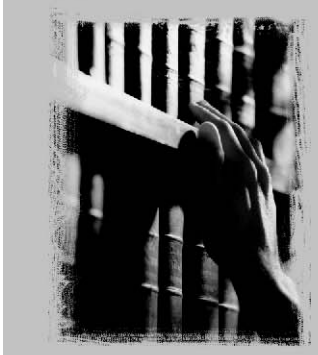

ONLY STUDY GUIDE FOR

EDRHOD-G

The Educator

as Researcher, Scholar and Lifelong Learner

School of Arts, Education, Language and Communication

Department Teacher Education

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Contents

OUTCOMES FOR THIS MODULE

After you have worked through this module, you will be able to

(1) argue, in detail, how the work of the researcher and scholar are linked to lifelong learning
(2) draw up a research problem based on a reasoned, structured argument

In this module, we will be examining and exploring the role of the educator as a researcher, scholar and lifelong learner. To do this, we will be using an approach that you may not be familiar with. This approach is based on problem-solving, questioning and argument.

Research, problem-solving and questioning are all tools of a philosophy known as *critical rationalism.* For the purposes of this module, you do not need to worry about the theoretical details of critical rationalism. All you need to know is that critical rationalism focuses on problem-solving. It also focuses on information — specifically, we will be encouraging you to seek out relevant information and to argue.

Critical rationalism is particularly suited to the classroom because critical rationalism wants teachers and learners to think for themselves and to question what they are told.

We believe that this approach leads to research of a high quality that is relevant. As you will see while working through the three units that make up this module, all research work, and particularly research work in education, needs to be open to new ideas and new solutions.

UNIT 1

Reason and action

OUTCOMES FOR UNIT 1

After you have worked through unit 1, you will be able to

(1) explain the meaning of the words ''educator'', ''researcher'' and ''scholar''
(2) state the difference in meaning between the word ''educator'' in English and the equivalent word in your mother tongue
(3) describe the steps involved in problem-solving
(4) use correct reference techniques when you do your own research work
(5) explain what is meant by the ''digital divide''

Let us introduce this section with a few questions that you may find odd:

- What is an educator?
- What is a learner?
- What is a researcher?
- What is a scholar?

In South African education today, the two words ''educator'' and ''learner'' are used constantly. And when people use the same word over and over again, they may be using that word carelessly.

So: What is an educator? What is a learner? A researcher? A scholar?

ACTIVITY

Even if you're not sure of how to respond to these questions, we'd like you to pause for a moment and describe what you think an educator, a learner, a researcher, a lifelong learner and a scholar are. Write your response in the space below.

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OUR RESPONSE

The word ''educator'' immediately brings to mind someone standing in front of a classroom, giving information to learners. This is certainly part of what an educator is, but only a part. We believe that all human beings are educators and, by implication, that all human beings are learners. All of us learn from each other, all the time — educators of young children learn things from the children in their care and two adults working together in an office learn things from each other. We could put it more strongly: to learn and educate is to be alive.

What about a researcher? Like the word ''educator'', the word ''researcher'' immediately brings to mind certain images, in this case someone in a white coat in a science laboratory. This is however a highly distorted version of what the word ''researcher'' means. Research is actually just a more focused form of learning. Whenever any of us do research, we usually want to find out something — perhaps something very specific (for example, the history of formal education in South Africa) or perhaps something very general (for example, new ideas on how to educate more effectively). The moment that any of us surf the Internet looking for information, or go to a library or even ask our peers where to get more information about something, we are doing research.

So, finally, what is a scholar? Here's something you may find interesting: when we started developing this study guide, we suddenly realised we weren't sure what a scholar is! This meant we had to do some research of our own — in this case, we went to a dictionary to find out what the word meant, and came up with the following:

> ''A learned person''

A scholar, then, is simply someone who has learned a lot — it's probably true to say, then, that an elderly person is more of a scholar than a teenager simply because the elderly person has had more years in which to learn. It is common practice in oral cultures (for instance, traditional African cultures, or those cultures in Canada and some parts of the United States of America which are commonly referred to as ''first nationals'', or indigenous peoples) to place a significant emphasis on memory to preserve ''knowledge'', lore and custom. Kieran Egan, American philosopher of education based at Simon Fraser University, argues that in such cultures elders are of such considerable social importance because they tell stories that articulate conceptions of identity, morality, order, the gods and ancestors. They are therefore regarded as qualified to speak authoritatively on public issues and to mediate in social, political and cultural matters because they articulate the meaning of life (Egan, 2001:924). When you read Nelson Mandela's *Long Walk to Freedom*, you will also notice that he speaks fondly about his boyhood experiences of elders in his native Thembuland, in the former Transkei. He writes that elders were ''wise men who retained the knowledge of tribal history and custom in their heads and whose opinions carried great weight'' (Mandela, 1995:24). This suggests to us

that being a scholar and being wise are linked. A scholar is someone who has made a point of learning as much as possible — this means that you can't be a scholar without also being a researcher and a learner, and for all this, you need educators.

ACTIVITY

Take a look at both Kieran Egan and Nelson Mandela's views on wisdom and age. Does it necessarily follow that old people are therefore wise people? In a sense, is this a strong argument? If you have doubts, how do you think can a case best be made to link old age with wisdom while avoiding a weak argument? For instance, medical science tells us that as most people age they lose their memory, their reflexes, their capacity to reason, and look after themselves. That is why senility is common among the elderly. Now ask yourself, does it make sense to argue that the age group that is most likely to be senile can, at the same time, be likely the most wise?

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What then does it mean to be a scholar, a researcher and a lifelong learner and how does all this impact on daily life as an educator in a South African classroom? This is the issue we will be focusing on in this module.

You will soon notice that we ask a lot of questions! Developing a questioning approach to life and what one encounters in life is very much part of being a lifelong learner. Here's something else about being a lifelong learner and an educator: many questions do not have simple, straightforward answers. One of the problems of any education system is that it sometimes leads us to believe that ''for every question there is an answer''. This is often not the case. The Greek philosopher Socrates is renowned for puzzling his students with probing and mind boggling questions. As scholars, researchers and lifelong learners we can learn a lot from Socrates. At no stage was he willing to give his students straightforward answers to their questions. Instead he would turn the question around, explore numerous ways in which the same question could be asked. In this way, he got his students to appreciate the incomplete nature of human knowledge, to continue, through questioning, in their quest for rational and informed dialogue.

ACTIVITY

The word ''educator'' is an English word which reflects western value systems. In English, the word ''educator'' means ''someone who gives instruction'' or ''someone who imparts knowledge to

others''. What is the equivalent of ''educator'' in your mother tongue? Do the two words have the same meaning? Is there a link between wisdom and learning in your mother tongue? Write your response in the space below.

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OUR RESPONSE

One of the problems, we believe, is that contemporary, western-dominated society has lost sight of wisdom and puts far too much emphasis on technical competence and ''cleverness''. This puts educators and young learners under pressure to ''perform'', to ''get ahead''. Although technical performance and competence has given the West its global dominance, and has undoubtedly helped to make advances in medicine, all this has come at a price, not least of which is that western value systems, coupled with the population explosion, have created an ecological crisis that the young learners of today will one day have to solve.

Whatever your response, we think it is correct to say that all human beings are educators and learners and that you cannot neatly separate the two. Furthermore, in our view, all human beings remain lifelong learners and lifelong educators. We say this because human beings learn from each other all the time and educate each other all the time.

We have no choice but to learn from and educate each other, because human life is an ongoing attempt to solve problems. Interestingly enough, *all* species are engaged in the same activity: problem-solving. Problem-solving is not unique to human beings. Look at what the biologist Richard Dawkins says of bats and problem-solving in his book, *The Blind Watchmaker* (Dawkins 1986:6):

> Bats have a **problem**: how to find their way around in the dark. They hunt at night, and cannot use light to help them find prey and avoid obstacles. You might say that this is a problem of their own making, a problem that they could avoid simply by changing their habits and hunting by day. But the daytime economy is already heavily exploited by other creatures such as birds. It is probable, by the way, that nocturnal trading goes way back in the ancestry of all mammals. In the time when the dinosaurs dominated the daytime economy, our mammalian ancestors probably only managed to survive at all because they found ways of scraping a living at night. Only after the mysterious extinction of the dinosaurs about 65 million years ago were our ancestors able to emerge into the daylight in any substantial numbers.

ACTIVITY

Please read this passage carefully and then answer the following questions:

(1) Why do bats have to hunt at night? In other words: what is the problem with hunting during the day?

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(2) Millions of years ago, all mammals had the problem of surviving in a world dominated by dinosaurs. How did mammals solve this problem?

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OUR RESPONSE

(1) Bats hunt at night because, when bats first started to evolve as a separate species, they found that hunting during the day brought them into competition with birds, who could get to the food sources before they did. Also, they became prey to the bigger birds. To survive, bats needed to stay out of sight during the day, which meant they had to learn to hunt at night. We are mindful that this is not a foolproof solution for bats. For instance, a deadly night hunter that preys on rats and also find bats a delicacy, is an owl. So, after all, venturing into the night to hunt does not really eliminate risks for bats.

(2) Mammals started to evolve when the planet was still dominated by dinosaurs, including flesh-eating dinosaurs. To survive, the mammals had to stay out of the dinosaurs' way, which meant that a number of mammalian species learned to hunt during the evening and at night. Lions are a classic example of predators that are known to lounge lazily in the shade of trees during the day to have quality time with family members, but are deadly hunters during the night. For reasons that nobody knows, however, the problem of living alongside the dinosaurs was suddenly ''solved'' when the dinosaurs became extinct.

