

CHAPTER 4.

REFLECTION-ON-ACTION.

“Thoughts have gone forth whose power shall sleep no more.”

English Suffragettes slogan.1920.

Where have I gone?

Where have I been?

Where am I going?

I will try to answer these questions with the help of my students/ researchers and our shared reflections.

The analogies with both groups finished by the end of May 2003. Formative assessment was carried out to develop their powers of reflection on the acquired knowledge, the depth of their understanding and the changes or widening of opinions and value judgements.

As we all prepared to face the external examinations a few months away, past experiences blossomed in a deeper understanding of issues under study. Groups of students who had discovered in each other corresponding and supporting qualities in working styles and study dispositions gathered to share their efforts.

The second term of 2003 was devoted to intense practise with past papers to hone historical skills of comprehension, interpretation, analysis of bias and its usefulness and evaluation in its widest aspect taking into account audiences, circumstances, tones, nuances of differences in meaning and empathy with the climate of the given times.

4. i REFLECTIONS ON AND BY THE A GROUP: RISE IN SELF ESTEEM AND MOTIVATION.

On reading the students answers to the issue of the qualitative questionnaire, ‘Experiencing Learning’(see Appendix) I find a subliminal core question that I did not express even to myself when I issued it to the students. On reading Nell Noddings writings on Care and Moral Education I found a passage by Simone Weil that poses the question,

“What are you going through?”

As the link that establishes the connection in a dialogue.

The questionnaire’s first two questions focus on the ‘high’ and ‘low’ moments in students’ learning experiences tacitly asking ‘what are you going through?’

” For the first time I wasn’t afraid of telling you what I think and make a mistake.”

(A.L.15 years old. Appendix 4)

“All the time I was being valued, for me”. (M.N. 15 years old. Appendix 5)

“Last year when I started to improve the way you said it to me, like I was a clever girl, etc. that motivated me.”(V. 16 years old. Appendix 6)



Energies in teacher /student relations were diverted from work and study responsibilities in students and assessment judgements in the teacher, to the accomplishment of positive co-operative goals (N.Noddings, 2002: 5)

In the open hearted responses of my students, dialogues started which continue to enrich and deepen the knowledge I am generating from my manner in teaching which is such an integral part of my burgeoning educational theory. V. Richardson and C. Fallona describe ‘*Manner in Teaching*’ as possibly separate constructs of method and manner, and classroom management and instruction but argue that they become interwoven if they are analysed through the lens of the teacher’s beliefs and goals. They go to the heart of the matter when they focus on the relationship between student and teacher as being the core or centre in any analysis of manner in teaching.

The Elli Project at the University of Bristol (REDC, Feb.2004) adds the theme of relationships to the development of learning power in what it means to be an effective learner which it defines as one showing or having readiness, resilience, resourcefulness,

remembering and reflection.(The Campaign for Learning talks, Greany & Parsons,2003)

The three given comments from my students reflect:

- a) The loss of an inhibition leading to a disposition to take risks and eventually responsibility for learning.
- b) The growth in self-esteem from the appreciation of personal values.

The link in these comments is the understanding they express of their feelings and how they lead to self-knowledge. The same students remark on 'interactions' of myself with themselves and among each other as effective means of learning.

“ It seems that the quality of relationships between learners and their teachers is central to the development of a climate where learners can change and grow and develop their capacity to learn.” (The Effective Lifelong Learning Inventory project)

It is the manner of the teacher in the classroom that is focussed to the development of harmonious, helpfully integrating relationships not only of the students with her but among the students as well. The caring example of the teacher extends and permeates the classroom community.

The small groups' strategy seems to have enhanced curiosity/interest and created a safety net of trust to allow taking risks and accepting challenges. Some remarked that impersonations allowed them not only to learn the topic through empathy but also to connect with each other and reach an understanding of different opinions.

The method and classroom management allowed subliminal instruction to take place through these experiences leading not only to the acquisition of knowledge and understanding but to the development of awareness of self worth and resilience when mistakes might be made. This reflects a change in students that shapes some of my primary goals: growing confidence, increasing empathy and rationality. Self knowledge gained through facing and vanquishing fears may lead to improve learning power and empathy with others going through the same process. These three students who show awareness of growing self-esteem will carry this in them from my manner in teaching.

One step of this scaffold is the trust between my students and me. This trust is manifest in the open, unrestricted dialogues in which 'high' moments were tempered with 'low'.

