How do I contribute to the education of myself and others through improving the quality of living educational space? The story of living myself through others as a practitioner-researcher.

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A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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Signature: ………………………………………………………………….

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Acknowledgements

My darling wife, Karen and beautiful daughter, Sophia without whom life would have no love or meaning.

My parents, who taught me the value and importance of life.

Jack, who changed things forever.

The staff and students who make it all happen every day.

This thesis is dedicated to the memory of my father who sadly passed away before it was examined. God bless and keep you dad. I miss you.

How do I contribute to the education of myself and others through improving the quality of living educational space? The story of living myself through others as a practitioner-researcher.

Abstract

Within this text I propose and demonstrate an original relationally dynamic standard of judgement within my practice of *Living Myself Through Others*. I explore the on-going nature of transition between living educational spaces upon myself and how this process of change is addressed as I move through different stages of my career and life. I argue that I am able to improve the quality of the living educational space because of the relationships and experiences that I have had, alongside the living core values that I hold. This thesis reflects on the potential impact of enabling teachers to engage as teacher-researchers within their own school and accounts for the process I went through in order to make this happen. I further argue for the need to consider how practitioner accounts are assessed in order to ensure that the future of education is driven forward through the development of teachers as researchers influencing what educational knowledge is and how it is produced. The following text is a living educational theory action research enquiry that utilises autobiography as a way of accounting for one educator's transitions 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. This thesis addresses the vastly important influence of relationships within education and explores how these relationships impact on my practice as an educator. The text incorporates and captures these relationships through enabling these others to speak through their own voice. This thesis explores how I was able to create the shared living educational space necessary to enable teacher-research to occur and flourish.

Preface

I wanted 'I' to be the first word of the text. I wanted 'I' to start things off. I believe that 'I' is the starting point. From this 'I' will emerge 'we' and 'us'.

Figure 1: Simon Riding, July 2004

This is me. I look quite happy and relaxed. This photo was taken in July 2004 on my honeymoon in Canada. My wife, Karen, is taking this image. This is how she sees me at the time. This is how she is able to capture me. I am looking into the camera: I am looking through the camera and beyond. I am looking into her. I am fully present at that moment in time. I am connected to hope and the future. That is why I am happy. I am the writer of the text you are reading. I think it's important for the reader to be able to picture the writer so that they can begin to connect with him or her.

For me this thesis is a multi-media collection of ideas that have been brought together in order to account for whom and what I am. Okri echoes this idea through reference to life being a collection of ideas for us to make sense of:

> 'And our world, as on a cinema screen, can be one in which messages are flashed, projected. Maybe we flash the messages, maybe we project them. But their meaning is left for us to decipher…I'm talking about the little secret messages that life sends us, sends to us alone.' (Okri, 2003, p. 24)

What follows are some of the secret platonic messages that have been sent to me that I would like to share with you.

'Oh Simon, I hope you're taking your vitamins every day! You know, you don't have to be the top of the class, we will still love you.' (Mum and Dad, 1974-present)

I always remember these frequent words from my parents. There seemed, to them, to be some kind of link between the taking of vitamin tablets each day without fail, and happiness. These words carry within them the eternal hope that my parents carry with them each day. Perhaps their nature is summed up in the fact that they didn't push me that hard at school, when I was a student. To clarify this a little, I mean that they weren't constantly demanding that I work, but rather left me to my own devices, knowing that *support* was crucial, rather than *force*. Maybe this is what gave me the comfort within a school setting. Maybe this has really influenced the way I am today. Whatever it was, I certainly did feel comfortable, when I was there. Despite being school phobic for over twelve months when I was at Primary school, I still managed to leave school with straight 'A Grades' at GCSE. But more importantly, I managed to leave with a passion for and commitment to gaining knowledge through education. I loved every day at secondary school as I loved the recognition it gave me in feeling valued. I loved the fact that I could do what was given to me and gained success from it. I enjoyed finding out new things and discovering. I left valuing learning. This is something that would stay with me through the rest of my life. This is something that would inspire me to bring to those that I teach.

I want to one day be a school leader. I want to direct and improve: I want the responsibility that goes with this. Perhaps more importantly, I want the chance to put my ideas on education into practice to improve the lives of those who interact with my school. Firstly though, I wanted and needed to be an Assistant Headteacher. I wanted to be an exceptional Assistant Headteacher. I want to work with integrity and understanding of those around me. I want to respect others and be respected by them. I want to be able to *live through* those who I lead. I want to be able to use my position of influence to make students' lives better. I want to improve the life chances of young people. I want to move towards what I see is my purpose in life: enabling others to improve their world. School Phobic to School leader: it's an interesting journey.

With growth comes understanding and change, sometimes for the better and sometimes for the worse. Through life I grow. Through my thesis I am arguing that I exist within a multiplicity of selves (Hill and Stephens, 2005) that at times work

harmoniously together to help me to make things better and improve the quality of the educational space that I inhabit, but at other times exist to reinforce the living contradiction that I am. By this, I mean that my *self* can be split depending on the many personal and professional roles that I take on: the loving, warm and dedicated husband to my wife; the loving and caring son to my family; and the professional at School that seeks to make things better and improve the quality of education for those I come into contact with. Whilst I acknowledge that these things are not distinct, there are times when they come into conflict with each other: when at times I have to deliver the hard-message whilst wanting to appreciate the other in-front of me. However, what seem to join them are the values I carry with me into these roles: I bring the same dedication to my professional life as I do to my personal life: the sense of wanting to improve and draw from others the best that they can be. As I have moved through my career, through teacher into leadership, I have added to my repertoire of selves. This thesis explores this side of leadership, what I refer to as the living self in relation to others: the others may be other people, but at times are also the others of my own self that I live through.

Through my thesis I intend to explore the changing nature of the 'I' that I am: how as a teacher I felt lost, young and inexperienced; how as a middle leader I felt relaxed, confident and comfortable with my life, particularly after meeting my wife, my co-enquirer; how as an inexperienced senior leader I felt like I was initially struggling to find my own identity. These provide examples of the complex nature of the 'I' that exists. I intend to explore how the 'I' changes through the roles that I have undertaken and how it has been responsive to the experiences that I have had.

I further want to demonstrate how the 'I' that I am has moved to a 'we' through my practice. I want to demonstrate how I live through a relationally dynamic standard of judgement within my practice of *living myself through others*. By this I mean that I am aware of and respond to the relationships that I have with others and recognise that as an individual I must be fluid enough to change and adapt to the circumstances that I encounter. I want to explore how I have made things better for others within education through my ability to contribute to and improve the quality of the living educational space that I exist within. Through this I am exploring how the 'I' has influenced and has been influenced by the 'we'.

Beyond this, I am exploring the institutional influence on the 'I', in the sense of Foucault (1977). I argue that the conditions under which I have worked have helped

to determine the type of practitioner that I am. I can further reflect that as I have progressed through my career and gained promotions the influence over me has changed and likewise my influence over others and the space I am part of has also changed. I am exploring the ways in which I am influencing and being influenced by the institutions *and the individuals* of which I am a part of.

In order to clarify this I offer the following model that I have developed to demonstrate these ideas:
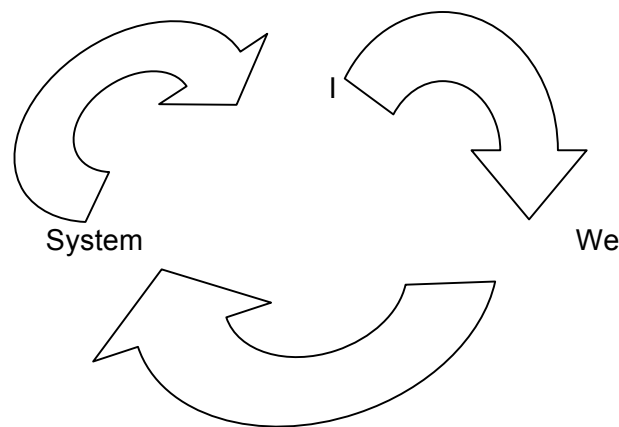
Figure 2: Model to show cyclical influence of relationships within a wider system

I argue that it is essential for the individual to understand the self, the 'I' (the micro level), before they can then understand and influence the other, the 'we' (the meso level), before then understanding and influencing the systems that are at work (the structural level). The cyclical nature of this relationship recognises the influence of the system on the individual: for me the micro, meso and structural levels are linked via relationships and this is the reason why I focus on relationally dynamic standards of judgement. Through this thesis I draw out the relationships and influence of these elements on my life and practice. The next section will clarify the research stories that have emerged to frame this thesis.

Introduction

Within this section I aim to introduce the reader to my initial arguments within this thesis, mainly of my desire to produce a text that is engaging and inspiring both to myself through the account that I create and for others to want to engage with it and learn from it. Furthermore, the reader will be introduced to the two schools that are the geographical sites of this research. The reader will also read a break down of each of the sections of this thesis and a summary of the content of those sections.

The research question that guides this thesis is '*How do I contribute to the education of myself and others through improving the quality of living educational space? The story of living myself through others as a practitioner-researcher*' This question has emerged through the experiences that I have had through my career. This question encapsulates the passion, drive and desire that I live by each day. I believe that it summarises my own value base and drives me on day after day. This question incorporates the key elements of my own ontological being.

My present research programme into the above question has evolved from research for my Masters dissertation on *'Living myself through others. How can I account for my claims and understanding of a teacher-research group at Westwood St Thomas School?'* (Riding, 2003) The major transformation in my question from my master's dissertation enquiry is in the relationship between my understanding of the social and environmental influences that open and limit possibilities for action and my understanding of the epistemological significance of the relationally dynamic awareness in *living myself through others*.

In constructing the story of *living myself through others as a practitioner researcher in education*, I intend to make an original contribution to educational knowledge through expressing, clarifying and communicating the meanings of a relationally dynamic, ontological value of living myself through others. The originality of the contribution lies in the narrative process of forming the living epistemological standard of judgment of *living myself through others*, from the exploration of the implications of asking, researching and answering the question, '*How do I contribute to the education of myself and others through improving the quality of living educational space?*' This original contribution is demonstrated through my exploration of my practice, and in particular considering the transitions that have provided opportunities

for educational growth. This standard of judgement is fluid in nature and has grown with me.

As a starting point within this thesis I want to clarify for the reader my basic desires to:
- creatively engage with the ideas of others
- communicate my ideas within a creative form
- demonstrate my personal engagement with this work through my passionate account.

As evidence to support and exemplify my ideas, I refer to Evans (1995) and feel the passion she feels when she comments in her action research Ph.D. thesis:

> 'My excitement at the possibility of using story in a creative way was related to my strong feeling that I would like teacher knowledge to be more widely shared in schools, to be accessible in its language, and to be captivating for its audience.' (Evans, 1995)

I sense that more personalised and passionate accounts are required that reflect the nature of the profession, being a personalised and passionate profession. In 100 years time, if a spaceman looked over our library shelves at the writing on education will they summarise from it that education was about people? That it was about improving people? That it was about emotions and values? Or will they think that it was about experiments, and objects and other things that don't cry when you poke them? I agree with Bassey (1992) in his Presidential Address to the British Education Research Association (BERA) in his claims that:

> '…too many research papers are expressed in clumsy English, overloaded with terminology that is familiar to few people, poorly structured, long-winded, and in general written from the perspective of the writer without concern for the audience.' (Bassey, 1992, p. 10)

In this respect I also wonder who these traditional educational reports are written for. Who is the audience? Who is the readership? Do these reports really engage potential leaders and managers to improve their practice? Will these studies provide a sound research base to support the work of schools as they strive for improvement? Will the mere existence of a *National College for School Leadership* (N.C.S.L.) research database promote the development of community and promote the creation of new knowledge? By traditional, I am referring to a social science perspective of research that is 'done to' subjects. Perhaps what I am looking for is

something that has a little more bite: something that can engage the reader within the text and demand that they take note of the content. I am arguing that more of an impassioned response is needed, in the sense of Michael Polanyi's (1958) passionate participation of the knower within the production of the known. I am arguing for practitioners to engage in accounting for their own practice through creating their own living educational theories (Whitehead, 1989) as a way of improving practice. This thesis is my response to these concerns. This thesis is from an Assistant Headteacher writing about being an Assistant Headteacher; it is a teacher-researcher writing about being a teacher-researcher. It is a text that supports Self-Study of Teacher Education Practices (a Special Interest Group of the American Educational Research Association) research as a way of positively influencing the practice of education.

The Schools

I would like to offer my understanding of the two schools that will feature within this text. I want to now outline for you my impression of the two Schools that have dominated my career to date and will further dominate this text. Some of these comments may seem to be a little 'direct', but I want to establish from the start my intention to create a narrative that is not afraid to communicate a truth, no matter how harsh it may seem. By 'truth' I mean the ability to say when things don't go well alongside when they do: the giving of the 'hard' message. I am reflecting on Kemmis (2006) and his arguments for:

> '…the need for action researchers and practitioner researchers to be willing to tell unwelcome truths.' (Kemmis, 2006, p. 474)

Westwood St Thomas (1998 – 2004)

I will always remember the journey to School, to Westwood St Thomas. It was a very stop-start journey, that took me through a great deal of traffic. Whilst it was relatively short in distance, it took some time being stuck in traffic. I didn't seem to get time to think.

Westwood St Thomas School is a 13-19 Upper School on the west side of Salisbury. Salisbury has a number of different types of schools within it, and Westwood is the only truly comprehensive school, drawing students from all backgrounds and abilities. The most recent OfSted report, from my time at the School, commented:

'Both the key stage 2 performance of the contributory middle schools and the school's own standardised test data indicates that the student cohort, though having a full range of ability, is significantly biased to the less able band. Far more students than usual, in a comprehensive school, are significantly behind their age expectation in attainment at entry and many have a range of literacy and numeracy difficulties. The overall capability of the student cohort is well below that of a typical comprehensive school. Whilst all students are well cared for, many experience a variety of social and economic disadvantage in their backgrounds…' (Westwood St Thomas' OfSted Report, 1998)

Whilst this OfSted report is a number of years old, in terms of being a school, it has struggled significantly with sustaining improvement in its performance over time. The School never seemed to be able to move forward in a coherent way and secure year on year improvement. I always found this frustrating, as I was somebody who wanted things to improve to give the students that walked through the door the best possible chances in life. The School seemed to have an inbuilt culture that placed a ceiling on the limits and potential: it seemed to live down to expectation through both staff and students.

Through my M.A. dissertation (Riding, 2003) I explored in great detail the early part of my own career and how I felt the culture of Westwood St Thomas helped me to grow and supported me to reflect on and improve my own practice. I commented:

'I joined Westwood St Thomas Upper School in September 1998 as a Newly Qualified Teacher just as the previous Head announced her retirement after many years of service to the school. I attached little significance to the timing of the two events, although some would argue that greatness must follow! However, the arrival of a new Headteacher from Bristol at the start of my second year was of such significance and direct influence over my career that I would only fully realise this four years later'

With this new Head came change. Even from my own inexperienced outlook on education at that time it was clear to see that staff seemed to have been crying out for a change of leadership that would be strong and creative: somebody who could take the school into the 21st century. With the new Headteacher came that required change: a focus on teaching and learning; a coherent School Development Plan; a fresh approach to placing faith in staff to do their jobs; and ultimately, a desire to try things out.' (Riding, 2003, p.11)

And:

> 'Significantly the shift was more direct, asking practitioners to move towards being reflective on their own practice and being responsible for this reflection. A sense of self development seemed to be implied through this with staff asked to initiate a process of change.' (Riding, 2003, p.13)

Within the School, the mentioned Headteacher was tremendously significant in implementing change processes and also in opening the door of possibilities in terms of how to improve individual practice. With him came support and understanding of how teachers can actively reflect on their practice and improve it and the power of this.

Westwood was a School that struggled to allow its students to achieve their potential. Many of the basic systems were not in place to support student achievement and the lack of these meant that the School was a very tough School to work in. My impression was that staff were very often chasing their tails and very often gave up because the job became too vast to try and overcome. On an individual level staff were trying to create these systems that should have existed at a whole school level. Alongside this, on a daily basis there was a great deal of confrontation and challenge from students.

As a middle leader when I left this school, I was firmly at the heart of the school. It is very often that challenging schools bond staff together and this was certainly the case at Westwood. I felt part of a strong team in terms of the closeness of staff.

Bitterne Park (2004 – 2006)

The journey to and from School was always an enjoyable part of the day. It was a longer journey than my previous one mainly travelling down the A36, yet I didn't get stuck in traffic. The longer, freer journey meant that I had time to think and understand the day. I had time to regenerate. By the time I arrived home I had dealt with many issues that I had to deal with and I could embrace my home life with some certainty and clarity. In some ways this journey reflected the freedom that the School gave me in unlocking my own creativity and sense of freedom. I drove past the edge of the New Forest and saw the wildlife and nature present within it. I saw the ponies of the New Forest eating their hay. I saw the changing seasons as they occurred. Admittedly, it was usually very dark when I was driving during the very early morning

or late at night, but I still managed to catch glimpses at times of the natural world. This helped to inspire me.

Bitterne Park can easily be described as a constantly improving School. It is a School that doesn't stand still and that wants to keep moving and improving. The School has grand plans and works hard to fulfil them. It is a very successful School.

OfSted commented during the 2006 Inspection:

> 'Bitterne Park is an outstanding school in which students flourish: almost all fulfil their potential. It is a mature, well run community in which relations between staff and students are founded on respect, care and aspiration and all share a sense of purpose.' (Bitterne Park School OfSted Report, 2006)

Perhaps one of the things that drew me to it was the friendliness of the School. In particular, the senior team works very hard but creates a very good atmosphere to be a part of. This is certainly down to the leadership of the Headteacher who promotes responsibility and accountability within the team that is then spread throughout the school. The Senior Team is a very strong and cohesive team that works well together: it is very much a model of how a team should work together, allowing strengths to emerge within it. This School was able to give me the drive that I was searching for: the chance to creatively make improvements at a whole school level. A culture existed of success: that staff and students recognised the value of education and improvement and placed this high on the agenda. This was still, however, an inner-city School with inner-city issues. However, it seemed to be getting things right. In the 2006 OfSted, the School was classed as 'outstanding'.

The content of the sequences

The following is a summary of the text that follows. I want to provide you with a brief outline of how I have structured the text.

Sequence 1 Values in Education

Within this section I want to explain to the reader what my own core values are that I attempt to live my life by both professionally and personally. Within this section I want

to explicate my own living educational theory and outline my approaches to action research. I also want to explain my understanding of living educational space.

Within this section I want to be able to show the nature of the living and creative methodology that I am constructing in order to support the claims that I am making. I want to essentially argue that I am using a creative and emerging methodology that is resulting from the text that I am writing, rather than following a more traditional approach to methodology that seeks to outline and plan in advance of the research what needs to be done to find the answer to the research questions. I want to argue that my methodology is refining itself and is responsive to the needs of the enquiry. I want to argue that this in itself is essentially mirroring my responsive and reflective approach to middle and senior leadership. I approach this section through reflecting on the significant others that I have been involved with through my educational life.

I want to give the reader a flavour of the people who have emerged as significant people within my career and to explain how they have influenced me. I also want to present examples of relationships that I have had that I feel have been influential in my own development. I also argue that I have influenced and been influenced by others and attempt to illustrate this.

I want to clearly argue that the values I hold are based on the relationships that I have with others and that it is through these relationships that my values qualify themselves and respond to the living environment I am part of.

I also want to be able to explore the nature of the Ph.D. criteria and be able to demonstrate what my evolving understanding of these criteria is and how I feel it applies to the work that I am undertaking. I will also explore my views on what constitutes educational knowledge and how I believe I have successfully met the criteria that would justify the award of a Ph.D. for this thesis. I also want to demonstrate how I am moving the debate forward on how to judge practitioner accounts within the Academy with my original contributions to knowledge.

Sequence 2 The Past

Within this section I want to be able to explain to the reader my own personal past and narrative that has helped to construct my value base. I want to explore the key

influences on my developing understanding of educative practice. I will look at two key aspects of my Past: my *self* and my time at Westwood St Thomas School.

I focus on the key personal issues that have helped to construct my *self.*

Through reflecting on these key issues I want to be able to present reflections on my time as a school refuser and also be able to present the reflections of those who also had involvement in this event. I want to argue that my own personal life narrative is massively crucial and important in determining the educator that I am and that my life history determines how I approach my life as an educator.

I show in detail my experiences as a teacher, manager and middle leader during my 6 years at Westwood St Thomas School, from 1998 – 2004, as I moved from being a *Newly Qualified Teacher* to being a Head of Faculty. I want to try and understand how this has helped prepare me for Assistant Headship.

I want to show and reflect on the range of different experiences that I have gained from my time at Westwood St Thomas School and be able to allow the reader to understand how these experiences have begun to prepare me for School leadership.

I want to also paint a picture of my classroom and approaches to teaching and learning that I have taken in my early career, particularly focusing on my belief that I create an open, honest, safe and democratic classroom. I also want to show my emerging approach to leadership as being an inclusive, democratic style within my middle leader role.

I want to argue that my experiences at Westwood St Thomas, through my clear developing understanding of action research and reflective practice, helped to prepare me for senior leadership. I further argue that the influence of the significant others that I came into contact with helped me to prepare for this.

Sequence 3 The Present

Within this section I want to be able to record the experiences of my first 18 months in post as Assistant Headteacher at Bitterne Park School. I want to be able to review my practice and focus on key issues that I have taken on within my role. I want to be

able to account for my learning over this time. I want to be able to come to some understanding of the role of what it means to be an Assistant Headteacher. I also want to be able to reflect on my own growing sense of educative practice in comparison to my understanding from sequence 1 and sequence 2 of this study. This section aims to reflect the difficulties associated with managing transition between roles and schools and account for how I tried to do this myself.

Within this section I want to argue that holding onto my own sense of values and beliefs is what helped me to deal with this transition. I argue that keeping in touch with significant others is crucial in order to support transition. I also want to argue that dealing with the sense of change is vastly under-valued and that there needs to be a heightened awareness of the impact of change on individuals.

Sequence 4 The Future

Throughout this section I want to look at the further implications of this thesis and argue that those who engage with the text can gain from it. I explore how my journey has identified some key issues which I believe need to be embraced through education. I return to the original contributions that I make to knowledge through this thesis and further clarify them. I explore the nature of teacher-research and support my claims through reference to teacher-researchers. I argue that practitioner accounts need to be valued and circumstances need to be established to support the work of teacher-researchers in order to improve the quality of educational research that is emerging.

You will now move into Sequence 1 where I will initially reflect on my own values that I hold as an educator and explain the key original contributions to knowledge that I offer through this thesis.

Sequence 1 Values in Education

In this section I intend to show the reader how I carry with me my own living educational values (Whitehead, 1989) and how these have emerged through my practice over time. I offer the reader my explanations of 'living myself through others', 'living educational space' and my own living educational theory. I further explain my understanding of action research. In my abstract I make the claim that, 'This thesis addresses the vastly important influence of relationships within education and explores how these relationships impact on my practice as an educator. The text incorporates and captures these relationships through enabling these others to speak through their own voice.' In order to demonstrate this I refer to my experiences with significant others.

It is essential that I begin with what I believe to be the central core vales and standard of judgement that underpin both my own work, life and also this writing. These values have emerged from within my practice over the last nine years and are integral to my own personal vision, but are also built from my own autobiographical experiences over time. Essentially, the value of *living myself through others* is the core element of this text, which I will explore in detail later on. However, from the outset my values are about individual students that I teach improving: that is my passion. It is through the claims I make that I wish to express my own living educational theory that has emerged, and is still emerging even at the point of writing this, over my professional career as a practitioner.

I want to be able to communicate to you the values that I feel are important to me within my life. I want to also be able to explain where I feel these values have emerged from over time. This is because I feel that my living values have emerged and are emerging as a result of the experiences that I encounter and create through my life, both educational and non-educational experiences. It is through these experiences, and significantly the dialogical experiences when I attempt to understand *others,* that I move forward in my understanding of my own values. However, my values are rooted within my own autobiographical experiences: my professional self and personal self are intertwined and influence each other. I am the practitioner that I am because of who I am and the life that I have had.

My understanding of my life and its links to my practice seems to connect with Senge's (1990) sense of *Personal Mastery*:

'Personal mastery goes beyond competence and skills, though it is grounded in competence and skills. It goes beyond spiritual unfolding or opening, although it requires spiritual growth. It means approaching one's life as a creative work, living life from a creative as opposed to reactive viewpoint.' (Senge, 1990, p. 141)

For me this echoes my approach to my career: the attempt to creatively embrace the opportunities that I have and be able to use this sense of creativity to be able to improve the quality of the living educational space. Senge addressed the issues of life construction and the sense that the individual can construct their own life: that we have control over our own experiences. This is also evident in Eisner's (1993) notions of human beings creating their own experiences and the quality of these experiences depend on the way they employ their own minds (Eisner, 1993, p. 5). This is something I value and believe: that the human being has the ability to create their own life direction through the choices that they make. It is through this belief that I approach my work as a teacher and leader. It is through this sense of choice that I work on a day-to-day level with my students.

I have always approached life as looking at what I can gain from it: at what opportunities I can get from it. I have always been a very ambitious person: somebody who wants to get to the top, whatever that was. I've never been quite sure where this has come from: the son of a working class family from Blackburn. Yet, through my life I have always attempted to 'better' myself at whatever I do. Hence, on one level, the desire to gain a Ph.D. after gaining an M.A. was my attempt to improve as there was something out there that I could strive for. I think it was a natural consequence that I was able to connect to the action research approach, and in particular Whitehead's (2003) ideas, to educative improvement. An approach that started with 'How can I improve….?' seemed to directly tap into my sense of being ambitious: my life itself is simply about asking the question, 'How can I improve?' My values centre on embedding this approach into those I teach.

I am in support of Whitehead (2003) when he comments:
'I am suggesting that the unique constellation of values, embodied in the practices of each s-step researcher, moves the researcher to accept a responsibility to account for their own practice and learning in terms of their values.' (Whitehead, 2003, p. 9)

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This thesis is me taking the responsibility to account for my own practice and learning, for others to encounter and validate. This thesis is the account of how I have attempted to improve over the last nine years. It is my view that in the vastly important job of educating others, I have a responsibility to improve and be held to account for my decisions and choices.

In the next section I will explain my original contribution to knowledge of my relationally dynamic standard of judgement of *living myself through others*.

1.1 Living myself through others

Within this section I want to explain my original contribution to knowledge and to demonstrate how I am drawing on the work of Thayer-Bacon (1995) in terms of understanding relational epistemology and the influence of this on the development of my living educational theory. I refer to the work of Connelly & Clandinin (1999) in terms of their expression of 'stories to live by' and 'narrative landscapes' in helping me to explain my standard of judgement. I draw on this to reflect the importance of others within my own living educational theory (Whitehead, 1989) and to demonstrate my originality of mind in living out my standard of judgment of living myself through others. Beyond this, through my examples of the educational relationships that I have had, I want to reflect how I account for my own living educational theory. I am using Naidoo's (2005) relational sense of depending on others in order to establish self and engaging with Pring (2000) in also reflecting the importance of recognising others as people and human beings. Through engaging with Sartre (2003) I am demonstrating my ability to understand the other and acknowledge the other as a person and human being. I understand Kincheloe (2003) in terms of acknowledging the importance of experience in contributing to the debate on education and educational research.

In terms of ontology, the debate surrounding the nature of understanding education; I believe that my approach is associated with the view that there is not a truth to find but rather one that emerges through the engagement with my own practice. This may be in contrast to a more social science perspective that acknowledges the presence of an absolute truth that needs to be found through research. This approach is reflected through, for instance, my living methodology that was not planned in advance but rather emerged through time and experience. My ontological approach is rooted within relational epistemology due to the fact that I believe the 'truth' that I find will be as a result of the interactions that I have through the journey that I am undertaking.

In terms of epistemology, the debate to understanding knowledge; it is my approach, an anti-positivist approach, to acknowledge the value of living through experiences in order to fully understand them as opposed to a more traditional, positivist view of being able to research from a distance upon a subject that may be unfamiliar. This living through of experiences again reinforces my relational epistemology in terms of constructing events as they happen from the experiences that I have, through

utilising reflection. This stance draws together my ontology and epistemology, acknowledging that who I am, my ontology, is determined through what I know, my epistemology. These two things, as Thayor-Bacon (1995) recognises, are related to each other and cannot be separated.

Below are a collection of images that I have used within my thesis. These images represent the people who have been, or who are still, significant others to me within my personal and professional life. All of them have been highly significant in extending my own understanding of my practice and have been central in helping me continue to grow as a practitioner and improve.

The first two images are of staff who I led whilst a middle leader, Simon and Toni.

Figure 3: Image of Simon Ratcliffe, 2004
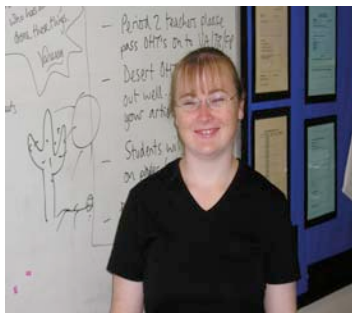
Figure 4: Image of Toni Bowden, 2004

The image below is of one of my students who I taught, Dan.

Figure 5: Image of Dan, 2005

The image below is of my wife, Karen and my daughter Sophia.

Figure 6: Image of my wife, Karen and my daughter Sophia, 2007

The image below is from my wedding day, surrounded by significant others.

Figure 7: Image from my Wedding Day, 2004, showing my family and work colleagues intertwined and merging.

The image below is taken when I was a few years old, with my parents.

Figure 8: Image of my parents with me in the background, taken in 1979.

My growing understanding of 'relational epistemology' (Thayer-Bacon, 1995) is emerging through my enquiry. I am attempting to account for my enquiry through producing a narrative account that has emerged from the relationships that I have had through my life and educational experiences. Within my thesis I am drawing on many examples of these relationships: of my relationships with the students that I have taught; the staff I have worked with and led; my relationship with my wife and co-enquirer; my relationship with my supervisor; my relationship with my family; and my relationship with myself. All of these relationships are helping to create the educator that I am and are influencing my practice. My thesis attempts to account for this.

Thayer-Bacon (1995) explains relational epistemology as:

> 'A relational epistemology views knowledge as something that is socially constructed by embedded, embodied people who are in relation with each other.' (Thayer-Bacon, 1995)

This is a notion that I embrace through my thesis attempting to demonstrate that through the relationships that I have with others, and in particular significant others, I am learning to enhance my own practice and make things better. The key for me is the importance stressed on relationships in moving forward our understanding of knowledge: it is through understanding the other and providing the conditions for dialogue that will contribute to this enhancement of the world. I am linking this to my understanding of action research in terms of my intent to allow my thesis to grow and emerge, rather than to plan in advance. Through the interactions that I have I allow these to help direct my research into differing areas that I may not necessarily know

in advance. For instance, I can refer to the example of the influence that finding out my father had lung cancer in 2005 and the way in which this has influenced my practice and the educator and person that I am. Whilst I could have known at the start of my research that I would come up against adversity and planned to acknowledge this I could not possibly have known that I would come up against this particular adversity. I use this example to demonstrate my responsiveness and the way in which I am acknowledging the importance played in my work of the relations with others and the value that I place upon these relationships.