What is particularly interesting about this passage, in our opinion, is the remark: ''only after the mysterious extinction of the dinosaurs''. In other words, despite a great deal of scientific research, no one knows why the dinosaurs were suddenly wiped out. However, an Italian automobile company, Fiat, has run a successful advertising campaign to market its small brand of cars: ''Small is good. Ask the dinosaurs''. An important point to note, though, is that not all questions have answers. Good scientists such as Richard Dawkins are just like good

educators: they are lifelong learners. Part of being a lifelong learner is being prepared to admit that we do not have all the answers. Because he knows he does not have all the answers, Richard Dawkins has devoted his life to learning as much as he can about the origins of life on earth, the evolution of life and by implication, the future of humankind. This willingness to engage in lifelong learning is what makes Dawkins a researcher and a scholar. Our earlier suggestion that not all questions have answers is crucial to potential researchers, scholars, and lifelong learners in South Africa because it is the view embraced by national policy on education. For instance, section 17 of the Department of Education's White Paper on Education and Training (1995) proposes that the curriculum, teaching methods and textbooks at all levels and in all programs of education and training, should encourage our learners to develop independent and critical thought as well as the capacity to question, enquire, reason, weigh evidence, form judgments, and achieve understanding. It also wants learners to ''recognise the provisional and incomplete nature of most human knowledge''.

WHAT WE WILL BE DOING IN THIS MODULE

Lifelong learning, scholarship and research are all part of the activity we referred to at the beginning: problem-solving. If we seek to solve a problem or improve our understanding of what happens in our classrooms, we will automatically be practicing lifelong learning, scholarship and research.

So what is involved in problem-solving?

Problem-solving can be broken down into the following steps:

(1) You start by identifying the problem.
(2) You then formulate that problem as precisely as possible.
(3) You then find out what other people have said about that problem and how it can be solved.
(4) You then decide whether other people's findings are relevant to the problem as it occurs in *your* context.
(5) You then actively apply what you think is the best solution to the problem.
(6) If that solution doesn't work, you try another solution.
(7) As you try different solutions and as time goes by, you may find yourself reformulating the problem.
(8) This will lead you to seeking new solutions.
Steps (7) and (8) are, in effect, what makes problem-solving a lifelong learning experience and why all of us need to be continuously receptive to new learning and new ideas. This is all part of being *open-minded*, which is essential in problem-solving.
(9) Lastly, you need to be prepared *to think for yourself* and to *critically analyse* any point of view or theory that you hear?

Look again at the proposals of White Paper on Education and Training above: ''encourage our learners to develop independent and critical thought, the capacity to question, enquire, reason, weigh evidence, form judgments''. Can you see how they are closely linked to step 9 of problem-solving above, which needs you ***to think for yourself*** and to ***critically analyse*** any point of view or theory that you hear? This is at the heart of the teaching of the Greek philosopher, Socrates, who argued that ''The unexamined life is not worth living''. Cornel West, Professor of African-American studies and philosophy of religion at Princeton University, U.S.A, and author of, among others, books such as *Race Matter* (1993) and *Democracy Matter* (2004), is a specialist in Socratic thought and practice. He reminds us that

> To engage in the Socratic activity is to engage in the activity of self-examination, self-interrogation, and self-questioning. This requires the courage to think critically, for oneself. It requires more courage to dig deep into the corners of one's own soul and wrestle with what one finds.

Professor West draws a crucial distinction between intelligence and intellect. The difference, he argues, is that intelligence is a manipulative faculty, while intellect is a critical faculty. He notes that most advanced liberal democratic states like his own country, the U.S, love intelligence but fear intellect. Intelligence is about the secret world of spying, or espionage. Intelligence officers are specialists in surveillance activities. They go to great lengths to mount surveillance cameras in very obscure places in order to watch and record the movements of people they suspect of disturbing the peace and compromising national security. They are experts at placing bugging devices in unsuspected places like pot plants, under ornamental tables, in telephone receivers, and under dashboards of cars in order to listen to, and record conversations of suspects. Even mobile phone companies are now bound by law to cooperate with intelligence officials by giving them information on people's cell numbers and private conversations. The expression: ''Big brother is watching,'' sums it all up. Locally, the suspension of three senior Intelligence officials in November 2005 for unauthorized surveillance of a member of the ANC's National Executive Committee illustrates the point Professor West is making above.

But intellect is different. It is about critical examination of the taken-for-granted, seemingly basic assumptions that individuals hold. It is about radically examining and clarifying those unarticulated forms of dogmatism, fixity, orthodoxy, frameworks and paradigms that often become so ossified and petrified that those who subscribe to them are never able to become self-critical and self-corrective to engage in dialogical exchange. The Socratic commitment to self-examination espoused by West is relevant to our exploration of the role of the educator as researcher, scholar and lifelong learner.

We will be looking at a number of problems in education and using all

these tools. As you work through these problems, you will start to practise using steps 1 to 8. Please note that steps 1 to 8 are problem-solving tools. Above all, always pause to reflect on how you can use intellect, and not intelligence, in your exploration of the role of the educator as researcher, scholar and lifelong learner.

PROBLEM: AN EDUCATOR WORKING IN AN UNDERRESOURCED CLASSROOM

Sipho is an educator in a classroom in Mamelodi. The classroom consists of 50 learners age 9 to 10. They all seem eager to learn, but Sipho is continually frustrated by the lack of educational resources available. He feels that the learners would do much better if they had access to more and better resources. After a particularly frustrating week, he decides he is going to do all he can to do something about the problem.

What is the first step Sipho must take?

He has done this already — he has identified a problem. In this case, the problem is being an educator in an under-resourced classroom.

The next step, step 2, is important.

Sipho must formulate the problem **as precisely as possible**. The word ''under-resourced'' is far too vague. Sipho must define the problem.

Here is the problem defined as precisely as possible:

(2) Problem: The classroom I teach in does not have enough textbooks for all the learners. We also need about 10 computers.

Now let us go through the problem following the step-by-step process described earlier.

(3) How have other educators solved this problem? Perhaps they have persuaded the school principal to get more funds. Or perhaps they have asked parents to donate books and computers.

(4) Are other educators' solutions relevant to Sipho's context? The answer here is ''yes''.

(5) Sipho then decides, on the basis of what he has learnt from other educators, that the best thing to do is ask the principal for more money for books and to see if anybody can donate old computers. Unfortunately, the principal says there is no way he can get more money for books — the school is already over budget. As far as computers are concerned, the last lot of computers were stolen and parents are now very reluctant to donate old PCs.

(6) What other solutions can Sipho try? Now we are moving on to step 6 — Sipho has tried one solution — asking for more money. That hasn't worked. So now he has to think of some other solution. Perhaps he has to ask the learners to share. What about photocopying? Maybe the school has a photocopier and Sipho can photocopy the most important pages of the textbooks.

Let's say that Sipho manages to come up with some sort of compromise. Maybe he asks the learners to share and maybe he manages to get some sort of photocopying done. A couple of the parents donate two old PCs.

As the year progresses, Sipho starts to realise that one of the reasons for needing books for each learner is that the work is very demanding for the learners. This leads him to reformulate the problem, step (7):

(7) The problem in my classroom is that the work is too advanced for learners of this level.

This then leads Sipho on to steps 8 and 9. Sipho, as you can see, has now begun to question the curriculum he is working with. Questioning why something does not work is the same as critically analysing something. This questioning will lead him to start doing his own research into what is appropriate in a curriculum. He will soon find out that a great deal has been written about curriculum development and that authors often have very different ideas. It will not be easy for him, therefore, to find out why and where the curriculum he teaches ''went wrong''.

We have deliberately chosen a well-known problem to show you how problem-solving works and how the stages of problem-solving are linked and how they build on each other.

ACTIVITY

Please read the following case study and then answer the questions that follow:

Thandi is a history educator in a large classroom. The learners' ages vary from 12 to 13. Although they are about the same age, these learners all come from different backgrounds and all of them have different abilities: some are able to cope with the history education, others seem to be at a loss. One day, Thandi discovers that one small group of learners have no understanding of our common dating system (BC and AD) or, indeed, of history at all — they think that Moses and Jesus lived at the same time. They know that white settlers arrived in South Africa ''a long time ago'', but when questioned, they think this was about 50 years ago! Thandi is appalled and feels she must do something.

(1) What is the problem here? Write down your answer in the space below.

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(2) Now define this problem as precisely as you can. Again, write down your answer in the space below.

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(3) If you were Thandi, what would you do to find out more about this problem?

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(4) What do you think is the best way of solving this problem (use your existing knowledge and experiences as an educator). We think we would ask all the learners to compile a wall chart with dates and people's names on it. Do you think this would help? Write down your answer in the space below.

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(5) Supposing the wall chart idea doesn't work very well: six months later, there are still a few learners who seem to have no grasp of dates. What would you do then?

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We would reformulate the problem like this:

> The problem in my history classroom is that some learners appear to lack certain cognitive skills and cannot grasp dates. This makes it very difficult for them to learn history.

How would you go about solving this problem?

We think you will agree that we are now confronting a complex issue. Perhaps, as educators, we need to do research into history education. Perhaps we need to re-examine the way we are teaching history.

Now let us look at another case study. Here the problem is coping with a badly behaved learner in the classroom. As you will see, this problem turns out to be very complex indeed.

Mary is in charge of a classroom of 30 learners. Although most of these learners are keen to make progress, one of them, Stephen, never seems to be happy unless he is causing trouble and stirring up some of the other learners. Mary knows that Stephen comes from a particularly bad home where there is virtually no adult supervision. One educator has told Mary that the best way to handle Stephen is to ignore him. Mary has been trying this for a year, but Stephen is getting more rowdier, not less. Mary then decides to try another idea: giving Stephen lots of attention. Stephen's behaviour improves for a while, but then he goes

downhill again. Mary is now feeling very frustrated and asks a number of her colleagues for advice.

ACTIVITY

(1) What is the problem that Mary is trying to solve? Write down your answer in the space below.

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(2) So far, Mary has failed to solve the problem. What does this tell you about the problem? Write down your answer in the space below.

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(3) Why does Stephen behave so badly? Write down your answer in the space below.

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OUR RESPONSE

(1) Mary's problem is: how can I get Stephen to stop behaving badly and stop stirring up other learners?
(2) The fact that Mary has failed to solve the problem tells us that the problem is complex.
(3) Stephen behaves badly because he comes from a home where there is virtually no adult supervision.

The statement in (3) is an explanation, but it is not a very good explanation. Apart from any other reason, it ignores the fact that many learners come from bad homes but by no means are all of them disruptive in the classroom. We need a more detailed explanation.

