International Journal of Education & the Arts

Evaluating the Imaginative:
Situated Practice and the Conditions for
Professional Judgement in Imaginative Education

Dave Trotman
Newman College of Higher Education
Birmingham, England

Abstract

It is now a matter of routine that schools in England are able to demonstrate the value of their work in terms of "impact" and "outcomes." In the province of imaginative education this is problematic. While Government has sought to create a new relationship between inspection and school self-evaluation, this in effect has amounted to little more than a bureaucratic and performative form of "self-inspection." At the same time the teaching profession is reminded that it lacks a shared language to enable clarity and precision about its judgements (Hargreaves, 2004). Acknowledging the necessity for imaginative educators to make their work publicly demonstrable, and recognising the private imaginative lifeworld as a sacred space, this paper calls for a (re)focusing of educational evaluation in imaginative education. Drawing on phenomenological research approaches and ideas of connoisseurship and pupil voice, six "situated" imaginative practices, spanning the solitary and the collective, are proposed in an attempt to consider ways in which the imagination might be made amenable to communal educational evaluation. Before the development of a shared evaluative language can be entertained, the necessary conditions for educational evaluation must first be created, and these conditions involve educators in the cultivation of their own imaginative lifeworlds as a

professional practice. Ultimately, through processes of interpretation and communalisation, educational evaluation of the imagination becomes an intrinsically transformative practice.

Introduction and Context

The development of the imagination is not necessarily a contentious ambition in the education of young people. In the pursuit of creativity and innovation; in the symbolic expression of ideas; in critical thinking and problem solving; and in the myriad of our inter-personal encounters, *imagination* emerges as an essential human capacity. It is all the more surprising, then, that the *education* of the imagination continues to reside at the periphery of educational policy in England. For those of us who are committed to the centrality of imagination in the lives of young people, this is a continuing frustration that, in turn, calls for a range of educational responses. These responses are inevitably wide-ranging and typically concern such matters as: curriculum, learning environments, pedagogy and assessment, teacher education and professional development, and, as will be the theme of this paper, *educational evaluation.* The development of a strategic educational response becomes all the more necessary when set against an educational backdrop in England of increasing reliance on intrusive forms of school surveillance and punitive accountability.

The need to develop forms of evaluation in imaginative education is both pressing and timely. While observers of educational policy point to an irreversible public thirst for educational transparency (Fullan, 2003, p. 24), others take the view that professional educators lack a shared language to enable clarity and precision about their judgements when discussing new or difficult aspects of pupil learning (Hargreaves, 2004, p. 28). In the UK these tensions are compounded further as government claims to the creation of a "new relationship" between schools and inspection through school *self-evaluation* (MacBeath et al, 2004, p. 5) amounts, in reality, to little more than *self-inspection* by another name (Lepkowska, *Times Educational Supplement*, 12 November, 2004). Such evaluation of children's learning is then undertaken from only the narrowest of perspectives. (MacBeath et al, p. 12).

In contrast, significant developments have been taking place that combine to create an important force in the promotion of an evaluative language in imaginative education. In Canada the work of the Imaginative Education Research Group at Simon Fraser University (www.ierg.net) is immediately apparent. In the UK, burgeoning research in creativity in education (Craft et al, 2001; 2003), pupil assessment (Black and Wiliam et al, 1998, 2002), and the promotion of "pupil voice" (Rudduck and Flutter, 2000; Fielding and Rudduck, 2002) have potentially powerful contributions to make in the imaginative sphere. These developments, when coupled with the necessity for educators to make their work "count" in the public domain, signal an opportune moment to (re)turn to the practice and advancement of educational evaluation in imaginative education.

The work of Elliot Eisner (1985, 1998) in this province is, of course, substantial, in which ideas around *connoisseurship* and *criticism* have been developed as central dimensions of practice in educational evaluation. The promotion of sensitive observation as a high order professional practice, and student participation in evaluation are also prescient features of Egan's (1992, p. 150) well-established work in imaginative education. Similarly, in writing on school self-evaluation in the UK, Saunders (1999) has argued for the instatement of "missing modes" of evaluation, embodying "encouragement of creativity and imagination" and "the development of insight and empathy." Crucially, as Saunders argues, this requires the development of "refined instruments" for tackling the "complexity of schooling" (Saunders, 1999, p. 426). These practices, however, remain largely untested in education in England.

