

TRAVEL IMPRESSIONS FROM SCHOLASTIC EDUCATION¹

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When American Indian children living on reservations are sent to school they have to unlearn much of what they have learned in their native culture. In school they have to learn to sit still for long periods, to raise their hand when they have to take care of their bodily functions, not to talk with, or touch, the child on the seat next to you. The native children have difficulties with individual learning, they are used to cooperative learning in a community of learners. In school they learn that cooperation is cheating. Knowledge becomes a commodity you take home with you and put it in the cupboard, and then you can take it out when you want to use it. In school the children all learn to become good bureaucrats.

This depiction of schooling was given by a native American - Paula Gunn Allen - in a talk on "*Native American Construction of Knowledge*" at this year's meeting of the American Educational Research Association. Allen belongs to the Laguna tribe and is a professor of English at the University of California in Los Angeles. The Indian reservation and the university are two very different worlds: "As a native Indian I have used my entire professional life to translate what I know and how I know it to my professional life as an academic educator. In an academic essay it is near impossible, in a poem it is difficult."

In her presentation at the educational research meeting, she read some of her poems and ventured into prose descriptions of the cultural differences (see the essays in "*The Sacred Hoop - Recovering the Feminine in American Indian Traditions*", Beacon Press, 1992, and the poems in "*Life Is a Fatal Disease - Collected Poems 1962-1995*", West End Press, 1997). Taking into account the hundreds of Indian tribes with their own languages and cultures, she outlined an Indian metaphysics of human beings as tied to a fragile world, existing as relational beings. The Indians live as one with the Earth in a sacred pact with nature, an approach that today is carried over into ecology. The native Americans' mode of thinking is circular rather than linear, holistic rather than particularistic. In Indian languages one single expression can stand for meanings which may take many words to spell out in the English language.

For fun Allen had once thought of writing a popular book, *Everything you wanted to know about American Indians - And were afraid to ask*. She soon came to realise that such a piecemeal presentation of a holistic Indian culture would be an impossible undertaking. Native Americans studying at Universities often encountered difficulties when writing a dissertation; their relational thinking was interdisciplinary, whereas the Ph.D. requirements in the University departments tended to discipline one to a strictly unidisciplinarian thinking.

¹ Previous travel reports from AERA meetings have appeared in Nyhedsbrev 18, oktober 1995; Nyhedsbrev 13, juni 1993; Nyhedsbrev 10, juni 1992.

Paula Gunn Allen emphasized the primacy of the embedded oral language of the native Indian culture as a contrast to the distancing of the written, printed language in the European American culture. While critical of the industrialised printing culture after Gutenberg, she was positive to the electronic media with their flexible and multiple forms of communication. As a tool for facilitating the transition from oral speech to the written printed mode she mentioned the new computers that one can talk to and that render what was said in a written language. These computers are, however, still expensive, and she has not succeeded in convincing the elders of her tribe into buying one. A Canadian Indian in the audience told that her own tribe was more open to the new media; the tribe had bought several of the oral to writing computers, which were a great help in the Indian education.

A non-scholastic perspective on the educational research meeting

The presentation of the native American Indians' construction of knowledge was the last one I attended at the educational meeting in San Diego and it provided a frame for understanding the previous sessions from which I will report some impressions and which are selective in several senses. Of the about 1,000 sessions at the meeting, I attended only a few and I am here reporting only a few of these. My perspective was made further selective by my being engaged in a Danish research network on "Non-scholastic Learning and Adult Education" and by working at the "Centre of Qualitative Research" in Aarhus (see notes 1 and 2).

This year's meeting took place in the Marriot and the Hyatt Hotels by the harbor in San Diego, with a view of many yachts and an aircraft carrier. San Diego is the second largest city in California and the largest naval base on the West Coast, home of the US Pacific Fleet. There were about 11,000 participants at this remarkably well-organised meeting, and with the many divisions and special interest groups one did not feel overwhelmed by such a large number of participants. Many of the sessions went beyond the standard paper-reading format by allowing for experimental and artistic presentations. The meeting was also enlivened by a multitude of receptions organised by the attending universities and publishers, with free snacks, and, by some, also free drinks, the latter reception being one that would guarantee an encounter with Scandinavian colleagues.