- This means we need to ask another ''why?'' question: why do **some** learners from bad homes behave badly? In other words, we need to go back to stage (2) and formulate our problem more precisely.
- Once we have formulated our problem more precisely, we can start

to do research. We can start to read about problem behaviour and what causes it: we will soon find that there are a number of disciplines that give us input here — for example, sociology and psychology. Sociology will focus on how certain social conditions lead to problem behaviour, and psychology will focus on how certain mental conditions lead to problem behaviour.

Another thing we can do in our research into Stephen's behaviour problem is to simply ''ask around''. Mary is doing this already. She's asked a number of other educators about problem behaviour and how to deal with it and some of these educators have probably said things like: ''Stephen's family life is particularly unsatisfactory because he is ignored all the time.'' This sort of input helps us to come up with a satisfactory explanation.

- Let's imagine that Mary starts to get to know Stephen better and starts to do research into the whole issue of problem behaviour in schools, etc. Maybe she contacts someone who is doing research into this issue. After a while, Mary feels she can come up with a better explanation of why Stephen behaves badly. She comes up with the following explanation:
- ''The reason why Stephen has always behaved so badly is that, unlike all the other children in my class, he was an only child and he has always felt isolated. The other children had brothers and sisters to turn to, even if their fathers weren't around and their mothers weren't coping and there was very little money. Stephen has no one to turn to. His father disappeared soon after he was born, his mother is a domestic worker who hardly ever comes home and his only adult supervision is an aunt who pops in occasionally. The textbooks and the research work say the same thing: an isolated child is far more likely to indulge in problem behaviour than a child with a support group. This is because the isolated child has nobody to look up, to turn to, to emulate — the isolated child never gets socialised into society.''

We think you will agree that this is a much better explanation. But now let us stop and pause for a while. Where does Mary get this information on badly behaved learners?

We think you will agree that she likely gets her information from a combination of the following:

(1) Older, more experienced educators. She asks them what they think and finds out about their experiences. This is a good example of getting first-hand evidence for any research work we do. But given that a crucial purpose of this course is to engage in the Socratic activity of self-examination, self-interrogation, and self-questioning, we need to ask whether older, more experienced educators do indeed constitute reliable sources of first-hand information to help Mary solve her problem. That is, while there is a modicum of truth in the assumption, there is also a strong likelihood that this might not be the case. The view that some of the experienced educators

might be suffering from a ''generation gap'' syndrome also merits consideration. This means that they have been in the field for so long, doing the same thing over and over again, that they missed out on the opportunities to renew their skills and attitudes at courses, seminars, workshops or conferences. They might be so stuck in the old ways of ''how we do things around here'' that they make no time to understand the needs and aspirations of the young and more hip generation of Nokia cell phones, I-Pods, MP3s, Quicksilver, Billabong and Diesel brands. This suggests that they might be prone to stereotyping this post-modern, hi-tech generation of students instead of trying to understand them.

(2) Textbooks and published research work. Any research work and any form of investigation involve reading and thinking for ourselves, using the work of experts in the field. There is only one place to go for this: the library. In Mary's case, her research into Stephen's problem will take her to the discipline of education, but this is a huge area that is likely to complicate Mary's life.

Mary will need to get information from one or more of the following sources:

- Educational psychology
- Abnormal psychology
- Child psychology
- Group behaviour

This is obviously a formidable task — this is where subject librarians can help her. In Mary's case, there is the additional problem of a lack of research into the problems of African and non-western classrooms. It may be that she will find more relevant information in textbooks focusing on schooling in Second and Third World countries (for example, South America).

Today, as you probably know, a great deal of research is published directly onto the Internet. The Internet is certainly very useful, but Mary needs to bear in mind the following before simply downloading any information from the Internet:

- Not all Internet sources are reliable. In this case, Mary needs to make sure that any website she visits, has good credentials (for example, is maintained by professionals in the field).
- Some Internet sources are very keen to push a certain theory or ideology. This is not necessarily bad, but in Mary's case, she needs to realise that a website that is maintained by, for example, a certain school of psychologists, will be biased in its slant.
- Many, if not most, Internet sources are very much western/First World. In fact, many Internet sources assume that all Internet users are Americans! This obviously reflects uncritical cultural bias on the part of the website designers.

Putting these issues aside, the problems presented by a problem learner in an American classroom are likely to be quite different from those experienced in a classroom in Soweto. More importantly still, by no means does everyone have access to the Internet. In information and communication technology (ICT) this is known as the ''digital divide''. Indeed, Internet access is one of the things that divide the developed world and the developing world. Internet access is only available in those parts of the world that have a national electricity supply and which have sophisticated telecommunication systems. We will be discussing this problem in more detail shortly.

As we have said, many textbooks are written by people living in First World countries (for example, America and Britain). This is also true of most Internet sources — these, too, tend to be written by people living in First World countries. Given this bias, what would you do to obtain relevant information about problem learners in classrooms in South Africa?

SUGGESTION: Find out what published research is available on problem learners in classrooms in South African townships. Do you feel that you personally can make a contribution here?

So far, we've focused on the case of a problem learner in the classroom. But, of course, there are other education problems that you may be more interested in. Perhaps you are interested in how groups of learners behave and why some groups of learners are more successful than others.

Where would you go to get information on this?

Can you draw on your own experience, or the experiences of other educators?

On the surface these are the most obvious sources of information available to Mary. But given that these disciplines are scientifically inclined their suggested answers are most likely to be heavily influenced by scientific applications, with emphasis on mathematical precision and assumptions about ''objective truth''. It takes more to understand human nature and its relation to social dynamics than reliance on science-oriented disciplines.

Let us go back to the assumption that ''the isolated child has nobody to look up to, to turn to, to emulate'', and therefore ''the isolated child never gets socialised into society.'' Perhaps Mary needs to unpack this assumption a little further. To do this she will probably have to appeal to philosophy of education, another field of education not included in the above list of possible sources of information. Philosophy of education is Socratic in approach, that is, it is critical and reflective. Its basis is to question the taken-for-granted assumptions and presuppositions with a view to arriving at some semblance of conceptual validity. For example, if Mary were to choose to go the Socratic route she would be forced to critically and rigorously dissect

the assumption that because ''an isolated child has nobody to look up to, to turn to, to emulate, it never gets socialised into society.''

ACTIVITY

(1) What are your thoughts on Stephen? Is this assumption fact or opinion?

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(2) Would you want to help Stephen?

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(3) Suppose you are Mary confronted by a problem learner such as Stephen. What would be the focus of your research?

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(4) How can one differentiate between fact and opinion with respect to behavioural traits of individuals?

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(5) Is it sound to argue that children who grow up without adult or parental supervision will turn out to be social misfits?

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The Principle of Falsification

Karl Popper (1902–1994), who is considered by many to be the father of critical rationalism, is also known for the ''principle of falsification''. The basis of this principle is that we can never know whether a statement or belief is definitely true, but we can find out whether it is false. How useful is the ''principle of falsification''? Do you think either you or Mary can comfortably use the ''principle of falsification'' to establish that it is false to assume that a child who grows up without adult or parental supervision necessarily turns out to be an adult with problems? For instance, is it not possible to find children who do not have parents or adult role models, but who are doing perfectly well in their studies? Were this fact to be established, we will have to think differently about not only the basis of the assumption in question, but also its validity. Now here is a teaser.

In 2003, Mamajoro Shilubana, former educator and researcher at the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC), now with the Department of

Labour, conducted a study for a Master of Education degree with the then Rand Afrikaans University (RAU). The theme of the dissertation was the effects of staying alone without parents or guardians, on school performance. The study was conducted in the Metsimaholo municipality, Deneysville, in the province of Free State. Metsimaholo is a poor, rural and highly marginalised municipality with almost 61% unemployment. Shilubana sampled six secondary learners (two boys and four girls) aged between 9 and 14, in grades 8, 9 and 10, and living in shacks in an informal settlement without adult or parental supervision. Her findings are useful for putting into perspective Mary's problem with Stephen. Their above average marks in the second term were: grade 10 learner, 56%; the two grade 9 learners, 73% and 60%; the three grade 8 learners, 52%, 54% and 56% respectively.

HOW TO MAKE ''IRRELEVANT'' TEXTBOOKS/INTERNET INFORMATION MORE RELEVANT

Supposing all the information you could find for your research was based on western (that is, First World) classrooms.

Here are some questions that will help you use these books to your best advantage:

(1) What was the nature of the problem that the author researched? Write down your answer in the space below.

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(2) Are there *any* similarities between this problem and the problem I want to solve? There probably are: make a list of these similarities. Write down your answer in the space below.

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(3) What do I have in common with an educator in an American classroom? (Remember: some American schools are in ghettos and poor areas.) Write down your answer in the space below.

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(4) What do the learners in my school have in common with the learners referred to in western (First World) textbooks? Write down your answer in the space below.

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IMPORTANT: RESEARCH AND REFERRING TO YOUR SOURCES

As we have seen, research requires talking to other people, going to the library and using the Internet. In fact, almost any form of written work requires that we do this. When we started writing this module, we spoke to a number of people about how to write the module and we spent quite a long time looking for appropriate information from books and the Internet.

As you saw, we began this unit by referring to a book by the author Richard Dawkins. At the end of the quote from his book, we inserted the following:

(Dawkins 1986:6)

This is what is known as an in-text reference. It is an abbreviated form of the full reference to the book. The full references to this book and other books that we used to help us write this module, appear in the list of references at the end of the module.

This is what a full reference to the book looks like:

Dawkins, R. (1986) *The blind watchmaker*. New York: Norton.

As you can see, the title of the book is in italics.

As we have said, you don't just have to use books for information. Newspaper articles and magazines are also a good source of information. *Time* magazine is often used as an information resource.

This is how you would write out the full reference to an article in *Time* magazine:

Chu, J. (2003) O Father, where art Thou? *Time.* June: 14–20.

As you can see, the title of the article is in ordinary type, the name of the journal, *Time*, is in italics.

The in-text reference would look like this:

(Chu 2003:14–20)

Internet referencing can be very complex. It is really not necessary for us to go into too much detail at this stage. As you will see later on in this module, we use an Internet website.

This is how you refer to a website:

http://name of website/date of download

It is important to give the download date because some websites may go offline or the information may vary considerably, even in as brief a period as a month.

But supposing you don't have Internet access?