I am arguing that I am taking the ideas of Thayer-Bacon on relational epistemology further with my exemplification of her ideas through demonstrating them within my practice, thus synthesising her ideas with living educational theory (Whitehead, 1989) to demonstrate how living relational epistemology works for me and my practice through demonstrating my own original living standard of judgement of *living myself through others*. My thesis attempts to account for how I have come to believe certain things within my practice and life. Thayor-Bacon comments in relation to her epistemology:

> '…I am trying to offer one that is more open and inclusive as it attempts to be self-conscious, reflective, adjustable and adaptable as people gain further in understanding. My hope is that a theory of knowledge that begins with an understanding that theories are ideas – stories which are socially constructed and, therefore, fallible and subject to change – should be one that is less open to ideological abuse.' (Thayer-Bacon, 1995)

For me this acknowledges that living theory appreciates change and movement within education and that human beings are capable of responding to circumstances around them. I believe that through this thesis I am able to reflect the importance that narratives play within my own living educational theory and how I believe that stories can contribute to our understanding of educational research.

I further, through my thesis, want to embody my own desire to expand what we understand epistemology to mean (Thayer-Bacon, 1995) through including different elements and ways of knowing what I know. I aim to represent this and communicate this to the reader through my presentation of a multi-media text that attempts to capture the nature of the educational relationships that I have had over time that have contributed towards making me the educator that I am. By multi-media I mean through video and use of images set alongside a narrative account.

Through my embracing of relational epistemology I am attempting to bring this form of enquiry into my practice and demonstrate that I value the relationships that I have with others: I am demonstrating that I am applying the theory to practice. Within my practice, one example of this is my work in establishing an in-house teacher-research group at Bitterne Park School and the consequent relationships that this has helped to create with members of that group. This is discussed in detail in sequence 3. I can particularly refer to two teachers who have fully embraced teacher-research and with whom I draw upon my changing relationship with over time.

One example of my living relational epistemology is my understanding of my living educational standard of judgment of *living myself through others*. This educational standard is one that has emerged and that I have been attempting to understand and live out since 2003. It is very much about a *personal vision* (Senge, 1990, p. 147) that I have for the practice of education. It came to me, very much out of luck and through a moment of inspiration: the gentle rain from heaven did indeed drop upon my pensive brow. To be more precise, it came to me at about 10.53pm just as I was getting into bed. The exact date I cannot remember. However, I was writing my M.A. dissertation at the time and I remember I was feeling as though something was missing from it. There was something happening in my practice that seemed to be working and I couldn't quite put it into words. I remember trying to be clear on what it was that I was trying to do in terms of my educational practice. The phrase *living myself through others* jumped into my head, pretty much as the idea for the 'flux capacitor' jumped into Doc Brown's head as he fell off the toilet seat one day and banged his head in *Back to the Future:* we all know the impact of that episode! It seemed to sum up what my philosophy was: that I wanted to make things better for *others*; that I wanted to help *others* out. Perhaps it also encapsulated that I wanted to understand why *others* acted as they did.

For me to demonstrate and express my own standard of judgement and values I will explain to the reader my relationships with certain influential people within my time at Westwood St Thomas. I use these to explain to the reader my own standard of judgement because my standard of judgement is based on relationships that are relationally dynamic. Through these examples I will be able to articulate and clarify how and why my standard of judgement and values are what they are. I was Head of Faculty at Westwood St Thomas and I had only been in post for 12 months or so. As a result of this, I was very inexperienced and needed something to hold on to.

The standard of judgment of *living myself through others* for me is about recognising the sense of 'I am because we are' (Naidoo, 2005). Naidoo explains that an individual exists because of the existence of others. Within my own relationally dynamic standard of judgement I argue that my own existence is as a result of the relationships that I have through others and that these relationships help me to improve my practice.

I am recognising the importance of the other within my own development and understanding the life-affirming energy (Whitehead, 2005) that I can get from these relationships with others. Through this value I am recognising the sense of the other and the way in which I exist because of the recognition of others: it is through the relationships that I have that I exist in the way that I do. If I take away these relationships then the person that I am will change. I am therefore responding to the sense of boundaries that exist within these relationships. This was evidenced through my transition in roles from Westwood St Thomas to Bitterne Park: I account later on in the text in sequence 3 for how I managed this transition, but one of the key elements to this was the fact that I wasn't prepared for the impact of changing those I worked with on my own living values. This provided further evidence for me of how research is not so transferable and generalisable: how what works in one situation will not necessarily work in another.

Within my own M.A. dissertation I attempted to establish a definition of what *living through others* as an educational standard of judgement means. For me, this value has influenced the way I have worked with the significant others in my professional and personal life. I commented:

> "Living myself through others.' As I listen to those words there is an echo of them that reverberates around my head. I have tried to come to some understanding of what these four words mean: the sum of them together, I believe, is greater than the individual words themselves. I believe that these four words are the educative value by which I have been working over the last three years. I am establishing that through my own experiences as a teacher-researcher working within the Westwood St Thomas teacher-research group, I have been able to try and come to a greater understanding of my own practice. Fundamentally, I am trying to establish that the interactions between people have the potential to improve educational practice. It is these interactions that have the power to move educators forward as they are able

to provide the circumstances required for meaningful reflection. 'Living' implies that the work is taken from something that is still in the process of developing. 'Myself' implies the nature of the autobiographical account that I wish to contribute to educational knowledge. 'Through' implies that I am interacting with others to try and aid my own professional growth and understanding of the work that I am undertaking, and consequently as a by-product, improving theirs. The 'others' is the sense of sharing and collegiality that encourages a growing of epistemology to aid professional improvement. Within the narrative framework of this dissertation, I want to explore my belief that the future I can create is embedded within the narrative past that I have come from: it is the sharing of these narratives, through working with others that will allow me to understand my present and future. I believe that through taking stock of these past narratives, my own future may well be better. I believe that this sharing is crucial as it will help me to avoid distorting the views that I may have of my own self-importance. As you read through this account, 'Living myself through others' is the value that you should try and judge the effectiveness of the writing by. Through my exploration of my part in trying to understand how a group of teacher-researchers is working I have tried to explore what I have gained from being a part of this group. My own strength and honour, I hope, will allow me to account accurately the pictures I have seen.' (Riding, 2003, p. 7-8)

Essentially I think that I have moved on from this understanding of this educative value. I think that it is more than just my experiences from the Westwood teacher-research group that has allowed me to live by this standard of judgement: I believe that it is my career and all aspects of it that I am *living through* this standard of judgement. I do firmly still believe that it is a reflection of the power of the educative narrative which allows the development of educational practice and it is using the narrative to *live through others* by allowing them a voice within my text which will allow me to understand them better. This is why I am writing this Ph.D.: to try and understand what I have learned, how I have helped others, how others have helped me and to allow others to learn from my own experiences.

This original contribution to knowledge is a non-impositional living standard of judgment. By this I mean that the incorporation of living 'through' someone is about sharing and creatively engaging, as opposed to 'taking from'. This standard of judgment is also relationally dynamic, in the sense of being based on and responsive

to relationships with others. I also gain my own life affirming energy from this standard in order to live out my life more fully and productively for the good of humanity. From living my life through this standard of judgment I am able to contribute to improving the quality of the living educational space and also creatively engage with others in order to improve my own practice and influence the practice of others. Thus, I am able to explain the nature of my own educational influence on others through this standard of judgment.

I understand *living myself through others* further through reflecting on Pring (2000) in relation to his sense of what it means to 'be a person'. Pring explores six qualities and capacities associated with being a person. What are of most significance to my living educational values and standards of judgement are his comments in relation to education and understanding of the world:

> '…one aspect of that understanding of the world is the recognition of other
> people as *persons* – that is, as centres of consciousness in their own right
> with the capacity to think, to feel and to experience in the light of those
> thoughts. It is to have the capacity, too, to reflect upon oneself as a person –
> able to have one's own thoughts and point of view.' (Pring, 2000, p. 18)

This I feel touches my own sense of educational development and values. My educational theory is based on being able to recognise the *other* and through this being able to improve the *self* and *other* from this relationship: through this relationship, both *self* and *other* gain in the form of extending their educational knowledge base and understanding of their practice.

However, I reflect on Pring's words and wonder how many times I have denied his definition of being a person to others within my own practice? How many times have I denied my students their voice? How many times have I shouted instead of listening? How many times has one of my student's acts influenced my whole judgement? How many times have I denied staff from being as a result of my comments or my gaze? I can reflect on my own practice and consider my own living contradiction from this.

I believe that my parents lived out this value, like many parents do, through my up-bringing. They seemed to, and still do, live their lives *through* their children. Neither of my parents have many formal qualifications, yet they were able to instil a sense of success within their three children that promoted each of them to want to be the best that they could be. Essentially, my parents *lived through* me and my successes: my graduations have been theirs; my results have been theirs; my promotions have been

theirs. They have creatively engaged with me and from this something new and productive has emerged. I think that they reflect a world in which caring more for the *other* is more important than caring for the *self.* I think they reflect what sacrifice is and understand the meaning of the word in relation to their own children. Without their sacrifices I do genuinely believe that I would not be at this laptop today writing this thesis. I think this experience has led me to be able to actively empathise with others as I have seen it in action: my parents' ability to whole-heartedly put me first in anything has demonstrated to me a level of human emotion and compassion that makes the world, and in particular my world, a better place. In many respects, my parents are a living example of how informal appreciative inquiry can work. Each day I see examples of where this doesn't happen: where parents don't seem to care about their children and where relationships go wrong with families and where Schools are then asked to pick up the pieces.

Sartre explores this sense of *self* and *other* within *Being and Nothingness* (2003) and of particular interest is the way he reflects on the importance of allowing the *other* the opportunity to express themselves. He comments:

> 'In short, if the Other is to be a probable object and not a dream of an object, then his object-ness must of necessity refer not to an original solitude beyond my reach, but to a fundamental connection in which the Other is manifested in some way other than through the knowledge which I have of him.' (Sartre, 2003, p. 277)

This rings true of the way my parents approached their children: allowing them to live rather than be held up as an image maintained idealistically in their heads. My living standard of judgement, *living myself through others*, requires a creative engagement for something new, such as a living educational theory, to emerge. I hope throughout this text I am able to reflect to you, the reader, the sense of the *other* within it: that you are able to engage with the *others* that exist within it as I attempt to give them their voice through a multi-media approach, rather than me simply relying on my own knowledge of them and delivering this to you through my own description. What I want to communicate is the fundamental connections that I believe I have made, and am making through the quality of the relationships that I have. I want to communicate how I believe I use these to make things better.

The search for further qualification of the value of *living through others* is something that my relationship with Mark Potts, Deputy Headteacher at Westwood St Thomas School and member of the Westwood teacher-research group enabled me to do.

Mark was an incredibly passionate man and held real qualities of concern for fellow human beings. He set up outstanding links with a school in South Africa in order to improve the quality of their lives. When speaking to him it is his warmth and care that really shines through.

I offer one example of a dialogue I exchanged with him via email on the 26th February 2004, as I attempted to further refine my own educational value of *living myself through others*. This dialogue demonstrates my *living through* Mark: Mark is engaging with my idea of *living myself through others*, and reflects on this creatively for his own new understandings of this to emerge within his own language. This is another example of my attempts to empower the *other* through giving them their own voice within this text. Mark commented:

> 'Simon
>
> I knew it would come. I have been thinking about this idea of yours. I am thinking about it in relation to my dissertation on 'presencing' and mindfulness etc.. I am interpreting it as in my words - How I am influenced by others and how I graft the traits/personality/characteristics of others on to my own living presence?
> Is this how you see it?
> How did you first come up with the phrase?
>
> Mark'

I reply:

> 'Dear Mark
>
> Good day off in the snow?
>
> Great to hear this. I have attached an extract from my PhD were I am talking about the moment and also how I am now moving on with my understanding. My latest addition to my understanding is arguing that this is a 'working class' value instilled into me by my parents as a result of their experiences and values. Does this connect to your past? Would be interested to hear your thoughts.

strength and honour

simon'

He replies:

'Simon

Thanks for this. It is interesting. I have to think how it relates to my thoughts on 'presencing' and mindfulness for my dissertation. It is an interesting value and I am certainly close to you on the idea of day to day interactions influencing our practice and that of others. The notion of others trusting us is interesting. I am also discovering the importance of trusting myself and my own judgement as well. I think this is more secure as I understand my own value base more. Claxton led me to consider how to become a more effective intuitor and part of this is, I think, trusting your intuitive judgements. I am less sure about the claim that it is a working class value. I hesitate here because I remember my own learning as part of my Social Science first degree. I just remember that the whole notion of class is a minefield when approached from a politicial and sociological perspective. Defining working class is difficult. To talk about working class, as opposed to middle class values, is even more difficult.

Mark'

And:

'More thoughts

What about living others through myself? I wonder whether this gets nearer to my idea of "grafting the traits/ personality of others on to my own living presence". I am thinking about how others influence me here. Understanding this can help me to understand how I can influence others through my 'presencing'. By considering "Living Myself Through Others" and "Living Others Through Myself" there is more of a notion of interaction and interdependence, a recognition that the influence is both ways. Is this a value that you can identify with?

Mark'

I reply:

'Dear Mark

Great to hear your dialogues with yourself and your internal struggle with pinning down ideas....I know it well. I like your ideas but the 'living others through myself' implies to me that the 'I' is at the centre of the living and that others are influencing the 'I' - the 'I' is almost like a buddhist self(?) that allows others to inhabit it for a time to develop before moving on: in terms of an analogy, it's like the 'I' is a flower filled with nectar and the 'others' are the bees that drink from it?

Whilst I like this, living myself through others implies for me more of an active role for the 'I' - the self. It's almost like the 'self' going in search of the 'other' in order to help it live: the flower goes searching for the nectar to fill it before the bee can drink. Perhaps though, living others through myself is the natural progression for this: it is the next step. Once the self has found the other, it is then there to be drunk from? Perhaps this is something about how you are at a different stage of your career than I am: as deputy head your role is different to mine as HOF?

Really enjoying this dialogue

strength and honour

simon'

For me this dialogue is one of the ways that I am able to connect with another member of the teacher-research community, but also one of the ways in which I can connect with another member of my School community as we both strive to deepen our understanding of the nature of education and learning. It is the sense of two practitioners extending and qualifying their understanding of values in order to improve their practice which is so evident. I wonder at this point whether or not I will be able to build this kind of relationship with the staff that I lead within my new School and role at Bitterne Park School? I sense that when I am working with Mark and have these dialogues that I feel fully valued and I sense that he is fully present within them.

He is able to make me feel like this despite his role relationship to mine. This is something that I want to hold close as I move on. For me, the dialogue represents two practitioners exploring the nature of their practice and dismissing the role boundaries that exist within their work relationships. For me this is one of the powers of teacher-research communities within schools.

Furthermore, I would argue that this exchange of emails about my educational values is one example of the way in which I am holding up my claims to account within the teacher-research community. Whitehead (2003) argues:

> '…the nature of 'first person' or 'I' enquiries provide ontological connection to the epistemological standards. In other words it is a form of research that requires <u>of the researcher</u> a willingness to hold himself or herself to account in terms of values.' (Whitehead, 2003, p. 8)

For me this encapsulates the sense of this thesis. I am firmly placing myself at the centre of the research and recognising that I carry with me the values and ideas that I hold. The research I am conducting is answering the questions I have set out whilst recognising that I am a person as well who is participating within the research: I am not at a distance looking at the issues. As a researcher using first-person I am making clear my own values and accounting for my practice within these values.

Further to this, my willingness to hold myself, values and experiences to account with the teacher-research group that emerged at Westwood St Thomas' School itself, as a form of validation, is also important. This is important in the sense that I am validating my work through other teacher-researchers, who are also willing to share their views and values.

As this thesis develops and grows it is part of my living theory (Whitehead, 1993). This emerges as I increase my learning over time in order to qualify and alter my values based on the knowledge I have at the time. This thesis is a snap-shot in time of my living theory that is emerging. This for me implies the importance of a practitioner being willing to account for their values as they are something that will emerge over time as they interact with their changing environment. I am reminded of Whitehead's (1993) comments in relation to 'living' theory within his own educational research, commenting:

> 'By a 'living' theory I mean that the explanations generated by the theory to explain the educational development of individuals contain an evaluation of past practice and evidence of present practice which includes the 'I's'

intention (a human goal) to produce something valued which is not yet in existence.' (Whitehead, 1993, p. 80)

This reflects the dialogue between me and Mark as we continue to explore our educational development. The notion of living theory is something that I can engage with, particularly in terms of my understanding of *living myself through others*, where I define *living* as something that is in process. Essentially, this thesis is an example of living educational theory as it attempts to explain my own educational development through past reflection and future projection.

I would argue that this type of dialogue as illustrated in the email above with Mark is an example of the life affirming force and energy (Whitehead, 2005) that is present within teacher-research. This reflects Evans' (1995) thoughts in her thesis, where she comments:

> 'I believe that through the support of action research methodology, particularly, the support of the community of action researchers and the dialogue these communities promote, teachers can become effective researchers of their practice and contribute to both educational research methodology and epistemology, not in the form of 'critical theory' but in the sense of 'living educational theory'.' (Evans, 1995)

Again, as I exchange dialogue with Mark I am aware of the support and challenge we are providing for each other as we wrestle with our understandings of our values and practice. Through these dialogues, we are developing the epistemology and also contributing to a living methodology that is responding to the nature of the relationship that we have. We are seeking to promote our epistemologies as they emerge from within our practice.

Kincheloe (2003) further reflects this notion in his vision of teacher-research and reflects Whitehead's (1993) comments of the need for experiential learning and reflection within education, commenting:

> 'In such a new democratised culture teacher scholars begin to understand the power implications of technical standards. In this context they appreciate the benefits of research, especially as they relate to understanding the forces shaping education that fall outside their immediate experience and perception. As these insights are constructed, teachers begin to understand what they know from experience. With this in mind they gain heightened awareness of how they can contribute to the research on education. Indeed,

they realize that they have access to understandings that go far beyond what the expert researchers have produced.' (Kincheloe, 2003, p. 18)

It is my claim that the greater extents to which I can live the value of *living through others* within my everyday life, the greater contribution I can make and help others to make to the improvement of educational practice as I recognise and support the view that teacher-researchers embody a wealth of untapped knowledge within them. I can refer to my work with Simon, Toni and Mark, as indicated above, to reflect and support this view. Without my acknowledging of them as individual people, and without recognising their sense of self, I do not feel that I would have built such a productive professional and personal relationship with each of them. It is through these relationships that I have gained access to the development of teachers and leadership practice, which I explore with this thesis. I also believe that I have been able to learn from these relationships and been able to take something from them, as well as enabling them to *live* out their own values.

I can further reflect on Whitehead's (1999) comments in relation to his own practice:

'…I moved to consider my influence on others. Thus, in the third enquiry, 'How do I help you to improve your learning?', the standards are expressed in terms of an extension of my discipline of education into my educative relations as a supervisor of Ph.D. practitioner-researchers.' (Whitehead, 1999, p. 10)

For me the essence of Whitehead's comments here reflect my own living standard of judgment of *living through others*. In order to help others to improve their learning it is necessary to extend and develop the ability of both parties to be able to *live through* the experiences that the other has and understands. Both parties are actively involved and learn from the process. I wonder to what extent I can improve Jack's learning as he begins to appreciate and understand my own living educational theory and embodied values as he supervises this Ph.D.? Later in this thesis, I will deal more closely with my loving and emerging relationship with Jack

Living myself through education I am drawn to consider exactly what is education? What does it mean? Education for me is about change, improvement, creativity. It's about dialogue and democracy. It's about letting the disempowered speak. It's about support and challenge. It's about individual students. It's about real students in real Schools. It's about the work I've done with Daniel, a Year 12 student.

Figure 9: Image of Dan, 2005

Daniel was a Year 12 Media student that I have taught. His image is above. I am taking the image. I was immediately surprised by the quality of the work that he produced: he was a clear grade 'A' student within this subject. However, beyond this I felt that I could connect with him. He was a very mature student but I sensed his passion for the subject that I so much love. I could understand where he was coming from and the comments he made were so reflective of the way I read texts. I wanted to support and help him as much as possible. Partially, I feel, because I felt guilty about leaving his group at the end of Year 12 to move to my new school, but also because I believe he had a great deal of potential.

Through his Year 12 I worked with Dan closely to help ready him for his exams: he lacked a great deal of confidence in his ability. I asked Daniel to reflect on his experiences of my teaching because I wanted to know why it was that he was succeeding within my own lessons. He commented through email:

'Mr. Riding

Mr. Riding is probably the most highly regarded teacher (at least by the pupils) at Westwood St Thomas. In my opinion he is certainly one of the best, if not, the best. There are many reasons why I think this:
One reason that I and many others really enjoy being taught by Mr. Riding is that he incorporates humour into his lessons. He tells jokes (sometimes funny) and also allows pupils to join in on the jokes and this allows for a very relaxed atmosphere. The important thing though, is that the jokes are never allowed to take over the lesson

and Mr. Riding is very good at moving the class back to being work orientated. I have always felt with Mr. Riding that one reason we get on so well with him is that he shows his own personality in lessons. He doesn't seem to have a separate 'act' or attitude that he displays in class, which seems to be common amongst teachers. I feel that I can talk to sir as easily about issues completely irrelevant to media studies or English as I can about them. All of these factors together contribute to the fact that we always, or certainly usually, get all the work done and also enjoy the lessons. I think this reflects that Mr. Riding really values that you have to enjoy what you are learning in order to do your best. He certainly achieves this in my opinion.

Another great thing about Mr. Riding's lessons is that he always has a basic lesson plan, but is willing to let class discussion and focus go off on tangents relevant to the subject. His teaching is very much based around discussion, debate and teacher/pupil interaction rather than just text books. This is just a far more interesting way of learning and makes it more enjoyable for all involved. He relies on us to extend our own learning. He teaches us the facts, but does not indoctrinate us. He expects us to be able to use the information he gives us to form a viewpoint or opinion.

Mr. Riding is very good at talking to us as pupils; he never talks down to us and always treats us as equal. He treats us with respect and is given it back in return. This is true right through the school and is one reason why so many pupils relate to him. I have had an experience where I was feeling unhappy about the standard of teaching in a certain area. I chose to talk to him as opposed to my actual tutor. He then went about solving the problem by organising meetings with me and any pupils with concerns in order to hear our views. He then went to the teachers involved to express, anonymously, the concerns put forward. He then spent his own time after school and at lunchtimes helping me and others work on what we felt we had lacked from our other teachers. This is a good example of the sort of teacher Mr. Riding is, and clearly demonstrates what makes him such a highly regarded tutor. The way in which he conducted the meetings was very much appreciated and showed him to be, to me, a very capable leader as well as teacher.

When in lessons I always feel that Mr. Riding cares about what he is teaching me, and I can tell that he wants to do everything he can to get us a good grade and learn to enjoy the subject. I always feel that I am included in group discussions or debates. If a debate does occur and people in the class are expressing different views sometimes Mr. Riding will sit out and allow us to debate without interruption, this again is good as it encourages us to speak and gives us confidence. If I have any criticism at all then it would be that one or two of the quieter people in class sometimes appear to lose interest during these discussions. If a pupil does not have high self-esteem or the

confidence to contribute they may feel excluded from the interactive method of teaching. Personally when in lessons I feel valued, included, and comfortable and motivated to learn.

I think Mr. Riding is driven on by a genuine passion for teaching. He has spoken before of his enjoyment at university and I think he really wants us to get the best possible grades, to be able to go to university, and fulfill our full potential. His enthusiasm is constant and in turn we are driven on by it. I don't ever doubt that Mr. Riding wants the best for his pupils, and that is why he will go to lengths to ensure that we are getting the best possible teaching in all areas.

I think how much Mr. Riding is appreciated as a teacher is reflected in how disappointed everyone is that he's leaving. However, personally it comes as no surprise that he has landed a job as a deputy head. And much as I do wish he would be able to see me through the second year of my A-Levels, I'm glad he's got a better job. He deserves it, he'll have no problem. Why he couldn't just be deputy head at Westwood however, I don't know.' (Daniel, July 2004)

As I read through this text I could understand the comments being made: I was struck by the maturity and the clarity with which Daniel is able to speak about me and my values: I really felt that I was living my values out and that they were being understood and valued by this student. He makes claims for others and I am aware that I also teach his brother and I believe his claims. The growing sense of departure as I move towards leaving Westwood brings with it an even more growing sense of impending loss. At times, perhaps as teachers we move on so readily and easily without always considering the potentially massive impact that we can have on those that we teach. To us, it's a job. To the student, it's their life chances and future. To hear a student saying these things constantly reminds me of why I do the job that I do and why I *love* it so much. For me, it is a true *love* in the sense of spreading my own sense of humanity and understanding that goes with it.

Perhaps it seems appropriate at this point to pick up on Dan's comments about my love of University. I hadn't thought about this much until reading Dan's comments: perhaps, on reflection I do talk about my own time at University within the classroom as a way of trying to inspire the love of learning that I have. However, my own University experiences were split into three quite distinct phases. I completed my first degree, combined honors in English and Media at the University of Plymouth. This was a three year course that was able to inspire me on many levels: my creativity yet also my own love of English as a subject. It was during this time that I gained a real

interest in critical theory and its relation to the world. I also was able to develop my love of writing and my Media interests. At the end of the three year course I came out fully intending to carry on with studies, wanting to study English at a higher level. I briefly enrolled on an M.A. course at University of Exeter studying Critical Studies. This fell through as I wasn't really committed and personally, I wasn't in the frame of mind to engage in this type of work at this stage of my life. At the time I was also working in a bar and generally enjoying life a little too much to really be able to gain anything from further studies. This to me was like a gap year, which I hadn't realized at the time.

I left the bar and the South in February 1997 to move back to Blackburn in order to take up a job in a Bank. Within two weeks I realized that Banking wasn't for me: sitting at a desk doing a mind-numbingly boring job wasn't what I wanted after the years I dedicated to my studies so I made the decision to apply to do a PGCE. I had thought about this in my final year of my under-graduate course and had applied and been on an interview to University of Exeter. However, I didn't get a place and at the time I really wasn't certain I wanted to be a teacher. 12 months on though and I was now convinced. I applied and got an interview at Bath Spa University College to do a Secondary English PGCE. I had to complete a week in a Primary School so did this at a local school in Blackburn and loved it. It was at that moment that I realized I would love the job: being around learning all day seemed great to me.

I graduated from Bath Spa, my second stint at University, in 1998 and got my position at Westwood St Thomas. It was during my time at Westwood St Thomas that I established my links with the University of Bath, my third stint at University.

From Daniel's comments it seems that my own educational values are being drawn out: my sense of enjoyment of education; my sense of democratic approaches to education; my sense of wanting to get the best from education for people; my sense of raising expectations; my sense of valuing the student voice. These are the things that I want to promote within my teaching and it seems as though Daniel is able to access these.

In the next section I want to clarify my methodology and how I have approached the research within this thesis.

1.2 Methodology

> 'Without the freedom to innovate beyond the range of models provided by traditional social science research or action research, the practitioners in our group may have been less effective than they ultimately were in serving the growth of professional thought, subsequent professional actions or the resolution of professional conflicts through their research.' (Dadds & Hart, 2001, p. 166-167)

Within this section I am embracing Dadds & Hart (2001) claims to support methodological inventiveness within practitioner research. I refer to my own living educational theory (Whitehead, 1989) in order to explain and clarify my meanings. I embrace action research as a way of accounting for my educational influence. For further clarification of these key aspects of this thesis, please refer to the separate chapters on each.

My own methodology is linked in many ways to my framing of the thesis title. My methodology emerges through the living experiences that I have. My methodology is the processes that I am going through in order to try and understand and answer the research questions established within this thesis. My methodology is relational and aims to collect data through understanding the individuals that have contributed to my growing understanding of myself.

My methodology is both complex and simple: it is easy to explain and very difficult. It is emerging alongside my practice and is responsive to the needs of my practice. My methodology accounts for my lived practice and aims to help me account for the minor miracles of my own practice, as Eisner (1988) comments:

> 'We are beginning to ask ourselves how we can see and describe the minor miracles of stunning teaching instead of prescribing how teachers should go about their work.' (Eisner, 1988, p. 19)

My methodology also reflects Winter's (1998) suggestion that within action research inquiries the focus changes and responds over time to the circumstances that the researcher finds him or herself in. My methodology seems to exist beyond me: it seems to morph and become what I need it to become. I think of it as a helpful friend that sits alongside me and guides me through this maze, helping me to make some kind of sense of what I experience. Through my methodology I am accounting for the choices that I have made and how these choices have influenced the work that I

have produced (Reason, 2005). Through this account I am making public my own living educational theory.

Action research

I am utilising first, second and third person action research (Reason & McArdle, 2007). This approach is my attempt to understand my own practice and then to improve what I am doing. I am utilising this approach because I want to improve the quality of the educational relationships that I hold and that I believe through understanding and improving my practice that I can improve these relationships and the living educational space we inhabit. Alongside this, I strongly believe in my own living value of *living myself through others*. This value is something that I want to be able to live out more within my own practice.

My methodology is partly based on Jack Whitehead's self-study form (Whitehead, 1989). I embrace the cyclical nature of this form of study as for me it supports my views that learning and leadership is never finished but is always seeking the next way to improve learning. My experiences tell me that things are never finished and that there is always something more to do. My drive to improve the quality to learning means that I am never satisfied or happy with the status quo but rather need to see how I can keep 'tweaking' things to improve them. My rewards are gained from the process I continually go through placed against the successes that I achieve along the way: the work with an individual student; the improvement of results; the improvement in practice of a member of staff.

I. I experience a concern because I feel my values are negated – for me it is the basis of this thesis of trying to make things better. However, beyond this, it is about utilising the six questions that I have established to help guide me through making things better.

II. I imagine a solution – for me, the solution is about being in a place or world where it is a better place to be. Specifically though, I have 'mini'-imagined solutions to the different aspects of my research, for instance: I imagine a teaching profession that is once again able to support teacher-research by providing free access for teachers to higher study that is conducted on school sites within learning hubs; it is about being able to contribute to the academy my account of my learning that is presented in a creative and inspiring way for others.

III. I act to find a solution – for me this is about the steps I am taking in order to achieve that outcomes that I imagine, of for instance: establishing a teacher-research group within my School as previously mentioned; of reflecting on my own practice in order to improve it.

IV. I evaluate the outcome – for me this is about how I know whether something has been successful or not, for instance: utilising the dialogues with staff and students in order to reflect on the impact of my work.

V. I modify my actions – for me this is about responding to how others see me and responding to what I learn, for instance: recognising at the end of the first unit that we delivered on the in-house M.A. programme that I established that it wasn't as effective as it could have been through the evaluations that I conducted and then consequently changing this in order to respond to the needs of others.

VI. I experience a concern – for me this is returning to the cycle once again, recognising that the process simply goes on, for instance: taking the in-house M.A. group and attempting to expand it into Southampton L.A. strategy for teacher improvement; of beginning the process of transition again through moving from Assistant Headteacher to Deputy Headteacher. (Whitehead, 1989)

Living Educational Theory

I am further embracing living educational theory (Whitehead, 1989) as I move through my thesis. I embrace this in order to acknowledge the importance that I place on experience within my learning and living. My own thesis charts the living nature of my practice as it changes through the experiences that I have and the reflections that I make. For instance, within my experiences I can reflect on the part that significant others have played within my own development. I can acknowledge that as a middle leader, I was able to draw on the strength of a significant other within my work place and this was able to help drive me on and move forward. I can then reflect that as I moved into senior leadership, I lacked this significant other in the work place, probably due to the nature of the position and as a result of this my practice suffered. I needed to find another significant other and I can account for how this became my wife, a co-enquirer.

