# Chapter 1
# Hoyle: Ambiguity, Serendipity, and Playfulness

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> *Silence fell in the great hall of the palace at Anuradhapura. The oldest of the three princes of Serendip was about to relate a story for his father, the king, and members of the royal court.*
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> *The monarch … had once sent his sons forth to travel in the great world that they might grow in virtue and wisdom. By happy chance and not a little sagacity, they met with fortunate adventures, heard marvellous tales, and gained extraordinary friends.*
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> *(Hodges, 1966, p. 3)*

It would be unusual to come across a piece of writing on the subject of the teaching profession in which there is no reference to the work of Eric Hoyle. Since the publication of his very first book on this topic, '*The Role of the Teacher*' in 1964, there is no doubt that his writing and lectures over the last forty years has deepened the understanding of all who work and teach in the field of teacher education. But Hoyle would be the first to recognise that we, all of us, are today where we are in our thinking about the teaching profession as a result of *intersubjectivity*; that is through our interaction with each other, in writing or other forms of communication, we mediate the viewpoint of the other. This book is testament to this fact, and therefore, it is by happy chance and not with a little sagacity that Hoyle met with fortunate adventures, heard marvellous tales, and gained extraordinary friends and colleagues, many of whom are contributors to this volume.

There is little doubt that his teaching, examining and research of teachers, and the teaching profession, in countries both more and less developed, has given him a broad outlook and a sympathy for the status of the profession everywhere. But, for those who know his work, this can hardly be described as travellers' tales, nor as simple chance discoveries or blind leaps of faith. Serendipity as we use it here is therefore better understood as sagacity, the ability to link together apparently innocuous facts in order to come to a valuable conclusion. And in a distinctive way, Hoyle, the influences of Merton clear in his work, prefers logically interconnected conceptions which are limited and modest in scope, rather than all-embracing and grandiose. This is what Merton refers to as *theories of the middle range*, or theories that are intermediate to the minor, everyday working hypotheses, and the all-inclusive

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speculations of the 'master conceptual scheme'. It is precisely this degree of incisiveness, far sightedness and the ability to discern between fashionable policy and the reality at the coalface that has come to define Hoyle's writing.

Hoyle's work is best described as trying to make sense of the autonomy-control binary that dictates the nature of teaching, management and professionalization today. Hoyle in this volume reflects on this:

'… forty years of engagement with the idea of teaching as a profession suggests that there is an endemic dilemma entailed in the relationship between two modes of organizing teachers' work: the bureaucratic (managerial) and the professional. At the heart of this is the balance between autonomy and control.'

Hoyle's interest in the nature of management arises from his interest in the nature of organisations. But his work is best defined by his focus on a theory for understanding organisations rather than management theory, or a so-call theory for action. For Hoyle, it is more useful to answer the question how leaders or managers can best support and develop teachers as professionals, hence the notion of 'temperate' leadership (Hoyle and Wallace, 2005), as opposed to putting into practice much of the prevailing rhetoric of 'transformational' or 'my way' leadership. His reference point on this is the organisational theorist James March (1999). March adopts an interdisciplinary approach to the study of organisations which draws on sociology, politics, economics and various meta-theories, such as decision-theory, game theory, and choice theory. Like March, Hoyle insists on seeking to understand how organisations actually function. But, as we have said before, it is not the grand theories of organisation that interest him. Hoyle prefers a conceptual playfulness in making sense of the complexity of organisations. Little wonder then, his affinity for the counter-intuitive perspectives of March, such as, organisations 'running backwards', or the notion of managerialism as a 'solution in search of a problem' (March and Olsen, 1976). Hoyle and Wallace (2005) show how some of the metaphors generated by March to capture the complexity of organisations, such as the 'garbage can' theory, or the description of universities as 'organized anarchies' (March and Olsen, 1976), are at once simple and profound. But the lowly metaphor has the power to be insightfully playful (as are those used by March) or to become dangerous, almost fundamentalist gospel; sadly, such metaphors as the 'learning organisation' or the 'transformational school', examples of the latter. For Hoyle, perhaps the central challenge for professionals is to read the metaphor more as a playful heuristic that unlocks our capacity to understand and appreciate the nature of organisations, rather than as a rubric for doing management.