“When *things weren’t as I wanted, and my opinion didn’t count...*” (M. 15 years old. Appendix 5)

4.ii HOW DO THESE REFLECTIONS FROM MY STUDENTS CONTRIBUTE TO BUILDING MY LIVING EDUCATIONAL THEORY?

“When *I called you or picked up my hand and sometimes you didn’t see me ... I felt ignored.*”(M.L.15 years old. Appendix 7)

These students express frustration and uncertainty at certain times that reflect my living contradiction in my classroom management. Yet they are able to feel confident that our relationship will not break down and what they are doing is actually recognising my condition of learner and helping me to change and refine my manner in teaching. They show me their reflections in a logical manner to induce a philosophical conversation that will lead me to reflect upon living contradictions in my manner that need change.

4. iii HOW CAN I LEARN FROM THIS, WHAT RESOURCES DO I HAVE OR NEED TO GENERATE?

Answers are not unmoveable; questions that require time to mature are at the core of my critical thinking for continuous revision and learning. A living educational theory is about questions as much as answers.

“Sometimes *I feel I cannot express myself when it comes to written work because the class is very noisy...*”

“*You are very expressive (for better or worse) and if I do well in an activity you always tell me so or give out merits.*” (M.A.16 years old. Appendix 8). The ambiguity in these comments from one student highlights an apparent contradiction in my method and classroom management yet I can argue that they represent my beliefs in love and freedom, two of my guiding principles. I am confident that the love I feel for all students need no explanation and will shine through this discourse .The issue of freedom is a thornier topic.

The appeals for silence and order from my more serious students were not ignored but answered with continuous positive feedback to pupils that either always or occasionally met the requirements of the course. (J.M.Halsted&M.J.Pryor, 2001:180) Still my answer to disruptive behaviour did not rely on dependence on external rules but on the

virtue of doing one's personal best. The respect for each one's individuality and freedom was in some cases not followed up by "*the respect that each person must show for the rights of others*" (M.Sanger, 2002.: 696) the immediate action was to call out the offenders repeatedly, which suggests "*that dependence on external motivation (did) little to improve (the) sense of social responsibility*" (J.M.Halsted&M.J.Pryor 2001,:180)

In "Forms of discipline: a typology" by Tim Small, he locates 'Organisational Discipline' in the classroom. This discipline is cooperative and evinces good order for the accomplishment of an enterprise. In my classroom I aimed at reaching the next stage 'Functional Discipline' with encouragement and praise reinforced by experiences of success and self-knowledge. Although this was my praxis it was not the real life of my classroom. The drive, identified as positive encouragement leading to success, in a classroom inhabited by fifteen year olds led to noise and occasional disorder. The desired collaborative behaviour led to heated exchanges of ideas and opinions (see a video. Appendix 1b) and experiences of success were sometimes loudly celebrated. Yet there was evidence of some positive achievements:

"We need to try to keep order so that everyone can be heard, but that's more of a problem for us to solve."(C. 15 years old. Appendix 9). C. gives evidence of her working consciousness in showing her awareness of student actions, their effects on the classroom community and her willingness to help the teacher in solving the problem by proposing the active participation of all. This interdependence towards the common good to benefit the classroom community is not a rare show of metacognition but was shared by a majority, albeit the more silent one, of the H group. But there was still some way to go to reach the ultimate goal, which relies on collaborative behaviour and low dependency rate. These last two characteristics take time in preparation and individual maturation. Perhaps it was too much to ask from this particular age group and its differences in personal development.

Both levels of maturity and lack of intrinsic motivation played a part in these differences. Lackadaisical, troubled individuals with distracting factors from dysfunctional backgrounds needed persistent normative measures. I valued the support evinced by the majority expressed in C's words for its contribution to the classroom caring climate.

The different objectives I set myself with group A and group H elicited corresponding differences in the answers to:

What are you learning about yourself as a learner?

4. iv IN THE SHARED ACTIVITIES AS PRACTICED IN THE ANALOGIES , WERE CHANGES ACKNOWLEDGED AND ACCEPTED?

Some of the answers to the motivational objective transmit a sense of surprise at their own feelings of adequacy and powers of achievement,

“That I can do more than I thought I could, this work helped me realise that.”(Au.15 years old. Appendix 10)

“That I can get better results if I want” (J.15 years old. Appendix11)

These mind states show student empowerment, which might lead to a transfer of cognitive abilities throughout their curricula.