I must also acknowledge that I am taking the stance that I am not constructing a methodology associated with a social science perspective. I agree with Reason (2005) in his assertions that traditional social science findings from research are of

little use to practitioners. I have not planned my thesis in advance of creating it. My methodology is centred on the fact that the 'I' is being placed firmly at the centre of the enquiry and that I intend to centre the work of this thesis around my own autobiographical episodes, whilst valuing and acknowledging the valuable contribution those around me can make to my own growing epistemological development. This reflects Bullough, Jr and Pinnegar (2001) when they comment:

> 'When biography and history are joined, when the issue confronted by the self is shown to have relationship to and bearing on the context and ethos of a time, then self study moves to research.' (Bullough, Jr & Pinnegar, 2001, p. 15)

It is my argument that the narrative I am constructing here through my own autobiographical experiences is directly related and influential upon the nature of teacher and leader that I am. A further discussion of the importance of the autobiographical choices I have made is in appendix 9. My methodology is promoting and valuing self-study as a valid form of educational research that should be a part of the academy. I am arguing that this methodology is a valid form of academic research that enables me, as a practitioner, to account for my learning over time.

Methodological Inventiveness

Further to this, I can explain that my methodology is an 'emerging methodology' that is growing, changing and re-forming as the enquiry develops and extends. I acknowledge the call by Lumby, Foskett and Fidler (2005, p. 135) to evolve the methodologies that currently exist within education in order to explore issues of leadership within schools. I agree for the need to support changing methodologies that aim to further our understanding of values and epistemologies. This is due to the fact that my own sense of epistemological growth is emerging through this enquiry and as I *live through* others within my work. I believe I am showing a qualitative approach to education research that values, through my emerging methodology, the living embodied knowledge that I hold as an educator. My own understanding of my practice changes as I experience different things within my life and career. This means that I cannot know these things beforehand. My own educational values are being laid bare for the reader to engage with. However, I believe that I am accounting for the changing nature of these values as my educational role and life moves forward.

I believe that it is because I am a teacher-researcher that I am able to construct a narrative account and story that brings to life the experiences that I have had through

creating a multi-dimensional account of my experiences. I am in a position as a researcher of doing what I am researching about: my work is conducted within a first-person account. Whilst I acknowledge that this may have limitations in terms of the distance I have from my subject, I believe that this is negated as I am producing living knowledge about issues that I am engaging with and living through. Through my first person account I am able to utilise reflection in a methodical way that allows me access to working through the issues that I face within my day-to-day experiences. This I believe provides an honest and genuine account of an educator as I move into school leadership. I am in support of Lomax (1998) in her claims to make educational research educative, commenting:

> '….the relation between researcher and researched is dialogical, that the research aims to develop 'voice' among the silenced, that the onus of research should be on the practitioner, that the author's values should be part of the report, and that validity and reliability should be a mutual process rather than a research procedure.' (Lomax, 1998, p. 11)

Further to this I would argue that I am constructing new knowledge about the situation that I am writing about. Through my methodology of writing from a first-person perspective I am attempting to support the view that I am driving improvement in education through being a user of the educational knowledge that I produce, which is reflected within the Thomas & Pring (2004, p. 42) argument where they argue that it is crucial for users of educational knowledge to be involved in its production. My methodology values my practitioner account and supports the notion that practitioner accounts are a valid form of research.

It is important to acknowledge the role played by the interactive nature of this text and the ways in which I encompass the many ways of knowing (Reason, 2005) evident within action research. Within this text you will recognise the vital importance that I am attributing to the use of visual images and video clips to support and evidence the claims that I am making. For me, this intends to send the reader the message that I value the visual alongside the written word. I am responding to Eisner's (1993) claims that:

> 'Experience, however, is private. For experience to become public, we must find some means to represent it. Culture makes available to the developing human an array of forms of representation through which the transformation of consciousness into its public equivalent is created.' (Eisner, 1993, p. 7)

This text is my transforming for the reader of my own experience into a form that I feel represents and communicates it. I am in a unique position to be able to capture this kind of visual text of my own practice as I account for my claims because this is an action research thesis. The images included aim to carry with them the weight of meaning that words alone could not capture on the page. Eisner (1988) further comments:

> 'To try to comprehend the ways in which people function and the meanings the events in their lives have for them and to neglect either seeing or portraying those events and meanings is to distort and limit what can be known about them.' (Eisner, 1988, p. 17)

For me, this is a strength of this text. Allied to this is the sense that I want this text to be able to fully tell the story that I want it to and I only feel this could happen through being able to visually support my ideas. For me this links the notion of creativity, meaning and the communication of ideas which I feel is so important within teacher-research.

The sense of 'methodological inventiveness' as reflected through Dadds and Hart (2001) is central to this text through the reflection of the fact that I am establishing my own methodology as it emerges through this thesis. It is my view that I am exercising my own methodological inventiveness through this text and through this process of study. This reflects Dadds and Hart when they comment:

> '…for some practitioner researchers, creating their own unique way through their research may be as important as their self-chosen research focus.' (Dadds & Hart, 2001, p.166)

I would argue that through this text, the style of my own research is as fundamentally important as the content of the material produced: the style is attempting to recognise the diversity of research methodology that can exist within educative research. This thesis reveals my own personality and character. It is my own account of my life and learning. How I say what I say is as important to me as what I have to say itself.

This is further reflected within Thomas & Pring (2004) who comment:

> 'The use of the word 'intuition' by Einstein in the context of scientific endeavour is an interesting one. Clearly he is not denying the significance of evidence. Rather, he seems to be promoting a kind of spatchcock use of evidence – a playing with almost any piece of seemingly relevant information – by scientists in their everyday work.' (Thomas & Pring, 2004, p.3)

This sense of playing with evidence is a reflection of my methodological inventiveness: a sense that the teacher-researcher can play with the materials that they have in order to create the text that emerges before them. For me, this is how things are made better: by challenging the status quo and perceived way of doing things in order to improve things. The inclusion in this thesis of images, video-clips and songs reflect my intuition in order to communicate my living theory to the reader.

I am creating a living methodology that seeks to help me research into my practice, understanding how it is at present and how it can be improved. When I begin my research, and throughout it, I am not looking for the pre-existing truth, but rather to respond to what emerges through the project. The reality I create is my own reality and through my creative account I aim to make the text as credible as I can, through communicating my insights to the reader in appropriate forms.

My approach to this thesis is to take an action research approach, trying essentially to understand myself as teacher, leader and learner before trying to consider the range of my influence over others through my time as a teacher. My action research approach is linked to my own educational standards of judgement. By this, I mean my desire to make things better is at the forefront of my practice. Alongside this, my desire to live through others allows me to engage with others and value their contributions. Kincheloe (2003) comments:

> 'The first step in such a process, as you might guess, is to understand the relationship between researchers and what they are researching. Where do we start such a process? I would argue that an awareness of self and the forces which shape the self is a prerequisite for the formulation of more effective methods of research. Knowledge of self allows researchers to understand how social forces and research conventions shape their definitions of knowledge, of inquiry, of effective educational practice. Knowledge of the self allows them consciousness to choose between research traditions which depersonalize the process of knowing in hopes of gaining certainty, pure objective knowledge, and research and orientations which assert that since the mind of the observer is always involved, it should be utilized as a valuable tool.' (Kincheloe, 2003, p.51)

I am looking to take an anti-Enlightenment stance in approach to my thesis from the perspective that educational reality is not constructed or founded upon pure scientific knowledge, but is rather formed as a product of the dialogical and relational potential of teacher-research. I am drawing on Coulter's (1999) sense of valuing the potential

within teacher-research that an understanding of the dialogical forms of knowledge creation can have. My relationship with my co-enquirer, my wife, is one example of this dialogical and relational understanding in practice. For me it is this approach which has the potential to unlock the closely guarded secrets of education as it empowers those at the heart of it to take up the challenge of understanding it further and making it better, through understanding the self.

I am acknowledging Carr & Kemmis (1986) in understanding the power of action research to be focused on 'improving' and 'involving' throughout the research. I am a believer that throughout this thesis I have been able to involve a wide and growing circle of people within it. Over time the range of those affected by my research has developed and grown. Fundamentally, it has centred on my own sense of improving my own practice and as a consequence, improving the practice, or conditions of practice, for others. I am clear though that through my methodology I was not able to fully understand how this story would end and so I was not able to be able to plan from the start where I or this research would end up. I had no idea that I would be able to influence, by the end of this period of my life, the C.P.D. provision and strategy within Southampton L.A. (Local Authority). This is again reference to my living educational theory approach to action research that I have taken.

Beyond this I am looking to fully incorporate a narrative approach to my thesis that allows me to be able to breathe life into my work and give it the life affirming energy (Whitehead, 2005) that it deserves. I want the creative narrative style to reflect the personality that I am. I want to be able to *live through* the narrative and allow others the opportunity to be able to access me through it. I want to breathe life into the text so that the reader can fully engage within it and gain their own sense of life affirming energy from it.

In terms of validity within this thesis, I am drawing on Anderson & Herr (1999) descriptions of validity that they determine are relevant to judging practitioner accounts and demonstrating how I have addressed these:

Outcome validity - …the extent to which actions occur which lead to a resolution of the problem that led to the study.
Essentially the problem that drives this thesis and my life forward is very complex and it is very difficult to judge whether or not a 'resolution' has occurred. I do not believe that the complex nature of education, and life, can determine that a resolution

has occurred. I believe that we can make small gains and movements forward in improving things, but I don't believe that we can claim a resolution. This is what I would refer to as the spirals of improvement through the action research approach that I have undertaken. My living educational theory approach ensures that my life is lived as enquiry (Marshall, 1999) and thus that a resolution is not achieved. However, I do believe that I have moved forward in understanding the problem(s) that I have encountered over the period of this study: I do believe that I have learned a great deal about the issues that I have addressed. What this study has thrown up is a whole host of other issues that also need addressing. I do not see how the narrative and story of this text can come to a smooth conclusion or end. The issue is not about the product at the end, but rather about the far more important process that I have gone through: this is where the learning has taken place.

Process validity - …to what extent problems are framed and solved in a manner that permits ongoing learning of the individual or system.
I would argue that this type of validity is central to this thesis. The learning process is central to the work that has taken place. Through this thesis, I have demonstrated my own learning and also how I have influenced the learning of the systems that I am part of. I have framed the issues within this thesis in such a way as to allow this learning to take place: through the placing of the 'I' at the centre of the text; through drawing on the autobiographical experiences to demonstrate the personal and professional connections in my life and so on. This, I believe, is a relevant form of validity within this text.

Democratic validity - …the extent to which research is done in collaboration with all parties who have a stake in the problem under investigation.
Throughout this text I have attempted to incorporate the voices of those who have been part of the research. I have incorporated their writings, their comments, their video-clips and so on, in order to allow them to speak to the reader. This is my form of empowering these people so that I am not speaking for them. This form of validity is crucial as it taps into my own value-base of recognising and valuing the other.

Catalytic validity - …the degree to which the research process reorients, focuses, and energizes participants toward knowing reality in order to transform it.
This sense of validity is evident within this text. This study attempts to understand the world in which I live and work and attempts to communicate this to the reader through its various methods of presentation of materials. Through this thesis I have

attempted to live by the question that drives me on: how can I make things better? This question is my attempt to transform the world in which I live into a better place through living out my values within my life and practice as an educator.

Dialogic validity - …the goodness of research monitored through a form of peer review.

I have fully utilised the use of a validity group to support my growing claims. This validity group takes on an emerging form: the people I work with; the students; the teacher-researchers that I came into contact with; my supervisor; my wife. These different groups have allowed me to draw on a vast range of influences upon my growing understanding of the text that I am producing. Beyond this, I have taken a wide definition of what peer review is: I have not limited this to simply those within my own profession, but rather widened this group to incorporate those I teach and come into contact with within my wider life.

Methods

With my choice of methods I am recognising the distinguishing quality of living educational theory that offers validation of ideas and data as both a personal and social process (Whitehead, 2008). Through my interpretation of my data I recognise Polanyi's (1958) claims that an individual can understand the world from his/her own perspective alongside the social validation through the use of significant others or validation groups. The methods I have chosen have enabled me to produce a disciplined narrative of my educational learning.

I have enhanced this study through my extensive use of a journal in order to reflect on the work I have been carrying out. These entries into my journal grant me access to my inner thoughts and give me the space to account for, then reflect on events and incidents at a later date. These accounts from my journal are one form of evidence that I am drawing upon that is then triangulated with other forms of evidence to enhance the validity of them. I have further attempted to incorporate into my work the use of images, both video and still images, as a way of trying to communicate my meanings and ideas to the reader.

In terms of the use of images within this thesis to communicate my explanations of the educational influence I have had it is important that the reader cautions and makes themselves aware of the issues surrounding the construction of meaning within images. I have naturally attempted to anchor meaning through my own

accompanying narrative and description that surrounds and frames the images, as I attempt to guide the reader through my own insights and meanings from them. However, as a reader you will engage in your own interpretation of this text and what I offer through it. Be comfortable enough to gain your own sense from what I offer and read the text as you wish. The photographer Kuhn (1985), in relation to her own photography and how she reads her own family photographs, comments:

> 'In order to show what it is evidence of, a photograph must always point you away from itself. Family photographs are supposed to show not so much that we were once there, as how we once were: to evoke memories which might have little or nothing to do with what is actually in the picture. The photograph is a prop, a prompt, a pre-text: it sets the scene for recollection.' (Kuhn, 1985, p. 18)

As I reflect on my own video and digital camera portraits of the work that I have completed over the last few years I too remember the memories and recollect the feelings and emotions brought about from watching the videos: the people I have worked with; the memories I have. Kuhn further comments:

> '…that the processes of making meaning and making memories are characterised by a certain fluidity. Meanings and memories may change with time, be mutually contradictory, may even be an occasion for or an expression of conflict.' (Kuhn, 1985, p. 19)

I can reflect on the images that I have produced and constructed for this text: I watch them and look at them over and over and realise how they have changed in terms of my understanding of them. My readings now are not the readings I had at the time, as I grow as an individual. My own sense of making meaning changes with the experiences that I have. It is this fluidity that helps to create the improvements within my own practice: that I am not static, but actively seeking change in order to make things better. If meanings didn't change over time then complacency and certainty would set in and take over the need to improve.

Living myself through others, a relationally dynamic value that I live my personal and professional life by, is also contributing to my own understanding of the methodological approach that I am taking through this thesis. I am arguing that my methods demonstrate this living standard of judgement. This is evident in my approaches to interviews. I have utilised semi-structured interviews, in the loosest sense, to support my growing claims as I have progressed through the fieldwork aspects of this thesis. These have captured the moments and comments around which the narrative journey has been constructed. I have been able to engage and

talk with those that I 'interview' and also those who have interviewed me. However, 'interview' sounds like the wrong word: sounds too formal. I prefer to use the word 'dialogue': those I have had a dialogue with. 'Interview' sounds impositional and as though I am forcing or pressuring those I talk with: I'm not. I'm interested in listening to what they have to say and empowering them to give their views on me and my practice. Kincheloe (2003) supports this approach commenting:

> 'Critical teacher researchers reject the positivistic notion of internal validity which is based on the assumption that a tangible, knowable reality exists and research descriptions accurately portray that reality. Our reconceptualisation of validity discards the concept of internal validity, replacing it with the notion of credibility of the researcher's portrayals of constructed realities.'
> (Kinceheloe, 2003, p. 168)

Central to my own growing understanding of the living educational theory (Whitehead, 1989) that I am creating is the continued use of a video camera and still camera to capture moments for later reflections. I believe I have provided the reader with a visual as well as a written record of my account. Okri (2002) comments:

> 'And so my hostility to the camera crystallised. I became convinced that it was a spy, certain that it was not so much a faithful recorder of what it captured as a distorter of what it gazed upon.' (Okri, 2002, p. 19)

For me, the 'spy' is positive and helpful and through this thesis I want to be able to see through my eyes as the interactive nature of the text transpires and unfolds. I want the reader to be able to 'spy' upon me and my educational theory: I want the reader to gain a pleasure from this text and be able to focus their gaze on the parts of this text that grabs them, as I have focused on the parts of my practice which have grabbed me.

Beyond this my methods have also incorporated the use of transcripts of interviews that others have completed on me and the engagement with the ideas of others.

I want to now explain my living educational theory to the reader.

1.3 Living Educational Theory

It is important that I clarify for the reader what I mean by living educational theory. My understanding of this has emerged from the work of Jack Whitehead. My methodology for this study follows a living educational theory methodology and through utilizing this, my own living educational theory has emerged. Whitehead refers to living educational theories as:

> '…explanations that individuals produce for their educational influences in learning. They are grounded in the relational dynamics of everyday life and explain the receptively responsive educational influences of individuals in their own lives. They are unique.' (Whitehead, 2008, p. 14)

This thesis contains my explanations for my learning. However, where I have made an original contribution to living educational theory is through my focus on accounting for the 'living' element of living educational theory. Through this thesis I explain the nature of the autobiographical influence on my learning. It is this that takes our knowledge and understanding of living educational theory further than it currently is.

Whitehead (2008) argues that there are distinguishing qualities relating to a living educational theory methodology that are intended to enable an individual to explain the nature of their educational influence:

1. 'I' as a living contradiction;
2. the use of action reflection cycles;
3. the use of procedures of personal and social validation;
4. the inclusion of a life-affirming energy;
5. the use of values.

I have creatively engaged with these qualities in order to explain my own educational influence.

'I' as a living contradiction

In order to explain my own educational influence I have focused on the importance of accounting for my own autobiographical experiences and the impact of these within my professional life. Through these accounts, I demonstrate the nature of the living contradiction that I am, not only professionally but personally. Some examples will be found in Sequence 3 where I account for my frustration at being an inexperienced senior manager, struggling to live out his values productively and purposefully.

The use of action reflection cycles

Within this thesis I have utilized these cycles in order to account for the nature of my educational influence and also as a way of improving my practice. I understand action reflection cycles as:

> 'I recognize that I am working to improve what I am doing because of the values I use to give meaning and purpose to my life. I think we may be similar in that when we believe our values are not being lived as fully as they could be, we feel concerned and our imaginations begin to offer possibilities for improving practice. When the conditions permit, I choose one possibility to act on. I act and evaluate the effectiveness of my actions and understandings in relation to the values I use to judge improvements in my practice. If I am still not living my values as fully as I believe to be possible I modify my concerns, actions and evaluations.' (Whitehead, 2008, p. 11)

The action reflection cycles are both holistic in terms of relating to the whole thesis and also within the thesis there are smaller, specific cycles referring to particular incidents. Within the whole thesis, the framing of my question at the start, the actions taken throughout the thesis accounting for and justifying what I have done, and the conclusions at the end all work as a long-term action reflection cycle. Within the thesis, the smaller action reflection cycles are evident in the following examples: the introduction of a media course at Westwood St Thomas; the introduction of a teacher-research group at Bitterne Park; the working with an NQT at Bitterne Park; my understanding of the role of being an Assistant Headteacher.

The use of procedures of personal and social validation

I understand personal validation from the perspective of Polanyi's (1958) claims that an individual can claim to understand the world from their own point of view (Whitehead, 2008, p. 11). Within this thesis I have exercised my own understanding of the events that have occurred and accounted for these within the descriptions that I have made.

I understand social validation from the perspective of holding my ideas and accounts up for public validation as a way of strengthening the quality of my accounts and understanding of my influence. Within this thesis I have utilized significant others and validation groups in order to clarify and validate the nature of the claims that I have made. For instance, I have referred to my relationships with significant others and how I have shared ideas and materials with them. Beyond this, I have utilized the teacher-research group at Bitterne Park as a validation group.

The inclusion of a life-affirming energy

I understand life affirming energy to mean the energy that drives the individual on through the passionate engagement with their lives. For me, my own life affirming energy is derived from my relationally dynamic original living standard of judgment of *living myself through others*. This standard of judgment as lived out within my own practice enables me to focus on improving the quality of the living educational space. Through this thesis I clarify the meaning of this and demonstrate it within my own practice.

The use of values

I understand values to mean:

> '….the human goals which we use to give our lives their particular form….reasons for action…' (Whitehead, 1993, p. 71)

Within this thesis I account through Sequence 1 for my own values: my own goals and reasons for action. I base this understanding on my reflection on my own autobiographical experiences arguing that my personal and professional experiences are linked. I also argue that my reasons for action are based on my desire to want to live out more fully my own original living standard of judgment of *living myself through others*.

Does my articulation of my own living educational theory mean that I am rejecting other theories? Throughout this thesis I draw on the theories and ideas of others in order to inform my own understanding of my own living educational theory. I engage with the ideas of others with a creative intent to learn from and add to these ideas. Through engaging with theory I am able to reflect and understand my own practice and to then be able to articulate the nature of my own educational influence. I see theory as a creative spark from which I contribute my own originality.

However, current theory limits me. What I mean by this is that current theory does not have the language or ideas to enable me to fully explain and account for the nature of my own educational influence and therefore I account for my own living educational theory to do this, communicating my meanings and ideas through my own language and concepts.

I want to now clarify my understanding of action research and how I am utilising this through this thesis.

1.4 Action Research

My primary aim is to contribute to improving the quality of life that exists in the world. I narrow this broad statement down to improving the quality of life for those that I come into contact with in my professional life in education.

I use the tools and skills that I have been given and developed in order to make this happen.

My primary skills are in education. I believe that I need to reflect on myself as a person in order to understand myself and from this I can then positively influence others.

I believe that it is through the quality of the relationships that I have, that I will contribute to improving my own practice, influence others and consequently improve the world.

I am able to appreciate Reason & McArdle (2007) in recognising that my action research methods are promoting my self-improvement and contributing to improvements within the wider organisations that I work in.

I am using Reason & Bradbury's (2001) model of First, Second and Third person inquiry into practice. They define first-person research as:

> 'First-person action research/practice skills and methods address the ability of the researcher to foster an inquiring approach to his or her own life, to act awarely and choicefully, and to assess effects in the outside world while acting.' (Reason & McArdle, 2007, p. 8)

I address this through my original contribution of accounting for the nature of the autobiographical experiences that I have had and how the personal experiences have influenced my own professional practice.

They define second-person as:

> 'Second-person action research/practice addresses our ability to inquire face-to-face with others into issues of mutual concern – for example in the service of improving our personal and professional practice both individually and separately. Second-person inquiry starts with interpersonal dialogue and

> includes the development of communities of inquiry and learning
> organizations.' (Reason & McArdle, 2007, p. 12)

I believe that this resonates with my own original contribution in this thesis of living educational space. I argue that through the living educational space I was able to offer the conditions for face-to-face inquiry through establishing a teacher-research group at Bitterne Park School.

The definition of third-person is:

> '…[to] move beyond the relatively contained and small scale practices of first-
> and second-person action research to stimulate inquiry in whole organizations
> and in the wider society…' (Reason & McArdle, 2007, p. 15)

Through Sequence 4 I consider the potential impact of this, arguing the need for individuals to account for the nature of their influence through establishing their own living educational theories.

I live and work in a world that is very different from the first roots and establishment of action research. I have progressed through a system from the start of my teaching career that has demanded and expected that teachers reflect on and improve their practice: professional standards have existed for me from day one with externally set targets in operation. I have trained through a system that requires teachers to recognise that they have the ability to influence the learning that goes on by changing their own behaviours and practice: that if something doesn't work, it is up to the teacher to change. I have grown in this system that expects this to happen and I have not known anything different.

Lewin (1946) is credited with the beginnings of action research, albeit a very different form compared to that which I and my colleagues may be used to today. His form of action research was very structured and prescriptive and was not self-initiated from concerns over personal practice. His model was, however, cyclical in its nature. Stenhouse (1975) moved these ideas forward through advocating that teachers actually undertook research into their own practice, rather than research being undertaken by researchers. Stenhouse further developed (1983) the notions of student-led research, where students were at the heart of the research undertaken. For Stenhouse research was a way of breaking the control and power relations imposed on the teaching profession and a move towards teachers directly influencing the political agenda.

Cochran-Smith & Lytle (1999) argue that there are three conceptual frameworks for teacher-research that emerged within the 1990's:

- Teacher research as social inquiry
- Teacher research as ways of knowing within communities
- Teacher research as practical inquiry.

They argue that these three frameworks are interrelated at times. Through the production of my thesis I argue that I have drawn on these three frameworks in order to account for my claims. I have worked collaboratively (teacher research as social inquiry) with others in order to improve my own practice and influence the practice of others. Through the establishment of the teacher-research group I have demonstrated the ways in which I have contributed to the improvement of practice within the schools I have worked (knowing within communities). This reinforces the argument offered by Cordingley (2004) that evidence-informed practice has the potential to improve practice because it requires the teacher becoming a learner again and thus understanding their own learners better (Cordingley, 2004, p. 80). I have undergone sustained reflection on my own practice in order to improve it, through for instance the use of a reflection journal of video image (research as practice inquiry). However, I would argue that I am contributing to this list of conceptual frameworks through offering 'teacher research as self and other awareness'. By this I mean seeing teacher research as a tool to understanding one's own practice through engaging with one's own autobiographical experiences and through using these lived experiences to understand others. My educational value of *living myself through others* is my original contribution to the conceptual frameworks of teacher research.

Through this thesis I am following Whitehead's (1989) action reflection cycle as my model of action research. This model is a spiral of self-improvement based on improving practice through:

1. I experience problems when some of my educational values are negated in my practice;
2. I imagine a solution to my problems.
3. I act in the direction of a chosen solution.
4. I evaluate the outcomes of my actions.
5. I modify my problems, ideas and actions in the light of my evaluations.

I have applied this spiral to answering the broad research question that I have framed within this thesis. However, within the thesis I have demonstrated mini-spirals of self-improvement:

The above model is my approach to action research within this thesis. What it shows is a broad spiral with lots of smaller spirals emerging from the larger one.

Broad spiral:

My desire is to live out my values more fully within my practice of *living myself through others* and my recognition that through creating my own living educational theory and through establishing a living educational space that I would be able to do this. Therefore, I reflect on my autobiographical experiences and also my own professional experiences in order to understand the nature of my practice and my understanding of my concern. I carry out actions of involving others in the collection of data and evidence and of establishing a teacher-research group in order to live out my values more fully. I further reflect on my personal and professional life to understand the educator that I am. I evaluate the impact of this and recognise how I could have improved what I did in order to improve future practice.

Smaller spirals:

Within this thesis smaller spirals have emerged from the broader spiral.

- The introduction of Media Studies at Westwood as described in chapter 2.6;
- The 3 examples of how I began to re-embrace teacher-research at Bitterne Park School in chapter 3.5;
- The autobiographical reflections on being a school-refuser in chapter 2.2;
- The reflection on my relationships with significant others in chapters 1.5, 2.4 and 3.2;
- My reflections on my role as Assistant Headteacher in chapters 3.1, 3.3, 3.4, 3.5, 3.7.

I work in a way that is creative and imaginative. I work in a profession that has very limited resources and so I have to be creative. I bring this creativity and imagination to my research. I feel a connection to Eisner (1988) in his comments about methods within research:

> '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. Thus, our awareness is always limited by the tools we use. When those tools do not invite further sensory exploration, our consciousness is diminished. (Eisner, 1988, p17)

Within my research I have been reluctant to plan to the last detail my methods, rather preferring to respond as and when required to the moments that exist. For instance, I have gathered many hours of video over the period of the research capturing me doing the job that I do. This wasn't intended to 'capture' a particular event of moment, but rather to capture my practice and allow me to build a much more accurate picture of the work that I do. I feel that my data would have been greatly affected if I'd have limited myself to setting up moments of research to capture as it would not have shown me as I am everyday. This further supports Eisner's (1993) argument:

> 'For experience to become public, we must find some means to represent it.' (Eisner, 1993, p. 7)

Through my thesis I am going through the process of making public my experience. The ways in which I have chosen to represent my experience is through a multi-media approach which incorporates video and image alongside text. For me this allows me to capture my practice and account for my experiences.

I want to be able to account for the reason why I have embraced action research rather than any other methodological approach. I would argue that throughout my professional life as a middle leader I have been *living through* the Action Research cycle and using this as a means to improve my teaching and leadership practice. The range of modules I have covered through my M.A. have dealt with establishing an action research approach within my practice. My M.A. dissertation focused on:

'Living myself through others. How can I account for my claims and understanding of a teacher-research group at Westwood St Thomas School?'

A teaching module focused on:

'How can I manage the implementation of the National Literacy Strategy with a sample Year 9 group in preparation for the full implementation of the Strategy in the latter stages of KS3 next academic year?'

Another teaching module focused on:

'How can I improve the chances of borderline 5 A*-C students gaining 5 A*-C grades at GCSE over a short period using a variety of teaching and learning strategies?'

A Methods of Educational Enquiry focused on:

'A Case Study on the impact of a teacher-research group at Westwood St Thomas School on professional knowledge and development.'

A Management of Staff Development module focused on:

'How can I manage the development of an approach to Whole School Literacy through using Action Research as an aid to this?'

All of the above units I have completed have been firmly rooted in improving my practice. They have also been about improving my leadership skills in terms of improving the quality of the living educational space. This, I believe, is where I connect to action research: the sense of establishing how I can improve or make things better.

However, I have also written what I would class as more traditional academic essays within two of my units. These are units that do not place the 'I' at the forefront of the inquiry and in my opinion, do not contribute as successfully to educational knowledge as they do not carry the power of the personal learning journey within them for the reader: they do not account for my learning and growth nor do they focus on improvement of my own practice or the impact of my practice on my learners. They seem to be written to get an M.A. rather than for self improvement. An Introduction to Educational Management module focused on:

'How relevant are management models of leadership, decision making and teamwork in the development, planning and delivery of a summer literacy school?'

A Management of Change module focused on:

'Consider a change with which you are familiar that has occurred within your own institution within the last year. Analyse the approach, implementation and outcomes with regard to the theories and models addressed in this module.'

Both these modules dealt with applying theory that did not influence my living practice as it was happening as they were both reflections and application on a past event. Whilst I acknowledge that I was able to learn from these experiences, for me they did not engage or require me to reflect on my present practice and to influence the work that I was currently doing. In contrast, for me the simplicity of action research is reflected through McNiff, Lomax and Whitehead (1996) when they comment:

'We believe that well-conducted action research can lead

➢ to your own personal development,

➢ to better professional practice,

➢ to improvements in the institution in which you work, and

➢ to your making a contribution to the good order of society.' (McNiff, Lomax and Whitehead, 1996, p. 8)

This seems to be part of the essence of being a good leader: the sense of developing the self as a way of improving your own practice so that you can promote improvements within other people's practice and hence improving the quality of learning that takes place within your own School and beyond. This is why I feel that promoting an action research approach to leadership will help me to positively influence and *live through others* as I seek to contribute to improvements in their

practice. However, my crucial learning from this has been that the leader, both senior and middle, surely needs to begin with improving himself before he begins to try and influence others. I would argue that a process of self-learning and discovery that is firmly rooted in reflection is required of any leader is that he/she understands themselves and their own practice. My experience of action research enquiries based on 'How can I improve…?' established for me a clear understanding of my own practice as a basis for me to then use my leadership to help others improve and thus for me to live out my own living standard of judgement based on the educational value of *living through others*. This relationally dynamic standard of judgement enables me to be responsive to people and situations that arise within my personal and professional life.

But what makes my work research? Sebba (2004) draws on Dyson and Desforges (2002) and their claims to distinctly define 3 types of research capacities, including:

□ scholarly research to build knowledge;

□ policy makers to use research;

□ and practitioners to produce research to inform their own practice. (Sebba, 2004, p. 39)

This fundamentally contributes to the issues surrounding practitioner research and reinforces the idea that practitioner research is not 'scholarly'. I disagree with this. My thesis, as a piece of practitioner research, is a piece of scholarly research that makes a significant contribution to education in offering a new relationally dynamic educational standard of judgement and providing the evidence of this in practice. Sebba (2004) seems to try and split scholarly and practitioner research and to see them as separate entities. Through the establishment of an in-house teacher-research group which I explain in sequence 3 I was able to demonstrate how practitioner research and academic research can work together in harmony in order to improve practice and contribute to educational knowledge.