The theme of the meeting was "*Diversity and Citizenship in Multicultural Studies*" and it encompassed a wide spectrum of philosophical, ethical, political and also artistic approaches to the educational domain. Thematically, the American Educational Research Association meeting is more open-minded than the corresponding European educational conferences I have attended, and definitely more open-minded than the psychological conferences. The numerous interesting and conceptually rigorous presentations, with many otherwise marginalised voices given the floor, make the AERA meeting well worth visiting for a European educational researcher.

This year, however, in contrast to a fascination with the open-mindedness of the AERA meetings in previous years, I came to harbour some doubts about its impact. Inspired by the presentation of the Native American Indians' construction of knowledge, I came in retrospect to view not only the educational system, but to a certain extent also the meeting on educational research, as bureaucratic and scholastic. A bureaucracy is characterised by stability, it operates with formal and standardised procedures and methods, going by the rules. An organisation, or a subject matter, is separated into different divisions, often with strict lines of demarcation. The emphasis is on regularity and

stability, written communication prevails. Decisions are to be based upon impartial formal criteria, preferably with quantification allowing a ranking of alternatives on a one-dimensional scale.

The two separate worlds of teaching and testing

The educational meeting was organised into separate divisions and special interest groups, the two largest divisions being "*Learning and Instruction*" and "*Teaching and Teacher Education*", each with several hundred sessions. The divisions provided a necessary structure to, and an overview, of the plethora of interesting topics treated. There was, though, a tendency to draw an Iron Curtain around the different divisions, and their respective perspectives on education. This split dominated in particular the treatment of teaching/learning and of testing; even in the following session co-sponsored by the Division for "Learning and Curriculum", and "Research and Measurement Methodology".

In this well attended session "*Beyond the Buzzwords: Reciprocal Teaching, Cooperative Learning, and Multiple Intelligences Today and Tomorrow*", Ann Brown (Harvard University) described a 15-year project on "Reciprocal Teaching". It involved communities of learners with school-children teaching one another and working together in a mutual effort to solve problems, for example the many tasks required for constructing a biosphere. Elisabeth Cohen (Harvard University) presented a 19-year project on "Cooperative Learning" where the teacher fosters interactions in groups where the students learn to use one another as resources for learning, this pooling of expertise thus promoting equity in the classroom. (The presentation in this session by Howard Gardner on multiple intelligences is reviewed below). The discussant, Larry Cuban, addressed some of the difficulties in large-scale implementation of these structural innovations of cooperative teaching and learning. Neither he, nor any of the participants addressed the difficulties of cooperative learning in a basically individualistic educational structure, where the outcome of learning is measured individually, usually by standardised multiple-choice tests, and with the common forms of grading along the curve enhancing competition among the pupils.

The Vice-Presidential Address of the Division for "Research and Measurement Methodology" given by Williams Mehrens (University of Michigan) dealt with the "*Consequences of Assessment: What is the evidence?*". The broad effects of testing have become a political issue with President Clinton's proposal to introduce voluntary national tests (The United States, as well as Denmark, falls short in international comparisons of tests on mathematics and scientific reasoning, below many of the East Asian and Eastern European countries, which spend considerably less money on education). In the United States 46 of the 50 states are already using some type of standardised tests, and of these 41 states are applying multiple-choice tests. National polls showed 57% of the public for, and 68% of the teachers against national testing. Teachers feared the public use of test scores, with consequences for schools and classes with low test scores. There were reports of teachers cheating by instructing their pupils in the tests in order to improve the test scores of their own class.

Mehrens acknowledged that although "We all know that how you test is how it gets taught", there was little knowledge about the consequences of tests, with very few empirical studies. One tentative generalisation he offered was that if the stakes of the testing for the teachers were high, and if they experienced the tests as legitimate, they would have an impact on the teachers' teaching. The impact on students was barely addressed; Mehrens mentioned that performance tests and portfolios

increased student motivation, and warned against equating test scores with quality of education, but he did not draw on empirical studies of the effects of testing on the learning process.