Some were able to differentiate strengths and shortcomings,

“I’m learning that sometimes I like and find the subject interesting but I don’t know how to study.” (AL.15 years old. Appendix 4)

Others showed awareness of a less productive attitude and committed to its correction,

“To be more attentive in class.”(V.16 years old. Appendix 6)

“...When we work in groups, so that we understand better...”(M.N.15 years old.)

(Appendix 5)

The mutual engagement of the small groups and their constant engagement with myself did not end with the analogy exercise but continued and raised my awareness to the effectiveness of my strategies to generate understanding and to develop in the future richer and more sophisticated methods for higher order thinking. These strategies are embedded in my manner in teaching and I doubt their effectiveness if the classroom environment is not nurturing and stimulated by positive feelings of love in accepting differences and freedom of expression built on mutual trust.

This question invited a reflection on metacognition. This is the ability to know what we know and what we don’t know. Unless asked directly and given the time to ponder the answer, students are not in the habit of wondering why they are doing what they do. Less do they question themselves about their personal learning methods and the

efficiency of such in view of the results of their performances? In the students' answers there were temporal and comparative judgements.

In the H group a learning 'high' was the Soviet analogy when students felt that they were 'connected' and 'be in another person's shoes'.

Often in the past, routine class work may have led students to make immediate value judgements through a mechanical, hurried approach or "*become addicted to being told what to think and do*"(Freseman.1990: 26 in newhorizons.org.costa) The previous, careful preparation to the Soviet analogy informed students to exercise reflection-in-action while practising a listening behaviour (Piaget called it "*overcoming ego centrism*") to see through the perspectives of others.

4. v THE STORY OF MARINA:

Before we reached the stage of the Soviet analogy Marina had suffered a serious emotional crisis. When I introduced the Russian history unit Marina met with a very different perspective to the one that had been familiar to her throughout her life and that was deeply embedded in her intellectual and emotional being.

Her grandparents are White Russian refugees who arrived in our country after suffering from their opposition to the Bolshevik Revolution, Civil War and Stalin's government. The family environment in which Marina grew up is deeply religious and imbued with fond memories of Tsarist times. Marina is deeply attached to her grandparents who hold a very strong position as the elders in the family. They were her only source of historical knowledge about the 'old country'.

Perhaps my deeply held conviction that to practice objectivity and open mindedness in exploring the cruel history of the Twentieth century needs compassion as an essential value to hold up as a mirror to my students had too strong an impact in showing Marina 'the plight of the landless peasantry' and some examples of the contrasting uncaring attitude of the Russian aristocracy and Royal family which she met in working with sources. She started showing signs of distress and kept herself away from history classes. I misjudged the depth of her conflict. I considered her disagreements as simply springing from a lack of knowledge disregarding the emotional content in the issue. I approached the problem as a cognitive lack to be handled intellectually in contradiction

with my caring values. The problem came to a head in an interview with her parents who strongly expressed their disagreement with my resources and teaching approach and asked me to abandon this unit, which was causing their child so much distress. This I could not do.

But how far had I lived my moral obligation to care for the well being of my students? How secure was the classroom environment if Marina's distress had reached the point where she did not want to come to class for fear that her family values would be contradicted?

Nell Noddings in 'Care and Critical thinking' in her book *Educating Moral People* highlights Simone Weil's emphasis on attention on the living other by asking the question, "*What are you going through?*" "*Asking such a question fastens our attention on the living other and not on a set of principles or our own righteousness.*"

(Noddings, 2002, :2)

4. vi WHAT WAS MY HEALING ACTION ?

I decided to give Marina more space in class to relate her family lore and encouraged her to bring some valuable historical material that her grandparents possessed.

Paradoxically much of it consisted of revolutionary cartoons not at all flattering to White officers in the Civil War with whose names we were acquainted. I photocopied all this wonderful visual material in colour and returned it to Marina to fashion a Red and White poster which still hangs in my classroom as her donation from her passage through year 10 and as a permanent reminder to myself to practice my attention to others with greater awareness.

When the moment for the Soviet analogy arrived Marina had the opportunity to impersonate a 'kulak' with a group of classmates who shared her views. This gave me an appreciation of the power of role-play in learning not only as a cognitive activity but also as a window to emotional awareness. Playing roles that did not match their personal beliefs or after listening to an opponent's views had a liberating effect.