Torrance (2004) also identifies the dichotomy between propositional, theoretical knowledge and practical knowledge; arguing that the former follows well-understood methodological processes, whereas the latter has a lack of clear methodological scrutiny (Torrance, 2004, p. 188). In a response to this my thesis demonstrates practical knowledge from a practitioner that follows a methodological process that is creative and responsive to the needs of the enquiry. We need to ensure that we don't dismiss something just because it is different and new. I would argue that it is a mistake to see the divide between 'theoretical' and 'practical' knowledge. My thesis is

both theoretical and practical at the same time, creating living educational theory alongside practical solutions to problems. The greatest benefit is when theory and practice sit alongside each other so as to move forward our educational understandings and improve the quality of learning that takes place. I want to create learners that will bring forward the next generation of advancements in knowledge and so we must ensure that we apply these principles to our own field of educational research, allowing researchers to breathe and explore the realms of possibility rather than only sticking to what we already know. One principle I apply to my daily work is very simple: *if you do what you've always done, you'll get what you always got.* If we envisage a future for education and research where researchers are distant practitioners not necessarily engaged within the day-to-day job that they are researching about; and a future where the practitioners who are engaged in the day-to-day job are discouraged from researching in order to improve what they do, then I think we will be harming the future of the profession and missing out on massive potential understandings of how to improve what we do.

Sebba (2004) continues to argue of the importance of achieving real 'impact' from research as opposed to simply achieving 'dissemination'; she argues that you can have the latter quite easily without necessarily having the former (Sebba, 2004, p. 40). Within my thesis, the construction of an action research living educational theory thesis has required me to work through real problems that I have encountered within my practice and to test out real answers to my concerns. For example, the concern I had over improving teacher-practice in my second school which led to me establishing a teacher-research group ensured that I was having real impact on real teachers and real students; my work wasn't only disseminated to others, although I did do this at times (presentation to BECTA and LAs), but actually had direct impact. The evidence included from significant others, for instance, supports this.

I want to now explain for the reader my understanding of my original contribution to knowledge of 'living educational space'.

1.5 Living Educational Space

Within this section I want to explain and clarify my meanings of the term 'living educational space'. Within my abstract I claim that, 'I explore the on-going nature of transition between living educational spaces upon myself and how this process of change is addressed as I move through different stages of my career and life…. I argue that I am able to improve the quality of the living educational space because of the relationships and experiences that I have had, alongside the living core values that I hold….. This thesis explores how I was able to create the shared living educational space necessary to enable teacher-research to occur and flourish.' The idea of 'living educational space' is part of the original contribution to knowledge that this thesis offers.

I believe that I carry a space with and around me. This space incorporates my whole being: my life story alongside the values that I hold and my own unique living educational theory.

I believe that others carry their own living educational spaces with them.

I believe that the environment I and others inhabit has its own living educational space as well. This may be a school, for instance, which contains procedures or ideas of education.

There are times when these three elements come together, and it is at this point that some common agreement is reached in order to allow these individuals to live through this space. The marrying of these three things, with creative intent and engagement, contributes to improving the quality of education. My own living educational theory incorporates my living standard of judgment of *living myself through others*. This is my life affirming energy (Whitehead, 2008). I use this standard of judgment as a way of understanding others within this living educational space and enabling me and others to creatively engage in order to improve the quality of it.

Within Sequence 3, Chapter 3.6, I recount my experiences of introducing a teacher-research group to Bitterne Park School. The introduction of this group enabled me and the participants to explore their own living educational spaces through enquiry and to then influence the living educational space of the school.

However, I would argue that living educational space is not necessarily based on a school context. I recognize that I am living life as enquiry (Marshall, 1999) and therefore argue that I always have living educational space around me. My inclusion of autobiographical examples within this thesis, for instance, The School-Refuser Story in Chapter 2.2, demonstrates this sense of being present within living educational space. From these examples I understand and clarify my own being.

This offers the further originality of this thesis which is the moving of personal experiences into the professional domain to account for the nature of their influence. By this I mean the recognition that the nature of my autobiography influences my professional life I lead.

I believe that from reflection of the living educational space something new emerges from it as contributions to educational knowledge and improving practice. This thesis makes contributions to:

1. A new epistemology. For me a new living standard of judgment has emerged of *living myself through others.* This I believe responds to Schon's (1995) calls for the emergence of a new epistemology from action research that enables practitioners to account for the knowledge they hold.
2. A living theory methodology. The sustained use of an autobiographical methodological approach alongside the creation and accounting for my own living educational theory is contributing to a living theory methodology.
3. Improving the practice of teachers. Within this thesis I account in Sequence 3 for the impact of establishing the living educational space for teachers to engage in practitioner research in improving practice and in generating their own educational knowledge.
4. Improving the quality of educational relationships. Demonstrating that a relationally dynamic standard of judgment *of living myself through others* through my practice has contributed to improvements in the quality of my educational relationships.

Within the next section in want to begin to explain some of the educational relationships that I have had and I will refer to 'significant others' who have been part of this.

1.6 Significant Others (1)

Within this section I want to demonstrate how my growing relationship with Jack is an example of a loving educational relationship through drawing on Cho's (2005) notion of love. I also want to provide an account of my growing living educational relationship with my wife. It is further evidence of my understanding of the importance of my own learning through others and how this can be used to positively influence the living educational space that I inhabit. I again remind myself of Cho's (2005) notion of love as I engage with my wife within a loving educational relationship. Through Jack and Karen this has helped me to triangulate my own ideas. Within my abstract, 'I argue that I am able to improve the quality of the living educational space because of the relationships and experiences that I have had, alongside the living core values that I hold…. This thesis addresses the vastly important influence of relationships within education and explores how these relationships impact on my practice as an educator. The text incorporates and captures these relationships through enabling these others to speak through their own voice.'

I refer to 'significant others' as people who I have had loving relationships (Cho, 2005) with and who I have *lived through*.

Figure 10: Image of Jack Whitehead

I want to offer an insight into my growing relationship with Jack Whitehead. My relationship with Jack began during my M.A. through the University of Bath, some 5 years ago. Over this time I believe our relationship has grown, moving from a professional relationship to one of mutual respect and love. This sense of love, I believe, is firmly nested in Cho's (2005) notion of love and is something that I can embrace within the relationship that I have with Jack. Cho comments:

> 'In the love encounter, the teacher and student do not seek knowledge from or of each other, but, rather, they seek knowledge from the world with each other:' (Cho, 2005, p 94)

This reflects for me the way that I try to treat those that I teach. I treat my relationship with Jack in the same way that I would want others to treat and see me. I listen to

Jack because I believe in what he says: if I didn't respect him I wouldn't listen to him. It is in one sense a co-enquiry. Cho embraces the relationally dynamic understanding of learning and through this I am able to understand my own values and being: of seeing learning as an exchange between people together rather than a one-way process. Cho further comments in relation to this co-enquiry approach to knowledge:

> '…love means the pursuit of real knowledge, knowledge that is no longer limited to particular content passed from one to the other, but rather knowledge that can only be attained by each partner seeking it in the world.' (Cho, 2005, p 94)

Jack has been fundamental in helping to bring forward my thoughts, feelings and ideas on education and he has helped me to be able to account for my own living educational theory as it has emerged through my personal and professional life. My relationship with him has provided the space for this to happen. He has been instrumental in drawing my own life affirming energy form within me and helping to centralise this within my life in order to improve what I do for the benefit of others. He has been a tower of strength and a voice of reason when my own personality has demanded me to react in other ways. I hope my students get the same from me as I have got from Jack.

Over this period of study I have had a great deal of contact with Jack. I want to draw on some examples of this contact in order to illustrate why Jack is a significant other to me. Much of our contact has been through email and I will draw on some of these. Jack wrote in response to an early draft of this thesis:

> 'Hi Simon - having just read your account I can see why you are really enjoying what you are creating. It's a most engaging read and carries your passion as a committed educator and practitioner-researcher. Your story also carries your creative and critical engagements with the ideas of others and you open acknowledgement of your learning with colleagues. All I think I can do is to encourage you to keep sending me more until the thesis is complete!

> Because so many of your educational relationships with colleagues and students involve your educational influence through conversations, it might strengthen your thesis to draw on data of some of your educational conversations with students (like the one with Mark) in which you can show

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your influence on the learning of others in the others own voice. Let's
chat about this next week. Looking forward to seeing you.

Love Jack.' (22-04-04)

This response was both great to receive and slightly frustrating. On one hand it is
really positive to hear somebody liking my writing and I get the impression that Jack
is pleased. However, I was also hoping for something a little more 'critical' of my
work: something that I could pin my next ideas to and respond to and take on board
through my writing. As ever, I am wanting and seeking the criticism that I can use to
improve from. However, I recognise that Jack also works within Cho's (2005) notion
of love and his response is sent in a loving way that wants to enquire alongside me.
He will not respond in such a way that tells me what I should do, but rather wants the
writing to emerge from within our relationship.

Jack further wrote in relation to being sent another section of my writing:
> 'Hi Simon- a beautiful evening in Bath and I'm off out to saviour the balmy
> evening with drinks and dinner in the Garden. I've downloaded your thesis
> writing and I'm looking forward to responding. I'd like to try something
> new in my response to your writing to see if I can respond in a way that
> shows your influence in my own education as I seek to communicate my own
> learning as I live myself through others. I've already got this vague
> intuition of how I want to respond to your writings.

Love Jack.' (30-05-04)

This for me is the kind of response that I've come to understand and appreciate from
Jack. Within our relationship I can sense the growing opening of insights into each
other. Through this thesis I am opening myself up to him and allowing him insights
into my character and being: in a sense, this is the trust that I have in him to do this. I
am also growing in awareness of how Jack wants to be able to connect with the
value of *living through others*: how he wants to be able to value it and appreciate it
within his own practice. It is this type of creative engagement and encounter which is
demonstration of *living myself through others* within a living educational space: of
somebody creatively engaging with the idea of *living myself through others* and
something new emerging from it within their own practice. This relationship mirrors

the types of relationships that I want with those who I come into contact with in school: the sense of co-enquiring and learning from the world we inhabit together.

Jack's willingness to learn alongside me as a co-enquirer has increased the loving relationship that I feel we have. I have learned from him how to overcome the contextual barriers that have been placed in front of me as I have been producing this thesis: I have learned how to move around barriers in a dynamic way through seeking the positive more fully from the negatives presented to me. This was never more so than during my transfer from MPhil to PhD, when my first transfer paper and presentation failed and my second one passed. Jack was able to support me in creatively responding to very challenging circumstances and it is this approach that I am beginning to apply to my professional life much more fully.

Figure 11: Image of my wife Karen and daughter Sophia, 2007.

It is very significant that through the time of writing this thesis I have been living with my fiancée, shown above, at the start of writing, who became my wife, at the end of writing, who has also been writing her Ph.D. thesis. The above image was taken at home with our daughter, Sophia, and reflects the person that I understand Karen to be. I am taking the image. Her gaze is looking at me and I am able to draw out that smile and connection. Perhaps I can consider the significance of this relationship of writer, teacher-researcher, and fiancée/husband. This is my own recognition that I am influencing and being influenced by the relationships that surround me.

We both write mainly from home within the same room, writing on our laptops not more than one metre away from each other. We read, engage and write significant

contributions to our growing understanding of our own practice. We travel in the car, and we discuss, on the way to get our shopping. We watch television, and we discuss our writing. Our lives as teacher-researchers are significant within our existence. We did not have children at the start of this research: perhaps this is our gap-filler? We each have our own *baby* emerging from within our computers, growing on a daily basis, desperate to be fed and cared for, gasping for knowledge and wisdom to be able to go into the world and live through others its existence. Then Sophia came along. For us, our work has a desire to be living: to be understood and engaged with by others. Our work is part of our lives.

My wife is the more questioning of us: she is asking, desiring as a parent. She wants her *child* to be right. She wants to be able to follow a plan. She wants to keep it simple and keep it in such a way that others can appreciate it. She wants to be able to talk about it. She is an enthusiastic parent who wants to be able to talk about her child, not in a boastful way, but with an engagement and love for it.

I am not the same. I want my *child* to have the love and compassion that I feel. I want it to be able to recognise others and *live through* their experiences. I want it to be able to value their feelings, emotions and passions. I want it to be creative and set new boundaries. I want it to be able to explore for itself its surroundings. I don't mind if it makes its own mistakes. I don't fear for it.

This describes my own notions of being in *loco parentis*. This describes the types of relationships that I want with those I come into contact with. I strive to live out these values within my own life as I help to raise our daughter. I strive to live out these values within my own professional life as I experience educational relationships and aim to bring my love and life to them in order to bring out the best in myself and others.

Further to this I can reflect on the impact that my professional and personal life have on each other. It is probably true that the two things are gelled well together; I can reflect on my wedding day and the following image that shows myself, my wife and other members of the teacher-research group there to celebrate with us along with members of our families. I feel that this reflects how our personal and professional lives are entwined, for positive reasons, and the extent to which we rely on these professional relationships as supporting mechanisms.

Figure 12: Image from my Wedding Day, 2004. The image contains both family and work colleagues.

Central to our growing educational relationship is our desire to be *worthy of each other*: both personally as well as professionally. This, I believe, is what drives us on to account for our own living educational theories and educational practice. We want to seek to define what it means to be worthy to each other and the world. From each other, we get this sense of inspiration and pleasure that allows us to drive forward. When we are with each other, we are both fully present: perhaps none more so than on our wedding day. We gain the sense of regeneration from each other, drawing on each other's strengths each day. This is what provides for us our relationally dynamic educational standard of judgement: as we grow and change, so does our growing and emerging educational theory.

Within the next section I want to explain how my work is worthy of a doctorate.

1.7 The criteria

Within this section I intend to show how I value the freedom of expression of the researcher in order to enhance the quality and value of practitioner research that is emerging through the Academy. I draw on Furlong and Oancea (2005) in their calls for recognising the potential diversity within research that could exist, and Lomax (1998) in her calls to extend the ways that we judge research. I support Kincheloe (2003) in his valuing of the Emancipatory potential of research, and consider Foucault (1977) in his exploration of knowledge and power within social formations.

From the outset of this thesis I have been clear in my intention to write the account that I felt best reflected the experiences and learning that has taken place over the preceding years. I agree with Reason (2005) in his comments:

> 'If we start from the idea that creating knowledge is a practical affair, we will start not, as in traditional academic research, from an interesting theoretical questions, but from what concerns us in practice, from the presenting issues in our lives.' (Reason, 2005, p. 3)

I was clear that I wanted to be truthful and honest within my own mind of what has influenced me to be the educator that I am: I was starting from practical concerns within my own personal and professional life and these became the guiding research stories that were able to frame this thesis. However, I am aware that I cannot account for everything and in that respect, I have been selective in the narrative I have told.

As a secondary aspect to this I have been aware of the need to meet the criteria offered by the University of Bath so that this work can be assessed and placed within the Academy. Two of the criteria that I am working to are:

☐ making an original and significant contribution to knowledge;

☐ giving evidence of originality of mind and critical judgement in a particular subject.

I am in support of Furlong and Oancea (2005) with respect to their calls for acknowledging the recognition of diverse forms of evidence to respond to the changing nature of educational research production. I want to create an account of my own practitioner's autobiographical educational narrative that I want to be creative, imaginative, truthful and engaging. I want to be able to account for my learning in a creative way that allows a reader to judge my account with a freedom of judgement that is based on learning, education and practice. I want to be able to contribute to Coulter's (1999) claims for the need to:

'…move from focusing on the generation of knowledge necessary for scholarly dialogue to examining the dialogue itself.' (Coulter, 1999, p. 5)

Throughout this thesis I intend to be able to show that I am satisfying the criteria required for a Ph.D. study of *originality of mind* and *critical judgement*. Perhaps as a starting point for this section of my thesis it is important for me to explain what my own epistemology is and what I believe is educational knowledge in respect of my own growing understanding through my role as a teacher-researcher and leader.

Kincheloe (2003) recognises the link between what we understand educative knowledge to be and Habermas' three forms of knowledge: the Technical interest; the Practical interest; and the Emancipatory interest. It is through these forms of defined knowledge that I can recognise my own understanding of what I constitute to be my own living educational theory. I cannot fully recognise the sense of Habermas' *Technical Interest* with teacher-research: whilst I can sense the importance of teacher-research providing the tools to support the improvement of teachers within their work, I cannot see the sense in the value of being able to reproduce events or data to support research. This sense is reflected in Whitehead's (2003) comments regarding whether it is necessary or possible to be able to reproduce events or research. Research for me is far more subjective and personalised in that it is essentially there to support the individual and their practice as an influential educator. Others may well be able to take something from the research, but essentially the research is a personal learning journey and account. It is not there as a reproducible theory of education that can be generalised. I am aware of how much educational research is based on this Technical Interest model. I am aware of my own research work for NCSL that has required me to produce research in this Technical Interest style in order to gain funding.

For instance, I read an account that reflects on Assessment for Learning in Schools that concludes it impacts positively on attainment. I wonder what am I to take from this, other than it might benefit my students in some way and that I need to creatively engage with this in order to make it relevant to my school. It is my engagement with it that makes it relevant, rather than the material itself. My argument is that this thesis I am writing accounts for my own learning journey: my conclusions may be useful to others, but it is essentially my own learning journey. In this, this text is to be judged against whether or not it accounts for my learning journey.

The *Practical Interest* I feel is useful in the sense that it helps to provide the metaphors that teacher-researchers can use to support their explanations of the work that they carry out: it helps to provide a meta-language to communicate with others within the teacher-research community and to help put ideas across in an understandable and communicable form. I can reflect on the importance to me of incorporating the essence of the story of *Henry V* into my Management of Staff Development M.A. assignment and also of incorporating *The Great Gatsby* into my M.A. dissertation as a way of helping me to communicate the stories that I wanted to tell. These references allowed me to be able to draw on autobiographical references that were important to me in my life and help me to communicate with the reader the feelings and emotions that I had through making these connections and contextual references.

Essentially though it is the *Emancipatory Interest* which supports the work of teacher-researchers through supporting knowledge production that allows the teacher-researcher the freedom to work without restraint or restriction within their chosen areas to improve their practice. It is this form of knowledge which links knowledge with knowledge-use: linking knowledge with improvements in practice within the classroom. For me it is this type of knowledge that has the potential to liberate teachers within their classrooms and to promote knowledge that is valued as it is produced by those who have a direct stake in the uses of the knowledge produced.

Whitehead (2003) argues well the need for a greater understanding and acceptance within the Academy of teacher-research accounts. He comments:

> 'Where there is still much work to be done is in developing the shared understandings of the values-based standards of judgement used by examiners of s-step accounts.' (Whitehead, 2003, p. 6)

By this I understand Whitehead to mean that there is a need to further clarify the examination of s-step accounts, in order to proliferate the understandings of living standards of judgements, that are the ways in which individuals account for and explain the nature of their learning and educational influence over themselves and others. My hope is that the readers of this text will be able to appreciate my values and reflect on Whitehead's comments above. However, in order to read and appreciate this text the reader may wish to draw on Bakhtin's theory of the carnival in terms of its ability to:

> '…disclose(s) the potentiality of an entirely different world, or another order, another way of life.' (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 48)

I am proposing a world where teacher-researchers and academic-researchers can work together in order to produce the tools that will enable education and life to move forward in a productive way. Sequence 3 of this thesis accounts for how I did this. I understand that both practitioners and researchers have the same ends in sight: to make things better for others through improving the quality of the educational space inhabited. As Coulter (1999) acknowledges:

> 'Dialogic truth is not pronounced by philosopher kings, but constructed by ordinary people.' (Coulter, 1999, p. 9)

In my view, we are all ordinary people trying to make things better. My understanding of teacher-researchers and their ability to be knowledge producers within education drives forward my epistemology. I support Kincheloe (2003) when he comments:

> 'Promoting teachers as researchers is a fundamental way of cleaning up the damage of technical standards. De-skilling of teachers and dumbing-down of the curriculum take place when teachers are seen as receivers not producers of knowledge. A vibrant professional culture depends on a group of practitioners who have the freedom to continuously reinvent themselves via their research and knowledge production.' (Kincheloe, 2003, p. 19)

This sense of 'vibrant', 'freedom', and 'reinvention' is central here. How liberating those words are! Essentially this has been my own experience of teacher-research. Being part of a teacher-research community at Westwood St Thomas has established for me the importance of allowing teachers the chance to take control of the improvement of their practice: change that is driven from within individuals has more chance of making a greater, lasting impact on practice. Change that is externally enforced leaves the door of refusal open. I can reflect on my own previous teacher-research projects that I have undertaken on for instance, having to implement the KS3 *National Literacy Strategy* within my own school and using an action research cycle to help me introduce this externally imposed national initiative within my local context. I can reflect on the sense of creativity as commented by Coulter and Wiens (2002) who attempt to link the sense of knowledge production of teacher-researchers alongside university academics and consider how the two can gain from the relationship between the two groups of people. Returning to Kincheloe's 'vibrant', 'freedom' and 'reinvention' reflects the need to constantly re-evaluate the nature of educational knowledge: to constantly ask the question, 'How can I/We improve….?' That is why that question is the key starting point for any teacher-researcher enquiry as it draws implicitly on vibrancy, freedom and

reinvention within its answer. Within this thesis, I want to be judged against the same criteria: Is it vibrant? Is it free? Is it reinventing?

I can reflect on the notions of 'power' and 'knowledge' from Foucault (1977) and relate these to the debate over what we should constitute as educational knowledge:

> 'Perhaps, too, we should abandon a whole tradition that allows us to imagine that knowledge can exist only where the power relations are suspended and that knowledge can develop only outside its injunctions, its demands and its interests. Perhaps we should abandon the belief that power makes mad and that, by the same token, the renunciation of power is one of the conditions of knowledge. We should admit rather that power produces knowledge (and not simply by encouraging it because it serves power or by applying it because it is useful); that power and knowledge directly imply one another; that there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations. These 'power-knowledge relations' are to be analysed, therefore, not on the basis of a subject of knowledge who is or is not free in relation to the power system, but, on the contrary, the subject who knows, the objects to be known and the modalities of knowledge must be regarded as so many effects of these fundamental implications of power-knowledge and their historical transformations. In short, it is not the activity of the subject of knowledge that produces a corpus of knowledge, useful or resistant to power, but power-knowledge, the processes and struggles that traverse it and of which it is made up, that determines the forms and possible domains of knowledge.' (Foucault, 1977, p. 27-28)

Foucault's sense of trying to understand the processes of discipline which are at work in relation to the control of people within society is worthy of note within education: one of those processes which he sees as dispersing power through society. For me, it is central for educators to be able to understand the power that they possess and to be able to create and transform the work that they do as practitioners so that the messages that they deliver are appropriate rather than being political to serve the single needs of the ruling political regimes at the time. For too long, education has been at the beckoning call of whichever political party has been in power, changing direction based on political ideology rather than the needs of the learners.

In relation to the Ph.D. thesis I am writing, I can draw upon Whitehead's (2003) comments:

> 'Any research account of an educational practice must make sense to the reader if it is to be judged as a contribution to educational knowledge. What I mean by making sense is that the account has a logic in that the reader can comprehend the form that the reasoning is taking.' (Whitehead, 2003, p. 16)

Form is important within this text: form opens up within this text and emerges. As I write this text, and re-write it, the form morphs into something else. The form begins to breathe and live itself and come to life. The form this text takes, as a multi-media text incorporating image and video, is further evidence of my originality of mind.

My critical judgements are being demonstrated through my interactions with my own emerging educational theory, through my engagement with the ideas of others and through my growing understanding of what is educational to me. It is through my engagement and reflective considerations of my own practice that I am seeking to improve the work that I do.

> 'The examination combines the techniques of an observing hierarchy and those of a normalising judgement. It is a normalizing gaze, a surveillance that makes it possible to qualify, to classify and to punish. It establishes over individuals a visibility through which one differentiates them and judges them. That is why, in all the mechanisms of discipline, the examination is highly ritualised. In it are combined the ceremony of power and the form of the experiment, the deployment of force and the establishment of truth. At the heart of the procedures of discipline, it manifests the subjection of those who are perceived as objects and the objectification of those who are subjected. The superimposition of the power relations and knowledge relations assumes in the examination all its visible brilliance.' (Foucault, 1977, p. 184-185)

Within the next section I want to explain to the reader how I have considered ethics within my thesis.

1.8 Ethics

All interviews and interactions within this text have gained informed consent (Cohen et al., 2000) from participants. However, beyond this I am arguing that the ethics that I have employed have emerged through the inquiry as a result of the interactions and decisions that I have taken. They have reflected the educational values that I have proposed at the start of the inquiry and essentially, through my attempt to *live through* those that I have communicated with, I have allowed this to be the determining factor in decisions made. I am suggesting that this is another form of my own originality of mind and critical engagement as my approach has emerged through the inquiry and through my critical engagement and I have developed a greater understanding of how I want to work. I am acknowledging that through my critical engagement I have been able to make this informed decision and this has allowed my originality of mind to develop. I further feel that this is a reflection of my growing sense of professionalism and judgement as a teacher-researcher, to be able to make these informed decisions regarding ethics within my thesis.

Cohen et al. (2000) draw on Hopkins (1985) in determining a set of ethical principles for action researchers to follow during their research:

Observe protocol – within this I have gained permission from the two schools at the centre of the research that I was working in.

Involve participants – I have incorporated the voices of others into the text to help me to construct the narrative.

Negotiate with those affected – where staff have not wanted me to use their input I have respected this; where consent has been given I have used their work. In some examples staff have requested that their names not be used and I have respected their requests.

Report progress – I have shared the work I have done with those involved through making it available on the web and through discussion with those involved in it. These forms of validation have helped to refine my own understandings of the data that I have collected.

Obtain explicit authorizations – those I have incorporated within the work have given their full authorization.

Negotiate descriptions of people's work – where I have written about others I have included their responses within the work.

Negotiate accounts of others' points of view – where others have requested changes I have incorporated these into my account.

Obtain explicit authorization before using quotations – through presenting a multi-media text I have obtained permissions before gathering data in a multi-media form.

Negotiate reports for various levels of release – where I have shared and released this work I have taken account of who the audience is.

Accept responsibility for maintaining confidentiality – where individuals have wanted to remain anonymous I have adhered to this request.

Retain the right to report your work – I have considered this through the publishing to the web this account.

Make your principles of procedure binding and known – as this account has emerged over a period of time I have informed individuals at the point that they were drawn on to add to the account. Obviously, over time as the account has emerged, some of the principles have changed and I have made people aware of these emerging procedures that I have used.

Within the next sequence I want to move from my own educational values and to reflect on my own life-story as I continue to explain my own living educational theory.

Sequence 2 The Past

Figure 13: Image of my parents and me, 1979.

Within this sequence I intend to explore the value that I place on the role of autobiography within my own practice. In my abstract I make the claim that, '… I am the educator that I am because of the life I have led and the life that I am currently leading.' I draw on Kincheloe (2003) in his argument to support autobiography as a valid form of research and on Day (2004) in his linking of the personal and professional self and its importance within practice. I consider and extend Bullough Jr and Pinnegar (2001) in exploring their guidelines for using autobiography within research and exploring these within my own practice.

Why am I including this autobiographical account of my life as evidence of my originality of mind and critical judgement? Within this sequence I want to explore this through exemplifying how I believe my past has influenced my present. I also argue that my past helps to clarify the practitioner that I am.

Ribbins, Pashiardis & Gronn (2003) quote Gronn & Ribbins (1996) commenting in relation to developing leaders:

> '"First, as detailed case histories, biographies may be inspected for evidence of the development and learning of leadership attributes. Second, they provide analytical balance sheets on the ends to which leaders have directed their attributes throughout their careers within the shifting demands on, and options available to, them. Third, a comparative analysis of leaders' career paths as revealed in biographies can answer broader institutional-level questions,…"'

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(Ribbins, Pashiardis & Gronn, 2003, p 4)

Somehow, I don't think that the clinical nature of Ribbins' et al. (2003) language can quite capture the sense of human emotion and feeling that I feel as a leader and living educator who is a human being. However, I agree with the importance of (auto)biographies providing evidence of learning, providing justifications for decisions made and providing wider understanding of why schools run as they do. I want to develop the arguments of Ribbins et al. (2003) to incorporate autobiography as I believe that it is through engaging individuals within self-reflection that the power to improve the quality of the living educational space is enhanced.

The above image, figure 24, is an image of me and my parents. My mum found this image as she was clearing out the back bedroom and sent it to me with the comment:

> 'Hi Simon
>
> This is the only photograph with just the three of us on it, you were about 6. Don't forget I was either taking a photograph or your dad was, kids weren't as conversant with cameras then, so Angela and Samantha [my sisters] wouldn't have been allowed to use the camera.
>
> This was taken down Witton Park.
>
> Love Mum' (December, 2005)

My *self* has been created through the interactions from the two other people in the above photograph: without their influence I wouldn't have been the person that I am today. When I look at this photograph I see a little boy that is happy and full of life: a little boy that is a person; a little boy that carries with him hopes and dreams for the future; a little boy that is peering over the shoulders of the life of his parents; a little boy that has and knows love. This captures the sense of the personalised narrative that I want to account for. I am aware of my need to not only search outside, within the schools that I have worked in, for voices to be incorporated into this text as evidence, but also to listen carefully to those voices that are already present within my life and history, such as my parents. (Coulter, 1999, p. 9)

Within the next section I want to explain the nature of autobiography within this thesis.

2.1 Autobiography

The autobiographical form that this thesis takes is my expressing of my own creative intent and understanding of my life and practice. I have chosen the autobiographical form as this was the most appropriate way for me to communicate these meanings. The autobiographical form allows me to communicate my values and being and to demonstrate how my life, both personal and professional, is intertwined within the matrix of experience. An autobiographical form also enables me to communicate the living nature of my own living educational theory.

My form of writing is an expression of my methodological inventiveness (Dadds & Hart, 2001). My form of writing is linked to my own being and my life as an educator. My creative expression of my life of inquiry is contained within the images, video and words contained within this thesis. Dadds & Hart comment:

> '…for some practitioner researchers, creating their own unique way through their research may be as important as their self-chosen research focus.'
> (Dadds & Hart, 2001, p 166)

I recognise that my research is unique and that the way that I have chosen to understand my life as a practitioner-researcher has been able to contribute to improving my practice by allowing me to understand my self as a person. From this insight, I have been able to contribute to the education of others. I also recognise that I have been creative in the way I have chosen to work through my research: bringing my own set of values and unique attributes to this work in order to understand life and education better.

Hill & Stephens (2005) argue for the importance of looking at the self in detail in order to make sense of who we are. They argue that individuals exist in the form of many 'selves' and that we need to be able to connect these in order to understand who we are. I very often need to make choices with regards to which self I am living out in different circumstances. In some cases this can lead to a lack of pleasure within life as we are being forced to live out a living contradiction. Part of our responsibility as a leader is to help others to manage their selves as well. This is all linked to individual's core values and we need as leaders to understand these.

Marshall (2004) refers to the importance of 'first-person' action research, self-reflective inquiry or self-study. She draws on Reason & Bradbury (2001) in defining first-person action research as a way of inquiring into our own lives and making

sense of them thus allowing us to research into more elements of our being as we can then inquire into more events as we look at all the elements of our life rather than just the specific educational moments. She further refers to second-person research as involving others and third person as seeking to bring in the wider community. I would argue that I have drawn on all three elements within my own research. 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 moments of being and action…'
> (Marshall, 2004, p2)

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, p2)

Marshall (1999) further exemplifies my own sense of life and research through her idea of *living life as inquiry* that she refers to as:

> '…a range of beliefs, strategies and ways of behaving which encourage me to treat little as fixed, finished, clear cut.' (Marshall, 1999, p2)

Marshall argues for the importance of understanding of self in order to improve what we do. She argues that the everyday life we lead holds value and importance in understanding our place within the world. For me this resonates with the heart of my own thesis. My own life story and history have been held up and reflected upon in order to improve my own learning and life of today and tomorrow.

