

Chapter 7: Shared living standards of judgment as motivation for a life of enquiry

I have described to you the importance of my shared life with my husband as giving us shared living standards of judgment. These we take *into* and *from* our educational lives. I have explored with you how shared standards of judgment have developed similarly between the student researchers, my colleagues, the school and me. I now return to the shared dynamic between my husband and I, asking how this supports me in what I do and in giving me the motivation to enquire.

7.1 Emerging shared values through doing

Three years into my marriage and Simon and I are both still researching, both sharing a loving quality of relationship that allows us to enquire together and apart. We recognise our professional and personal lives and the connections shared between the two. No longer do we try to separate these as separate identities that we have. We recognise that the one supports the other.

“Th(is) text is a multi-media representation of an action research enquiry that utilises autobiography as a way of accounting for one educator’s movement from being a classroom teacher, through middle leadership and finally into senior school leadership. I argue that I am the educator that I am because of the life I have led and the life that I am currently leading.” (Riding, S. 2008, abstract)

Simon is making meaning of his move into Senior Leadership, exploring how narrative and personal experience define him in that role. He is sharing his journey of setting up a practitioner-researcher group in a school where practitioner-research previously did not occur. He is identifying how his relationship with the teachers in the group allows the individual to develop his/her voice and create listeners for these voices. In this work, he carries forward *valuing the other*, a living standard of judgment that emerged through the Westwood St. Thomas teacher-researcher group. Here he reflects upon coming to work with the sixth-form mentors at my school, for which he needed to overcome boundaries on behalf of both the schools. He is looking here to make the *possible probable* (Whitehead, Joan, 2004):

“However, recognising that I wanted to make the possible probable and recognising what this meant to Karen I really wanted to find a way to sort this out. For both of us this reflected the way in which we are bound by the institutions we work in and the

regulations surrounding them and that it was only through creative thinking that this event could happen.” (Riding, S., 2008, p.223)

The similarities in context between our two enquiries have only emerged through time, as we have embraced shared living educational standards of judgement to which we hold ourselves and the other to account. I am sharing with you my narrative of developing intergenerational student-led research as a force for change within a school. I believe that intergenerational research is key to developing a sustainable way of working. I am looking to make the *possible probable* (Whitehead, Joan 2004). These are some of the connections between Simon’s enquiry and my own.

There is also a danger that goes alongside living and enquiring together in a marriage. There is the temptation to analyse all that happens, to think beyond the pleasure of the moment to how I could interpret this event. We have both needed to learn when to let go, and to create space within our marriage outside of enquiry. Taking time to remember our roles as husband and wife, mother and father, I believe is fundamentally important:

“I do need to know when not to adopt a thoroughly inquiring approach and to leave life “unprocessed”, but deciding when and how to do this is also a part of living inquiringly.” (Marshall, 1999, p.2)

Our motivation in our professional life comes from the life-affirming energy that we hold together. I have energy for what I do in my professional life as I seek to recreate a loving way of being with those individuals with whom I work and enquire. It is the shared experiences between us that have led to the right conditions for relationships of trust to be formed. As Simon talks above of the importance of experience in making him the practitioner that he is, so Eisner (1998) talks of the primacy of experience as a fundamental part of living and enquiring:

“Like breathing, we regard experience as a condition that is ineluctably associated with being alive” (Eisner, 1998, p.15)

“It is one of our culture’s most significant tasks, one for which our schools have special responsibility, to provide the tools and to develop the skills through which the child can create his or her own experience.” (Eisner, 1998, p.15)

Eisner also shares Simon's and my own view that schools are there to serve and enhance the lives of the children in them. Simon in particular, referring to his life experience as a school refuser, holds this value close to him:

"This section of the thesis began with an exploration of what I believed was a fundamental experience in determining who I am: my experience of being a school refuser. Through this exploration I have been able to frame my relationships with family and friends as a way of explaining my own living educational theory."
(Riding, S., 2006, p.231)

The school has a social responsibility to respond to the needs of the child, yet within this the child can support the school in learning about learning. The experience on offer to the child can therefore be enhanced through student-led enquiry that explores what the school does and how to do it better. Improvements are made through learning about the significance of pedagogical experience as teachers in the classroom. I argue that by both teachers and students embracing learning, a constructive dialogue emerges that allows teachers to see again through younger eyes:

