Living Contradiction

A Teacher's Examination of Tension and Disruption in Schools, in Classrooms and in Self

Sean Warren **and** Stephen Bigger

Praise for *Living Contradiction*

Drawing from a great wealth of research and the even greater wealth of their combined personal experience, Sean Warren and Stephen Bigger have written something rare – a book which not only deconstructs the thorny issues endemic in the British education system, but also presents us with intuitive and achievable remedies for them.

Charlie Carroll, author of *On the Edge*

A fascinating insight into teaching and education – I can personally identify with so many of the aspects discussed. What is clear throughout is that relationships in teaching are crucial: they underpin and determine the behaviour of students in our schools, whether we agree that this should be the case or not.

I would recommend *Living Contradiction* to anyone entering or already in the education profession.

Clare Gammons, Head Teacher, Cambian Wisbech School

Living Contradiction is a fascinating, honest examination of that genuine contradiction faced by teachers in reconciling the effort made to encourage young people towards independent critical thinking, with the simultaneous sense of responsibility to instruct and insist on a particular behaviour.

The authors' methodology is robust, providing a full discussion and acknowledgement of the benefits and constraints of autobiography in an academic research project, and offers thought-provoking insight into the use of the immediacy of blogging as a tool to record or diarise, and share, immediate experience. *Living Contradiction* also offers an interesting evaluation of the role of educational theorists set against the realities of teachers' experience on the front line in schools, where years of academic research are set against the need to respond to a behaviour in a matter of minutes.

Suzie Grogan, author of *Shell Shocked Britain*

Living Contradiction is the book that I wish I had had when I embarked on a career as a teacher.

The 'living contradiction' that is its starting point is painfully familiar to everyone who has stood in a classroom and wondered how they had ended up this way, with the energy-sapping task of keeping order becoming an end in itself. We had thought it was a precondition for learning, and we craved the respect of pupils and colleagues, but we had sacrificed the excitement that brought us into the profession.

Warren and Bigger's book breaks out of this sterile dilemma: discipline versus self-expression, strength versus weakness. Warren is no naive idealist, and is well aware that teachers continue to be accountable to a regime that insists on measurable, quantitative, and sometimes trivial outcomes. The breaking of familiar patterns is challenging for him, for colleagues, and for pupils. It is a rocky ride for everyone, but also an exemplary exercise in practice-based research. Armed with insights from educationalists and a rigorous methodology that enables him to analyse and interpret the results of his new approach, and fortified by a constant, questioning dialogue with Stephen Bigger, Sean Warren succeeds in changing the dynamic in his classroom – a hard-won achievement and a thrilling one.

This is not an arid book – all teachers will recognise the day-to-day dilemmas, confrontations, and compromises recounted here with honesty and wit. But it is inspirational: here is someone who has had the courage to believe in his students, in himself, and in the power of education.

Ann Miller, University Fellow, University of Leicester

Living Contradiction is an intelligent, sensitive, and socially situated antidote to the macho, authoritarian 'what works' publications in education that cocksurely proselytise about what needs to be done to improve teaching and learning.

In conceptualising teaching as a moral and ethical practice, Warren and Bigger seek to illuminate and confront some of the complexities involved in dealing with the thorny issues of behaviour and discipline in schools. But rather than providing spurious, short term solutions, *Living Contradiction* takes the reader on a journey of critical reflection and self-learning as the authentic experience of Warren's professional life is openly interrogated. The richness, sensitivity, and depth of thought with which this book examines matters relating to behaviour and discipline in schools makes it very unique from many other publications.

Dr Matt O'Leary, Reader in Education, Birmingham City University

Warren and Bigger's account is deeply human and is a model example of how to turn a piece of academic research (a PhD in this case) into a beautifully written, highly readable, and truly inspirational book.

Living Contradiction is a book for now which addresses the urgency for a radical reassessment of what schooling should mean. Some of the source material – particularly the extracts from pupils' diaries – are frankly shocking, and illustrate an alarming lack of respect afforded to pupils' human rights and dignity. Not all schools are the same, of course, but all who are involved in the education of our young people will find here a fascinating and inspiring journey that grapples with the real issues of schooling.

I'm certain that many teachers will find *Living Contradiction* deeply relevant and truly inspirational.