Whether you do or not, please read the following article (which was published, online, in 1999) and then answer the questions that follow:

Monday, 1 November 1999

Losing ground bit by bit, by BBC News Online's Jane Black

The hype for everything online obscures the reality about how technology is changing life at the end of the 20th century. From Manhattan and Madrid, the Internet has fundamentally changed work, recreation — even love. But in Malawi and Mozambique, life remains very much the same.

More than 80% of people in the world have never heard a dial tone, let alone sent an email or downloaded information from the World Wide Web.

Facts first

First the figures. The statistics on the basic building block of connectedness — that is, phone lines — are stark. According to the latest UN Human Development Report, industrialised countries, with only 15% of the world's population, are home to 88% of all Internet users. Less than 1% of people in South Asia are online even though it is home to one-fifth of the world's population.

The situation is even worse in Africa. With 739 million people, there are only 14 million phone lines. That's fewer than in Manhattan or Tokyo. Eighty percent of those lines are in only six countries. There are only 1 million Internet users on the entire continent compared with 10,5 million in the UK.

Even if telecommunications systems were in place, most of the world's poor would still be excluded from the information revolution because of illiteracy and a lack of basic computer skills.

In Benin, for example, more than 60% of the population is illiterate. The other 40% are similarly out of luck. Four-fifths of Websites are in English, a language understood by only one in 10 people on the planet.

Barriers

The lack of resources in poor communities can't explain the technology gap alone. In the developing world, there is still resistance to the idea that technology is a quick fix.

Take the African Virtual University. The World Bank-sponsored programme has broadcast over 2 000 hours of instruction to over 9 000 students in all regions of sub-Saharan Africa. The initiative has allowed AVU students to take courses given by professors from world-renowned educational institutions in Africa, North America, and Europe.

That does not impress Ethiopian Meghistab Haile: ''With that money

just imagine how many lecturers you could have. If the World Bank is really wanting to help African universities then the first step would be to encourage and support the Africans. In the end it is only the Africans who can solve their problems.''

Others complain that high-tech education — available only to a select elite — is not worth it when so many places on the continent are still without electricity and running water.

''Our priorities are hygiene, sanitation, safe drinking water,'' said Supatra Koirala, who works at a private nursing home in Kathmandu. ''How is having access to the Internet going to change that?''

ACTIVITY

Write your responses in the spaces provided.

(1) In 1999, how many Africans were Internet users?

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(2) Are you an Internet user?

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(3) If you are not an Internet user, do you know anybody who is?

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(4) Do you support the World Bank's initiative (the African Virtual University)? Or do you think the money should have been spent on other things?

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(5) What is your response to Supatra Koirala's comments?

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REFERENCES FOR UNIT 1

Dawkins, R. 1986. *The blind watchmaker.* New York: Norton. http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/ special report.

Egan, K. 2001. ''Why education is so difficult and contentious''. *Teachers College Record,* 103 (6), 923–941.

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West, C. (2004) *Democracy matters: winning the fight against imperialism*. New York: Penguin Press.

(2003) ''Readings and Conversations'', KUNM Television discussion forum on social, political, and cultural issues, Santa Fe, New Mexico, June 25.

(1993) *Race Matters.* New York: Vintage Books.

UNIT 2

How to argue

OUTCOMES FOR UNIT 2

After you have worked through unit 2, you will be able to

(1) explain the structure of the argument
(2) spot the weaknesses in poor arguments
(3) explain what is meant by a hidden assumption
(4) state what is meant by a fact
(5) state what is meant by value
(6) choose a research topic that interests you personally

HOW TO ARGUE

We've discussed a number of things so far:

- Getting information
- Using the information available to us
- Problem solving

Now let us look at something else: argument. Argument, research, scholarship and learning are all interlinked, as you will see.

In its simplest form, an argument works like this:

STRUCTURE OF AN ARGUMENT

x is true.

Given that x is true, y is also true.

A well-known example of a simple argument is a mathematical statement:

$x + y = 3$
$x = 2$

Therefore $y = 1$.

Of course, only some of us are mathematics educators. But all educators and learners use argument.

Here is another example of a simple argument:

John is married to Mary.
Therefore John is Mary's husband, and Mary is John's wife.

Most arguments are not as simple as this but, nonetheless, virtually all forms of argument are based on taking a statement or set of statements and then using these statements to claim that something else is or is not true.

For example:

> John is married to Mary.
> Therefore John loves Mary and Mary loves John.

Let us look at that last argument again:

> ''John is married to Mary.
> Therefore John loves Mary and Mary loves John.''

Do you think this is a good argument? Well, we think it is not because, unfortunately, being married to someone does not necessarily mean you love him or her. Imagine John and Mary were living in a society where the culture orders the way things are done and marriage is therefore arranged by the parents. Obviously John and Mary will not have met previously or engaged in courtship before marriage. This raises another important question, once again a question of validity: how valid is the assumption that people can only love one another dearly in marriage because they dated beforehand, and were therefore able to develop strong emotional bonds in the process? In some arranged marriages the parties involved are not even aware of it, as they are very young when the arrangements are made. Yet some of these people argue that such marriages are in fact more enduring than marriages that occur as a result of the choice exercised by couples. The reason, they contend, is that such marriages endure because they are rooted in strong cultural beliefs and enduring traditions that have been preserved for posterity, shielded against destructive foreign influences, and are being meticulously passed from generation to generation. Proponents of this view would contend that doubt over the issue of love should not even arise. So that the presentation

> ''John is married to Mary.
> Therefore John loves Mary and Mary loves John.''

should be taken as valid and not be the subject of debate.

In some African communities marriages take place neither through courtship nor arrangement, but through chobedisano (a Sotho word), which in Xhosa is known as Ukuthwala. In township language this is called 'fat en set'. In western liberal democratic societies this would be termed kidnapping, and amounts to the violation of a woman's constitutional right to choose her partner in marriage.

From a western liberal democratic society's point of view, sociologists, social workers, marriage counsellors and political scientists would contend that it is better to rather say:

> ''John is married to Mary.
> It is therefore likely that John and Mary still love each other.''

The reason for this is that John and Mary may be married, but they may both be having affairs with other people and probably be thinking about divorce. The cautious phrase ''It is therefore likely ...'', it is posited, makes this a better argument.

ACTIVITY

Write your responses in the spaces provided.

(1) What are your thoughts on ''logical'' arguments and different cultural practices?

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(2) Do you think it is fair that marriage between two people should be arranged without their participation?

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(3) Do you think it is fair for a women to go into a marriage through chobedisano (Sotho), or Ukuthwala (Xhosa)?

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(4) In your opinion, what might be the logical explanation for claims that the above marriages are more enduring than those that occur as a result of choice?

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(5) If you're married, how was your marriage arranged?

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(6) If you're not married, would be comfortable if your marriage was arranged?

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ACTIVITY

Argument 1

''Sarah's handbag has disappeared from her office.
I saw John near Sarah's office an hour ago.
Therefore John has stolen Sarah's handbag.''

What is the problem with this argument? Please write down your answer in the space below.

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OUR RESPONSE

There are three big problems with this argument:

(1) The fact that Sarah's handbag has disappeared from her office does not mean it has been stolen. **In other words, there is an untested assumption here.**
(2) The fact that I saw John near Sarah's office does not mean that John entered Sarah's office at all and it certainly does not mean that John stole her handbag.

In other words, there are two other untested assumptions here: (a) that John entered Sarah's office at all and (b) that having entered her office, he stole her handbag.

During a media briefing at the height of the Monica Lewinsky sex scandal, former US president, Bill Clinton, pointed his finger at the television cameras and said, ''I did not have sex with that woman, Monica Lewinsky''.

As an Attorney at law himself, he was testing the strength of an untested assumption about what might have happened between himself and Ms Lewinsky in the privacy of his Presidential Oval Office. Clinton went on to debate and put into perspective assumptions about ''sex'' and what it really means to say that two people have had sex. His robust line of argumentation embarrassed and put to shame the case of Chief Prosecutor Kenneth Starr, who spent over $40 million of Federal (state) funds on a case based on what later proved to be an untested assumption. The Bill Clinton - Monica Lewinsky case provides useful lessons. As you think of your topic for research, think very carefully about the validity of the kind of assumption that frame you thoughts. You do this by recalling what we said is required to engage in the Socratic activity:

To engage in the Socratic activity is to engage in the activity of self-examination, self-interrogation, and self-questioning. This requires the courage to think critically, for oneself. It requires more courage to dig deep into the corners of one's own soul and wrestle with what one finds than it does for a soldier to fight on the battlefield.

ACTIVITY

Argument 2

''We live in a very technological society.

Maths and science teaching is therefore the most important part of the curriculum.''

What is your response to this argument? Write down your answer in the space below.

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OUR RESPONSE

It is true that, because we live in a very technological society, maths and science are an important part of the curriculum. But we do not agree that they are the most important part of the curriculum. Technology has the power to destroy the human race and the most important part of the curriculum is therefore teaching learners moral responsibility.

What do you think is the most important subject in the curriculum? Or do you think they are all equally important?

Argue your point of view in the space below.

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Argument 3

''There's no point studying beyond school level.

I know this because Tom left school when he was only 13 — today he's a rich businessman!''

Let us look at this argument together.

This argument is based on a **hidden assumption.**

The hidden assumption in this case is:

> ''The whole purpose of higher education is to enable people to get well-paid jobs or to enable people to become entrepreneurs.''

ACTIVITY

Do you accept this assumption? Why? Why not? Again, write your answer in the space below.

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OUR RESPONSE

We certainly do not agree with this hidden assumption. In fact, we resist the very idea that higher education is linked to some **measurable** output. The purpose of higher education is to enable certain groups of people to critically analyse and explore themselves and society. This, we believe, is by no means some sort of luxury, but an urgent necessity in a world plagued with overwhelming problems. Having said that, we are not saying that there is something intrinsically wrong with going to university in order to get a better job. Many people do just that.

If you accept this assumption (that is, that the whole purpose of higher education is to enable people to make money), then you might be inclined to agree with argument 3.

Now let us look at argument 4, which is also about education and work.