"This role playing made me understand both points of view and I really liked defending what I thought was right." (Marina, 15 years old. Appendix 3) from someone with very

strong cultural blocks M.L. seems to have become a good listener trying to understand what others were saying (see video, appendix 1b) to be able to learn what she had until then disagreed with *'because she had been told what to think'*. Now she knows exactly what it is she disagrees with *'both points of view'*, hers and the opposite, to be able to defend what she thinks is right, but with a difference, now she is aware of the opposite reasons to her convictions.

There was consensus that critical thinking had started. We were aware of what could be, the possibility that listening to different voices would have a positive social value. We envisioned some epistemological aims. We started conjecturing from the awareness gained in empathy from modelling behaviour, that our strongest held opinions could be questioned by ourselves and observed from different angles. This was a big step for some students with cultural blocks. A learning 'high' for one of these was



"Playing the role of a commissar, even if I don't agree with collectivisation. (A.V. 15 years old. Appendix 2)

"In some aspects I did change it (my opinion) and in others not, because I understood some things I didn't before." (M.L.15 years old. Appendix 7). They shifted from their ego centred point of view by acquiring new knowledge and associated understanding to reach allocentrism. By 'being in another person's shoes, taking through role playing an orientation they had until then rejected through lack of knowledge, they were able to enrich their opinions (which did not change) and use them with greater freedom and expertise.

Others became aware of capacities that had already been recognised by their peers but not by themselves.

"I learnt from myself that I have more potential to discuss than what I thought."(M.L.15 years old. Appendix 7)

Previous preparation to this exercise had given her powers of expression she had not explored before. The



understanding and use of the correct terminology cleared her thoughts and sharpened her language. This raised her awareness of a natural disposition she had until then ignored although it had been recognised by her peers in its incipient form.

The objective of the development of creative and critical thinking in the H group received responses that show differences in learning styles, changes in cultural blocks and stages of maturity. These answers in inchoate metacognition paved the way to the systematic instruction and practice in procedures to develop increased proficiency in carrying out the historical skills needed to answer examination requirements.

“ I think I learned to adopt different points of view and to evaluate what people might think and why.” (M.A.16 years old. Appendix 8)



M.A indicates with these words that she is ready to listen to others with understanding and empathy that A.L.Costa identifies as one of the highest forms of intelligent behaviour in his Thinking Skills Program. (New Horizons, 2003) To adopt different points of view it is necessary to become a skilful listener to be able to see through the perspectives of others. To evaluate what people might think and why, means to pay close attention to what is being said beneath the words as stated by Senge et al. In Costa’s Program.

Other responses still show a greater reliance on teaching strategies,

“When you explain well, I grasp the idea easily,” (A.V.15 years old. Appendix12)

“Now I understand quicker when we study a new topic. Before it was more difficult.”
Mt.15 years old. Appendix 13)

For others, doing led to knowing,

“I find role playing more effective...it helps me to remember.”(C.15 years old. Appendix 9)

But Mel found a correspondence between her particular learning style and the variety of strategies employed in this course.

“Visual learning style: that with different skills (meaning strategies) I learn more.

She has learnt that her *myself*’ meaning her ease does complement her *“And then I have a very myself which helps me very well my hearing* Mel has given careful



talent *“to express with the use of language attention shortcomings. strong talent to express when I can’t develop style.”* (Appendix 14)

thought to her capabilities and taken advantage of the strategies offered in the development of different tasks through her awareness of her primary and secondary learning styles. Her sensitivity and imagination allowed her to increase the range of her senses to create empathetic bonds with her classmates and her teacher, *‘all connected’* were her words.

4. vii IS THIS MY LIVING EDUCATIONAL THEORY?

“The need for reason is not inspired by the quest for truth but by the quest for meaning. And truth and meaning are not the same.” (H.Arendt, 1971:15)

I have explored the grounds in my manner in teaching through my students’ thoughts and it is time to weave strands of reflection together. My students and I have put our thoughts to work on historical matters to find meaning in many puzzling and unresolved matters. Each one has walked along different paths and found tentative meanings to changes and to find justifications for old and new ideas. We have all grown in awareness in the process.

Hannah Arendt writes that morals comes from mores, the Latin for rules of behaviour or customs, and ethics comes from ethos, the Greek word for habitat or habits.

I set out to instruct in thinking skills, to provide content tasks requiring skilful thinking and asked my students to reflect upon them.

