher and specialist in rural community development. I claim to have been engaged in action research all my professional life, seeking how to improve my practice.

The two enquiries were not central or solely the concern of my research. My research has a broader focus. It grew in two dimensions:

1) It encompasses my professional life, and
2) It permeates all chapters of this dissertation.

This dissertation relates how I have changed, integrated my thinking and - I trust - improved.

The focus of my research is on the efficacy of the rural development practitioner. My strategy is to study myself as I learn, develop, improve, act and answer 'How do I improve my practice?' (Whitehead 1989; 1993) In answering the question through the methodology of action research, I hope to:

1. Involve others in my learning (and their learning becomes evidence of my effectiveness and a validation of the work);
2. The account of the path I will have followed becomes a model for other practitioners who may wish to improve their practice in the particular context of their work.

The thesis is the product of a series of drafts that I have shared with supervisors and validators. This permits me to reflect on earlier writing, on the comments of others, and to synthesise all our best thinking. I strive to call attention to my growing understanding of my epistemology of practice. I repeat what I stated in chapter one: because of the recurrent stopover visits to the themes, because of the discursive nature of the dialectical approach and because of my antipathy to fragmenting systems, the product mirrors the reflexive nature of its design.

Benefits of Action Research

I hope that the claim by Lomax (1990: 10), quoted in McNiff et al (1996: 11), on teachers' action research of staff development will apply to practitioners in community development:

> '...action research is a way of defining and implementing relevant professional development. It is able to harness forms of collaboration and participation that are part of our professional rhetoric but are rarely effective in practice...[it]...starts small with a single committed person focusing on his/her practice. It gains momentum through the involvement of others as collaborators. It spreads as individuals reflect on the nature of their participation, and the principle of shared ownership of practice is established. It can result in the formation of a self-critical community: extended professionals in the best sense of the term.'

This quotation is significant in that it encompasses elements of a tailor-made programme of action for my research in my chosen field, viz. professional development, ensuring collaborative development through self-critical discourse. McNiff, Lomax and Whitehead (1996: 8) go further, claiming that:

> 'well conducted action research can lead
> - to your own personal development,
> - to better professional practice,
> - to improvements in the institutions in which you work, and
> - to your making a contribution to the good order of society.'

These assurances, which echo Carr and Kemis (1986: 165) quoted earlier, and my experience of these benefits, inspire confidence in action research as suited to this study. Bawden of Michigan State University, in a personal communication about action research, captures something of the dynamic between action research and community development:

> 'While usually expressed as a "spiral of activity cycles" of planning, acting, observing, and reflecting, it is perhaps better expressed as a continuing flux between 'finding out' and 'taking action', where part of that 'finding out' and 'taking action' relates to the processes of 'finding out' and 'taking action' themselves. Thus action research is a wonderful vehicle for the development of different research methodologies as well as for the creation of new knowledge and innovative action as revealed by such methodologies in action.'
>
> (Bawden: 1999)

I did not grasp the implications of this for quite some time. What Bawden and McNiff were addressing was that the basis of this research was action. It is the practice of research on action, the accumulation of insights arising from this practice that leads to a form of knowledge / wisdom for the future guidance of the practitioner. This is the habit I wish to cultivate and embed in my practice. The implications of this aspiration go beyond this work. They affect my practice now and in the future.

I see community development being mediated through dialogue or conversational learning to a significant degree. Dialogue is the principal means for participants to learn what is going on. Dialogue (Bohm 1996; Isaacs 1999) means constructive, transformative, ultimately incremental conversations building a deposit of knowledge, process, experience and skills. This knowledge is based on shared quest, principles, values and broadly based purposes. It reflects what dominantly has happened in the field; community development does not occur without dialogue. It might be said that communities meet together to converse and to work together. An outsider observing communities in session would be likely to conclude that their activities were made up of conversations. Kimball (1994) concurs when he says: "Communities can be defined as intricate networks of purposeful conversations about the issues that matter most to people".

Communities can judge the effectiveness of their work through reflective dialogue. Conversational learning/dialogue dominates the process. (Bohm 1996; Isaacs 1999). Attempts to promote conversational learning in the teaching project were unsuccessful. The report on the Tóchar Valley Network is in essence a report on conversations.

Action Research - the Methodology

Action based research has many forms. This has led to a range of descriptions that at the time of writing is baffling. This bafflement has been (Elden and Chisolm, 1993; Bailey and Eastman1996) and continues (Raelin 1999) to be addressed by action researchers. Current clarification is sought around six action strategies: 'action research, participatory action research, action learning, action science, developmental action enquiry and cooperative enquiry' (Raelin 1999: 116). This ongoing debate is not central to my discourse.

The conduct of an action research project is described in several texts: Atweh et al., (1998); Carr and Kemmis, (1986); Checkland, (1981); Cohen and Manion, (1997); Elliott, J., (1991) and (1998); Greenwood et al., (1998); Kemmis et al., (1982); McKernan, (1996); McNiff, (1995 and 1998); Mc Niff et al., (1996); Robson, (1997); Whitehead, (1993) and Zuber-Skerritt, (1993). All refer to a sequence of actions, described by Whitehead (1993: 120) - whom I have somewhat arbitrarily selected - as having a cycle, or more accurately, a spiral, of the following sequence of activities:

(1) Describing a problem or challenge;
(2) Proposing a solution;
(3) Acting in the direction of the chosen solution;
(4) Evaluating the outcome of the action; and
(5) Modifying the problem, ideas and further action in the light of evaluation at (4).

The quality of each activity influences the thoroughness and rigour of the research. Thus each step in the sequence reflects the degree of insight and learning applied.

I have used all the elements of this outline or basic structure of action research - the numbers in brackets relate to the stages - in both enquiries. In the first project, teaching "Profile of Rural Ireland" to boarding college students, reported fully in chapter four, I applied the elements as follows:

> I had a challenge (1); I proposed to teach the curriculum through conversational learning (2). I tried (3); I was opposed, I reassessed the resulting situation (4). As a result of my actions I modified my original description of the problem; I advanced an alternative solution; I implemented that solution; I assessed the second outcome (5) and so on.

In part of the second project, recounted in chapter five, I again followed the action research sequence:

> My challenge was (1) to assess the influence of 'in community knowledge'. I describe how (2) I set about finding a solution by assessing evidence of 'in community knowledge'; and what I did (3). I assessed the outcome of the action by describing what the influence of this knowledge was (and how it was being ignored by external agencies). I outlined the implications (5) of this experience for my practice and its implications for the practice of rural community development generally.

Both of these enquiries were located within the design of this thesis. The thesis itself was also designed to address:

> (1) the challenge of improving my practice along the lines of the action research spiral of activities. I proposed (2) to examine my practice through action research. In order to (3) act in the direction of my chosen solution I studied and came to understand and implement how action research is conducted. The outcome of this activity was (4) my own theory, which I evaluated and shared with others. This theory is based on both my own practice and on observing the practice of other practitioners. This commitment resulted in new insights and an improvement in my practice. This has been validated along lines set out in the last section of this chapter, 'validation'. I have learned from this exercise and am committed to (5) further progress in rural community development.

This description of what was afoot almost follows a formula. I realise with Altrichter (1992: 43), as cited by Lomax (1994:115) that action research in its essentials is not profoundly different from "everyday competencies by which practitioners observe, interpret, make sense of and develop their practice". Indeed the same sequence is at play when we learn how to whistle or to cycle.

However the practice of action research can be much more highly developed when attendant influences are triggered. In this context I cite one example from my work here, the framing of the problems in both projects. In the second project, I view the communities in the Tóchar Valley Network as a system, with interdependent elements or subsystems. The implications of my findings for these and for other communities are more wide ranging than would be the case, were I to ignore systems theory. Correspondingly, my insight in the teaching project was that the ten students were isolated from their rural communities and their connection with one another could not be described as an independent, sustaining system, least of all in terms of a rural community. That very inadequacy in their association led me to question why the benefits from the system that is rural community development could have been ignored in the official programme, whose purpose was the acquisition of the practice of rural community development

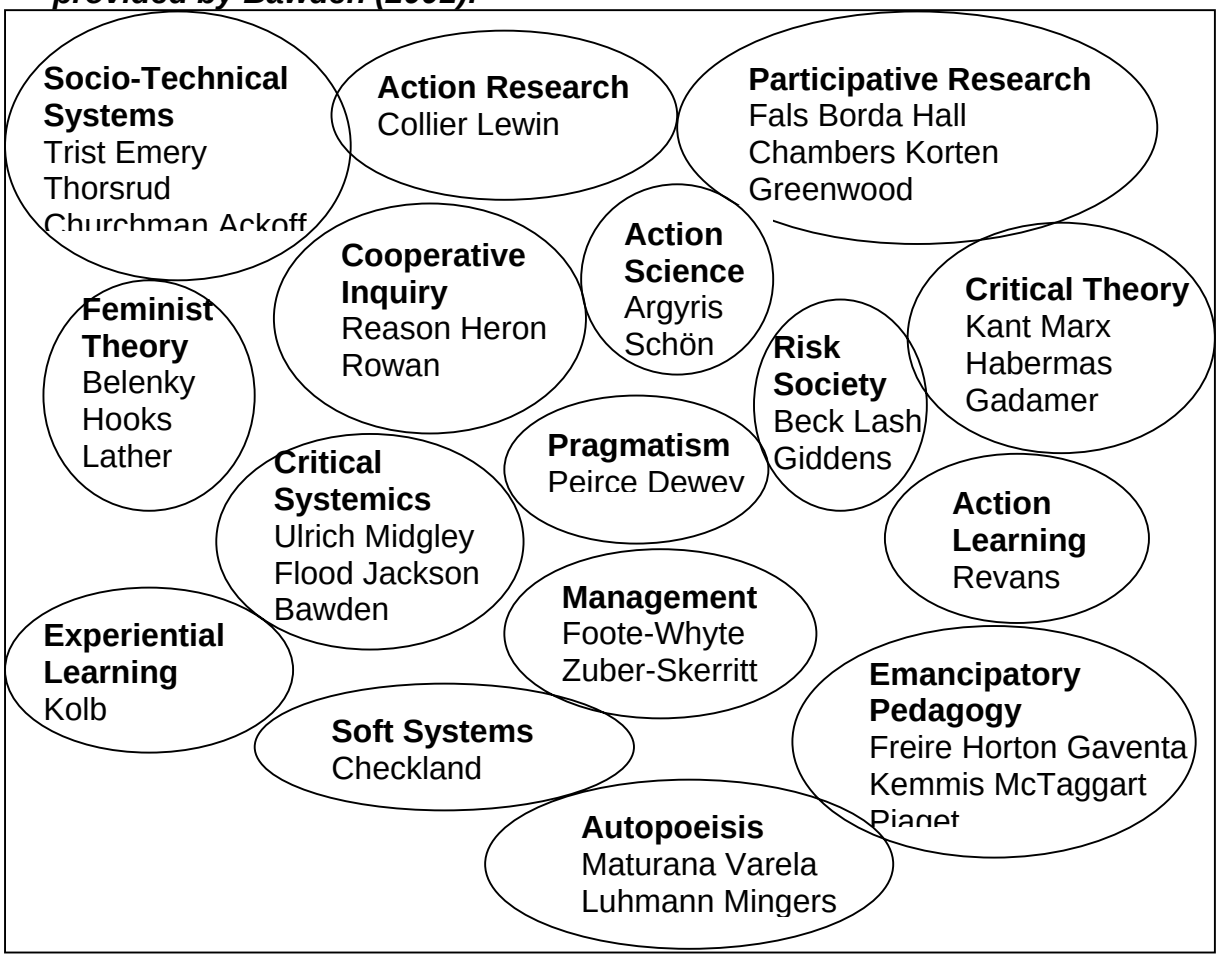
Associated Influences on Action Research

There are other influences at work in action research besides systems theory. Action research is dominated by two related activities acting (doing) and reflecting (thinking). The 'acting' is governed by the nature of the problem or challenge. Reflecting is a compound of many elements. One can argue that while working, we all take action. From my perspective, it is the reflecting that delivers the understanding, the meaning and the theory. Schön (see appendix 3.1) writes about 'espoused theories and theories in action'. He suggests that that reflection may be a 'reflection on' events and is generally conducted subsequently; 'reflection in' the midst of the event as it unfolds, occurs more or less on one's feet. Most of my reflection has been subsequent to events that have occurred. My reflecting in the situation occurred occasionally; for example as an immediate response to student behaviour in the project, teaching the module "Profile of Rural Ireland". Reflection also shapes the capacity to deliver improvement and a better social order. Mezirow (1990: xvi) cites meaning, reflection, critical reflection, critical self-reflection, transformative learning and emancipatory education as some of the dimensions of thinking. All carry implications if not imperatives of change and transformation. Lomax (1984: 113 - 116) adds the dimensions of rigour, ethics, logic, and aesthetics.

I have earlier, in chapter two, identified the absence of a necessary paradigm shift as a significant insight into the state of research in rural development in Ireland. So the concept of paradigms also comes into play. Collaboration and participation, while presumed, have repercussions in the dynamics of any research project. Grenfell el al. (1998) guide my thinking by distinguishing interpretations of effective theories of education from the tradition of ‘thoroughly scientific theories’. They argue, (op cit: 7), that theories are not so much the means by which we understand and explain the activity of education but how and on what basis we make our choices 'to effect and determine the activity in the first place'. Thus while the technical rational theory of science is descriptive, and preoccupied with events in the past, postmodern educational theory is predictive and focused ultimately on what action will follow in the future. And theories I might engender about change and transformation in communities are more about prediction of germane activity than descriptions of past activities. As a practitioner I need a reliable basis to guide my activities around rural community development.

An overall assessment of the influences at work around action research is provided in Table 4 "Action Research: An Influence Map" drawn on material provided by Bawden (2001):

Table 4 "Action Research: An Influence Map" drawn on material provided by Bawden (2001):



I have recast this material in tabular form and included one example each of the published works of the leading authorities in each area of influence. This is set out in Table 6. It is to be found in appendix three.

All the influences may impinge on action research. They facilitate a variety of possibilities and perspectives that promise a profusion of findings, responsive to a variety of situations and all geared to bringing about a better order. In my view Bawden's influences shape action research in three principal ways. These are standpoints, approaches and outcomes. By standpoints I mean the perspective(s) from which the research is approached; by approaches I mean the particular influence that acts on the methodology; and by outcomes I mean the discipline(s) that is to be advanced. The following alignments help me understand the potential of these influences:

Table 5: Alignment of Influences Affecting Action Research Governed by Standpoints, Approaches and Outcomes

Standpoints	**Approaches**	**Outcomes**
Critical Theory	Action Research	Action learning
Feminist Theory	Action Science	Autopoesis
Pragmatism	Cooperative Enquiry	Critical Theory
Socio-Technical Systems	Participative Research	Emancipatory Pedagogy
Soft Systems	Critical Systemics	Feminist Theory
		Management
		Experiential Learning

In terms of my own research I claim significant outcomes in all areas listed above, with the exceptions of feminist theory and perhaps management. I would claim some benefit from critical systemics. The standpoints or perspectives I deployed were pragmatic, dealing with emergent events. This characterised both projects. The process of thinking that I undertook to make sense of what was happening and generate theory about it is based on critical theory.

I see how what I have discovered in this thesis might be further advanced subsequently through cooperative enquiry and participative research.

Validation

Two factors dominate the process of this research, my practice and the substantive issue, rural community development. The goal is to improve my practice in rural community development. Improving my practice and advancing my understanding of rural community development are interdependent goals in this work.

I advance my practice through a greater understanding of community development. That is governed by my reflecting on that advancing understanding. But that is only half the story. What remains unclear is where this better understanding is to be generated. The significant site for generating this understanding of rural community development, under my choice of methodology, is in action, i.e. where it is practised. This is where one can answer the action research questions: does it work? If not, what adjustments must I make so that it does? Can this performance in turn be improved? This is where research on this action is positioned, i.e. action research. This is where validity primarily is found.

I am aware that the location of one project or episode in a boarding college cannot be described as an optimal context for community development. It might be argued that this location is so totally unsuited as to be implausible and that I might have found more conducive surroundings. I have already

suggested that practitioners do not enjoy this autonomy. I now wish to advance another line of reasoning. When I was an undergraduate student of horticulture, the college had two orchards. One was recently established and might be described as a 'state of the art' orchard. There were no imperfections. The other was nearly a hundred years old, showed it and was home to many pests and diseases. My point is that the old orchard was a richer source of learning - because of its defects. As a student I could recognise at first hand such pathogens as apple scab, manganese deficiency and woolly aphid in the old orchard. Every precaution had been taken in the new orchard to ensure that none of these defects was manifest. If medical students were restricted to visiting only fighting fit 'patients' in their teaching hospitals, their learning would be seriously challenged. Much is to be learned from faulty approaches to rural community development.

Validation in this work is based on (i) triangulation, on (ii) critical thinking, on (iii) participants' evidence, on their learning as a consequence of their participation in this research, and on (iv) resultant action. By resultant action I mean that when the findings are implemented and they in time deliver, this will also be / is further evidence of validity. This occurs during and after the work is completed. I deploy all four [(i) to (iv)]. I look to the critique of validators (supervisors, critical friends, other practitioners and others) whose comments are incorporated throughout. These comments are not solicited solely post-factum but have been deliberately invited, albeit informally, at critical junctures as the work progressed. I have asked a select number of validators to give me a more formal response in writing. These responses are in appendix six. I have also returned data to involved participants in the form of drafts to check that my account corresponds to their recollection of events and conversations. This is what Ruonavaara (200: 87) describes as 'face validity'.

Triangulation is the incorporation of multiple methods and sources of information to crosscheck information and to strengthen the trustworthiness of data. This procedure is supported by Elliott (1991: 82-83), Mc Niff (1988: 132 -136), Robson (1993:290) and Smith et al (1997: 242). Critical thinking is systematic deliberation that constructs theories and knowledge through questioning action, practice and emerging theories. I find Lomax (1986) cited by McNiff (1988: 132) captures my perspective when she writes:

> "Critical reflection is the way in which a naive understanding of practice is transformed; where the practitioner reflects upon instead of merely experiencing practice; and where the process is made public and shared so that others can gain an understanding of the practice."

See also Smith et al (1997:242) and Brookfield (1987), particularly chapter seven.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter I have endeavoured to accomplish the following:

1. I said that the purpose of doing research is to generate theory and facilitate understanding. I am interested in exploring what kind of theory might be most appropriate for conceptualising issues arising from the practice of rural community development. I am aware that various kinds of theory exist. The dominant kind in western intellectual traditions is propositional theory. I tried to demonstrate that propositional theory is not appropriate, because it denies innate characteristics of rural community development and because it offers prescriptive definitions of processes which themselves defy definition.

2. I stated that I wished to explore how I might generate my own theory of rural community development by engaging in my own enquiry about my own practice. This form of enquiry is often called action research. This is different from dominant forms of research, which are: (i) Empirical research, which offers prescriptive definitions; and (ii) Interpretative research, which does the same. I have attempted to give an overview of the ontological, epistemological and methodological assumptions within these traditions, and to point to the empathetic link between action research processes and those of rural community development.

3. I state that I am exploring the potential of action research as a transformative methodology that emulates the processes of rural community development; the methodology is developmental, transformative, emergent, holistic, collaborative, critical, emancipatory, and reflective. So too is effective community development.

4. I hold that action research is more appropriate to my enquiry than traditional approaches. I ask questions of the kind, 'How do I improve my work?" (Whitehead, 1989; 1993), and answer them with claims to knowledge, backed up by evidence that shows how I have improved my practice.

5. I advance this work in the context where I believe a paradigm shift, which would acknowledge the need for a broader base to the methodologies in use, is still awaited in Irish Agriculture. I anticipate communities taking charge of their own research.

CHAPTER 4

INVESTIGATING MY EXPERIENCE OF TEACHING THE OFFICIAL RURAL DEVELOPMENT CURRICULUM 'PROFILE OF RURAL IRELAND'

"The world of your truth can be my limitation;
Your wisdom my negation.
Don't instruct me; let's walk together.
Let my richness begin where yours ends.

You will not know who I am
by listening to yourself.
Don't instruct me; let me be.
Your failure is that I be identical to you."

Maturana[8]

Introduction

This chapter is a story of apparent failure. It begins by describing the context of this enquiry into my experience of teaching the official curriculum, "Profile of Rural Ireland", designed to promote rural development in Ireland. A copy of this curriculum is in Appendix 4.1. I describe my plans for teaching it. I explain how and why these plans were changed. I reflect on the curriculum, on the participants and on my practice in teaching it. I offer recommendations. I generate my own theory of best practice in training for rural community development as a result of my experience.

The project focuses on my concerns around effectiveness of training in rural development which official programmes purport to deliver. It is closely linked to my central research question: 'how can I best advance my effectiveness as a rural community development practitioner? ' In this, the first project, I continue to attempt to improve my practice. I do this by modifying my practice and reflecting on my experience. I look to the literature to support this experience. Thus I hope to enhance my practice in the education of future participants in rural community development.

Induction of participants in rural development through formal education is a new departure in Ireland. Teagasc's rural development practitioners teach this programme. The mandatory modules of this new programme are 'Rural Enterprise Development' and 'Profile of Rural Ireland'. I taught the latter.

[8] From Umberto Maturana's "The Student's Prayer" in reaction to his teachers who wanted to teach him what they knew, rather than draw out – 'educare' - what he needed to learn, or - better - teach him how to learn for himself. Translation by Marcial Losada.

These are supplemented by a range of modules taken from Teagasc's mainline programme for the Certificate in Farming.

A reasonable expectation from the programme is that effective participants in rural development would emerge. The government officially endorses the ensuing certification through the National Council for Vocational Awards (NCVA).

The programme's aspirations are noble. They seem strikingly at one with the profile of effective participants in rural community development, as this excerpt from the official curriculum portrays:

> "The development of learners' core skills is a key objective of vocational education and learning. The opportunity to develop these skills may arise through a single module or a range of modules. The core skills include:
>
> · taking initiative
> · taking responsibility for one's own learning and progress
> · problem solving
> · applying theoretical knowledge in practical contexts
> · being numerate and literate
> · having information and communication technology skills
> · sourcing and organising information effectively
> · listening effectively
> · communicating orally and in writing
> · working effectively in group situations
> · understanding health and safety issues
> · reflecting on and evaluating quality of own learning and achievement.
>
> Course providers are encouraged to design programmes which enable learners to develop core skills. "
>
> (NCVA 1999: 2)

However the Teagasc (undated) literature, the principal document made available to aspiring participants, is obscure and less forthcoming. It pledges that graduate participants 'will acquire enterprise skills, computer skills and learn how to access opportunities in rural areas.' The content of "Profile of Rural Ireland" is concerned with rural community development, a likely source of 'opportunities in rural areas'. This focus is both explicit and evident in the curriculum (see appendix 4.1.).

Earlier I have explained that effective rural community development is both context grounded and practice driven. These attributes provide challenges to any curriculum or programme that would advance effective practice in rural development. If context and practice are determinants of effective rural community development, following a programme that ignores these

determinants puts the efficacy of such training at risk. I believe this is what happened in this episode.

Concerns

I am saying that - from the outset - I have reservations about the curriculum, the approach to teaching and the context of that teaching.

I am concerned about the setting in which this programme was taught. I feel that an agricultural college, dissociated from local communities, fails to reflect rural community experiences. It denies any perception of community as a system. This is compounded where the participants are exclusively male adolescents, of a narrow age range. Context and practice are not optional considerations for effective training in rural development. This approach to rural community development was allowed to happen because our tradition and practice in the transactional teaching approach to agriculture was transferred and applied to rural community development. This happened too because of adherence to superseded paradigms, described in chapter three.

Preparations

I sought an opportunity to teach this new curriculum and report on my experiences. This would be my first investigation.

I approached an agricultural college in December 1999. The programme was offered there for the first time to the September 1999 intake of Certificate in Farming students. It had been difficult to recruit a qualified tutor. The programme was deferred. I was looking for three or four classes. Asked instead to teach the entire module within the time remaining, I agreed. I picked up from the headmaster some perplexity around the value and suitability of the programmes being taught in the college. Our views and concerns converged.

The headmaster told me that the deferral of the programme had upset the students. As a result, there was an urgency to focus on delivering the module, on furnishing the required projects and passing examinations.

In chapter two I explained that my earlier practice with groups had been didactic. I knew and had set the curriculum in my teaching days. Freire's metaphor of the 'banking educationalist' fairly described my first approach to teaching. I wished to change that approach to one of conversational learning. This was to be my opportunity.

I now recognised (chapter two) that in community development participants should exercise significant control over what they learn. If the inclusion of

context and practice were to feature, I deliberately had to make room for them in an approach of joint discourse with the participants.

In the agricultural college I therefore aspired to benefit from interaction with young rural people. I assumed that they were committed to exploring a rural development career in their own communities. What I hoped to achieve would be emancipatory because I interpreted the challenge as facilitating these young people's potential to discern and set about reaching their goals.

McNiff (2000: 39 et seq.) suggests that knowledge may be categorised into propositional, procedural and personal or tacit forms. Propositional knowledge is founded on the Newtonian-Cartesian paradigm, which objectifies knowledge and makes it neutral, concentrating on conveying expert information that is assumed to have been lacking. Propositional knowledge is viewed as embodying truth. It is fixed and more or less static. When updated it is done in predictable ways. It is not focused on outcomes of clearer understandings, or on change, or development. These are educational goals for personal or tacit knowledge, not propositional knowledge. Nor is it concerned with how information/learning might be applied, the ‘how to’ or procedural knowledge. Knowledge derived from empirical approaches is not concerned with the personal.

Tacit and procedural knowledge dominate the process of rural community development. Argyris and Schön (1974:10) tell us that tacit knowledge starts out as inaccessible theories in use, i.e. tacit. It is my task to try to make the tacit theories that sustain community development explicit. The problem that was emerging was that procedural and personal knowledge, the type of knowledge at the heart of community development were virtually sidelined in the "Profile of Rural Ireland" curriculum. But I was not aware of this in December 1999.

Conversational Learning

Dialogue as a means of learning is a cornerstone of community development education. To promote independent communities, participants should learn to dialogue respectfully. The downside of the alternative, one-way didactic domination is that there is little empowerment of participants. Little critical thought is fostered. There is an abdication of responsibility by all the players.

Planning for the Project

In my preparations to teach the programme, I followed the guideline questions set by McNiff et al (1996: 36 *et seq.),* which read as follows:

1. ‘ What is your research focus?
2. Why have you chosen this issue as a focus?

3. What kind of evidence can you produce to show what is happening? (Evidence 1)
4. What can you do about what you find?
5. What kind of evidence can you produce to show that what you are doing is having an impact? (Evidence 2)
6. How do you evaluate that impact?
7. How will you ensure that any judgements you might make are reasonably fair and accurate?
8. What will you do then?'

What follows is a record of my answers to these eight questions. The answers are written at two points in time. The first, in standard type font, relates my thinking before I taught the programme. I re-visited these answers after I taught the programme and amended these answers then. The amendments appear *in italics.*

The answers form a record of my growing understanding of approaches to training in rural development. Later in the text I provide a detailed account of what happened in the classroom. The classroom events influenced my thinking. I agree with Atkinson (2000: 159) when she cites Ferrucci (1982) as saying that writing and rewriting stimulates the interchange between the conscious and the unconscious, or the tacit and explicit. This pattern of writing in the answers to the eight questions constitutes a form of research. The answers (1 – 8) below were first drafted in the closing months of 1999 and are a testimony to my original expectations. The subsequent amendments *(in Italics)* were first drafted in June 2,000.

1 <u>What is my research focus for this project?</u>
My primary focus is to improve my own practice. I wish to improve my ability in conversational learning. I planned to improve my practice through consultation with other experienced practitioners, with the participants themselves and through reflection on what worked and did not work. I planned to log my learning and record progress, highlighting the events that contributed to that achievement or frustrated it. I also planned to invite some participants to provide critical feedback on their experience, so as to improve my effectiveness.

Subsequently I revised this and added several concerns including:
The curriculum content.

- *Its congruity with rural community development.*
- *The process of education I ultimately used.*
- *The suitability of the classroom setting.*
- *The absence of the experiential.*
- *The contextual aspects of rural community.*
- *The demotion of procedural and tacit knowledge.*

2 Why have I chosen this issue as a focus?

My reasons include:

- Fostering competence in new entrants is a key function underlying the stability of rural communities.
- I have limited experience of conversational learning. I wish to improve.
- The new curriculum has not hitherto been assessed in classroom practice.
- I have limited training and feedback on my performance in this area.
- This can model significant applicable learning through action research, meeting widely experienced needs among practitioners.

I know that many colleagues teaching this subject have no background in community development and prefer to teach transactionally. I mean supplying absent information. But rural community development is dependent on a lived out response from participants. I seek assurance that my approach to promoting facility with processes of rural community development is competent, appropriate and brings desired and long-term effectiveness. I cite my values and my desire to provide as effective a service as possible.

The unexpected breakthrough in this experience was the growing conviction that the entire undertaking was highly questionable. Its epistemology was grounded in positivism. Most of its practitioners were working out of what seems to me as unsuited paradigms. Serious flaws included poor practice in procedural and personal development domains.

3 What kind of evidence can I produce to show what is happening?

I expect to be able to furnish evidence from the following records:

- My class preparation notes.
- Critical reflections on class delivery.
- The written syllabus I prepare.
- My diary.
- Participants work, including tests, homework and projects.
- Public examination results.
- Records of conversations with colleagues, participants, headmaster, critical friends.

4 What can I do about what I find?

My early plans were to improve my own abilities at conversational learning. I hoped too to give useful feedback to the National Council for Vocational Awards on the relevance of the curriculum and had alerted key personnel in the Council of my plans. I wanted my account of what I encountered to be

realistic. I was aware of the difficulties colleagues in other centres were encountering.

> 'A richness of action research is that it is developmental; we simply don't know until we try something out. The research resides in our capacity to monitor action and reflection on the action, and show how the improvement of our learning influences the direction that practice takes: We don't need to have well-formed answers at any stage, until we come to writing up and making a claim to knowledge.'
>
> (Mc Niff - personal communication.)

I believe my findings are grounds for a radical change of approach to training in rural community development.

5 What kind of evidence can I produce to show that what I am doing is having an impact?

I think that much of this 'evidence' (Mc Niff et al 1996: 41) is generated through reflecting on the accounts or raw data of what is going on. It is the answer to the question that I constantly propose to put to my colleagues and myself: 'What am I (are we) learning here?' To show that what I am doing has an impact I expect an improvement in my conversational learning skills - corroborated by the participants' progress and enthusiasm.

But the purpose of the programme is to facilitate the attainment of community development skills and expertise by the class participants. Their progress and the relevance of the prescribed curriculum will come in for scrutiny.

