

Chapter 3: Where and with whom this story takes place

I have stated that my work with student researchers has taken place over a period of seven years. In this Chapter I describe to you the second school in which this research has been located. Although I will refer back to my previous school in Chapter 5, where I worked with students as active research participants, the involvement of intergenerational research has taken place in this second school. Acknowledging the contribution of the first has been important, yet here I aim to share with you the climate and background of my current school as a base for student-led research. I refer to my work with the students in the first school via comments pulled from my own previous research conducted there⁵. This description of the school is moreover a physical one in nature, which I felt was important in physically grounding the research before looking at the culture and climate of the school in Chapter 6. Alongside the school, I also look here to introduce the participants involved in the enquiry. These are the individuals with whom I believe to share living standards of judgment through a life of enquiry.

3.1 Bishop Wordsworth's School

Bishop Wordsworth's Church of England Grammar School is a voluntary aided selective school for boys aged 11-18 years of age. In the 2001 official inspection report conducted by OfSted (Office for Standards in Education), the school was described as:

"... driven by a sense of common purpose, clarity of vision and enthusiasm for learning. The teachers rise above the limitations imposed by the poor accommodation and bring about some real transformation in the quality of the students' work. It must be added, however, that working in the shadow of an imposing cathedral spire compensates to some extent for the otherwise cramped working conditions." (OfSted, 2001 p.1)

⁵ See Collins (2002, 2003, 2004)

**Figure 7: Bishop Wordsworth's School from Salisbury Cathedral spire
(retrieved from www.bws.wilts.sch.uk)**



The school's ethos is described in the following way:

"The School aims to serve its community by providing an education of the highest quality within the context of Christian belief and practice. It encourages an understanding of the meaning and significance of faith and promotes Christian values through the experience it offers to its pupils." (Retrieved from bws.wilts.sch.uk on 31.10.07)

The school has a long history, and in the original part of the school, images of the founding Bishop can be found alongside former lodgings of the original boys who attended. I believe, if you asked anyone who knew of the school about what makes it *tick* they would conclude that academic performance and the pastoral care provided for its students are both key. These are the qualities that the Deputy Headteacher and co-researcher used to describe the school to me. These foundational qualities are supported by an extensive extra-curricular programme including the school's prestigious choir and its numerous rugby teams' prowess in local and national leagues.

In 2004, the school was successfully awarded Language College specialist status that has seen extensive refurbishment of the existing Languages accommodation as well as an increase in the availability of interactive whiteboards in the majority of the school's classroom. If you spend a few moments considering the image above, an aerial view of the school, I believe that this highlights very well the blend of old and new that give the school its unique character. To the right of the sight you can see

the Sports Centre, completed in 2004 with gym and reception area. This has replaced the disused open-air swimming pool that was originally on this site. To the left of the image is a green area known as “*The number 11 lawn*” where whole-school assemblies were originally held. The modern two-story “*Paddock Block*” provides the Humanities and English Departments with modern teaching bases. This block joins onto the school’s Chapel. The school is the only local authority maintained school in Wiltshire to employ the services of a school Chaplin.

The sixth-form is provided jointly by the school and by South Wilts Grammar School for Girls, some 15 minutes walk through the City centre. This arrangement sees a variety of courses in Years 12 and 13 now jointly taught, simultaneously providing a range of opportunities for students attending in the sixth-form. Over 98% of students from Year 11⁶ continue into the sixth-form, which offers mainly academic Advanced Level qualifications. A large majority of students, on average 93%, from the school’s sixth-form continue into Higher Education.

As a visitor to the school on the day of my interview, I was struck by a number of things. Firstly the general sense of order and cooperation that prevailed, this despite the appalling state of some of the school’s buildings at that time. Secondly the uniqueness of some aspects of the school such as the “*gown room*” for the choir, the Chapel in which, ironically, a Politics Lecture was being held and the two-site split that required students to cross a busy road unsupervised between lessons. Overall though, something special was in the air, and I believe that to be a buzz about learning. After the relative chaos of the school in which I was teaching at the time, it was as if I was stepping into another world. Everyday I now remind myself how lucky I am to be working with these young people in such a caring environment.