"...(There is) a narrowing (that) accompanies "growing up", from child to adult..It is the product of a detached viewpoint that separates "subject" from "object", "self" from "other" and "better" from "worse", regardless of context. The detachment that, needs must, comes to empower and protect us, swings our focus round from inside-out to outside-in. All of a sudden, things begin to resolve into a sharp, clear focus-sorted"! Carried away with our success, we may go as far as to regard our outside-in, objective view as the one and only "correct" one. We then hasten to instruct our children, learners of all kinds, young and old, to accept and learn it, whilst abandoning their naïve, inside-out view as wrong." (Rayner, 2006b, p.4)

I believe that through my experience of enquiry with student researchers, I am embracing again my childhood *inside, looking-out* (Rayner, 2005) view of the world and of the possibilities that it can offer me. Simon is similarly embracing this as he learns alongside the practitioner-researchers at his own school.

There were no pre-conceived standards to adhere to when I began this research, only the excitement of discovering that others were doing the same; looking to learn

alongside the learners in their own classrooms and see things from another perspective:

“Were we to mentally and habitually exchange places with our pupils or students, we, as teachers, would have to rely more on our imagination. We would have to deal with uncertainty and ambiguity and treat them as part of the learning process. We would not be able to plan everything in advance but would probably allow knowledge to emerge and grow in and through the practice. We would listen to our learners more carefully; indeed we would have their voices in our heads, and respond to their individual needs.” (Farren, 2005, p.3)

I have discovered the thrill of not knowing the next step that I must take. For once, I was not attempting to label what I was seeing and learning. I reacted alongside events instead of planning them. I avoided labelling the experiences I was having, as I realised that any attempt to do this would be to limit the possibility of the students’ work and to close myself off from the possibilities that it opened up. I was excited by the unexpectedness of the enquiry and by my own learning, as emphasised by the following:

“When in our teaching, our curriculum, and our research methods we emphasize the prompt classification and labelling of objects and events, we restrict our consciousness and reduce the likelihood that the qualities of which those objects and events consist will be experienced.”
(Eisner, 1988, p.17)

“If I learn something new I actually go to bed happy.”
(John Cleese interviewed by Michael Parkinson in Stoll, Earl & Fink, 2002, p.77)

“Educational research should strive to be ethical, creative and emancipatory and contribute to the imaginative acquisition of knowledge.”
(Lomax, 1998, p.2)

As a researcher, I have always been reminded of the importance of maintaining an objective view of the research process. Rayner (2005a) argues for us to become excited by research and to revel in the learning that it brings to us. If we are to ignore this excitement and to turn our backs on our own *inside, looking-out* (Rayner, 2005) view, telling ourselves that this does not promote validity of the research, then I

suggest that we are turning our backs on our very motivation and excitement as researchers. I do not wish this research to be done around and away from me, instead I wish to get my hands dirty and see clearly through my own eyes. I believe that only through lived experience can I truly understand this enquiry:

“As action researchers would agree, our subjectivity actively contributes to our knowledge of the things with which we now interact. Without this relational aspect, we could miss vital aspects about the “things” which we enquire into.” (Ladkin, 2005, p.113)

Learning is for me a living shared quality that stems from enquiry with others. In trying to understand how learning can be improved through the students’ eyes, I am seeking to further my knowledge about best learning practice. I am bringing myself into this enquiry. Ladkin (2005) describes three aspects related to subjectivity and action researchers:

“A placing of importance on the day-to-day world in which we live, rather than the abstracted world of scientific measurement and principals;

The importance of doing in developing knowing-the stance that there are certain things which can only be known through their enactment;

An aim to apprehend the world in a way that reveals its truth and acknowledging the way in which our subjectivity contributes to that truth.” (Ladkin, 2005, p.112)

I share with Ladkin the importance of knowing through experience and of the lived-in world as providing enquiry with the space to exist. It is only through being part of this space and this enquiry that I can fully comprehend my claims to knowledge. In this way it is only through experiencing *“intergenerational research”* that I can fully understand what it is and its implications. Whilst I could read about it and understand what I am reading, what these words communicate remains unknown. Similarly, *collaboration with others* is a lived experience in which all bring their own both subjective and objective views to the shared space we inhabit; subjectivity that supports the enquiry in finding motivation and direction. As a practitioner-researcher, I look to creatively work with the world around me so that I can truly know the space that I inhabit. It is only through living out shared values with others in my life that I can seek to improve what I experience:

“Examining the nature of a concept such as “influence” then, has limited potential for deepening knowing unless it is experienced as a lived phenomenon.”