But most of all, Hoyle is fascinated by ambiguity and dilemma (see Hoyle this volume). Building on the work of March (March and Olsen, 1976) and Weick (1976), Hoyle and Wallace argue that 'because of the incommensurable values and demands which are endemic to all organisations, a variety of inevitable dilemmas and ambiguities are generated, which no amount of rationality, efficiency or control will eliminate'. Rather, these ambiguities may have effects opposite to those intended by policy-makers and legislators. Sometimes, pro-

fessionals, recognising that certain policy imperatives are unworkable, actually rescue its larger aspirations through a 'principled infidelity' – a conscious decision not to implement policies in the way that they are intended. The message from Hoyle and Wallace is that 'successful' practitioners are those who are aware of ambiguities, ironies and dilemmas, generated by the nature of organisations. Teachers would do well to collaborate in their local contexts, and in a neo-Vygotskian way, co-construct meaning relative to their own local contexts and shape and mould policy imperatives and ideas accordingly, rather than to adopt a 'big idea' from elsewhere. They thus argue for a more localised approach to 'making things marginally better for those students who are in a particular school at a particular time'. To achieve this, they argue, 'teachers must be given the space to manage the inherent ambiguities and ironies of the contexts in which they work'.

But alluring as ambiguity is as a concept, the suggestion that it constrains the options that professionals have to achieving a 'radical transformation' of the status quo is not universally shared. Bottery (2007) for example, accuses Hoyle of conservatism and argues that a 'fixation' on the local is unhelpful in sensitising students and their communities to the national and the global.

Stinging criticism for what we have come to recognise as the Zeitgeist of Hoyle?

We asked Hoyle about this and found his reply interesting:

> *I'm surprised to find that my value position in terms of education has become increasingly conservative in the sense of taking the view that education remains essentially a conservative institution in that it transmits culture and that there is a relatively unchanging, deep structure of schooling that teachers get on with everyday. 'Choice', covert and not so covert, selection, league tables, city academies and so on, have an impact, of course, and greatly exercise parents (and grandparents) who are preoccupied with these matters but underneath it all the old verities of education persist and the professionalization of teachers should be concerned with helping them to improve teaching rather than engage with these epiphenomenal issues'.*
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> Personal communication, 2007

Of course Hoyle is right in pointing out that education remains for all intents and purposes a conservative institution and parents, where it concerns their own children, organise around local issues. This of course does not preclude teachers, parents or indeed their children from organising more globally too, and in many different ways; some content with a twinning arrangement with a school in The Gambia, while others might seek to be more active in contributing to global change, for example through doing Development work. And while Bottery is right about the need for a more national and global movement to combat the ever pervasive culture of compliance that schools, universities and other public sector institutions are engulfed in, perhaps we need to recognise that whilst in organisations are embedded a set of incommensurable values, people within organisations, and within each person, there is likely to reside a full spectrum of value positions. So while it is true that ambiguity plagues organisations, many of us live with ambiguity in terms of our own ideals. Our working lives, our political lives, and our social lives shape in very different ways, our identities and ontological stances. So yes, we do need a

global movement to turn the tide of narrow instrumentalism that dictates the way in which schools and other social institutions are managed, but is the site of teaching the best place around which to organise such a movement? Perhaps not, first because it is unrealistic; second because, in typical liberal fashion, the argument assumes that teachers or other professionals do not occupy other public and political spaces, or that they should be in the vanguard of the proposed revolutionary transformation; and third, because there is a fundamental flaw in a political position that assumes that educational transformation is in itself a sufficient condition to transform the culture of control and accountability, so deeply embedded in all sectors of public, social and political life.

Hoyle recognises what he calls, his own 'lived ambiguity' even though this is not always clear in his writing. But how could it be? Like all good writing, where the arguments are cogent, the style proficient, and the stance uncompromising, it rarely permits us more than a glimpse into the inevitable philosophical struggles that he, like all of us, has to endure in his 'search for meaning' (Frankl, 1963).

Frankl discusses three broad approaches to finding meaning: through experiencing something, by doing (an existentialist idea of finding meaning by becoming involved in a project or occupation), and by adopting an attitudinal or value position.

Hoyle touches on all three aspects and talks of living with ambiguity in relation to his value position in relation to knowledge, his own teaching and research, and his epistemological stance. In respect of the first, Hoyle unwittingly touches on an issue that has split the academic community and is likely to determine the organisation of institutions of Higher Education for many years to come. In a recent paper, Johnson (forthcoming) argues that the higher education sector in the Britain has found itself swept into a maelstrom of competing ideas and philosophies about the changing role of the modern university, some wanting to hold on to the core values of the nature of knowledge and the search for truth. Others, many of whom had been systematically under-funded and under-resourced, seek to occupy a strategic position within a growing 'market' of higher education where courses and programmes are sold to meet commercial and industrial demands. And then there are those who feel that these two 'missions' are not incompatible and that such bifurcation is the only way forward.