The evidence is contradictory. It was in teaching this restricted curriculum that I discovered its limitations, not only in its content but also in its pedagogic approach. It failed to match the needs and competencies of its participants. The programme was indifferent to the participants' needs and competencies.

6 How will I evaluate that impact?

The records I will be making available (see question 3 above) in the account of the classroom activities, which follows this section, will help me assess the impact. My earliest thoughts were that I would be able to recount the plans that some of the participants would make for their futures in rural society. If we were to make progress, the link between what the participants learned and their future plans would be the most satisfying evidence of the compatibility of the curriculum with the participants' expectations and abilities.

The long-term impact was my conviction that the official programme failed to deliver competency. In confining itself to propositional knowledge it short-changed the legitimate expectations of its participants. It did not facilitate the personal planning I had in mind

7 How will I ensure that any judgements that I might make are reasonably fair and accurate?

I expect to be able to say that 'I am now more competent at a particular facet of rural community development than I was before.' I expect to give reasons for that improvement. This will probably relate to a greater understanding of what is going on. I expect to become more familiar with the process and to relate where that improvement has taken effect.

I will look to support these findings through the feedback of my colleagues, the evidence from the programme's participants, their examination results and support from the literature, particularly in the domains of knowledge, role and understanding of systems. The views of such stakeholders as the National Council for Vocational Awards, the college authorities and established practitioners will ensure that my conclusions are fair and reasonable.

I will look to the literature for support for my views on the inadequacy of this programme. I will supplement this with my reflections and those of critical colleagues.

8 What will I do then?

I will implement my learning in my practice of facilitation skills in rural community development. Through writing up and ultimately sharing an account of how I brought about that improvement, I provide reliable evidence from the field of what works and does not.

I will indicate how that process itself might be enriched. I will seek the opinions of other validators on the foregoing. I will furnish a final account of the process.

I have an early indication from the college management that this undertaking has significantly influenced the future development of this programme in their colleges. I am pleased because action research strives to serve the purposes of bringing about desirable change, based on evidence and reliable assessment of the status quo.

_____

Much of the foregoing plan, i.e. the original script (non-italics) of questions 1 to 8, was to be swept away by the experience of classroom reality. It gave way to a survivor's tale, one of reconstruction, realism, endurance and resourcefulness that brought about an improvement, if not a sea change in my practice.

The Story of My Involvement

I first met the class of ten young men on 25 February 2000. These second year students had signed up for the Certificate in Rural Enterprise Programme at the end of their first year in the college. The course should have started in September of 1999.

Their decision implied that the Certificate in Farming, the standard programme, did not meet their needs. The Certificate in Farming assumes that its participants can derive their incomes from full-time farming. The Certificate in Rural Enterprise prepares rural dwellers - not necessarily landowners - for a successful life in rural development. These ten students would be trained for effective membership of their respective rural communities. The curriculum in its aims and goals so envisages. Minimally they would be expected to be more effective in this realm than those who had not attended such a programme.

For my first lesson, I decided to build on the students' apparent shared decision governing their futures. I hoped to do this by having the group address the questions below. I was prepared to be sidetracked in whatever direction the participants' experience or curiosity might lead. This would be consistent with conversational learning. These questions are from my class-preparation notes:

Class 1: Remote Planning Notes for Class 1.

1. Why I decided to do this course (Group collective findings). (10 minutes)
2. What are the factors outside our control that has prompted us to enrol in this programme? (Joint exercise on flip chart.) (10 minutes)
3. What are our needs and expectations, the competencies that we require and the information we will need? (20 minutes)
4. Can we attempt to draw up a curriculum that will be relevant to our needs? (30 minutes)
5. How can this curriculum best be taught? (10 minutes)
6. What would frustrate progress? (10 minutes)
7. We divert to look at the precarious future of farming. (15 minutes)
8. Summary (5 minutes).

Shortly before I met the students, members of the teaching staff told me that they found the group difficult:

> "*They are not focused."* one said*. "They are rattling around here and they don't know what they should be doing*."

The delay in getting their course underway had not helped. I recorded phrases like the following in my diary:

> "*They don't know what they want." "They are lazy." "They don't do any work." "I think they are kind of lost."*

I was optimistic. If they had moved from the prevailing programme in agriculture to an untried course in rural development, this showed some adventurous spirit. Once we had established common ground, I was confident we could make progress.

The answers to questions 4 and 5 of the class preparation notes above represented my commitment to focus on their concerns. I would accommodate their views when we jointly drew up our curriculum. My earlier experience with the Training for Transformation Programme (Hope et al. 1995), together with Rogers (1983), had influenced me to invite the participants to have this input in their curriculum. Despite the urgency to deliver the programme within less than half the time allotted, it was important that participants' wishes should be met. Had I not invited their views, I would discard the principle that community development participants should take charge of their own training.

I anticipated that there would be some degree of overlap between the NCVA curriculum and the desires of the participants. My intention was to meet both the participants' wishes and the official curriculum's requirements simultaneously. This was the practice of those who taught the 'Training for Transformation' programme (Hope et al. 1995).

My class notes, which I had prepared for the opening session, were as follows:

Introductory Class in Rural Development
Friday 25 February 2000

1. Hopes and Expectations;
   Concern and Fears.
   Written exercise. (20)

2. Why I decided to do this course

Group collective findings. (10)

When we have a clear picture of why we enrolled on this course and have a consensus around our personal reasons and the factors beyond our immediate control that influenced us in this decision, we might begin to look at how our needs are to be met through this series of classes.

3. What are the factors outside our control that has prompted us to enrol in this programme? (Joint exercise on flip chart.) (10)

4. What are our needs and expectations, the competencies that we require and the information we will need? (20)

5. Can we attempt to draw up a curriculum that will be relevant to our needs? (30)

6. How can this curriculum best be taught? (10)

7. What would frustrate progress? (10)

8. We divert to look at the precarious future of farming. (15)

9. Summary.

10. Looking at your resources and the opportunities you foresee, tell me how you will earn an income in the year 2005 (Assignment).

(The figures in brackets refer to the expected duration in minutes of each item.)

Report on Class One in Rural Development

Friday 25 February 2000

(The report appears in italics.)

1. Hopes and Expectations;
   Concern and Fears.
   Written exercise. (20)

I suggested that the purpose of the programme from the perspective of the state was to help the students become more effective in rural communities. They would have to give some thought to what they were going to do. The purpose of an effective course was to help them to that end. Their reaction was extremely passive for the most part, with some stating that they thought the Certificate in Rural Enterprise was the easier option and that that was why they had pursued it.

2. Why I decided to do this course
   Group collective findings. (10)

I asked them to work in groups of three to four and to share with one another why they were on the course and to report their joint findings, without attributing any particular answer to any one student. The following are their findings, culled from their notes and my recollections recorded shortly after the class. This account also includes the ensuing discussion:

Many recognised that they would have to supplement their income from sources outside farming. Most thought in terms of becoming employees. One hoped to set up a partnership with two brothers and continue farming. Some spoke of a wish to study agriculture at UCD. Another wanted to become a Garda. Another, who later proved to be eccentric, proclaimed his intention of becoming a priest. An exploratory discussion followed on the advantages and disadvantages of many of the career options. These responses raised questions about the relevance of the programme.

I noted that they showed great difficulty - even embarrassment - about getting the discussion underway. One student, DE, told me after the class, they had never done anything like this before.

3. What are the factors outside our control that has prompted us to enrol in this programme? (Joint exercise on flip chart.) (10)

I identified falling prices and rising costs in agriculture, the need for a growing income, general uncertainty and the weak position of farmers to secure prices for commodities. The students were not forthcoming and while they did not dissent from what I was suggesting, I began to get the impression that the discussion was not fully engaging their attention.

I got the distinct impression that I was making the entire running, I was the source of the factors, which they were happy to comment on, but they were not forthcoming in listing these factors.

4. What are our needs and expectations, the competencies that we require and the information we will need? (20)

The discussion on this was patchy; in part due to 'red herrings' and the way the students had dispersed themselves throughout the room. This to a degree I hope will be rescued through the exercise for the next day. It was agreed that the context of each student's community was distinct and different; the programme should address this

It was disappointing; they were not prepared to be forthcoming.

5. Can we attempt to draw up a curriculum relevant to our needs? (30)

I need to return to this; it is largely dependent on a reasonable performance on question 4.

I was in difficulty with my strategy. If they had never been consulted, the idea that they would have a say in what they were to learn would be beyond their expectations.

6. How can this curriculum best be taught? (10)

There was some measure of agreement that this should be by dialogue, checking its relevance to the contexts of each individual as he reaches a decision on his future career. .

Perhaps this is an optimistic assessment on my part. Perhaps they were sceptical or dubious. Subsequent events were to prove that they did not observe these conclusions.

7. What would frustrate progress? (10)

I thought it prudent to postpone this, at least until more of the class had become engaged in what we were about.

8. We divert to look at the precarious future of farming. (15)

I dealt with this fairly fully. We looked at the effects of GATT, with its design to bring European prices down to world prices, the fact that farmers were price takers not price makers, that standards of living were set to rise in other occupations. It was unrealistic to expect that farmers could furnish enough income solely from farming for an improving lifestyle.

From the hush and the absence of private conversations, I gathered I had caught their attention.

9. Summary.
I summarised what we had covered. I need to give them more time to understand what it is I am about.

10. Looking at your resources and the opportunities you foresee, tell me how you will earn an income in the year 2005.

I asked them to prepare one of the following, as an assignment / homework for the next day:

(1) Aide memoir notes
(2) essay or
(3) picture describing how they hoped to earn their income in 2005.

Additional Concerns

I had little influence over the layout of the classroom. The room was big, with more than twice the number of desks that we required. When I arrived the students had already spread themselves throughout. As it was our first class they were engaging in trying out how I might react, through some guarded undercurrent comment as the class progressed. I do not particularly mind ongoing comment but this was in part destructive. Those who were forthcoming in discussion became the targets of ribald comment. I took a firm line on this and discouraged it. This 'slagging', if it persisted, could inhibit dialogue and learning. I proposed next day to gather them around the large table and sit in the middle. I needed to be able to attach names to faces. I got the distinct feeling that they had not given this programme the consideration needed.

Class Two in Rural Development

I arrived early to arrange seats around a large table. I sat at the middle of the long side. I distributed class notes and invited the students to sit with me. I had copies of participants' photographs. We had hardly begun when I discovered that the room had been double booked. We had to return to the original room of our first class. There the students worked quickly to re-establish the disarray of the first class.

No assignment was done. They informed me that they did not do homework and that this was the college policy. The principal did not share this perception. They brought in mobile phones and telephoned one another. When I protested, they tried to maintain that this was permitted in the college. I had to lay down the law; if they wished to make or receive calls, they would have to leave the classroom. The premise on which I was going to progress, i.e. the combination of interested participants + relevant curriculum + reasonably competent facilitator (me), was either defective or deficient.

They were not interested in compiling a curriculum. Their behaviour frustrated a facilitative approach. I felt the brunt of being a visitor. I was unsure what the norms were. I was not totally sure of what was permissible for me to insist upon as acceptable behaviour in the college.

I had not anticipated that I would have to fight to be heard or to check immature behaviour. Later (2000) I met John Elliott at an action research conference in Dublin. He introduced us to the anagram RHINO – 'Really Here In Name Only' – which describes the behaviour of the majority in a classroom, when the minority of disaffected students tie up the teacher's energies with behavioural issues. That majority coasts along, do not exert themselves, and settle for mediocrity.

There was little commitment to the purposes of our meetings. The plan I had to improve my practice at conversational learning was being met head-on with a series of challenges. There was a group of three in the class who did not understand the conversational learning approach. They took advantage of its openness to deride their colleagues' ideas. I spoke about the practice of not criticising others unless one had a better idea oneself, and of the need to respect one another. They agreed in principle. In practice they did not. For example, one student, who hailed from Connaught, shared that his family ran a refuse collection business. He was dubbed 'rubbish-man'; when I protested, they subsided into a temporary silence. A second example was my would-be priest, who went on about this vocation being 'a sure way of living in rural Ireland'. One response included " B, what are you going to do for sex?" I asked if he had taken steps to advance his calling, to which he replied it was much too early; he was only thinking about it.

I had foreseen, as evidenced in my preparations, that the classroom was to be where the participants and I shared common learning objectives. There would be a commitment to learn and reflect together. We would work our way through a collaboratively generated, relevant curriculum.

The following are the notes for the class I had originally prepared:

Recapitulation Class 2 -Original Notes

1. Hopes and Expectations;
   Concern and Fears.
   Written exercise.

2. Why I decided to do this course

Group collective findings.

3. What are the factors outside our control that has prompted us to enrol in this programme? (Joint exercise on flip chart.)

4. What are our needs and expectations, the competencies that we require and the information we will need?

5. Share our thoughts on devising a common curriculum. (To be put together from the assignment given 29 February)

I spoke with a critical colleague, (GC) who had a lot of experience in dealing with this age group. He helped me decide, in view of the lack of engagement, to defer this plan and substitute the following exercise:

- Calculate the costs of running a home, assuming two adults and two children.
- What percentage of the running costs will the farm supply?

Running Costs of a Home

Utilities	**Amount in IR£**
Electricity	
Heat	
Water	
Refuse	
TV	
Telephone	
Other - specify	
Transport	
Road tax	
Insurance	
Petrol / diesel	
Service	
Depreciation / lease	
Bus fares	
Groceries	
House maintenance	
Insurance	
Mortgage	
Clothing	
Newspapers / books/ videos	
Health insurance	
Child minding	
Education	
Income tax	
Recreation	
Pocket money	
Holidays	
Savings	
Bank charges	

Pension Charity / church Anything else? TOTAL Estimate of percentage supplied by my farm:

We carried out the exercise and the overall figures varied from £8,000 to £30,000 per annum. This seemed reasonable. The figures ranged from social welfare family allowances to middle income expenditure. They also reflected the range of incomes the participants' families enjoy, given their profiles. The students were uncomfortable with the range of figures. Their reaction was to deride those who produced both the high and low figures. The student who produced the £30,000 figure was ' a swank' and the lower budget was interpreted as evidence of meanness. I interpreted this as their expectation that there ought to be one right answer, or at least a tighter range. I said it reflected the realities of what life was like on the dole.

I asked how this exercise had impacted on each one. No participant then was drawing a full wage. If we moved these figures forward to the year 2010, many would be married. They might have dependent parents, an additional mortgage, children of their own and possibly siblings still at home, whose education might still be ongoing. I felt that this was really hitting home. While there was no shared response there was an engaged silence. They could see that the scope of farming to generate additional income was limited.

Reflection

Reluctantly, because of the quality of our engagement, the rejection of my invitation for input into the curriculum and the pressure of time, I decided to concentrate on the content of the official curriculum. I conducted two straightforward classes, class numbers 3 and 5, where I went quickly through the curriculum (see Appendix 2), outlining the content to be covered and the work they would do. The curriculum was bereft of a local context, i.e. the local contexts each participant could have brought to it. There were two aspects of the task that were not working. These were the participants and the curriculum. I needed a modus operandi to deliver the programme.

I looked again at my class plan. The prospects of having an experience where I could sedately improve my practice seemed frankly naive. In the cut and thrust of the classroom, dominated by scepticism and a studied lack of interest, my plan was floundering.

I seriously considered resigning. I spoke with a Teagasc teacher who was conducting this programme in the West. His experience was little different. The easy option would have been to walk away. I could restart a more pliable investigation. Then it occurred to me that I was in a privileged position to do

something effective about what was happening. Had I remained in Teagasc, I would not have the option of quitting. Neither do Irish practitioners have the freedom to decamp when the going gets rough. I wished to conduct relevant research in precisely these inauspicious circumstances. This was the boast of action research, i.e. laying the groundwork in inauspicious circumstances to bring about improvement.

I decided that the focus of my investigation would shift to the reasons for my difficulty. Yet, on further reflection, the focus remained the same, i.e. on my practice. It was the context of that practice that I had not anticipated. It was to be one of difficult and challenging circumstances, Schön's 'swampy lowlands'. The question of note then was: would my methodology of choice be able to deal with this emergent situation? I believed it would. Furthermore I knew at this point that, had the study been conducted under traditional methodologies, it would have had to be abandoned. Its predictable unpredictability would scupper it.

If I can adequately explain the ordeal and find the reasons for it, I could suggest some changes. I would be instrumental in improving matters. I would improve my practice.

The Participants

I list the details students' families supplied on their original college application forms. They are as follows:

Profile of Participants

Number of Participants: 10	
Dates of Birth:	ranging from September 1983 to February 1980, i.e. from 16 to 20 years old while on the course.
Public Examination Completed:	3 Junior Certificate; 7 Leaving Certificate.
Intention to Stay Farming:	Yes; 8; No: 2.
Parents in Full time farming:	7.
Home Farm Area: Ranged from:	20 Hectares to 1,000 Hectares

I decided to meet with the participants individually, to discuss their commitment to the programme. I wanted to rescue the situation as best I could. This became 'Class 4'. I assigned the following questionnaire, (see appendix 4) for completion and having ascertained from the principal that no

absolute rubric would be infringed were the participants to devote themselves to this as homework, I asked them to have it prepared for our meeting.

The questionnaire was designed to promote discussion about a future career in rural Ireland and to provide some insight into their individual thinking regarding their futures. On this occasion all had completed the questionnaire - evidence that the rebellion over homework was over.

I discovered that the majority wished to acquire some skills as:

- Apprentice electricians (2),
- Plumber (1),
- Carpenter (1),
- Refrigeration plant fitter (1),
- Panel beater (1),
- Horticultural producer (1),
- Livery provider or auctioneer (1),
- Farming in Poland (1) and
- Farming through inheritance (1).

Looking again at the original applications to the college, my questionnaire showed that the numbers proposing to enter full-time farming (originally eight) had dropped to two. This - taken positively - was evidence of a growing enlightenment. Of the eight who had declared for full-time farming and had little to gain from rural development, six had seen the need to supplement their incomes through alternative enterprises and rural development. That said, they had given surprisingly little attention to furthering their choices; only one knew where to go for further training. The programme, as I interpreted it, was not geared to provide this range of training.

I had some sympathy for their dilemma. It was evident that their original commitment had changed radically and might well change again. When I pressed them on what they would do next to further their careers, most spoke vaguely of doing a placement (i.e. a mandatory three-month stay with a master craftsman or other suitable individual). It seemed very slapdash and uncommitted approach to getting a recognised qualification. Further conversation elicited that the majority had recently changed their career decisions. Caution suggested that even these decisions be interpreted as transient.

Their perception of the programme was revealing, as the following evidence shows. They were very matter-of-fact about what they wanted. All (10/10) recognised that a career in farming was troubled by uncertainty. An ability to bring in weekly cash was a widespread and pressing aspiration (7/10). Their interpretation of the programme's promotional literature convinced them that the Certificate in Rural Enterprise was best fitted to meet their needs (7/10). They had little use for rural development or rural community development

(8/10). Some expressed disappointment, saying it was too theoretical (4/10). None (0/10) had any experience of rural community development.

I was struck by a conversation I had about that time with my son who was enjoying his first experience of teaching. His topic was computer skills for a group of primary teachers. He claimed that he based all his teaching on their experience. He claimed that in a sense he taught nothing new because he was at pains to relate all to his students' experience. The light dawned. My students had no experience in rural community development on which I might build; there was no foundation and low motivation. Tacit and procedural knowledge – not to mention propositional – had no context for these young men. With a great deal of effort I might have lined up Vygotsky's (1978) concept of proximal development, which focuses on the gap between what students might do with assistance and what they can do independently (therefore needing no assistance). Vygotsky suggests that the educational goal should be to move participants from dependence to independence. However my perception was that the participants had little of Vygotsky's independent experience on which to base this approach. Not one student had had any meaningful contact with a rural community and only the western student had first hand experience of an alternative enterprise. Some appropriate experience might have been provided through visits and placement. That was not provided for in this curriculum. Without experience to draw on, I could not reasonably expect them to ask searching questions related to their future careers. In fact they asked no questions. There ought to have been questions. Engagement with arrangements for one's future career that does not give rise to querying is a very uncomfortable situation. Rorty (1979: 61) suggests that the Cartesian domination marked "the triumph of the quest for certainty over the quest for wisdom." 'Quest' infers mission, dedicated purpose; this was sadly missing.

The students expected to acquire factual information (10/10). They cited their experience of the agricultural modules of the programme, where it was clear from the texts what was required. They looked for learning but not for wisdom or insight. This was the pattern of their experience, derived from the didactic approach practised in the other modules of the syllabus and in their experience of second level education.

Their mode of learning had not given them an appreciation of sharing wisdom. It dawned on me that they wanted to subvert the curriculum into a collection of specifics, which they would learn and reel off in an examination. This was the prevailing goal. As we shall see, the certifying authorities share it.

Classes Resumed

Time began to press. I concentrated on delivering facts. I prepared class notes, closely following the curriculum. I explained each topic and shared my

prepared notes. I encouraged discussion and sought a response from the students, with mixed results. I continued thus until class 8, when the students decided to ignore me, by refusing to respond in any way to my discourse. I had never come across this before. I thought it offensive and immature. I determined to hide my feelings. I stoically completed the two-hour class. I persisted in pressing a point to one student who reluctantly answered, to the vocal annoyance of three ‘controlling‘ students, who hissed at him. One called him a 'w---er'.

After the class I conferred with the headmaster, critical friends and colleagues. I decided on the following strategy. I would prepare notes in greater detail. I would share them with the students. They would study them. I would make myself available to clarify any difficulties. They would not be required to attend full class, only to collect the notes. I would be happy to work with those who wished to stay.

The reaction to my decisions was revealing. The three who led the class in ostracising me were baffled; they held their heads low; one reddened. One student said this was all the fault of the three ringleaders. Another asked me to reconsider and said they would conduct themselves. I said I was not prepared to accept what happened. It reflected on all of them. Time coerced me to complete the programme. Despite pleadings, I followed that line for four classes. Relations then improved. Subsequently we collaborated well in preparing assignments and projects for the official examination.

Nevertheless, I was conscious of a sense of failure. I completed the programme by doing precisely what I least wished to do. I abandoned conversational learning, reducing the curriculum to digestible facts. Worse, I re-instated myself as the ‘expert’, the source of wisdom, spoon-feeding the participants in the name of education. I became complicit in endorsing the public examination as the dominant goal of our endeavours. Here, if ever, was a living example of Whitehead’s (1993: 8) ‘living contradiction’. Here I was denying and obstructing my principled commitment to dialogue. Here students and I were ready collaborators in short-changing ourselves on the potential of rural community development and its relevance to their future careers. That relevance went beyond the curriculum and in a context is touted abroad as a preparation for life, the outcome was shocking.

Hart (2001: 5) suggests "The educator's role includes helping to find the song that sings in the student and helping him or her learn to sing it." This he sees coming through questions. This did not occur to these students.

Examinations

There were no past examination papers for the module 'Profile of Rural Ireland'. I set a mock examination. I doubled the number of questions prescribed by the NCVA, so as to cover the curriculum comprehensively. Only three passed this examination. I gave individual feedback on the answers and pointed out that the lengthy question paper would probably have similar questions in the official test. I advised that if they prepared by going over the 'mock' examination, they could be confident of passing.

The procedure for generating the official test required that I submit a draft of the examination paper to the NCVA. The NCVA would be free to accept, amend or reject this. The examination paper comes in two parts. Part A has twelve short questions, covering the curriculum; ten must be answered. Part B calls for four 'structured' questions; two must be answered. 'Structured' means the question is a composite of sub-questions, of increasing complexity.

My Part A paper was accepted. In Part B, two of four questions were rejected. I think that this is noteworthy. These were the original questions I had submitted for Part B:

Section B
4 Structured Questions. 2 Questions to be answered.

Question 1 (Rejected by the NCVA)
Answer sections a and b and either c or d.

a. Briefly describe why you decided to do this course. (4 marks)
b. How did the course help you? (6 marks)
c. If there were shortcomings in the curriculum, what improvements would you suggest to it? (10 marks)

or

d. If the curriculum was entirely satisfactory, what were its special strengths? (10 marks).

Question 2 (Rejected by the NCVA)

a. Briefly describe your future career in rural Ireland. (3 marks)
b. What sections of this course will be of use to you? (4 marks)
c. Why and how will they help you? (5 Marks)
d. Recommend 4 changes (they can be additions, deletions or whatever) that you would like to see implemented. (8 marks)

Question 3 (Accepted by the NCVA)
You are a member of your local community development association at home. Your association has decided to undertake a development programme. You are asked to advise the community on how this should be done.
Briefly describe the steps that you believe should be implemented, to put a programme into operation. (5 Marks)
Say why each step is necessary. (6 marks).
How would you evaluate progress? (9 marks)

Question 4 (Accepted by the NCVA)
Describe what you can do for your local community. (4 marks)
How would you set about winning your community's approval for your ideas? (6 marks)
Briefly describe how you would set about involving official and non-government organisations in your plans. (10 marks).

Questions 1 and 2 were rejected by the NCVA on the grounds that they could not be demonstrably directly related to the curriculum on a section-by-section basis.

The final version of Part B was as follows:

Section B
4 Structured Questions. 2 Questions to be answered. Use the answer book provided. Clearly number the questions you have selected.

Question 1(formerly question 3 above)
You are a member of your local community development association at home. Your association has decided to undertake a development programme. You are asked to advise the community on how this should be done.
Briefly describe the steps that you believe should be implemented, to put a programme into operation. (5 Marks)
Say why each step is necessary. (6 marks).
How would you evaluate progress? (9 marks)

Question 2 (formerly question 4 above)
Describe what you can do for your local community. (4 marks)
How would you set about winning your community's approval for your ideas. (6 marks)
Briefly describe how you would set about involving official and non-government organisations in your plans. (10 marks).

Question 3
You have been invited back to your school to talk to some final year students about the benefits of the Certificate in Rural Enterprise programme.
Briefly describe the programme (4 marks).
State how the curriculum has been of use to you and might be of use to your audience. Be specific, citing different parts of the curriculum. (8 marks)
Share with your audience the specific benefits to you of the course. (8 marks)

Question 4
You have been asked by your local community to provide a suitable training course for people in your age group in the parish. You have a free hand.
Briefly describe the purpose of your programme. (5 marks)
Briefly describe how this programme would be conducted. Remember it is a community development programme. Specifically say what you would be doing and what you would expect the participants to do. (6 marks)
In no more than 70 words, describe what you consider to be the important and significant content of your programme. (9 marks)

Only one student selected questioned 1 of the structured questions. His answer was exceptional. He is a bright but disaffected student. He told me he was in the college under duress, at his mother's insistence. She expected her mother (his grandmother) would by-pass her other children and make him her heir to a substantial farm. This was a dubious basis on which to build a career.

He was one of the three influential dissenters in class. Given the tenuous nature of his future in agriculture, his frustrated behaviour was understandable and not entirely without justification. After the exam, we met when he was handing in some projects. I congratulated him on his performance and particularly on his answer to structured question 1. I told him that there were times when I could cheerfully have throttled him. He had kept his light under the proverbial bushel. It was a matter of some regret that we had not made better use of our opportunity together. We parted amicably.

Despite some staggering examples of ignorance, e.g. defining the social economy as running discos, the ten students all passed. Three were awarded a merit. This may be due to positive marking, which rewards all accurate information and ignores overwhelming evidence of profoundest ignorance.

None of the students qualified for the Certificate in Rural Enterprise. All failed to qualify in the prescribed agricultural modules. They had a second opportunity to qualify in the autumn. This outcome is significant, given the participants' loudly proclaimed preference for the certainties of the agricultural curriculum.

This partially satisfactory outcome, i.e. the success at the rural development element of the examinations, eclipses the palpable disenchantment the students and I experienced. The focus of national (Teagasc, Departments of Agriculture and Rural Development, of Education and Science, of Enterprise, Trade and Employment, the NCVA and FÁS) and EU agencies dwells on these outwardly satisfactory and duly certified outcomes. The supporting statistics of the examination would be cited in official annual reports and appraisals. Success rates would point to money well spent and would be cited as unassailable justification for continuing the programmes. The classroom experience does not surface. There was no mechanism to deal with the dissatisfaction of participants and teachers.

A Benevolent View?

These students, typically in their late teens and early twenties, were immersed in the solitary process of taking career decisions. The freedoms of childhood had recently given way to burdens of maturity.

I have demonstrated their propensity to change their career choice within the three-month interval of our acquaintance. They were inadequately informed on pathways to their choice of occupation. Their dilemmas surrounding their careers received little support. By that I mean that an opportunity to contextualise the curriculum in their individual favour and circumstance was not provided on the programme. An educational opportunity was sabotaged.

All the students had poor self–esteem. This they demonstrated by their classroom immaturity, their taking fright at the prospect of any ambiguity around what they might learn. In our private conversations some admitted that they never experienced the conversational approach. Not to expect to be asked for one's opinion was a grave reflection on their experience of education. To accept this condition was evidence of their low self-esteem. To blight this opportunity by trivialising it or ridiculing it -as some of them did - was as much a symptom of immaturity as it was of inability to contribute. While I was frustrated by this apparent non-cooperation, it was undoubtedly trying for them. It was difficult to judge how well informed their decision to pursue the programme was in the first place. The students' tendency to put one another down did not help. Their mindset ensured further limitations to how and what we might address:

- Not for them Gardner's (1993) discoveries of 'multiple intelligences'. Despite my efforts, they were uncomfortable with any notion that people learn effectively through methods other than 'chalk and talk'.

- They were to be excluded from the benefits of experiential learning with what Kolb (1984) had identified as its attendant potential for development and lifelong acumen.

- Isaacs' tri-partite vision (1999: 13) of the outcomes of a dialogical approach to education - in the sense of elucidating meaning, giving voice to feelings and processing the power to act - was rejected.

- Lost too were inter-related building blocks of community development: personal development, interpersonal skills and decision-making.

Notions that what we were about would include personal development and change, growth, reflection and transformation, were - as I have shown - rejected from the outset. Students' final comments to me, validated by the McDonald letter in appendix six, reflected no element of insight or regret about this missed opportunity.

Are these students better fitted to play their part in rural development as a result of this programme? I think not. I would find it difficult to demonstrate either from their course work or from our informal discourses that they had grown in understanding of rural development. I met them on the last day of term, to evaluate their experiences. In very robust terms they told me and the headmaster that the module was irrelevant. They could see no use for it. I hope that this aversion is short-lived.