3.2 Those that together form this enquiry

In the writing that I am about to share with you, numerous key participants are involved. I feel that it is important at this stage to introduce these people to you, as they together form alongside me the motivation for this enquiry. I introduce these significant others myself, as I want these to come from my perspective of the shared life that we have, in which my role has been to bring them together within evolving boundaries that allow us to learn from the other.

⁶ Percentage based on the average number continuing onto the school’s sixth-form in the period 2001-2006 inclusive

Simon Riding: My strength and the other half of the coin

Figure 8: Image of Simon presenting at the 2004 BECTA conference



Simon and I met whilst both teaching at our former school “Westwood St. Thomas” over seven years ago. He has always been a tremendous support and encourager, not only to myself but also to everyone with whom he works. I saw, at Westwood St. Thomas, how he grew emotionally and physically into his role as a leader and to this day he retains an ideology and conviction of the value of education.

I have no doubt that Simon, now a Deputy Headteacher in a local authority maintained school in Wiltshire, will grow into a unique Headteacher who will drive forward his school with unending conviction whilst valuing the people within it.

Despite the double blows of developing rheumatoid arthritis over three years ago and also of seeing his father undergo intensive treatment for cancer, Simon still wants to come home at the end of the day and talk with vigour about the challenges that he has faced. It is this energy that is one of his essential qualities, and that I believe will continue for a lifetime. It is all these elements combined that allow me to love him as I do and for us to hold the shared life that we have.

Jack Whitehead (Academic tutor to Simon and I at the University of Bath)



Figure 9: Jack Whitehead with Jean McNiff retrieved from <http://www.jeanmcniff.com/vsmall5.JPG> on 31.10.07

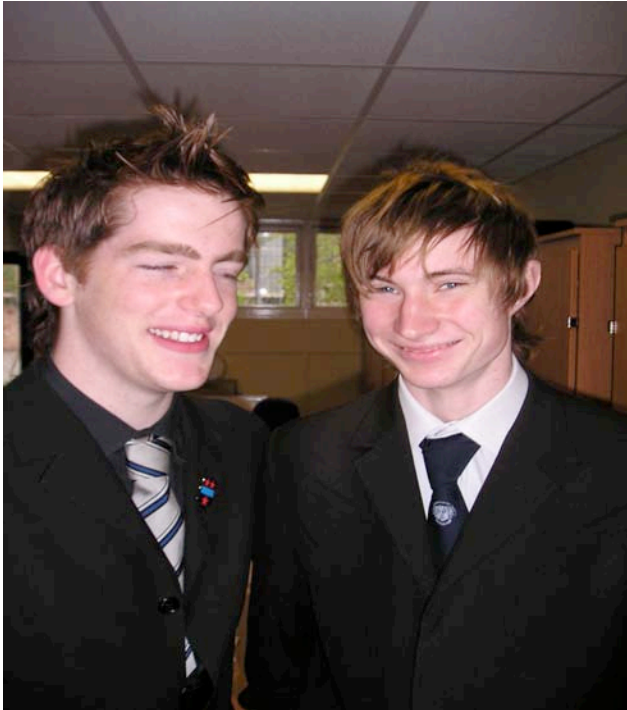
Jack is a unique individual whose passion for what he does extends far into the international arena. The benefits of his perspective on “*living educational theory*” and action research that embraces the “I” have been widely felt. I could not do him justice in an introduction such as this; all I can do is brush the surface. For all who come into contact with Jack, the warmth and compassion that he carries are an essential part of who he is. However tired and lacklustre I feel before meeting with Jack, I will always come away with a unique sense of feeling revitalised and ready for the challenges ahead.

I can see Jack now, sitting in his disordered office laughing out loud with his arms folded across his chest. Within this stance he embraces the anger at the injustice he sees around him alongside the joy of the discovery of new knowledge. This sense of injustice drives him to seek out new ways of being which are just and fair and has led him to fight for his cause with vigour and conviction.

This is the image that I have of him, and in a way his office reflects how out of disorder he can construct meaning, a living dialogic approach. One of his unique qualities is that he genuinely cares for others and holds unending belief in their capabilities. He believes never to have influenced anyone is his educational journey, instead allowing them to find their own way through. As one of his students, I would beg to differ.