Parker (2002) considers the impact of life history on leadership acknowledging the link between personality and leadership approaches. He conducts this research through researching into five existing successful Headteachers and does not reflect on his own experiences. I agree with his comments and conclusions and I would argue that I have taken his points about these links further through engaging in first-person action research. My account incorporates my life story and sites this within its historical context (Goodson, 1992) moving from anecdotal recounts to important developmental experiences in shaping the person that I am today.

Parker identified a number of key findings from his research into these successful Headteachers:

> '…that a good deal of what they do comes from who they are and not from what they have learnt.' (Parker, 2002, p. 32)

I would argue that this presents a narrow view of what learning is. A great deal of my learning is from within my life as a whole and it is my application of this learning that enables me to be the educator that I am. I would agree that leadership is not just about passing the standards of the N.P.Q.H qualification, but is more about what you do each day in practice. The choices and decisions that I make are based on the core values that I carry with me. These evolving values are drawn from the experiences that I engage with and also from the deep-rooted experiences that I have had within my life.

> 'They looked back through their own lives and realised how easily they could have ended up in jobs with no prospect – a life unfulfilled. Their passion does not come from a training manual; it comes from a deep-seated desire to help their students avoid the same fate.' (Parker, 2002, p. 32)

I account within my thesis of the important role that my parents have played in creating the educator and person that I am today. It was their constant influence of telling me that I could be anything that I wanted to be if I worked hard enough that supported me in becoming a teacher. It was their determination that I wouldn't be a labourer like my father that helped me realise my dreams.

> '…this ability to take risks and think unconventionally are characteristics that they would probably trace back to their respective upbringings.' (Parker, 2002, p. 33)

In order to be the person I am today I have had to take risks. The easy option would have been to follow in the family cycle of being a labourer. However, breaking the pattern and taking that risk of leaving my home demonstrated that there was a different way of living life.

> '…all five heads trace their competitiveness back to their roots.' (Parker, 2002, p. 34)

From my early childhood experiences I have always maintained a competitive edge: to be the best; to be first. This is part of the reason why I achieved straight A's within my GCSEs at school and why I moved so quickly through leadership positions within my career.

Karpiak (2003) draws on the framework offered by Britzman (1998) in looking at the ways that autobiography can aid self-development and growth within people. Britzman identified three potential ways of telling life stories: ethnographic (a focus on

detail); reflective (a focus on tension/anxiety); uncanny (the revealing of an inner kept truth or secret). Britzman argues that these ways are progressively deeper in terms of revealing what the core values are that drive the individual.

For me I have needed to respond to all three of these elements within my own story in order to communicate to the reader the passion and feelings evident within my life. I had to merge the three elements in order to explain and account for my influence as an educator.

Ethnographic: I include details relevant to my life story of changing jobs, of getting married, of simple names and dates of events. However, this thesis is not an auto-ethnographic study as I am addressing the research from the perspective of a values base rather than a cultural base: I am explaining the nature of my life and own educational influence from explaining the nature of my values that are living and emerging form within my practice, rather than from a cultural perspective which would see me as 'fitting into' a pre-determined place. I picture this as a jig-saw: if it was an auto-ethnographic study, I would be looking to fit my piece into the picture. However, from a values perspective, the picture is still emerging so I contribute to creating it as I go along.

Reflective: I have incorporated comments and reflections on events that have occurred of for instance, looking at the transition between the roles of middle and senior leader or reflecting on my experiences of introducing a teacher-research group into my school.

Uncanny: I have dealt with the vastly significant event of being a school-refuser as a child which was a very difficult aspect of my story to come to terms with. Beyond this I incorporate my experiences of personal sorrow at the learning of my father's lung cancer and the affect of this on me.

Through writing about and utilising my own autobiography within my study I acknowledge the debate that will surround the sense of validity within it. I have written a qualitative study that requires validity to be measured in a way that is different to a traditional account or thesis. For instance, through Reason's (2005) calls for validity to measure the level at which the research makes us think about our own values; or through Kincheloe's (2003) ideas that validity should be determined through how useful research is in telling us something about our personal and

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professional lives or based on the credibility of the account; or through Anderson & Herr (1999) and the framework they propose for assessing practitioner accounts.

Feldman (2003) reflects on Bullough & Pinnegar's (2001) proposed Guidelines for Quality in Autobiographical Forms of Self-Study arguing for the need to ensure that validity is addressed within self-study research in order for qualitative research to be applicable for a wide audience. Feldman identifies the key concern surrounding self-study that utilises autobiographical forms as creating accurate accounts that are 'truthful'. Feldman argues for a movement towards existentialism as one way of ensuring that self-study deals with our individual reasons for being. For Feldman it is essential that the self-study researcher clearly deals with the 'how' question: how has data been gained? How has it been interpreted? He identified 4 ways in which we can increase validity:

1. Provide details of the research methods used;
2. Provide details of how data has been transformed into an artistic impression;
3. Provide details of why one representation has been chosen over others;
4. Provide evidence of the value of the change in being of the educator.

(Feldman, 2003, pp 27-28)

For me these debates are part of the continued development of the qualitative research movement as it searches for the academic freedom to allow self-study practitioners the opportunity to account for their learning and living within a form that is appropriate to do so. It is difficult to acknowledge that educational research does not fit into boxes and cannot be controlled in the same way that scientific experiments can be.

Marshall & Reason (1998) further contribute to this debate when considering the nature of validity within research. They sum up two questions to test the validity: "Has this inquiry helped to develop the quality of aware action among those involved?"
"Is there evidence of improved action-inquiry capacities?"
I would argue that my thesis is a response to my whole being: it is a self-reflection and consideration of who I have been, who I am and who I might be, through my reflection. My thesis draws on the critical theory of my life and integrates this theory with the academic theory that is already out there. My actions and practice have changed as a result of my inquiry and through my application to my life of self-

reflection I have demonstrated my capacity to continue to reflect upon my existence and improve it.

But, how can I demonstrate that I have satisfied the need to incorporate *rigour* and *criticality* within my thesis? How can a thesis that promotes autobiography as a valid method of research go beyond simply anecdotal story-telling and become research?

On one level I have been subject to the same process of any doctoral student of going through the transfer process and responding to the internal reader concerns. Beyond this, I have been part of Validity Groups and worked alongside a co-researcher who has been able to question the meanings and understandings that I am trying to demonstrate. This element has been particularly important.

This research has revealed my own values and the motivations that drive me to do what I do the way that I do it. My work alongside my wife, a fellow doctoral student has been a vastly important element of the research process. The love between us and the passion to be the best that we can be for each other is something that drives us both on. The quality of this personal and educational relationship is something that I try and mirror within my own educational relationships with others. I am referring to love in the sense that Cho (2005) refers to it as being something positive and liberating in improving the quality of education through the general concern to improve things through working together. The interesting journey through our production of our thesis together has been revolving around our changing desires to get the best from each other. We began our writing as competitors: unable to share our understandings with each other as we fought to reach the finish line. Over time, our mission became the same mission: our boundaries of independence and competition became permeable and supportive to get the best from each other and want the best for each other. This internal relationship mirrors the journey through education of my own experiences: of being a product of a labour government in the late 1990's that focused on standards and league tables which by definition promoted competition rather than collaboration. I believe my thesis accounts for my transformational attempts to promote inclusion and collaboration through sharing and demonstrating a relationally dynamic awareness.

Snow (2001) argues for the need to find ways of making public the personalised knowledge of the practitioner in order to avoid having to rely on simple anecdote. She implies the difficulty though of doing this. Furlong & Oancea (2005) further

acknowledge the difficulties in accessing practitioner accounts in terms of educational knowledge. The way in which I have held my practice up for scrutiny and accounted for my standards of judgement and own way of being as a human being and a practitioner is a move towards making public the accounts of practitioners. The contribution of my story to the field of education, along with the stories of other practitioners, will enhance the understanding of learning and living through the explanations of what it is like within identified contexts. My role in establishing a practitioner-research group at my school was my way of enabling other practitioners to account for their own learning and being through providing them with the opportunities to do this.

Winter (1996) identifies 6 key principles of action research which I believe help me to demonstrate rigour within my work:

1. *reflexive critique* – process of becoming aware of our own perceptual biases
2. *dialectical critique* – way of understanding the relationships between elements within our own contexts
3. *collaboration* – taking of everyone's view in contributing to understanding the situation
4. *risking disturbance* – understanding of self and willingness to open this up to critique
5. *creating plural structures* – promoting various accounts rather than one single finished account
6. *theory and practice internalised* – recognising theory and practice as dependent upon each other

Through this thesis I have accounted for my own living values and explained how I have applied these to my own practice. I have looked at the situations that I have found myself in and analysed these. I have incorporated the voices of others in order to help me account for my claims. I have analysed and evaluated my own being and accounted for how I have come to see things as I do. I have promoted a multi-narrative approach where others have written parts of this account. I have drawn on theory in order to account for my own practice and contributed to living theory in order to produce new insights and understanding.

Day (2004) recognises the important role that an educator's personal life plays within their professional commenting:

'Good teaching is to do with teachers' values, identities, moral purposes, attitudes to learning (their own as well as those of their students), their caring and commitment to be the best they can at all times and in every circumstance for the good of their students. It is about their enthusiasm and their passion.' (Day, 2004, p. 15-16)

My thesis demonstrates how I have engaged with these ideas. My recognising and accounting for my values; my uncovering and accounting for my identity; my clarifying of my moral purpose; my explaining of my attitude to learning; my desire to be the best that I can; and my passion for what I do. My thesis lays bare these ideas for the reader to make judgements on.

With specific regard to 'identity', Day (2004) comments:

'Teachers' professional identities – who and what they are, their self-image, the meanings they attach to themselves and their work, and the meanings that are attributed to them by others – are, then, associated with both the subject they teach (this is particularly the case with secondary school teachers), their relationships with the pupils they teach, their roles, and the connections between these and their lives outside school.' (Day, 2004, p. 53)

It is within these realms that I have significantly developed these notions of the importance of the relationship between personal and professional self. Through my thesis I have explicitly made clear the links between who I am and what I do; drawing on evidence from the relationships that I have in order to explain my professional identity. Day (2004) further comments:

'Identities are not stable but discontinuous, fragmented and subject to change (Day and Hadfield, 1996). Indeed, today's professional has been described as, 'mobilizing a complex of occasional identities in response to shifting contexts' (Stronach et al., 2002, p. 117). (Day, 2004, p. 57)

This notion of understanding the self as a moving entity is vitally important. The self morphs and emerges depending on the situation it finds itself in. My own self, as I have demonstrated, has needed to change depending upon the context I have found myself in. My identity also shifts between the personal and professional.

Day (2004) further hits the point when he comments:

'Good teachers will not be content to reflect critically upon and examine their own teaching and its contexts, nor be satisfied only to plan for the next lesson on the basis of what they have learnt from the last. Rather, they will want to find ways of looking at the learning experience from different perspectives,

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engaging in the messy, frustrating and rewarding 'clay' of learning (Barth, 1990, p. 49). They will want to open up their classrooms to others in order to share and learn, and ensure that their thinking and practices are not always based solely upon their own experience. They will not be content only to comply with the institutional imperatives of performance-management processes or school-improvement planning, however well they are managed.' (Day, 2004, p. 109)

What my thesis is able to do is to take this argument further by being able to provide evidence of this within practice. Day (2004) is able to provide a theoretical model or idea of good teachers but does not provide any real evidence to support the argument. Through my thesis I am able to engage within this theory and also to demonstrate how I have lived it out within my day-to-day practice.

Parker (2002) acknowledges the lack of research into how life history impacts on leadership within education: how who the leader you are is not considered to be linked to where you have come from. I agree with Parker and add to his arguments for the need to consider life history within leadership as an influential aspect of practice.

I am including an autobiographical account because this Ph.D. is about me: it's about my life, my thoughts, my development and my educational theory. The story you are reading is my story for others. This narrative is about the way that I *live through others* and as you read this, you too will be allowing me to *live through* you as you engage with me as the writer. It is about the way that I am approaching the learning and understanding of the immensely complex job that I do and it is about why I am as I am: the personal and the professional. I want to recognise the vast importance upon me of the relational, spiritual and aesthetic meanings that I absorb as I move through my life. I want to be able to clarify these meanings for you and allow you the insight into the icons that reflect my existence. I want to be able to capture within my own language the moments in time that define my being. Inspect at your will; analyse at your pleasure; compare. Perhaps Okri (2002) eloquently sums this up for me here:

> 'My obsession took, at first, a curious form. I became aware of words heard out of context, and invested them with more meaning than could have been intended. I became a hunter after floating words. Things overheard started off complex trains of thought, of fantasy. I began to weave whole fantasies out of these hanging words.' (Okri, 2002, p. 27)

As I remembered my experiences within my life, I too began to *weave my fantasies* and bring my words and snapshots to life: to give them meaning. At one time, this was the first thing written in this thesis: it was page one. Now, these words have floated to somewhere else in the text.

I can also reflect on Barthes' influential essay on *The Death of the Author* (1986) and his comments regarding the position of the writer of a text. He comments:

> 'We know that a text consists not of a line of words, releasing a single "theological" meaning (the "message" of the Author-God), but of a multi-dimensional space in which are married and contested several writings, none of which is original: the text is a fabric of quotations, resulting from a thousand sources of culture.' (Barthes, 1986, p. 52-53)

This reflects my views on what you are currently reading: the multi-dimensional space in which I am attempting to draw together the voices of those concerned within my own text for you, as the reader, to be able to judge the comments made by them. The influence of culture upon what I am producing is, I believe, as a result of the years of experience that I have built up. You are not solely reading my thesis. You are reading the result of all those people and influences upon me being brought together within one space, that have helped to create me as the human-being I am today.

Imagine my Ph.D. writing space as a classroom: as I wait in my classroom for my next class to arrive I get ready, I ponder, I reflect on how we left last lesson, I reflect on what went wrong and what went right. When they arrive, I don't lecture at them for 50 minutes: I allow them to speak; I allow them their voice. This is my multi-dimensional Ph.D. space.

Barthes (1986) further comments:

> 'To assign an Author to a text is to impose a brake on it, to furnish it with a final signified, to close writing. This conception is quite suited to criticism, which then undertakes the important task of discovering the Author (or his hypostases: society, history, the psyche, freedom) beneath the work: once the Author is found, the text is "explained," the critic has won; hence, it is hardly surprising that historically the Author's empire has been the Critic's as well, as also that (even new) criticism is today unsettled at the same time as the Author.' (Barthes, 1986, p. 53)

This for me reflects the debate concerning the validity of educational research. I can reflect on the ways that I want to promote the sense of 'voice' within my text and how this may well be unsuited to traditional social science academic research notions of defining one author to one Ph.D. text, for ease of assessing. Why is my name only on the front of this text? How will they assess the cacophony of voices that are present within it that go together to help explain my living educational theory? My acknowledgements try and go some way to recognising their influences, but not far enough. By allowing individuals their voices, I hope I am empowering them and recognising their impact on this text: by including their images, their video, their websites, their work, I hope that as a reader you can engage and *live through* them as I have. This is my own move towards illustrating Reason's (2005) arguments related to validity within research. He calls for a move:

> '…away from validity as "policing" and "legitimation" toward a concern for validity as asking questions, stimulating dialogue, making us think about just what our research practices are grounded in and thus what are the significant claims concerning quality we wish to make.' (Reason, 2005, p. 10)

Through the construction of this thesis I believe I have contributed to this debate on validity. I have attempted to incorporate this debate within the text through capturing the many voices that have contributed to creating the person that I am. Through sequence 4 of this thesis I particularly aim to stimulate further discussion of the potential influence of this thesis for others. In order to produce this thesis I have engaged in a great deal of dialogue in order to understand and improve my own practice. For me, it is through asking questions and through dialogue that I go about improving my practice. I am part of a profession that is based predominantly on dialogue and questioning and it is these skills that I try and inspire my students and staff to also have.

Essentially I see my development as a construction of selves that have evolved over time. It is this construction of selves that are amalgamated in order to produce the individual that I am. I feel that it is important to be able to go back to these and be able to understand them if I am to be able to know myself. In many respects, these selves will be constructing this text, producing a text that is written by many authors. I am a father. I am a son. I am a husband. I am a teacher. I am an Assistant Headteacher. If I am to be credible in these roles then I need to know myself, where I have come from and how I have been constructed through the dialogical, relational and interactive experiences that I have encountered so that I can confidently realise

and *live through* my own and others' thoughts. How can I lead others if I cannot lead myself?

I see each day as engaging with stories or narratives of learning: some good and some bad. D'Arcy (1998) reflects on the notions of her own living educational theory in relation to the stories that surround her. She comments:

'My living educational theory as it is expressed in this enquiry, is embedded in the particularities of the journey that I have made. It cannot be separated from the stories to which I have responded or from my conversations with pupils, teachers and fellow researchers or from my encounters with the work of reader-response theorists and other teacher educators.

In a wider and perhaps deeper sense, as I have gradually come to realise, my living educational theory is embedded in the whole of my life, in my experiences as a student, a teacher, an English Adviser and in the values which have underpinned and informed all those experiences. My understandings as an educator and now as an educational action researcher are continually open to extension and clarification through the particularities of my own life.' (D'Arcy, 1998, p. 6-7)

I can connect with these comments in the sense that I too see my own links between who I am as a person and the type of professional that I am: the two are connected and inter-twined. I am a blending and a mixture of the people, events and experiences I have connected with over my life. As I move forward and reflect, I realise that I am a changing being, responding to circumstances through the results of my prior experiences whilst being flexible enough to change.

Evans (1995) reflects on Lomax in terms of the importance of *self* within teacher-research and comments:

'A fundamental part of Lomax's view of action research is that the self is the focus of the enquiry and the ultimate question is what have I learned and changed about myself from this study? In seeking to know about 'myself', I and the teachers at Roseacre have followed closely the six principles that Lomax sees as structuring her own form of action research' (Evans, 1995, p. 76)

Whilst I can acknowledge the essence of the first part of these comments, essentially recognising that action research is about self learning, I cannot accept the need to try and apply oneself to a set of principles and to see how far one can measure up to fitting into these principles: I would much rather see new educational ground being dug through the development of individual principles rather than the fitting into existing principles. The sense of the journey of change and exploration for me is about the self-discovery of self-defining principles that emerge as a result of the experiences that I have. The journey for me is not about measuring the extent to which I can accommodate myself within pre-determined criteria: it is about contributing to and establishing the criteria. As a brief reflection on this, sequence 1 of this thesis established my own living educational standards of judgement that I have applied to my role as Head of Faculty and middle leader. These are standards that I will take into Parts 2, 3 and 4 and test them out against being a senior leader.

Kincheloe (2003) reflects the importance to me of exploring and promoting the autobiographical elements of the teacher-researcher, commenting:

> 'We *can* pursue knowledge by promoting a closeness between researcher and researched – a closeness based on a lengthy interaction which explores the etymology of the phenomenon and seeks to discover relationships between its history and present context. As we cultivate this closeness we make use of our most powerful ways of knowing – our subjectivities and intuitions. We use our images and symbols to help explain the phenomenon we have grown to know so intimately. Our intuition is more than an occasional flash of insight; it is a tool which allows us to see the forest, the trees, and the wood and the simultaneous, multidimensional relationships among them. Research which promotes such insight, which can be used to improve our practice, is of a higher quality than that which holds internal and external validity but tells us little that we didn't already know or could use in our professional lives.' (Kincheloe, 2003, p. 170)

This sense of 'intuition' is something I appreciate. The intuition here allows us to connect and make sense of the world in which we inhabit, moving beyond simply carrying out research that is purely descriptive of what already exists, to creating new insights into education. I do not want to simply describe what we already know is good practice: I want to account for how I have connected up my learning in order to improve the quality of education of those I come into contact with. I argue that our intuition is created through our autobiographical experiences that shape our lives and understanding of the world over a period of time.

Day (2004) also acknowledges the link between professional and personal self:

> '…teaching is not only about intellectual and emotional engagement with others – whether pupils, colleagues or parents – but also intellectual and emotional engagement with self through regular review and renewal of purposes and practices.' (Day, 2004, p. 1)

Bullough, Jr and Pinnegar (2001, p. 16) establish a set of guidelines for using autobiography within research. I can reflect on these guidelines as I construct my own autobiographical account of my learning. I will consider them in terms of my own development but only within the context of aiming to grow and learn something new in the process: the fitting into the guidelines is not what I am trying to do, but rather the using of them to further my own self-understanding. I would offer the additional guideline of any other form that the living researcher deems to be appropriate in order to help communicate the meanings of their life and work to others.

Autobiographical self-studies should ring true and enable connection.

I agree with this view and believe that the narrative account I have constructed does indeed ring true of the events in my life which have helped to contribute to me being the human being, practitioner and leader that I am. It is difficult for me to judge whether a reader can connect with the comments and story. However, the diverse nature of the presentation of the material I hope reflects my attempt to bring in the audience for this text as I present my educational theories in multi-media forms. But in terms of connecting to the sense of the narrative I believe that the reader is able to do this through the incorporation of voices, images and text that attempt to bring to life the power of my own experiences and the journey that I have undertaken. Through my style of writing I have tried to be open and welcoming, sharing thoughts and emotions with my reader in order to build trust within the writer/reader relationship.

Self studies should promote insight and interpretation.

Throughout this account I have attempted to not only narrate the events but also to dig underneath them for other meanings and connections to try and gain a greater understanding of my own history and practice. Perhaps my greatest insight has been into myself and my own understanding of my self. I have learned a great deal about myself and looked at myself from many angles. This story could not have been

presented in the way it is had I not done this. This is evidence of my critical engagement.

Autobiographical self-study research must engage history forthrightly and the author must take an honest stand.

Through this account I have brought in other voices in order to try and validate the claims I am making: the honesty with which I have recounted events and included some quite painful recollections reflects my attempts to encapsulate this guideline. However, the difficulty facing the qualitative researcher who engages autobiography as a form of research is how to deal with the ideas of 'truth' and 'honesty'. In order to try and overcome these issues I have presented a study that draws on a variety of evidence to support the claims made. My research, like any piece of research, has been presented through language which in itself is open to interpretation and manipulation. The integrity of the researcher is the highest order and my incorporation of events and incidents that may not show me in a favourable light are my attempts to ensure that I am simply not constructing a victory narrative. (Maclure, 1996)

Biographical and autobiographical self-studies in teacher education are about the problems and issues that make someone an educator.

This narrative is my attempt to deal with a number of issues and problems highlighted through my research question. My use of first, second and third person autobiographical forms of research (Reason & Bradbury, 2001) are intended to help me to contextualise and fully understand my own being. My living educational theory action research approach, utilising Whitehead's (1989) 'How do I improve…?' question to form my inquiry establishes my focus on identifying and dealing with the problems and issues that I face as an educator.

Authentic voice is a necessary but not sufficient condition for the scholarly standing of a biographical self-study.

I would argue that this guideline also applies to autobiography as well as it is important that the researcher of an autobiographical study is able to create an authentic voice within their text. By this I mean that they are able to create confidence that they know what they are talking about. For instance, I write about being a teacher, a middle leader, and an Assistant Headteacher. It is important that I have done these things in practice if I am to be able to write authentically about them. Within this guideline it is also necessary to consider what 'scholarly' means. I have

made the assumption that scholarly incorporates different ways of knowing, including practical knowledge as well as theoretical knowledge. I am referring to Habermas' (1972) 3 forms of knowledge and recognising the importance of his emancipatory interest of knowledge within this.

The autobiographical self-study researcher has an ineluctable obligation to seek to improve the learning situation not only for the self but for the other.
Throughout this text I am recognising the *other* within it: through my educative value of *living through others* I am living through the experiences of the *other* in order to improve their educational experiences as well as my own. My research question is focused on addressing this guideline. My application of the action research cycle to the situations in which I find myself has required me to improve my own practice whilst contributing to the education of others: others being both students and staff.

Powerful autobiographical self-studies portray character development and include dramatic action: Something genuine is at stake in the story.
Throughout this text I am accounting for my own progress through education, describing and analysing the changes that have taken place in my own living educational theory. Other characters have been involved within this text: both playing a minor or major role at different times. I have written about significant others that I have come across, and fleeting acquaintances that have too briefly touched me and moved on. I have also included details of key moments within my educational autobiography alongside other moments which may to others be insignificant but to me are important. This meshing of major and minor roles plays together to form an orchestration of time and place to breathe life into my own story for others. Something genuine is actually at stake and this has changed over time. When I began this study I believed that what was at stake was the job that I was doing: that somehow I would improve the work I did simply by reflecting on it alone. However, I realised as time went on that this was not the 'something genuine'. The genuine things at stake were:

□   my own sense of self-discovery and understanding, including my own well-being and ability to live through the job that I had chosen to undertake;

□   the quality of education for the students that I came into contact with;

□   the quality of professional learning offered to staff that I came into contact with.

Quality autobiographical self-studies attend carefully to persons in context or setting.

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I have included details referring to the context of the situation that I have found myself in. I have used detailed description to try and help the reader picture the contexts and settings. I have attempted to draw on my understanding of creative writing and my own English and literature background to extend the sense of creativity and life-breathing words within the text. The aim of this is to allow the reader to be a part of the narrative: to become part of it and *live through* it as you engage with the educative value that I am proposing that I live by. At times I have acknowledged when I have given my own interpretation of the context and when I have drawn on other evidence to support interpretations made.

Quality autobiographical self-studies offer fresh perspectives on established truths. Through this text I am trying to provide a fresh look at key issues identified through my 6 research stories that run through the text. My original contributions to knowledge are not only in the form of answering the questions but also in terms of how I have accounted for this knowledge.

Self-studies that rely on correspondence should provide the reader with an inside look at participants' thinking and feeling.
Within this text I have used transcripts, other people's writing and thoughts, other people's responses to what I have written, interviews and so on. I have attempted to set the scene within these and to integrate them into my text. Where I have used other people's responses I have used them in such a way as to allow them to speak through their own words. I have included full transcripts within the appendices. This I feel helps the reader to formulate their own responses to what they are reading.

To be scholarship, edited conversation or correspondence must not only have coherence and structure, but that coherence and structure should provide argumentation and convincing evidence.
This brings in an interesting debate: the nature of scholarship. It is perhaps disappointing to read the links being made between scholarship, coherence, structure and evidence. I would argue that what I am producing is not scholarship in this sense, but more a teacher-research account that does not follow the traditional norms of scholarship but is in fact embracing methodological inventiveness (Dadds and Hart, 2001) and as a form of research is valid and convincing as it is about my own practice as a teacher-researcher. I would argue that coherence and structure is relevant only to the point that it is necessary to help make sense and that if we are to embrace the embodied knowledge within the teaching profession we need to

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acknowledge that the embodied knowledge can indeed take many forms and that we must recognise this. An art teacher, for instance, may embody their professional knowledge in the form of an image and not necessarily in the form of words. I believe that I am creating scholarship: the new form of scholarship and epistemology that Schon (1995) called for by focusing on the development of appropriate standards of judgement that allow practitioners to account for their embodied knowledge.

Donald Schon (1995) uses metaphor referring to the swampy ground inhabited by the issues of greatest importance to education and the swampy ground being the place that the practitioner must descend to if he/she is to address the issues that really face them everyday in the classroom.

Schon makes the point that practitioners who immerse themselves within this swampy land often face difficulties in responding to questions of rigor or relevance: referring to experience, trial and error, intuition, muddling when referring to methods.

Schon argues therefore for new standards of judgement that are needed to constitute a new epistemology for educational knowledge to enable these swamp-based issues to be addressed. For me the idea of relationally dynamic standards of judgement offer a way forward in creating this new epistemology and enable me to deal with the swamp-based issues that I face: of contributing to a learning community; of ensuring all my students are provided with the best life-chance opportunities that they can have; of securing commitment of a workforce to a vision; of improving my own practice.

I am arguing for an inclusional form of research and within this 'Being critical' from a perspective of inclusionality doesn't mean engaging in a traditional 'argument culture' but rather it means being clear about relationally dynamic standards of judgement such as 'Living Myself Through Others' and being able to show how these have withstood the mutual rational control of critical discussion in validation meetings.

Perhaps my denial is that I am denying the traditional forms of what we constitute as educational knowledge and contributing to the debate on what we should accept as relevant standards of judgement based on Schon's epistemology of practice. I am arguing that current existing theory does not allow me to account for my own learning and my contribution to the learning of others. My research, through contributing to the

living educational space, aims to enable others to also be able to account for their practitioner knowledge.

Self-studies that rely on correspondence bring with them the necessity to select, frame, arrange, and footnote the correspondence in ways that demonstrate wholeness.

Through my detailed descriptions I have attempted to build a clear picture for the reader to try and understand my own meanings from the embodied knowledge that I carry. My use of appendices further contributes to the whole picture. However, a text can never capture a 'wholeness': indeed it is very difficult for any piece of research to claim 'wholeness' within the work conducted. It is not possible to include all material collected but indeed to be selective as with any research. The account includes explanations as to how decisions have been made with regards to this.

Interpretations made of self-study data should not only reveal but also interrogate the relationships, contradictions, and limits of the views presented.

Through this text I have provided an outline of the various pieces of evidence that I have included in support of my account. These have followed a presentational structure in the ways that I have ordered my material from a random collection of writings into something that makes more narrative sense. This is inevitable and during this process the meanings that I have gained from the various interviews and texts will have been ordered in such a way as to support my overall claims. It is this recognition to the reader that will highlight to them that they need to be aware of this as they read so that they can be looking for their own interpretations rather than simply being guided by my own.

Effective correspondence self-studies contain complication or tension.

As you read the various texts within this writing you will recognise where tensions arise: where others have disagreed with me and where I disagree with them. It is at these moments that the reader can reflect on these tensions and move forward in their own understanding of the text that they are reading as they wrestle with the proliferation of meanings presented to them.

However, through exercising my originality of mind and contributing further to our knowledge of these guidelines I would argue that the following could enhance them:

1. The inclusion of a specific consideration of *how* autobiographical research is presented. I would argue that autobiographical accounts should be presented in such a way as to reflect the person writing. For instance, I have chosen to incorporate multi-media within my account as this is a reflection of the type of creative person that I am. I have chosen to incorporate images of various kinds in order to try and communicate the nature of my character. I believe the form chosen to represent research is important as it contributes to the reader's connection and understanding of the writer.

2. I would further argue that the guidelines could benefit from incorporating a need for autobiographical accounts within educational research to be able to demonstrate the connections between the *selves* that exist and how these various *selves* contribute and connect to the whole of the person. I have argued that the self exists within a multiplicity depending upon the context or situation an individual finds themselves in. The self isn't fixed but is fluid and responsive in a relationally dynamic way. It is also a living contradiction at times. I have recognised the connections between the personal and professional selves and reflected on how they influence each other at different times. This is important in accounting for who and what I am.

My originality and contribution to knowledge is also in applying these guidelines to practice and demonstrating them in practice.

Plummer (1983), referred to in Cohen et al. (2001) identifies 5 broad research processes with regards to the use of life history within research. Whilst he generally applies these to biographical research, I shall apply them to my own autobiographical research.

□ Preparation

Plummer (1983) argues that there are three key questions to ask associated with this process: 'Who is the object of the study?'; 'What makes a good informant?' and 'What needs clarifying in the early stages of the research?' Through my own preparation and planning I was able to deal with some of these issues. However as this research was taking account of my living practice I was not able to prepare everything in advance, but rather needed to leave space within the study to be able to respond to circumstances that arose.