Corresponding to the neglect of the educational consequences of individual testing and grading in the session on solidaric and cooperative teaching and learning, there was in this session on assessment no systematic discussion of the forms of teaching and learning promoted by the teachers teaching to and the students learning of the tests. Neither were there any deliberations on the types of knowledge constructed by measuring learning outcome in fragmented questions to be answered as unequivocally "right" or "wrong" on the multiple-choice tests. Empirical studies of testing and grading - documenting a pervasive grade perspective by students, fostering discipline, competition and an instrumental commodity orientation to learning and knowledge, with a non-risk-oriented learning and an atomised conception of knowledge - simply did not enter the discourse.

Educational tests are a bureaucratic method of selection and control *par excellence*, providing access to further educational privileges. The tests are formally fair; they avoid a personal favoritism which qualitative judgements in oral examinations may open be for, the selection by tests proceeds through anonymous quantitative selection procedures. Research, and the many sessions on testing at the educational meeting focused on technical issues such as item selection and scaling procedures, computer evaluation of essays, treating testing in isolation to education as a social process. When learning and testing are separate in educational research, it is up to the pupils who have "to learn to the test", and the teachers who are asked to "teach to the test", to reconcile the professionally separated aspects of the learning and testing in their school practice. With educational researchers fragmenting teaching and testing into separate divisions, with few boundary transitions, one is reminded of the waiter's reply to the guest: "It is not my table".

Howard Gardner, originally a psychologist, now a professor of education at Harvard University, discussed teaching and testing in a comprehensive vein. In the session on cooperative learning he addressed post-book reactions to his influential "*Multiple Intelligences*" from 1983. When the book appeared it was rejected by psychologists as too strongly based on anthropology and evolutionary theory, being at odds with the ruling one-dimensional scaling of the psychological intelligence tests. The book soon became popular in education. His own attitude to the use of the book was originally *laissez-faire* - "let a hundred flowers bloom". Then he learned of the use of multiple intelligences in Australia, where his different forms of intelligence were applied to the testing of racial groups and with repercussions for the teaching of these groups. He became actively involved in stopping this misuse of his concepts, appearing on Australian TV to protest against the racial applications of his concepts. He has since become more reflective on the consequences of the concept of multiple intelligence, discussing what should be done with the concept to promote specific educational goals and emphasising the researchers' responsibility for the use of the knowledge he creates.

In a later talk he asked "*Where to Draw the Line: The Perils of New Paradigms*" which he exemplified by the topics of intelligence, creativity and scholarship. He defined intelligence as the ability to solve a problem, or fashion a product that is valued in at least one community, and he depicted different forms of intelligence as linguistic, logical, musical, spatial, bodily, interpersonal, intrapersonal, and adding a naturalistic ecological form. He went on to ask, "Did I let the spirit out of the bottle?" and mentioned the many extensions of the intelligence concept by others, such as recent books on "Emotional intelligence", "Moral intelligence", "Financial intelligence" and concluded: "We should not call something intelligence just because we like it".

Addressing creativity, Gardner defined a creative individual as one who regularly is able to solve problems, fashion products, and pose issues in a domain in a way that is initially novel and ultimately acceptable in a cultural setting. Critical to a cult of spontaneous creativity, he stressed that only persons well immersed in a tradition are able to produce something fundamentally new, mentioning Freud, Einstein, Piaget; it is people who have undertaken one or several apprenticeships who can do something really new, create new paradigms. As with intelligence, he emphasized the researcher's responsibility to the community for the knowledge he produces.

Regarding scholarship, Gardner took issue with Elliot Eisner's frequently cited statement in a presidential address at an earlier AERA meeting - Eisner being willing to consider a novel for a dissertation at Stanford University. To Gardner, art and science are different genres, with different criteria for evaluation, and the two genres should not become blurred. Furthermore, he addressed the ethical responsibilities of scholarship, pointing out that the level of scholarship does not necessarily indicate higher levels of morality; one example was the Wannsee meeting in 1942 at which the extermination of the European Jews was planned - most of the participants at the meeting held doctorates from European Universities.