In responding to contemporary policy imperatives and thinking around educational evaluation, the thrust of this paper will be to offer a modest personal contribution to the ways in which forms of imaginative engagement can be seen as *situated* practices (Lave and Wenger, 1991). These practices, in turn, necessitate particular conditions for professional judgement in imaginative education. The ideas advanced here build on previous reported empirical research (Trotman, 2005) and are governed by two competing educational interests: that of public and private domains. The first of these concerns the realisation of imaginative practice in public interactions; the second, the sanctity of the uniquely personal interior world of the individual educational experience.

Approaches to Educational Evaluation
In his observation on the absence of a shared professional language, Hargreaves (2004), concludes that teachers "lack an agreed discourse for what they already know as part of the traditional culture and wisdom of the profession," and that "arcane, pedagogic jargon: the technical language devised by academics is alien to most teachers" (Hargreaves, 2004, p. 28). Hargreaves's observation is nowhere more apposite than in the evaluation of imaginative education. But where should educators start? Enriching professional vocabulary without recourse to the arcane; the development of shared professional language and agreed discourse? These are not easy things to reconcile. For many educators it is difficult not to resort to the arcane, as imaginative lifeworlds are imbued with myth, metaphor, abstraction, fantasy, imagery, and affect - not easy things to get at in the sphere of the esoteric and the ambiguous.

As Wood and Hicks (2002, p. 93) persuasively argue, the elimination of ambiguity from the educational enterprise can come at some serious cost, as preoccupations with precision and clarity "preclude serious dialogue and negotiation between teachers and students about what is to be learned and why" (Wood and Hicks, p. 93). Hence, as I shall argue, *authentic* and *agreed* discourses that embody *shared* language cannot be developed without "pupil voice"

being an equal partner in the enterprise (Rudduck and Flutter, 2000; Fielding and Rudduck, 2002)

By definition, an inclusive approach to the evaluation of imaginative education becomes a form of meta-affective learning, involving both private/solitary and public/collective practice for teachers *and* pupils as facilitators and connoisseurs. None of this is possible without imaginative experience, in educational terms, being subject to personal interpretation and intensive forms of what Moustakas (1994, p. 95) calls *communalisation*. For if teachers" work is to be educative - *educare*: "to rear or foster", rather than from *educere*: "to lead forth…" (Williams, 1988, p. 111), then this requires educators to first attend to the *condition*s for the development of an agreed discourse.

Six Situated Practices in the Imaginative

In the ideas that follow, six situated practices are proposed:
   1. The *solitary* imagination
   2. The *contemplative* imagination
   3. Imaginative *correspondence*
   4. The *contributory* imagination
   5. Imaginative *dissonance*
   6. The *reciprocal collective* imagination

Extending from the solitary to the collective, these practices are interrelated and mutually interdependent. Each has its own contrasting characteristic of imaginative practice and presents a particular aspect for educational evaluation.

The Imaginative as Solitary
There can be little doubt that imaginative practice in all sorts of media demands a level of solitary engagement. Rather than being inimical to the development of the imagination, solitary activity is a necessary prerequisite, yet it also presents a raft of problems in the evaluation and subsequent valuing of imaginative experience. Warnock (1977, quoted in Egan, 1992, p. 159) and Egan (1992) have both countered the belief that cooperative group work, with its accent on socialisation and communication, is necessarily educationally beneficial. Psychologist Anthony Storr (1988) also challenges the belief that interpersonal relationships are necessarily the key to ameliorating private troubles. In fact Storr identifies solitude as the critical agency for facilitating "learning, thinking, innovation, and maintaining contact with one's own inner world" (p. 29). In solitary practice, freedom of consciousness, mindful awareness, cognitive play and deep reflection are afforded space for focused personal attention. For Claxton and Lucas (2004), the solitary is a fundamental aspect of

three dimensions of states of mind: *focus*, *orientation* and *sociability*, "…being playful, receptive, inward and solitary" (pp. 10 -11).