Independent confirmation of this aversion came in the second week in June 2000. I was the NCVA extern examiner for the Certificate in Rural Enterprise in three locations in Connaught. I asked to meet with three of the 'best' students. All found the module irrelevant. I expected that because these

western students resided at home, they might more readily experience the module's relevance in their communities. This was not so. I grant that this disaffection is probably prejudiced by the phenomenon that young people are rarely represented in community groups. This absence from the cutting edge of community development raises fundamental questions about the purposes and relevance of this curriculum for these students. With no experience of community development are these young people ready for this training, regardless of how exceptional its content and process might be? The informal view of 'Partners', the organisation that conducts the Training for Transformation programme is that they are not. They discourage participation by anyone less than 21 years, on the grounds that they have few relevant, shareable experiences.

Summary

The students were engaging with a subject, of which they had no experience. They were taught through a process in which they had no familiarity. The programme was being pursued conceptually in contrast to applicably, and theoretically versus experientially. Boarding away from home and from their local communities exacerbated this. They were schooled, not educated.

They were performance oriented and yet disposed to minimal engagement. This thwarted a pursuit of excellence, conversational learning and thoughtful commitment to reflection and action. They had made at best tenuous decisions regarding their futures. This instability of their career decisions did not impinge on the curriculum and vice versa. The programme, which was just starting out and largely untried, failed to engage with the participants and teachers. Despite my efforts, the students failed to respond to or did not comprehend the invitation to agree our own curriculum.

The Curriculum

The curriculum (see copy in appendix four) was largely assembled outside the context of a living rural community. Projects apart, it left minimal discretion to stakeholders. It reflected the view that 'one size fits all'. It is implemented, without adjustment, throughout the State. Nevertheless, as we have seen, its aspirations are noble. A real stumbling block lay in the dichotomy between these aspirations and the content of the curriculum. For example 'taking initiative, taking responsibility for one's own learning and progress, problem solving, applying theoretical knowledge in practical contexts', (NCVA 1999: 2), all desiderata in rural community development, found no significant expression in the curriculum. It focused on what was theoretical about rural development and shunned the experiential. It dealt in empirical knowledge and had little time for procedural and tacit knowledge.

The coursework required students to complete projects. Prescriptive directions to the candidates undermined these opportunities for personal

learning. For example, a comparison of two EU member states is required. Unfortunately Ireland is excluded. In requiring the candidates' personal views on this comparison, they are rewarded with only 5% of the marks. Again for example, the project specified that candidates 'research and profile' – as part of a team - an area of rural Ireland. Being away from one's rural hinterland in a boarding college did not facilitate the participation of a local team.

Much of the content of the curriculum was ephemeral because it was tied to the conditions for grant aid of that period (1994 – 2000). It required committing to memory administrative aspects of schemes that are now (2001) redundant because these schemes have been superseded. This memory-work provides ideal material for Paper A multi-question examination, for quantifiable evaluation and quantifiable grading. Prioritising this material as suitable content in rural community development was dubious on two counts:

1) The material was on the point of being obsolete.
2) Even if it were current, it had little to do with the contextual, practice or relational aspects of rural community development.

Processes that called for students to think, to reflect on potential impacts in one's own community, in one's own life and that would value their thoughtful comments, remained outside this curriculum. A striking contrast exists between official training in agriculture and official training in rural development. Agriculture carries three concomitant opportunities for supervised 'hands-on' experiences, (i) in college, (ii) with host-farmers and (iii) on students' home farms, which their curriculum exploits. This contrasts with no parallel experiential opportunities in rural development, where the need was arguably more pressing.

Hock (2,000) – the founder of Visa USA and Visa International – suggests that:

> "...the first and paramount responsibility of any one who purports to manage is to manage self: one's own integrity, character, ethics, knowledge, wisdom, temperament, words and acts. It is a complex, unending, incredibly difficult, oft shunned task."

This focus – on oneself - was not facilitated by the curriculum. Yet this focus was at the core of the students' dilemmas as they tried to take life-determining decisions. The curriculum does not sustain this and as personal development was not on the curriculum, participants would not entertain it.

The modular approach of the agricultural subjects induced a minimalist response from the participants. ' What was the minimum required to pass?' was the crie de coeur. Assessment on the agricultural side concentrated on

certifying that students had reached a standard. It did not encourage the pursuit of excellence, nor was outstanding achievement recognised or celebrated.

I looked again to Schön (1996: 31 et seq.) to explain the shortcomings of this traditional approach. His reservations about third level institutions and the professions centre on his perception that they manage to increase the gap between theory and practice because they cling to the empirical, positivist methodology. This is what has happened to this curriculum.

In chapter three, I demonstrated the shortcomings of technical rationality on post-modern agriculture. I dwelt on its effects on research in rural community development. My experience was that it had a tendency to deliver blueprints as its dominant means of education and training. Confronted with idiosyncratic contexts and ever-changing practices of community development, this approach had severe shortcomings. This curriculum is an example of the unsuitability of the technical rationality approach.

From an organisational standpoint one could ignore the process of delivery. By that I mean that by concentrating on the official outcomes in terms of examination results, one could be persuaded that all was satisfactory, provided a respectable number completed the programme successfully. But this perception was based on participants restating transmitted facts and delivering projects largely downloaded from the Internet. It did not deliver competency in rural community development, any hint of transformation of every day practice or move towards providing a reflective participant or potential practitioner.

I believe that practitioners, who implement a rural development curriculum locally that reflects indigenous practice, have a distinct advantage when they build their lessons on shareable local practical experience. This contextualisation can embrace the experiences of the practitioner and students alike. Students can readily explore contexts where specific changes have occurred and commit to accomplishing something similar themselves. The converse makes the point more forcefully. Instructors, who would 'teach' rural development by precluding all mention of both the practice and context of the participants' rural communities, defy good sense and create preventable complexities for their students. They are not unlike riverbank swimming trainers, who concentrate on a theoretical approach to swimming on dry land and avoid the only context where progress can be genuinely evaluated, i.e. in the water.

Towards a Relevant Curriculum

Is it desirable to deliver a nation-wide, a-contextual, 'one size fits all' qualification for stakeholders in a system of unique contexts that is rural

community development? It cannot be recommended. If pursued, one must ask 'to what purpose?' But what we may be looking at is an example where the demands of the academic certification tail have largely wagged the body of this curriculum.

I cite two instances in support of my contention that a purely theoretical curriculum, devoid of a community setting, is not relevant. In the first I rely on the evidence of rural community development training given some years ago to a community in Mayo Abbey, County Mayo, which is confirmed in the Lally letter of validation in appendix six. Firstly it was given at the community's own request. The local rural development officer invited participants to help her draw up the curriculum. It was to reflect the participants' preoccupations. Attendance at the programme averaged 90%. The outcome in terms of activities undertaken since within that community included:

1 A community resource survey.
2 A census of population.
3 The building of a community hall, offices, training and exhibition centre, (one of the finest in the west.)
4 A representative organisation.
5 A youth training programme.
6 A collaborative venture with neighbouring communities in developing an ancient pilgrim path.

If this community's particular context had not been allowed to surface, if the rural development officer had decided to confine her intervention to a theoretical course, none of these initiatives could be nurtured. The lack of even one initiative from the 'Profile of Rural Ireland' module is telling. Authorities will counter that it would be difficult to evaluate.

My second instance is centred on a successful programme "Partners in Community Leadership – Youth and Adults Working Together for Better Communities" (Hougen et al. 1993). I cite this programme as one evaluated example (Hougen et al. 1995) of how adolescents have been involved in rural community development. This programme (Hougen 1995: 2):

- " Focuses on the community development process.
- Involves youth in community leadership and decision-making.
- Encourages youth and adults to form partnerships."

Features of the programme that suggest alternative approaches to 'Profile of Rural Ireland' include:

1. It has adults and youth work together. This reflects life in rural communities. Rural communities where adolescents are the sole activists are rare. Nor would such developments be desirable.

2. Extension agents gear the programme for use. The interaction takes place in real rural communities. This is not a theoretical approach.

3. Participants deliver the programme in their own communities. They address their communities' day-to-day concerns.

4. The programme is highly participatory. A 'hands-on' style is mandatory. Participants learn by doing.

5. Its participants evaluate the programme.

The programme consists of 10 modules that require about 15 hours of involvement, not including the time spent with the community. The modules have the following titles and are as follows:

Module 1: The Kick Off
Participants are introduced to the programme and get to know one another.

Module 2: Working Together
Participants focus on the strengths and challenges presented to youth and adults working together as partners.

Module 3: Getting to Know My Community
Participants examine various aspects of their community.

Module 4: Looking at our Community Today
Participants share their differing perspectives to build a more comprehensive view of their community.

Module 5: Knowing our Community Leaders
Participants meet with community leaders to discover their perspectives on important community issues.

Module 6: Examining Our Community's Future
Participants set out how they would like their community to evolve.

Module 7: Identifying Our Community Project
Participants select a project that addresses a need or issue in the community.

Module 8: Launching Our Action Plan
Participants develop an action plan to address their identified project.

Module 9: Doing Our Community Project
Participants conduct an action project using the knowledge and skills gained from the programme.

Module 10: The Lift Off
Participants gather evaluation information, discuss future plans and celebrate accomplishments. Youth and adult participants are challenged to continue community work within existing community organisations.

This programme demonstrates an alternative approach. However I do not like it. It is over prescriptive and dogmatic on delivery. Its merit for my purposes is that it works out of a different approach which values the experiential and the participants as members of their separate communities. It engages in real community development as the means of imparting skills, attitudes and knowledge. It is context based and practice driven. Essentially it is an apprenticeship. In short the programme shows that there is another way.

Such an approach would require adjustments from the semi-state agencies that provide and certify our courses. Fundamental questions arise about power, what might be accomplished, how effectiveness might be demonstrated, whether the existing arrangements can be reformed and whether the whole endeavour might better be advanced through non government agencies.

Consequences of Our Current Practice

Schön (1995) called for a new epistemology for a new scholarship; this may be construed as the basis of action research. There is a matching need for a new epistemology for the reflective practice that is community development, one that recognises its singular trait of 'knowledge/skill in action'. 'Profile of Rural Ireland' uses an epistemology where knowledge is divorced from action. There are consequences to this practice. Knowledge is seen as extraneously situated, outside the participant. There is no invitation to make one's own of it or of generating some of one's own theories about community development. 'In community knowledge' or wisdom, the focus of much of chapter five is not facilitated. Lawson (1961: vii) charges that this kind of wisdom lies in human action, possessed of both intellectual and ethical dimensions and that the promotion of this type of wisdom is the task of education.

Lee Williams (2000:8) relates the frustration a rural community that wished to improve employment. This community decided to attract industry. To this end they tidied up the locality. No one came. They then decided to start their own industry. Shortage of land and hostile reaction from existing industries brought this to a halt. They understood the underlying power issues that prevented development only after they learned to stop blaming themselves. Such tacit, emergent, chancy, unreplicable but 'must-be-self-discovered' learning - at the heart of community development - could not surface in the official curriculum.

The Reflective Community Development Practitioner

I pondered over the lessons of teaching this curriculum, "Profile of Rural Ireland". Unforeseen elements came to characterise it. I had expected to

improve my practice within a predictable system of three elements: participants, suitable curriculum and effective practitioner.

I related how I wished to resign. Two advisors suggested that I ditch this experience and reconstitute it in a more appropriate setting, with compliant participants. I might experience the consolations that accompany predictability, control and a restricted range of differences.

I slowly began to appreciate that the attraction in resigning or tinkering with the conditions of my investigation would deny the reality of my circumstances. Were I to follow this advice I would undermine my case. Because my case revolves around the predicament of practitioners in the field who want to improve. They need to conduct effective research on their practice. No effective alternatives come to mind.

These circumstances were not unique; I had reports of similar difficulties from colleagues with equally disenchanted students. I realised that I was experiencing Schön's (1983: 42) 'swampy lowlands' of the practitioner's everyday reality, a reality around its processes that without this research would not otherwise come to light. If I were to persist, I could do something about it.

The very action that I am engaged with, now, I believe writing up this account, encompasses the capacity to effectively improve the training being offered. When this work is published it has the potential to make a difference for greater effectiveness. It will then have given expression to that action - element of action research that is the harbinger of improvement in practice and in social conditions.

There was also an unanticipated outcome to this teaching episode. I had expected to produce a pedestrian account, based on some reflections and tested improvements on training of new entrants to rural community development. I had expected to highlight how I would have enhanced my practice. I thought the 'surprise' element of action research could not manifest itself in this humdrum work. Instead I discovered blocking, conflict and 'swampy lowlands'. I was educating in a vacuum. The skills and knowledge that I thought might be acquired were not finding any practical expression. Because of the dominance of certification and evaluation procedures, management did not know the realities of the classroom. Had I not produced this account of 'swampy lowland' life, no basis for reform would present. The evidence, if anything, showed to the contrary. I, as an extern examiner, was reporting significant success rates in the public examinations. In this I was confirming that all was well. In an unforeseen way, through action research, this account was produced, rooted in the reality of my classroom experience. It reflects events officially undisclosed - if not denied.

Because this account demonstrates that rural community development is not effectively advanced through this curriculum, I have improved my practice in an unanticipated way.

My methodological approach resulted in my thinking of this venture in different ways. It allowed me to come to terms with a contradiction where I had been forced to deny my values. More significantly it guided me in making my case for a better way by indicating how I could best write a compelling account of what had occurred and go on to suggest (below) a better approach. I found Schön (1995 :29) particularly encouraging:

> " We should think about practice as a setting not only for the application of knowledge but for its generation. We should ask not only how practitioners can better apply the results of academic research, but what kinds of knowing are already embedded in competent practice.
>
> Perhaps there is an epistemology of practice that takes fuller account of the competence practitioners sometimes display in situations of uncertainty, complexity, uniqueness, and conflict. Perhaps there is a way of looking at problem-setting and intuitive artistry that presents these activities as describable and as susceptible to a kind of rigor that falls outside the boundaries of technical rationality. "

I find this apt. The 'epistemology of practice' in Schön's description of my situation - 'uncertainty, complexity, uniqueness, and conflict' applied to my experience. Furthermore, and as he predicted, it has led to valuable discovery in this particular investigation. Significantly it helps copper fasten the case for action research as a methodology that outstandingly helps us unearth concealed influences and tacit knowledge.

I trace many insights to the adversity I endured in the classroom. Reflection allows this adversity to bring forward new thinking and solutions. Schön describes this reflection as ' knowing in action ' and elaborates:

> " When the practitioner reflects-in-action in a case he [she} perceives as unique, paying attention to phenomena and surfacing his intuitive understanding of them, his [her] experimenting is at once exploratory, move testing, and hypothesis testing. The three functions are fulfilled by the very same actions. " (1987: 72)

My finding was that as an approach to rural community development, the curriculum "Profile of Rural Ireland" was not beneficial. I pondered over the inconsistencies that the curriculum promoted; it had a context-based system taught a-contextually and a practice-driven system imparted theoretically.

Perhaps the lesson is that practitioners need to reflect in the moment of action (conversation / teaching). From this standpoint, situations do not present themselves as though they might be predictable or knowable but as unfamiliar, unreliable, troubling and exasperating (for all participants). It is reflection on and from this troubling state of affairs that instigates new solutions, new knowledge and transformed practice.

Habermas suggests reasons why procedures are so difficult to reform. His thesis (in "The Theory of Communicative Action" 1984) is that all procedures become abstract over time. They begin, as undoubtedly "Profile of Rural Ireland" began, as generative ideas that enthuse practitioners. In time these ideas become a failing system and contemporaneously, are elevated beyond the consciousness of practitioners. They begin to exist outside them, of their influence and control. Instead of concerning themselves with the excitement of evolving ideas, of continually checking that they 'fit' the needs and competencies of the participants, practitioners can become trapped in the systematised, atrophied substitute and devote their energies to defending the system, as they know it. This gives certain piquancy to the phrase 'working the system'.

A set curriculum, with a rigid evaluation is an invitation to stop thinking. There is evidence that such is the case here. Communities cannot own this kind of knowledge. Implicit too is that one type of knowledge is valued by the system, factual and empirically derived knowledge. Emancipatory, tacit, personal knowledge and wisdom arising from experience are largely ignored. That the curriculum is capable of quantifiable appraisal amounts to closing the case for the status quo. All that remains is to commission the gatekeepers to preserve and uphold it.

Elliott (1998 p xiv) laments this short-changing of the curriculum's promise:

> " Planning the curriculum by objectives distorts the nature of knowledge and leaves little room for individuals to use our culture as a medium for the development of their own thinking in relation to things that matter in life. By standardising and pre-determining learning outcomes 'objectives' inhibit the expression of individuality and creativity in learning, and thereby prevent young people from personally appropriating culture as a resource for making sense of their experience. This approach to curriculum may be appropriate in a context where people need to acquire specific skills and techniques, but more is required in the context of a general education aimed at developing young people's capacities for discernment, discrimination and judgement in the complex and unstructured situations they will encounter in life. "

Because community development is both a process and a lived experience, his words are particularly telling. A programme that followed Elliott would create a more supportive background for students of the Certificate in Rural Enterprise.

No community has yet played 'hard ball' with the official programme, "Profile of Rural Ireland" nor taken the teaching agencies to task over the few skills their graduates acquire in rural community development. I am reporting that this programme is ineffective. Devising a new curriculum and locating it in communities will not be adequate.

A different epistemology for community development, a community environment for its implementation and for the involvement of suitable non – government organisations (NGO's) in this field of training are required. This last is advocated because of NGO's matchless expertise of involvement at community level, because of their on-going need to bring on new recruits and because they are less likely to become bogged down by the marginal matters of evaluation and examinations.

Formulating My Own Theory…

I focused on the dynamics of how community development might be 'taught'. My accomplishment with "Profile of Rural Ireland" might be summarised as an educational achievement, endorsed for the students by an official vocational award but failing to convert into effective use of knowledge. The programme I taught managed to ignore the very aspects that Bawden indicated were excluded also by technical rationality, viz. ' ethical, aesthetic spiritual, cultural and ecological concerns' (Bawden 1984: 4). This neglect tied the curriculum to the outdated paradigms of bygone eras.

I considered how community development prospered in the past, before classroom approaches. How did we come to have '*Meitheal's*[9] in the not so distant past*?* How were these organised and sustained? What determined who might participate? Were there lessons for modern rural communities?

I sought a new pedagogy. A suitable curriculum would not consist of a cluster of facts like mathematics, where there is only one correct answer. Community development is about a way of living in relation to one's fellow citizens, oneself and the issues that confront one's community. It is both ethical and moral. Its knowledge is applied in action. It is a form of wisdom that may be at times intuitive; we simply know what to do. It is about learning how to make an effective contribution to future well-being. It is a process. It is a form of

[9] A meitheal according to Dineen (1927: 736) is a number of local men (sic) who make themselves available for agricultural work locally. The custom has virtually expired.

socialisation inaccessible from books or conceptually but through experience. It is at times ambiguous, vulnerable and open to the uncertain.

Hart (2001:4) says that 'intolerance and fear of ambiguity and the unknown contributes to the sterilization and commodification of knowledge, where single correct answers, fear of making mistakes, and multiple choice exams are the gatekeepers of certainty.' Is this not the outcome of 'Profile of Rural Ireland'?

I thought of skills we acquire that are not always formally taught. Learning how to whistle, ride a bicycle, cut turf, become sociable and acquire a working vocabulary are accomplishments largely acquired through imitation, attempt and repetition. They are examples of abilities we acquire at or close to home. They are not the subjects of certification or the focus of academic scrutiny. This knowledge is tacit. There is something about how we acquire facility in these capabilities that is efficiently effective. In these examples I was challenged to rethink how I learn. In the process of our early learning, that which we have come to view as secondary might be key (Polanyi 1958).

Hanks (1991: 14) put my dilemma rather well: “What kinds of social engagements provide the proper context for learning to take place?“ He asks this in the preface of a fascinating book by Lave and Wenger (1991). Hanks answers his question (op cit: 14 -15):

> “ The individual learner is not gaining a discrete body of abstract knowledge which (s)he will then transport and reapply in later contexts. Instead (s)he acquires the skill to perform by actually engaging in the process, under attenuated conditions of legitimate peripheral participation. This central concept denotes the particular mode of engagement of a learner who participates in the actual practice of an expert, but only to a limited degree and with limited responsibility for the ultimate product as a whole. There is no necessary implication that a learner acquires mental representations that remain fixed thereafter, nor that the “lesson“ taught consists itself in a set of abstract representations.“

Lave and Wenger won me over when they said (p 32) that “children are, after all, quintessentially legitimate peripheral participants in adult social worlds.“ This is a way of learning that is under-appreciated. They postulate that it is a form of apprenticeship. Longstanding apprenticeships, organised by guild, were an effective form of learning, where trainees commonly lived with their masters and in turn established themselves as masters. The statement “I am a carpenter, / a butcher, /a blacksmith” carried the inference of an identity formed of years of apprenticeship, of located or situational learning, observing, attempting, reassessing and advancing. This was within a relationship where the master taught, demonstrated, facilitated, corrected,

assessed and encouraged. The growing maturity of the trainee was factored into the trainee's experiential learning.

I think this kind of training can be more effective in community development. It accommodates the growing capacity for responsibility of community development's new entrants. It provides a gradual and natural transition from early learning in young trainees' homes to their communities.

My emerging theory surmised how community was encouraged about a hundred years ago. The learning was provided in one's local community, where trial and error was accommodated, where stories of past feats were told and expertise passed down the generations. If we learn the basic skills of how to conduct ourselves at home, it seems likely that we can learn our basic community skills in our communities. If not there, where is the best alternative? This tradition follows apprenticeships closely.

Hanks (1991: 14) supports this apprenticeship system as an effective approach. He suggests that the novice should progress "…by actually engaging in the process, under attenuated conditions of *legitimate peripheral participation."* (Italics Hanks'). He explains:

> " This central concept denotes the particular mode of engagement of a learner who participates in the actual practice as an expert, but only to a limited degree and with limited responsibility for the ultimate product as a whole."

In emphasising the way that should be followed, his advice is brusque: "If learning is about increased access to performance, then the way to maximise learning is to perform, not to talk about it." (Op cit: 22). He would have little patience with either the official curriculum or its theoretical approach. To make progress, a context of real community development is a prerequisite, as are practical, participative experiences that are not risky and that are explicitly provided as appropriate learning opportunities for new entrants.

Lave and Wenger (1991: 29) endorse this view *(Italics theirs)*:

> " Learning viewed as situated activity has as its central defining characteristic a process that we call *legitimate peripheral participation.* By this we mean to draw attention to the point that learners inevitably participate in communities of practitioners and that the mastery of knowledge and skill requires newcomers to move towards full participation in the socio-cultural practices of the community. "

But what does situated learning mean? Lave and Wenger (op cit: 33) again:

> [Situated Learning] 'took on the proportions of a general theoretical

perspective, the basis of claims about the relational character of knowledge and learning, about the negotiated character of meaning, and about the concerned (engaged, dilemma driven) nature of learning activity for the people involved. That perspective meant that there is no activity that is not situated. It implies emphasis on comprehensive understanding involving the whole person rather than "receiving" a body of factual knowledge about the world; on activity in and with the world; and on the view that the agent, activity, and the world mutually constitute each other.'

What I understand from this is that the theory of situated learning (or of learning in situ):

- Incorporates and gives effective expression to the link between knowledge and learning, between knower and learner.
- Meaning – I assume in the sense of import or significance – is arrived at as an outcome of a shared end-result through dialogue and collective experiences with the learning community.
- The 'concerned' nature of the activity is reflected in the reality of the common quest for a solution to a communal dilemma.
- It is accomplished within a system, comprising the activity being learned, the learner and the contextual environment.

Lave and Wenger cite this theory of situated learning in five examples of apprenticeships. These are midwifery, tailoring, naval quarter mastering, butchery and - intriguingly – non-drinking alcoholics. Each represents a system, or situation where knowledgeable masters of learning facilitate self-discovery, share their growing knowledge and do that in such a way that apprentices in turn, over time, become masters. The kind of learning encompasses a process that:

1. Links the learner to the knower.
2. Promotes a shared understanding of the task in hand.
3. Ultimately solves the challenge.
4. Ensures that the process accepts responsibility for its own continuance by completing the cycle where the apprentice becomes a master.

It is notable that the last three of these specifications are absent in "Profile of Rural Ireland".

Essentially I advocate that situated learning, a form of apprenticeship, be the model of learning for community education and development. Just as in the five apprenticeships cited, each would share the common goal of ensuring that their expertise would grow and be passed on through the generations. So too should communities concern themselves with providing analogous opportunities to the upcoming generations to learn the ropes. Thus they ensure this expertise becomes part of a valued, living community tradition.

The benefits of apprenticeship would strengthen community development. What is needed is the contextualisation of the learning or ‘situated learning’, performance-centred learning experiences and a structure that re-establishes responsibility for training in local communities. The Hougen programme, outlined earlier and known as “ Partners in Community Leadership – Youth and Adults Working Together for Better Communities“ is an example. It provides this experiential and situated encounter for its participants.

This recommendation presents a problem regarding the validation of end results. Lave and Wenger (op cit: 112) take a view of validation that makes it redundant in community development. They say that in the absence of an outcome of ability to participate, ‘didactic caretakers‘ take over new entrants. The focus shifts from a learning opportunity through co-participation to a didactic approach perpetrated on the newcomer, who is viewed as a 'person-to-be-changed'. This has two consequences:

1 The learner becomes the object of change.
2 Exchange value replaces the use value that flows from increasing participation.

Where participation, that is use value, is the intention motivating the opportunity to learn, 'changes in cultural identity and social relations are inevitably part of the process'. If cultural identity, what I have been naming as community context, is ignored, exchange value, where knowledge is turned into a commodity, becomes the only possible outcome. This leads to a contradiction between ' the use and exchange values of the outcome of the learning, which manifests itself in conflicts between learning to know and learning to display knowledge for evaluation'. I leave it to Lave and Wenger (op cit: 112) to describe the consequences:

> "Testing in schools and in trade schools (unnecessary in situations of apprenticeship learning) is perhaps the most pervasive and salient example of a way of establishing value of knowledge. Test taking then becomes a new parasitic, the goal of which is to increase the exchange value of learning independently of its use value.”

But there is a bland assumption behind my guidance. That is that our communities are ready to act on this advice. This, for the historical reasons already related in the chapter two, is not so. Community development is a recent event. This is in contrast to continental European and American experiences, where there has been public support for community development for generations. This therefore affects my finding and modifies it to a goal to be attained, because the majority of Irish communities today are beginners. They continue to benefit from the involvement of their practitioners. They need to safeguard their independence by gradually taking charge of the induction of their new members.

Conclusion

In these closing paragraphs I have formulated the elements of my own theory on the training of new entrants and made some suggestions regarding the curriculum and the grounding of candidates for participation in training in rural community development. I have suggested that the more appropriate methodology be based on apprenticeship, promoting opportunities for legitimate peripheral participation. I acknowledge that communities in general here might not yet ready for this suggestion. I do not see this as a reason for postponing it. It should inform our long-term strategy for the future training in community development.

Two tasks remain:

1. Publishing my interim findings, so as to encourage further dialogue and agreed change in practices for this programme; and – as a prelude to:

2. Continuing the investigative action research cycle by deciding to explore best alternative proposals.

CHAPTER 5

REPORTING ON MY LEARNING EXPERIENCES IN THE TÓCHAR VALLEY NETWORK

"The future is not some place we are going to,
but one we are creating.
The paths to it are not found
but made,
and the activity of making them
changes both the maker and the destination." [*]

Introduction

I commenced this dissertation by recalling impressions of my first visit to the restored abbey at Ballintubber in the foreword of chapter one. That account revealed my attitude and limited reflective consciousness of rural community development before my career in rural development began. Using this recollection, I attempt to bring back my early experiences of learning about community development.

This chapter focuses first and foremost on two phenomena. Firstly it looks at a community's way of knowing that that is significant for them in their practice of rural community development in situ; what I refer to as 'in community knowledge'. Secondly it looks at their values and the significance of their values in their expression of community. I have signalled in chapter two the importance of values. I cited Bawden (1984: 4) as saying of values that they:

> 'reflect a focused concern for the well-being of the relationships between people and their environments as evaluated as much by ethical, aesthetic spiritual, cultural and ecological concerns, as by technical, economic, practical, social and political ones.'

I want to understand something more of the contributing effects to rural community development of ethical, aesthetic spiritual, cultural and ecological concerns, that is, values. Their values present an importunate challenge for me. 'In community knowledge', community values and my own values influence my practice and me. In this chapter, I wish to build on a theory that includes these influences.

I say that I am about the business of developing my own theory, that theory of practice on which I rely and which is the object of my research. With Atkinson (2000: 149) I found my interest in reflexivity as a research paradigm, within

[*] Commission for the Future, Australia, 1989. Quoted in Atweh et al, (1998: 83).

the field of action research, led me towards postmodern interpretations of experience. I hope to go on developing that theory, even (especially) when this work is finished. I particularly want to look at the nature of the knowledge base that underpins the every-day working of the Tóchar Valley Network and to explain the terms in which I have grown to understand that form of knowledge and relate to it. As a result of my association with the Tóchar Valley Network, I have come to see this knowledge, held in and by mature communities, as a source of their effectiveness and as a significant advantageous means of sustainability for the process of rural community development. I hold the view that applied community development is a body of competence, found within an established community's practice. It has been put together over time, in significant part through what this community describes as 'trial and error' and I describe as the product of reflexivity. Their trial and error or my 'reflexivity' helps validate this knowledge, by highlighting its existence and influence. By reflexivity I mean the recursive cycles of action research through which actions come to be reviewed for effectiveness, as described in Atweh et al. (1998:22).

In chapter four, I made the case for apprenticeship as the reliable way of learning for participants new to community development - see Hanks (1991: 14) and Lave and Wenger (1991: 29) for descriptions of apprenticeship under conditions of ' legitimate peripheral participation'. This form of apprenticeship is a significant link between this chapter, chapter five and the last, chapter four. I am suggesting here that my relationship to the Tochar Valley Network of communities for the duration of this project is aptly described as such an apprenticeship, that is one of ' legitimate peripheral participation'. It was the relevant learning process for me, a learning practitioner in the Tóchar Valley Network. In chapter four I described myself as a practitioner who taught; here I was a practitioner who learned.

Coming out of the technical rational paradigm of my earlier career, the perceived contribution of practitioners was one based on their expertise. They brought knowledge from elsewhere. Because I am working on the conviction that significant knowledge lies in communities and because I wish to access that knowledge, I am seeking the opportunity to access that knowledge. Because I now work in the era of sustainability, through a methodology of action research, where notions of knowledge being located in its entirety outside communities are redundant, the idea of the practitioner as a learner in the public domain is a normal facet of my practice. To publicly acknowledge that I am a learner, as I have done with these communities is as consistent with my values of openness and transparency as it is expedient for me as a means of gaining significant knowledge. So, I would wish to be able to claim to have improved my learning about two aspects of the nature of community development: 'in community knowledge' and community values. Such insights improve my practice.