Concluding his presentation, Gardner mentioned the following variables as now becoming important for education: knowledge explosion, technological power, disciplinary shifts, artificial intelligence and the possibilities of genetics, life-long learning, non-school education, and globalisation. Another boundary-crossing educational researcher, Andy Hargreaves (OISE, Toronto), gave an elegant talk on "*The Emotional Politics of Teacher Development*", in which he discussed the teachers' emotional stress in relation to their bureaucratized work situation, and argued for overcoming the rift between emotionality and rationality. In the book "*Changing Teachers, Changing Times: A Teacher's Work and Culture in the Postmodern Age*" (1984) he presents on the basis of an interview study a vivid picture of how the rigidity and fragmentation of the modern bureaucratic school is ill adapted to the more flexible organisations of a postmodern society.

Political, economic and military contexts of education

A complex and conflictual society, new forms of production with new forms of occupational qualifications and demands, life-long learning required by the world of work were not central topics to educational researchers; when they were addressed, it was usually in small separate sessions. For example, in the United States today only 17% of the workforce is employed in direct production, whereas 75% is employed in a broadly defined service sector. The implications of this transition in working life and the ensuing qualifications for the coming workforce being educated in the schools were barely addressed. The general political contexts of education were treated in several sessions by scholars such as Philippe Wexler, Michael Apple, Robert Giroux, Peter McLaren, and Tom Popkewitz.

There were several large commemorative sessions for Paulo Freire, who died recently. I arrived late for one session, and at first believed I had come to the wrong room, to a session for kindergarden teachers - in the large auditorium small groups of educational researchers were huddled on the floor, engaged in painting large colorful posters. Looking more closely, however, the posters were replete

with slogans to the memory of Freire, such as "Freire in our hearts", "Long live democratic education", and "Down with capitalism".

The economic foundations for world education were treated in a small session on *"Life-long learning: Perspectives of the OECD, UNESCO, EU and the World Bank"*, with presentations by directors from the educational divisions of these organisations. Although the term itself is more than a hundred years old, the notion of life-long learning first took hold in the 1970s, then as a reaction to an ever-growing initial education, and to the continual outdateding of skills through technological innovations. In the industrialised countries today there is a participation in adult education of close to 50%; President Clinton has called for a White House summit on life-long learning at the end of this year.

Among the trends depicted there was an increasing integration of the public and the private sectors of education, and an emphasis on work-related learning. A global accreditation of learning achievements was also featured. The fostering of learning environments was a key issue, and greater attention to local culture, language and differences was considered necessary in order to reduce drop-out rates. An educational analogy to the trend in the health area - from healing to prevention - was also mentioned; I do not quite remember the educational part and I may be recreating it from a non-scholastic perspective - from teaching to learning environments.

Allan Simpson from the European Commission pointed out that the increasing importance of competence requirements through diploma was disadvantageous to informal learners. He advocated on-site learning as the best training for the job. When learning and work intermingle, this may create difficulties in the responsibilities for financing the work-integrated learning; in contrast to the traditional apprenticeship, the integration of learning and work may encounter economic barriers. (I shall include an example hereof from a European country. During a visit to a vocational school Officials from the Ministry of Education had attended a lavish dinner, prepared by the future cooks among the pupils. In particular, the pastry served for the dessert was excellent: "kransekager" in the elaborate form of ships and the like. To the question about what was done with the pastry the pupils created on other days, the answer was "Fed to the pigs!". The local labour union could not condone the pupils selling their products, as it would be unfair competition from the state school.