This solitary space is a private space in which fantasy, daydreams, reflections, thoughts, meditations, beliefs, anxieties and aspirations find form in our consciousness. The solitary is in some instances, quite literally, sacred (see for example Wolters (ed.). *The Cloud of Unknowing and Other Works*), and in eastern mysticism privacy and informed sustained meditative practice are seen as central to the cultivation of the personal conscious. In meditative practice solitariness becomes crucial to a particular form of scrutiny of the inner world and the promotion of serenity (e.g. śama in Hindu philosophy – see Bernard, 2003, p. 222). Capra (1975) highlights the sophistication of this practice as a counterpoint to teamwork and technological reliance in scientific inquiry.

> Physicists perform experiments involving elaborate teamwork and a highly sophisticated technology, whereas mystics obtain their knowledge through introspection, without any machinery, in the privacy of meditation…the complexity and efficiency of the physicist's technical apparatus is matched, if not surpassed, by that of the mystic's consciousness – both physical and spiritual in deep meditation. The scientists and the mystics, then, have developed highly sophisticated methods of observing nature which are inaccessible to the layperson. A page from a journal of modern experimental physics will be as mysterious to the uninitiated as a Tibetan Mandala. Both are records of enquiries in to the nature of the universe. (35-36)

Meditation can of course mean many things, and in its most developed form it is ultimately a *spiritual* practice. Spiritual meditative practices such as "discursive" "vertical" meditation (Moffitt, 1972, p. 154) and *nirvikalpa* (Collinson et al, 2000, p. 85) involve the mastery of consciousness, and underscore some of the parallels and important differences between the solitary imaginative lifeworld and that of devotional self-giving.

In the solitary private world, intuiting, imagery, illusion and streams of conscious do not for the most part become realised in material form. The solitary imaginative lifeworld of children is, in evaluative terms, a uniquely personal no-go area; as Gibran (1926) wisely asserts: "their souls dwell in the house of tomorrow, which you cannot visit, not even in your dreams" (p. 22). Yet, solitary imaginative practice in educational settings is also a situated practice, and if it has some important educational worth, as I would argue, professional educators must articulate its value.

In their encounters with the solitary, educators cannot avoid operating in the mode of facilitative non-intervention: calling upon their observations, impressions, perceptions and intuitions, while at the same time sensitively sustaining a unique and delicate educational ecology. *Facilitative* non-intervention embraces and extends beyond a mindful awareness of the pupil experience - what Kounin (1970), in writing on classroom management, describes as "withitness." In this sense of its use, withitness involves *deep* understanding and refinement of teacher interpretations, embodying: perception, intuition, affect and meaning. Such interpretation would appear to be practically impossible, and ethically suspect, without educators calling forth interpretations of their own situated, solitary, affective and imaginative practice.   In educational evaluation, this presents some significant challenges for teacher-facilitators at the level of the professional and personal. On the one hand, educators need to be conversant with their own solitary imaginative lifeworlds, while on the other hand, be able to develop practices in deep situated mindful awareness without recourse, paradoxically, to particular forms of judgement: namely, *sitting in* judgement.

This calls for three critical dimensions of professional practice in which educators must:

1. cultivate and "vivify their own feelings" (Egan, 1992, p. 113),
2. develop their own emotionally intelligent practices in which personal feelings, emotions and moods are educationally and professionally contextualised (Goleman, 1996, 1998), and
3. avoid "colouring the other's communication" with imbued personal habits of thinking, feeling, seeing, labelling, judging or comparing (Moustakas, *1994,* 89).

While much has been made in the UK of developing emotional intelligence in young people (DfES, 2004), little consideration has been given to the development of teachers" emotional and affective capacities in evaluative judgement. In the first two of these dimensions it requires teachers to commit to a conscious engagement with their own affective and emotional lifeworlds. As Hargreaves (2003, 46) points out, "teaching and learning are *always* social and emotional practices by design or neglect." In the second of these dimensions it requires a commitment to practices that enable the avoidance of conditioned predispositions and prejudgement. In the language of eidetic phenomenology, Epoché, or "bracketing" as it is more widely known, is such a practice and is a cornerstone of this form of phenomenological enquiry (Moustakas, 1994).