The Data

The major part of the data was collected from tape recordings made, with the consent of the participants, of the sessions conducted within the Tóchar Valley by the team from Michigan State University and the representative participants of the twelve communities. I wrote up this data in a script and used that script as direct evidence of the proceedings and as material for reflection. It was supplemented through conversations with the stakeholders and the joint reviewing of drafts of this thesis.

Reflecting on my First Visit to Ballintubber

Reflecting now, some 15 years later on this first visit described at the beginning of this work, when I knew nothing of rural community development, I attempt to revisit my state of unawareness. I list the sensations that I recall affecting me on that first visit. These were:

A sense of history, faith, spirituality, silence and rurality.

There had been virtually no human contact with the local community on my first visit, apart from the lady of the swallows. Furthermore I had assumed that the Office of Public Works, the official agency that cares for Ireland's national monuments, had carried out the restoration of the abbey. That the abbey's refurbishment could be the product of community endeavour and commitment did not cross my mind.

My Second Visit

In 1993, as a specialist in rural development with Teagasc, I returned to Ballintubber, leading a group of cross-border practitioners in rural development together with a team from Michigan State University. I wished to show my visitors Irish examples of rural community development. I was, at the time, hard-pressed to find a suitable location. I had heard reports of my colleagues, Sr Maureen Lally, then rural development officer with Teagasc, and Terry Gallagher, County Mayo's then Chief Agricultural Officer and of their unique work in this area.

On this my second visit we were given the grand tour with a heady running commentary of stories, jokes, fables, parables, history, folklore, spiritual experiences and faith. We were told tales of loyalty, treachery, history, local folklore and sheer survival. One example: the local landlord, Moore of Moore Hall, had promised the community that he would donate his winnings if his horse won the Grand National horse race in 1847, the worst year of the Famine. The horse, ridden by a local young man, won.

We were shown the uncovered foundations of the Tóchar Phádraig causeway, great wooden planks that are 4,000 years old. We were advised from the book of Lismore on a suitable disposition for going on pilgrimage. We visited the local well that Patrick had reputedly used to baptise local converts. We were introduced to two more Tóchars within the abbey grounds.

The craggy relocated rocks - which I thought on my first visit were so incompatible with the abbey's surroundings - represented biblical events and facilitated reflection. Within the nearby lake there was a hermitage, based on an even older Carmelite foundation, a particular facility for visitors who would bring the notion of 'getting away from it all' to an utmost experience.

The swallows were back in the abbey. They were implementing a new strategic plan. They had moved their nest from beside the high altar to the back of the church. From there, I was told, they had much more scope targeting their visiting cards on the congregation. Everyone knew about keeping the door ajar during daylight hours.

The northern facing grave was that of Séan na Sagart[10], a local priest hunter, who had been murdered. The then local community had reluctantly buried his body within the abbey grounds and had marked their repugnance to doing so by orienting the grave northwards, 'where the sun never rises'. Nature collaborated in this act of disdain when a sapling grew in the grave and split it. This in time became the splendid ash tree of which I, years earlier, had been so approving.

The three shelters served several purposes. They related to Gospel events. The birth of Christ and Mary's visit to Elisabeth's home had been transposed to Irish rural settings. The third 'shelter' was a model of the type of earliest Irish church that our ancestors might have used. Later on we were brought to the Scioból (Dinneen: 1927: 972 - a barn or granary) for hospitality, a singing session and to learn, experientially, some Irish dancing.

I was affected by the celebratory style of the proceedings. Here was a community that was at one with its heritage and traditions and was proud of them. So much so that it was willing to go out of its way to share them with visitors, not in the accidental way one sometimes stumbles on a rural occasion, nor yet in the exclusively manipulative fashion, presumed suited to tourists. This community had come to recognise that their heritage was their principal asset, was their appeal or draw. They might have provided for their visitors exclusively through a suitable brochure, self-conducted tours of interpretative centres or a video. Instead they valued the interpersonal, the participative approach. The visitors on my second visit included some members of the unionist tradition, who told me they were impressed by the variety and richness of the experiences and the openness of the people. Unwisely I had arranged state of the art accommodation in nearby Westport. We would have been more than welcome to stay in local accommodation and could have learned more of these people and what they stood for.

[10] Séan of the priests.

Subsequent visits unveiled further riches. The entire community is annually involved in a passion play at Easter time, a type of Son et Lumière production. What is remarkable is that local people play all the parts. The dynamics of this production do not have a parallel elsewhere in rural Ireland. And it is a phenomenal production, produced by the Taidhbhearc, the almost national theatre of the west of Ireland. I participated in their Easter vigil ceremonies. The lighting of the paschal fire was done in the abbey grounds, with the entire congregation gathered round. The braziers had been filled with special turf – harvested locally and noted for its durability. These braziers, when lighted from the Paschal fire involved indigenous resources and work of local human hands in this community's celebration of Easter. Indigenous resources are neglected elsewhere.

I have tried to convey my emerging sense of discovery on my second and subsequent visits. I can now look back and see the abbey and its grounds as an amphitheatre, restored and fashioned by this local community for their own purposes. It is an architectural expression of both their values and their knowledge. My experience on my first visit was like going to see the set of a play but not knowing what play was on and surmising what it might be. On second thoughts that description is inaccurate. I had visited a stage set and did not realise that it was a stage set. It was a community's stage set or their expression in the landscape's architecture of stories, beliefs, values, historical events and symbols of endurance that were significant for them. It was their physical contribution. They had not commissioned others to do it for them.

The laudable influence of the painter, Derek Hill, in encouraging the Tory Island painters is a less intricate initiative than what has been accomplished in Ballintubber. Hill's accomplishment is painters' paint on canvas, reflecting what Tory scenery says to these artists. A single medium is used in Tory in contrast to the many media it takes in Ballintubber to express their heritage, history, knowledge, values, aesthetics and culture.

I cannot capture here, within the confines of another single medium - the written word - the buzz and the excitement when Ballintubber comes to life. I know it cannot be replicated. In this, the distinctiveness of communities is given emphasis. This is a unique and fundamental learning point for me; the context of each community is unique. To ignore this feature is to invite folly. Smith et al. (1997), emphasise this throughout their work; to give but one example:

> "To be grounded in the context is to discover the vital importance of really knowing complex circumstances - an unveiling of reality as a tight web of causation and consequences."
>
> (Smith et al 1997: 204).

Similarly: Daloz et al. (1996); Hein et al (1993); Hope at al (1995); and Wall et al (1992)

What my visitors and I experienced was the outcome of a community process, of their deliberations, enthusiasm and persistence, of trial and error around a unique heritage they were proud to share.

Reflection

I endeavoured to engage with reflective practice, a mode that links thought and action with reflection so as to improve professional practice. Much of what follows are for me clearer insights on what happened and plausible speculation on tempting scenarios of future activities. According to Peters (1991: 95) what I engage with in reflective practice is "a special kind of practice ...[that] involves a systematic enquiry into the practice itself."

I made a second list of the insights that affected me on my ensuing visits. Compared to the first (a sense of history, faith, spirituality, silence and rurality) it was considerably longer:

> A sense of history, medieval travel, faith, persecution, death, social custom, emergence, spirituality, exertion and silence.

The human qualities demonstrated by the participants included:

> Persistence, vision, resilience, determination, wisdom, resourcefulness, collaboration and sharing.

In subsequent conversations, I learned about the 'sitters on the fence' in the community, the criticism and the lack of understanding and support, particularly from state agencies. Here was a community venture, somewhat out of kilter with the norm in not, from the outset, emphasising a focus on jobs and enterprise. This community was challenging the conventional expectations of community development. The scope of the influences and the range of the resources it engaged with make it difficult for traditional scientific approaches to address.

As I retrace my learning to my early days in community development, the community development accomplishments that I sought were here. But the knowledge that supported the process remained hidden. As a newly appointed specialist in rural development in Teagasc, I had written a number of draft policy booklets, for example "The Role of Teagasc's Rural Development Officer". (Lillis 1993). This reflected my empirical training. This booklet presupposed that all relevant resources to initiate and sustain community development were vested in practitioners. Practitioners would mediate the absent knowledge and expertise, which in the view I held then, were generated and located outside the community and needed to be brought into it from outside. I never contemplated the notion of such practitioners

learning transparently in the full view of communities' participants; there was in my then understanding little for them to learn there. In a way my thinking then was dynamically no different from the expertise I dispensed formerly as a horticultural advisor.

But here the pertinent knowledge on heritage, history, culture and values was not extraneous but indigenous, assimilated and lived by the participants. I found that the participants become knowledgeable about their community, within their community in ways not unlike those I advocated in chapter four. The traditional paradigm in use does not admit of this.

This knowledge in community underlies the basis of Freire's third chapter in "Pedagogy of the Oppressed" (.Freire 1974: 60 - 95). He goes on to dwell on the dialectic that surrounds communities' sense of history. He admonishes the investigator/researcher coming from outside, warning against:

> "The investigator who, in the name of scientific objectivity, transforms the organic into something inorganic, what is becoming into what is, life into death, fears change...in making people the passive objects of investigation in order to arrive at rigid models, he betrays his own character as a destroyer of life." (Op cit: 80).

Carr and Kemmis (1986:149) join Freire in pointing to the limitations imposed by the very pervasiveness of enlighteners' power and contend that corrective action should always be applied. These warnings, taken together are severe and in a situation where I claim local expressions of culture and heritage are ignored, the outlook is even bleaker than Freire would have us believe.

The expectations surrounding the possible contributions of experts echo some of the concerns of the Frankfurt school of philosophers, of whom Jurgen Habermas was a leading light (White 1995). Habermas (1972, 1974) formulated a theory of critical social science, which focused on the cultural, political and historical influences that persuade us to accept, think and act in ways that may not always be in the best interests of individual communities. In Habermas's view that knowledge is driven by human interests and practices in three areas: technical interest, practical interest and emancipatory interest (McNiff 2000: 130 - 131). Emancipatory interest helps to free us from the traditional controlling influences that limit or prescribe our knowledge and actions. Freire's 'destroyer of life' would be numbered among these controlling influences. Under the influence of emancipatory interests, organisations and communities have the potential to become places where participants are encouraged to improve their understanding of their work and to constantly assess their work practices. Critical theoretic forms of research, of which action research is one, facilitate this practice. The potential in community development reflects Habermas's insights. Freire (1974) and Hope and Timmel (1995) give practical expression to Habermas's theory.

On further reflection, I think that many people in the Western world are conditioned to having expertise mediated to them by expert specialists. These expectations are fulfilled on a daily basis by the hordes of significant services that impact on our lives, such as medical, veterinary, legal, agricultural, teaching, social services, central and local government services. While this abundance of expertise would not have been Freire's experience in South America, community participants here can be tempted to easily discard their own opinions when beset by expertise.

Communities are idiosyncratic and their very uniqueness frustrates the replicability imperative of traditional research. Individual communities' distinctive research needs have been consistently neglected. I believe this is so because, inter alia, the dominant paradigm is unsuited to engage with their uniqueness. It is therefore not useful or wise for these communities to rely on traditional research resources. They need to turn to the new scholarship, to critical theoretic forms of research, such as this. I further contend that communities should learn to conduct much of their own research.

Freire (1974) in advocating what he termed conscientisation of participants, through which they would understand their circumstances, laid this as the foundation for their future emancipation. But to understand their circumstances, participants have to know or research, that is look into, their circumstances. If they misconstrue their circumstances, much of their subsequent activity will be misdirected. In chapter three I found that agricultural scientists, addressing rural development, needed to make a paradigm shift. Their continued use of inappropriate methodologies for rural development means they still rely on inappropriate academic models for gaining access to knowledge about community development. They do not address community values. Significant parts of this knowledge are located within communities. It is not logical to ignore this 'in community knowledge'.

Then this phenomenon of 'in community knowledge', its links to and expositions of the community's culture, heritage, aesthetics and values, its vulnerability to subversion or - as is the case declared here - to being ignored, these are stages of a reflexive spiral that lead into systems theory. Where a community is observed as a system that reflects Bawden's 'notion of formal entities with particular structures and properties' (undated: 2) there are repercussions. As a system, made up of subsystems, each subsystem has an effect on the functioning of the whole (Ackoff 1981). Each 'system' is in turn a sub-system of a more complex system. Viewed from the systemic perspective, the vulnerability of the Tóchar Valley communities' way of life is susceptible to attack or neglect from outside. These communities - as we shall see further on - feel betrayed by the prevalence of non-systemic pedagogical approaches of the nation's education practices, which cling to the prevailing paradigm. This prevailing paradigm is characterised by

"reductionism, determinism and autonomous individualism, all undergirded by a stringent materialism" (Vitz 1996: 18).

It is not that this community is moribund or has a culture that faces extinction. Members of the communities were challenged by Professor Bawden to tell futuristic tales. On subsequent visits to the Celtic Furrow, the communities' interpretative centre, such speculative tales were being told. A pilot programme was being created, where an undergraduate Michigan State University student had been sought by the communities to work within the 'home-school- community ' scheme of the Department of Education, which provides a forum for issues of joint concern. It is expected that the communities' concern - that students and parents see a future life in the valley as an attractive option - will be addressed. This initiative is significant because it rectifies an educational practice that has a haemorrhaging effect on youthful populations of rural Ireland. If successful this project could be a prototype and carry weight with the Government as a demonstrable means of maintaining rural communities here.

This may well prove to be a systemically sound decision for these communities, but it is surely a convoluted way for the communities to marshal state resources and ensure their future.

The Ballintubber community's values lie at the core of their underlying motivation. This community decided what they wanted for their community and the criteria by which they wished to conduct their joint venture. They wished to share their insights with eleven other communities located along the pilgrim route to Croagh Patrick, known as the Tóchar Valley. This venture was to become a significant part of the lives of these participants. They had come to realise that the heritage they had was particularly rich. They valued it. They knew that it would be attractive to others. They were prepared to make sacrifices for its maintenance - they turned away from conventional development with its focus on large-scale jobs and industry. This idea, held by the community, is a type of knowing or wisdom. Were ignorance to reign, they would not have recognised this unique heritage and might have committed their energies to more pedestrian enterprises.

I look again at my criteria - set at the outset of this dissertation in chapter one - for selecting action research as the methodology of choice for my purposes:

Action research allows me access to the practice of rural community development. It accommodates some principal characteristics of community development viz. that it is context grounded, practice driven and highly relational. It takes on board the inimitability of each community. It accommodates my participation as community development activity emerges. It facilitates my quest to improve my practice. It adjusts to the emergent

nature of community development. It admits to challenges of an ethical nature. It affords me a convincing means of validating my findings.

The access that I am afforded arises from addressing shared problems. Because of my involvement with the Tóchar Valley Network in this Kellogg funded initiative, its board of trustees has asked me to assist in drawing up their plans. I have offered to do this through an action research basis. I interpret this commission as an expression of their trust and confidence in me. This commission is peripheral to this research. I mention it as evidence of my trusted relationship with this network of communities.

Regarding the principal characteristics of community development, action research allows me - in contrast to traditional approaches - to research the contextual nature of the Tóchar Valley Network. What is going on is the practice of community development, at which I have a ringside seat. The highly relational character of this encounter is evident. Their practice of community development takes on board the contextual inimitability of these twelve communities that make up the network. It does not try to blend them into a bland mélange of all. This approach facilitates my quest to improve my practice. What it does is, it allows me to participate as an equal in the areas where I am proficient and as an apprentice where I am a novice. In other words it recognises my strengths and limitations and encourages me to improve. It is an example of what Lave and Wenger (1991: 29) call 'legitimate peripheral participation'.

I believe that action research approaches respond sensitively to the emergent nature of community development. I had not foreseen the involvement of Michigan State University. Before our first meeting the expectation that Michigan State University and I anticipated was that women's issues would come to the fore. We were wrong. The communities were concerned about youth.

As to a convincing means of validating my findings, I have to demonstrate that I learned, that what I learned is original and is the basis of my own theory for an approach to community development. I believe that what I have uncovered could not be provided through other means or through more conventional research. I believe too that through action research I will have demonstrated its usefulness in itself as a reliable means of facilitating individual communities doing their own research.

The Emerging Tóchar Valley Network Project

My original intention, formulated nearly three years ago, was to have two projects. One would be based in Ireland and the second - facilitating learning opportunities arising from the involvement of Michigan State University - would be conducted in Michigan. This is not what happened.

I was commissioned as a consultant by the Conference for Religious of Ireland to help conduct a cross-border colloquium for practitioners in community development. Mc Wey (1999) wrote the official report. The Peace and Reconciliation Programme for Northern Ireland funded the venture. The three-day meeting, held in Derry in June 1999, involved the collaboration of seventeen delegates, each representing a community group based in Ireland.

I arranged for Professors Frank Fear and Richard Bawden and their team from Michigan State University to facilitate the proceedings. Their approach was to visit each community in the days leading up to the conference. On such a visit I introduced Professor Fear to the Tóchar Valley Network. There, as a result of what he saw, he expressed the wish that the entire venture should be recorded. At a subsequent meeting between Terry Gallagher, project manager, Ballintubber tourism Co-operative and Sister Maureen Lally, project manager, Tóchar Valley Network and myself on the 11 November 1999, we decided to explore the prospects of collaborating with Professor Fear and The Liberty Hyde Bailey Scholars Program, of which he is chairman.

Learning from how they approached community development in an Irish situation would be richer and more relevant than my original plan of working alongside them in American communities. My original plan, to be conducted in the United States, might have – at best – tenuous relevance for Irish conditions. I was conscious that with traditional methodologies this abrupt change would have presented difficulties. This change also meant committing to ‘going with the flow‘, grounding the research on whatever situation emerged, as decided by the communities of the Tóchar Valley Network.

Additional Funding

I approached Dr Gail Imig of the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, Battle Creek, Michigan for funding. She had visited Ballintubber and had been impressed. She indicated that she would promote a suitable application. I collaborated with Professor Frank Fear, Sister Maureen Lally and Terry Gallagher in preparing a submission for funding (Bailey 2000). A decision to fund was made in March 2000.

The rationale of the funding proposal was as follows:

> ‘Universities and colleges around the world have a tradition of working with local people to improve local quality of life. Technical assistance (including information-technology transfer and extension) has been the dominant institutional engagement model. In this model, university expertise - often in the form of research-based knowledge - is made available locally. This model works well when indigenous capacity is

> limited and when local people benefit from adopting outside ideas, practices, or technologies. The technical assistance model is less appropriate when local people have experience envisioning and organizing local development efforts. When local development is conceived and directed locally - known in some quarters as 'autonomous development' - outside influence is locally regulated, that is, targeted by local people in ways that make sense locally. Expressed simply, autonomous development involves local people taking control of their development agenda. It is the ultimate form of empowerment. Yet, higher education - historically a knowledge generation and product development institution - is more adept at influencing development through the technical assistance-transfer model than by collaborating with local people in the autonomous development mode.
>
> In the proposed initiative, U.S. faculty members, university extension personnel, and students (both undergraduate and graduate) will work in an international setting side-by-side with a local group that has had experience and success engaging in local development. This group seeks to expand their development work, and has invited university cooperation in undertaking a regional development effort.' (Bailey 2000: 1-2).

This proposal, to which I had contributed, promised to be sensitive to the autonomous development of the Tóchar valley communities. Its attractive undertaking was that it had as a core value that the Tóchar Valley Network would itself control their development agenda.

The Tóchar Valley Network Setting

The Tóchar Valley runs from mid to west County Mayo. The Tóchar itself extends from the round tower in Balla in the east to the peak of Croagh Patrick in the west and on to Murrisk at the mountain's Atlantic base.

Rural development is a priority in the Tóchar Valley, an area with a total population of about 10,000 people. It has, like many parts of rural Ireland, a declining production agriculture sector. The poor prospects in farming, alternative opportunities arising from increasing prosperity and the marginalisation of rural life, have translated into youth out-migration. The local economy has suffered through the concentration of employment in urban areas, the reluctance to provide infrastructure and the uneven application of public investment programmes.

Rather than approach rural development, community by community, activists in the valley envision a common future. They work together to create a regional rural development agenda. An umbrella organisation -The Tóchar

Valley Rural Community Network - has been created to envision and undertake rural development in the twelve communities that straddle the ancient pilgrim way. It has a board of trustees. The twelve rural communities are Murrisk, Breakloon/Drummin, Aughagower, Killawalla, Partry, Ballyhearne, Ballintubber, Clogher, Belcarra, Mayo Abbey, Balla, and Ballyglass.

There is an interpretative centre, known as the Celtic Furrow, which explains the heritage, history, folklore, archaeology, beliefs, customs and aspirations of the Irish people, since earliest times. President McAleese officially opened this centre on June 6th, 2001. It is remarkable on several counts. It is inspired and built by community members from indigenous materials. It speculates on our future heritage. Again, the visitor is not alone. A guide is provided for a modest payment. Every care is taken not to advocate a particular interpretation. Visitors are invited to reach their own conclusions. They come away, having considered such elemental issues as the use and abuse of power, current core values and the consequences of current practices on our environment. A number of visitors from America have told me that they have been profoundly affected. Joanne H. in April 2001, of Menominee taped her entire visit, with a view to sharing it with her community.

Perhaps the following insight is fanciful; the visitors' journey winds over and back through the history of the ages, at times in a labyrinth or web that touches on the outstanding events of the epochs and reaches out into the future. The recursive path taken by visitors might be interpreted as a visit to related systems; the path taken is a tracing of the spirals of action research. The whole undertaking goes beyond interpretation and acquisition of knowledge. It shares with action research the goal of praxis, of promoting a better order.

The objectives of the Tóchar Valley Network are:

- To empower local communities
- To stem current decline in population.
- To ensure the provision of social and physical services for those choosing to live in the valley.
- To cater specially for rural dwellers, small farmers, women, youth, and the long-term unemployed.
- To ensure the guardianship and protection of archaeological and heritage remains.
- Develop a sound economy for all rural communities without sacrificing the quality of the natural environment.
- To promote an awareness of the natural environment.

They propose to make progress by adherence to the following principles:

- Through the ‘bottom up’ approach new initiatives can be created.
- Local communities are best placed to identify their needs and competencies.
- Encouraging dialogue across communities so that common issues and approaches emerge naturally.
- A network of twelve communities is more likely to influence local government policy than one community acting alone; Were each community to work on its own, no single community can cope with the changes on its own.
- By providing rural women with the opportunity to play a leading role, this ensures a broader vision than might otherwise pertain.
- Community development is effectively delivered through partnership and collaboration with governmental and other partners to strengthen development efforts.
- That young people can make a major contribution to the development of their communities.

(Ballintubber: undated documentation)

Even though the Tóchar Valley Rural Community Network is only recently established, early 1999, it is involved actively in the region. Projects undertaken or in the queue include creating economic opportunities through cultural tourism. The current strategy is to provide tourists and pilgrims, through a variety of ‘packages’ to enjoy the opportunity of interacting with local communities, to have them appreciate local food, to hear local stories in the literal sense of the Irish phrase, ‘béal oideas’ = oral education: (Dinneen 1927: 87).

Introducing ‘In Community Knowledge’

My primary goal was to highlight the effectiveness of ‘in community knowledge’. I decided to do this by highlighting its contribution to the discourse, particularly in the first session with the Michigan State University team. The thrust of this team’s intervention was to acknowledge this expertise or knowledge and to work and walk alongside the Tóchar Valley Network participants. Indeed this approach was the basis and justification for funding from the Kellogg foundation (Bailey 2000) and is reflected in some of their collaborative writing in the area of outreach (Fear et al. 2000 and Fear et al. 2001). My methodology of choice held out the prospect that emergent events could be carefully thought about and assessed as situations unfolded. In other words my approach to discovering this ‘in community knowledge’ would dovetail into the proceedings. I was also convinced that any thing approaching an insistent or challenging approach, asking participants outright to deliver examples of their ‘in community knowledge’ would fail. I think it would also have adverse repercussions for the work the network was proposing to accomplish with the Michigan State University team. The confronting request would be regressive and ineffective.

I decided to participate as a learner, observing, recording, reflecting and making sense of what happened. Because the approach was one of dialogue, it presupposed knowledge and competence on all sides – visiting team and participants. The event promised to be a fertile ground for 'in community knowledge'. It would contrast with commoner situations where visiting experts conveyed one-way information.

'In Community Knowledge'

Session 1

In this, the first of two sessions with the Michigan State University team, I wish to explore 'in community knowledge', that is the knowledge on which the community itself relies for their every-day practice of rural community development.

Introduction

The first visit by the Michigan State University was largely exploratory. The Michigan State University team's opening comment to the people of the Tóchar Valley was:

> "From what we see in you and what you do, it is important for us to become involved. We learn and become better human beings."
> (Fear: 12 June 2000).

Later, in the interim report, he was more specific. He highlighted moral agency, context-sensitive vision and shared leadership as elements that made the Tóchar Valley Network "a world class example of the power of local vision, local initiative and local determination" (Fear et al. 2000: 4). The project as funded envisaged four visits. Conversational learning was the principal means of discourse.

My first task, regarding the data on which I rely, was to compile a record of these conversations. I used the record, particularly of the first session, in its entirety together with particular aspects of subsequent sessions. I wished to reflect on these accounts. I particularly wished to advance theories that support autonomous knowledge development by rural communities and to further explore values and their contribution to my understanding of the process of community development.

The MSU Team's Insights

What did the Michigan State team see? What do the Tóchar Valley participants do? The conversation gives some evidence. Beginning with the views some of the visitors expressed at that first session, I provide the highlights of five contributors:

Professor Frank Fear, Michigan State University Team Leader:

The Kellogg Foundation recognizes the Tóchar Valley as a world-class initiative. The initiative and its people were in the driving force of innovation. The Government and its agencies were lagging behind. The Tóchar Valley is authentic and makes us all better human beings. He had two functions:

1. To help, and
2. To learn from the Tóchar Valley.

He added that community development was about moral purposes. There was a shared desire to retain the quality of life.

Jonglim, Team Member:

The entire enterprise was unique and valuable. She saw the opportunities ahead as 'going to a new place.' There was a risk that women's issues and youth would be treated as an addendum, an extra carriage on the railway. Instead one is trying to create a tapestry where these issues are seamlessly interwoven into the fabric, not an afterthought or compartmentalised. If the latter approach is followed, it institutionalises the values of the communities and reflects what they are content to have, i.e. women and youth as a tail to the development train. These issues are not 'add-on' items; they have the potential to become transformational power engines themselves. If consigned to the tail, you have little responsibility.

Jan Hartough Team Member:

The questions that recurred and had to be addressed were:

1. Who am I?
2. What do I value?
3. How do I learn?
4. What is my worldview?
5. How do I put this together?

Add to this the importance of trust and of networking. This makes for the participating individual's programme.

Kathy Fear Team Member:

People are key and the development required a reassessment of the purpose of education for local people in the light of the Tóchar, which she found to have an integrated curriculum of experiential learning. This undertaking would represent another revolution. She had been struck by the positioning of the 1798 monument in Castlebar outside the county offices, which had been cited as being unhelpful to development in the last few days. She was impressed by the amount of self-reflection done by members of the Tóchar Valley Network and this was in contrast to the power permitted to the inhabitants of Westport.

Scott Team Member:

This was his second visit and he was surprised that the stories at the Abbey were different, evolving and progressive, compared to his first visit. We should reflect on why they had shown us certain things, e.g. the Abbey or the Celtic Furrow. Was it because it reflected their values?

Summarising Frank said there were 8 theme areas:

1. Women and Development,
2. Youth and Development
3. Inclusiveness
4. Transformation
5. Growth and Development
6. Leadership and Organisation Development
7. Rural Development Policy, all the way to Brussels,
8. Lowering travel and tourism barriers

My Reflections on the MSU Team's Insights

I think what the Michigan State University team saw was a significant and uncommon expression of a rural community, where values and a way of life were appreciated and lived. The visitors saw the link between change, transformation and journey, pilgrimage and tóchar. I do not know if the link's philosophical potential was fully appreciated. Why were the Tóchar Valley participants concentrating their energies on restoring and sharing this pilgrim walk, when these energies might be better spent on conventional economic development?

I think that what impressed and was appreciated about the Michigan State team's first visit was that they endorsed the priorities of the communities and their sense of pride in what they had achieved together, largely on their own. The team made a point of visiting and seeing all these achievements for themselves.

The level of personal development of the participants and their ability to be self-reflective impacted on the visitors. Where this reflection is the practice of communities, it has a different dynamic to traditional approaches. In traditional approaches experts provide expertise to participants whom they presume to need this expertise. Of the eight theme areas Frank Fear identified in his summary, within two months the first six were receiving effective attention.

The Participants' Insights

But what of the participants from the Tóchar Valley Network; what was their own view of themselves and what they do? My emerging theory suggests that significant knowledge and wisdom about their communities are located in the members of the community. This knowledge is often overlooked and where the traditional dynamics of extension are at play, it is often ignored. So my question is, what evidence did the communities display of 'in community knowledge'?

I deliberately decided not to disrupt the discourse of our meetings by putting questions about in community knowledge on the agenda. I preferred to observe what would emerge, rather than pursue a catechism on 'in community knowledge'. I decided to explore what resources of wisdom the community participants drew on during their discourses.

I turn first to the views expressed by the Tóchar Valley participants in general. I believe their contributions gave strong evidence of community wisdom. Participants spoke deliberately of their concerns and cares. They were conscious of the neglect of youth, of poor infrastructure and the shortcomings of rural development policy. They knew their own skills and those of their neighbours. They knew their area, its resources and its history.

They expressed concerns about the structure of education, of its urban location and bias, of its process, particularly in terms of instilling values. The dilemma was about fitting the process of public education to the specific needs and resources of a local area, where it is often designed (e.g. by Government or state agencies) to meet more urbanized needs. They felt that the philosophy of education in schools was more responsive to economic purposes rather than social benefit. There was concern about the leadership training of youth in the light of the brain drain of youth out of the area. There was a question of input and influencing the curriculum at school, with a view to its valuing rural living.

They expressed further concerns, which they themselves summarised on flip chart paper in the form of questions:

- "What is success?
- How is the torch passed on?
- The never-ending process of inculcating values.
- How is self-worth determined?
- How do we deal with the expectations of our guests?
- The potential contribution of senior citizens?
- The potential contribution of youth?"