A session on *"Military Contributions to Education and Training Research"* did not have a large attendance. Learning researchers from the military services gave here an overview of decades of research on learning in their laboratories, now being closed down owing to the reduced military budgets with the ending of the Cold War. Ted Schlecter (Army Research Institute) pointed to the many innovations in learning and cognition first being developed in military research, such as televised instruction (the Korean War), computer-based instruction (the Vietnam War), training simulators (the Cold War), and, more generally, the system's approaches to training and the cognitive revolution with artificial intelligence and cognitive tasks analyses. Such innovations had either originated within military learning research or had largely been funded by military grants. (The latter part of the statement is easily verified by reading the footnotes in the experimental journals on learning and cognition from the 1960s and 70s thanking various Pentagon agencies for grants making the research possible).

The learning of skills is essential to military training, particularly today in mastering the complex technological equipment. The military researchers maintained that the instructional programs they

had developed could reduce the time for original training by up to 30%. Time-saving by relearning was important if a previously trained unit were to be sent into action half a year or more after its initial training. One researcher mentioned that some of their relearning studies were the first in the area since Ebbinghaus. Robert Seidel (Army Research Institute) was strongly critical of the short time periods his academic colleagues used to study learning, usually spending less than one hour with an experimental subject. In his laboratory he would work with one subject for about 30 hours. The findings of the many short-term learning experiments in the university laboratories, which have provided the empirical bedrock of the academic theories of learning, were according to Seidel more often than not, due to the simple warm-up effects of new subjects in a new situation. The amount of effort spent into developing instructional programs was impressive; 7,000 subjects had participated in the construction of one program with a total of 90,000 subject hours to develop this one program.

The flexible technological means-ends efficiency of the military learning research provided a marked contrast to the stable bureaucratic structures of the educational system and educational research. The military researchers, who had spent much time providing extensive empirically based knowledge about learning processes, and who had developed highly efficient practical instructional programs, felt somewhat overlooked by their colleagues at universities, in schools, and at psychological and educational meetings. When a military researcher pointed out to an educational colleague that 30% of time could be saved in school by adopting one of the new instructional programs, the rejoinder was, "What shall we then do in school with the saved time?". Business corporations were more open to the time and money-saving instructional programs for language and skill learning, now purchasing them from the military.

On the search for non-scholastic learning

Pursuing my interests in non-scholastic forms of learning, I searched the program index for relevant topics. The term "apprenticeship" was not among the about 1,000 topics indexed for the educational meeting. In a few session titles apprenticeship was mentioned, then often in the form of "cognitive apprenticeship" as adapted to classroom teaching, and less as a mode of crossing the current barrier between the worlds of learning and work. President Clinton's proposal in his inaugural address to Congress from 1993 - "to establish a partnership between business and education and the government for apprenticeship programs in every state of this country to give our people the skills they need" - has gone unheeded in educational research.

For "mentoring" and "supervision" there were many entries. One session, "*Mentoring in Professional Practice and in Education*", addressed the situation of novice teachers in grade school as well as at universities. The loneliness of the new teachers was contrasted with the mutuality of the mentoring relationship between a new and an old teacher. Factors of the mentoring relationship emphasised were the students' self-selection of their mentors, a contract for the mentoring relationship, fostering general interaction with the educational community, and evaluation of the mentoring process. Identification with the mentor could be pronounced, and the novice becoming a mere clone of the mentor should be counteracted.

I also checked on some of the sessions indexed under "natural learning environments". The topics dealt with frequently turned out to be museums as a learning environment, changes in the classroom, and the like, hardly venturing into the world of work as an environment for learning. There were

only a few entries under workplace learning and vocational training, then notably from German researchers.

Although several presenters sought to overcome a rift between rationality and emotionality, they did not arrive at “the body” as an educational subject. The body did not exist in the program index, nor was it dominant in the presentations of educational research. The only time I recall hearing “the body” mentioned in the sessions I attended was by the American Indian poet. Pupils and teachers as bodily beings in the world, the body as subject and object, the body as a learning and knowing subject, fall outside the frame of reference of scholastic education.

Learning was connected mainly as the acquisition of knowledge, there was less interest in the learning of skills, with only one entry under "skills" in the index. The skill model of the Dreyfus brothers was not in focus. They argue that knowledge of rules and facts - dominating learning and testing in schools - pertain mainly to the initial levels of mastery, whereas expertise in manual and mental skills rests on an intuitive, embodied, emotional, expertise, acquired by accumulated practice. The expert's knowledge is hardly accessible by conventional testing and requires evaluation through performances in practice.