Argument 4

> ''A good education is not about making money. **A good education is about teaching people to think and act responsibly.** There are many problems in the workplace and business world today that are not getting solved (for example, unemployment). This is because too many people in business are out to make a quick buck — there's no long-term planning and no sense of social responsibility. The business world and the workplace needs people with top-quality thinking skills and who aren't out for profit all the time. That's why a good education is important — it improves the overall quality of people entering the workplace.''

This is quite a complex argument.

Look at the phrase in bold. This is the **basis** of the argument.

ACTIVITY

According to argument 4, what is happening in the workplace and business world today? Write your answer in the space below.

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OUR RESPONSE

According to argument 4, what is happening in the workplace and business world today is that it is dominated by the profit motive and greed. As a result, there is a lack of long-term planning and many companies have lost all sense of social responsibility. In short, the business world needs to change its value system.

According to argument 4, what contribution can a good education make to the workplace? What do you think? Write your answer in the space below.

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OUR RESPONSE

A good education gives people the ability to critically analyse dominant social values and this is the sort of critical outlook that is needed in the modern business world. Earlier we referred to the Socratic activity of engaging in self-examination, self-interrogation, and self-questioning, of questioning the taken-for-granted assumptions about how society is ordered. A good education raises people's perspectives on and perceptions about themselves, others and the world around them, to higher order reflection.

What subject do you teach? How do you think can your subject help people solve problems in the workplace?

Think about this!

Now read the following, which is a discussion between two people: Hilary, who is a history educator, and David, who teaches computer

literacy. Hilary and David are also two PGCE students and they are discussing argument 4.

DISCUSSION

Hilary: I agree with argument 4. A good education is important and a good education includes teaching learners about history. People think that history is a load of boring stuff about the past — that it's all about dates and events that happened a long time ago that are no longer of any relevance. That's not true at all. History is about the study of people. If something is going wrong in South Africa and the South African workplace today, it's because people haven't learned from the mistakes of the past.

David: Sorry, Hilary, but I can't agree with you. The modern world is too different, too technological, to bear any comparison with the world of even 50 years ago. We need to teach learners computer literacy, accountancy, business skills and practical science.

Hilary: You're forgetting something. Machines and science do not run the world, David — human beings do. And it is science — biology — that tells us that human beings are driven just as much by instinct today as they were 30 000 years ago.

David: All right, you've got a point. But then let's study biology, not history!

Hilary: Biology, history and technology are all linked. History is many things: it is the study of the human species in action as a group. It's also the study of individual history — you have a history, I have a history. Argument 4 talks of problems in the workplace — the moment we start studying why a company has run into problems, we're studying history — in this case, the history of the company.

David: If we want to find out why a company runs into problems, we need to look at its balance sheet — that's accountancy!

Hilary: But a balance sheet only tells you part of the story. It doesn't tell you why sales dropped. I was speaking to Mr Meinhard, the geography educator, the other day — he reckons that some PC companies are in trouble now because of the drought — people are having to pay more for basic foodstuffs, so they don't have income for a new computer. We're back to basics!

David: Fair enough, but then science is working on that. I read in the paper the other day that they're thinking of artificial rain — seeding the clouds. You can't get away from science and technology.

Hilary: Science and technology are only beneficial if they're controlled by responsible human beings who understand just how badly things can go wrong. That's why I believe we should teach learners the history of World War 2 and the dropping of the atom bomb. And look at biological warfare. Our young learners are growing up in a world that is running out of food, water and where political and religious fanaticism is threatening humankind. Do you really think accountancy and computer literacy are going to make our learners better able to cope with these realities?

As you can see, this debate is full of argument and is extremely complex.

ACTIVITY

Continue with the debate in the space below. Hilary has just referred to some real and very frightening problems: biological warfare, fanaticism, depleted natural resources.

It is now David's turn to speak:

David: Fair enough, I agree that science and technology need to be used responsibly. But it will be science and technology that bring us new ways of surviving in the face of the ecological crisis you're talking about. For example, if we're going to have enough water in the future, we're going to have to desalinate the oceans. And science will get us away from religion and religious fanaticism.

What do you think Hilary will say to this?
What do you say to this?

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OUR RESPONSE

We do actually have a lot of sympathy with what David is saying and we certainly feel that religious fanaticism needs to be overcome — science definitely helps here because it critically examines the claims

of religion. But we do feel that David is evading the issue of responsibility and values. And many people argue that this is precisely where religion can be of help! The idea of using science and technology responsibly is worth re-emphasising. Do you remember the details of the Second World War and the way in which Japan was forced to surrender? In a nutshell: In 1943 the Allied forces assembled a team of scientists at Los Alamos, New Mexico, led by Professor J. Robert Oppenheimer, a brilliant physicist. Professor Oppenheimer's team designed and assembled the first hydrogen bomb. On 6 August 1945 the first bomb was dropped on the city of Hiroshima, killing more than 78 000 people. The second was dropped on the city of Nagasaki on 9 August, killing over 38 000. Professor Oppenheimer later lived a haunted life, haunted not by his scientific achievement, but by the realisation that the fruits of his scientific research had been used against mankind. In four days, two bombs which were works of scientific creation killed more than 1 million people (almost the entire population of Botswana). Perhaps you can now understand why it is important to teach young people bio-ethics, so that they become aware of the social and ethical aspects of science.

Do you think David and Hilary agree about anything in education? Do they at least agree on the need to solve certain problems? We think they do.

THEORY AND PRACTICE: THE REAL WORLD

Hilary, who is a history educator, said this:

> ''Our young learners are growing up in a world that is running out of food, water and where political and religious fanaticism is threatening humankind.''

These are big, overwhelming issues.

How should we tackle these issues in the classroom?

David seems to believe that science and technology are the answer to these frightening problems.

One day, David is discussing this with Ms Mekeni, who is an Environmental Studies educator.

She makes the following remark:

> ''I was very upset at the recent Parents' Meeting. One of the parents came up to me afterwards and said he didn't see the point of Environmental Studies. All we have to do, he said, is tell learners to recycle and grow their own vegetables! But you can't get away from theory. Our learners need to understand that South Africa is part of the huge ecosystem of planet earth. There's a lot even the experts don't understand — *El Niño*, for example. I encourage my learners to learn as much about theory as they can.''

David responded by saying:

> ''I agree. That's why natural science education is so important. Learners need to be taught scientific theory, because this is the key to helping our learners work and live responsibly. When I think about it, I realise I don't know much about *El Niño* myself!''

At that point, Hilary came into the room and heard David and Ms Mekeni talking. After a while, she said the same thing — she didn't know much about *El Niño* either!

ACTIVITY

Research

Write your responses in the spaces provided.

How much do you know about *El Niño* and what causes *El Niño*?

If you have access to the Internet, you can find out something about *El Niño* on a number of websites: the best website we found, for the non-scientist, was the website maintained by the University of Illinois. (*El Niño*: Online meteorology guide). The URL address is:

http://ww2010.atmos.uiuc.edu/(Gh)/guides/mtr/eln/home.rxml

If you have trouble finding this website, use a search engine and search *El Niño*.

If you do not have access to the Internet, we suggest you visit your local library — books are often far more useful than the Internet simply because they provide much more detail. Another possible resource is Time magazine — do you ever read this or do you know somebody who does?

If you have trouble finding out about *El Niño*, you can still do your own ecological research. In fact, this is a good research project to do with your learners.

(1) What is the weather like in your part of the world? In Pretoria, South Africa, we have cold, dry winters and hot summers. Historically, in Pretoria, our hot summers have always brought us regular rain. What is worrying is that, in the last few years, the rainfall has been unpredictable and lower than average.

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(2) Have there been any changes in the weather patterns where you live? If you're not certain, ask older people. Farmers often keep their own records.

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(3) Is there a meteorological office you can contact? If there is, see what they can tell you.

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(4) Have any rivers or lakes in your area dried up in recent years?

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(5) Perhaps you sometimes go to the movies. At the time of writing this module (June 2004), a movie called *The day after tomorrow* had just been released. Did you see this film? What was the topic of this film? (If you didn't see the film, see if you can find out what it was about.)

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Once you've gathered as much information as you can about the weather and climate in your area, you can get your learners to, say, draw a bar chart of rainfall and temperatures in your area or write a short report on why people think a local river dried up.

THEORY AND DISCUSSION

When we went looking for information about *El Niño*, we found out a number of interesting things. *El Niño* is a periodic phenomenon that occurs every 3 to 7 years. The US government has placed ''weather watch'' buoys in the Pacific Ocean that record temperature changes in the Pacific. The hope is that this will enable the scientific community to warn us all of impending *El Niño*s. *El Niño* refers, in brief, to the massive warming of the western waters of the Pacific Ocean and is related to weakened east trade winds. *El Niño* leads to unusually high rainfall and flooding in parts of Southern America, and drought in our part of the world, South Africa.

The problem is: all this theory and explanation gives us no clue about what any of us, least of all learners and educators can do about it! Indeed, scientists themselves are powerless in the face of *El Niño* — this is because, to date, nobody knows what actually causes the trade winds to weaken.

So nobody can do anything about *El Niño* until scientists investigate further — more theory is needed, not less!

However, one thing we did find out from the websites was that *El Niño* is only one reason for drought. The world as a whole is experiencing climate change, with serious consequences for humankind. Hilary is right — young learners in school today will be faced with food shortages, and so on.

RESEARCH AND ACTION

One of the things that you've probably noticed is that Hilary and David and the Environmental Studies educator are all learning from each other! One of the most interesting things here is that Hilary and David have done something very important: they have agreed to find out more about (that is, do research into) a subject that is outside their field of teaching.

One of the problems of teaching a specialist subject is that it tends to make educators feel that they should only do research into their field of study.

But, if you think about this, this could be very limiting and could well lead people down a dead end. Also, there are certain issues that will have an impact on literally everybody on the planet: global warming and climate change is one such issue.

ACTIVITY

Research again

(1) Can you think of any other issues that do have or will have an impact on everybody? If you can, write down your response in the space below.

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(2) Alternatively, is there any issue that interests you that you would like to research? This can be any issue — for the moment, never mind that it is not part of the curriculum you teach. Again, write down your response in the space below.

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(3) Let's take an example. Perhaps you are an African Languages educator and, in your spare time, sing in your local church choir. In this case, you may be very interested in doing research into the history of church music in South Africa.