This was all in session one. Further on I report more fully on an exercise in session two where, through photolanguage, they expressed their concerns about values. This later revelation supplements my case. Also in session two

they were asked to list the significant activities planned in each community. I cite their answers below. The range and diversity is significant, especially when one recalls that communities average just about 200 families each. The activities reflect their knowledge in action, what they chose to do. These are the generative themes, the enterprises that fire their enthusiasm. The following are the activities listed in February 2001:

Ballintubber

- Easter Ceremonies
- Radio broadcast of same
- Celtic Furrow being opened
- Passion play
- Museum – joined with Museums of Mayo
- Pastoral Council
- School
- New Choir
- Development of Rural Tourism Packages
- Tóchar extension being opened – Balla to Clogher

Balla

- By-pass
- Tóchar extension
- Building development
- Play
- New Restaurant
- New water scheme

Clogher

- New FÁS scheme. Completion of Forge
- Producing local magazine
- Organising School Reunion for August - inviting emigrants.
- Race Night for 20th April
- Youth Club recently formed
- Tóchar walk being developed through the Clogher area (stiles & signs)
- Weekly card games
- Liaison with County Council re local developments

Ballyheane

- Village Lighting
- Townland signs are presently being erected
- Final stage of development of football pitch, car park and club house
- Prayer group and stations active for Lent
- Enhancing of water scheme
- Planning community dance
- Feasibility study on community centre
- Enhancing cemetery
- Developing picnic and rest area
- Parish Pastoral council visitation and welcome package for new neighbours

- Weekly Village news items in local newspaper – Bits and Bobs

Murrisk
- Final stage of completion of Millennium Park
- New youth club formed
- New parent/toddler group formed
- New local history group formed
- Planning of Heritage and Pattern Day for August
- New FÁS scheme in operation - village enhancement
- Preparations for St. Patrick's Day Parade

Ballyglass/Belcarra/Killawalla
- Village enhancements
- Community Centres
- Water and sewerage
- People working together
- Environmental Awareness
- Community Development
- Reunions
- Local History Course
- Migrants' returning third Sunday in August -preparations for.

My Reflections on the Participants' Insights

The opinions expressed by the communities' members demonstrate their concerned views. Generally participants are well informed and realistic. These opinions attain significance when these communities are contrasted with other communities where such views are rarely publicly expressed. In the latter communities, the participants simply may not know or if they do, they do not feel comfortable sharing this type of information. In such communities there is an added challenge for the practitioner and the participants. They are starting from scratch in the community development process characterised by such building blocks as personal engagement, interpersonal relations, decision-making, leadership, organisation development and community resource development. There is no broad consensus among participants in these domains. They make for a vast field of knowledge or expertise, which progressive communities have and can presume to call upon. Without this 'knowledge in community', progress is delayed and it has poor foundations.

If I cannot demonstrate that mature communities, like the Tóchar Valley communities, have valuable 'in community knowledge', then the assumption that this significant knowledge guides them in their daily activities as communities falters. I stated earlier that this type of information, 'in community knowledge' was not uncompromisingly pursued at these sessions in the Tóchar Valley. It was volunteered. It emerged. I believe it might not have emerged, if it had been baldly demanded. Such a demand would not have been appropriate, i.e. to request to have my agenda supplant the communities' agenda. Nevertheless I do not rely on such emergent

knowledge alone and reported above, to copper fasten my theory that significant and pertinent knowledge is to be found in communities.

I cite two further, corroborating specific examples of knowledge in community, in some detail. They provide additional evidence to the foregoing expressions from the communities. The contributors, Lorraine and Fr Frank Fahey, live in two separate communities of the Tóchar. They shared insights around community that exemplify for me a resource of knowledge within their communities that - in its particular way - is as rich as any available from any outside source. The significance of these contributions is that they come from participants and that they arose unprompted. The information was volunteered and not specifically requested.

Lorraine had two themes, which I report numerically below as Lorraine (1), on the bashful Celt and transformation and Lorraine (2), on action research.

Lorraine (1) The Bashful Celt and Transformation:

> Transformation is 'going to a new place and changing as you go'. She said that the particular focus of the valley's tourism effort was one where the tourist ceased to be a spectator but was invited to make his or her own fun/experience. They had to roll up their sleeves and get stuck in. She went on to make a point about the recurring motifs within the Celtic experience: the stylised lettering, Celtic knot-work, the intricacies of Celtic design, the repetition within the music and the idiosyncratic use of language. Because of all this repetition of themes, you no longer need to repeat the theme – it becomes implicit. That aspect of our culture expresses our temperament. So when people come along from outside and see our culture and say, "This is exciting" we are inclined to say - defensively - "what do you mean?". We do not like being seen – like the little people – and they (the little people) become a metaphor for the aspects of ourselves we do not wish to have scrutinised.
>
> She instanced the success of Riverdance; we had always been doing it and no one had said it was great before. We complain and say that it has been 'got up'. Someone has captured what was real and marketed it to the modern market and we are saying: "we are going to be found out". But there is no need for us here (i.e. in the Tóchar Valley Network) to fear that we will be found out because the pattern and content of what we have is authentically found here. We may not know how to market it in the modern way. We have become so used to sublimating the vision it has become out of reach.
>
> What we need to do is to bring the culture back to ourselves and own it ourselves. This is the challenge in tourism – to behave authentically and as we really are and that is what we have to face up to here. We

all share the same heritage but we walk around as though it were not there. But our dream has been 'outed'.

Lorraine (2) in a second submission spoke unprompted about aspects of her approach to development, which I interpret as an intuitive expression of action research:

Lorraine (2) Learning from Experience:

She thought that we have come to recognise our culture from outsiders telling us. She was struck by the need to reflect back over one's contribution, asking oneself such questions as 'what worked there?' Or 'when did I blow it?' and learn from one's mistakes. Then note positive results in very small ways is how desirable change is brought about. And by moving on and doing this in small groups we can learn together to restructure our approach from the feedback on the results of one's own actions. These small cells can be a very useful way of working. If you cannot do this, it becomes a problem; if you do and you share, it ceases to be a problem. These cells have the potential of becoming a tremendous resource.

The abbey has that cell of educational growth. Angela[11] and her storytelling approach has that cell of educational growth. Because the abbey has come to symbolise stability, it is in a sense always there. It represents the triumph of suffering; it has the phoenix potential. The abbey has so many levels through time and space. Angela is part of the consciousness. She is the reliving of the tale. Bringing the young people on the walk is one of the great initiations. We now lack these initiations, which were throughout all society and throughout history. You meet yourself in that challenge. These things are part of the Celtic tradition as much as they are part of the Native American tradition. We may not share the same way of describing them, but we share the key elements.

Father Frank Fahey's views were of a philosophical nature, anticipating a providential vision for the Tóchar:

Father Frank Fahey:

We are part of a bigger picture, but such a tiny part. The thrust of Acts[12] 17, verses 26 to 29, was that Providence provided that God

[11] Angela is the remarkable guide at the Abbey.

[12] "From one single principle He not only created the whole human race so that they could occupy the entire earth, but He decreed the times and limits of their habitation. And He did this so they might seek the Deity and, by feeling their way towards Him, succeed in finding Him; and indeed He is not far from any of us, since it is in Him that we live, and move, and exist, as indeed some of your own writers have said: 'We are all His children.' Since we are the children of God, we have no excuse for thinking that

would be active in practical ways in certain places at particular times. In some way the Tóchar Valley itself is part of the future, a future that is unfolding now. If we see that in a vocational sense, even if we see it in a small way only, we grasp the point that we are part of a small stream, leading to a bigger thing, part of the consciousness of some Supreme Being.

Youth involved in the Tóchar Valley is not the problem; youth involved in anything is the problem. About 1,500 young people between the ages of twelve and thirteen come to the abbey annually to enter into a commitment for their confirmation. For most of them it is not an entrance in religious terms, it is an exit.

What we hope in the abbey is that we might capture even in human terms what it means to be a Christian. In coming to the abbey it is about the past, about the stories, about nature. While there is a five-week preparation course for confirmation, what really fires them [the youth] is the Tóchar walk from here to Aughagower, which is about 11 miles. And what they are getting is their own culture. We ourselves recognise that there is something we have in terms of culture that we must pass on. Young people recognise what is authentic and they love to come to the abbey and to the Celtic Furrow.

What Megan[13] did last night is part of this discerning process – that we are part of something that is greater than ourselves. We may make mistakes but all will be right sometime. He was aware of what we have but thought that we are able to put it to the youth in ways that are challenging for them.

He had recently walked that new part of the Tóchar from Balla to Ballintubber and what interested him were the stories, new to him, of what each field portrayed. Suddenly the whole place comes alive and that in a way is what John O'Donohue[14] has done in Anam Chara. He has put the indefinable mystery back into life.

My Reflections on Lorraine/Fahey Insights.

I thought these contributions were extraordinarily rich. Viewed as a resource

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the Deity looks like anything in gold, silver or stone that has been carved and designed by a man." (New Jerusalem Bible 1985: 1829)

[13] Megan, a member of the Michigan State team, had decided to work in the area with youth. She had visited the abbey late at night to reflect on her decision. This visit was part of the context of the discussions.

[14] See O'Donohue 1997.

located within the Tóchar Valley Network, the wisdom of these participants was a wellspring. Lorraine's exposition of how she learns was research in action/activity, with insights gained from reflection on experience leading to praxis. I thought it more compelling than the influence of specialists, who may be prone to tell us from 'out there', from outside our communities, what we ought be doing 'in here', inside our communities. The specialists may not practise what they prescribe. I thought Lorraine confronted the lack of debate about what we mean by our culture and why we are ambivalent about it. Paradoxically it was expounded in the Scioból. Her contribution might be interpreted as local wisdom. It was in the tradition of folklore or of folk wisdom with shades of "Translations", Brian Freil's play (1980) about an Irish hedge school and its wisdom. It was the equivalent of academic erudition and more accessible. It was tailored to local experience. I reflected on the fact that we so order the education of our youth that Lorraine's insights - a local community resource - might never come their way.

Fr Fahey's contribution grounded the Tóchar at two levels, one cultural and the other spiritual. Not that they are distinct; they are intermingled. The abbey introduces heritage, culture, religion, history and these in an experiential way to its visitors. Young people learn in many ways but are treated in schools predominantly through 'chalk and talk'. Walking the pilgrim path - upon which their forefathers strode - never fails to move them. Hearing the stories associated with the Tóchar makes it a living parable and an opportunity to pick up guidelines for life.

I anticipated some hesitation from the group about Fr Fahey's view, based on Acts 17, that both the abbey and the Tóchar were providentially spared for this current destiny in history and the future. No one found it remarkable. His view that Providence waits and holds for future use in due time is substantiated by the parallel delayed discovery of the grave of St James, the Apostle and patron of Spain, in Compostella, nearly one thousand years after Christ and nearly one thousand years ago. Compostella then became a pan-European centre of medieval pilgrimage, next in order of importance to Jerusalem and Rome. The Tóchar is a discovery of a potential whose time had come. Indeed there could be 'a tide in the affairs of men, which taken at the flood' could lead to new insights. The Tóchar nurtured that possibility. I think this is noteworthy and is evidence of a community's appreciation of and communal regard for what is far more profound for them than an historic ancient church and walking route of archaeological interest.

Viewed in a systemic way (Bertalanffy 1968; Capra 1982, 1997 (a), 1987 (b); Checkland 1981; Churchman 1971; Wheatley 1992), Father Fahey's contribution is extraordinary because his system entails dimensions that span history, culture, religion and heritage. His 'web of life' embraces this world and 'a kingdom not of this world' (John 18:36), our past generations, our culture and the exigencies of present living. Underpinning his view is a process of reflection that has not resulted merely in an exegesis of a Christian

philosophy in a pat theoretical format. It has gone beyond the theoretical to find practical expression. This reflection process has led him to contribute to the communities' endeavours in practical ways. His practice I interpret as research in action. He has made a significant contribution to restoring the Tóchar and in expressing practical concern about the communities. He is recognised as a practitioner of community development. He practises action research, though this might be news to him. What is rigorous about his practice is his adherence to the guiding principle that his actions or activity embodies his philosophy and are congruent with his values. I interpret this as resulting from a lived experience, where adherence to core principles has been confirmed.

On Sunday 29 of April 2001, I heard him preach on the encounter between the resurrected Christ and the apostles. The latter had reverted in quick time to their early vocation of fishing. At this they were singularly unsuccessful, because, having fished all night, they had caught nothing. Suddenly he (Fr Fahey) was building on a sequence in action research terms that requires compliance with a notion that one tries some activity, no matter what, when faced with a persistent dilemma. The instruction to the ineffectual fishermen was to cast out their nets at the starboard side, a daft suggestion for a fishing boat so close to shore. I felt he was talking about determination or persistence. Having followed conventional fishing practice all night without success, the fishing apostles might well be of a mind for a bit of unorthodox activity. The resulting success, with its quantifiable evidence of 153 fish, brings about the closure of the fishing careers of these apostles. This episode had many - if not most -of the sequences of action research. It resulted in a recommitment to a calling that had been earlier adopted and recently abandoned on the death of Christ. This was big time transformation or more accurately a second vocational transformation, with greater commitment than the first. My focus is not on the Gospel account but on the interpretation Father Fahey was putting before us. The result of action research would be personal transformation.

I have been using the word 'wisdom' as a synonym for 'in community knowledge'. The meaning of wisdom is hard to capture, yet in common parlance we recognise it and talk of it. Wisdom, 'in community knowledge' does not come from amassing bits of information, it is not a hoarding or accumulating exercise. Nor is it an entity, a thing. Hart (2001:3) says that it is 'An activity of knowing...we act wisely.' Thomas Aquinas, according to Gilby (1967: 364) in Hart (2001: 3) said that 'wisdom differs from science in looking at things from a greater height'. In other words wisdom takes more into account than does science. 'In community knowledge' encompasses more than empirical science regards.

Heschel (1972, 78) concludes that wisdom comes through awe and reverence:

> 'The loss of awe is the great block to insight. A return to reverence is the first prerequisite for a revival of wisdom…. Wisdom comes from awe rather than from shrewdness. It is evoked not in moments of calculation but in moments of being in rapport with the mystery of reality. The greatest insights happen to us in moments of awe.'

I think that it is these moments of insight that have remained outside the scope of the dominant paradigm in use.

I believe these serendipitous examples of knowledge in community help make my case for recognising that pertinent knowledge is in communities and can be strengthened there. This 'in-community knowledge' can be far-reaching in its effects on practitioners' practice. I think, as I have tried to demonstrate in chapter three, that the view that holds to the supremacy of outside knowledge is founded on the technical rational paradigm. It tends to rely on a blueprint approach, where the blueprint of information is a product of technical rational research. This approach is not sensitive to admitting that pertinent knowledge exists in communities. It is not imbued with the rationale, cited in Bailey (2000: 1-2), which committed the Michigan State University team to recognise the autonomous nature of the development work of the communities of the Tóchar Valley Network.

I would add that as a practitioner I find this standpoint of the technical rational school unrealistic. There are few situations where communities may be guaranteed to have an ongoing association with a research-based institution. In other words, communities ultimately find themselves on their own. In the light of this ultimate condition, where they must rely on themselves, I question the value of a relationship with a technical rational based institution, which does not admit to communities' long-term condition and excludes the influences of values (Bawden 1984: 4). In other field of education, participants' relationship with their teachers comes to an end and is marked by a general irreversibility. I am thinking of our experiences of primary, secondary and third cycle education, which ultimately ends. Indeed there is the possibility that some graduates of this system will exceed the knowledge and competence of their teachers. But this does not often happen in the communities' outreach programmes of technical rationality. There is an unrealistic presumption of adherents of the technical rational school that - even though participants might give a lifetime to their community - they are rarely recognised as experts or publicly acknowledged to have gained valued insights into the process that they practise.

I believe the evidence of the communities' participants, together with the examples from the participants Lorraine and Father Frank Fahey, goes to support my view that 'in community knowledge' exists in mature communities and is a resource from which practitioners may learn. I did not expect to see such evidence of understanding of action research or practical wisdom among communities, nor to see it rooted in practice, as Lorraine described it.

I publicly demonstrated and acknowledged that learning. I have claimed from the outset in chapter one to be 'a community development practitioner, a learner, researcher, facilitator and teacher' (opening sentence, chapter one). From a systems theory perspective I carry out all these functions within my practice. Here with these communities I have been primarily a learner, but also a researcher and facilitator. These all are manifestations of aspects of my practice.

I wish to contrast this 'in community knowledge' of the Tóchar Valley Network, unrecognised by most official validating agency, with the validated examination results of my agricultural college students. It goes without saying which group has the more utilitarian knowledge. My students in chapter four were explicit about the irrelevance of what they had been taught. Perhaps the lesson is about, as Fear writes (undated), the pre-eminence of learning in contrast to teaching. I think that when we presume to teach, we must create opportunities for learning. These may be rejected. I attributed this failure in the last chapter to the inappropriateness of the curriculum, the failure to demonstrate the relevance of its content to the students and the pervading influence of a minimalist approach to passing examinations. But the contrast between the students' almost disdainful declaration with the understated display of communities' knowledge in Mayo, which I have recounted here, could hardly be more marked. I believe I have facilitated this presentation by the Tóchar Valley communities, in so far as I helped obtain the funding and introduced the Michigan State Team. But this display was the work of the people themselves and re-echoes the discoveries of both Carmel Lillis (2000) and Long (2000) in their facilitating a similar outcome in their distinct callings. People learn for themselves.

PHOTOLANGUAGE

Session 2.

In this, the second of two sessions, and as I have indicated earlier in this chapter, this is essentially about the values held by the Tóchar Valley Network communities and also on their impact on me.

One of the key commitments that the MSU team had made to the Ballintubber group during exploratory discussions was to help facilitate discourse about future directions and strategic developments. In this process, they also committed themselves to using techniques that would be appropriate for wider use in community discourse. The photolanguage exercise that was introduced by two members of the MSU team was set within these contexts. As they explained it, photographs can act as very powerful metaphors that can facilitate the explicit expression of otherwise tacit feelings, memories, dreams, ideas, and profound values.

The process was originally devised and developed in Lyon, France by Pierre Babin (Founder of the Centre de Recherche et Comunication) and his colleagues, psycho-sociologists Claire Belisle and Alain Baptiste (Belisle et al., 1991). A description of a similar approach may be found in Hope et al. (1995, Book 1: 83 - 84).

The exercise required each participant to select one photograph from a collection of approximately eighty standard-sized photographs, which, in the words of the facilitators, "spoke to him or her about some fundamental aspect, or another of their community". Ten members from the group [representing the communities], one of the Michigan State team, one Tóchar Valley Network staff member and I participated. One of the facilitators told me that they were ready to abandon the process quickly, if it was not achieving its purpose. The purpose was to elicit a set of values that those in the community held dear, about the nature of their community.

Following our individual selections, we were invited to explain to our neighbour what it was about the selected photograph that appealed and what meaning we attributed to our choice. In turn, we provided the same service for our neighbour. With the permission of that neighbour we were then invited to relate the story that he or she had just shared, with the rest of the group. I selected a photograph of a dew-covered spider's web, suspended in the branches of a shrub. As we each narrated the story of another, the facilitators attempted to capture on newsprint, the essence of each story, from which we were then invited to identify particular themes and/or foundational values from these summaries. A copy of their findings is set out below:

- Mother and son representing happiness and reflecting family values: these are the values we should be trying to capture as a community.
- Work men representing work and concerns about the impact of high employment rates on voluntary help, and reflecting the tension in values about "charity begins at home".
- A mixed age group representing the richness of diversity in a community and reflecting the need for everyone in the community to have the opportunity of telling their stories
- A figure with both light and dark faces representing the need to understand all aspects of human nature and valuing such tensions in the creation of a vision for a better future
- Detainees behind a wire enclosures representing the feeling that there are times when the Tóchar Valley Communities feel "fenced in" and unable to find ways "out", and reflecting the value of freedom
- Being comforted representing human beings bringing "warmth to the cold" reflecting a value for caring about caring!
- Material resources representing the potential of tourism but reflecting the need to approach such development with an ethic of "caretakers of the earth"
- Walking across the bridge representing the need for someone to lead and the value of leadership for difficult tasks

- Wilderness representing the sense of place and reflecting on how daunting strange places – literal and figurative - can be
- Dispersed group reflecting the importance of not leaving folk behind in moving forward reflecting inclusion and caring
- Collection of antiques, representing what might have been and reflecting the value of seizing opportunities when they are presented.
- Cobweb with dew representing, on the one hand beauty and patience and interdependence, but with the "fly perspective" ever present, on the other. The values of interdependence were emphasised
- The Old and Frail Patient representing hope in the face of difficult circumstances reflecting the value of hope

In the next part of the exercise we were invited to contribute together to a written account of the significant events in the history of the Tóchar Valley, starting at earliest times, concluding at the present day. This was done on a wide strip of paper, running for about forty feet on trestle tables.

Then the question was set:

> Which of these events of history, with significant consequences for the valley, and which carried the consequences we now knew of, had been strategically planned for by authorities of the day?

In answer we discussed the Great Famine and the destruction of the abbey. It was agreed that the famine was certainly not planned and that all the consequences of the destruction of the abbey at Ballintubber had not been fully anticipated.

From exploring history, we were then invited to turn our attention to the future, bringing to our deliberations the sense of discontinuity and unpredictability that our study of the past had revealed. We were encouraged to think about different but plausible scenarios of the future, where similar unpredictability as had occurred in history might re-occur and to use these as frameworks for thinking about strategic development.

My Learning

Firstly, I learned that this was a very suitable way of bringing out / establishing a community's values. I had read of an alternative, "*Through the Looking Glass: Identifying Desirable Group Values*" (Hein et al. 1993: 277 - 278) and thought it less that sensitively constructed. I thought the participation was enthusiastic and animated. The values that were highlighted included:

> Family values, work ethics, diversity of skills and experiences, understanding, insights into tensions, future visioning, freedom, caring for carers, caretakers of the earth, leadership, our sense of place, inclusion, carpe diem, interdependence and hope.

Again, it may be helpful to reflect on experiences with other communities where the participants come together for purposes that are broadly excluding in purpose. Such communities may wish to exclude travellers, immigrants, drug-addicts, mental patients, disadvantaged persons or disabled people. They may be concerned about planning permission for housing, landfill sites or industry. In these contrasting situations it dawned on me that values play little part. Shared values facilitate a different dynamic.

As a result, I began to ask myself some fundamental questions about my own values. Was I, as a practitioner, contemplating that values were for participants and not for me? Would this aspiration not be a subliminal continuation of the standpoint of researchers, advisors and teachers in the traditional, empiricist mode? Elliott (1998: 157 -158) reminds us that Aristotle held in Ethics that values are necessarily vague 'because they can only be operationally defined in the actions we take to realise them.'(Op cit: 157). Where Elliott (ibidem) states that education is intrinsically ethical in character, I hold that rural community development, in pursuing a better order for its participants, is ethical too. In my early career my advice on horticultural crop production was largely transactional in nature. As long as the advice I gave was reliable and accurate, my values were not relevant to this advisory transaction. But because a goal of community development is tied into the good of society, reflecting about this desired improvement in society and the best means of advancing it cannot be separated from ethics and values. If I fail to reflect on my values, if I do not ask myself whether or not I live them in practice, I am not much of a practitioner or action researcher. Sowell (1987) emphasises the connection between vision and values. I cannot contribute in situations where I cannot share the goals or vision of a community and their values.

Therefore I find myself at a critical point in this dissertation. I have introduced myself here as eager to improve my practice. But this desired improvement has always been far more than an enhancement of a technique, or of a knowledge base or of a skill. It embraces my 'sense of life', as O'Donohue (1998: 93) names it. For values and vision shape the meaning of my life and practice in community development.

I am committed to improving my practice through action research. I adopt the principle that improving my practice is the professional activity that I should continuously seek. In doing this, I join participants in personal development, the first of my building blocks of community development mentioned in chapter three. In pursuing improvement in the second of these building blocks, interpersonal skills, I would cultivate a high regard for all community activists and others with whom communities interact. Decision making, my third building block, I would advance through action research. It is here that action happens. I look to action research to guide determinations and to assess their consequences. In this practice, I would expect to promote the practice of action research itself, my seventh block.

It seems to me that the interpretation of leadership that I am most comfortable with is one of servant leader or facilitator who supports participants in their endeavours. I agree with Daloz et al. (1996: 42) that there are many kinds of leadership, but I write only of what works for me. O'Toole (1996: 12) asks why so much of our leadership is contingency based and deplores the absence of its ethical basis. That said I accept a duty to promote my discoveries in this dissertation among practitioners, academics and participants. This arises from my benefiting from public funding and more so from my conviction that my discoveries are significant and can contribute to the advancement of rural community development.

I am aware of my limitations. I am aware too of a responsibility to renew my resources. When I wrote of my values in chapter two, I said that much of the Christian philosophy appeals to me. I now look forward to a committed attempt to integrate that philosophy into my practice. That integration -which I mentioned in connection with the Tóchar Valley Network - is the subject for ongoing exploration. I would expect such work to be reflective and to have practical effects. I do not hold this view out as one that others must follow. Such a directive outcome denies my values. But I do believe that a philosophical base is desirable; otherwise action research is downsized to a technique that provides interesting insights but may be deficient in values and vision.

On strategic planning, the overall point was to call into question the value of those approaches to strategic planning for local development that assumed reliability in predictable future environments. The alternative position, presented in Ballintubber, called for us to think of dynamic interrelationships between the community and a range of environments where it might have to operate in the future, as the 'reliable' context for planning. The aim is not to get the future right but to avoid getting it wrong. In this approach, it is the process that is important, not the accuracy of the prediction; it the getting in touch with the systemic advance of communities rather than trying to fit them into straightjackets we ourselves have fashioned for ourselves.

Conclusion

The general thrust of Polanyi's work (1958, 1962), over four decades ago was to question the adherence by the scientific community to its dogmatic cult of objectivity. He sought to establish that the researchers' personal participation in their knowledge - in its discovery and in its validation - is an indispensable part of science itself. I have been impressed by the passion and commitment to emerging discovery in the broad field of biology by researchers and lecturers, starting with my undergraduate days. Traditional science has a way of not valuing this devotion. In its official products of scientific papers, this dedication is overlooked. Yet I believe researchers are affected by scientific

discoveries. Manchester (1975: 214 - 215) cites the concerns of Einstein and Szilard to impress President Roosevelt on the potential of a chain reaction in uranium in 1939. Six years later they had changed their minds (op cit: 335 - 336) and were intent on getting back to Roosevelt to counsel him against atomic bombs. A commitment to the greater good is what shines through, particularly in the biological and social sciences.

I have learned in Ballintubber. The gain in knowledge there came from several sources, including my own knowledge, that of each participant, and that of the Michigan State team. With McNiff (2000: 41) we can confirm:

> "We know more than we can say; our personal knowledge is unarticulable, because usually we are not aware of it - we just know."

Of course there were outside sources such as the books and papers we shared. I will still describe it as conversational learning. It was also learning in action. For me - in terms of personal progress - I no longer feel the sense of apprehension that I felt when I first attended a community meeting with Sr Maureen Lally. When I realised that I could not match my preparation for such a meeting with an un-anticipatable event, that was a turning point. I now am comfortable with the notion that we are all learners and that that is publicly acknowledged. I forsake the inflexibility of being exclusively expert.

Polanyi (1958, 1962: 256) shares my epistemological stance, when he states:

> "While I shall continue to argue a series of points and adduce evidence for my proposed conclusions, I shall always wish it to be understood that in the last resort my statements affirm my personal beliefs, arrived at by the considerations given in the text in conjunction with other not specified motives of my own. Nothing I shall say should claim the objectivity to which in my belief no reasoning should ever aspire: namely that it proceeds by a strict process, the acceptance of which by the expositor, and his recommendation of which for acceptance by others, include no passionate impulse of his own."

Perhaps the aptly named Dreamer (1999: 45) describes the ambiguity of my position more clearly:

> "And all the while, deep inside, I know what I have always known: that the knowledge will never be enough. This is the secret we keep from ourselves. And the moment it is revealed, we become aware of a need for something else; for the wisdom to live with what we do not know, what we cannot control, what is painful—and still choose life."

My findings, like Polanyi's, are tentative.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

"Are we there yet?"

(The universal travelling child).

Introduction

Throughout this thesis I have used the metaphor of a journey to describe and link my exploration of emergent learning and change. That journey of change and learning was connected with the notion of pilgrimage, particularly through the study's association with Tóchar Phádraig (chapter five). I acknowledge that element of pilgrimage in this work, with its implications for personal improvement, change and enlightenment.

This resemblance to a journey has helped bring into being my emergent understanding of knowledge. In my early career I saw knowledge as fixed, quantifiable and dominantly externally located in academia. This kind of knowledge was a commodity that was accessed to strengthen a particular enterprise or performance. Its integrity rested on reliable empirical investigation.

The journey was the means of generating knowledge; it was the means through which I came to know. That knowledge was not fixed; it was fluid, changing with the perspective of each participant possessor. It was embedded in each participant. It had dimensions of ethical deliberation. I had to reconceptualise my understanding of knowledge and expand my earlier understanding of it to accommodate my findings. This 'in community knowledge' tended to be related to participants' experience and the outcome of reflection on community process. It was a form of personified wisdom, accessed through dialogue. My emerging understanding of this knowledge was also related to my experience and reflection. This new kind of knowledge addressed the relational nature of communities. It had an axiological basis in that it took account of values and principles held by communities' participants. It was not an objectified item, found in academia but a form of living, embodied theory born of experience. Generated from experience and reflection, it underpinned the disposition to collaborate in community. Many of these characteristics (relational, experiential, axiological, reflective and embedded location) are not accessible to the same degree through traditional methodologies. I believe my discoveries and research approach has implications for future research in rural community development.

This form of scholarship was new to me. It is of the post-modern era. It has implications for the future of research in community development. What was modelled in the Tóchar Valley Network through conversational learning has implications for rural community development. There, practitioners moved to

a standpoint where they too were learners and that they could learn significantly in community. See Fear et al, 2000 (a) and letters of validation from Bawden, Fear, Lally and McNiff in appendix six.

This view of knowledge in the context of rural community development carries implications for the structures and processes of the future. I believe that further use of my approach in community development will yield further insights. But these insights cannot be accessed unless the process and practice of the researcher changes to accommodate the nature of the new scholarship. I trust that I have demonstrated one possible pattern of approach for others to consider. I am aware that there are implications for colleagues in these discoveries. I am also aware that - as with all changes - there will be resistance.

I have highlighted the predictable geographic and intellectual isolation of practitioners' typical employment conditions. In the closing years of my public service career, as a specialist in community development, I experienced that isolation. I endeavoured at that time to force my technical rational approach, which had been a reliable resource to me as an advisor, to continue to guide me in my then new responsibilities. It had very limited application as I demonstrated in "The Role of Teagasc's Rural Development Officer" (Lillis 1993). The dilemmas I experienced then around reliability and pertinence of empirically grounded information for communities, together with the absence of dependable lodestars for my own guidance in the world of community development, are on their way to resolution as a result of this research. (See Lally letter of validation in appendix six). Structures and processes of support will be needed to promote and sustain the changes I suggest. The exchange of research of this nature among communities is rare, in short supply and needs to be fostered.