Recently, there have been several non-scholastic attempts to reintegrate learning and work, such as in the studies of Jean Lave and others on situated learning and apprenticeship. When aspects of non-scholastic learning were treated at the educational meeting, it tended to be in a piecemeal fashion adapted to existing educational class structures. When the situated learning approach was taken up in some sessions, it was in a technological mode of making existing forms of teaching more efficient, in forms such as "cognitive apprenticeship" neatly packaged for classroom size management. A tacit presupposition is that learning to teach today appears axiomatic to most educational research where a classroom paradigm of educational research dominates starting from "The classroom is my world".

The proliferation of qualitative research

In contrast to American psychology, qualitative methods are today generally accepted in American educational research. At the educational meeting there were many sessions on qualitative studies from the classrooms, often in a narrative form. In addition to the sometimes rather empiricistic qualitative reports, several sessions addressed the implications of art and philosophy for qualitative research. Quantitative educational research was presented in separate divisions. In several sessions on research in general new theories were addressed; the new conceptions tended, however, to be truncated into isolated variables, manageable for the statistical hypothesis testing of a bureaucratic research methodology, rendering the provocative and challenging impact of the theories innocuous. The social studies of science by Latour and others of science as action and the social construction of scientific facts did not appear to have any major impact on the conceptions of educational research.

The importance of art for education was the key theme of a well-attended conversation hour at 7 o'clock in the morning with Philip Jackson (University of Chicago) about his new book on John Dewey and the lessons of art for education. Elliot Eisner (Stanford University) also talked about "*The arts in educational research*". To him, the practice of science is an art; we need to go beyond the split between feeling and thinking, and regard art as an epistemic endeavour towards knowing

the world. He is currently engaged in an interview study on the research process with scientists at the Palo Alto Center for Advanced Studies.

Eisner depicted the artistic process by outlining five modes of children learning art: *Composing* - learning to pay attention to relationships in a work of art, an embodied knowledge recognizing the rightness of fit. Learning to pay attention to *qualitative nuances* - using as an example the task of drawing our own house when away from it. Learning to be *flexibly purposive* - open to surprises, surrounding to the work of improvisation, such as displayed in jazz music. Learning to work within the *constraints of medium* - ranging from the paintbrush to computer technology. Learning to *choose in the absence of rules* - which contrasts with school where knowledge is predominantly taught by rules and mimesis, often with only one correct solution. While in spelling, a homogeneity of outcome is desirable - "You don't want innovative spelling" - in art a heterogeneity of outcome is desirable.

Eisner also discussed a differing emphasis on the artistic process or on the resulting art product as the main intrinsic reinforcing factor. He contrasted both with the dominant commodification in society and schools of work and product. The latter form of extrinsic reinforcement was illustrated by a story of a kid proudly walking through the classroom with a strange-looking statue. Another kid asks "What is it?" and gets the answer: "It is a B+".

Several sessions on evaluation and qualitative research drew on analyses of knowledge by philosophers like Derrida, Foucault, Lyotard, Habermas and Rorty. Norman Denzin and Yvonna Lincoln (University of Illinois and Texas A & M University) chaired a session on *Locating the Postmodern and the Liberatory Within Qualitative Evaluation Models*. Their monumental *Handbook of Qualitative Research* from Sage, 1994, appeared this year in a new edition, split into three separate volumes *The Landscape of Qualitative Research*, *Strategies of Qualitative Inquiry* and *Collecting and Interpreting Qualitative Materials*. The two are also editors of the journal *Qualitative Inquiry*.