How would you go about this research? Write your answer in the space below.

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(4) Do you think you could link your research to your field of teaching? Write your answer in the space below.

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OUR RESPONSE

We believe that African Languages and the history of church music in South Africa are definitely interconnected. Although church music is dominated by western style music (for example, plainsong in the Roman Catholic church, hymns in the Methodist church, organ music), when Christianity was brought to South Africa by white missionaries, its forms of worship were assimilated by African tradition which, obviously, includes African Languages.

So, to return to our question:

Is there any issue you would personally like to research which, on the face of it, does not appear to be linked to your teaching subject?

ACTIVITY

Research again

Please choose an issue that interests you personally and set a whole day aside to get some information on this issue.

To obtain this information, you can use:

- The Unisa library (invaluable!)
- Books (your local library)
- Magazines (visit a CNA)
- Rent a video or DVD on the subject (Can you think of any films that explored this area of interest?)
- The Internet (if you have Internet access)

What did you manage to get hold of? Some books? Websites? Something else? Please give titles in the space below.

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Do you think you can link any of this to your field of teaching?

Even if you are inclined to say ''no'', think again. The person who is, for example, teaching history is the same person who is interested in football (yes, this is a valid research topic). (In this case, the educator could link history and the history of sport in South Africa.)

Once you've done all this, design a lesson for your learners in which you share your personal research topic with them. Show them how this links with the subject you teach.

ACTIVITY

Researching big issues

One of the criticisms of education is that it concentrates on theory rather than practicalities.

Earlier on, we briefly discussed *El Niño* and said that the problem is that there is nothing anybody can do about *El Niño* until scientists find out more. We also mentioned climate change and the huge problems facing the world today.

Here is a list of other ''big issues''. Perhaps you can add to this list.

- Aids
- Child abuse
- Poverty
- Unemployment
- Racism
- Sexism
- The wealth gap
- Unequal access to the earth's resources
- Corruption in business and politics
- American domination
- Resource scarcity
- Over-population
- Oil resources
- Religious fanaticism

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Of all these issues, which issues do you personally feel are the most important and most in need of research and action?

OUR RESPONSE

We personally feel that over-population and resource scarcity are the most important. But we are also concerned by American domination of the globe and we feel strongly that human beings should work together

to reduce poverty. So these are the issues we want to find out more about and research — with a view to doing something ourselves and persuading others to do something.

But you may feel quite differently.

Perhaps you feel that racism is the most important, or Aids and child abuse. Racism has indeed become one of the most topical issues in some of South Africa's public higher education institutions. Professor Jonathan Jansen, Dean of Education at the University of Pretoria, made the following trenchant remarks about racism in educational institutions:

There are hundreds of little incidents, unseen and unrecorded, that happen to young and older students because of race the grouping of children, the dominant assessment practices, the learner preferences of the teacher, the display of cultural symbols, the organisation of religious symbols, the scope of awards and rewards, and the decisions of 'who teaches what' are all organised in ways that show preference based on race (as well as social class), religion and gender (Jansen, 2004).

For a more detailed understanding of Professor Jansen's views on race matters, consult his paper ''Race, education and democracy after ten years: how far have we come?'', which he prepared for the Institute for Democracy in South Africa (IDASA).

This brings us to something else that is important to the research role of educators: our values.

FACTS AND VALUES

The best way to understand what a value is, is to contrast it with the opposite, a fact.

Let's look at the following remarks. As you will see, all of these consist of two parts: a fact and a value.

(1) ''Women are members of the human race. Therefore they should have equal rights.''
(2) ''Telling lies spoils our relationships with other people. Therefore it's always wrong to tell lies.''
(3) ''Animals are conscious beings with feelings just like human beings. Therefore cruelty to animals is always wrong, even in the context of medical research.''

Let's look at each of these statements in turn.

Statement (1) consists of two parts:

(a) Women are members of the human race.
(b) Therefore women should have equal rights.

Part (a) is a physical **fact** about the natural biological world.

Part (b) uses the word ''should''. Any phrase that includes the word ''should'' is a **value.**

As researchers, it is important that we realise that there is no logical connection between a fact and a value. Women are clearly members of the human race. Women belong to the species *homo sapiens.* This is a neutral, objective fact which gives us information about the world as it is. But a fact (an ''is'' statement) is in no way logically related to an ''ought'' statement, so it is totally incorrect to say:

> Women belong to the human race
> Therefore
> Women ought to have equal rights

You might as well say:

> Janet lives in Tshwane
> Therefore
> Janet ought to have the same rights as a man.

In other words, the two statements have NOTHING TO DO WITH EACH OTHER.

A statement such as, ''women ought to have equal rights'', is about values. Values are the same as morals. Values are extremely important to all human beings and all human societies. We need to be able to recognise values and we need to be empowered to criticise society's values. We also need to be able to criticise and rethink our own values; that is, to engage in the Socratic activity of self-examination, self-interrogation, and self-questioning, to develop the courage to think critically, for oneself.

Now let us look at the second statement which, on the face of it, is slightly more complex:

Like the first statement, statement 2 can be divided into two:

(a) Telling lies spoils our relationships with other people.
(b) Therefore it is wrong to tell lies.

Here Part (a) is the FACT, the ''is'' statement. It tells us something neutral and objective about the world as it is. In this case, the world is the social world, the world of human relationships. Human relationships are based on trust. If I tell people lies, I destroy their trust in me and thus seriously damage my relationships with those people. This is a fact.

(b) Once again, Part (b) is the VALUE STATEMENT. It contains the word ''wrong''. Saying, ''It is wrong to tell lies'' is an expression of a value. If I say, ''It is wrong to tell lies'', I am not making a neutral, objective statement about the world as it is. In fact, some people do not share this value. Some people are quite prepared to

tell lies in certain circumstances and do not feel the least bit guilty about doing so.

Once again, there is **no logical connection whatsoever between** (a) and (b). The statements, ''Telling lies spoils our relationships with other people'' and ''It is always wrong to tell lies'', are two completely different **types or categories of statements.** They have nothing to do with each other. Let us take another example of two statements that have nothing to do with each other: a statement from a mathematics book and a statement from a history book.

(a) 1 + 1 = 2

Therefore

(b) The new Constitution was approved in 1996

Statement (a) and statement (b) are both undoubtedly true, but **they have nothing to do with each other.**

It's exactly the same with facts and values. A statement that expresses a fact is a statement about the natural or physical world. A statement that expresses a value is about something else — values, which have nothing to do with the natural or physical world.

ACTIVITY

Now look at statement (3):

(3) ''Animals are conscious beings with feelings just like human beings. Therefore cruelty to animals is always wrong, even in the context of medical research.''

Which part of this is the FACT statement? Write your answer in the space below.

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Which part is the VALUE statement? Write your answer in the space below.

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OUR RESPONSE

The following text in bold is the fact statement and the text in italics is the value statement:

> **''Animals are conscious beings with feelings just like human beings** therefore *cruelty to animals is always wrong, even in the context of medical research.''*

Once again, this is an example of false reasoning. The fact that animals are like human beings is a biological fact. It has nothing to do with the value statement, ''cruelty to animals is always wrong''. Indeed, the word ''cruelty'' is a value judgment in itself. Some people believe that vivisection is needed if we are ever to cure cancer and Aids. Other people believe that it is totally unacceptable to inflict painful experiments on animals, even if humans benefit from such experiments.

Argument (3) also contains another important word to look out for in arguments; the word ''always''. Similar words also worth spotting, are: ''everybody'' and ''all''. You often hear people say things like, ''everybody knows that ...'', or, ''all people are the same ...'' or, as in our example, ''it's always wrong/right to ...'' Statements containing words like ''always'' or ''everybody'' need to be challenged for the simple reason that such statements are usually untrue and full of generalisations.

RESEARCH, BIG ISSUES AND VALUES

Earlier on, we listed a number of big issues facing South Africa and the world today.

Let's look at that list again:

- Aids
- Child abuse
- Poverty
- Unemployment
- Racism
- Sexism
- The wealth gap
- Unequal access to the earth's resources
- Corruption in business and politics
- American domination
- Resource scarcity
- Over-population
- Oil resources
- Religious and political fanaticism

Unfortunately all these issues are **facts.** It is a fact that people die of Aids and it is a fact that some people kill and hurt others in the name of religion or for political reasons. For instance, recent statistics released

by UNAIDS/WHO (2005) indicate that AIDS has killed more than 25 million people since it was first recognised in 1981. Sub-Saharan Africa, which harbours just over 10% of the world's population, is home to more than 60% (or 25,8 million) of all people living with HIV. And the number of people living with HIV in South Africa alone is estimated to be 6 million. Western liberal democratic states, led by the US and the UK, have waged ''regime change'' wars in Afghanistan and Iraq with enormous loss of human life. Arabs and Jews have fought religious and politically motivated wars since the founding of the state of Israel on 14 May 1948. These are **facts** that one can verify by consulting authoritative databases.

But the importance that we personally give to each of these issues indicates **our value system.** For instance, some people think that Aids is a more important issue than, say, corruption in business. If you asked them ''why?'' they would say something like: ''Well, corruption in business is wrong, of course, but it doesn't actually kill people. Aids kills innocent children. That's far worse!'' This person obviously feels that human life is the most valuable thing there is. This is a value.

Other people might choose from this list the wealth gap and poverty as the two most important issues. For instance, in an effort to highlight the distinction between the wealth and affluence of white and blacks in South Africa, President Thabo Mbeki has advanced an argument that is now popularly known as the ''two nations'' thesis. He writes:

South Africa is a country of two nations. One of these nations is white and relatively prosperous, irrespective of gender or geographic dispersal. It has ready access to a developed economy and physical, educational, communication and other infrastructure. This enables it to argue that, except for the persistence of gender discrimination against women, all members of this nation have the possibility to exercise their right to equal opportunity; those development opportunities to which the constitution of 1993 committed our country.

The second and larger nation of South Africa is black and poor, with the worst affected being women in the rural areas, the black rural population in general and the disabled. This nation lives under conditions of a grossly underdeveloped economic, physical, educational, communication and other infrastructure. There is virtually no opportunity for these people to exercise what in reality amounts to a theoretical right to equal opportunity, with that right being equal within this black nation only to the extent that it is incapable of realisation (Mbeki, 1998:71–72).