For my part I look forward to pursuing my practice largely within the new scholarship (Schön 1995; Boyer 1990). I would like to encourage new thinking in the field of rural development. Most of those who have written letters of validation (appendix six) are/were already persuaded about the relevance of the new scholarship; I would like to convince others to move from a form of theory that sees process as objectives to a new theory that permits them to understand what is happening. I see this as a gradual, piecemeal development and as the result of modelling the process. Exhortations would be a waste of effort.

Some further key learnings to emerge from this study are as follows:

- I came to recognise that each community is uniquely different. Communities differ because of the variety of influences in their make-up. (See chapter five.)

- I came to realise that communities have applicable know-how themselves; that this knowledge in action (Schön 1987, 1994, 1995 and 1996) is a reliable basis for their practice, on which they daily depend to advance. I learned that I too could access that knowledge through accessing it in rural communities. (See chapter five; see letters in appendix six from Professors Frank Fear, Richard Bawden, Sr Maureen Lally and Dr Jean McNiff).

- I found that communities are highly relational and interactive. I prioritised that characteristic, interpersonal relations, in my dealings with communities as a target area for improvement in my practice.

- I worked out through reflection on my experience as a teaching practitioner that new entrants to community development were likely to learn best through experiential learning, or 'situated learning: legitimate peripheral participation' (see Hanks et al. 1991; Lave and Wenger, 1991) within a type of apprenticeship, in their own communities (see chapter four).

- In accessing 'in community knowledge' (chapter five) I myself learned how to access this information through ‘legitimate peripheral participation' with the permission of the Tóchar Valley Network of communities. I give several examples of this learning in chapter five.

- This kind of knowledge is a complex mixture of experience, values, contextual information and expertise, embodied in language, organisational processes and norms of behaviour, as aptly described by Lyotard (1984). I would expand Lyotard's description of knowledge by adding a disposition that celebrates participants' talents particularly in storytelling, music and dance in ways that are devoid of affectation.

- I see this kind of knowledge as embedded in maturing communities. I think it is rarely indigenous, i.e. occurring naturally but is the result of experience of community processes. Communities themselves, through conversational learning, largely generate it. Neither does it result from a blueprint or of an input of exogenous knowledge. It is a ground rock for a community's independence. It is an experience of learning. Embedded knowledge differs from indigenous knowledge. I see indigenous knowledge as largely static, largely generated on an individual basis and useful in an individual's transactions with his or her environment. Embedded knowledge is additional. As described by Lyotard (1984) above, in a community development context it is largely

the result of experience in the community's processes. External sources or exogenous knowledge does not have an over-riding impact in this domain.

- I was introduced to the concept of 'multiple intelligences' (Gardner, 1993; Fitzgibbon and Fleischmann, 2000), which recognise and validate giftedness in areas outside the propositional forms of the mathematical, logical and literacy domains. Many of the facets of intelligence recognised in the theory of multiple intelligences, especially intrapersonal and interpersonal skills, are foundational and sustaining resources in community development. They are fundamental to its effectiveness (Benson 1996; Biddle et al. 1965; Christenson et al. 1980; Cook 1994; Fear 1997; Hope et al. 1995; Schaffer et al. 1993; Theobold, 1991).

- The official curriculum "Profile of Rural Ireland" was cast as factual concepts. Its content could be described as empirically derived. Emancipatory, tacit or personal knowledge, more in keeping with the knowledge required for participation in rural community development, were not highlighted.

- I became convinced that the traditional methodologies of research were constrained in their capacity to engage with rural community development. There were aspects of its holistic nature that these methodologies did not address, notably the well being of the relationships between people and their environments as influenced by ethical, aesthetic spiritual, cultural and ecological concerns. In using action research as my principal methodology I was able to access these aspects of the practice of rural community development, which traditional methodologies do not address.

- Another key insight on the journey was the realisation that the paradigm shift from the era of productivity to the era of persistence or the age of sustainability had not occurred in Irish agriculture (chapters two and three).

- The perspective of rural community development gained from systems theory allowed me to bring together aspects of my practice that hitherto had been kept quite disconnected. I have in mind my perception of my practice as incorporating me as a learner. This aspect of me, the learner, was unacknowledged in my public service practice.

- I wished to access the values held by the Tóchar Valley Network communities and found the process known as photolanguage (Belisle et al., 1991) a wonderful means of encouraging participants to discuss their values (chapter four). I became conscious of the pervasive influence of a community's values. It became imperative that I re-examine my own values to recognise and implement their guiding direction in my practice.

- I was driven from the outset and throughout this venture by the disadvantaged position of rural community development practitioners. They are often isolated, not only geographically, but also intellectually. The communities with which practitioners work are themselves individually idiosyncratic. For these reasons, the research needs of practitioners and communities are rarely met through the dominant conventional research methodologies. Practitioners (and their communities) would benefit from a process that they can reliably operate themselves and that delivers dependable and pertinent guidance to their particular challenge. A search for this benefit was a motivating factor. Action research, from within the critical theoretic family of methodologies is a methodology that meets these needs. For additional support for this view, see letters of Professors Frank Fear, Richard Bawden and Sr Maureen Lally.

- In using action research as my principal methodology I was able to access the practice of rural community development. Action research accommodated the principal characteristics of community development. It took on board the uniqueness of each community.

- Action research accommodated my participation as unforeseen community development activity emerged and adjusted to its emergent nature. It was sensitive to ethical issues. Unpredictability and emergence - so prevalent in community development - are among its characteristics.

- I realised too – as I confirm in my opening remarks in this chapter - that knowledge is not always an external commodity, located beyond the community. I came to hold the view too that practitioners and participants in communities are knowers, capable of acting in their own best interests and for the common good, using their knowledge to those ends. Unlike my earlier practice as an advisor, my expertise would not be an indispensable building block for self-sustaining communities

- I believe that I have changed and grown (see Fear's, Bawden's, Mc Donald's, Mc Niff's Glavey's and Lally's letters of validation, appendix 6). Action research on one's practice is essentially an invitation to respond positively to a means that facilitates my doing so. I came to realise more clearly that I was responsible for my own life, that I could change but that I had no mandate to expect others to change in ways that I might wish. I - like Professor Fear (see letter of validation, appendix 6) had been trapped in positivism for a time. I too was 'forced to explore alternatives because of field experiences in communities.' (Fear, 2001: Appendix six)

- 'There is no question in my mind that you struggled, to your core, with this piece. The 'you' that started is not the 'you' who is finishing. Pushing yourself to the brink, you now possess a transformed understanding of self, practice and development. You look at the world

through different eyes and, consequently, see different things.... The study is *only a first step* in expressing your understanding about what it means to walk a significantly different path of rural development thinking and practice.' (Fear, 2001: appendix six.)

Validation of these Claims

In chapter three I wrote:

> 'Validation in this work is based on (i) triangulation, on (ii) critical thinking, on (iii) participants' evidence, on their learning as a consequence of their participation in this research, and on (iv) resultant action. By resultant action I mean that when the findings are implemented and they in time deliver, this will also be / is evidence of validity. This occurs during and after the work is completed. I use all four [(i) to (iv)]. I look to the critique of validators (supervisors, critical friends, other practitioners and others) whose comments are incorporated throughout. These comments are not solicited solely post-factum but have been deliberately invited, albeit informally, at critical junctures as the work progressed.'

I have asked a group of people to write as validators. They are:

Professor Richard Bawden, Michigan State University;
Professor Frank Fear, Michigan State University;
Chris Glavey, M. Phil. and PhD candidate, University of Glamorgan, critical friend;
Sr Maureen Lally, Project Manager, Tochar Valley Network;
Pádraig Mc Donald, S.D.B. Headmaster Emeritus, Warrenstown Agricultural College;
Dr Jean Mc Niff, University of Limerick;
Dr Pádraig Wims, University College Dublin.

Their responses are in appendix six. I have also returned data to involved participants (particularly the students in chapter four and Father Fahey and Lorraine of the Tóchar Valley Network) in the form of drafts to check that my account corresponds to their recollection of events and conversations. This is what Ruonavaara (2001:87) describes as 'face validity'.

Triangulation is the incorporation of multiple methods and sources of information to crosscheck information and to strengthen the trustworthiness of data. This procedure is supported by Elliott (1991: 82-83), Mc Niff (1988: 132 -136), Robson (1993:290) and Smith et al (1997: 242). Critical thinking is a form of systematic deliberation that constructs theories and knowledge through questioning action, practice and emerging theories. I find Lomax (1986) cited by McNiff (1988: 132) captures my perspective when she writes:

> "Critical reflection is the way in which a naive understanding of practice is transformed; where the practitioner reflects upon instead of merely experiencing practice; and where the process is made public and shared so that others can gain an understanding of the practice." '

I have applied these measures through out this work so that I might claim with Carr and Kemmis, cited earlier in chapter three,

> '...firstly, the improvement of a practice of some kind; secondly, the improvement of the understanding of a practice by its practitioners; and thirdly, the improvement of the situation in which the practice takes place.'

Significance of the Study

The study potentially has significant implications in the following four areas:
1. Public policy,
2. Rural community development itself,
3. Significance for me personally and
4. Other practitioners.

I expand on these, 1 - 4:

1. Significance for Public Policy

In chapter two, I made the case that rural development - including rural community development - had been neglected, more or less since the foundation of the state. Nowadays publicly backed community development is directed almost exclusively at disadvantaged communities. Community development is linked to disadvantage and is itself disadvantaged.

My findings could do much to redress these limitations. This work holds that a paradigm shift in the research methodology appropriate to the multi-faceted system that is rural community development is overdue (chapters two and three). Empirical approaches that worked well for the production and productivity eras of agriculture are inadequate when applied to rural development in the post-modern era. As a result, both the training and development approaches associated with the dominant research methodology are inappropriate. These fail to engage with participants (chapter four).

It appeared to me (see chapter four) that the needs of a group of young men, destined to live in rural Ireland, were ignored by a curriculum that shunned the potential of experiential learning in favour of the almost wholly theoretical. But community development is practice-based. The goal of validating a qualification in rural development superseded the benefits of knowledgeable, practical and genuinely engaged youth in communities.

A legacy of the dominant paradigm in use is the survival of a 'one size fits all' approach by officialdom to rural development. This denies the idiosyncratic nature of rural (and of all) communities to facilitate a predominantly top down, unresponding approach by the public sector. By breaking new ground through the application of critical thinking I expect this paradigm shift will gain wider acceptance.

In demonstrating that action research has brought about an improvement in my practice, there is an implication that the process I have followed can encourage and facilitate the improvement of the practices of other practitioners. Improving the practices of practitioners would be a welcome outcome for policy makers.

I am also advocating that action research is a reliable means through which the challenges that confront all communities might be addressed. Learning through action research locally is an advantageous goal of public policy.

2. Significance for Rural Community Development

This dissertation sees rural community development as an inclusive system and illuminated by systems thinking (Bawden 1984; Bertalanffy 1968; Capra 1982, 1997 (a), 1997 (b); Checkland 1981; Churchman 1971; O'Connor et al.1997; Wheatley 1992). I have differed from the dominant practice in Ireland in refraining from breaking this system into sections, so that it might be better examined (Bohm 1996). This procedure of not fragmenting community development facilitates an approach where my practice within the system of rural community development in its entirety may be reliably examined and advanced.

In early drafts of this work, I thought that the difference between rural and urban community development was confined to the likelihood that rural communities were more liable to know one another more closely than would their urban counterparts. This was because rural families' roots are traceable over generations and they live less anonymously than do their urban counterparts. Rural participants would therefore be more circumspect about sharing experiences.

That was the principal difference I saw. In this perception I overlooked the contributions to the distinctive experience that is rural living of shared heritage, folklore, landscape, values, archaeology, customs, entertainment, spirituality, festivals, music, stories, local history, limited choice of services and facilities, games and even accent-inflection. Where many of these resources and idiosyncrasies are recognised with pride by such rural communities as the twelve communities that make up the Tóchar Valley Network (chapter five), I came in this study to realise the uniqueness they

confer on rural communities. Arguably each of the facets I have listed exists in urban areas. They do so at levels that are less influential and less likely to become generative themes, that is themes round which communities might show enthusiasm and develop programmes. Engagement with these facets and ownership of them would be of a different order.

I realised too the importance of the transformative influence of values in communities. For too long in the Irish experience, values were associated with reactionary stances, so much so as to make them ineffective as a force for a better order. The connection between the values and the heritage of the Tóchar Valley Network, disclosed through photolanguage, recounted in chapter five, is the significant attraction for the Michigan State team. They interpret the connection as an authentic and unique expression of the Celtic spirit (Fear et al 2000: 7-8).

I was responsible for introducing Michigan State University to these communities. What this university did was to validate the communities' knowledge and achievements, when few outside agencies would do so (Fear et al. 2000).

The majority of government agencies fail to engage with these types of communities. FAS is one exception, together with the national universities of Ireland. In the last two years, government has proposed reverting to a policy I first noted in a National Economic and Social Council report (NESC November 1994). This report advocated the deliberate development of some twelve country towns. It was assumed this policy, based on urban development, would cater in some unspecified way for rural hinterlands. This is a form of disengagement by the state with a significant section of its people.

My discovery of embedded knowledge in communities is significant. This kind of information, which facilitates the members of these communities to act effectively as communities, is the indirect product of an understanding of multiple intelligences (Gardner 1993). It is the kind of knowledge in community that few if any Irish agencies recognise. Where this capability is absent or underdeveloped, as is the case in many communities, it can delay progress.

3. Significance for Me

The significance of this research for me has been a transformation and expansion of my perceptions and abilities. I owe this to several 'turning points' along my journey. The principal turning points are as follows:

1 The decision of the Irish Department of Agriculture and Food, together with the United States Department of Agriculture to

award me a scholarship to facilitate this research in September 1998.

2 The suggestion of Dr Jean Mc Niff that I focus on my own practice and examine it through action research.

3 Discovering Schön's writings.

4 The Derry Seminar in 1998 for community development practitioners, where I was first introduced to conversational learning.

5 Reading "Life after Senge" (Fear) and learning about the potential contribution of leadership, community resource development and community organisation building in community development.

6 Becoming aware of the phases of development in agriculture: Self -sufficiency (pioneering), Production, Productivity and Postmodern and their implications for a paradigm shift (Bawden) that had not occurred here.

7 The shortcomings of empirically based methodologies in the domain of rural development; the promotion of action research.

8 My experience in Warrenstown College teaching 'Profile of Rural Ireland', an exogenously developed curriculum which did not take into account the needs, capacities and future life-contexts of the ten participants.

9 'Attenuated conditions of legitimate peripheral participation' (Lave and Wenger) - the notion of apprenticeship preferably in one's own community as the effective locus for learning about community development.

10 Serendipitous W. K. Kellogg Foundation funding which provided the opportunity to bring Michigan State University to the Tóchar Valley Network of rural communities, where I learned about 'in community knowledge'.

11 The use of photolanguage (Bawden), through which communities' values was accessed and systemic theory applied.

My interest in this study was impelled by my experience in my last assignment in Teagasc. As a specialist in leadership and community development, I was

expected to offer guidance to Teagasc's newly appointed rural development officers. My early interpretation of this assignment was to write "The Role of Teagasc's Rural Development Officer" (Teagasc 1993). In ignorance of Bohm (1996), I fractured 'role' into its component parts: role set, role range, the competency requirements of officers, the scope of their work and their approaches to it. The resulting document (op cit.) was largely prescriptive and, in style, not unlike the blueprints on crop production I produced in my earlier career as an advisor for growers. The document had all the elements of its propositional parentage. I assumed that rural development officers had little to offer by way of input into the document and that they were a biddable lot, who might be told what to do. They in turn would tell their rural communities what was expected of them. I was building a hierarchy or chain of command.

I learned, over time, that this approach was unsustainable and logged my emerging insights in several articles (Lillis 1995; 2000; 2001; forthcoming; and Brewer and Lillis 2001). In this documentation I recognised that I could not change others; they are at liberty to change for themselves. However, I, myself, could change, if I were willing to review my thinking and my practice. I could progress from being Vygotsky's metaphorical child (1978), learning as a child from an adult's demonstrations, to becoming Vygotsky's independent adult. That is what I did and this work is the account of what happened.

The critical reflection on my practice, which I undertook throughout this thesis, yielded insights that led to a living theory (Whitehead 1989) that now sustains what I do and plan to do in rural community development. In the journey to that conclusion I came to know the limitations of positivist methodologies and the significance of examining my own practice and thinking through action research.

It was significant for me to discover that the Lewinian field of action research would facilitate my critique of my practice. Advancing beyond the production and productivity phases of agricultural development into post-modern approaches was a determining breakthrough in my thinking. I was well aware of the contribution that action research was making to Irish education (Mc Niff et al. 2000).

Very late in my research, I was advised to read Palmer. I was fascinated with his exposition of the importance of balance between action and reflection in our world of work. It resonated with my thinking and discoveries. For Palmer (1999), the majority of us are called to a world of work or action. But action without reflection is in danger of resulting in frenzy and exhaustion; reflection without action is in a parallel danger of resulting in unreality. It is in recognising the interdependence of action and reflection / *researcher* / research and their interdependent contribution to disclosing our insights of life's experience that I think I can claim to have made a contribution.

4. Significance for Other Practitioners

One reason for publishing this account is for its educational impact. I hope it gives pointers for other practitioners and participants, which they might adapt in resolving dilemmas of their practice of rural community development. I trust that in ways not dissimilar to my own experience, they too might reach a fuller understanding of their own educational development. They too could produce their own living theories (Whitehead 1989). 'Living theory' for me has two dimensions in its implications:

(1) A living theory is a theory or body of knowledge on which the practitioner relies to guide practice.

(2) A living theory is living also in the sense that it is not static - it is an emergent accretion of knowledge, made up of skills, experience, values, celebration, contextual information and expertise, organisational processes and norms of behaviour.

Thus the action research approach to which I subscribe generates an educational theory that is founded in individual's claim to understand and guide her/his own educational development and practice. I see that living form of educational theory growing as the critical dialogical community it informs reaches a critical mass of adherents and, as Gladwell (2000) predicts, becomes an unstoppable force for desirable change.

I think that the challenge of my findings is to invite a response from all our best thinking. To advance this I would like to promote a wider discourse among scholars, participants and practitioners, working in a learning community, so that our findings advance the policy and practice of rural community development itself. This I see as urgent. That we have used an inappropriate paradigm for rural community development up to now is a conviction of mine. I believe that what can emerge would be transformative, not only for the people involved, but for other countries. The Cork declaration (chapter two), crafted to a great extent by the Irish delegates, is evidence of such collaboration yielding dividends at European level. We might begin by addressing the question "Is the practice of community development a fit focus for scholarship? Would knowing about its ways be an asset to advancing rural peoples? Should this form of scholarship that cuts across teaching, research, service and education and results in progress not itself be a field for urgent study? What about learning from our own practice?

"Are We There Yet?"

The problem with 'role' is that it invites a defining and circumscribing description, that it is a straitjacket, a 'box' into which the role description is confined. At the same time the box excludes aspects not considered germane. Within the box 'role' demarcates duties, expectations, credentials, scope and other contextual factors. It differentiates between what falls within the role and what is excluded. It sets restrictions. I have tended to avoid the word 'role' in relation to the practitioner in rural community development.

From my experience in the last three years reflecting on my practice and thinking, I do not see that restrictions are advantageous. Boundaries to the reach of my examination of my practice would not have been helpful. They would have begged the questions: Why? Who gets to set them? On whose authority?

The conventional notion of 'role' puts at risk aspects of my understanding of 'practitioner' that would include emergence, evolution and response to serendipity. It implies that it is the right of others - perhaps not even engaged in the process of rural community development - to prescribe the practitioners' remit. In a sense I can argue that when I worked within the context of Ireland's official rural development service, I wrote that rigid script about role (see Lillis 1993), where I prescribed its content and boundaries. I have already said that my perceptions therein were very limited.

But the thrust of this dissertation stands for the gradual emergence of my understanding of rural community development and its practitioners as that emergence responds to communities' particular endeavours. I have also claimed that this work is ongoing; that what I have accomplished is a way of looking at the system that is rural community development that makes it meaningful for me. From this examination I have developed theories that help my understanding of the process of community development. This process has helped me interpret the potential contribution of the practitioner. I have developed these insights principally by reflecting on my practice and on my learning. I have found the process enriching, leading to all the ways in which I have been able to improve my practice.

I believe all practitioners have the right to examine their own practice with a view to improving it. I believe that I have demonstrated that this process has benefits that facilitate improvement in practice. I think too that action research brings to rural communities a reliable means of effectively addressing their own research. Given the distinctive nature of each community and the fact that rural community development is process driven, action research as a methodology is tailor-made for such research. If then, communities and practitioners engage in this kind of research, they become effective, addressing systematically features of community development that hitherto restricted their development. Their understanding of the potential contribution of their practitioners is one such feature they might wish to examine. They would not be helped were the description of their roles standardised, cast in stone and prescribed for them by outside agents.

Again, given the diversity in communities, a 'one-size-fits-all' approach on the role of the rural community development practitioner is not an auspicious point of departure for community development. It does not make sense. Perhaps it

does when control and accountability predominate and are the real agenda. This denial of diversity I interpret as a legacy of propositional theory, the technical rational school that conducts empirical research and transfers the findings to rural dwellers on the basis that this information has been lacking. There follows a whole retinue of provisions and directives that ensure that practitioners' employing organisations can satisfy themselves and other supervising organisations that the unsought information has been made available.

Noer's (1997) premise is built on a different dispensation governing employment in organisations. He advocates a culture in organisations that encourages all to break free from the dysfunctional constraints and conditioned behaviour of the past and commit to becoming learners, committed to growing with the challenge of change (op cit: 214 - 217). A static, inflexible conception of role would not fit with his view. The guiding principle of successful employees of the future is one where they are self-directed pursuers of knowledge. What he advocates matches my findings. Noer's view is linked to that of Vaill (1996), who conceived the metaphor 'permanent white water' to describe the unpredictability of the world of work. He advocates systems learning (op cit: 103 -119) but warns that systems learning is resisted in organisations that do not have an institutional learning philosophy (op cit: 104).

I would link this to the influences I identified affecting action research in table 3.6 of chapter three, which point to the potential of action research for enhancing our understanding of the world:

Table 5: Alignment of Influences Affecting Action Research Governed by Standpoints, Approaches and Outcomes

Standpoints	**Approaches**	**Outcomes**
Critical Theory	Action Research	Action learning
Feminist Theory	Action Science	Autopoesis
Pragmatism	Cooperative Enquiry	Critical Theory
Socio-Technical Systems	Participative Research	Emancipatory Pedagogy
Soft Systems	Critical Systemics	Feminist Theory
		Management
		Experiential Learning

Where organisations commit to becoming learning organisations in their pursuit of effectiveness for a changing world, the concept of an inflexible, demarcated role is conflicting and out of date. Because I write of community development, it does not mean that communities are exempt from change as experienced in business organisations. Two of my seven building blocks of community development are community resource development and community organisation development (chapter two). These building blocks presuppose the notion of the learning organisation. While I made much of

the 'in community knowledge' in chapter five, it is nevertheless the product of a learning organisation, a resource within an organised community, a foundation on which communities rely for effectiveness on the ground locally. Thus we have all this learning going on.

The Practitioner

What then are effective practitioners doing? I think that they are committed systemic learners, philosophers and facilitators or servant-leaders with an outgoing agenda. By 'outgoing' I mean their agenda is not egocentric. What follows is a personal view, the distillation of the experience of the last three years work on this thesis. I elaborate:

1. Practitioners as Systemic Learners

The systemic approach 'asks its practitioner to embrace complexity, contingency, dynamism, and perhaps even mystery' (Vaill 1996: 109). Vaill (op cit: 105) lists the disadvantages of non-systemic approaches, i.e. the old paradigms, as including:

> '...the tendency to think in black-and-white, either-or terms; the tendency to believe in simple linear cause-effect relationships; the tendency to ignore feed-back; the tendency to ignore the relationship between a phenomenon and its environment; the tendency to isolate a phenomenon in time, thus ignoring various time-based cycles; the tendency to ignore the natural boundaries of a phenomenon in favour of what we think what its boundaries should be; and the tendency to believe that we can describe a phenomenon independently of ourselves as perceivers (that is , without considering systemic interactions between ourselves and the phenomenon.) All of these examples are denials of a systems point of view...'

From the outset of this work I have interpreted - albeit occasionally intuitively - the above list of Vaill's practices of disadvantage as practices with which I was uneasy. For example, I have instinctively turned away from the practice of fragmenting structures into pieces, the better to examine them, the equivalent of isolation of a phenomenon in time and ignoring natural boundaries, which drew Vaill's criticism. In using action research, I had moved away from the rest of Vaill's list of disadvantages:

The scope for ignoring feedback was nil. The dialogical process, conducted primarily - though certainly not exclusively - with myself (through 'discussion with earlier drafts and with others) minimised ' the tendency to think in black-and-white, either-or terms; the tendency to believe in simple linear cause-effect relationships'. The exchanges with Professor Fear - which stand at 147 e-mails (5 June 2001) - are validated in the opening paragraph of his letter (see appendix six).

I have highlighted the contextual nature of community development. By placing my thinking, my practice and my learning at the centre of this study I do not describe community development in terms that are independent of my potential influence and myself. It would appear that I knew more than I was aware of knowing.

But it is Mezirow (1997:5) who issues the challenge to encourage a learning practitioner. He holds that a defining characteristic of our humanity is our electing to understand our experience of life. He is of the opinion that we should pursue this understanding actively. He admits that some people will forego their rights in this domain and accept their understanding of life's experiences from authority figures.

A goal of adult education is transformative learning, which develops autonomous thinking. This in my view would sit uncomfortably with the one-way flow of information that students expected, as I detailed in chapter four. The official curriculum I taught these students did not encourage autonomous thinking. The curriculum raises serious questions about the autonomy of my former colleagues engaged in teaching 'Profile of Rural Ireland'.

Mezirow 's view is that - over time - we acquire a certain rigidity in the way we view the world. His view reflects my perception of myself in my earlier adherence to a technical rational approach to knowledge and learning. Mezirow (1991: 167) calls for transformation of this perspective:

> "Perspective transformation is the process of becoming critically aware of how and why our assumptions have come to constrain the way we perceive, understand, and feel about our world; changing these structures of habitual expectation to make possible a more inclusive, discriminating, and integrating perspective; and finally making choices or otherwise acting upon these new understandings"

Boyd and Myers (1988) advocated a variation, which was broader in the scope of influences they recognised than Mezirow's theory of transformation, particularly its emphasis on rationality. The modification called for the admission of intuitive, creative, emotional dimensions to transformation. This shift is anticipated in the seminal work of Belenky et al. (1986) and in the then emerging feminists' studies. But my experience of communities learning and compiling knowledge inclines me to the view that intuition, creativity and interpersonal giftedness are hallmarks of its processes. I have in mind, for example, the photolanguage exercise outlined in chapter five.

I am suggesting that practitioners might lead as systemic learners and encourage participants to do so too. The long-term nurturing of the system

that is rural community development should never depend on one individual, and particularly not on the community's practitioner.

2. Practitioners as Philosophers

My concern here is about ensuring that rural communities do not content themselves with technique, a concern of Lasley's (1989) and of Schön's (1987, 1995, 1996).

Without a philosophical perspective, a looming gap between what is espoused and what is enacted may not cause concern. Principles and values may receive scant attention and activity may concentrate on material and economic progress only. The contribution of values that I described in Ballintubber may be ignored, instead of being celebrated and seen as a defining resource that encompasses and articulates the community's deepest concerns. Additionally the importance of learning may be difficult to inculcate if reflective practice, within a philosophy that would foster it, is not cultivated.

3. Practitioners as Servant-Leaders

This last is very much a personal interpretation. I share with Gronn (1995: 25) as cited in West-Burnham (1997) some reservations about leadership literature. He complains that it elevates incumbents to 'previously unheard of levels of potential, altered levels of awareness, autonomy, mission and vision' to the extent that it sets leaders apart and that the frailness of our humanity is made to disappear.

The original description of 'servant leader' is attributed to Robert Greenleaf, (1977) who tended to associate it with Western values, indeed specifically American values, such as:

> '...excellence, fulfilling one's potential and allowing others to do so, achievement, quality of products and services, and a commitment to never-ending growth'.
>
> (Zohar et al. 2000: 33).

But I think there may be room for something more. We can lead insulated lives, lives that injustice, deprivation and prejudice do not touch. We can be disconnected from reality. Practitioners might focus on restoring their communities and reconnect them with this reality.

The opportunities that open up before the practitioner are distinguished by the potential to turn their work into a vocation. Zohar et al. (2000:33) claim that the possibility of converting one's job into a vocation conflicts with the value structure of most - if not all - businesses and professions.

These writers go on to encourage the development of an individual interpretation of servant leadership, 'attuned to the basic life forces of the universe and, in serving them, naturally serves his or her colleagues, company society or whatever.' What strikes me is that the practitioner in community development can commit to a more public dedication to values. Further on Zohar et al. (op cit: 259 - 260) state:

> 'True servant leaders...make things happen that others have felt impossible, they create new ways for human beings to relate to one another...The life of the servant leader improves the attitudes and lifestyle - the conventions - of his tribe.'

I am trying to capture some elements of the values and vision that are normally tacit. I am talking of the servant leader constantly asking the question 'why not?' when useful proposals are at risk of being discarded for no good reason.

I have said earlier that I resist being prescriptive for several reasons:

- because prescriptive advice often is the fruit of another's journey;
- taking prescriptive advice may mean not going on a significant journey, and:
- not learning,
- not meeting people whose conversation might enrich one,
- not thinking and
- having little of substance to share with others.

Donovan's (1978; vii) counsel, adapted to practitioners, quoted earlier, will bear repetition:

> '… do not try to call them back to where they were, and do not try to call them to where you are, as beautiful as that place might seem to you. You must have the courage to go with them to a place that neither you nor they have ever been before.'

:

This advice implies equality and interdependence. It ensures that the community will not be dependent on the practitioner. It assumes that a sense of adventure will persist.

Rather than achieve success and notoriety-for themselves- and there are plenty of opportunities for so presenting communities' attainments as their own -practitioners, as servant leaders, must be careful to stand aside and allow the community participants the acclaim that is their due. The fate that will await their success in rural community development has been accurately foretold some time ago:

They started with what the people knew,
they built on what they had.
But as with the best leaders,
when the work is done,

the task accomplished,
The people will say
"We have done this ourselves"

Lao Tau. China.700 B.C.