Dr Geoff Teece, Honorary Research Fellow,
University of Exeter Graduate School of Education

What I like most about *Living Contradiction* is its collaborative nature and its honesty. Sean Warren and Stephen Bigger exemplify a collaborative educational relationship: the book shows how Bigger shared his understandings of critical theory, encouraging Warren to see that autobiographical writings could produce a valid and academically legitimate contribution to educational knowledge in the generation of a living educational theory. The honesty is in Warren's educational journey, which will captivate your imagination and resonate with your own experiences of the imposition of institutional power relations.

I believe that *Living Contradiction* will be of great value on initial and continuing professional development programmes in education, and to all professionals in a wide range of workplace contexts who are facing their own contradictions in living their values as fully as they can.

Jack Whitehead, Visiting Professor of Education, University of Cumbria

Warren and Bigger present a highly engaging account of a teacher's journey from an approach founded in authoritarianism to one founded in respect and care: moving from discipline imposed by teachers, to developing pupils' self-discipline that is the result of self-learning. The move from compliance and confrontation to cooperation and care is compelling in its challenge to readers to review their professional practice and relationships.

Underpinned by research and personal reflection, *Living Contradiction* is a powerful challenge to the ways in which schools work.

Dr Richard Woolley, Head, Centre for Education and Inclusion,
Deputy Head (Research), Institute of Education, University of Worcester

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Prologue

Sean

In 1981, I was coming to the end of my compulsory education, and about to embark on the world of work – I was yet to realise that it would lead to a career in teaching. When I belatedly chose to become a teacher, I was largely oblivious to politics, educational history, theory, or policy. A desire to work with children and to help them achieve motivated me. I was totally unaware that the vocation I had chosen would cause me to compromise and distort these noble but simplistic intentions. I had no inkling that through steadfast adherence to institutional standards and expectations, I would lose something of myself in the process.

In the same year, 1981, Berlak and Berlak conducted a study producing insights which I remained ignorant of for over 30 years. Whilst preparing to leave classroom teaching to write up the findings from my own research, I read their work for the first time and smiled. Unbeknownst to me, they had foretold (and affirmed) the validity of investigating the deep sense of incongruity which had come to define my experience of operating in the English education system. In the Berlaks' terms, I had been brooding over the *dilemmas* of schooling:

> The authors describe dilemmas as representing contradictions that reside in the situation, in the individual, and in the larger society – as they are played out in one form of institutional life: schooling. These dilemmas focus on the fluidity and the reflexivity of the social process that are encapsulated in daily encounters between teachers and children. The practitioner's exchanges are not to be seen as disconnected, contradictory, discrete, or situational, but a complex pattern of behaviours which are joined together through consciousness.
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> A participant in the Berlaks' research (Mr Scott), provides a hint of his continuing internal conversations, as he deliberates over the apparent thoughtful choices he is making. He concludes: "I have yet to come to terms with myself," as he distinguishes between the 'act' and the person. It is evident that he has some degree of awareness of a wide range of contradictory social experiences and social forces, past and contemporary – both in his classroom, his school, and beyond in the wider community. He has internalised these contradictions (in his personal and social history, and in his present circumstances) and they are now 'within' him, a part of his generalised other, informing his outward responses.

The writers suggest that an awareness of how these forces come to bear on our conditions means that we are capable of altering our behaviour patterns and/or act with others to alter our circumstances – to become steadfast in our efforts to transform.

They conclude that the purpose of enquiry for teachers is to enable us to partake in reflective action. Engaging in this process requires participants to look again and recognise that what they have been taking for granted about classroom life, the origins of schooling activities, and the ensuing consequences upon children and society are all problematic. (adapted from Berlak and Berlak 2002: 8–10)

Turbulent change defines the past three decades in education, yet the dilemmas (or contradictions) remain as pertinent today as they ever were, perhaps even more so, as schools negotiate market forces, incessant political intervention, media platforms, and that old chestnut – pupil behaviour. Think of the teaching profession, and increasingly there are concerns about stress, recruitment, and retention. The Children's Society report (Pople et al. 2015) informs readers that children in England are amongst the unhappiest in the world. These, I argue, are clear symptoms: they substantiate an apparent tension in schools in light of the relentless demand for us to be ever more rigorous in the pursuit of quantifiable effectiveness, lest we be judged as failing.