The best way to illustrate the wealth gap and poverty referred to in President Mbeki's ''two nations'' thesis is to take a closer look at the residential areas of Sandton and Alexandra, in Johannesburg. Separated by a highway, Sandton is an affluent, high-life suburban area for the country's super-rich, while Alexandra is a slum characterised by shacks, abject poverty and squalor. If asked ''why?'' the world is ordered in this way, President Mbeki and others

who closely monitor sociological trends the world over, would argue that, ''globally, human society will never stop having wars until wealth is more equally distributed. Besides, it's just wrong that a few people are super-wealthy while there are South American and African children dying of starvation.''

This school of thought considers the most valuable thing to be that all human beings have a decent quality of life. Again, this is a value. The sort of research we choose to do, will reflect our values and interests — in other words, ''who we are''.

RESEARCH: WHICH ''BIG ISSUE'' DO YOU WANT TO RESEARCH?

Of all the big issues listed above, which do you feel are most important? Limit your choice to three.

Write your answer down in the space below.

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Do you think you can say why you feel these issues are so important? Again, write your answer down in the space below.

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OUR RESPONSE

We believe the following are the most important three issues:

- Over-population
- Resource scarcity
- Religious and political fanaticism

Our reasons for choosing these three are as follows:

(1) Over-population. Even if we learn to distribute the world's resources more equally, the fact is that the human population is outstripping the earth's capacity to support it. Over-population is already one of the root causes of misery in Third World countries. A poor family with only one child to support will suffer much less than a poor family with five children to support.

(2) Resource scarcity. This is linked to (1). It is estimated that, within the next 50 years, water will become scarce throughout the earth.

Desalination is technologically difficult and extremely expensive. Even if we succeed in desalinating the oceans, water will become an expensive commodity. Poor people will be forced to drink contaminated water and will contract disease.

(3) Religious and political fanaticism. Religious and political fanaticism destroys all chances of human beings solving problems and makes any form of learning and research impossible. Religious and political fanaticism spreads when people get desperate. In our opinion, (1), (2) and (3) are all linked.

You will note that none of this contains a value statement. **But** our choice of (1), (2) and (3) reflect our value system. In our value system, the **quality** of human life is very important.

Your value system may be very different from ours.

REFERENCES FOR UNIT 2

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UNIT 3

Research, values and education

OUTCOMES FOR UNIT 3

After you have worked through unit 3, you will be able to

(1) Draw up a research problem in education
(2) Defend your research problem on the basis of a structured, reasoned argument

Now let us take an example of research issues in education itself:

SCENARIO

Sipho worked in a classroom in Soweto for many years. The schools he worked in struggled with many problems:

(1) Not enough money for books.
(2) Overcrowded, seriously under-resourced classrooms.
(3) Too few properly trained educators.
(4) Learner absenteeism.
(5) Poor exam pass-rates.

Sipho now works in the Department of Education and is part of a team that allocates money for research into Education. One researcher wants money for research into problem learners who behave disruptively in the classroom. (Learners like Stephen, in the case study in unit 1.) Sipho is not happy with this request and includes the following written statement in his submission:

> ''Township schools are full of problems (eg not enough books) and able learners who want to progress are sometimes defeated by these problems (1). There's only so much money to go round, as we all know (2). It would therefore be very unfair to allocate funds to this research which is directed at problem learners, since problem learners, as we know, are always a minority group in classrooms (3). We have a moral duty to approve research which helps our able learners (4). We ought to be concentrating on and spending money on our able learners (5). Problem learners who stop other learners from working should be treated with disciplinary measures and, if necessary, expelled (6).''

Which of these statements are fact statements? Which are value statements?

What is Sipho's argument? Is Sipho's argument a valid argument for turning down this research request?

OUR RESPONSE

Statements (1) and (2) are fact statements. (3), (4), (5) and (6) are all value statements. Statement (3) also contains a universal statement. The words ''moral duty'', ''ought'' and ''should'' tell us that (4), (5) and (6) are all value statements. The word ''always'' in (3) tells us that this is a statement that needs challenging. **Sipho's argument**, **basically**, **is as follows**:

(1) ''Township schools are full of problems (eg not enough books) and able learners who want to progress are sometimes defeated by these problems

Statement (1) is a factual statement that refers to two facts:

- Township schools are full of problems.
- Because of these problems, some able learners do badly and fail their exams.

But then Sipho's argument, in statement (3), moves out of the realm of fact. Statement (3) contains the word ''always'':

- Problem learners are always a minority in classrooms.

As we said in unit 2, statements containing the word ''always'' need challenging. In this case, we can say that, no matter how much Sipho knows about classrooms in South Africa, he has no way of knowing that problem learners are always a minority, either today or in the past. There could well be classrooms where problem learners were in the majority.

The value statement in statement (3) is:

- Minority groups are less important than majorities.

You may agree with Sipho. That is not the point. The point is that this is a value statement. In many human societies, certain minority groups are regarded as being very important indeed. In western society, beautiful people are a minority group who are treated as being ''special''. In some Asiatic societies, mystics and ascetics form a minority group who are regarded as being at least as important as other groups.

Statement (4) is a value statement: What Sipho is really saying here is: according to my value system, it is morally unacceptable that able learners are failing because of these unsolved problems.

Statement (5) is a value statement. The word ''should'' tells us this.

As you can see, Sipho's argument needs to be challenged.

Now let us reword Sipho's argument, bringing out the hidden

assumptions and making plain the values that he endorses — the bold type.

''Township schools are full of problems and able learners who want to progress are sometimes defeated by these problems (for example, not enough books). There's only so much money to go round, as we all know. **As far as we can tell,** problem learners are a minority of learners. **In my opinion, we should not fund research for minority groups. We should fund research which will help our able learners to succeed. Also, in my opinion, problem learners should be treated with disciplinary measures. If that doesn't work, they should be expelled. What does the rest of the committee think?''**

This sort of openness is crucial in research and scholarship.

There is nothing invalid about values. We all have values. But — and this is the essential point — we need to acknowledge that they are **our values,** and not some unchangeable, unquestionable truth that was given to us by God or society.

Sipho's reworded reasons for rejecting the research proposal make his values plain and open up the possibility of discussion.

ACTIVITY

If you were on the committee, how would you respond to Sipho's reasons for rejecting the proposal? Do you agree with him? (That is, do you share any of his values?)

Write your response in the space below.

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OUR RESPONSE

We would make two points here:

(1) Unfortunately, there are so many social problems in South African society that learners who disrupt classrooms may not be a minority. We simply do not know.
(2) What we do know is that Sipho has a point: there is only so much money available for schools and that money, we believe, should be used to upgrade schools generally. We freely admit this view reflects a value system that is not entirely compassionate.
(3) We would also point out, however, that by upgrading schools generally, this may end up helping some problem learners overcome their disruptive tendencies.

ACTIVITY

Here is the research proposal that Sipho is not prepared to fund:

> ''One of the problems in South African classrooms today is disruptive learners. Disruptive learners come from a variety of social backgrounds and home situations. The aim of this research is to find out whether there is a common factor (for example, lack of adult supervision) in explaining why some learners are disruptive. It is estimated that disruptive learners cost South Africa millions of rands each year and that thousands of learning hours are lost as a result of this behaviour. South Africa and South African learners deserve better. All of us involved in education have an obligation to help solve the problem of disruptive learners in South African classrooms.''

Which of these statements are fact statements? Which are value statements? Write your response in the space below:

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OUR RESPONSE

The sentences in bold are fact statements:

> ''**One of the problems in SA classrooms in 2004 is disruptive learners. Disruptive learners come from a variety of social backgrounds and home situations. The aim of this research is to find out whether there is a common factor (for example, lack of adult supervision) in explaining why some learners are disruptive. It is estimated that disruptive learners cost SA millions of rands each year and that thousands of learning hours are lost as a result of this behaviour.** South Africa and South African learners deserve better. All of us involved in Education have an obligation to help solve the problem of disruptive learners in SA classrooms.''

The last two statements are value statements.

Like all of us, the people on this committee have to make a decision **based on what they know and on untested assumptions.**

As long as we openly realise the limits of what we know and as long as we openly acknowledge that we are proceeding on the basis of assumptions, there is nothing wrong with the committee responding as follows:

> ''We're not certain whether problem learners are a minority in our schools, but Sipho is right: there's only so much money to go round. Spending research funds on problem learners rather than able learners does not seem to us to be the most effective way forward. For this reason, we've had to say 'no' to your research proposal.''

Supposing, however, someone on the committee, Peter, says:

> ''I don't know whether problem learners are a minority or not, but I would like to tell you all something. I was a problem learner. In fact, I was expelled from several schools and ended up in a street gang. Fortunately, somebody in the family contacted me and put me back in school. If she hadn't helped me, I don't know where I'd be now. I feel I owe something to someone. I think we should help problem learners.''

How would you personally respond to this?

What should the committee do? What would be a reasonable response?

OUR RESPONSE

This story, we freely admit, is difficult for us to respond to. Earlier on, we said that we would be inclined to take a ''hard line'' with disruptive learners or, at least, given that funds are limited, that we are personally inclined not to fund research that focuses on such learners. But, at the same time, we feel that we should be open to learn from this story. Apart from anything else, there is reason to believe that at least some disruptive learners are ''bright kids''. In view of all this, we would still stand by our original position, but we would also be personally inclined to agree to allocate a certain percentage of funds to this sort of research.

As you can see, none of these issues have easy, simple answers.

THE NEED TO AVOID INCONSISTENCY

As you have probably realised by now, solving problems is by no means easy. Apart from any other reason, we are all unique human beings with different experiences and different viewpoints. A scholar, Susan Stebbing, said the following:

> ''We do not think with a part of ourselves. Our thinking involves our whole personality. How I think is conditioned by the kind of person I am, whoever 'I' may stand for. It is, we need to remember, persons who think, not purely rational spirits. When I think, I think about a subject matter, i.e. about some topic. There is no thinking in a vacuum'' (Stebbing 1951:25, 27).