Have I created habits of mind?

Did my students show dispositions to reflect and to open their minds and hearts to honesty through trust, compassion through acceptance of differences in their written dialogues with me, their teacher?

I venture a tentative yes, although Hannah Arendt warns that “*only habits and customs can be taught and we know only too well the alarming speed with which they are unlearned and forgotten when new circumstances demand a change in manners and patterns of behaviour.*”(H.Arendt, 1971:5)

I have learned that learners are motivated by hands on tasks that are well structured and planned to challenge ingenuity, include knowledge of the subject and stretch their skills from mere comprehension to problem solving and evaluations that deepen their understanding to make informed decisions as to what opinions to hold on topics of their subject matter.

So I offer examples of my learning aimed at improving my educational influence on my students learning to think creatively and critically with only a temporary certainty on their part, as evinced in their writings, but a more lasting and hopefully evolving learning on how to improve myself as a teacher.

In deconstructing pedagogy, I separated my technological approach to education, that is instructional objectives and tools of the teaching trade to construct new knowledge in the learner’s inner scaffolding, from my manner in teaching described by Gary Fenstermacher as “*manner is defined as conduct expressive of dispositions or traits of character that fall into a category of moral goods known as virtues*”. (G.Fenstermacher, 2002: 640). Some of the virtues cited in this study. On the concept of manner and its visibility in teaching practice, are the ones I have tried to awaken in my students.

Looking back through the past 20 months, I see the need to put together that deconstruction to generate a living educational theory, which I hope may be seen as “*constructivist and learner centred*”. (L.Shulman & M.Sherin,2003 :136) I wish to echo the characteristics of the Fostering a Community of Learners reform with my students’ engagement in tasks to foster the development of higher-order understanding (metacognition) and skills (self assurance in the practice of historical skills) and the collaboration reached by some who continue to share study time outside school as I was informed lately by my 2003 former students.

Weaving together educational technology and manner in teaching I endeavoured to construct a classroom community which in spite of shortcomings created by careless behaviour in some, created bonds of better understanding, shared ideas, mutual accomplishments and respect for cultural and ideological differences. Through a shared commitment to achieve a variety of tasks, some of them risky in their originality as judged by colleagues, significant steps were made by students in political objectivity which pointed the way to acceptance of differences while maintaining personal beliefs, as is everyone's right. This was understood as my commitment to respect democratic freedom as a history teacher.

To build a classroom community involves the construction of a framework consisting of mastery of the subject and a wealth of vocabulary that will transmit to the learner an adequate dose of professionalism to inspire trust and respect. It is important, as a significant factor in effective teaching to present students with the query for the main ideas in any history topic.

- What is the concern? Social distress?
- How do we define it? Radical life changes?
- Who is affected by it? Everyman?

This will lead to a deep sense of awareness, a prerequisite to all further tasks like source analysis.

The issue of control in the classroom community must be raised as some of my living contradictions in leading adolescent students. It rests on two legs: assessment of work and classroom management. In a learner-centred, constructivist ambience, assessment needs to be formative, explicit and open to negotiation if students show a commitment to improvement.

“There is a characteristic that really helps me and that is that you allow us to correct the questions we had wrong and you change our grades. So in a test, Depth Study etc. we have the possibility of improving and learning from our mistakes.” (Mt.15 years old. Appendix 13)

Classroom management moves into the area of manner in teaching. Here my sense of justice and equality are called into action and tested. Justice as well as equality are subject to the encouragement of virtuous conduct of respect and consideration for

others. I think it is no sign of inequality to try to control disruptive behaviour by highlighting exalted examples of positive social attitude and task commitment.

A strong point in my living educational theory is achieving improvement in students' social relations to allow for all round dialogue and sharing of ideas to achieve interdependent thinking and flexibility of criteria.

As the subject of this dissertation is the study of the extent of my influence in my students' learning to think creatively and critically, I feel that this is the place to attempt to speculate on it as both mastery of the subject and manner in teaching are intrinsically involved.

Extending influence means inspiring trust, one will not accept what is offered with uncertainty in risk taking. The drive in extending influence is motivation. Students' need to develop skills or learn content requires certain skills in the teacher. These may be my own passionate commitment to the subject matter expressed in continuous learning of which the students are aware, and my open and friendly disposition demonstrated in a fair negotiating attitude based on genuinely held values of love, freedom and justice.