(Ladkin, 2005, p.116)

Marshall (2004) talks about *living life through enquiry*, an idea that I believe shared similarities to Ladkin’s lived experience. Both require the immersion of the researcher in their enquiry to allow them to question and develop their epistemological way of being:

“I have an image of living continually in process, adjusting, seeing what emerges, bringing things into question. This involves, for example, attempting to open to continual question what I know, feel, do and want, and finding ways to engage actively in this questioning and process its stages.” (Marshall, 2004, p.2)

My husband also shares this way of being as he states:

“I share similar desires as Marshall (2004) in wanting to draw more sense from my life and understand the self more in order to improve my practice thus I am:

‘...seeking to bring attention into more moment of being and action...’

(Marshall, 2004, p.2)

I further connect with her calls for each researcher to develop their own sense of first-person research as we are all unique beings that need to inquire into our own lives in such a way as to make sense of them. (Marshall, 2004, p.2)”

(Riding, S., 2008, p.302)

This knowing through action is for me the pleasure of my life as a learner. On teacher-training days I awake with a smile. This is a day for me to reflect upon what has been and to consider the next steps. In contrast, each school day allows me to question what I am doing in the classroom and how I can improve upon this. The training days allow me an opportunity to return to and engage with theory, to know new ideas and to feel the excitement that their possibility evokes. These days give me space in which to reflect with colleagues on what has been and what is yet to come. The classroom gives me an arena in which to do this, turning scientific

principles into lived experience, so that they hold true value. I believe that, as a classroom practitioner, I need to engage with the theoretical and the practice, as one informs the other and provides me with a continued sense of motivation for what I do:

“Quite often living like this can be fun, and has the capacity to turn what might be daunting, mundane or duty-full activities into ones which are engaging, interesting, playful and opportunities for learning.” (Marshall, 1999, p.2)

“The life-world is the everyday world of practical, lived experience”

“This is the kind of knowing which is of particular significance to us in that which enables us to make things “work”.” (Ladkin, 2005, pp.112-116)

I interpret this kind of knowing as giving practitioners the motivation to enquire. Enquiries allow practitioners to look at what they enjoy doing, bringing meaning to their work. If the two are disconnected, then what a dull life it would be.

Cockburn (2000) quotes the words of a primary school teacher when asked about her motivation in her work, to which the primary teacher responds:

“I love getting a new class in September, thinking that by the time they leave me at the end of the year they would know so much more and it would be because of what I had taught them” (Cockburn, 2000, p.227)

I would partially share this teacher’s sentiments that her intrinsic motivation for what she does lies in her classroom teaching, but that describing herself as the instigator of knowledge leaves out most of the equation: the excitement that we gain as classroom practitioners which comes from our contact with students. If we focus only on teaching, we are ignoring the wealth of knowledge that each student brings with them into the classroom, their capacity for engagement and the creation of new knowledge. It is this contact with students that wills me into work each day: the excitement of the unexpected.

“Some people seem to view everyday events as opportunities for learning: they enjoy the challenge. For example, not so long ago, when one of us asked her father, in his late eighties, about his day, he told her that on his walk he decided to go down a particular street because “I haven’t been down it before and I wanted to find out more about it.” (Stoll et al., 2003, p.77)

Huberman (1993b), Helsby and McCulloch (1996) state that:

“Teachers who are, for example, in regularly changing roles, work in a supportive culture, and are reflective and able to participate in significant decision-making in school, maintain their motivation and satisfaction in the essential core of their work-classroom teaching.”(Huberman, Helsby & McCulloch, 1996, p.118)

Through the work that I embrace with the intergenerational researchers, a new community is being formed that learns together. This is an emergent community that expands and adapts to best fit its purpose i.e. supporting the school in knowing itself better.

It is a community that has been formed, not out of a pre-defined need by the school, but rather the specific desire of some students within the school to increase their capacity for enhancing the learning experience. This is a space that brings together a diverse range of stakeholders within the school and asks them to see with different eyes. It is a community asking the school to open its eyes to new possibilities of learning about itself.