Dilemmas reside in the lived experiences of practitioners, and, as I will show, may even be detected by discerning pupils as they protest against the nature of teacher–pupil encounters and query the legitimacy of the institutional status quo. Schooling is distinguished from education. On the surface, the situations I describe in this book are familiar and routine, yet the exchanges I experienced were rich and complex, often representing sites of struggle. The concepts of *tension* and *disruption* in the title relate to school systems and classroom interactions, but I also came to discover how these concepts could play out from deep within a teacher's psyche. These are the realms that I interrogated as a practitioner-researcher.

I believe this perturbing state – this condition – to be endemic. For me it was subliminal, obscured, undefined. Nias (1989: 65) describes teachers as living with tension, dilemma, and contradiction, and concludes, "those who claim that they can be themselves in and through work … are signalling that they have learned to live not just with stress but with paradox". Unfortunately, I came to a point in my career when I could not. Looking beyond paradox, my sense of dissonance intensified as I came to better appreciate the hypocrisy engrained within the school system; it had infiltrated my professional identity, it was inherent within me, and it was apparent in my practice.

It is my privilege to take the baton from Mr Scott all these years on, and to offer an array of perspectives to probe his predicament, for it is one with which I began to identify. As I sought "to come to terms with myself", I came to recognise myself as a *living* contradiction. Significantly, I want to convey both the profound and subtle implications as I critique my contribution as a teacher and as an authority figure. And yet, it is important to declare that my attention extends beyond these formal roles. Implicit in the text is the thought, the possibility, that I am being a man in our society with all that entails – the anger, the appeal of strength and assertion of will, an inclination to resort to violence to deal with threat. Negotiating issues of masculinity, identity, and status as a child and an adult, in the family and the workplace, I acknowledge that this might be an 'everyman's' tale but it is not everyone's story. I ponder whether my experiences would have the same resonance with a female teacher, or indeed male colleagues who don't identify with the power dynamic I convey. Regardless of gender, my fervent hope is that this book might encourage some brave colleagues to run the next leg. Whilst this book is written with teachers in mind, I am aware that there is growing interest amongst practitioners about the use of evidence to inform practice. I want to illustrate how the research process has the capacity to shine a discerning light on the classroom elements we find important and troublesome. The holistic coverage incorporates and shifts between perspectives I classify as 'I' and 'them' – 'we' and 'us'. The interests I explore in my work include the exchange of teaching and learning interactions, and low level disruptions. These provide context to examine *my* dilemmas. The scene in which I unravel my concern is a typical secondary school in the UK; the broad setting is the education system, whose current constitution was established as I was about to start my professional career at the end of the 1980s.

Preface

Stephen

I remember in 1987, when working in teacher education, the assembled education staff at Westminster College, Oxford being firmly told by Secretary of State for Education Kenneth Baker, who had helicoptered in for that purpose, that the education service was in a parlous state and that the new national curriculum, national testing, league tables, and a new inspection service would solve all the problems and turn everything around. The finger was pointed at left-wing educators and politicians, and explicitly at John Dewey's influence. The grass roots development of bodies such as the Inner London Education Authority and the Schools Council were being swept away and centralised policies imposed. His 30 minute speech has defined the three decades that followed, whatever the colour of the government. Of course, this centralising policy did not solve all the problems. Even defining the national curriculum was, and is, difficult and at times bitterly contested, not least concerning the place of Britain in history. To a crowded, subject based curriculum was added cross-curricular themes to answer criticisms of the limitations of focusing only on academic subjects. That the planners were pouring a gallon into a pint pot has always been a major criticism. Amongst the many issues was the differentiation between what is taught (content) and how it is taught (pedagogy and developmental learning).

In 1988, national projects called Compacts began to encourage secondary schools to up their game. It was a grass roots scheme, imported in 1987 from Boston, Massachusetts, and it was financially cheap. Year 11 pupils were set Compact Goals, which were crystallised as excellent attendance and punctuality, demonstrating personal qualities, coursework completion, and participation in work related activities. Mentors from local businesses went into the schools regularly to help and support. I was seconded to a leadership role in Birmingham Compact (1992–1994). The schools were self-selecting, in the sense that head teachers had to be keen and feel their staff would be enthusiastic about it. The inner city school catchments were deprived, but most were vibrant schools which we had regularly used for teaching practice placements. Each school had a three year programme in which staff committed themselves to working in motivational ways, mentors from industry offered classroom based support, and Year 11 pupils were rewarded with a formal certificate for achieving Compact Goals (see Bigger 1996 and 2000). Enough to say here that the programme achieved very significant results in the schools' examination results for the majority of pupils. The percentage ending Year 11 with five GCSEs (all grades) rose