Hoyle might argue that these value positions are incommensurable, and drawing on Berlin (1969) he would suggest that this does not preclude one 'from arguing the case for one over another' (Hoyle and Wallace, 2005). But what we have here is probably more than a problem of incompatible values. Perhaps a few years ago, the positions were in flux and might have been construed as a problem to be resolved. Now, it seems, the positions have hardened and the organisation of higher education is more a dilemma than an ambiguity. According to Johnson (forthcoming) the different value positions can be chartered along a 'looking in-looking out continuum' which reflects an interesting but irreducible tension between those with strongly held views about the nature of knowledge, its scientific and disciplinary foundations, and the core mission of the university. In the former view, in brief, universities are above all concerned with the search for truth. Applications are

secondary; this is essentially an inward looking, philosophical view of knowledge; the alternative view is that the production of knowledge is a condition of productivity, innovation and creativity and that its production is not confined to the academy alone. Rather, the sphere of activity is widened beyond the university to include a more diverse set of researchers and practitioners; this constitutes an outward looking, more economically driven view.

Clearly we cannot simply replace a disciplinary form of enquiry that emphasises fundamental epistemological principles, and that forms the basis for understanding the discipline, with one that is solely needs driven. But, at the same time, we should not close off the opportunity for academics to contribute to societal need. After all, academics are, or should be, concerned and active citizens too. The flip side of the coin suggests that research more orientated to application and development should not eschew the fundamental principles upon which research in any one tradition is built. This tension appears to be at the heart of the dilemma between control and autonomy referred to by Hoyle.

In relation to theory, we have highlighted above Hoyle's preference for the theories of the middle range which inevitably, entail the development of taxonomies and typologies, and the summarising of concepts. Hoyle has always been happy to typologise and label and it is fascinating that since boyhood, he has been a great admirer of Linnaeus who was born just over 300 years ago this year.

Yet Hoyle admits that typologies greatly oversimplify the complexity of the world, and argues that they must be complimented by a more rounded view of the social world - hence the importance of good novels and ethnographies. Typologies and concepts provide a good starting point for exploration because they are heuristic. It is for this reason that Hoyle as a teacher has always encouraged students to be sensitive to the meanings of the words that constitute our working concepts and to 'play' with meanings, principally because that for much of the time our concepts function as metaphors (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980).

Hoyle also feels particularly sensitive of his lived ambiguity in respect of his teaching and writing, both which have focussed on improving our understanding of organisations (i.e., organisation theory rather than prescriptive management theory). He says:

> 'I try to teach students to understand organisations but their jobs often involve the management of change. I sometimes wonder if, in improving understanding, I am undermining their capacity to manage by emphasizing ambiguity, paradox, contingency, complexity, unintended consequences and so forth thereby inducing analysis paralysis. But I console myself with the thought that (a) others will teach them management and (b) effective management is dependent on understanding. In any case, my teaching and my writing can hardly be said to be 'value free', but at least I hope that I'm up-front about where I stand'.
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> Personal communication, 2007

Analysis paralysis? Surely not! Indeed, it is his ability to play with concepts that we would argue is a defining characteristic of Hoyle the teacher. Much of his teaching shows the ease with which he is able to interrogate complex concepts, sometimes weighing one against the other in a curious contrapuntal form, while at

the same time extending both, analogous to an operatic Fugue. This is also evident in his writing. Little wonder then that some of the commentators on his work refer to 'levels of literary complexity that few books published in the field can match' (Brundrett, 2007:434 reviewing (Hoyle and Wallace, 2005). We cannot say for certain that this is the case, but there is no doubt that not many teachings have been able to achieve a serious analysis of complex forms of human behaviour in organizational settings, with quite the same playfulness as that managed by Hoyle.

It is appropriate therefore, to end this piece on the following note:

> *'His life … entailed more than authorship. He was a wonderful teacher, with a vivid speaking style, clear and witty, and a terrific memory for facts. His lectures often packed the hall, his private tutoring earned him extra money, and he made botany both empirical and fun by leading big festive field trips into the countryside on summer Saturdays, complete with picnic lunches, banners and kettledrums, and a bugle sounding whenever someone found a rare plant. He had the instincts of an impresario. But he was also quietly effective in mentoring the most talented and serious of his students, of whom more than a dozen went off on adventuresome natural history explorations around the world, faithfully sending data and specimens back to the old man. With his typically sublime absence of modesty, he called those travellers the apostles'.*

Of course we speak here of Linneus but it hardly goes unnoticed that Hoyle shares many of his characteristics. We cannot vouch for Hoyle's knowledge of Flora and Fauna, nor his leading his students into the countryside with banners and kettle drums; But more typical of him, for one who has tutored the perceptions of so many, and perhaps unlike Linneus, is his modesty.

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