“How can we help develop a love of learning from an early age? In our current education system, are we offering a curriculum appropriate to the needs of the learner? In higher education where talk is of knowledge transfer rather than pedagogy, are the learner’s needs being overlooked?

How can I, as a higher education educator initiate and help to co-create a curriculum with my learners? What if we did something different? Wouldn’t it be interesting to step into the shoes of the learner at the other end of our classroom and experience what it is like to be looking in from the other side?” (Farren, 2005, p.2)

7.2 Motivation through enquiry

“This phase of my inquiry marks a shift in my attention from the general to the particular. That is, from the general focus of how to create a learning environment that is supportive of the goals of the program to the creation of a safe space for learning and the creation of a loving and life affirming relationship with particular students.” (Hartog, 2004, p.77)

Church (2005) describes how networks can increase our capacity for love, not solely that of the group working together as a whole, but for each individual within that structure. I reflect upon my own growing sense of love for humanity that has arisen as a result of my involvement with the student researchers. This has allowed me to embrace my enemy as a potential critical friend. Certain moments held within my memory come to mind: a summer's sports day when I sat upon the grass with Shane (1) and talked, oblivious to the runners on the track: walking to my classroom after break and exchanging a smile with Harry and Theo (2): realising the potential of my colleague's question "What's this all for?" with regards student-research. These memories have arisen from our joint work and the experiences that we have shared, and they have challenged each of us to work in a new way. Cho (2005) calls this love we share a "*common pursuit of new knowledge within the world*", and I for one am very glad to have experienced this within my work.

Church (2005) also talks of "*working together for a common purpose*" within communities. I believe that alongside this shared purpose; we all have our individual reasons for our involvement. Whilst the third-generation researchers are looking for increased responsibility as they move towards the sixth-form, the second-generation are looking for their work to be valued across the school community. The H.E. Researcher working alongside the group is looking to see how intergenerational student-led research adds to the current debate on students-as-researchers. The Headteacher asks what his school can benefit from work of this type. Each person asks: "*What can I learn from this?*" Although we have our noble reasons for being involved within the research, we all have our own selfish reasons behind this. In this way, Church has expressed knowing herself better as a starting point for her research:

"I start from an understanding that knowing myself better will enhance my capacity for good action in the world. Through questioning myself and writing myself on to the page, I can trace how I can resist community formations, whilst simultaneously wanting to be in community with others." (Church, 2005, abstract)

In a similar way it is our own learning as teachers in the classroom that is our intrinsic motivation for doing what we do: that daily source of renewal and surprise that wills us to participate in a wider professional capacity as outlined by Huberman (1993). I would argue that it would be impossible to find a classroom practitioner that does not

wish to gain personally from his/her classroom experience, and who does not enjoy being occasionally surprised by his/her own learning.

Cockburn (2000) cites another teacher's (William's) motivation for his professional life:

"You just know that you have made a difference in their lives." (Cockburn, 2000, p.229)

Yet, at the same time, do they not make a difference to our lives? I would argue that alongside student learning in William's classroom, William himself is also evolving in his understanding of his own practice whilst enjoying the sense of achievement that he personally gains from seeing the students' progress.

Working with intergenerational researchers has allowed me to recognize that it is still the *classroom experience* that is my intrinsic motivation for what I do. The researchers have allowed me great insight into their learning processes and I have learned alongside them about how to enhance my classroom practice. If I were to remove myself from the classroom, a large part of me would be unfulfilled, a part that that would yearn for a return to that environment.

I consider how Simon, my husband, is now virtually without classroom contact in his role as Assistant Headteacher. I remember how vividly he used to describe his classroom experiences within his former role at Westwood St. Thomas School, where he was Head of English. His face would light up at the mention of a name or of a situation that he had encountered. Still he retains this sense of pleasure in his classroom experience:

"I can still do it! My value added results were the best in the Department, despite the roughly six weeks that I wasn't there to teach the group. It helps to know that I still can rise to the challenge." (comments by Simon on GCSE results day August 2007)

"For teachers, going to school must be about learning as it is about teaching. They must have time each day to learn, plan lessons and critique student work, and support improvement as members of learning teams..Staff development cannot be something educators do only on specified days in the school calendar. It must be part of every educator's daily work schedule." (Hirsch, 2001, p.10)

This relates to Church's description of a reason behind networks of people working together:

"A network thrives on the drive, commitment and passion of its members. It is the combination of diversity (many autonomous institutions and individuals) and a common purpose, which gives a network power and energy. It is thus vital for a network to know what resources its members have and would be prepared to contribute and share. The aim of a contributions assessment is to hook into where the energy lies for the members, and involve people through their passion and drive to make a difference." (Church, 2005, p.24)

Simon is finding his place within a new network at Bitterne Park School, in which he argues that the leadership team give the school its drive and common purpose, ultimately derived from the school's Headteacher:

"Even in my early days as a senior leader it was pretty obvious that it was the senior team making the difference within the school: it's the senior team that sets the vision and direction, recruits the staff, trains the staff and so on. Without the strong senior leadership team in place, the school wouldn't be the outstanding, as assessed by OfSted in March 2006, school that it is. One conversation with an Advanced Skills Teacher (AST) within the school drew out the following comments:

'...it's such a strong presence in the school...the senior team here runs things and motivates me to want to improve what I'm doing...it's about the challenge it sets...' (Conversation with AST, February 2005)." (Riding, S., 2008, p.187)

I am arguing for an extended network within a school, one that taps into and embraces students as a part of their shared community. I am arguing for the school network to be opened up to student involvement, so that student research may support teachers in their motivation to learn as individuals and collaboratively within their existing networks. Through utilising the resource of students-as-researchers, boundaries between Departments, school stakeholders and the Leadership team begin to open up. This desire to contribute to the school was recently expressed by the second-generation researchers:

"Throughout our time as researchers we have worked together with a wide range of people. This has been an essential element in making our research successful, as it

means that we gain and share more knowledge from and with these other groups. The research term of “triangulation”, we use to emphasize the importance of groups of people working together to make this research work. We believe that without the involvement of these groups: teachers, our Headteacher, other students and our research mentor, the whole research process would be compromised” (shared voice of the second-generation researchers, June 2006)

As the students seek a channel for their energy to enquire in their evolving role as student researchers, Simon’s intrinsic motivation for what he does fulfils a similar role, as he looks to embrace the learning he experiences within his new position. He is finding that the colleagues with whom he works allow him the same sense of learning that I share with the students:

“I recognise that when my leadership team is faced with a challenge or issue, we do not sit around and draw on theory in order to solve it, but rather we draw on our own experiences and lives in order to come to a solution.” (Riding, S., 2006, p.201)

The progress that the school has made under Simon’s own initiatives allows him to revel in this *work well done*. Simon and I are both channelling the passion for this learning through creating a narrative of experiences that may lest be forgotten:

“My own personal engagement is with narratives and stories that remind me of the buzz and passion involved in the profession that I am part of.”
(Riding, S., 2008, p.186)

These narratives allow us to make meaning from what has occurred and to reflect upon the images, words and questions that arise in our minds:

“Images, phrases, concepts and questions around which I organise my sense of inquiring can arise from a variety of sources, but when they “appear” they can have an intensity which makes me recognise them as powerful, or invest them with such power. They have an evocative quality for me, repeatedly catching my attention, and/or are rich phrases which echo in different areas of my life.” (Marshall, 1995, p.4)

This reflection allows me to re-find energy and motivation for the ongoing enquiry. As time passes and the enquiry evolves, this energy shifts to different foci. Some issues have been resolved and some now seem less important than they once did; yet as

my focus changes I still carry the resultant energy from my past investment into these. The enquiry has been altered by the energy invested in it from its various participants. One enquiry merges into another as the journey through life continues. Alongside this journey I retain the energy from the past in the shared standards that I seek to live out. I disagree with Marshall that past enquiries are emptied of energy, as I believe that the energy from an enquiry continues with the life of that researcher:

“Typically, when I engage in the kinds of enquiry I am discussing, I notice that my focus of interest and questioning moves on as I sufficiently resolve specific issues. There may be an iterative process in which I cycle through similar themes again, but enquiries which I have lived full tend to become emptied of energy.”

(Marshall, 1995, p.5)

Enquiries that have been fulfilled give a sense of achievement and learning. Enquiries that have not been fulfilled are experiences to be learnt from. We carry this new knowledge from these differing experiences. In the era of self assessment by schools, enquiry with students can play an increasing role in allowing the school to know itself better.

I now move onto the significance of these shared living standards of judgment as motivation for my life of enquiry in the following Chapter. I hope now to make meaning of what has been and how this will effect what is to come.