from 30% up to 70% or 80% in many of the schools, showing that pupils became increasingly engaged with their studies. This was an example of how positive pedagogy greatly enhances achievement. The project was killed by league tables: these forced schools to focus on raising a few grade Ds to Cs rather than motivating *all* pupils. It was a privilege to work along-side 21 inner city comprehensive schools, even if it meant signing thousands of certificates.

I was responsible for education PhDs at the University of Worcester when Sean came in to discuss his project. By now a well-respected religious education teacher responsible for behaviour and discipline, he wished to explore this area in order to disseminate good practice to others. In the ensuing discussion, it became clear that there were issues of power and authority that needed further thought. As a consequence, he began asking the broad question, "Is it possible to build good positive relationships with pupils without sacrificing order and discipline?" and more specifically, "Could we find ways to support pupils to become more self-disciplined without compromising their education?"

To achieve this, habits of a lifetime needed to be reassessed. Where issues had once been resolved by authoritarian means (through a demand, instruction, or reproof), new strategies were needed. This formed the basis of a part-time action research project which formed the basis of his PhD, and now this book. The supervision relationship included using a research diary in blog format allowing frequent discussions of experiences and findings, all of which helped to articulate issues and theories. I explain this process in more detail elsewhere (Bigger 2009a).

These thoughts formed the melting pot from which this book is the end product. It has been, in a real sense, Sean's journey, but a journey taken with interested and willing co-travellers. Our conversations are reflected in most pages of the book.

I will end with some thoughts on teaching, learning, and schooling. Firstly, these are not the same thing. Schooling can take place without much learning. Teaching does not necessarily end with learning. Learning is not always positive: pupils can learn not to care and not to achieve. That these three can work well together to enhance the experience of pupils is the belief that has inspired this book. It is depressing that the issues which a century ago inspired John Dewey to develop a pedagogy of hands-on experience are still problematic today. The curriculum has become a stagnant testing regime. I remember a 6-year-old Chinese-American girl weeping through her (American) maths SAT, and would not be surprised if now, in middle age, she has difficulties with maths as a consequence. A curriculum and pedagogy which fails to motivate and enthuse has failed pupils. There are many questions to be asked about current credentialist and accountability policies

in schools; this book invites further thought on how a school can benefit its pupils by creating an environment where they feel respected and enthused.

At the end of the 19th century, Dewey set out a pedagogic creed to help pupils develop into the creative thinkers, producers, and inventors needed for the following century (see McDermott 1981: 442–454). This creed emphasised five 'articles':

1. Learning should enhance understanding of and for social life.

2. Schools are social institutions and should represent society at its best, and be an embryo society in which children participate in disciplined ways.

3. The curriculum should relate to the social experiences of the pupils.

4. Children learn best through activity, developing good habits of action, and thought.

5. Education is shared social consciousness. Teachers are engaged in the formation of the proper social life.

Thus, learning should be hands on, engaging pupils with real experiences. Pedagogy should be judged on the way it motivates and energises learners. It should make pupils more critically aware. It should induct young people into lifelong learning and encourage democracy, not compliance and blind obedience. In Dewey's view, schooling is not a preparation for future life: the jobs these young people will end up doing may not exist at the time of their schooling. School learning has to be a thing in itself, a form of present enrichment rather than training for something uncertain. Now the 20th century has turned into the 21st we need to update this broad credo in detail. The curriculum and pedagogy need to become socially enriching again. This vision was Kenneth Baker's bête noire, and its opposite now holds schooling in its grip, except where teachers subvert the usual mediocrity with creative pedagogy. Dewey was one of many voices seeking to explore real learning. Others will help us to articulate ideas later in the book.