□ Data collection

Within this process it is argued that the researcher needs to utilise a variety of interview techniques. Throughout this study I have moved between formal

interviewing both of myself and others to informal, casual chatting that I have used within my evidence. This range of techniques adds vibrancy and a *living*, relational feel to the research.

□ Data storage

The concern with regards to this process is that life histories tend to generate a vast amount of data because these studies have lots of material to draw on. I have utilised both written and multi-media texts. In addition the use of a clear system of storage aided the process massively. The difficulty facing any autobiographical researcher is making the decision about which material to include in order to construct the narrative.

□ Data analysis

Three issues emerge with regards to this. Plummer acknowledges that the use of life history research very often draws criticism that it is specific to the context it is in rather than being representative example of research. He argues the need for the researcher to be explicit in his/her links to the wider context of the work. (Cohen et al., 2001, p. 167) Within my research I have taken my own experiences, reflected on them and my own learning from them, and then drawn general conclusions from these. I offer these throughout my thesis, but particularly within sequence 4.

Secondly, Plummer (1983) argues that concerns exist over the reliability of research using life history and that there is a need to be clear on where the research stands in terms of bias. In order to overcome this Plummer argues the need to take account of the relationships between the informant, the researcher and the interaction taking place. Through my research I have accounted for my own biases and laid these bare in terms of accounting for my own values through sequence 1. Through my informants and interactions I have used their own words and accounts as reflections. I have acknowledged where bias may occur and have used triangulation of evidence in order to reduce bias.

Thirdly, Plummer (1983) argues for the need to ensure that validity checks occur through:
- Autocritique;
- comparison with similar work;
- comparison with official records;
- comparison through interviewing other informants.

The construction process of this thesis has built into it these validity checks, through the use of validity groups to test out the conclusions made, the critical engagement with the work of others and the presenting of evidence through a variety of sources.

□   Data presentation

Plummer argues that the researcher of life history needs to:

- have a clear view of who you are writing for and what you want to accomplish;
- be clear how far you want to intrude upon the data;
- practise writing regularly.

With regards to these things, my writing is intended to help me to reflect on my own practice with the aim being to improve it whilst also enabling me to pass my doctorate. However it is also intended to add to the body of knowledge within educational research. Within my own research I have needed to address some difficult issues that surround my own being and with this I have deliberately not withheld information of influences upon my own being. Through the construction of a journal and the extended text of this thesis my own writing practice has been taking place very regularly.

….and so I create the story……

2.2 The School-Refuser Story

Within the following sections I intend to be able to demonstrate through my practice my understanding of the guidelines for autobiographical study as reflected by Bullough, Jr and Pinnegar (2001). I also intend to demonstrate my own original contributions to these guidelines within my practice. I intend to explore key incidents and key characters from my past as evidence of my contribution to my own learning through life.

> 'Slowly, I was learning to love my theme. Hello to journeys. *Salut* to escapes. I hope my escape leads me back to myself, by a new route, so that I can see my life and its possibilities as if for the first time.
> And so this journey must be a sort of dying for me; a dying of the old self; a birth of something new and fearless and bright and strange.' (Okri, 2002, p. 32)

Figure 14: Image of me, aged 11 with my prize-giving awards from Primary School.

Within this section I am demonstrating the following guidelines from Bullough, Jr and Pinnegar (2001):

□   Autobiographical self-studies should ring true and enable connection.

□   Self studies should promote insight and interpretation.

□   Autobiographical self-study research must engage history forthrightly and the author must take an honest stand.

□   Biographical and autobiographical self-studies in teacher education are about the problems and issues that make someone an educator.

□   Authentic voice is a necessary but not sufficient condition for the scholarly standing of a biographical self-study.

Further to this I am demonstrating my own original contribution to these guidelines of demonstrating the multiplicity of self that I am and have been through being a school-

refuser on one hand, to becoming a school-leader on the other. This section further seeks to illustrate the importance within my original living standard of judgement of *living myself through others*, of understanding self and life history in order to understand others.

It's quite interesting to start this section with an image of traditional success and achievement. I am holding in this photograph the two prizes I won at the prize giving day in Year 6 prior to leaving my Primary School: I won academic excellence and the cricket award. This image captures the end of a very long struggle and battle that I had through my early childhood to come to terms with the role education could play in my life. This photograph is still proudly displayed in my parents' home. It has two meanings: one is that it reminds me of the negative aspects of the following events and secondly it reminds me of the positive aspects of the following events. On the back of the photo my mother had scribbled the note, 'Simon happy '86'. A few simple comments that reflect the importance of the image in my history. These few words from my mother seem to want to make a point about the time and place: perhaps almost breathing a sigh of relief into the narrative of life as I realise that she and my father went through so much stress to get to that point. She should be allowed the opportunity to write history in this way as she deserves it.

It is interesting to consider the word 'refuser' and to consider the types of associated connotations that can accompany it. The word kind of carries with it very negative associations: a kind of deliberate choice within an act of doing. What follows for me was not a deliberate act of any kind: it is very much a non-deliberate act. Then, it was a cry for help: now it is different: it is a statement. Over time, the power of language changes: the context changes. I have tried to explore the ideas surrounding school-refusers but it is a difficult area to get clear information on. There is little understanding of how to deal with it, let alone considering the various types of school-refusers there actually are. Perhaps this reflects the stigma attached to it or the sheer difficulty in dealing with this as a problem, particularly if it would involve supporting it via additional funding. It seems easier to label it negatively and ignore it. My own understanding of my experiences as a school –refuser have given me a real understanding and deepened awareness of the sensitivities associated with students who find that they are placed in tough circumstances that they must overcome if they are to succeed. My sympathies are evident when I am faced with students who are faced with circumstances similar to my own. However, I have found it difficult to deal

with these types of students because it still stirs the memories of my own experiences.

The theme for this part of the story is persistence. This is catharsis, I think. For the first time in 21 years I will try and explore the one experience that has perhaps been the key to unlocking the door of my past. When I was nine years old I was a school-refuser.

I missed just over twelve months of school. 21 years later, I am completely submerged within the culture and context of schools: I am looking one day to lead one. I want to explore those events all those years ago for the first time as I feel it will help me to understand how and why I have established the epistemological views that I have.

As you get older your memory begins to leave you; narratives seem to become independent collections of related incidents that you spend most of your time trying to connect as if trying to order the Grand Narrative of your existence. I have spent time doing this. For many years I have intermittently thought back to my youth, but never tried to write it down: to try and make the narrative links where they have been broken by time. I can begin to see why I am who I am and why I hold the values and views that I do. It is hard when I think back to being a scared and insecure 9 year old, trying to remember what was happening and how things were being seen. Many things are clear: some are not. Perhaps the best thing is to put things down, the way I remember them, and not worry so much about the right order.

I remember being in the second year juniors, Miss X's class. She was a classic Primary school teacher: caring, quiet and very good at what she did. I remember Mr X, the Headteacher. I remember the social worker and Education Psychologist, but not their names. I also remember my family.

I cannot fully remember why I was a school refuser: I can remember everybody asking me many times every day, but I never had an answer. I wasn't bullied; I wasn't ill; I wasn't unable to cope with the work. I do remember being very frightened. I'd grown up with adults around me: spent everyday with my grandparents and they taught me a great deal. They taught me important things and they taught me the not-so important things. I watched horse-racing on TV and learned Maths from it. I'd never really hung around with friends: I found myself unable to contribute to their

conversations. I was very close to my family. I think part of the experience was about being frightened of losing them. For some reason I had a great fear of people dying and leaving: a real insecurity, as though they wouldn't be there when I came home from school. This was one of the reasons why I wanted to spend the day with them, so they couldn't go away. I had never really experienced death for myself: nobody around me had died.

I remember one day, later on in this period of time, when the Headteacher of the Primary School tried to drag me to school, literally, as he felt that that was the best way to do it. This happened at my grandparent's house. My granddad stopped it. Ironically, my grandparents' house was literally a two minute walk from the school. How times change.

I remember one day going to the doctors with my dad, as he wanted to see if there was any medication I could get to calm me down and make me go to school: the measure of their desperation. The doctor told my dad not to be so soft with me and to just take me and leave me. He couldn't do this. He couldn't watch his son go through so much pain.

I remember my parents forever being called away from work because I hadn't gone to school. I remember them worrying over losing their jobs because of this. I remember my dad trying to force me to go to school, physically, being at the end of his wits and not knowing what to do next. I remember none of this working.

I remember how I used to turn up on my grandparents front door step, sitting there waiting for them to get up in the morning to let me in, when I should have gone to school. I remember how I thought they'd be pleased to see me, yet, now I see what they actually felt was sheer frustration from their part of not being able to help. They could see the bigger picture that I couldn't see.

I remember having work sent home and finding it all so easy. I'd complete everything that they were doing in school and more, except I was doing it at home. I remember when I finally did go back, I wasn't behind in anything, and still won the academic excellence prize for the highest academic results at the end of the year in my Primary School. I still went on in my GCSEs to gain straight A grades in all subjects.

I remember the numerous occasions that my granddad drove me in to the school gates only to be faced with a crying grandson sitting in the car next to him, and he would return home with me, still crying. I remember him, an incredibly passive and quiet man, banging his hands one day on the steering-wheel as I sat next to him. For him, this was a real show of emotion and passion.

I remember crying, a lot: every day and night, with a fear that they'd send me to school. I remember threatening to leave home on many occasions. I remember putting my caring parents through hell for over twelve months: of court threats, legal action and so on. These were things that meant something to my parents. My parents were the type of parents who cared about such things deeply.

I remember one day getting up, getting dressed for school and going all on my own. I remember not having another day off school until I got chicken-pox in Year 10. I remember getting all A's in my GCSEs, going onto A-levels, University and then enrolling for a Ph.D. I also remember choosing to work in a place that I couldn't be dragged to years earlier. I remember only having two days off with sickness in six years at my Westwood St Thomas School, because I couldn't ever bring myself to miss school ever again.

I remember leaving University with a combined honours B.A. in English and Media and wondering what the hell I was supposed to do next. I remember taking a year when I ran a bar and then ended up on a training scheme for a Bank. I remember being bored senseless by this, feeling as though I was missing out on something and recognising that my life was really unfulfilled and not enjoyable. I remember not being able to spend time talking about books I had read and loved and I remember missing this. I remember spending a couple of weeks in a local primary school and loving every minute of it and realising that this was what life was about. I remember ringing in sick to work in order to be able to do this placement. I remember my returning home from the primary on one of the days and my mum recognising in my face the sheer enjoyment and delight I had to be doing this. I had applied for a PGCE at this point and got a place at Bath Spa University College for secondary English.

That is what I remember.

2.3 My parents

Within this section I want to engage with Bullough Jr and Pinnegar (2001) claims in relation to autobiographical studies that:

- *biographical and autobiographical self-studies in teacher education are about the problems and issues that make someone an educator;*
- *self-studies that rely on correspondence bring with them the necessity to select, frame, arrange, and footnote the correspondence in ways that demonstrate wholeness.*

Furthermore, I contribute to my explication of living myself through others as being a relationally dynamic standard of judgement through my exploration of my own being. I further contribute to living educational space through the emergence of new methodological approaches of engaging with my own life and offering this as a valid form or scholarship.

For me, the following is something that established for me the great sense of trust that is and has been established between myself and my parents. There is a feeling from the following comments that they trust me enough to be able to share with me and give me their words: that they are happy for me to use them, along with their emotions and allow me to comment on their actions and words. This for me reflects the great sense of bonding within the family. For me it is vitally important that my parents' own words are used and framed alongside my own comments: that they are allowed their own voice and that this comes through in the text.

For me the key to furthering my understanding of my own experiences was to ask my parents to read an early draft of my thesis and then to respond, in particular, to section 2.2 The School Refuser Story. From the text that my mother responded with I was able to construct further ideas on myself as I grew up. For me the text that she wrote reflects her own sense of humanity and worth that reflects a caring human being. Her comments are very emotional, yet carry an air of control about them. The passions for her views are still there. What follows is, in my eyes, a narrative that accounts for the emotions and feelings present within it: it is not congratulatory or cathartic, but more human than that. It is not constructed in the sense of a victory narrative: I know my mother would have spent some time thinking about her story, but not in a writerly way: more in a caring way. Others who experienced this as well have their own perspective on this issue. I want to give them a voice within this narrative. I want to be able to explore a cacophony of voices within this text.

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Figure 15: Image of me with my parents on my Wedding Day, 2004.

The above image is one that was taken on the morning of my wedding in July 2004. It is an image of me with my parents. It is important that you, as the reader, can see who is contributing to this text. I think it reflects well the relationship I have with my parents: my mum in the middle of me and my father, kind of being protected by us.

I knew there was much that I couldn't remember from this story and that needed filling in. I had never really spoken to them about it at all prior to this. This is what they had to say. My parents comment:

'Words – how they can be interpreted. When I read page 1 – "…didn't push me that hard at school." How could you say that? We were always there for you. I couldn't believe you could say that. I was ready to make a telephone call. But then I read the whole paragraph, and no, you didn't say that in the way I interpreted it. My son of almost 30 years had taught me a valuable lesson. Don't pick and choose what you read, read the whole. Then I understood. Then I was proud. Proud of what your dad and I had helped you to be. Proud to have helped in some way to shape the attitude you have for knowledge, how you have used that knowledge and by encouraging you to find knowledge and above all to share your passion with others.

Bringing up a child is a Herculaneum task that nothing on earth can prepare you for. You can only bring up a child with love, support, and security. You only have one "go", it is not a practice, and sometimes you fail. If we failed at any time, or thought we failed, we tried harder. We only wanted to send our three children out in to the wide world able to cope with the world out there. Knowing we couldn't be with you 24 hours per day. In the beginning, handing a child into someone else's care for a school day is heartbreaking. Will "they" look after him, will they know if he is

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worried, or sad? Your dad and I, have only ever wanted all our children to know that no matter what, you would always be loved. Reading your comments it appears that we have been a success, and we achieved what we set out to do. We wanted you to feel strong to face what ever the day would bring, but secure to know that you could always come home, be loved and we would always be proud. The vitamins message made me smile. That was our "plus" factor for our children. That was the "extra" that other children might not have, and it would ensure that you would be healthy, and ready to cope with anything. I suppose for "extra" you could read "happiness". Yes, if I gave you vitamins, you would be healthy therefore happy, able to do anything, therefore secure. A simple formula, but it does work. Fast forward the years to son at University, ringing up full of a cold, cough etc., the question is still asked – Are you taking your vitamins? Again the formula – vitamins = healthy = happy (because you are able to cope with lectures as you are not under the weather). Is this simple logic; an old wives tale; or mother's love? You decide. Fast forward even further to son now a teacher – complaining of feeling tired, too much work, sore throats etc., mother's response – Are you taking your vitamins? Nothing changes.

Turning next to another page – it is interesting to read how you see us. We live our lives through our children as you say because we are interested; we have always been interested in the triumphs, successes, and the disasters and failures. Parents should be proud of their children. We make no apology to anyone for being proud of ours. We love our three children, and I include in that our grandsons, and we don't care who knows it. It may not be fashionable but perhaps it should be. Children are like grown ups. They need to know they are loved. You should never assume a child knows it is loved; they need to be told and shown always. We have never wanted to think that at the end of our lives our children would doubt that we loved them. If they have doubts, then we would have failed. From what you write, we haven't failed. You mention "working class". All our married life our aim has been, that our children will not have to go on a factory floor to earn a living, our son would never have to work, as his father had to, at an engineering firm; standing for hours on end in front of a drop forge in temperatures of 140º F plus. Where the noise was deafening, resulting in reduced hearing in later years.   Having white hot pieces of steel jumping out at him, leaving scars over his hands and arms and body. Sweating so much that his clothes would stand up by themselves, full of sweat and oil, when he changed out of them at the end of the shift. Where his working boots went white through the sweat and the heat. Then doing this job 7 days a week to earn a living. No way would your father allow you to work like that.   Yes we are working class, that is why we

encouraged you all to use the brains you had been given, and to aim as high as you wanted.

Going back a few pages, dark memories from the past. The dark days of tears, heartache, frustration, unhappiness, blame sessions, weariness. White faced, shaking, shivering boy that broke our hearts because we couldn't help, couldn't get through the barrier. School Phobic to School Teacher – was I going to find out that everything really was my fault. Any parent worth their salt would automatically blame themselves. School Phobic to School Teacher – what was finally going to come out of the woodwork? Did I want to know? You bet I did.

I found the page I was looking for. What would this say? I wanted to know, but yet didn't. Would I feel ashamed that it was my fault? Then I read it, and read it out to your dad. My eyes were full, and your dad kept his back to me, painting a door. He didn't need to turn round. I could guess his feelings. My own memories are slightly different to yours. The day our world turned upside down when you refused to go into school when you were taken back to class after swimming. But the frustration comes back, and the helplessness. The shame/fear that Social Workers and Education Psychologists were involved in our lives, because we were unable to help our beloved son to conquer his fear of going into school. I remember the first time the social worker was "coming for a chat". I was scared; I looked round our home to try to see it as the social worker would. Was it clean and tidy enough? I had plenty of happy family photographs scattered about the place. Would the Social Worker think they were out for show? Did we have enough books out, (too many some might say), what else could I do to make sure no one took you away from us. The sleepless nights thinking what if they came to take you away because we couldn't do our job as parents properly. We would have run away with you before we would let anyone take you from us. Trying to make family life as "normal" as possible for Angela and Samantha. Hoping they would not refuse to go to school. Knowing that we still had to go to work, in those days, no work – no pay. What if we lost our jobs altogether, "they" would think we couldn't cope, and take you away. Always that fear of losing you. Taking the lock off the bathroom door to stop you locking yourself in so we couldn't get in to you. To this day we still don't have locks on the bathroom door. I remember going to school to see the Education Psychologist. Your dad and I were interviewed separately. I was asked to think back to when I gave birth to you. Was the birth "normal" Did I resent the fact that a big baby boy had caused me pain? I was furious with him. Did he not understand the joy of a son, after two girls? (Perhaps

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the interviewing techniques have changed now, I certainly hope so). Waiting for the telephone call each day, would it be a yes, or another none attendance. I am ashamed to say that I tried to hurt you, the only time in my life I have ever tried to hurt you and the biggest mistake of my life. You probably don't remember, but about half way through those dark days you were due to go to a football meal, at Crown Paints, in Darwen. Your dad said you should still be allowed to go. I disagreed. I would not let you go, I wanted to get back in charge of your life. I should have listened to your dad. I was wrong. There was going to be a talk by the Liverpool football manager. You cried, but I wouldn't let you go. I wanted to hurt you, to stop you hurting yourself, to make you go to school, to put our lives back as they were, to stop my pain. I realised when it was too late for you to go that I was wrong to have stopped you going. I even wrote to the football manager, and asked if he could send you a photograph or something, he never replied. That is something I will regret forever.

Your ability to share your knowledge with others, your enthusiasm for your chosen profession shines through your writing. As parents we are glad, and yet again I use the word proud, to have contributed to the making of this boy who went from School Phobic to School Teacher.

Simon, you know how proud we were to watch you receive your BA. You know how proud we were when we knew you were to be awarded your MA. Just wait until you collect your PhD. Then you will see two ordinary working class people, turn into the proudest people on this earth.

I will end my response by reminding you that you began your thesis by talking about "little secret messages that life sends us", well here is another one just for you, I think you will understand, "The List is paid off in full".' (June Riding, 2nd May, 2004)

What hits me immediately is the sense of love and warmth radiating from this text. I am perhaps now more aware than ever of where my views and attitudes have been constructed from that I have towards my profession. I think my sense of love, support and security that I promote, as is promoted to me from my parents, is reflected in the classroom that I construct. I think that it is this recognition of my *self* and comfort with my *self* that allows me to be able to *live through* this within my classroom in order to creatively engage and create something different or new. I am also reminded of the fact that what I had from an early age was the absolute desire to not have to live as my parents had lived: by this, I mean that I wouldn't have to labour for a living but

would 'succeed', in their eyes. This desire is something that has always been held within me and been something that has driven me on: part of my value base of making things better. I can connect with my mother's comments about love within her text and am reminded of Jack Whitehead's sense of love that he brings to his work and the world. Some moments can take you. You can read, stop, think and pause whilst you try to take on board the feelings. This is how I feel when I read my mother's text.

From within her narrative I can draw out a number of significant issues. Firstly, I had forgotten the moment when I first really became a school-refuser and to be reminded that it was after a swimming lesson is significant. Until recently, I was not a confident swimmer, really unable to swim at all and hating being in swimming pools. When I met my wife she was an excellent swimmer and many times attempted to get me to go swimming with her. It is only within the last twelve months that I have been able to conquer this real fear of swimming pools and now am a very confident swimmer that swims three or four times per week. This issue reflects, I feel, my connection with my wife and also my connection with my own past as I feel that as part of this thesis process I am addressing my own past directly for the first time. The swimming becomes a metaphor of my approaches to school: the swimming became a statement of my life as I dealt with the past that has created me. We all carry with us our own swimming metaphors that we need to deal with.

What were particularly touching for me were the comments my mother made about the visits from the social workers and how she felt at the time: the image of her looking around the house to see through the social workers eyes', in a sense trying to empathise with the social worker. Again for me this is about the connection being made between the circumstances and the emotions: the way that I have been brought up to understand the position of the *other*.

Within the next section I want to further explain my relationships with significant others.

2.4 Significant Others (2)

Figure 16: Image of Simon, 2004

Simon is a significant other to me. I claim that I have been able to *live through* him. The above image was taken the day after my wedding: Simon was my best man. I am taking the image. The shot I have captured is the way I remember Simon: it is the way I saw him on a day to day level.

Simon joined Westwood in my second year as Head of Faculty at Westwood. To describe him as an enigma really does play down his character. He is somebody that seems to have been trapped within the wrong time period. He would have been more suited to living within the Renaissance: frilly cuffs on a large white shirt whilst painting some picturesque landscape would have suited him well. He is not a natural teacher. By this I mean that he came into the profession late after spending many years surviving as a painter in Ireland and he found it very difficult to adjust to the regulated and constrictive life of teaching. I first spoke to him on the phone, prior to his interview. We had been struggling to appoint anyone to fill a vacancy and the Headteacher, had had contact on the internet with Simon responding to an old advert. On the phone, Simon immediately made an impression on me: he could talk and he wanted to. Something about him connected with me: he seemed passionate and interesting: he was engaging and easy to listen to. He had a sense of warmth in his voice that I liked. He perhaps had the qualities that I didn't have at the time and I saw that this could strengthen the team. He came for interview and got the job. He spent two years working with me at Westwood. He eventually became my 2nd in Faculty.

At the start though, he struggled. He couldn't understand the students and they found it hard to 'get him'. He was creative, very creative and he wanted to use this in the

classroom: but the students couldn't get this as they weren't used to it. During an early conversation with Simon he reflected on this:

> '…I just don't understand how to get through to them…they don't seem to listen or do anything that I tell them…' (Conversation with Simon, October 2001)

Many conversations followed over the following two years. We would meet regularly, usually every week. Some of these conversations I would tape record, with Simon's agreement. He too was engaged in the in-house M.A. and knew that I was writing my thesis around my relationships with others. However, we also met outside of work quite regularly and some of these conversations I would also record. I have drawn on these tapes during this thesis.

I worked hard with him to allow him his creativity, but to still work within the boundaries that the students understood. He liked to work at the boundaries that existed and this made him all the more appealing. I tried to enable him to 'creatively comply'. He later reflected:

> '…you opened me up…you believed in me even when I was at rock bottom you were there…' (Conversation with Simon, July 2003)

What struck me the most was his sense of personalisation of education: he spent so much time working one-to-one with students, getting the best from them. He couldn't organise anything very well and didn't understand the whole management and leadership culture, but he didn't need to. I realised his skills and allowed him to play to his strengths: he knew my strengths and allowed me to play to mine. Through my significant relationship with Simon I was able to release my creative tension and free my imagination. Through Simon I could feel a sense of liberation in my mind, thoughts and practice. I have asked Simon to read and respond to my own writing and reflections because I feel he has so much to contribute to my own development and growth as well as what he can offer to the world. I received the following email response after his first reading of this text:

> 'Dear S,
>
> I've read the opening to your PhD. thesis and it flows really well; there is a lucid quality to it, like a polished lens designed to see far off but with no loss of focus. It was marvellous to vanish through the wormhole in time and appear again in your childhood. The quotation about the vitamin tablets was so rich with detail and humour, I wanted to hear more but I felt you left

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enough space around the narrative to keep it intimate and true. Any more information would almost break the spell of the looking glass magic into the past. As well as the power of vitamins to enhance performance you should tell them about the enriching properties of coffee, cigars, smuggled lager, table football and penguin bars.

The whole tone is different to your previous writing, I like the fact that the literary allusions of the past work fade out and the more honest revelations fade up: I enjoyed the way you have shifted the emphasis from Henry V's regal battle cry to the real stuff of life, to be found in the boys with the baggage. I think the playing about with scale is what helps to bring out the message. You seem to eat a piece of the mushroom that takes you to the lofty heights of *National Professional Qualification for Headship* then you nibble a bit that shrinks you down to an NQT flea. That gives the narrative a range of contexts in which to hear the range of voices, so vital to your approach. It feels like Greek theatre in a way, with the Gods on one stage sharpening their thunderbolts, generally throwing around their weight, and the mortals on another, trying to make a decent fire and stopping the pupils from throwing themselves out of the window. (Thank-You Simon Brown for that priceless memory)

This self collapsing, reconstructing, box of tricks narrative is perfect for the job.

I loved this comment: *'I feel that academics are doing to education what Tesco did to the corner shop: reducing the product to a homogenous and impersonal loaf of bread.'*

Your narrative is definitely not Tesco's more like a french market, where the goods are still flapping and clucking in the basket.

I'm looking forward to plucking and roasting a few more pages later,

Included are some bits and bobs connected to the opening few pages.

On my mark, unleash hell,

S.' (Email from Simon received on 30 June 2004)

I am immediately taken aback by this. I am reminded of working with him and his way and manner which I felt so appealing and warming. I remember how things do seem to be so different now. His style of writing jumps from the page and speaks to me so much. I like his construction of his response: I know it is a construction, but I still like it, because this is his character: he is a character. I like his secret platonic messages that he provides: the *Henry V* references re-ignite the passion of our relationship as I remember what that play means to us both and the lengthy discussions we have both had about it: the metaphorical allusions to *Alice in Wonderland*; *Gladiator*; *The Disorderly Women;* and *Frenchness* are all intertwined within our personal relationship. I read and I smile again, as I did many times within our working relationship.

Beyond this he also sends me further comments, which are centred on a book he is reading, *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance* (1974) by Robert Pirsig. His comments are such that I can feel the sense of mystery: that he is trying to send me cryptic messages that I must crack. I feel as though I am becoming a detective character in this novel that I am writing and as I move through each episode I am the one who can solve the crime for others. I read his quotes that he has included but I sense he wants me to understand more than just the words he has included.

Simon will pop into this text from time to time as I try and value his voice and contribution that he has made to me as an educator.


Figure 17: Image of Toni, 2005

Toni is also a significant other to me. I am also claiming that I have been able to *live through* her. Toni arrived also in my second year as Head of Faculty. Toni was pretty much straight from University. She stayed three years at Westwood and left the same year that I did. She became my KS3 Co-ordinator. What struck me the most about Toni was her passion and her incredibly high standards that she set herself and demanded of others around her in all that she did. She was very dedicated and idealistic. At first she struggled to understand the way that schools worked and couldn't see why 'perfection', in her mind, wasn't possible: she always seemed to be fighting against something, whether that was internal or external. Over time, she has begun to fight fewer battles. Toni was also much centred on giving students the best of herself: giving students the personalised approach to learning. When she first arrived she was timid but over time she has warmed to the profession. The above image is of Toni. I am taking the image. I feel this is significant in terms of my own presence within her development that I have been able to draw out from her the expression she has on her face. The image I have taken from her shows the side of her that I saw: the side of happiness and enjoyment of what she is doing: a side of being relaxed and content within her environment. This I feel is one of my successes.

In order to contribute to the reader's understanding of my thoughts at the time I will draw on an M.A. assignment on the Management of Staff Development that I completed. In this text I reflected on how I was managing the people that I worked with. Specifically, in this part of the text I am referring to my attempts to implement the *National Literacy Strategy* within my Faculty:

> 'One of things that I don't want to lose sight of when attempting to implement this new strategy is the make up of the team that I am attempting the strategy with. My department is a new department consisting of three NQTs, one teacher starting her second year of teaching and a more experienced Head of Faculty. Under these circumstances it is essential that consideration be given to the staff that I will be working with.' (Riding, 2001, p. 9)

This is a reflection of the time when Simon and Toni joined the team: this is a reflection of my thoughts and feelings. This reflects for me my normal experience of the time that I have spent in my career so far. I have experienced a great deal of change and fluctuation in terms of staff and this has perhaps influenced my own practice greatly. In my six years at Westwood, we had 26 different teachers in the Faculty: quite a large turnover of staff. I feel I have always valued the importance of people and building a sense of spirit quickly with those I work closely with: bonding has always been important to me. Indeed, my best man at my wedding was my

previous 2nd in Faculty, Simon. In essence, I wanted to *live through* problems and the difficulties that others were experiencing: to be able say 'Yes, I know it's difficult, but it will get better…trust me, I can help you.' Perhaps this is it: I wanted them to trust me in what I was saying was accurate and in order for them to trust me they needed to see that I was engaging with them: that I was *living through* them. Trust can only emerge between people over time, and time wasn't something I always had with staff. I can distinctly still remember when Simon was having a really difficult time in his first year of teaching, coming to me to let me know he had had enough and wanted to resign from his job. I remember listening to him and clearly giving him what became to be the most important and crucial piece of advice I'd ever given to him. It was simple: he was constantly asking his low ability students in lessons to multi-task and they simply couldn't do it. When I pointed this out, it was like the penny was dropping for him. From that point onwards, he improved significantly.

Some of the ways that I began to understand my Faculty better is through engaging with their teacher-research writings as they attempted to account for their own lives and professional practice through action research enquiries. Westwood had a growing culture of teacher-research within it, something I'll deal with in more detail later on. One of the results of this was that two key staff within my Faculty engaged within this teacher-research. One of my staff, Toni was part of the Westwood St Thomas teacher-research group. I got to know her much better through our involvement in this group mainly as a result of the fact that she really opened up her practice to improvement through dialogue. This itself promoted others to open up about their own practice. In her assignment *'How can I develop a positive working relationship within my classroom, which has an impact on learning?'* (2002) Toni, as a member of my Faculty wrote:

> 'It has been a great development within our department to place a real emphasis on the practice of Modelling the learning process to students. It was therefore quite shocking to see that despite my attempts to Model the process of exploring and creating texts in my classroom, I was effectively failing to Model the actual Learning process. It is my firm belief that the Teacher's primary role is to be a constant Model of expectation and proactive learning in the classroom. However, I was presenting an open contradiction to the students through my negativity of body and verbal language.' (Bowden, 2002, p.3)

and:

'I was extremely fortunate to be involved in a department that held reflective approaches at the heart of its practice, and benefited from being able to share in two other Action Research enquiries taking place within my own Faculty. Action Research became a valuable tool for the focus of educational theory into practice.' (Bowden, 2002, p. 3)

and:

'Although I felt that the video evidence would assist my own evaluation of concerns and issues within the lesson I decided to take advantage of the supportive ethos of my department, and I invited my Head of Department to observe the Sample Lesson One. The culture of the department and school fully embraces reflective practice through the engagement of peer observation, which is designed to be a wholly informative and supportive practice. This use of peer observation allowed the video evidence to become part of a wholly reflective process:' (Bowden, 2002, p.4)

'On viewing the video evidence of Sample Lesson One I formed one key question with regards to the lack of positivity in the classroom: who was that awful Miss Grim standing, no sorry looming, in front of the class? It was most disturbing to witness the ways in which I attempted to control and teach the lesson, and I could not recognise the slightest suggestion of my own personality as I spoke to the class. This highlighted the key concerns that were preventing the progress of learning in the classroom: the lack of positive social engagement; the lack of constructive communication between students; and the ways in which my own attitude regarding the group, and its certain individuals, was limiting and restricting their independence and ownership of their learning.' (Bowden, 2002, p. 5)

I can gain a great deal from these comments when reflecting on the teacher concerned. What comes through is the teacher's passion and frustration at her own practice, yet the determination of her to actually want to improve what is happening within her classroom. For me, Toni's comments support my own summaries of the culture of the Faculty that I was leading: a Faculty that really valued active-reflection on their practice and had learned how to actively-reflect. I get the sense from her writing that she was part of a team that was willing to improve itself. Furthermore, the honesty from the comments reflects a trust within the team to be able to honestly acknowledge that things needed to be improved and acted upon. I could sense from this that the potential to improve things was present within the team and in her.