> In practicing Epoche, I must focus on some specific situation, person, or issue, find a quiet place in which I can review my current thoughts and feelings regarding this person, situation or issue. Each time in my review I set aside biases and prejudgements and return with a readiness to look again into my life, to enter

> with hope and intention of seeing this person, or situation, or issue with new and
> receptive eyes. (89)

Combined with the development of a professional emotional and affective conscious, this creates conditions for deep withitness. In evaluative terms, such practices enable heightened perceptiveness and developed powers of interpretation. For Eisner (1994, p. 217) this is the entrée into connoisseurship:

> The connoisseur of anything - and one can have connoisseurship about anything – appreciates what he or she encounters in the proper meaning of the word. Appreciation does not mean necessarily liking something, although one might like what one experiences. Appreciation here means awareness and an understanding of what one has experienced. Such an awareness provides the basis for judgement. (92)

The Imaginative as Contemplative
The transition from the solitary to contemplative involves a shift in orientation. Here the contemplative becomes a moment of conscious engagement in the deep subjective lifeworld where personal thoughts, feelings, ideas, images, moods, memories and emotions become the subject of special personal attention – a mode of meta-cognition and meta-affect: an inquiry into our own thinking and feeling and the development of practised attentiveness of *presence* (Parker, 1997, p. 77).   For Burns (1979), this is the province of self-concept where ideas about self and others are developed, and for Gardner (1993) it is the realm of the intra-personal intelligence; in effect it marks the entrée into the world of *pupil* connoisseurship. In educational practice this entails a pedagogic approach that facilitates connoisseurship without recourse to intervention based on unconscious prejudgements and biases.

For the pupil, this marks the transition from the merely reflexive[1] to the reflective, involving increasing meta-cognitive process. In pedagogic terms, the "teacher" of imagination is in the mode of the facilitative, in which practice extends from the deep "withitness" necessary for creating the conditions for solitary imaginative practice, to that with a deeper critical edge in which "an understanding of what one has experienced" (Eisner, 1985, p. 92) is proactively sought, facilitated, and independently interpreted by the pupil and teacher. In the words of Heschel (quoted in MacBeath and McGlynn, 2002, p. 32): "we must learn to know what we see rather than seeing what we already know." In this sense it places participants and the imaginative educator at the threshold of the inter-subjective lifeworld.

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[1] In contemplation theory the 'spectator or listener is engaged in single-minded absorption in its [the art] object" (Collinson, 2000, 85)

The Imaginative Correspondence
In entering the sphere of imaginative correspondence, the imaginative life world becomes increasingly amenable to public scrutiny and judgement. In the solitary contemplative modes of imaginative practice, connoisseurship is a private activity, directed and owned by the child in which the teacher is non-interventionist, mindfully withit, facilitative and reflective. The use of the term "facilitate" and "reflect" here being Rogers" (1994, p. 349) meaning the "ability of the facilitator to reflect thoughtfully on the conditions at hand and respond appropriately in the best interest of the learner"; and giving full recognition *in practice* that "" 'lived' experience always belongs to and is never taken away from the person who is experiencing and reflecting" (Russon, 1993, p. 29).

In the mode of imaginative correspondence, imaginative experience enters the realm of a palpable inter-subjective world in which the world is one that is shared, experienced and interpreted by others (Schutz, 1970, p. 164). It is a world in which children enter the shared experiences of the "third party," both in the literal and in realised symbolic form: the composer, the author, the painter, the story teller, the choreographer, the games designer, the reporter etc. It is a world that may indeed remain private to external apprehension out of choice, but in entering the sphere of correspondence the imaginative lifeworld is imbued with a particular impulse derived from the momentum of external affective stimuli: it is a dynamic, inter-subjective correspondence with the "Other." This internal correspondence can, and often does, become public in the form of play, role play, pretence, imagery, the creation of symbolic artefacts and environments etc, which are available in educational contexts for apprehension, observation and further facilitation. In palpable form, correspondence with the other gives special significance to forms of *empathic development.*