Introduction

The Background to the Book

Stephen

When prominent politicians call for tougher discipline in schools, requiring pupils to respect and even fear their teachers, they encourage advocates of zero tolerance and champions of Assertive Discipline to quash any disruption to learning and to use punishment or 'consequences' as a key weapon. The latest manifestation is encompassed in the phrase 'no excuses'. Pupils have on occasions found themselves described in the media and some popular books through emotive and derogatory terms, such as 'yobs' and 'buggers'. Pupils belong to a family, most will be future parents, and all are people whom we hope will enrich society in the future. They have to be in school for well over a decade, whether they like it or not. Schools and teachers have the power to make their stay profitable, ideally enjoyable, or something to be endured; likewise, pupils have the power to make or break teachers. I believe that when adults are entrusted to contribute to these formative years, there is a straight choice between suppression and empowerment. Sean's research shows that in certain and testing circumstances the choice feels anything but straightforward.

Values are in vogue in education stated in school policies across the land. They are a list of what the school wants people to think about them – that they are caring, effective, and ethical. Of course, the values they state may not be the values they operate. Institutions cannot be regarded as ethical just because they say they are. This book explores some ethical implications for pedagogy and school management, rooting educational processes in positive relationships between teachers and pupils.

Conventional notions of teacher professionalism and effectiveness can compromise the very best of intentions amidst the reality of classroom life. Even with experienced and successful teachers, the elusive subtleties of power, responsibility, pressure, and stress shape their expectations of what they are tasked to do. The pressure and expectations for firm classroom control can lead to disciplinarian and authoritarian assumptions. Beyond the advocated techniques and advice espoused in training materials and by high profile 'behaviour experts' via social media, implicit strategies – such as shouting, belittling, shaming, and sarcasm – are resorted to much too easily. Some staff are even able to impose their will by their very presence. In other words, a 'good' teacher, conceived by many serving and aspiring teachers, as well as many children and parents, is an authoritarian who can *control*

children. Sean's research shows that for some pupils who are familiar with this power relationship, it is underlying fear which masquerades as respect. Unfortunately, fear breeds subversion and rebellion, with pupils constantly testing boundaries to get away with whatever they can – if not with the strict teachers, then with others who seem fair game. In certain circumstances, this diversion from learning includes even the normally compliant or 'good' student. Perhaps this is best illustrated when the authority of a supply or substitute teacher is collectively undermined or dismissed. As power is selectively contested, the classroom chemistry is thus infused with variable expressions of subtle resistance and explicit conflict, rather than the development of a learning relationship. This is described in greater detail in Part III.

Sean's description of the process of personally altering his established approach to discipline and teaching derived, he realised, from sustained professional conditioning which he calls 'living contradiction' – that is, he realised that what was required of him professionally was in contradiction to his personal aspirations and values. His absorption of these implicit expectations could be traced back to his childhood,[1] and subsequently reinforced daily, term on term, year on year, within the school environment. When in charge of others, he described himself not as a tyrant but as someone firmly in control whose views and will were paramount – he had learned to dominate, and his methods were affirmed by colleagues, observers, pupils, and parents alike. Class control was largely by diktat, with rules clearly set by the establishment and policed by staff. Sean gradually became responsible for whole school discipline, organising detentions and the broader paraphernalia of discipline. His efforts were valued by the school and praised as outstanding by Ofsted and most pupils were responsive.

The articulation of Sean's sense of disquiet over a prolonged period, and his subsequent search for a different way forward through research, finds a historical parallel which illuminates his gradual shift with regard to discipline. Until the 1970s, corporal punishment was considered normal and any teacher who opposed it was out of step. I was caned once, for no great crime. I remember my last head teacher caning 40 boys in one morning. After corporal punishment was banned, that situation changed (Conroy and de Ruyter 2008). Sean may feel out of step now, but may not be in 20 years' time.

Today, pupil discipline is very high on the national agenda for education. Ofsted have reported continuously on low level disruption as a serious cause of pupil under-achievement. Some newspapers have demonised young

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1   Sean's research contained autobiographical reflexivity. He discovered many ghosts that needed to be laid to rest from his own difficult schooling and experiences of bullying relationships. He theorised this through the literature on reflexivity, emphasising 'the living I', focusing on his own life performance through action research, and living theory. This methodology is expanded on in Chapters 2 and 8.

people and demanded tougher measures. Some schools, and increasingly academies free of local authority constraints, operating under zero tolerance policies have demanded that some pupils be expelled as a matter of course once procedures have been followed or exhausted. The very idea of questioning whether the relational and educational experiences offered might have contributed to the pupil's objectionable behaviour is rare. Discipline is presented as something *done* to a child, not a strength that they are *encouraged to develop*. We reverse that here. A school's mission should be to encourage self-discipline, not to enforce and police an imposed disciplinary code. This book develops an alternative way which places self-learning first. We seek to show that this is not a threat to either academic standards or school behaviour; rather, it is the current behaviourist and authoritarian strategies which damage and impede the development of the young person.