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APPENDIX 3

This appendix relates to chapter three.

It consists of the following documentation:

1 **Review of Conventional Methodologies.**

2. **Schön's Support for Action Research.**

3. **Diary Extract.**

4. **Influences Affecting Action Research; their Leading Authorities and Examples of their Published Works**

REVIEW OF CONVENTIONAL METHODOLOGIES

In this review I examine the empirical / propositional / quantitative and the interpretative / qualitative methodologies. I explain why I have found them wanting for my purposes. I wish to complete my rationale for committing to a practitioner-based approach.

Quantitative Methodology

Von Wright (1994: 10) holds that originally the exact natural sciences, especially mathematical physics, 'set a methodological ideal or standard which measures the degree of development and perfection of all other sciences, including the humanities.' Measurement - the quantitative approach - is the essence of positivism.

There has been a strong reaction against positivism. Cohen and Manion (1997:22-23) cite the poet William Blake (1757 - 1827) as a sceptic of the ontological and epistemological bases of empirical research. The Danish philosopher Kierkegaard, was critical of empiricism's inability to express human potential (*Op cit.* 1997:23). Roszak (1970) also quoted in Cohen and Manion (op cit: 24) finds that empirical approaches persuade us to deny our experience:

'…we subordinate nature to our command by estranging ourselves from more and more of what we experience, until the reality about which objectivity tells us so much finally becomes a universe of congealed alienation.'

This denial of experience challenges empirical researchers in community development situations. It distances them from participants. Holbrook (1971) quoted in Cohen and Manion (op cit: 24 - 25) claims that our study of ourselves through empiricism has yielded little. For Holbrook positivism is limited to:

> *'…an approach which demands that nothing must be regarded as real which cannot be found by empirical science and rational methods, by 'objectivity'. Since the whole problem … belongs to 'psychic reality', to man's* (sic.) *'inner world', to his moral being, and to the subjective life, there can be no debate unless we are prepared to recognise the bankruptcy of positivism, and the failure of 'objectivity' to give an adequate account of existence, and are prepared to find new modes of enquiry.'*

Cresswell (1994: 4 - 10) suggests the following twelve factors as characteristic of the quantitative/empiricist approach:

1) Reality is objective, singular and apart from the researcher.

2) The researcher is aloof from that which is researched.
3) Empirical research is value-free and unbiased.
4) It is conducted on a formal basis.
5) It is based on a set of widely held definitions, commonly using words such as 'relationship', 'comparison' and 'within-group'.
6) It is written up impersonally, in a detached manner.
7) It relies on a deductive process of analysis.
8) It seeks to relate cause to effect.
9) It has a predetermined, static design virtually from the outset.
10) It is context free.
11) It relies on generalisations which lead to prediction, explanation and understanding
12) Its accuracy and reliability are tested through objective instruments of validity and reliability.

Non-positivists hold these limit access to knowledge about community. They may distort our understanding of community.

Relevance of Qualitative Methodologies to this Research

Creswell (1994:5) suggests that in the case of qualitative / interpretative research methodologies, the converse of the twelve characteristics of empirical research, quoted above, pertain:

.

1) Reality is subjective, multiple and experienced by researchers as participants in the study.
2) The researcher interacts with that which is being researched.
3) It is value laden and acknowledges biases.
4) It is conducted on an informal basis.
5) It is characterised by evolving decisions.
6) It is written up personally, using 'I', 'my', 'we' and 'our' and using qualitative words such as 'understanding', 'discover' and 'meaning'.
7) It relies on an inductive process of analysis.
8) It encompasses mutual, simultaneous shaping of factors.
9) It has an emerging, indeterminate, unfolding design virtually from the outset.
10) It is context-bound.
11) It relies on patterns and the development of theories for understanding.
12) Its accuracy and reliability rest on verification and triangulation.

(Doberneck 1998:4)

The qualitative methodologies seem to meet my purposes. Denzin and Lincoln, (1994:2) on qualitative research are encouraging too:

> 'Qualitative research is multimethod in focus, involving an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter. This

means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them.'

However, I have excluded interpretive research from further consideration for several reasons. It precludes examining the practitioner in practice. Furthermore, it exercises a control that cannot fully facilitate serendipity and emergence. I have been asked to take part in such studies in the past. My experience was that the researcher had an agenda, i.e. pursuing their study pretty well regardless of mine. Participation (1 above) and interaction (2 above) were always on the terms of the researcher. With regard to 'evolving decisions' (5 above) and emergence (9 above) these characteristics were present to a very limited degree. There was no sense in which it might be said that the researcher was free to go with the flow of events, or contemplate finishing with outcomes that were substantially different to those which were originally planned. Emergence, serendipity and flexibility would have to be fully accommodated in research on rural community development, if research were to reflect authenticity. Were it otherwise the selected community would be participating on the researcher's terms. Overall it would be difficult to advocate qualitative methodologies as being suited to communities who might wish to conduct their own research on challenges particular to themselves.

Empirical and interpretative researchers carry out research about 'other' people, who are not normally consulted about methods, purpose or resulting recommendations. In community development, this is insensate to individual communities and their values.

I relied on reliable traditional research earlier in my career as advisor and teacher. I thought that I could continue to rely on it in my new responsibilities as a rural development specialist. Applied to rural community development, the epistemology of traditional methodologies would be that a theory - once discovered and perfected - could be relied on to deliver constantly in virtually all situations, until disproved. Under this paradigm, communities would access research / scholarship exclusively through academia. It would link their practitioner to dependence on research, continuing my earlier advantageous experience as advisor and educator. It would imply that community development is not a process but a product, universally re-creatable. It would infer that research could not be a community function.

Further Reservations

I have further misgivings about the dominant methodologies. These reservations relate to reductionism, an inability to address inherent personal contradictions and the absence of necessary paradigm shifts.

1. Reductionism

Quantitative methodologies fragment and separate their subject matter into component parts, so as to scrutinise them better. This segmentation, in the case of rural community development - which is both a holistic system and a holistic process - is questionable. I have difficulty in examining aspects of this integrated process/system, when it is artificially broken down. A priori, there is a significant complication in establishing and controlling individual phases of its many processes and contexts. The assumption that a clear understanding of a fragment of a process, will subsequently reliably contribute to our understanding of the process upon re-integration, is questionable. This fragmentation approach undermines the view of rural community development as a holistic system. In this I have in mind Capra (1997: 81) lamenting reductionism's destruction of patterns in physics and particularly, Bohm's reservations (1996: viii) as outlined in Lee Nichol's foreword:

> 'To illustrate the significance of fragmentation, Bohm often used the example of a watch that had been smashed into random pieces. These pieces are often quite different from the *parts* that have gone into the making of the watch. The parts have an integral relationship to one another, resulting in a functional whole. The fragments, on the other hand, have no essential relationship. Similarly, the generic thought process of humanity incline toward seeing the world in a fragmentary way, "breaking things up which are not really separate." Such perception, says Bohm, necessarily results in a world of nations, economies, value systems and "selves" that are fundamentally at odds with one another, despite topically successful attempts to impose social order. One primary intent of Bohm's dialogue, then, is to shed light on the activity of this fragmentation - not only as theoretical analysis, but also as a concrete, experiential process.'

Bohm himself (op cit: 49 - 50) equates our practice of fragmentation of thought processes to pollution happening up-stream, beyond our control and our awareness. I interpret his metaphor as a state of mind, a pre-disposition to ignore fragmentation, which somehow happens 'up-stream'. I am reluctant to engage in unnecessary fragmentation.

As I made progress with this study I found further support for this originally intuitive view. By the time the study had concluded, my approach to fragmentation had been firmly embedded in systems theory and supported by Bertalanffy 1968; Capra 1982, 1997 (a), 1987 (b); Checkland 1981; Churchman 1971; Wheatley 1992 and Zohar, and Marshall, 2000.

2. Significance of Paradigm Shifts

Kuhn's (1962) analysis of the history of scientific revolutions gave rise to the idea of 'paradigm shifts' where collections of achievements in science occur in revolutionary, discontinuous ways. A significant shift occurred early in the last

century in physics when scientists struggled with emergent insights into the atomic and sub-atomic phenomena. Capra (1997: 5) makes two points: First, as physicists tried to accommodate their discoveries they:

> 'became painfully aware that their basic concepts, their language, and their whole way of thinking were inadequate to describe atomic phenomena.'

Second, he claims that this crisis is paralleled in a radical revision of our prevailing worldview of society, which view was mediated to us through science's recent advances in systems thinking and ecology. (Capra 1972).

Kuhn (quoted in Tarnas 1996 : 360 -361) finds science advances through 'seeking confirmations of the prevailing paradigm' leading to repetition of the physicists' experiences of paradigm inadequacy of the last century. The certainty of the Cartesian/Newtonian world order is being undermined. Kuhn's explains his introducing the concept 'paradigm':

> '...I mean to suggest some accepted examples of actual scientific practice - examples which include law, theory, application, and instrumentation together - provide models from which spring particular coherent traditions of scientific research…The study of paradigms …is what mainly prepares the student for membership in the particular scientific community with which he will later practice. Because he joins men who learned the bases of their field from the same concrete models, his subsequent practice will seldom evoke overt disagreement over fundamentals. Men whose research is based on shared paradigms are committed to the same rules and standards for scientific practice.
>
> (Kuhn, 1996:10-11).

This has implications for me. While I was trained in the empirical tradition, acquiring a new paradigm through action research is not for me an either-or situation. I have not forgotten my earlier training. I still find it relevant, particularly when speaking with individual entrepreneurs in rural development. But I think it is secondary in what I do here. I am committed to examining and continuing to examine my practice now and after the completion of this thesis. It is a way of life.

3. Personal Contradiction

Whitehead (1989; 1993) and my own understanding highlight the state of being a 'living contradiction' experienced by many stakeholders. I cite this in my biography (chapter two) and in my account of teaching the 'Profile of Rural Ireland' (chapter four). Noticing and resolving this experience of paradox are means to increased insight and effectiveness, goals of this study. However, a

paradox as such commonly falls outside the consideration of the dominant methodologies.

Cresswell (1994: 27 et seq.) expands on seven methods in use by non-positivists: biography, phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, case study ethnomethodology and symbolic interactionism. These too I have found unsuited to my purposes.

SCHÖN'S SUPPORT FOR ACTION RESEARCH

Schön (1983, 1987 & 1995) argued for a new epistemology of practice. He provided a framework that addressed cognitive and organisational barriers and illuminated the practice of reflectivity. He focused on the competence and dexterity embedded in skilful practice and displayed by practitioners in situations of uncertainty, unfamiliarity, disagreement and anomaly. This competence he terms 'reflection-in-action'. It lies at the heart of professionals' daily practice. Understanding its processes enhances ability to perform. Such knowledge is often tacit and ignored.

Schön claims that universities have favoured systemic empirical knowledge. They exclude inquiry into the 'reflection in action' process of the effective practitioner. He talks of the dichotomy between 'espoused theory' or the systemic knowledge that professionals acquire in college and the 'theory in action', which they acquire through experience arising from their work. This theory in action is valuable. It informs everyday practice. It is infused with preference, confidence and lived through by the thriving practitioner. Moreover, do we not instinctively rely on this expertise, this 'theory in action' when introducing a beginner to the world of work? We often team up the ingénue with the reliable, experienced performer. Is this practice not an implicit admission that the 'espoused theory' acquired in academia is augmentable in meaningful and enhancing ways through deliberate exposure of the new graduate to an apprenticeship of 'theory in action'? My struggle with my 'theory in action' over years of public service was marked by dissatisfaction with its ability to deliver effectiveness. This I now see as a result of my not appreciating 'reflection in action'. I strove within the limitations of technical rationality to justify instinctual departures from the norm.

Schön (1995) explicitly used the expression 'action research' as the descriptor of the new epistemology for the first time. His line of argument augments the case for action research, particularly when the research question is 'How do I improve my practice?' as is the case here.

I surmise Schön - an architect by profession – experienced less difficulty in having practitioners bring problems for research to universities than I. Communities can never have their needs met satisfactorily through only traditional research approaches. They and their practitioners must also look elsewhere for the support they need.

I suggest that practitioner-based research goes some way to meet this need. If such research were broadened to include participants, as Freire (1997: xi) anticipates, the research requirements of individual communities could be met. Communities would be taking charge. This would go further than Schön envisaged. His case is for practitioner-based research. But I argue that ultimately participants will share the gifts of the practitioner. And I am wary of

compromises or ‘half-way houses’; they tend to become permanent homes for their original tenants. Given the inherited context and the future challenges (Chapter 2), action research as a support for all stakeholders is stronger than envisaged by Schön. If traditional approaches continue to be held out as mediating the way forward, it is difficult to discern how our understanding of rural community development might advance. It is even more difficult to foresee how staff might grow, how development could be holistic, how a paradigm shift would be facilitated or how research at individual community level might advance.

DIARY EXTRACT

I introduce two extracts from my research diary. The first is from January 2000, the second, *January 2001 (recorded in italics)*. In each year I responded to three questions:

1 Where I am in all this research.
2 What are the implications for me as a practical researcher?
3 What kind of theory am I generating? For whom?

I use these extracts, primarily to demonstrate and provide evidence of growth and development in my thinking.

1. Where am I in all this research?

[January 2000]
Beginning this research I set out to integrate many disparate elements of rural community development. I had an uninformed view of action research. I felt instinctively that it could help integrate the rudiments of rural community development. An early goal was to assemble this body of knowledge and to make sense of it.

The focus has shifted. My early training conditioned me to think that research and the knowledge it generated were extraneous 'things', located in academia. An early understanding of the change in my practice was that as an advisor, I worked for farmers. As a new rural community development practitioner I worked with rural people. I think now that I work on my practice. That implies acting (in the sense of doing), monitoring, reflecting, learning and changing. This is the essence of action research. It is what I am doing here.

There has been a shift from integrating external information to improving my practice through research on germane activity. The focus moved from exterior to interior deliberation. An early insight was that traditional approaches to research were inadequate. The goal I aspired to, viz. improving my practice is laudable and one which all professions would support. It was surprising to realise that conventional research did not facilitate this.

I recalled my original plan (Lillis 1993). I produced a combination of propositional principles describing the new jobs Teagasc was about to create in rural development. This booklet grew out of my practice as 'expert'; I would determine the role of rural development practitioner. This would be done on an entirely propositional basis. I demonstrated that there was no need to consult aspirants to the practitioners' role. Of limited applicability, it was largely irrelevant.

I began to realise that my focus should be on process, not outcomes. This self-critique leads to life-long learning.

[January 2001]
One year later, I have further clarified my thinking. I am more confident that what I have to say is significant, not least because of support in the literature from celebrated thinkers. I have better understanding of the development phases of agriculture and rural community development. This breakthrough in the contextualisation of my research is convincing.

I abandoned my earlier thesis structure. I had envisioned it set out as follows:

Chapter 1 would deal with what I was proposing to do;
Chapter 2: the context of the work;
Chapter 3: methodology
Chapters 4 and 5: research proper
Chapter 6: conclusions and significance of the work.

I grew uncomfortable with this layout. Unfortunate readers would plough through half the work (Chapters 1 to 3) before they got into 'real' research. It dawned on me relatively recently that the entire document was a record of my research on my ideas. The function of Chapters 4 and 5 is principally to test my emergent theories on my practice. My earlier plan reflected the structures of conventional theses. This regression reflected an inconsistency. I cannot contemporaneously maintain that the document is research and that chapters 4 and 5, exclusively, are also the research. This contradiction, if not dealt with, will cause me to lose focus on my research question.

2, <u>What are the Implications for me as a Practitioner Researcher?</u>

[January 2000]
I have become the focus of this research, my learning, my practice and me. I am a research practitioner. Aspects of me are in the findings. I am laying my practice, learning, values, changing, misgivings, vulnerability and findings open to scrutiny. My thinking and development dominate this work. I am almost certain that this is pioneering work in Irish rural community development. I wish to explain adequately what is afoot. This venture will produce an account of how I attempted to improve my practice. Others can share, critique, improve or emulate the account. This is a tremendous dividend.

I have read widely about rural community development. In terms of Schön's insights (1983, 1987, &1995), I risked a surfeit of 'espoused theory' without a balance of 'knowing in action' (op cit. 1983: 50), the essence of the effective practitioner. This particular methodology facilitates the balance that Schön

advocates, that grounding of theory in the disorder that is rural community development.

[January 2001]
One year later, my practice and I remain the focus of this research. I realise now with Schön's (1983:42) perceptive insights of special expertise arising from ''uncertainty, uniqueness, instability, and value conflict' that I learn significantly when I came under pressure. I also experienced Whitehead's (1989; 1993) idea of a living contradiction. Out of this real learning came.

I recognise that I have a struggle on hand. There is a temptation to disown empirical and interpretative methodologies. That would be wrong. These methodologies make a contribution. They have limitations in rural community development of post-modern agriculture

3. What kind of Theory am I generating? For whom?

[January 2000]
I have significantly revised my notions of practitioners, myself included. In the past I saw practitioners as the professionals, the source of expertise. They principally initiated rural community development. They were responsible for training participants and maintaining standards. In this perception practitioners would dispense their superior expertise as they saw fit. This was an extension of my advisory and teaching models.

If the practitioner's goal is to create autonomous rural communities, I saw serious flaws in this approach. Independent, unfettered communities - if they were to emerge and survive - would shun dependency on practitioners.

My thinking moved to practitioners' ensuring they collaboratively built up competence within communities to where the communities were independent. In time practitioners' expertise would be redundant. But that still left practitioners in charge of training of participants - and they could easily be made exclusively responsible. It is inconsistent that communities could be excluded from deciding their training needs.

Does the practitioner have any additional responsibilities? I recalled being unable to provide examples where the 'bottom-up' approach had alone instituted community development. I remain doubtful that local participants can take the initiative spontaneously. Some assistance from an external catalyst/mentor or special opportunity is normally needed to get things moving.

As portrayals of what practitioners do I rejected the 'nanny' and 'supplier of information' descriptions. Was it a style of leadership? Or was it largely a facilitative service? I now have reservations about the concept ‘role’. It can often denote a circumscribed stagnancy for occupiers of the role. Harré and van Langenhove (1999: 42) critique the idea that we should occupy roles others create for us. They suggest that we decide what kind of person we wish to be and work consistently to recreate ourselves. Their view is remarkably consistent with the contextual nature of communities and their need for adaptable practitioners. It is also at one with community development's invitation to transformation. The quality of the consultation between the participants and the practitioner is crucial. At its heart, the goal of mutual independence is set and in time achieved. I had not addressed any of this in my Teagasc document (Lillis 1993).

I think therefore that practitioners act with good authority when they facilitate the negotiation of inputs that strengthen the independence of the participants and invite them to subscribe actively towards that goal. I think this is best achieved through action research, where a problem is tabled for discussion and resolution. I feel other strategies fail, either on the grounds of shortcomings, dependency or because they smother initiative. When practitioners model an action research approach in this way for participants, they ensure the long-term survival and autonomy of the community group. Where they create a legacy through which participants turn automatically to action research to review past activities and assess further opportunities, practitioners’ work will have been well done. Practitioners should commit to moving on.

It follows that over time that the distinction between how practitioners work and how participants do so becomes blurred. This is because all share the goal of making the 'expertise' element of practitioners' contribution redundant. I mean 'redundant' in the sense that the community has itself assimilated much of that expertise and topped it up with additional abilities which it, itself has identified as necessary for its own ends.

So in a sense there will be no practitioners, only participants in community development. I think that Donovan, (1978: vii) both challenges practitioners and emphasises the importance of a collaborative approach to their practice, when he writes of their relationship with their participants:

> '… do not try to call them back to where they were, and do not try to call them to where you are, as beautiful as that place might seem to you. You must have the courage to go with them to a place that neither you nor they have ever been before.'

[January 2001]
I made a significant discovery when I read a report of a visit to Ireland by Professor Bawden (Bawden 2000). In it he demonstrated that empirical and interpretative approaches suited to the production and productivity phases of Agriculture were being inappropriately applied to rural community development. I was on to something. Agricultural researchers had not adjusted and were persisting with a limited methodology.

Another insight was the extensive effects of traditional methodologies. I think that they precondition me, because of my early training. Schön and others are critical for the same reason. I am convinced that they affect official research, education and development. I could not revert to an empirical / qualitative approach to community development because my understanding would be inferior. Too many characteristics of community development would be excluded from consideration.

The implications of these discoveries were far-reaching. By conducting this work through action research, it was in all likelihood going to be original. This intention is first cited away back in my submission for funding. I had not envisaged that action research was so radical. It facilitates practitioners' accessing the benefits of research into their particular practice. I was raising hard questions about what conventional research offered individual practitioners. I was challenging the way we theorise rural community development.

For Whom?

[January 2000]
Primarily for myself. I am the principal beneficiary of my own research, arising from reflection on my activity to improve my practice. Those who collaborate with me also benefit. If not, and I am unable to demonstrate any learning on their part, my discoveries are the poorer. I would lack validation from an immediate source, i.e. those immediately involved. There would be little point asserting that others might benefit, if those who participated with me did not..

A third group of beneficiaries is the ensuing readers who will interpret the thesis and may be stimulated to conduct similar research.

[January 2001]
The kind of theory that I am generating helps clarify my practice. It places it on sure foundations when I examine, through action research aspects of community development that remain hidden to conventional research. I now think that this discovery cannot be limited to one practitioner, me. In

promoting these findings, I share an opportunity for others to change their fundamental approach and research their practice. The benefits go beyond me to all the stakeholders in rural community development. They have fundamental repercussions in education, research and development aspects of rural community development.

(End of diary extract)

In this assessment I was found wanting by my critical colleague, who wrote on seeing draft 4 of this chapter:

> "About the issue of who the research is for. Its significance is far wider than a report just for you. You are in fact contributing to the development of a new form of theory. In terms of RCD15 this has massive implications. You are reconceptualising the field in terms of practitioner research, using a methodology of the new scholarship. The work clearly has significance for you at a personal level, but it also has implications for how the field is theorised. Your work could be the first to appear that shows the process of community development through participative action research - i.e. you are monitoring your learning and encouraging others to do the same. It also has implications for organisational development, where individual learning impacts on community learning at wider levels of an organic system.... Individual learning has the potential for wider learning processes - picking up on Senge's (1997) idea of the learning organisation. Your work is amazingly rich."
>
> 20 January 2001

My correspondent points to horizons that I have not yet assimilated (January 2001). This emphasises the emergent nature of action research and my evolving understanding.

Table 6: The Influences Affecting Action Research; their Leading Authorities and Examples of their Published Works[16]. (After Bawden 2001).

INFLUENCE	LEADING AUTHORITY	PUBLISHED WORK
Action Research	Collier	"United States Indian Administration as a Laboratory of Ethnic Relations"
	Lewin	"Action Research and Minority Problems"
Action Science	Argyris (& Schön)	"Theory in Practice: Increasing Professional Effectiveness"

15 RCD: Rural Community Development.

[16] Full reference is in the bibliography.

	Schön	“Knowing in Action: The New Scholarship Requires a New Epistemology”
Critical Theory	Kant	"Critique of Practical Reason"
	Marx	"Capital"
	Habermas	"Knowledge and Human Interests"
	Gadamer	"Truth and Method"
Management	Foote-Whyte	"Action Research for Management"
	Zuber-Skerritt	"Action Research for Change and Development "
Participative Research	Fals Borda	"Action and Knowledge: Breaking the Monopoly with Participatory Action Research"
	Hall	"Participatory Research: An Approach for Change"
	Chambers R.	Rapid Rural Appraisal: Rationale and Repertoire
	Greenwood	"Introduction to Action Research: Social Research for Social Change"
Feminist Theory	Belenky	"Women’s Ways of Knowing - The Development of Self, Voice and Mind"
	Hooks	"Feminist Theory: from Margin to Center"
	Lather	Getting Smart: Feminist Research and Pedagogy within the Postmodern.
Emancipatory Pedagogy	Freire	Pedagogy of the Oppressed
	Horton	"We make the Road by Walking: Conversations on Education and Social Change"
	Gaventa	"Power and Powerlessness: Quiescence and Rebellion in an Appalachian Valley"
	Kemmis & Mc Taggart	"The Action Research Planner"
	Piaget	"Logic and Psychology"
Autopoeisis	Maturana & Varela	"Autopoiesis and Cognition"

	Varela	"Autopoiesis and Cognition : the Realization of the Living"
	Mingers	"Self-producing Systems: Implications and Applications of Autopoiesis"
Co-operative Enquiry	Reason	"Human Enquiry"
	Heron	"Co-operative Enquiry: Research into the Human Condition"
	Rowan	"Human Enquiry: A Sourcebook of New Paradigm Research"
Action Learning	Revans	"The Origins and Growth of Action Learning"
Risk Society	Beck	"Reclaiming Educational Administration as a Caring Profession"
	Lash	"Sociology of Postmodernism"
	Giddens	"The Third Way: The Renewal of Social Democracy"
Pragmatism	Peirce	"Philosophy: Selected Writings"
	Dewey	"Democracy and Education"
Socio -Technical Systems	Ackoff	"Creating the Corporate Future"
	Churchman	"The Design of Inquiring Systems"
	Emery	"Participative Design for Participative Democracy"
	Thorsrud (with Emery)	"Form and Content in Industrial Democracy
	Trist (with Emery)	*"The Causal Texture of Organisational Environments"*
Soft Systems	Checkland	"Systems Thinking: Systems Practice"
Experiential Learning	Kolb	"Experiential Learning - Experience as the Source of Learning and Development"
Critical Systems	Bawden	"Systems Approaches to Agricultural Development: The Hawkesbury Experience"

	Flood	"Liberating Systems Theory: On Systems and Inquiry"
	Jackson	"Systems Methodology for the Management Sciences"
	Midgley	"Science as Salvation: A Modern Myth and its Meaning"
	Ulrich	"Systems Thinking, Systems Practice and Practical Philosophy: A Program of Research"

APPENDIX 4

This appendix relates to chapter four.

It consists of the following documentation:

(1) "Creating an Additional Job in Rural Areas using the Asset Inventory Approach" which the students worked through in preparation for class number four.

(2) The Official Curriculum for the "Profile of Rural Ireland"

CREATING AN ADDITIONAL JOB IN RURAL AREAS

using the
ASSET INVENTORY APPROACH

Identify and report on a series of Realistic Opportunities that you might start up and successfully run, based on the possibilities your assets provide.

This project is based on the theory that assets have multiple uses. Because the assets - be they land, buildings, machinery, skills, networks - have been used for a long time in only one particular way, we have lost sight of the potential alternative ways in which they might be used.

This is largely because we have never studied the range of alternative uses of our assets.

To complete this exercise and to arrive at some additional employment opportunities:

(a) List all the resources you (will) own or have access to PP 2-4.

(b) List all the opportunities which it is feasible for you to set up (i.e. it is technically possible to do) PP 4-7.

(c) List the attractions of each enterprise PP 4-7.

(d) List, for each opportunity rejected, your major reason for doing so PP 4-7.

(e) List the enterprises that have survived (b) to (d) above P 7.

(f) List the main obstacles, which you must overcome before any of the surviving opportunities can be implemented P 7.

(g) Reduce your list of options to three P 7.

This is meant to be a practical way of helping you to look at other opportunities; it is not a work of art - preferably use a pencil and rubber.

NAME:

RESOURCES

List the resources you own, or to which you have access, under the headings listed below. Give as much relevant descriptive information as possible.

1. LAND

   Acreage:
   Located at:
   Close to: (list geographical features nearby)
   If not owned by you, to what acreage could you expect to have access?

Other relevant information:
(Soil types, earliness of crops, shelter, services etc.)

2. BUILDINGS

List all structures, including domestic dwelling, sheds, ancient buildings, etc.

Buildings	Alternative Uses

3. LABOUR

List numbers available: -
Of whom ... are family members.
Number skilled:
These skills include:
Useful skills we don't have:
Which can be remedied by:

4. EQUIPMENT

Owned:
Access to:
Lacking but essential to start up
(Basic equipment only):

Can be got by:

5. CONTACTS/NETWORKS (Name & Telephone No.)

Retail:

Wholesale:

Own Suppliers:

Financial:

Supporters of these Projects:

Technical:

Other
Essential contacts that are lacking:

These can be established by:

6. CAPITAL (Leave this until last)

Savings:

Backing:

7. PERSONAL

Entrepreneurial Characteristics:

Education & Training:

Experience to date:

My strengths are:

I have to improve:

8. OPPORTUNITIES

List all the opportunities (i.e. products and services), which you could start up, using your assets. While each opportunity will involve the re-allocation of existing resources, some may additionally require significant new investment, or indeed large-scale investment. What is needed is an inventory of all the possibilities open to you.

Animal Production (Grass Fed)

Opportunity	Positive Attraction	Reason For Rejecting

Other Animal Production (Intensively Fed)

Opportunity	Positive Attraction	Reason for Rejecting

Tillage Crops (Conventional)

Opportunity	Positive Attraction	Reason for Rejecting

Horticultural Crop (Conventional)

Opportunity	Positive Attraction	Reason for Rejecting

Intensive Protected Crops

Opportunity	Positive Attraction	Reason for Rejecting

Alternative Animals

Opportunity	Positive Attraction	Reason for Rejecting

Alternative Crops

Opportunity	Positive Attraction	Reason for Rejecting

Value Added Products

Opportunity	Positive Attraction	Reason for Rejecting

Recreational Use of Land

Opportunity	Positive Attraction	Reason for Rejecting

Services to Farmers

Opportunity	Positive Attraction	Reason for Rejecting

Services to Industry

Opportunity	Positive Attraction	Reason for Rejecting

Services to Others

Opportunity	Positive Attraction	Reason for Rejecting

Any Other Possibilities

Opportunity	Positive Attraction	Reason for Rejecting

In the middle third of the foregoing, write a brief note on the positive attractions of each enterprise. For each enterprise you reject write an additional note citing your major reason. Now list below the enterprises which survived the foregoing scrutiny and which you might start up and successfully run.

Possible Enterprises	Critical Factors Determining Success

On the right hand side, for each enterprise, identify the critical factors that you must attend to before you can make any progress with your ideas. Examples of <u>some</u> of these factors are lack of technical knowledge, knowledge of the industry and contacts therein, market information, management skills, entrepreneurial characteristics, finances (profitability and funding), legal and other factors etc.

List the three projects that survive.

(End if questionnaire)

COMHAIRLE NÁISIÚNTA NA
gCÁILÍOCHTAÍ GAIRMOIDEACHAIS

NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR VOCATIONAL AWARDS

Consultative Draft Module Descriptor

Profile of Rural Ireland

Level 2 C20156

September 1999

Introduction

A module is a statement of the standards to be achieved to gain an NCVA award. Candidates are assessed to establish whether they have achieved the required standards. Credit is awarded for each module successfully completed.