In a session *Evaluating Educational Programs in the Postmodern* Ian Stronich (Manchester Metropolitan University, UK) provided a critical perspective on the qualitative research wave - *Evaluating With the Lights Out: Deconstructing 'Illuminative Evaluation' and 'New Paradigm' Research*. He had read critically three "founding texts" of the new qualitative literature - by Parlett & Hamilton, Glaser & Strauss, and Reason & Gowan - and found five throughgoing characteristics: *Dichotomizing* the qualitative and quantitative, more often than not equated with the good and the bad. *Homogenizing* - lumping widely different intellectual traditions together as supporting their views, such as mentioning Hegel and Carl Rogers in the same breath. The inner *personal* space is opened as the one authentic mode of being. A new *technological* conceptualisation of authenticity and solidarity is developed. There is a *metaphysics* of presence as representing reality, of the real and the authentic.

Patti Lather (University of Ohio) gave a long overdue critique of the "salvation narratives" of social research. In her presentation *Against Empathy, Voice and Authenticity* she drew on critiques by Foucault, Derrida and others of modern forms of knowing, with the will to understand others as violence, and the use of humanism to promote the governmentality of the modern subjects. The radical implications of postmodern thought for qualitative research in practice are well brought out in Patti Lather and Chris Smithies' book *Troubling the Angels: Women Living with HIV/AIDS*

(Westview/ Harper Collins, 1997) (note 4). A radical metatheoretical approach is taken by Jim Scheurich in his book *Research Method in the Postmodern* (Falmer Press, 1998); he is also editor of the *International Journal of Qualitative Research in Education*.

There were some time gaps in the philosophical conceptions of knowledge and action among the different divisions of the educational research. The testing sessions focused on test techniques, adhering to an implicit positivist empiricist conception of knowledge as consisting of facts and rules that had dominated philosophy at the beginning of this century, and were impervious to the many philosophical reconceptualisations of knowledge throughout the century. In the teaching and learning divisions, social constructionism pervaded some sessions, in particular with primary school children constructing science; the most recent philosopher to be of central interest in the teaching and learning divisions was John Dewey. In several sessions on system evaluation and qualitative research the challenges of current postmodern and pragmatic philosophy for their subject matter were addressed. Between the different divisions of educational research today there is a philosophical gap of about a hundred years in their divisional conceptions of knowledge.

Concluding non-scholastic remarks

The sessions I attended at this year's meeting of the American Educational Research Association remained nicely within the separate compartments of the appropriate educational divisions, with few radical attempts at crossing disciplinary boundaries. The bureaucratic perspective on education, introduced by the native American in the introduction, pertained, in my view, not only to the structure of the educational system being researched, and to a certain extent the structure of the educational research meeting itself, but also to the ruling conceptions of learning and teaching, of knowledge and research.

Alternative voices were heard in many sessions at the meeting, then mainly encapsulated in small separate and marginal contexts which did not endanger the main divisions keeping the business of teaching and testing going as usual. The diversified marginal voices that I heard addressed the political, the economic, and military contexts of education, the relationship between learning and the current world of work, artistic and current philosophical understandings of knowledge and action, and the native American's construction of knowledge.

The structure and content of the educational research meeting appear to some extent to match the social reality of the school system. Both are dominated by a bureaucratic structure which allows some open slots for idealistic teachers and educational researchers to attempt to reform school and society. The powerful divisions of teaching and testing remain firmly secured behind their fortified walls, continuing their business according to the same procedures as last year, with reformist teachers and researchers continually falling back in their Sisyphean endeavours.

NOTES

- 1) This report was originally prepared for Nyhedsbrev for Center for kvalitativ metodeudvikling, Psykologisk Institut, Aarhus Universitet.

- 2) A comprehensive picture of the meeting is found in the program for the meeting, which is available through:
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1230 Seventeenth Street,NW, Washington, DC, 20036-3078
Email: iera@gmu.edu Internet: <http://iera.net>
Many of the papers presented can be ordered through:
ERIC Document Reproduction Service, 7420 Fullerton Road, Springfield, VA 22153-2852;
tel:1-800 443-3742.
- 3) The next meeting takes place in Montreal, April 19-23, 1999. The call for papers can be found in *Educational Researcher*, May 1998.
- 4) Book reviewed by Dorte Marie Søndergaard in *Nordisk Pedagogik - Journal of Nordic Educational Research*, nr. 3, 1997.