Perhaps my own learning point from this was about 'honesty': I think I learned to be honest and open up into what was going wrong. This was a significant moment within my own career as prior to this I would have sensed that this kind of honesty reflected in this account could have been seen as a weakness. However, due to the experiences gained from those around me I was learning the power and potential of 'honesty' about your own practice.

For me, this approach and strategy of helping inexperienced teachers to reflect on their practice in a controlled way is a central aspect of helping the profession to grow. It is well documented that many teachers are now leaving the profession within the first five years of their careers and this is worrying. How many of these teachers would stay if they had the chances that my team had to reflect on their own practice through a supportive teacher-research community? Perhaps if more schools placed action research at the heart of their improvement process then more teachers would still be available to teach.

Her comments are also so powerful in relation to the role teacher research has to play in the teaching profession. Research can provide powerful tools for teachers to help them improve their practice. Being in a profession that is losing so many teachers in their early stages of their careers is quite concerning. Yet I can see the importance of giving teachers the tools to improve what they are doing. Toni was given the tools and she improved her practice.

Within the next section I want to explain the nature of my approach to teaching and learning.

2.5 Teaching and learning

Within this section I want to account for my own views on teaching and learning and to be able to demonstrate how my practice as a teacher has emerged to embody the values that I hold. In order to show the reader this I refer to a key moment when I spoke to a visiting group of Japanese researchers in 2004 and also draw on evidence from my own practice with those who I have taught. I also draw on Evans (1995) technique of asking staff to write narrative accounts in order to aid school improvement and I draw on one example from a practitioner of this. I engage with Kincheloe (2003) in terms of his argument of the importance of engaging the student voice within the classroom and draw on video evidence of my own practice to support this. I also draw on Rayner (2005) and his sense of inclusionality to reflect the importance of dialogue to my practice and to Day (2004) in his arguments to promote the human side of teaching within the profession.

> 'There are certain men in Africa who shake hands with you and afterwards you don't feel well. There are certain people in Africa who give you peculiar objects, and once these objects touch your palm a sleeping paranoia awakens you, and washing your hands a thousand times with carbolic soap or herbal potions can't rid you of the sensation of being spooked. These are travellers' tales which I happen to believe, being intelligent.' (Okri, 2002, p. 26)

It is this sense of spiritual and aesthetic understanding and recognition that I want to embrace within my own professional and personal life, and consequently acknowledge within this text. How I strive to be able to 'touch' those I teach and make a positive kind of ever-lasting impact and impression that Okri describes above. My teaching and learning values have probably been the things that I have stayed away from, in the sense of not directly confronting or questioning them, through my early teaching career. This may well have been because the idea of questioning and clarifying my values was not understood by me or really required. I first developed an awareness for them when I began my M.A. and since then have attempted to try and understand what it is that is essentially important to me; what it is that drives me on. What it is that stops me from becoming somebody who just turns up for the pay at the end of the month. I still maintain, as I did through my M.A., that until I began to work on my M.A., and essentially began to reflect on my own practice, I was not a very good teacher in the classroom.

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I now believe that I am a good teacher but more crucially one that always has the capacity to become even better. I believe that I am a good leader that has the capacity to improve through reflection. The short video clip below is from my teaching of a Year 10 Media group from 2002-2003. Perhaps significantly it is one of my students who is holding the camera. I had asked him to video me as part of my reflection on my own practice, as I did regularly. In this extract I believe that I am showing the nature of my teaching: that I am relaxed and confident in my own abilities within my own classroom: something has gone wrong, I have dropped my sheets whilst addressing the group, but I want to carry on. I am calm and content with where I am and who I am. The actor on the stage is confident enough not to let anything worry him and is able to continue.

dropping sheets movie.WMV

Figure 18: Video clip of me teaching a group of Year 10 students, 2003.

One of the ways in which I believe I was able to significantly improve the quality of learning taking place in my classroom was through my engagement with teacher-research and self-reflection. In order to explain this I draw on my comments when I spoke to a group of visiting Japanese teachers in March 2004 who visited Westwood St Thomas. The full transcript of this interview is in Appendix 1.

I commented about my experience of the traditional views to INSET within education:

> 'In Britain, the traditional view of INSET or training is you do a one-day course. You go somewhere else, London perhaps, and spend a day there in a hotel. But nothing happens. You talk about students we don't have, who are passionate and smiling … but we have students who don't want to learn. We saw INSET as a day out of school. That's of no value. What we wanted to do was to be able to deliver something in-house, in the school. We are using the expertise of the University, their links with the international context but also use what we know, our own school, our own students. Put these into a 'pot' and see what we come out with in the end…'

I believe that there is work to do on ensuring that an INSET model exists which focuses on the long-term improvement and benefits of training to practice so that

learning for students improves: that INSET is seen as integral and useful and not simply as a bolt-on. For me, the development of practitioners accounting for their own educational influence through the creation of their own living educational theories is central to this. For me, this will contribute to the improvements within the living educational space.

I explained how we approached the modules of the in-house M.A. programme at Westwood:

> 'Our meeting was once a week. Twelve members of staff who wouldn't normally talk to one another talking about how you can improve your practice in school. What can I do better? You think of the theoretical side from the University, 'Well actually this is what theory says about this…' Mix all these together and you come up with lots of ideas and you can then go away and try to improve. The thing that was important was that every member of staff who went to those meetings accepted they could do their job better and I think that is one of the hardest things for teachers to admit… that we can do it 'better'. The difficulty is convincing people who have been teaching many, many years that they are willing to do this, they can always improve. You will come across barriers, particularly in the British system where people are scared about someone watching them doing their job because they feel insecure…and that they can make it better for their students.'

For me, the point that I made regarding the importance of individuals taking responsibility for their own learning and improvement, is central to my own epistemology. My central value and original contribution of *living myself through others* has at the heart of it the drive for improving the learning that takes place.

I then commented on the wider social impact of the teacher-research group on the systems of the school:

> 'If we move onto the importance of the group, as a school we are starting to see that each of the research projects has filtered into the whole school improvement. Now, looking at the different enquiries, we are starting to ask, "How can we make use of these?" We are starting to use the skills that people have more. People have got good research skills; those who have actually thought it through know how to do action research. And that is useful in terms of improving what is going on in classrooms. That's the massive

thing – it's making a culture in the school of openness. To bring on board mentoring, a willingness to work with others, breaking down barriers between subjects, across the English Department, the Humanities Department, the Science Department can freely talk with the Geography Department and History teachers in that particular research group. So I am constantly talking about this – it breaks down barriers within the school and that's the key. I think the fact that it has been regular as well; units are usually for eight weeks at a time and then you tend to have a break where you can go away and collect all your data and then you have another unit a couple of months later…meetings weekly, once a week same place, same time and so you just get into a pattern. Then it is all voluntary. There is a real need, a real desire for people to work together.'

For me, this draws out the value I place on community and working with others. I see the school as a whole and recognise the benefits of collaboration in achieving wider aims of improvement. This leads into my view of collaboration within the research community as a way of forwarding our educational understandings and approaches to learning:

'What we now find is that work by the group is referring to other people's work within the group. Mark's MA dissertation is drawing on my work so we are no longer lining up just textbooks from University shelves. The knowledge we have created – it gives a real validity to it. This is my dissertation so when you read it you get references to website, to A researcher's website, to Jack's website it is referring to other teacher researchers' work and we are saying that as teachers have left the school to promotions and to move to other jobs, the knowledge of this group is like spreading the word. Spreading stories about what it is like and this is starting to get other people involved. There is a colleague of mine in another local school, who has got interest because they have never had the opportunity to get involved because they don't have a teacher researcher group. (Riding, 10th March 2004)

I distinctly remember speaking to the visiting teachers and educators from Japan. I had not prepared what I was going to talk about, but as I read back through this transcript, what strikes me so clearly is the passion and clarity of my judgements and convictions about teacher-research. I was not always so clearly able to articulate my views but as I have grown with the work of teacher-researchers I have begun to

understand the sense of importance of it within the profession. It seems so clear in terms of the interconnectiveness that I am trying to proliferate through my linking of my ideas to the work of those within the group. This is my sense of promoting the development and valuing of embodied teacher knowledge. This is why this thesis refers to the work of other teacher-researchers. This I feel is a further clarifying of my sense of my living educational theory within my practice and my valuing of others.

I have been fortunate to have worked and developed within a culture that is supportive of teachers who want to improve their practice. I have grown within a culture that remembers the manners of the profession: the manners that thank people for their work on a regular basis and that personalises a growing de-personalised profession. I have worked in a school where the standards of judgement are based on the quality of human interaction. I have worked with some really influential people within my career: Alan Hinchliffe as Headteacher and Stuart Jones as Deputy Headteacher, both of whom have been supportive in the work that I do. I have also managed others who have had a real impact on me: Simon, as my 2nd in Faculty and Toni, as my KS3 Co-ordinator who both embraced the values and ideology of teacher-research and bought into the vision that I was helping to create.

One of my approaches to teaching and learning is based on the sense of the narrative: I believe that learning is a narrative and that it's the job of the teacher to help a student to connect the narratives they come across into something that makes sense. This view was something that I wanted to promote within my Faculty.

In 2001 I asked my Faculty to write their own narratives about their experiences of working within my team. I wanted to unlock the creativity and imagination of those I worked with to increase the potential and push back the boundaries. I asked my team to write about their classroom experiences in their own style of writing. I also wanted to find out what their teaching and learning experiences were. This is one example of the culture I was used to at Westwood: a culture of creativity amongst those I worked with. The full narrative is available in Appendix 2.

The first paragraph from Toni's narrative was:
> 'The teacher had always found this group to be a challenge. There had only been a handful of lessons where the teacher had felt any feeling of success on hearing the bell. Oh the bell, it seemed to be highly ironic that something so trill and a sound so intrusive could be viewed as a joyous signal of relief. It

often seemed to the teacher that they had been holding their breath for fifty minutes and the bell was the green light for that luscious exhale. The teacher often felt exasperated, every new approach foiled, every new 'positive start', diminished to a whimper of 'You can go now…' as the last student made their exit.'

I can still remember reading this narrative at the time. I remember thinking how powerful and honest it was. I hadn't expected anyone to be as open about their experiences or to put their practice so openly out for others to see. For me I sensed the security within the team that was felt: to engage with the task and really see the potential from it of what I was asking them to do. Toni did make significant improvements in her practice after quite a mixed start to her career. I think this was down to her own capacity for improvement and also down to the support in depth of the staff that she worked with.

This technique reflects closely the work of Evans (1995) who comments with regards to narrative and story writing in relation to teacher-research. This was a learning point from my early work with Jack Whitehead, when he put me onto the work of Evans. Through interacting and engaging with this work I was able to utilise another tool within my leadership in order to help make things better. Evans comments about narratives:

> 'What one writes is similar to a case study, but there is scope for creativity – the story does not have to be true, but arises from the imagination of the researcher-as-writer and includes the discontinuities, the tensions, the questions to which the writer does not have answers.' (Evans, 1995)

I see the narratives that my Faculty produced being a reflection of the Faculty that I had helped to create, along with my colleagues. What I am particularly drawn by here is the sense of 'creativity' and 'imagination' within the use of story. For me, creativity and imagination are core elements of school improvement and leadership.

What is it then that 'creativity' and 'imagination' can give to school improvement? Is it about thinking divergently? Is it about seeing the potential that others don't see? Is it about connecting with others? Is it about feeling the passion and drive that this job brings? Is it about wanting to make things better? For me it is about all of these things. For me, it is about understanding the self in order to be the best practitioner that I can be. Kincheloe (2003) comments:

'…we can argue that teachers are obliged to become researchers of themselves revealing the interests implicit in their own teaching. Our emancipatory system of meaning will alert teachers to the need to cultivate and listen to the voices of students, understanding from the beginning that student voices encompass complex and contradictory relationships between students and the world.' (Kincheloe, 2003, p. 56)

Essentially I want to make the lives of those that I come into contact with better: I want to make a difference. It is very hard to separate my classroom practice from my own management and leadership, as I feel that the two things are bonded together. In my early management and teaching days I was quick to judge and very hard on those around me: I wanted perfection and waited for people to fail to live up to my standards, taking a kind of "joy" from their failures. This was one of my living contradictions. I believe that now I am different. Essentially I feel that I am more accepting of others and more willing to help others. I feel that I am more willing to listen to others. I feel that I am more understanding of people, rather than judgemental.

Within the classroom I believe in the importance of democracy: of allowing individuals the chance to take responsibility for themselves and also to be accountable for their actions. Learning is not something that is 'done to you': it's something that you are part of. I believe that everyone has the chance to succeed regardless of background. I am aware of my own upbringing within this: of how the values of my own childhood have influenced me to be the person I am today. I quickly realised within my own Faculty the need to make teaching and learning personal. I felt my own living contradiction emerging when I have felt myself labelling groups as being 'bad' instead of talking about individuals. I have felt myself in the past wanting to know 'bottom line figures' about cohorts instead of asking how individuals got on. In my final year as Head of Faculty I tried to individualise and personalise education instead of de-personalising it. A sign in my office reflected this each day and reminded me of my values. I felt the passion when, after delivering a revision session to three Year 12 students after school one night, Dan's mum rang me at the school immediately to thank me. I'd waited six years for this kind of recognition and I filled with pride and joy about receiving a simple phone call. She simply wanted to thank me for giving up my time to help her son: I didn't even teach him English, but I just wanted to help. I also believe that teachers can make the difference within the classroom: that they have a major role to play in being responsible for their own actions as well. What used to

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frustrate me about my own teaching was the fact that I couldn't always build positive relationships with those that I taught. Now I feel that I am better at doing this as I am able to try and understand where others are coming from. I can talk about music and Playstations and recognise the value invested in this type of dialogue. Am I perfect? No. Do I always do this? No. Am I a living contradiction? Yes. But the fact that I can acknowledge this means that I am along the road to improving this. I am confident within my own person to be able to make these statements as I feel that through my role as a teacher-researcher I have built up a clear picture of myself as a learner and as an educator.

For me the classroom is a living educational space. It is a safe place to live. It is a place of fun and enjoyment. It is a place of possibilities. It is a place of stimulation. How many of my students agree? It is a place where I learn everyday. This is the duality of the place: the irony of my education is that I engage in it every lesson of every day. They think that I am teaching them: but are they simply teaching me? Who is the teacher and who is the learner? They can teach me more about their learning than I could ever know. Every day I smile. Every day I laugh. Every day I build relationships and enjoy what I do. Every day I feel safe and content. Every day I learn. Every day I turn up for school, happy. I feel as though I am in my own sacred and special place. I feel as though I am in my own Arcadia. I love my job. This thesis is an extension of the classroom. When I am writing to you I am remembering the classroom and the events of the classroom. I remember the feelings and emotions of the classroom and I try and capture them. I remember those I have taught and those that I have tried to teach. I am in the position of teacher and learner again. I am trying to teach you, the reader, about my experiences and I am also a learner, learning from my own words and reflections about myself. Every time I re-read this paragraph I remember, I add, I change, and I learn something else about myself. At every turn, my Arcadia stands before me, peaceful and enchanting, calling for the reflection. I can reflect on my own time at School where my experiences of 'safety' and 'feeling safe' did not really exist in school. I can reflect on how I felt very unsafe within my secondary school due to the racial tensions within the school and the feeling of being intimidated by others through the tensions that existed.

This feeling is perhaps embedded within the next clip: a short extract from a lesson teaching 'Quiz Shows' to a Year 10 group, when I asked them to write and produce their own Quiz Show.

laughing movie.WMV

Figure 19: Video clip of me teaching Year 10 group, 2003.

This extract reflects the engagement that I want with the students I teach: the enjoyment and passion that emerges from the glance when the student looks at me and her face smiles; the laughter from the male students that spontaneously erupts from the moment. I look relaxed and happy with the moment: I am displaying the calm nature and love of what I do. It is through these moments that I feel true connection is made within the classroom between teacher and learner and it is through moments like this that teacher and student can engage and tap into each other's sense of humanity and passion. It is through moments like this that I feel that I am improving the quality of the living educational space that supports learning for myself and for others.

The following images are of my classroom at Westwood. I offer these as examples of my educational values and views: the sense that education should be inclusive and democratic. I am thinking of Rayner's (2005) sense of inclusionality, in terms of establishing the conditions for facilitating dialogue within the classroom. It is these values that I believe carry the sense of hope for humanity within them: my classroom is what carries hope for humanity within it. My classroom is part of the living educational space that I create as a teacher. It is through seeing the value and recognition of others that humanity has the potential to improve itself for all. Within my teaching room I attempt to live out this value by arranging the room in a democratic and inclusive way: the arc at the front brings the group to me and promotes the dialogical nature of the classroom that I so much enjoy and support: the centralisation of the overhead projector focuses the room to the front and to me. In my role at Westwood is it through the connection with students that my influence is made within education because as a middle leader that is still where my focus is. These images I feel are evidence for the reader of the above points. I want you to be able to see what my own expectations are: as a reader you can see how I would like to be judged as a professional and also what my expectations are of others who enter my teaching space.

Figure 20: Image of the layout of my classroom, 2004.

Figure 21: Image of the layout of my classroom, 2004.

This type of reflection that I am undertaking is something I try and instil into my classroom and those I teach each day. The range of my influence is still very much about influencing the students within the school directly. I want them to also be reflectors on their work and lives and to be able to think things through for themselves: I want them to be critical and creative in a way that goes beyond the curriculum. I asked my GCSE Year 10 Media Studies group to reflect on me as a teacher and their experiences of me in 2003-2004. I didn't want a written piece: I wanted something creative that reflected them within it. I gave the students a blank piece of paper, offering them various sizes and styles. They were given one hour to think through and complete their evaluations. I gave them some suggested headings to evaluate against: what they thought of Year 10 Media Studies course; what they thought of the units we'd covered; what the areas for improvement were in the

course; what they thought of the teaching and learning. The students completed the following and I then photographed them. This is what they produced.
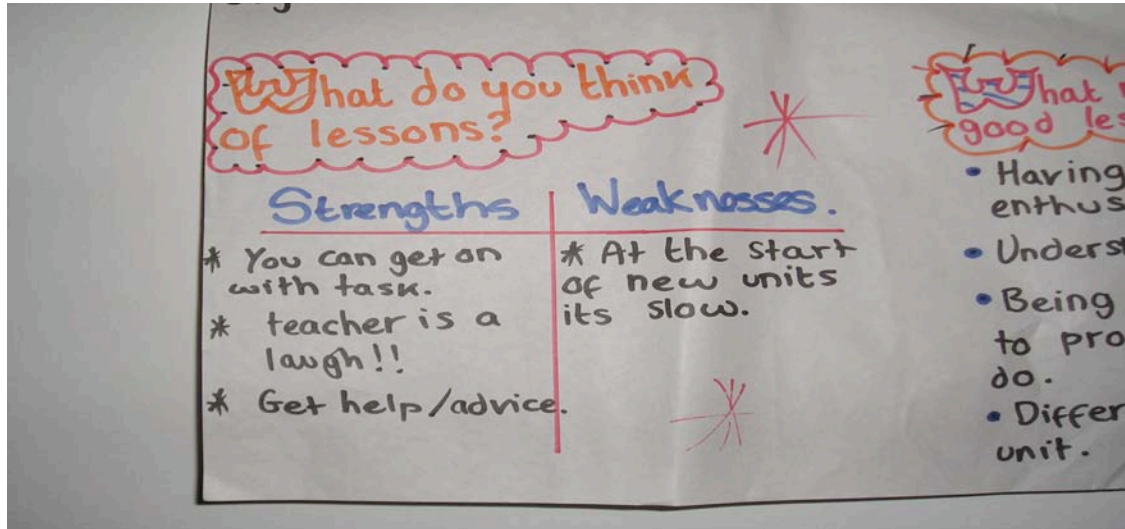
Figure 22: Extract from evaluation from Year 10 Media Group, 2004.

What I draw from this example is the quality from students of wanting to be able to enjoy their learning as well as succeeding academically: that the two go hand-in-hand. This sense of enjoying school is something that taps into my own experiences of education, as someone who was a school-refuser and did not necessarily enjoy school I am passionate that others should enjoy it.
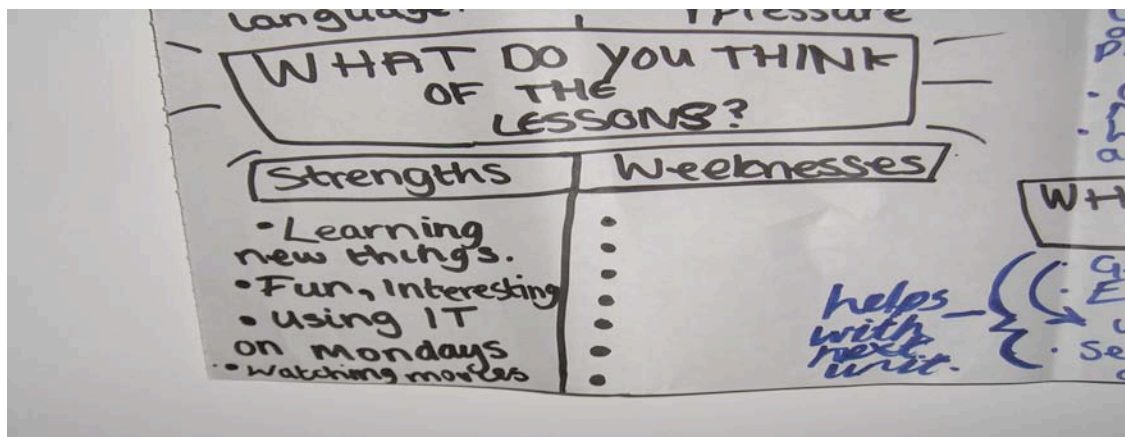
Figure 23: Extract from evaluation from Year 10 Media Group, 2004.

This example further reinforces comments about lessons needing to be 'fun'.

I also asked students to reflect on their experiences of Year 10 with me. They commented:
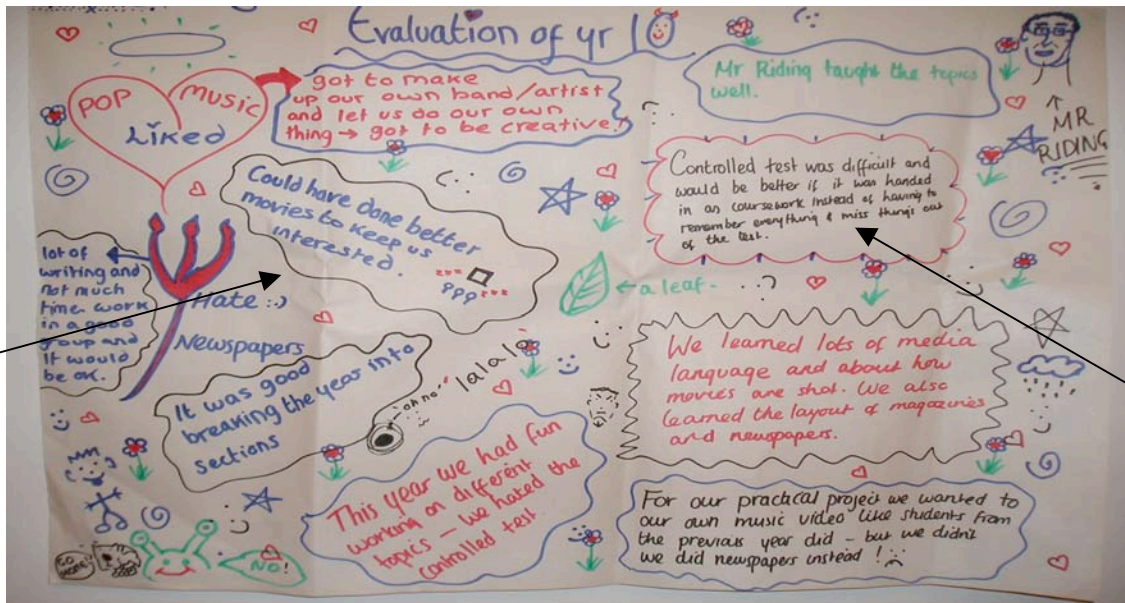
Figure 24: Extract from evaluation from Year 10 Media Group, 2004. Arrows highlight key points identified.

What I can from this evaluation is the creative response and also the honesty from the students: the students don't seem afraid to make comments on how to improve things: 'could have done better movies'; 'hated the controlled test'; 'lot of writing'. These comments further support the need to ask students what they think in order to support the continued improvements in teaching and learning.
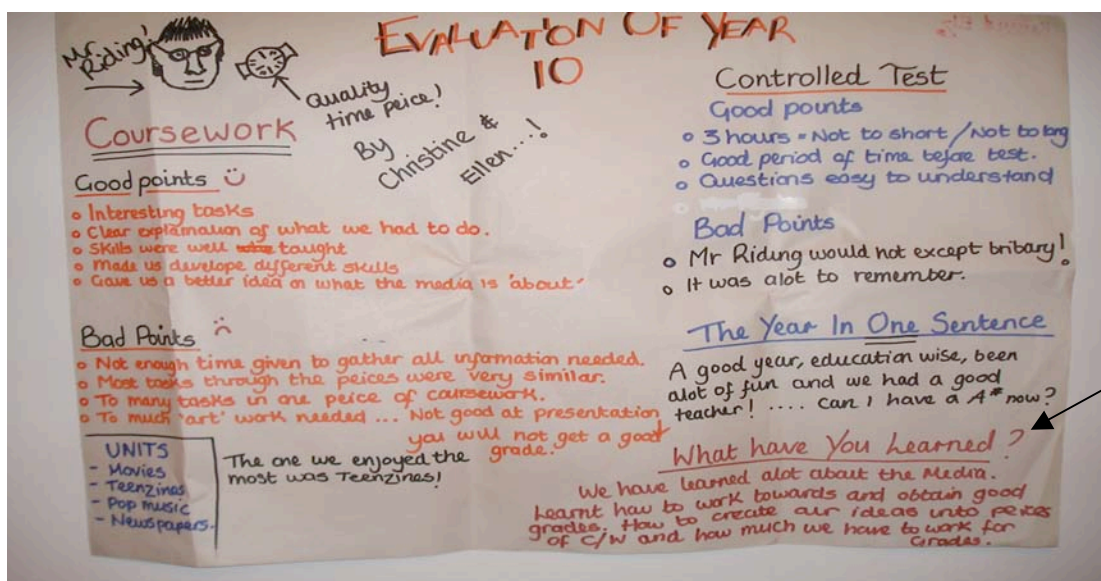
Figure 25: Extract from evaluation from Year 10 Media Group, 2004. Arrow highlights key point identified.

There were lots of important comments from this one with regards to learning from the individuals. Perhaps what stands out is the comment: 'how much we have to work for grades'. What I gained from this is the sense that learning and education is not a given but is to be earned and I sense from these students that they have felt that they earned their education.
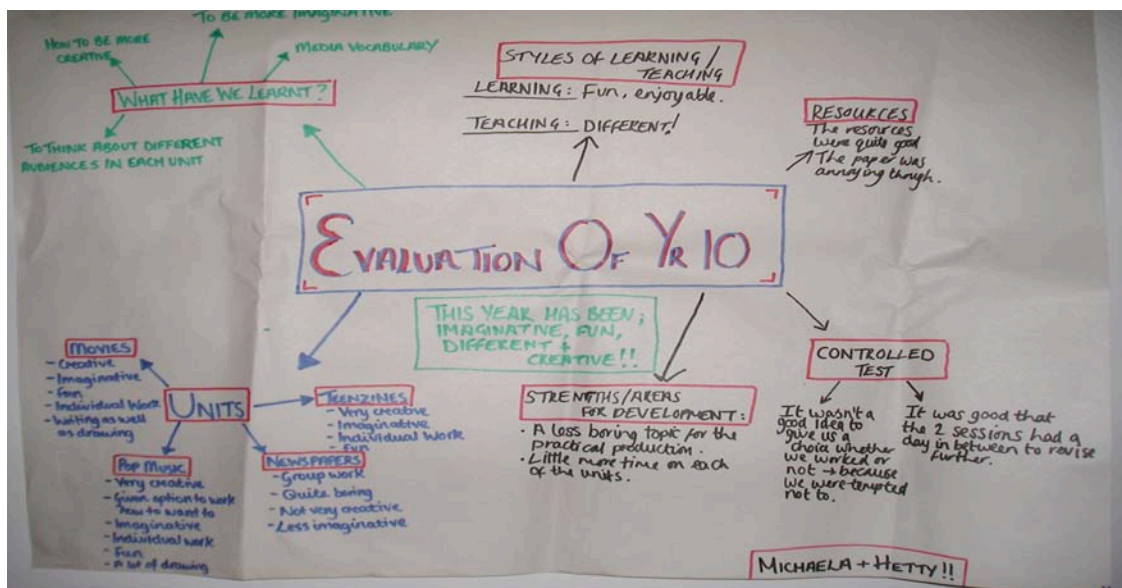
Figure 26: Extract from evaluation from Year 10 Media Group, 2004.

From this example I again draw the sense of enjoying learning whilst making progress.

I can strongly connect with Day (2004) when he comments in relation to teachers:

> '…students need teachers who are able to be themselves in the classroom, who combine the person with the professional, who are passionate about what and who they teach, who have moral purposes, who are committed to teaching creatively, who will never describe themselves only in terms of their technical competences; and who will acknowledge that teaching and learning is work that involves the emotions and intellect of self and student.' (Day, 2004, p. 64)

The above examples of work from my students are my attempts to show myself in the classroom and to teach creatively: my attempts to be different and try and bring

education to life. The inclusion of these images is my attempt to respond to Eisner's (1993) comments on representation being:

> '…the process of transforming the contents of consciousness into a public form so they can be stabilized, inspected, edited, and shared with others.'
> (Eisner, 1993, p. 6)

This thesis incorporates various multimedia within it in order to represent the content of my own consciousness and to communicate this within the public domain: my attempt to show my relational dynamics in a form that captures the nature of these in action. It is my belief that it is only possible for me to communicate the educator that I am and the experiences that I have had through multimedia forms supported by narrative commentary as this is my whole approach to understanding life and education: this is the way that I see the world.

I am not afraid to ask those who I teach what they think of my teaching because that is the way that I improve what I'm doing. Interestingly, it is this connection to the students which I value so highly at present. I wonder whether this will be the same when I move into senior leadership and whether or not my focus may well alter as I attempt to empower other staff to establish the types of relationships that I have built with students.