This state of affairs was the product of an education system which was unreflective and assumed its own truth and validity. It held the pupil liable for the problem without considering that it may be the adults – in the form of decision makers and enforcers – who were the source of much of the disruption. Sean began his PhD at the peak of his career as head of discipline, wishing to explore and disseminate authoritarian strategies. The subsequent period of reflection and questioning challenged his beliefs, attitudes, and values as an educator. He realised that he habitually compromised his personal values in the name of professionalism and effectiveness, dissociating personal values and aspirations from the teaching task. Claiming to be teaching pupils to think for themselves and to be self-disciplined, the professional reality was telling pupils to do as they were told. This further defines the notion of 'living contradiction', of living a life based on a lie. It was not the real Sean who was teaching, rather the authoritarian mask and persona he had created as he absorbed external notions of effectiveness.

This book describes the turbulent intellectual and professional process of redesigning pedagogy around the aspirations of self-learning and self-discipline, amidst the reality of pupils' challenging behaviour. There was a danger of a significant minority of pupils perceiving the new non-authoritarianism as a sign of weakness, especially when such a strategy was the exception rather than the rule in the school. This prompted Sean to shine a light on his doubts, insecurities, and engrained defensive habits as he tried to find effective ways to fill the void.

Another way of negotiating this time of transition was to bring the pupils along for the journey, explaining the new thinking and offering them a vision of self-determination. Over a three year period, pupils were progressively given more ownership of their learning. Teachers need to have authority, and there are circumstances where pupils might be unsafe if this were not so. But having authority is not the same as being authoritarian. It is a dangerous polarity to see teachers as either authoritarian or lax, and classes as

either ordered or disorderly. Pupils learn from discussing, considering, and reviewing their experiences. Integral to the process of learning are opportunities for dialogue, expressing opinion balanced with listening to others. Naturally there were challenges, anxieties, and temptations to resort back to quick-fix authoritarian strategies. Sean sought to find harmony between control and care and to negotiate the difference between compliance and cooperation.

Acknowledging that being on-task and learning are not the same thing, he tried to develop an approach which gave pupils more opportunities for autonomy. Of course there were occasions when the best strategy was for the teacher to lead and direct – for example, when teaching novice learners or presenting unfamiliar content. The challenge was to ensure that pupils didn't become over-dependent. It was affirmed that some did not have the capacity or resilience to cope immediately with independence if their previous schooling had not encouraged it. Sean had to find ways of nurturing learning habits whilst also delivering subject content. In the interim, he had to find effective ways to deal with some pupils' passive obstinacy as well as their active ploys to deflect their deficiencies or lack of engagement. It was clear that behaviour and learning held a reciprocal relationship – one influencing the other – therefore both aspects had to be addressed through his research. In building a classroom climate defined by his commitment to be respectful, fair, responsible, and trustful, the pupils were invited to use this as a model and to develop greater self-discipline. The approach negates the default practice of viewing any deviance from established norms as warranting punishment – a predetermined response sugar-coated in school policies and redefined in 'consequences' posters.

In addition, how children are taught has moral and human rights implications, so we would wish the book to contribute to these fields too. This includes areas such as dialogic education and education for democracy. There is today a global campaign to ensure that children are schooled, in some cases against a background of no schooling – for example, we have seen a campaign to allow girls in particular to be schooled, focusing around Malala Yousafzai. It seems perverse then to suggest that schools harm children, as John Holt once did in his book *How Children Fail* (1982 [1964]), which has led to a major home schooling programme in the United States. Questions need to be asked about education and schooling, amongst which are questions about potential abuse and harm, as Charles Dickens once did. There is literature today on well-being and happiness which are both relevant to school values and vision. Pupils who are stressed are unlikely to be achieving their full potential. Schools with stressed staff are unlikely to be effective either. Being driven by quantitative outcomes (i.e. league tables) dictates strategies, destroys creativity, and hampers pedagogical freedom.