Empathy is subject to varying interpretations, but here I follow Gould (1990) and Holden's (1990) definitions: an ability to appreciate the feelings of other people with whom we are not similar (Gould, 1990, p. 1172); a form of "emotional knowing" in which one projects oneself into the physical being of the other (Holden, 1990, p. 72).   In terms of educational evaluation, like solitary contemplative practice, this also requires of the educator the refinement of their own practices in *professional* empathy - as a "learned communication skill" (Kunyk and Olson, p. 2001). Further, it requires an orientation to interpretive *criticism,* which Eisner (1985) describes as:

> an effort to understand the meaning and significance that various forms of action have for those in a social setting…to answer these questions requires a journey into interpretation, an ability to empathetically participate in the life of another, to appreciate the meanings of such cultural symbols…. (97)

At the nexus of the solitary/private – communal/public transition, criticism is a public phenomenon. Where connoisseurship is a private endeavour, "critics" must vivify the qualities of the imaginative lifeworld "through the artful use of disclosure" (p. 93).

Realised Form and the Contributory Imagination
In the sphere of realised form, imaginative education enters the world of the social and communal. Here imagination finds expression in the public social world: in the presentation, performance, publication and exhibition etc. In contributory imaginative practice the pupil has the opportunity to make their uniquely individual contribution to a shared imaginative project – the dance choreography, the group composition, the drama, the video production etc. This is the province of the *collective* in which the solitary imagination meets social interaction and public expression. It is, however, more than a simple matter of mere collaboration. In communalisation there is what Moustakas describes as a continuous alteration of validity through reciprocal correction that leads to complete layers of meaning (1994, p. 95) - an elaborate form of criticism in the public medium. In this sense imaginative practice is *transformational* practice.

For the child, this is the province in which imagination is not only made public and social, but amenable to new meanings and interpretation through a reciprocation of ideas, empathy with the "Other", and reflection. It is where ideas and feelings and cognition and affect become the subject of deep intersubjective action: a "transformation" of imagination through communalisation. In terms of evaluative educational practice, imagination is made manifest in expressive and contributory ideas, actions, and language, enabling situated educational practice to be observed, discussed, and recorded. Through communalisation, teacher *interpretation* takes on a new and critical dimension in which imaginative practice becomes increasingly amenable to teacher-pupil interaction. "Pupil voice" becomes a central pedagogic dimension of such practice, in which new orders of experience are created through the active participation of pupils in the educational process (Rudduck and Flutter, 2000). Furthermore, communalisation clearly extends beyond simplistic versions of "group work" and "group discussion" in which traditional orthodoxies of individualised learning are commonly reinforced (Corden, 2001). This is the province of transformative imaginative practice, and its evaluation requires astute sensitive interaction and observation, interpretation, sharing, and reporting.

The Imaginative Dissonance
Of course, not all contributory practices are in imaginative "agreement". In engaging in public contributory imaginative practice, cognitive and emotional dissonance is an anticipated feature of the intersubjective communalisation of unique imaginative lifeworlds.

Cognitive and emotional tension is both a natural and necessary dynamic in solitary and communal practice. It is a hallmark of creative processes, in which flexibility and tolerance of ambiguity are crucial (Cropely, 2001), and provides the impulse for particular enriched meta-cognitive, meta-affective learning and problem solving. It is fundamental to *deep* empathic learning in which experiences, dispositions, perspectives, ideas and feelings are made amenable to particular forms of education, and makes further the demand upon educators that the emotional and affective dimensions of their work are continually practised and refined. Where tension is made publicly manifest, imaginative education extends beyond an initial withitness and connoisseurship to an established and refined practice of "critic" - embracing strategies for problem identification[2], the practice of emotional intelligence, and peer and facilitator mediation. In evaluative terms, this is the *process* of imaginative realisation and development in the public domain, in which learning is socially situated and amenable to a range of evaluative approaches and techniques.