According to critical rationalism, it is perfectly valid to be a certain person with certain experiences and a certain point of view, like Peter,

who wants to help problem learners. The main thing to avoid is inconsistency in our arguments and in our actions. Unfortunately, we can all be inconsistent at times.

The following are all examples of scenarios that involve inconsistencies in argument and/or action.

(1) A managing director of a large company says: ''Unfortunately, we've got to have lay-offs this year. The company's in financial trouble and we've got to cut costs.'' People are retrenched. Six months after this, the managing director approves the building of an executive gym at a cost of R1 million.
(2) In its syllabus, a private school claims to be tolerant of all religions. The Muslim girls are allowed to wear headscarves; the Christian learners are allowed to wear crucifixes. One day, a teenage learner who is keenly interested in Tibetan Buddhism goes to school with a ''third eye'' painted on her forehead. She is sent home for wearing ''extravagant makeup''.
(3) A school governing body is faced with having to decide what to do about two problem learners. One learns slowly and educators claim that he disrupts classes by refusing to stop talking and by throwing things around the classroom. The other problem learner is clever, gets good marks, behaves well in class but some parents claim he is a bully on the playground, so much so that their children have become socially withdrawn. Only the first problem learner gets expelled. The governing body claims that evidence of playground bullying is flimsy and that, if he is a bully, the other learner will ''grow out of it''. The learner is not expelled.

We think it is easy to spot the inconsistencies in these three scenarios. In the first case, the managing director is inconsistent in his financial policy (we feel like asking him: is it important to save money or not?). In the second case, the school has an inconsistency in its religious programme (the third eye is an important concept in Tibetan Buddhism, just as important as the wearing of headscarves or crucifixes in other religions). The third case is only slightly more difficult; the governing body is inconsistent in the way it defines ''problem learner''. It is also inconsistent in the way it treats evidence of problem learners — the educators' claims are accepted as ''the truth'' in the case of the first problem learner. In the case of the second problem learner, the school seems not to want to find out whether there is any truth in the accusation of bullying.

Let's go back to our example of the committee discussing the research proposal. Supposing, despite the lack of funds, Peter's ''plea'' to help problem learners causes the other committee members to rethink. After some time, they all get together again to debate the issue and they decide to approve this proposal. A year later, the same committee, consisting of the same members (including Peter), are faced with the decision to approve funds for another research proposal.

This research proposal reads as follows:

> ''My area of research is music and how music is taught in schools. I believe that music has important therapeutic qualities and that all learners and educators can benefit from learning about music. I want to do a series of qualitative research projects involving small groups of 5–10 learners and one educator that does not teach Music. I will introduce these learners to different singing styles and traditional and non-traditional musical instruments. At the end of a three month period, I will ask the educators involved to tell me whether they think this had any benefits to either them or their learners.''

The committee find this an interesting and unusual proposal, although one or two people do point out that it sounds rather vague and may well prove to be more expensive than the researcher realises. One person, Elijah, is particularly happy to approve the funding of this project and makes the following statement:

> ''I'm all for this project. Music was ignored in the schools I attended as a learner and at which I taught. I love listening to music; it definitely helps me to relax. My own son has a slight learning disability and music has definitely helped him improve.''

Peter, however, is very much against the research. He says: ''This proposal is far too vague and, to date, the therapeutic value of music has never been established. The researcher should have told us precisely what benefits he expects to see; as it stands, this research proposal has no means of measuring results or benefits. He should have sent us in the questionnaire he intends to send out at the end. Also, this research proposal sounds very elitist to me — and I see from the researcher's CV that he is a very privileged learner and has only ever attended privately funded schools. While we've got so many problem learners and so many schools with real needs, we cannot afford to fund this sort of thing.''

ACTIVITY

(1) Go through Elijah's short statement and separate the fact and value statements.

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(2) Go through Peter's statement and separate the fact and the value statements.

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(3) Then compare this statement with Peter's previous statement about problem learners and his support of problem learners.

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(4) Can you see how Peter is being inconsistent?

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OUR RESPONSE

Surprisingly, Elijah's statement contains no value statements. Elijah has simply told us that he loves listening to music and that he and his son have personally experienced the therapeutic benefits of music.

''I'm all for this project. Music was ignored in the schools I attended as a learner and at which I taught. I love listening to music; it definitely helps me to relax. My own son has a slight learning disability and music has helped him improve.''

Now let us look at Peter's statement. The statements in bold are all value statements.

He says: ''**This proposal is far too vague** and, to date, the therapeutic value of music has never been established. **The researcher should have told us precisely what benefits he expects to see;** as it stands, this research proposal has no means of measuring results or benefits. **He should have sent us in the questionnaire he intends to send out at the end. Also, this research proposal sounds very elitist to me** — and I see from the researcher's CV that he is a very privileged learner and has only ever attended privately funded schools. **While we've got so many problem learners, and so many schools with real needs, we cannot afford to fund this sort of thing.''**

The first three statements are all value statements. Peter is really saying, ''in my opinion, research should be precisely formulated with measurable aims and measurable results''. There is nothing wrong with this point of view, but Peter should remember that there are many different types of research, and there is nothing wrong with very open-ended research. In fact, open-ended research can throw up some very illuminating facts.

As far as Peter's inconsistency is concerned, Peter was very keen to support a research proposal aimed at problem learners, even though that research proposal was also imprecisely formulated (''helping problem learners'').

The last two statements are also value statements. In fact (although you may not have spotted this), there is a logical problem here. Peter

seems to be arguing that, because this researcher comes from a privileged background, this means that his research is elitist. There is however nothing in this research proposal to point to elitism or that the researcher is only interested in going into privately funded schools. For all Peter knows, the researcher may be particularly keen to use music to help the problem learners (and their educators) Peter was so keen to promote a year ago!

The word ''elitist'' tells us that there is a hidden value system in Peter's statement. By describing the research as ''elitist'', Peter is telling us that he personally does not approve of giving government money to learners from wealthy backgrounds. You may be inclined to agree with him. But then supposing another committee member says the following:

> ''I know this researcher's family. They are very wealthy people. They've given huge sums of money to educational projects and the researcher's mother does voluntary work with Aids orphans. They're caring people. And I agree with Elijah: music can do a lot of good.''

ACTIVITY

How would you personally respond to this? Write your response in the space below.

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In what way is this statement very similar to Peter's statement about problem learners?

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OUR RESPONSE

We would be inclined to support this research for the simple reason that music and the fine arts are, we believe, a way of resisting the emphasis on technical competence we referred to at the very beginning of this module. Also, we personally like the open-endedness of this research proposal — to those who would argue with us, we would say that open-ended research tends to yield unexpected discoveries that may prove to be of immense worth. Also, we would point out that there is much to learning that we do not know — this sort of research proposal will lead us into these new areas of knowledge.

The statement about the researcher's family is very similar to Peter's remarks about his own experiences as a problem learner who was ''rescued''. In both cases, we are looking at a call for sympathy and understanding based on real-life experiences. The point to remember here is that it is fine to put forward such a plea, but then, if we are to be logically consistent, we must be prepared to listen and respond to the pleas of others.

RESEARCH AND SCHOLARSHIP: What happened to an American Pastor?

What follows is an extract taken from the book, *Honest to Jesus*, by the American theologian, Robert Funk. We have chosen this book because Funk's experience is an excellent example of how research, scholarship and lifelong learning are intertwined. As you will see, genuine, honest research has the potential to have a real impact on someone's life.

> I began quite young with a string of beliefs. Back then, in the exuberance of youth, I thought it extremely important to hold the correct opinions. I didn't really know what the correct opinions were, but friends and others around me seemed to know, so I embraced theirs when I could understand them and sometimes when I couldn't … Most of us cling to opinions received second-hand and worn like used clothing … In high school, I majored in drama and debate. My educators urged me to … study law … But the pastor of the church I attended at the time thought I would make a good minister … this pastor … was very much in demand as a public speaker and civic leader. I liked his candour and admired his skills. He sent me to a Bible college in Tennessee. I promptly became a teenage evangelist, using my skill as a speaker to make my audiences laugh and cry almost at will. But I was uneasy.
>
> Learning at the Bible college was mostly by memorisation and recall. Truth was encoded in the simplistic creed of the college. A doctrinal straitjacket did not suit me. At the end of the second year I transferred to another University and studied classics. I discovered that real learning is agony — a struggle, a contest with ourselves, with superficial, entrenched ideas, and with the lore we absorb from our surrounding culture … I had set out on a quest for knowledge that would continue for the rest of my life.
>
> My odyssey began in the church. I started out as a parish minister, but soon learned that passion for truth was not compatible with that role. In self-defence, I became a scholar. To stay near the church, I taught in theological seminaries for the next two decades.
>
> Eventually, however, the longing for intellectual freedom drove me out of the seminary and into a secular university. I don't believe I was aware of it at the time, but the university had become my church and learning my real vocation. Yet my odyssey was not yet complete … I retired as soon as I could afford to … I organised the Westar Institute for private research.

> I weep to think that I spent 35 years in the classroom, in concert with thousands of other colleagues, only to have had so little lasting impact on students, ministerial candidates, and the American mind. In our time, religious literacy has reached a new low … Where have all the students gone? Apparently out into the dark night of consumerism, professional sports, and mindless television …
>
> Rather than view this situation with despair, I took it as a challenge. To my delight and comfort, I found other academic colleagues who shared my regrets and my hopes. Together we founded the Westar Institute and set out to respond to the challenges facing us. The first project of the new institute was the Jesus Seminar. Jesus is a topic of wide public interest, but the ancient gospels are the subject of profound public ignorance.
>
> But what if we cannot reach the original, the real Jesus, true Christianity, what is the purpose of our quest? The answer is worth repeating: The aim of the quest for the historical Jesus is to set Jesus free, to liberate him from prevailing captivities. But truth is a moving target. It is always time to start all over again.
>
> (Funk 1996: 3-7; 21)

As you can see, research can take one down the ''road less travelled'', by which we mean research can set you off in a direction you never thought of and may even find rather alarming! As this excerpt shows, Robert Funk made major life changes (for example, he left the pastoral ministry) as a result of his research.

REFERENCES FOR UNIT 3

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Stebbing, S. 1951. *Thinking to some purpose.* Harmondsworth: Penguin.