Pupils enter school with a range of experiences and problems perhaps unknown to their teachers. There may well be a way to switch them on to social awareness and confidence. I recall one boy who said very little, until it was discovered that rugby football was his passion. Another boy was hyperactive and uncooperative until a stuffed barn owl was placed in front of him, which he spent hours drawing. A girl was the despair of her teachers until a story gave her an imaginary mentor in her head, with whom she had inner conversations when stress arose. After being threatened by expulsion, she received a good behaviour prize a year later. Teaching is an art. Problems have to be identified, solutions have to be imagined. Above all, teaching and learning is a dialogue which encapsulates social awareness and engagement.

This book was initiated by a simple question: how do pupils feel about the *authoritative* stance adopted?[2] Of course, Sean didn't use this term; instead he tried to live the values which qualify the phrase, and through research provided a platform for pupils to comment freely, and without reprimand, on their experience of learning in his classroom. Probing the assumption that pupils view *authoritarianism* as normal, he sought to challenge learned behaviour either to conform or exploit – depending on the perceived effectiveness and competence of the adult. Personal reflection began at this point. Is authority something someone has, or do they learn to acquire it – perhaps through a training course, a book, or online advice? Is it defined by someone being consistent? Is that the same as being strict? Authoritarianism is a persona which works with some and not with others. With some, compliance with task directives suppresses initiative and imagination, undermining the learning process. With others, resistance sets the learner up for conflict with the teacher.

We drew on critical pedagogy which encourages social critique (Darder et al. 2009; Giroux 2011). These essays cover three decades: of these we point especially to 'Rethinking education as the practice of freedom: Paulo Freire and the promise of critical pedagogy' (Giroux 2011: 152–166) and Pauline Lipman's 'Beyond accountability: towards schools that create new people for a new way of life' (in Darder et al. 2009: 364–383). Giroux, following Freire, presents pedagogy as a social and political awareness-raising enterprise – that is, encouraging pupils to become active contributors rather than passive consumers, understanding their rights and responsibilities within a democratic community. By this we mean not so much the limited right to vote every few years, but involvement in a community that discusses needs and actions constantly to achieve fair and just solutions. This is John Dewey's social involvement on a democratic school. Dewey is the enemy of systems

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2   It is important to distinguish between *authoritative* and *authoritarian*. For Freire (2005), authoritative means exercising authority which is based on expertise; authoritarian implies an emphasis on power to control (Porter 2006).

schooling and a promoter of process education – pragmatism in action. These perspectives are explored further in Chapter 5.

Sean's work took place in a rural secondary school which, like other schools in the UK, has been incessantly responsive to government initiatives and Ofsted's impending shadow. The school became a converter academy in 2011. A bastion of the system he diligently served, he had no intention of questioning its validity or indeed that his own 'successful' methodology should be placed under scrutiny. Having become aware of critical theorists to engage with external perspectives, Sean drew on a range of 'lenses' (Brookfield 2008) to challenge him to critically examine his assumptions. In particular, Michel Foucault's (1977) portrayal of power as something which circulates and is exercised through everyday rituals and interactions was illuminating and intellectually stimulating. Application of the French social theorist's work provided a fresh perspective to interpret common phenomena. A liminal process, with all its insecurities, moving towards an uncertain future, helped Sean to explore alternative pedagogies.

We will address issues of methodology in Part II. These initial comments set up our later discussion of research which reflects on personal experience. We may have been trained to be 'objective' and avoid the use of the personal pronoun 'I'. This hides the fact that, even in laboratory research, the researcher makes personal choices about all aspects of the research. The reader may not be aware that the results presented have been selected for helpfulness. If a researcher observes a phenomenon, their understanding and interpretation rely on their personal experiences. Their comments will reflect probably flawed understandings.

So first person research using the pronoun 'I' is a serious enterprise which has to avoid bias and presuppositions. Researching human experiences requires respondents to tell their story and a researcher to interpret it. Grounded theory started this way, researching how dying people felt. Ethnography is in this tradition – a researcher interviewing the people involved and observing what they do. Autobiographical research was an offshoot. Donald Schön emphasised reflective practice. Reflection in the workplace became popular (see Chapter 2). If we reflect at work, we need to write it down and discuss it, so autobiography has a context. Soon the new field of autoethnography arrived, when researchers studied aspects of their own life experiences, reflecting on incidents, attitudes, and relationships (Denzin 2013). We try in this book to apply rigour to this process.