The Collective-Reciprocal

The collective-reciprocal is characterised by community, unity, mutuality, confidence, reflexivity and connectivity. These are the experiences in which collective imaginative action is undertaken and celebrated with seeming effortlessness and common and often unspoken purpose: a form of communal "in flow-ness"[3]. Thus, the collective-reciprocal is more than a public contributory form – in which individual contributions can be discrete and insulated - rather, it is a unique form of communitas: a collective consciousness that is the hallmark of mature and responsive imaginative engagement. It is imaginative *correspondence* on a large scale, involving inter-subjective and *interpersonal* imaginative action at the level of community. The parallels with spiritual communion are, of course, apparent and almost certainly involve a *transformation* of both the individual and the collective conscious. Crucially, in the collective-reciprocal the imaginative educator is positioned as both the co-creator of knowledge and co-learner – in the words of one participant in my own research: "I don't like being the one who knows…that's not my way of teaching, I like to be the one who might know how to find out, and might have access to certain things, but is equally concerned about finding out what will happen…" (Barry, November 2003). Indeed, the collective-reciprocal marks the interface between the uniquely individual and the processes of communal engagement. As Heron (2001) states:

> Our relation with the world, both human and more-than-human, is inherently one
> of connectedness. In perceiving and acting, we participate in and shape a
> subjective-objective world. Our world is co-created both by the given cosmos and
> by how we apprehend it and make choices within it.

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[2] For example, see de Bono (1987).
[3] See Paula Hillmann's (2004) illustration of Csikszentmihalyi's "in flow "and "optimal experience" in her paper to the IERG

Each person has an intrinsic signature, a distinctive personal rhythm evident in patterns of breathing, gesture, movement, sensory engagement and speech (Leonard, 1978), manifest at an idiosyncratic viewpoint, a distinctive point of reference for participative perspective and action. (333)

The Conditions, Methods and Processes of Evaluative Judgement

For the educational evaluation of imaginative practice to be both *trustworthy* and *meaningful*, it demands a form of educational practice that attends to four dynamics of professional work: Disposition, Interpretation, Communalisation, and Articulation.

In the first of these, *disposition* is the critical antecedent to evaluation.   This involves professional educators in their own solitary and intra-subjective work in the cultivation of emotional literacy and the watchful mindful awareness of self. It requires the application of bracketing: the avoidance of conditioned predispositions and prejudgement. It necessitates emotional intelligence, in which personal feelings, emotions, moods are educationally and professionally contextualised. It is the development of refined professional judgement in the affective realm and is the reciprocal of the pupil's solitary, contemplative imaginative lifeworld.

In educational evaluation *Interpretation* is rendered amenable to public scrutiny through the interface of connoisseurship and criticism: "…to notice or experience the significant and often subtle qualities that constitute an act, work, or object…" (Eisner, 1998, p. 85); "…educational critics are interested not only in making vivid what they have experienced, but in explaining its meaning" (p. 95), …"t*hrough the artful use of critical disclosure*" [italics added] (Eisner, 1985, p. 93). Eisner's observation marks the crux of the evaluative challenge in the articulation of imaginative education. In the practice of disclosure, interpretation meets the dynamics of *communalisation* and *articulation* through the medium of "pupil voice". While interpretation in educational evaluation may be a solitary practice, through communalisation interpretation is made public: a continuous alteration of validity through reciprocal correction, leading to complete layers of meaning (Moustakas, 1994, p. 95). Interpretation takes place in different contexts, spaces and times; and as Eisner (1985, p. 180) argues, it is assumed that educational situations can be described in a variety of ways, through a range of media, with each mode of representation having its own unique utilities and limitations.   In making educational evaluation of the imaginative amenable to communalisation, the following are offered as just some of the ways in which "pupil voice" can be realised in interpretation and evaluation:

- observed pupil responses - behaviours, reactions, expressions of mood, emotions and feelings and ideas
- recorded conversations
- pupil interactions
- forms of pupil writing - prose poetry, diaries
- pictures and images
- photography
- animations, storyboards and videos
- choreography
- composition
- improvisations and presentations.

Towards a Collaborative Evaluative Language

We are all linked at a deep unconscious level in a universal network in which
our thoughts, and even more our emotions, are all the time affecting others,
as others are in turn affecting us (Hick, 1999, p. 19)

As Hick intimates, there is a dynamic interrelationship between the solitary and communal practice. This is, of course, central to the development of an evaluative discourse in situated imaginative practice, and the challenges for each, I hope, have been made evident. In the province of communalisation, collaboration presents particular challenges for educational evaluation. In classroom contexts, spurious notions of collaboration have commonly reinforced traditional orthodoxies of individualised learning (Corden, 2001); in the staffroom, inter-professional discourse often becomes what Perkins (2003) calls *coblaboration*: "blab that does not really pool the minds around the table, going nowhere in any one of several different ways, or all of them." (Perkins, 2003, quoted in Fullan, 2005, p. 48). Here in the realm of "artful disclosure" there remains important work to do.