Shane and Alex (generation one of the student researchers)

Figure 10: Shane and Alex upon joining the school's sixth form



I taught GCSE French to both Shane and Alex six years ago at our former school of Westwood St. Thomas. It was Shane who first taught me the importance of valuing students' contributions to research, and how working with them is much more valuable than working without them. It was he who first approached me and asked why I hadn't asked for his opinion in research that I was conducting at the time. Both Shane and Alex carry a unique quality of empathy for teachers and for their fellow students. They had already been a vital part of the work of developing student research at Westwood St. Thomas.

I was most fortunate when both decided to join the sixth-form at Bishop Wordsworth's School. This allowed the knowledge learnt from Westwood to evolve further in a new era of student-led research to begin. It is without doubt that the enormous steps forward that student research has taken would not have occurred without these two individuals. If I look back at what both have achieved, their involvement in research is staggering. They have presented at conferences, staff training days and have worked with student researchers as mentors. I was extremely sorry to lose these two unique people to University this year, but know that the values they have gained from their work as researchers and research mentors is something they will always retain.

Figure 11: Harry, Paddy, Theo, Chris and Fred generation two of the student researchers-shown from left to right in the image



These five individuals first caught my attention when I was teaching them French in Year 7. All five possessed very different qualities, some very reflective and analytical in their approach whilst others overtly displayed leadership and organisational skills. I do not think that any of us could have predicted what would come out of the original project undertaken in 2004, or the journey that they would undertake as a result.

The make-up of the original group has now been altered, and in some way we always knew that this would come. Different priorities led Fred and Theo to leave the group due to the pressures upon them. Whilst the people in the group are unique, I believe that what they have achieved is not. Their work is representative of all students' capacity to enhance their school. These students have been ambassadors and are pioneers in work yet to be undertaken. I shall always remember the influence that these individuals have had upon my own understanding of students-as-researchers and the joy that our joint work has brought to me.

Andy, Martin and Matt (the third generation researchers) and Alan and Jamie (fourth generation) (no image available)

These five students are now in the sixth-form at my current school and have researched alongside the others for over two years. They came forward to volunteer as researchers after the peer group assemblies in which the other generations presented their findings to the year group. Older than the second generation by two years, they entered the group and struggled initially to find their unique role within it.

After a period of tension between the new and the old, established roles began to emerge in relationships of mutual trust.

The H.E Researcher (*no image*)

Formerly of the University of Bath and Bath Spa University, this researcher has accompanied the development of student researchers through its seven-year timespan. Originally, she acted as research mentor to practitioner-researchers with Jack Whitehead, whilst this group was undertaking their Masters Degrees through Bath University.

The researcher was there when the students first became involved with the teacher-researcher group at my invitation. She has witnessed the evolvement of these students firstly into active research participants before working with them at my current school as research mentor to them. Her support has allowed the student researchers to gain in confidence and competency in their researcher roles, in that she has acted as a critical friend to the group from the outside, looking-in.

Although the boundaries between us have once again become impermeable and we now travel on different paths forward, I still retain the sense of pleasure from our shared enquiry together with the students.

Graham Lloyd



Figure 12: Image of Graham viewing the student researchers' first practice presentation

When I first moved to Bishop Wordsworth's School in September 2003, Graham was the first colleague to talk to me. He did not just do this by chance through meeting me in the staffroom, but rather came to my (then dismal and depressing) classroom to offer his support. Graham thinks and reflects a great deal on his own influence and also how he can improve the work of the school.

Recently having taken up the post of Deputy Headteacher, Graham is now looking to build momentum for the teaching and learning that takes place within the school. He is looking to be creatively compliant in his work, looking to open up traditional viewpoints to new thinking in the name of progress, whilst recognising the culture within which he works. He is asking us, as classroom practitioners, to learn to share and talk with each other, and that by doing so we may learn to know ourselves better.

I now go on to look at my first and second year in post within this location and with these individuals that I have introduced. I look to explore the relationships and shared living standards which began to emerge (or failed to emerge) during that time of transition to a new role.