The standards in a module are expressed in terms of learning outcomes i.e. what the learner will be able to do on successful completion of the module.

While the NCVA is responsible for setting the standards for certification in partnership with course providers and industry, it is the course providers who are responsible for the design of the learning programmes. The duration, content and delivery of learning programmes should be appropriate to the learners' needs and interests, and should enable the learners to reach the standard as described in the modules. Modules may be delivered alone or integrated with other modules.

The development of learners' core skills is a key objective of vocational education and learning. The opportunity to develop these skills may arise through a single module or a range of modules. The core skills include:

· taking initiative
· taking responsibility for one's own learning and progress
· problem solving
· applying theoretical knowledge in practical contexts
· being numerate and literate
· having information and communication technology skills
· sourcing and organising information effectively
· listening effectively
· communicating orally and in writing
· working effectively in group situations
· understanding health and safety issues
· reflecting on and evaluating quality of own learning and achievement.

Course providers are encouraged to design programmes which enable learners to
develop core skills.

I	Title	Profile **of Rural Ireland**
2	Code	C20156
3	Level	2
4	**Value**	**I**
5	Purpose	This module is a statement of the standards to be achieved to gain an NCVA credit in *Profile of Rural Ireland* at level 2. This module is designed to provide the learner with an understanding of Irish rural society, its economy and the factors that promote or inhibit Rural Development. This module is a mandatory module on NCVA level 2 certificate *Rural Enterprise.* Course providers are responsible for designing learning programmes which are consistent with the learning outcomes and appropriate to the learners interests and needs.

6 **Preferred Entry Level**: Leaving Certificate or National Vocational Certificate, Level 1, or equivalent.

7 **Special**
Requirements None.

8 General Aims

This module aims to enable** the learner **to:

8.1 understand what is meant by the term 'rural'
8.2 understand rural society, its economy and the economic and social factors influencing rural communities

8.3 appreciate the influence membership of the EU has on rural areas

8.4 compare Ireland with other EU member states

8.5 appreciate the factors that promote or inhibit rural development

8.6 understand what is meant by community development and rural development

8.7 work effectively as a team member

8.8 develop investigative and report writing skills.

9 Units **This module comprises three units.**

Unit 1 **Rural Development**
Unit 2 **The Rural Economy**
Unit 3 **Rural Ireland and the European Union**

10 Specific Learning Outcomes

Unit 1 **Rural Development**

The *learner should be able* ***to:***

10.1.1 distinguish between the terms 'urban' and 'rural'

10.1.2 list the causes of social exclusion in rural society

10.1.3 summarise the main factors affecting the movement of human populations to and from rural areas of Ireland

10.1.4 summarise the main forces of change which are causing the transformation in the Irish economy and society (e.g. technology, life style, values, EU policy, Industrialisation)

10.1.5 describe how an identified rural area is viewed for the purposes of development by:
· Irish local government
grant aiding programmes (national and European)
· training programmes

10.1.6 outline rural infrastructure to include:
·transportation
· power supply
· water and sewage
· education
· health and social welfare
· housing and settlement

10.1.7 differentiate between strategic and project planning

10.1.8 outline the arrangement for delivery of rural development in Ireland

10.1.9 identify the prerequisite factors for successful rural development

10.1.10 describe the stages involved in planning a local area

10.l.11 describe the different approaches for delivery of rural development (bottom up/top down, centralised/decentralised, partnership/participative)

10.1.12 list the statutory, semi-state, local authority, voluntary organisations and non-government organisations (NGOs) involved in rural development

10.1.13 outline the role of the main organisations listed in 10.1. ! 2

10.1.14 identify the role of the following in stimulating rural development in an identified rural area:
· community
· local government
· development agencies

10.1.15 describe the opportunities for development in an identified rural area

10.1.16 describe the opportunities for women in rural development

10.1.17 define the term *'Community Animator'*

10.1.18 outline how the role of a community animator can help to facilitate the process of rural development

10.1.19 describe the stages in the animation of community development

10.1.20 explain the inter-relationship between social, economic and environmental development.

Unit 2 **The Rural Economy**

The learner should be able to:

10.2.1 define the term "pluriactivity"

10.2.2 describe the general trends, characteristics and structures of employment in rural communities

10.2.3 evaluate the significance of part time, seasonal, and off farm employment on rural communities

10.2.4 describe the following potential resources of rural communities:

· environmental
·skills
human
man-made assets
· infrastructure

10.2.5 outline what is meant by the term *resource audit*

10.2.6 complete a resource audit on an identified area

10.2.7 describe the principal means of wealth creation in rural communities e.g. natural resources, industry, social economy, services

10.2.8 describe the money routes that encourage money inflows and outflows in a rural economy

10.2.9 outline the multiplier effects of the routes outlined in 10.2.8

10.2.10 investigate the economy of an identified rural area

10.2.11 carry out a SWOT analysis of an identified area

10.2.12 work as part of a team

10.2.13 produce a structured report based on investigation/research of an identified topic.

Unit 3 **Rural Ireland and The European Union**

The learner should be able ***to:***

10.3.1 describe the influence membership of the EU has on rural areas

to include
· infrastructure
· farm diversification

· rural development

10.3.2	list the main institutions of the EU
10.3.3	outline the role of the main institutions listed in 10.3.2
10.3.4	identify the main sources of funding for rural development in the EU
10.3.5	identify where EU/other funding has been allocated to a range of development activities in an identified rural area
10.3.6	outline the rationale behind structural fund programmes
10.3.7	outline the role of the *National Development Plan and Operational programmes*
10.3.8	evaluate the effectiveness of rural development initiatives in relation to beneficiaries and local impact
10.3.9	compare the profile of at least two EU member states.

11 Assessment See the note on Assessment Principles inside the back page.

Summary	**Portfolio of Coursework**	**60%**
	Written Examination	**40%**

11.1 Technique **Portfolio of Coursework**

Mode Centre-based with external moderation by the NCVA.

Weighting	60%	
Components	Assignment	20%
	Project	40%

Assignment

The candidate must compare the profile of two EU member states (not Ireland). The form in which the Assignment is presented will be agreed in consultation with the tutor. A range of media can be used oral, written, graphical, audio-visual as required. The presentation should fulfil the performance criteria detailed in the Individual Candidate Marking Sheet 1.

Project

The candidate, as part of a team*, must research and profile a rural area in Ireland. If possible the project should be based around a rural development activity taking place in the area identified. The form in which the Project is

presented will be agreed in consultation with the tutor. A range of media can be used oral, written, graphical, audio-visual as required. The presentation should fulfil the performance criteria detailed in the Individual Candidate Marking Sheet 2.

*A 'team' can be formed from within the class group (max. 4 members), alternatively a candidate can work as part of a local development group e.g. community action group.

11.2 Technique **Written Examination** **!**

Mode Centre-based with external moderation by NCVA.

Weighting 40%

Duration 2 hours

Format **Section A** **20%**
12 short questions based on all the units.
10 questions to be answered.

Section B **20%**
4 structured questions covering the full range of *Specific Learning Outcomes.*
2 questions to be answered.

12 Performance Criteria

12.1 Portfolio of Coursework Performance criteria for each component of the portfolio are detailed in the accompanying Individual Candidate Marking Sheets 1-2.

12.2 Written **Examination**
The tutor must devise an examination paper and a detailed marking scheme.

13	Grading	Pass	50 - 64 %
		Merit	65 - 79 %
		Distinction	80 - 100 **%**

NCVA Assessment Principles

1 Assessment is regarded as an integral part of the learning process.

2 All NCVA assessment is criterion referenced. Each assessment technique has performance criteria which detail the range of marks to be awarded for specific standards of knowledge, skills and competence demonstrated by candidates.

3 The mode of assessment is generally local i.e. the assessment techniques are devised and implemented by assessors (teachers/tutors/trainers) in centres.

4 Assessment techniques in NCVA modules are valid in that they test a range of appropriate learning outcomes.

5 The reliability of assessment techniques is facilitated by providing support for assessors.

6 Each NCVA module describes one approach to assessment. It is possible for assessors to use other forms of assessment, provided they are demonstrated to be valid and reliable.

7 To enable all learners to demonstrate that they have reached the required standard, candidate evidence may be submitted in written, oral, visual, multimedia or other format as appropriate to the learning outcomes.

8 Assessment or a number of modules may be integrated, provided the separate criteria for each module are met.

9 Group or teamwork may form part of the assessment of a module, provided each candidate's achievement is separately assessed.

APPENDIX 6

Letters of Validation

Requested from:

Professor Richard Bawden, Michigan State University;
Professor Frank Fear, Michigan State University;
Chris Glavey, critical friend and PhD candidate, University of Glamorgan;
Sr Maureen Lally, Tochar Valley Network;
Pádraig Mc Donald, S.D.B. Headmaster Emeritus, Warrenstown Agricultural College;
Dr Jean Mc Niff, University of Limerick;
Dr Pádraig Wims, University College Dublin.

MICHIGAN STATE
UNIVERSITY

Department of Resource Development
Michigan State University
Michigan

June 6 2001

Séamus Lillis
University College Dublin
Ireland

Dear Séamus,

I write in support and admiration of the work that you have done for your dissertation. I have very much enjoyed our interactions over the past few years – our frequent e-mail exchanges around your chapter drafts in particular, as well as our long discussions face to face both in Ireland and Michigan – and it has been my privilege to have therefore joined you in a significant manner during the latter part of your learning/researching journey.

BAILEY
SCHOLARS PROGRAM

COLLEGE OF
AGRICULTURE &
NATURAL RESOURCES

Bailey Scholars Program

Michigan State University
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East Lansing, MI
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FAX: 517/432-0737

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web: http://www.canr.msu.edu/bailey/Home/

I have understood the profound difficulties that you have faced in dealing, both personally and professionally, with the issue of shifting paradigms in agricultural and rural development. I have related very strongly to many of the challenges that you have confronted in exploring experiential learning strategies in the classroom and action researching methodologies for your dissertation research. I have identified very closely with your embrace of the complicated matters of rural and community development as the context for progress not only in Irish agriculture, but also for rural Ireland writ large. And most of all perhaps, I have deeply appreciated the challenges and difficulties that you have faced in trying to build a scholarly practice based on these intellectual and practical foundations.

That I relate so closely to your work and to the personal and intellectual challenges that it has presented to you, is of course, no surprise. As you well know, the path that I too have 'lain down through walking' has many similarities to your own. I too was trained in the reductionist tradition of classical agricultural science and spent many years as a research parasitologist and science educator within universities in Australia. And I too came to realize the limitations of that paradigm when confronting the complex

issues of parasite control in the field. Working with Australian farmers and graziers on management strategies with respect to minimizing parasite damage to their grazing livestock I, like you in your practice, discovered that the process of human judgments were set within a far more comprehensive context than those of the research laboratory. This new appreciation was greatly amplified for me in the mid 1970s during a secondment in South America with FAO as an ‘animal health specialist’. There was no escaping the fact there that agricultural development issues involved ethical and aesthetic sensitivities, cultural and political feasibilities, and ecological responsibilities, in addition to the conventional dimensions of technical practicalities, social desirabilities and economic viabilities. Issues of equity, social justice and morality were as central to ‘progress’ as production and productivity.

It was in Latin America that I ‘discovered’ the twin intellectual pillars upon which I have built the rest of my career – action research/experiential learning and systems theories and philosophies. What a wonderful opportunity came my way upon returning to Australia, to be appointed to (what was then) Hawkesbury Agricultural College as its Dean of Agriculture and Rural Development. Over the succeeding two and a half decades I was exceptionally privileged to work essentially building an institution embracing the same two foundational pillars. With my faculty colleagues, many hundreds of students - post-graduate as well as undergraduate - collaborating farmers, extensions service professionals, other researchers and educators, and policy makers we developed the Hawkesbury approach to what we refer to as systemic development which is particularly characterized by its experiential learning/action researching strategies.

I mention all of this not just to provide linkages between my own work and personal and professional experiences with yours, but also to illustrate that ideas and practices similar to those that you have developed in your own work, have found strong institutional support as legitimate and essential scholarship in other parts of the world. Many aspects that are in common with the so-called ‘Hawkesbury Approach’ are encountered in many parts of the globe, attracting support from national service and governing agencies, and international funding bodies alike.

It is my very clear belief that the work that you have been doing over the past few years well illustrates the classical focus and indeed promulgated advantages of action researching approaches to development: (i) There have been ‘improvements’ in situations in which you have been involved as an action researcher (ii) and there have been ‘improvements’ in the understanding of many of the aspects of those situations by others who have co-researched with you. (iii) There have been clear ‘improvements’ in your own practices as an action researcher/development practitioner and (iv) there have been clear ‘improvements’ in your own scholarly interpretations and meaning-making capacities. Personal, professional and situation development have all been systemically integrated into your praxis as an authentic human being – and there are few more significant achievements in life than that.

Please accept my congratulations for that achievement and my strong support for your actual thesis and its dissertation.

With all best wishes,

Richard

Richard Bawden AM PhD
Emeritus Professor of Systemic Development and past Dean of Agriculture and Rural Development University of Western Sydney
Visiting Distinguished University Professor
Michigan State University

MICHIGAN STATE
UNIVERSITY

June 15, 2001

Mr. Séamus Lillis
University College, Dublin

Dear Séamus:

The purpose of this letter is to share my thoughts regarding your dissertation work. You have shared numerous drafts with me, and we have spent countless hours—virtually and in person—discussing your study. Because of those experiences, I have seen your study evolve as an expression of scholarship and you, yourself, evolve as a scholar.

I frame my comments about your learning in relationship to the experiences I've had at Michigan State University—serving on over 200 graduate committees in my 25 year career in graduate education. I have served as major professor and director for approximately 50 M.S. and Ph.D. graduates, 15 of those at the doctoral level (two since August 2000).

Based on that experience, let me say this: a dissertation is not just about contributing to a body of knowledge or demonstrating that a candidate can follow the rules of scholarly engagement. It is as much about the person doing the work—the seriousness of intent and the passion for discovering. There are important questions that require affirmative responses, such as: Has the study been a significant professional experience?

There is no question in my mind that you have struggled, to your core, with this piece. The 'you' that started is not the 'you' who is finishing. Pushing yourself to the brink, you now possess a transformed understanding of self, practice, and development. You look at the world through different eyes and, consequently, see different things.

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web: http://www.canr.msu.edu/bailey/Home/

I know that you will look back on this study in the years to come, and will probably shake your head. This study is *only a first step* in expressing your understanding about what it means to walk a significantly different path of rural development thinking and practice. I say "only a first step' for a reason. I see more and more doctoral students today who use the dissertation experience to express an emerging (for them) intellectual and practice worldview. That's a very different dynamic from what I had experience earlier in my career. The typical expression in the past: students using the dissertation to advance the dominant paradigm or to embellish an alternative paradigm they embraced coming into the research. Today, I see more and more examples of students whose thinking has been transformed—for one reason or another—during the doctoral experience. The dissertation, then, becomes a baptismal.

There were two issues for me as I read your dissertation. You and I both know that the dominant paradigm in rural development work (influenced by the overarching positivist worldview) is being questioned. It is being questioned for fundamental reasons, and those reasons align with the patterns described years ago in Thomas Kuhn's *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. With that, the first issue for me is this: Is your transformed understanding of rural development practice intellectually sound? In other words: "Have you made your case?" I believe you have.

The second issue for me is just as important as the first. For that, I draw on the work of Canadian Michael Fullan who argues in *Change Forces: Probing the Depths of Educational Reform* that changing the "it" starts with changing the "me." This is about the matter of authenticity—not in a "wild eye" radical sense, but in a meaningfully personal sense.

As I read your study (and especially your description of our work in Ballintubber) I read the words of a person grappling authentically with a paradigm shift of major proportions. You are a different person and professional when it comes to rural development these days because you think about, express yourself, and seek to practice differently. The shift can be understood in fundamental terms—epistemologically, ontologically, and methodologically. Most important for me is to witness the change in your axiology and rhetoric. Your description of entering the Ballintubber Abbey—before and now—expresses it fully. You "see" with fresh eyes and express what you see differently.

Your study, in my judgment, is not just a research product. It is also an authentic and meaningful expression of scholarship. In doing so, you join voices with the cacophony of those who embrace an alternative development paradigm—the emancipatory paradigm, expressed in such work as participatory research and autonomous development.

It is not always easy 'to see' the value of what you have done because, for so long, we have understood research in fairly uniform ways. But, today, we embrace a variety of expressions. Just this morning, I started reading a new book on Appreciative Inquiry in organizational development. Yesterday, I finished a new book by Lisa Delpit on literacy education. All of this work strikes me as astoundingly authentic and quite meaningful in terms of how scholarship can and does make a difference in 'the engagement interface,' the domain where Academy and society converge.

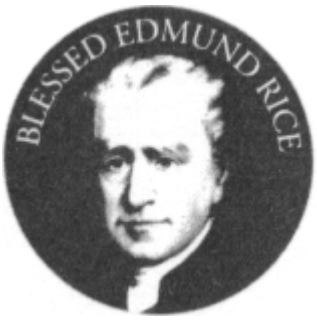
You know how this thinking has had an influence on my work at Michigan State. We are experimenting with new approaches to teaching and learning at the undergraduate level, as reflected in the nationally recognized work of our Bailey Scholars Program (see our article in the December 2000 issue of *The Journal of College and Character*). We are also writing about how the alternative paradigm is expressed in university outreach and extension work (see our May 2001 article in *The Journal of Higher Education Outreach and Engagement)*.

I commend you for what you have done, Séamus, because it forces me to continue learning and expanding my way of thinking and practicing. The key here is 'ing,' continuing the learning journey. Along that line, a book arrived in today's mail by Bill Cooke and Uma Kothari entitled *Participation: The New Tyranny?* It explores situations where development participation may co-opt people into accepting the development approach of those "in charge." Rather than uncritically accept the value of participation, we need to understand it critically. This is an example of what I mean by 'ing.' It is the road you have chosen to walk.

Cordially,

Frank A. Fear

Frank A. Fear
Professor and former chairperson, Department of Resource Development and The Liberty Hyde Bailey Scholars Program, both units in the College of Agriculture and Natural Resources, Michigan State University.



Christian Brothers
The Moorings,
13 Charleville Mall,
North Strand, Dublin I.

Tel/Fax: (01) 8550329
Email cglavey@connect.ie

14th June 2001

Dear Séamus,

Congratulations and best wishes to you on the completion of your PhD dissertation - you must be greatly relieved at reaching this stage in light of your personal struggle with issues and the difficulties you encountered throughout this project. It is great credit to you that your dogged determination and commitment to the project enabled you to draw it to a successful conclusion.

As a fellow traveller on the PhD route, I have enjoyed our many sessions of unravelling the intricacies of action research and its implications for ourselves, the work we engage in, the people we engage with and most of all critiquing our contribution to theory and practice. While we are at different stages of our academic work, it has been a mutually enriching experience sharing insights, hopes, frustrations and successes as our endeavours bore fruit, and our perspectives have grown and expanded.

Two areas of your work I feel have been particularly significant, both in the manner you engaged with them and the way they have unfolded.

BALLINTUBBER:
I have had a particular interest in this project and your research into it - one, I am a native of that area and am aware of some of the developments there, and two, I have a deep interest and have studied widely in the area of Celtic Spirituality. I have been particularly impressed with your respectful stance toward a community and an area where people struggle to deepen their awareness of and love for their heritage, to make it a relevant dimension of their existence, and to offer it to a world that is increasingly cynical, disdainful, and inimical to communities who have a deep affinity to the land. Your approach and your engagement with this community has been respectful, ethical, yet challenging- in inviting them to adopt an action research approach to their situation you have demonstrated your commitment to action research methodology by situating the locus of power four-square in the hands of the community. It is also significant that your own journey from an empiricist approach to one of collaboration, facilitation and accompaniment is reflected both in your writing and in your practice. Coming from the more traditional background which was a feature of your work with Teagasc, it is a significant

leap from being the "expert" with the "top down' approach to the action researcher as companion in a process.

Being a native of that part of the country, and with over 13 years experience in a Third World context, I am acutely aware of the serious limitations of "the expert" approach. I have personal experience of many projects which have failed, in some cases disastrously, where people or a community were told what their needs were by an outside agency. Your approach has been the antithesis of this, patiently accompanying this community as they defined their values, their hopes and dreams, and proceeded to implement them. As a "critical friend" you have worked at their pace, walking with them as the project developed, and encouraging them at all times in their ownership of the process.

WARRENSTOWN:
As an educator with experience of all levels from grade school to third level, I once again can empathise with your struggle to live out of your beliefs on the value of the action research paradigm. This struggle is apparent in your attempts to engage a group of students in an approach which invited responsibility for their own learning, encouraged them to he part of the process, and to develop content and process which is relevant to the lived reality of their daily lives in an agricultural context. I am aware of your frustration, your struggle, and your efforts to engage a new paradigm, while being hampered by a paradigm which is deeply embedded in the Irish educational system - what I term the "empty-vessel approach". In this paradigm, the educator (who holds the full jug of water) pours the water (knowledge) into the empty receptacle or vessel (the student), who passively accepts the knowledge and regurgitates it at examination time. Once again, in spite of your commitment to action research, you did not engage in a coercive or dictatorial imposition of your system.

I believe that throughout your research and writing, you have modelled the elements of an action research approach - accompaniment, collaboration, respectful listening and challenge, a willingness to engage in trial and error approaches, a commitment to strong standards of critique and evaluation, engaging in critical appraisal and discussion with your peers, and a willingness to submit your ideas and practice to critical scrutiny.
I further believe that you have contributed to a process of empowerment and transformation in each context where you have been involved and done so in an ethical and genuine manner.

I trust that the next stage of your personal and professional development will build on the great achievement documented in your dissertation.

Sincerely,

_____
Christopher Glavey cfc, M.Phil / Ph.D candidate.

Tochar Valley Rural
Community Network

Ballintubber, Claremorris,
Co. Mayo
Phone 094 30036
Fax 094-30018
Email tocharvalley@eircom.net

26 June 2001

Dear Séamus,

I am privileged to have been associated with your dissertation work over the last two years. It has also challenged me to critically examine my own way of practice and of thinking.

I propose in this letter to offer some of my observations as I witnessed your struggle to move away from being the advisor wearing the expert's hat to becoming a listening practitioner. I also can identify with your struggle since I too walked the road of expert / prescription giver at the earlier part of my career.

However, my insights into people and their abilities were enriched over the years through intensive training, particularly at the Tavistock Institute. Here the focus was on understanding knowledge. For example, community learning involves not only knowing "facts" but also appreciating how "facts" affect different people. It involves shaping separate meanings and perceptions into a common framework. For me a native American saying summed it up –

> "If you tell me, I'll forget,
> If you show me, I may not remember,
> If you involve me, I'll understand.

It is my conviction that change for you necessitated a huge paradigm shift – a shift that enabled you to move from one way of seeing the world to another. Working alongside you over the years, and sharing your study over the past two years, re-enforced for me the transformed understanding of rural community development that had to take place so that you could adopt to this new paradigm – people rather than things. Consequently, I am aware that you have gained tremendous insights into the importance of people initiating their own development. You have grown to recognise that each person has a contribution to make, and that it is the un-tapping of that resource that is important. In addition you are fully aware that the traditional method of telling people what is best for them, restricts, limits and stifles each person's creativity and potential.

I confirm your account of my rural community development training programme given some years ago to a community in Mayo Abbey, which you cite in chapter four.

In Chapter VI of your dissertation your quote “Communities have applicable know-how themselves', and that 'this knowledge in action is a basis for their practice, on which they depend to advance, supports and confirms the new way of thinking'. I have learned that I too share that knowledge and that I learned significant parts of it in rural communities with rural people where I worked. Rural Communities are indeed Universities for life.

I would like to reflect back one key learning that surfaced during our joint involvement with MSU. The incident occurred (unknown to you) when visiting the twelve rural communities in the Tóchar Valley. Your obvious expectations of their progress were revealed in some of your comments. The pace of their development and the time spent in consultation and listening to the people was slow and didn’t indicate much progress. It was at this very point that you revealed your conditioned self as agriculturist / specialist. In your old role it was possible for you to measure progress. Tons of wheat or increased gallons of milk were always clear indicators of success – now your measuring tools were not capable of showing up clearly what was achieved at community level. When challenged you immediately recognised that you had drifted into your old role.

Action research became a very valuable tool as you moved forward on the road to community development. Indeed, this road can aptly be described as “the road less travelled”. However, you eventually discovered that action research accommodated the principal characteristics of community development, viz – that it is context grounded, practice driven and highly relational. Your new evaluation tool was appropriate and I believe you have used it to the best advantage throughout your study.

May your new insights and research enlighten future practitioners as they journey the road that leads to best practices and greater appreciation and understanding of peoples’ own unique contributions to rural community development.

With best wishes,

Sincerely,

Sr Maureen Lally.

_____

Sr Maureen Lally.

Salesian College of Agriculture
Warrenstown,
Drumree,
County Meath.

Mr Séamus Lillis,
University College Dublin.

20/06/01

Dear Séamus,

At the outset, I would say it was a privilege to be part of your endeavours and I was delighted to be able to discuss these endeavours with you and to have you as part of the teaching staff in the college for the year.

I know you challenged me during our discussions to reflect on my own methodologies and practice. I was also very impressed with your methodology - that the teacher / lecturer is not the only expert - that a lot of the answers lies in the group themselves. I know that this gem has changed the way I look at groups and how I work with them.

You were asked by me to teach "Profile of Rural Ireland" as part of an NCVA programme in the college. At the start you were reluctant but agreed. You struggled with this experience. At one stage you thought of resigning, but thankfully you persevered and brought your research to the point it is today. You kept me informed at all times of your progress with the group. This was a difficult time for you in a largely empirical system, where credits for modules were gained with minimal amount of effort and work.

At the end of the course you and I held a review of this module with the students. I could safely say that the conclusion from this review was that this module had little or no relevance to the students at all. They did not see themselves using any of it in the distant or near future.

I myself have worked with this group of students. Having studied the outline of the module "Profile of Rural Ireland" I find it difficult to understand how this course could be taught in a college setting. I feel that the group needs to have a project that is community-based so that it can have a meaningful purpose and experience for the students. I feel the college group was too scattered in the geographical origins of its members for this programme to impact on them.

It took a while before I realised that this dissertation is not about the empirical contribution of knowledge nor is it about following the laid out syllabus as set out by the authorities. It is about looking at self and one's methodologies and the way people are to be approached and the way your students will work in the future.

I know Séamus that from speaking to you that you struggled a great deal with this dissertation. I know too that you have come out a better person and so have your methodology and practice.

So many teachers are frustrated, bored, depressed, unfulfilled with their work. Some could embark on a course of self-reflection and examine the way they work, see things, and deal with people. I think this self-reflection is fundamentally about getting to know ourselves and being comfortable with that aspect of self before engaging with others. We cannot always be falling back on empirical expertise as a backup or crutch for our inadequacies. Certainly in this dissertation you have critically self-reflected and honestly and truthfully told your story.

I would say, Séamus, that your work is not finished. It has only begun because this is a continuing process, ever new and always refreshing. You have influenced my way of thinking about the way I will approach rural development from here onwards.

I hope this is only the start of something great. Long may the reflection continue, because out of this will come great things.

Festina lente!

Best wishes

Pádraig McDonald, S.D.B.
Headmaster.

3 Wills Road,
Branksome,
Poole,
Dorset BH12 1NQ

6th July 2001

Mr Séamus Lillis,
University College,
Belfield,
Dublin.

Dear Séamus,

This letter is by way of thanks to you for inviting me to share your educational journey. It has been a most delightful experience as we have both found our way through what at times has seemed exciting confusion into new insights about the nature of our knowledge. I am aware that throughout we have both struggled to make sense of our different experiences and contexts. Here we are, at the end of this phase of the journey, in some ways more enlightened about what we are doing, but most importantly enlightened about the idea that knowledge itself is impossible to pin down and that we take assurance from that.

When we began our conversations there was a sense in which you positioned me as a scholar and yourself as a practitioner. I believe that we now both position ourselves as practitioners who are trying to make sense of our lives in a scholarly way. We do this with the real intent of trying to improve the quality of learning for ourselves and for those in our care. I believe that we are both making contributions, individually and collaboratively, to the new scholarship, which sees practice and research as interlinked and inseparable; for us, practice is a form of research and research is a form of practice.

I have learnt much from you. Thank you. At a substantive level I have learnt about the nature of traditional ways of educating in agriculture and rural community development. I have learnt how it is possible to reconceptualise these issues by locating the idea of development within persons. In my own recent work in evaluation and organisation studies I have come to see how evaluation is not evaluation of programmes, but of the people through whose lives those programmes come alive; and similarly, how organisations are not free-standing entities so much as people working in company with one another, all trying to make sense of what they are doing with social intent. Through our studies together I have grown increasingly aware of how important it is to locate epistemology within the practice of real life people,

rather than perceive it as an abstract phenomenon which may be studied from a distance.

I think what you have done in your studies in quite outstanding. In your own field you are reconceptualising the nature of rural community development, to shift perceptions of development as an object of study which may be theorised about by external experts, to a field of experience which may be understood through a process of people generating their own theories of how they are with one another. To have made this intellectual journey is an achievement to be admired. Not too many people would have been prepared to accept the risk of the mental and emotional destabilisation which such shifts in thinking tend to bring with them. Added to this, you have deliberately positioned yourself in your studies as a learner who is learning about the job on the job; you have consciously abdicated the security of being seen as an expert knower. You have, in the best possible way, rendered the familiar very strange; Foucault would have been proud of you.

I am also in admiration of the way you have accepted critique in a most positive way. You have listened, and acted on advice. Possibly one of the most thrilling moments for me of our professional relationship was when, in our conversation of two weeks ago, you said to me, 'I disagree with you.' This I feel marks a significant point in our journey, and also endorses, I believe, the educative nature of our journey. You feel comfortable in challenging my ideas. We enjoy parity of esteem as scholars. This is indeed a bouquet, that we can converse as equals in knowledge, each respecting the other's intellectual position, yet able to disagree within a relationship of friendship and acknowledgement of the other's strengths.

It has been a real joy to be part of your work, Séamus. I do urge you now to find fora for the dissemination of the ideas; you should definitely think of writing for refereed journals, and for presentation at international conferences. The research community has much to learn from you, not only from your ideas about substantive issues, but also from your experience of how you have come to know and how secure you are now in the insecurity of your own knowledge.

Congratulations on writing a superb thesis. I wish you everything good for the future.

With best wishes,

Yours sincerely,

Jean McNiff, PGCE, Dip. TEFL, MA, PhD
Distinguished Scholar in Residence,
Department of Education and Professional Studies,
University of Limerick.