Schratz (1993, pp. 67-68), in writing on qualitative voices in educational research, highlights the powerful impact of "collective consciousness", arguing that collective reflection is both an educative and transformative force for revealing underlying processes and meaning.   In school self-evaluation this is the province of what Argyris (1993) calls double loop learning. Single loop learning concerns the use of "audit, or self evaluation, tools …to give a picture of school culture at a given time"; the second loop learning involves "standing back and taking a critical stance on the nature and meaning of the evidence…" (quoted in MacBeath and McGlynn, 2002, p. 84).

Encouragingly, collaborative knowledge construction is not an untried educational practice in the United Kingdom. In the province of Early Years education, Fleur Griffiths has reported on her work with schools in Hartlepool LEA (Griffiths, *Times Educational Supplement*, 11 February, 2005) using talking tables " to facilitate children's conversations in which pupils are encouraged to visit each other's worlds. Here, conversational principles and mediation strategies are developed in conjunction with parents and staff. In the province of school improvement, Ainscow (2005) discusses the use of the "lesson study" in which a collaboratively planned lesson becomes the platform for gathering data on the quality of student experience, with emphasis being placed upon "listening to the views of students in a way that tends to introduce a critical edge to the discussions that take place" (Ainscow, 2005, p. 4). In the realm of the pupil-researcher, Kellett (2005) provides compelling examples of collaborative research undertaken by pupils in Primary and Secondary schools that offer profound insights into the child's view of their situated lifeworld.

In the work of the National College for School Leadership's "New Visions" program senior educational managers have been engaged in practices focusing on self-awareness, problem-based learning, creativity and values; central to this enterprise has been the use of Action Learning Sets. Action Learning Sets are a well-established practice in other employment contexts (Bourner and Frost, 1996; Cusins, 1996) and are designed to encourage a fully participative approach in which trust, articulation of perceptions, meaning making, and deep reflection are central to the process. *Trust*, as MacBeath et al (2004) point out, is an essential precursor to meaningful school self-evaluation. Despite being in only a formative stage of development with select senior management teams, the possibilities afforded by action sets as an evaluative tool for professional educators *and pupils* is considerable. The addition of pupil's "voice" (in its many forms) has a critical function in enabling *transformational* educational evaluation in which the evaluative process is undertaken as a partnership in teacher-pupil interpretation. While the challenges of such an undertaking are both significant and well documented (Fielding and Rudduck, 2002; Fielding 2004), the dividends for imaginative education are likely to be considerable, enabling the technical and the arcane to be supplanted by a shared and enriched professional language that is sustained in a culture of trust.

Coda

Much of the thinking presented here is not necessarily original, nor does it of course align well with current UK practice in school evaluation and inspection, where the accent remains firmly on instrumental and performative preoccupations. For those with an inspectorial mind-set, this approach is likely to be regarded as lacking "rigour" and "robustness"; yet if imagination is to be more than a token feature of educational policy- making, and its genuine worth is to be secured by educational practitioners in educational settings, then it is perhaps worth being reminded of Max Van Manen's (1997) claim for human science research:

> …human science research is rigorous when it is "strong" or "hard" in a moral and spirited sense. A strong and rigorous human science text distinguishes itself by its courage and resolve to stand up for the uniqueness and significance of the notion to which it has dedicated itself…a rigorous human science is prepared to be "soft," "soulful," "subtle," and '"sensitive" in its effort to bring the range of meanings of life's phenomena to our reflective awareness. (18)

If we are indeed able to ground such a vision in situated day-to-day educational practices, then we may begin to carefully unlock the complexities of a meaningfully shared evaluative language.

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About the Author

Dave Trotman is Principal Lecturer in Education and Professional Studies at Newman
College of Higher Education in Birmingham, England. A former teacher in both Secondary
and Primary schools, his research interests include creativity, imagination, management of
change and collaborative professional learning cultures. He works extensively with primary
phase practitioners on both initial teacher education and in-service programs.

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