My sixth form students reflect on me as their Media teacher. They comment about their teacher that he is someone who enjoys his job, who is always joking but who teaches them well. They accurately comment that I am someone who wants to be liked and popular. I link this to the fact that I was a school-refuser. I want to make up for what I missed. I want to be liked at school to try and make up for when I wasn't there. This is my education as much as theirs.

One of my Year 12 Media students, Sophie, commented about her experiences as a learner within my classroom during an evaluation of the course:

> 'This year I've really enjoyed the Media course so much that I want to do it at degree level in University. I think that your teaching approach worked really well with our class because everyone enjoyed this year and we've hopefully all passed. You are genuinely enthusiastic and interested in the subject and this attitude has had a positive effect on me as I actually looked forward to media lessons and I feel I've learnt a lot over the last year.

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There is a very relaxed and easy atmosphere in your lessons, which gives your students confidence to raise points, which led to some good discussions in our lessons. Your attitude and the classroom atmosphere made us feel liked we were being treated like adults. This also meant that we felt comfortable with saying when we didn't understand something and you give a lot of different examples of theories and concepts so we have a good grasp of them.

When I was in your lesson I really felt like you enjoyed teaching us and that you cared about how well we did. You gave us proper feedback on work and essays that we had done and made it clear what we needed to do to improve which helped me to improve my weaker areas. At the same time as helping us with our weaker areas of knowledge you gave us a lot of positive praise, which encouraged us to use and have confidence in the knowledge, and skills we had used. You made me feel that helping me and the rest of the class get our grades and do well was really important to you, I felt like you really cared about every single person in the classes education whether they were getting an A or a D.

All of us are going to miss you next year; you've helped us get some great grades and made the course really fun and interesting. Thank you.' (Sophie, July 2004)

It is to the simple yet effective comments of Whitehead (1993) that I can so easily align my approaches to research within the classroom:

'I argue that 'educational' researchers who are making claims to educational and professional knowledge should be showing how they are enabling the professionals and their pupils and students to speak on their own behalf. It is the idea that researchers should be showing what it means for themselves to be living more fully their values in their workplace and showing how they are enabling the 'researched' to speak on their own behalf which I am offering as a basis for socially-orientated, educational action research.' (Whitehead, 1993, p.82)

The above comments from Sophie are one way that I am trying live out the comments from Whitehead: how I am trying to enable my students to speak on their

own behalf and become empowered within the process of research and how I am trying to demonstrate that I am living out my values within my own workplace.

This sense of empowering others for me demonstrates the power of teacher-research. I have included within this thesis the voices of those who are a part of this research: I have empowered them to speak for themselves, both students and teachers who I have worked with. Teacher-research has the potential to be able to liberate those who do not have their own individual liberated voice. Kincheloe (2003) supports this commenting:

> 'One of the quickest ways to apply teacher research to the pursuit of good teaching involves, simply, teachers listening to students. This 'research on students' is a cardinal tenet of good teaching, as the teacher details his or her observations of the student as well as his or her reaction to the learner.'
> (Kincheloe, 2003, p. 39)

The ability to research with students, in a way that promotes student voice, is essential within the sense of extending the power-relations within educational research. The Westwood teacher-research group has used students within its practice to help extend its understanding of the learning process, in particular the role of assessment within the classroom, by inviting a group of students into one of its after-school sessions to be quizzed on various issues. This session liberated the sense of student voice and promoted honest dialogue about practice and learning, minimising power relations.

Wood & Anderson (2003) reflect on the vast importance of empowering the student-voice within a framework of creating a learning profession that aids staff development. They comment:

> 'The student voice relies on durable structures, appropriate protocols, expectations and a thorough preparation of staff and pupils to benefit from reflecting on practice. If pupils can be trained to offer measured, informed and articulate opinions then who better to feed back on learning and teaching than the pupils themselves.' (Wood & Anderson, 2003, p. 24)

However, we must move with caution with respect to Wood & Anderson (2003) in terms of *training* students to become part of the research community. It could be argued that *training* will stifle the sense of creativity that is inherent within the students: I do not feel if I'd asked my Year 10 Media students to evaluate me in a particular and specific way, they would have created such imaginative responses. I

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think we must *enlighten* students in terms of how they can help and then *empower* them to be given the voice that contributes to the educational debate. *Training*, for me, is not what it is about: it is about *un-training* them to *think* outside of the educational box that we create for them through our curriculum and designated pathways through syllabuses and schools.

I would argue Whitehead's (2003) comments below relate to my decision to incorporate the voices of students within this thesis:

> '…in teacher education practices, the teacher educator has a responsibility to seek to influence the education of his or her students. If the evidence of an educational influence is to be presented in the student's own voice and narrative of their learning, this has implications for the development of a view of an educational relationship as a form of co-enquiry. I am thinking of an enquiry in which both teacher educator and student can explore the implications of asking, researching and answering questions of the kind, 'How do I improve my practice?'' (Whitehead, 2003, p. 24)

I argue that the quality of the living education space is improved through the type of engagement described above, through teacher and student seeking knowledge together (Cho, 2005). The relationally dynamic awareness described above is central in improving the quality of education that takes place.

Within the next section I want to explain some of the ways in which I have engaged in learning in order to improve my practice.

2.6 Me as teacher-learner

Within this section I want to demonstrate the ways in which I have engaged in learning in order to improve my practice. I draw on O'Mahoney (2003) and engage with his four phases of preparation for principalship and with Pennington (2003) and the importance of considering your behaviour as a leader. I engage with Mujis et.al. (2003) demonstrating how my experiences and the people that I have been fortunate enough to work alongside have helped to move me on within my learning.

> 'But between seeking and finding there is another place, a special place, and maybe it is such a place that we journey towards now, that we call Arcadia, a place that for some is a book, a piece of music, a face, a photograph, a landscape, a lover, a city, a house, a land, a ritual, a path, a way of being, even.' (Okri, 2002, p. 84)

This perhaps is an excellent way to begin comments about my own teacher-learning. The metaphor of Arcadia, as used by Okri (2002) is a reflection of the way I consider my life with the Westwood St Thomas teacher-research group. Perhaps my life as a teacher-learner is most appropriately characterised through my work as a part of the Westwood St Thomas teacher-research group. For me, being part of a teacher-research group, is essentially about getting from this group what you need from it: some need to be able to talk things through; some need the dialogical nature of the group on a weekly basis; some need the theoretical break from reality; some need the qualifications; and some need the love that being part of a caring community gives. Further exploration of this is detailed in my M.A. Dissertation (Riding, 2003). As Okri reflects the variety of ways that something can be communicated above, the group seems to need the ability to be able to communicate in their own ways. The group together seems to create the pot of merging experiences that you can draw from. What is clear is that essentially people seem to move more towards the love it provides for them within a safe and secure environment.

For me, being a teacher-researcher is about experiencing the feeling of learning again. It's about being with others and learning alongside them. It's about getting that feeling of newness again. It's about being a child again and wondering how things work. It's about exploring. It's about creating. It's about being. Thomas & Pring (2004) comment:

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'Research or evidence-informed practice has the potential to support teaching and learning precisely because it involves teachers in becoming learners again, and so developing their understanding of how their students feel, and in modelling learning for their students. Hence evidence-informed practice does not merely mean bringing new information about what works to bear on professional practice, it becomes part of an ongoing learning process on the part of the practitioner. This does not mean, however, that research and/or evidence-informed practice is an end in itself. Its worth to practitioners still depends upon its capacity to enhance teaching and learning.' (Thomas & Pring, 2004, p. 80)

This is perhaps the essence of teacher-researchers and their potential impact upon education. It is the sense of being in the classroom and being able to remember what it was like to be a learner again and being able to appreciate the learning experience that students go through.

The video clip below is from a session in 2003 when the group was discussing the nature of teacher-research and its influence on their practice. The clip is significant for me in the sense of reflecting the power of the connection established between the group of practitioners. The clip shows Jack Whitehead as tutor, with myself, Karen, Mark, a couple of teachers from Westwood and a teacher from another local school. The clip shows the end of a point and the group erupts into laughter at a point made. For me, this shows how comfortable the group had become with each other and how connections between the individuals had been made. I learned from this that it is vitally important to be able to establish these productive working relationships with others and to have these types of positive connections. Beyond this, the quality of educational space was significantly enhanced through establishing the conditions that allowed these sorts of dialogues to take place.

The Westwood Teacher Researcher Group.WMV

Figure 27: Video clip of the Westwood Teacher-Research group, 2003.

Okri (2002) goes on to say:

''Even if we don't believe in it, we need the Arcadian dream,' Lao said suddenly. 'If only as a place where the spirit can rest. In life the body can have many holidays, but the spirit has so few. The body's holidays are simple:

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sex, sun, beach, sea, sleep. But the spirit's holidays are rarer: they are ideas, inspiration, Arcadias.' (Okri, 2002, p. 89)

Perhaps the teacher-research group provides the holiday for the spirit: the place where you can go to be inspired, loved, taken seriously. For me, this further enhances the importance of the regenerative spirit required within the human body. I believe that people need to be able to regenerate themselves somehow: each of us is different in how we do this. For instance, for my wife it's her long walks in the countryside, bringing her closer to nature; it's her love of and study of languages. For me, at present, it's my relaxation time at the end of the day by going to the gym; it's my writing in my journal; it's on the golf course. It's fair to say that as I grew closer to the end within my role at Westwood St Thomas, my influence decreased: I was essentially switching off. As this happened I found myself regenerating naturally from the lack of stress. I realised that in my new job, this would be vastly different, but that I would still need to be able to regenerate somehow, in some way.

I am all too well aware of what Wednesday, the day the Westwood teacher-research group met, had to bring for me: two periods during the day of a tricky year 10 group to contend with as well as trying to teach Year 12 Media last thing alongside the back-drop of supporting a *Graduate Trainee Teacher* with a tricky Year 9 group. It's middle of the week and by this point I'm usually shattered. Why would I possibly turn up for a further two and half hours discussion about teaching and learning in the form of an M.A. session? Perhaps for me it is the sense of being able to reflect within an Arcadian-like place: a chance to put into perspective and context why lower set Year 10 aren't always the darlings that I would like them to be and to focus on what I could do to improve this. Perhaps it allows me to rise above this whole sense of dullness that could take hold of doing the same thing each day and dealing with the same issues each day. The teacher-research group allows me to come to life: allows me to engage with the forces that feed my mind and body. It opens up the doorways to explore an unknown world: a world where the 'possible is probable' (Whitehead, 2003) for me, within this group I too am safe, am respected, and am listened to. I am valued and considered. I know I can get from it what I put into it. Perhaps the above description is what I want my students to be able to feel and say about being in one of my classes? I seemed to regenerate from it.

In relation to the Arcadian place O'Mahoney (2003) reflects the significance of community learning within schools:

'Beginning principals indicated that the most prominent sources of learning were neither professional leadership development courses nor university courses but more through workplace learning accompanied by the development of significant work relationships.' (O'Mahoney, 2003, p.16)

Maybe this is the workplace theory that takes place in an Arcadian place where the spirit can energise itself and relationships can develop through discussion. I am confident that throughout my own teaching career I have put my own professional learning at the forefront of my approaches to improvement. The singularly most influential element of my own professional learning has been my work with the Westwood St Thomas School teacher-research group. The history and development of this group is well documented within my own M.A. Dissertation (Riding, 2003). However, the key aspect of this teacher-research group is that it reflects O'Mahoney's (2003) points of workplace learning being a crucial source of learning. The fact that this teacher-research group took place on site at the school I was working at ensured that the work I completed for my M.A. was firmly rooted within improving my own practice within that school. Beyond this, the teacher-research group was able to essentially support the development of teacher relationships within the school, through which I personally was able to benefit from, which is noted through the following comments from members of the teacher-research group:

> 'When I asked the teacher-research group why it was they wanted to turn up to the weekly meetings many of the group had comments to make:
> '…it's also a slight luxury I think having the time or the incentive to question what you're doing…' (Jayne, 21st November 2002)
> '…I think also ultimately we all want to improve our practice or we wouldn't be here and you feel safer because you know other people empathise or sympathise because they want to do the same thing…' (Kate, 21st November 2002)
> '…it's been useful to have the group as a sounding board when you are developing a whole school policy or something …to actually have a group that you can discuss it openly with and validate it with and get a response from people again in a fairly safe environment you can get some really good ideas from it again it's so important to find time to reflect on these things and try and take the school forward and without this two and half hours on a Wednesday I find it very difficult to do that…' (Mark, 21st November 2002)

'…and I think another reason why I come is because I feel my opinions and views are valued…and that is what makes it safer…' (Kate, 21st November 2002)' (Riding, 2003, p. 44)

From these comments I can feel the sense of spiritual being coming from within them. I read their comments and can remember the individuals and as I do this I can begin again to *live through* them, drawing on my tacit knowledge of them as individuals to help re-inspire my own soul. Their comments really seem to reflect their characters. I can feel the 'luxury' that Jayne mentions, the 'safety' that Kate mentions, the open discussion that Mark mentions and the sense of being 'valued' that Kate mentions. For me, a kind of a spiritual connection is made between these people and their resulting experiences that are explored through the teacher-research group. This connection provides the necessary safety and humanity for individuals to grow and explore their own educational theories within a controlled space each week and then to be able to go out into schools and live out those values within their practice.

Essentially this reinforces the need to extend and understand the potential of stories within organisations as reflected in Carr-Stewart & Walker (2003). The above noted comments reflect the characters of the narratives I have been able *to live through*. These are the powerful sources of communication, which I would argue, reflect the nature of the school community. This is something that I wanted to hold on to and remember their impact, as I move into school leadership.

O'Mahoney (2003) also argues in relation to leadership that there are:
'…four distinct phases in their first year of socialization into the principal role – idealization, immersion, establishment and consolidation…' (O'Mahoney, 2003, p.15)

This emphasises my learning, within the *idealization* stage of socialization and I can reflect that I have encountered a great deal of informal mentoring. Stuart Jones, Deputy Head at Westwood St Thomas has been very influential within this aspect, as he has provided a great deal of mentoring, both formal and informal. This has been useful in that it has given me a realistic picture, as far as possible, of what the role of an Assistant Headteacher might bring. I have had a great deal of informal support from my previous Headteacher, providing me with support and guidance and involving me within the leadership of the School. However, I have also reflected on

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what I think the role will be like and how I believe I'll be able to do it. What it's not possible to understand, is the difficulties associated with the role until I'm actually in it. All I can see prior to starting the role are the good parts and benefits. Furthermore, the impact of this kind of mentoring described above is something that I need to remember when I am in senior leadership: I need to reflect on what has had impact on me as a middle leader and use this effectively when I have to lead my middle leaders.

I will be experiencing the *immersion, establishment and consolidation* stages once I am in post at Bitterne Park. It is through these stages that I will develop as a leader and be able to practice the role that I have. It will also be when I begin initial development on the idealization stage of the role for the next promotion that I may want. On reflection, this will mean that I will constantly be learning the present, yet planning for the future as I am constantly aiming to improve my practice and be ready for the next steps, whenever they are.

It is argued that each stage carries with it differing learning needs for the Headteacher and that the access to a mentor across these stages could be helpful in guiding the newly appointed head through their first period of headship. In reflection on this, to what extent will I receive the type of mentoring support established here when I am in post as Assistant Headteacher? Essentially, this cross references the work of Ribbins et al (2003) determining that school leadership is phased in terms of the school leader having to cross various phases of learning in order to move through to the other side and become fully established.

Further to this Pennington (2003) argues strongly for the characteristic of 'behaviour' dominating the role of leadership:

> 'What really makes the difference in leadership effectiveness is behaviour rather than skills, knowledge or IQ. Behaviour is a function of some of our personal characteristics and the particular situation…' (Pennington, 2003, p. 25)

This argument implies that observing the behaviours of those leaders that I have worked with could be central to establishing my own effective leadership as an Assistant Headteacher: that gaining experience of how to act in certain situations could be essential for future phases that I will need to cross. This could be correlated to the work being completed through the NPQH training programme. For instance, recently at a face-2-face training session we went through the model of how to

criticise staff and hold them to account for their actions: a method was suggested to use. In many respects this developed a behavioural approach to dealing with a particular set of circumstances. In many respects this style of work has directed the NPQH training: of trying to skill up candidates with behaviours and leaving the knowledge accumulation to self-directed study. This is clearly referenced within the NPQH programme. Further to this I would argue my development of the sense of educative values present within my practice is a reflection of my instinctive supporting of Pennington (2003). I would argue that this autobiographical exploration of *living myself through others* is my attempt to develop and reflect on my behaviours of *self* in relation to *other*. What is crucial to this though is a clear understanding of *self* and understanding what my personal characteristics are. I argue that without spending time reflecting on the *self* and understanding the *self,* it is not possible to effectively function in terms of leadership behaviours. For me, understanding of the self emerges from understanding my own past.

Alongside this, Pennington (2003) illustrates the links between behaviours and leadership styles: coercive; authoritative; affiliative; democratic; pacesetting; and coaching. The point being made is that leaders need to have a flexibility of styles, and behaviours, within which they can work if they are to be effective. For me, this flexibility of styles is as a result of understanding those that you work alongside and being able to *live through* them: of appreciating others in order to gain the best from them and improve both the practice of the *self* and the *other*. Within my middle leadership role I was clear that I needed to lead Simon and Toni very differently because as human beings, they were very different characters. This learning point is something that I need to take forward into my senior leadership role and the way I line-manage my middle leaders.

To extend this discussion further, in line with the importance and value placed on improving practice through mentoring, this sense of 'behaviours' is merged well with the concept of Headteacher mentoring. Devos & Verhoeven (2003) reflect on the ways in which school-based self-evaluation could be viewed in relation to the improvements to leadership practice. They comment:

> 'School leaders can provide a certain pressure on school members to change, but who will stimulate school leaders to change if self-evaluation indicates the need for fundamental changes in their behaviour?' (Devos et al, 2003, p. 404)

Essentially they address the key links between these three areas: the need for self-reflection on the part of the school leader, within the context of supportive yet challenging mentoring in order to promote self-evaluation with respect to the position of the school itself. Essentially, isn't there the need to establish an action-research cycle within the internal workings of leaders to promote improvements in practice? I would argue that Headteachers and school leaders need to fundamentally appreciate, understand and practice an action-research approach to self-improvement in order to challenge Devos et al. (2003). Evans (1995) I feel is able to demonstrate this through her practice as a Deputy Head and Delong (2002) also reflects this ability in her practice as Superintendent of Schools. Both of these leaders use action research to reflect on their practice with the aim of improving it.

It is through the process of reflection that I can really come to a better understanding of myself as teacher-learner and leader. I would argue that I am able to demonstrate the long-term action-research reflection cycle (McNiff et al., 1996) aspects through my career and it is this sustained thesis of reflection upon my practice that is allowing me to reach much longer-term reflection over my practice. As a result of this, I am able to improve my practice and use this to positively influence those I come into contact with in order to make things better.

It is through gaining access to long-term action reflection that I can begin to understand Muijs & Harris (2003). When reflecting upon my own career I can begin to understand the ways in which I have been prepared for school leadership through the work I have done in the classroom and around the school itself. Muijs & Harris (2003), drawing on the work of Day and Harris (2003), comment:

> '…there are four discernable and discrete dimensions of the teacher leadership role.' (Muijs et al., 2003, p. 439)

These are:

> '…the translation of the principles of school improvement into the practices of individual classrooms…focuses upon participative leadership where all teachers feel part of the change or development and have a sense of ownership. Teacher leaders may assist other teachers to cohere around a particular development…the mediating role. Teacher leaders are important sources of expertise and information…forging close relationships with individual teachers through which mutual learning takes place…' (Mujis et al., 2003, p. 439)

I would argue that these are skills that I can demonstrate throughout my career. Perhaps the thing that surprises me the most is the existence of the final element on the list. Perhaps I have taken for granted the establishment of relationships within the school and have not really considered this to be a form of leadership: merely as a form of friendliness. Perhaps this quality is something that I have been successful in and have reaped rewards: where others are quick to judge I do tend now to want to find reasons why and give the benefit of the doubt. However, for me what is missing from this list of characteristics is the sense of *creativity* and ability to *live through others* required to be a teacher-leader. For me it is accessing these characteristics as well that will bring the vibrant leadership into classrooms along with the humanity and sense of democracy needed within educative practice to reflect and model the expectations we have of our students.

Further to this are the potentially psychological aspects and impact associated with developing teacher-leadership within schools. Muijs and Harris (2003) comment:

> '…for example finding that teachers taking on leadership roles can be ostracized by their colleagues.' (Muijs et al., 2003, p.442)

and:

> '…'top-down' management structures in schools as a major impediment to the development of teacher leadership, as they militate against teachers attaining autonomy and taking on leadership roles within the school.' (Mujis et al., 2003, p. 442)

The two aspects covered above perhaps illustrate the fine balance that needs to be struck: the balance between building an inclusive community within a school that values all, and also allowing for individual difference to exist. I feel that there is the potential for ostracization to take place between staff as they perhaps fear changes that could be happening to schools through teacher-research communities: they feel threatened by the bonding within these research communities. I can reflect on this from the experience within the Westwood St Thomas teacher-research group as there are examples of teachers within the School who have reacted in a fearful and negative way to the group; somehow feeling threatened, intimidated or simply dismissive of the potential impact of wanting to improve practice through rigorous evaluation. However, as teacher-research becomes much more prevalent then it will perhaps become much more of the expected norm. I believe that this is the essence of what an in-house teacher-research group has ultimately provided: a way for teachers to actively take the leadership responsibility for wanting to improve their practice and ultimately taking the responsibility for improving it. Isn't this a

characteristic of those present within this teacher-research group: that they are people who want to improve their practice?

This is further expanded on when considering the importance of self-reflection within teaching:

> 'A concomitant of this is that teacher-leadership roles cannot successfully be imposed by management.' (Mujis et al., 2003, p.442)

and:

> 'Heads need to encourage teachers' continuous learning, by providing time and resources for continuing professional development (CPD) activities, and need to support and validate the concept of teacher leadership. These changes will necessitate many heads becoming facilitators rather than top-down managers' (Mujis et al., 2003, p. 442)

I can reflect on how, under a Headteacher at Westwood I was allowed time to complete my M.A. studies, which made the process meaningful and directly impacted on my practice. This caused me to reflect on my own thinking about school leadership. My vision of a school being well-equipped for the work that it needs to under-take to improve by skilling-up its staff who are in essence motivated to want to improve their own practice and know that he/she will be supported in order to carry out the vital task of reflecting on the work that they do in order to make it better. To what extent though, can I do this within the constraints of resources? Essentially it would probably need creative and divergent thinking: Westwood was able to do this, but in the future what sort of creativity of resources will be needed?

I hope that I am a leader who is supportive yet challenging to those that I lead. I hope I have the ability to see the strengths in others that they hold and be able to use this sight to maximise learning.

As a teacher-learner I have been very fortunate to have been provided with exceptional opportunities to improve my practice. Crucially, the impact on my development of being part of a teacher-research community has been central to my development. I am arguing that providing this sort of opportunity should be central in my drive to improve the teaching and learning within a school. This is something that I want to try and bring to Bitterne Park when in role as a senior leader there.

A Curriculum change

I offer the following as an example of my application of an action research cycle as a teacher-learner. This is one way in which I've improved the quality of the living educational space. This is included as an example of my sense of *living through others*. This is my attempt to *live through* my students, in terms of recognising the value of Media within their strengths. One of the major changes that I implemented within Westwood St Thomas was the movement within the core curriculum entitlement within my own Faculty. I have changed the provision of English and English Literature as an entitlement for all in KS4 to English and Media as an entitlement for all. I refer to this as an element of the way in which I was demonstrating my ability to think strategically and also within a context of futures thinking. Essentially I believed that within my own school and the wider social context that this was the right move for the school and that the school and students would gain a great deal from these changes. However, I also believed that this was taking on board the demands of a 21st Century education that is further requiring students to be provdied with the skills to be able to cope within a media-saturated and dominated world.

For me this was an example of Jack Whitehead's self-study form (Whitehead, 1989) within my own work as Head of Faculty: it reflects my middle leadership role engaging with teacher-research. I established a real concern over the curriculum choices that we were making for our students as I felt that we weren't giving our students the best possible chances to succeed from the courses that we were offering. I investigated this, came to some conclusions and implemented the changes to the curriculum. Further evaluation then continued throughout the course to monitor the implemented changes and to continue the reflection.

I would further argue that I took an action research approach to the implementation of this change within my own Faculty and that this experience has greatly contributed to my values and understanding of leadership in practice. The following process took place to implement this change:

- reflection with my students on the courses offered and discussion with many of them;
- a consultation paper produced for my faculty to consider the possible outcomes of the investigation into the curriculum provision that we undertake;
- a meeting to discuss the feedback from the potential changes suggested and options available;

- a formulation of a suggested response from the Faculty and suggestion of what should be done regarding the curriculum we provide;
- the implementation of the changed curriculum;
- an evaluating of the curriculum both during and after the change to monitor its effectiveness;
- an implementation of the revised curriculum based on investigations.

Due to the cyclical nature of this process the reformulating and evaluating continues and hence the 'tinkering' and 'messing' with what is delivered is always considered. Essentially this will provide a model of leadership whereby the provision is always considered and nothing is left to merely carry on. The feeling of never being completely satisfied with the status quo always exists.

It is my belief that within certain contexts the using of Media Studies as a viable alternative to Literature is essential in order to empower students to be able to deal with and accept the world as it is today. As I am writing this I have just finished reading about the Government's plans to stop fast-food advertising during children's prime-time television as a way of reducing the growing obesity amongst younger children. Whilst this can be welcomed, surely it is not attacking the second issue: if we empowered students to be able to understand the media more and to be able to de-code the advertising in the first place, they would then be in a position to make an informed decision about what they are doing. It is my belief that students who study Media studies have the opportunity to be able to question what they see, read and hear. There is a greater argument that in a media-saturated society, every student needs to be empowered to be able to deconstruct the media that dominates their lives.

Balzagette (2004) reflects on and argues for the need to develop the role of media as a subject in relation to raising literacy standards, commenting:

> '…teachers are opening up the relationship between English and Media in radical and imaginative ways…' (Balzagette, 2004, p. 7)

She goes on to further reflect in detail on the importance that Media can play within the teaching of English. However, what is crucial for me here is the sense of imagination: of thinking outside of the box instead of ploughing away with the same old diet, a rethinking of the situation takes place to ensure that students' needs are matched by the curriculum that is offered.

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I can reflect on Davies (2003) and how his comments link to my understanding of action-research as a process. I draw on his characteristics of strategic leaders who:

> 'Can see the future, bigger picture for the organisation as well as understanding the current contextual setting…Has a dissatisfaction or restlessness with the present…Has the ability to define the key moment for strategic change…Has the ability to translate strategy into action…' (Davies, 2003, p. 304)

Essentially, this curriculum change had been informally discussed for a few years. It was only as the school moved towards applying for Arts College status that I began to recognise the key moment for this type of change had arrived: the school was ready and I had the staff in place to implement the change. Essentially, in terms of strategic thinking I believe I was able to establish the present context, reflect on it and be able to implement a key change.

Davies (2003) further comments about a strategic leader who:

> 'Believes that strategy is as much about the creation of meaning for all those in the school as it is about the establishment of direction.' (Davies, 2003, p. 304)

However, this characteristic of strategic leaders is the one that I realise that I need to work on. With the example that I have provided of the above curriculum change I did not fully involve all staff within it. Within change management this is perhaps the most difficult aspect: persuading all those around you, or certainly a critical mass of people, that what you are doing is the right way forward. However, within the context of the students, I have ensured that distributed leadership has focused the Media co-ordinator on proliferating the message to the students of the importance of the subject and this curriculum change.

Perhaps very significant to this, where the bridge between Sequences 2 and 3 of this thesis are beginning to be laid, I can reflect on my first meeting, before I had moved officially to Bitterne Park, between myself and the Head of English and Media Co-ordinator at Bitterne Park. These two Subject leaders had been sent to meet me at Westwood so I could talk over how we had implemented the course of GCSE Media and English in our unique and creative way. Bitterne Park wanted to explore introducing something similar in order to challenge students and help develop the creative approaches they had to curriculum provision. Before this meeting I was quite nervous: I knew I would be line-managing the Head of Media the following year and I was keen to make the 'right' impression; whatever that was!

Initially I sensed that the two members of staff arrived really unsure about the ideas that were being proposed. Throughout the meeting I listened and asked a number of questions, trying to take on directly their concerns and answer the questions as honestly as possible. I wanted to find out from them what their feelings were and how their experiences of the school had brought them to this position. I was surprised that by the end of the two hour meeting, they both seemed very convinced about the merits and models of curriculum I had proposed and went away to begin planning what could happen next: in one sense they recognised that the possible was indeed probable (Whitehead, Joan, 2003). I was surprised by the fact that I was acting in the position of senior manager for the first real time: that I was there to guide these people and when I spoke I was listened to. The changing nature of relationships will be quite interesting for me to follow as I move further into this role. I do wonder what impressions they took away of me? How they saw me? What they will say about me? Always the reflective practitioner.

Within the next section I want to explain my understanding of middle leadership.

2.7 Middle leadership

Within this section I want to be able to explore what my experiences of middle leadership have been. I want to communicate to the reader my own values within my middle leadership practice of valuing the democratic and sense of togetherness that I put into practice. I refer to my own learning as a middle leader and my experiences of research through my M.A. at the University of Bath. I draw on McNiff, Lomax & Whitehead (1996) in order to demonstrate the potential impact of action research as one way that I attempted to improve my practice and the living educational space I share with others.

For me middle leadership is about engaging with others: it is about being able to reflect on your own practice as it happens. It is also about being able to learn who you are: learn about the self. Within my own leadership at middle management level I have tried to promote a sense of 'togetherness' and inclusivity, to involve those that I work with within the process of leadership itself. As one example I can refer to the office room, B9, that I have worked in for six years at Westwood St Thomas. This office has taken on an almost aura of its own between those that have been part of it over time. When I became Head of Faculty I wanted the work space to become a space of expression that allowed individuals the chance to engage with others. I wanted to promote the dialogical nature of education and get people speaking to each other. With this in mind I spent the following years building a living educational space that tried to reflect openness, creativity and focus. I got others involved in creating this space: those who I have worked with have contributed to this space and I sense that it is similar to my own classroom in terms of promoting the democratic nature of education.

Figure 28: Image of my desks within the English Office, Room B9, 2004.

The above image is an image of the desks I sat at in the B9 office and I feel it holds the icons that reflect me: the coffee; the messy desk with piles of things going on; the files piled high. Leadership is about having things going-on: it is about having messiness and being able to live with it. It is about doing these things in order to help spread the responsibility of leadership so that one person doesn't become too bogged-down with it: it's about sharing it out so that the room becomes the leadership vessel rather than just the person. This room was like the ship that carried us to the vast possibilities that we wanted to explore.

Within this, leadership is about creating the structures so that the whole thing does not fall down when one person leaves: it's about creating the sustainability within the place that isn't about one person but more about a way of doing things within a time and space. Through this feeling I believe that I was able to keep going, no matter how difficult things became, because I had a sense of somewhere to go to re-inspire me.

Figure 29: Wider Image of the B9 English Office, 2004.

The above image reflects the educational space within the office: the possibilities of dialogue and engagement between staff that were possible through enabling eye contact with and between others. What can also be seen is the creativity expressed on the white board of staff engaging with each other. Successful middle leadership is about letting communication flow and opening up the channels of dialogue and discussion.

I have always been confident in my own ability and the work that I do. This I feel has allowed me to help others. This self-worth I believe I have passed on to my colleagues. I feel Simon and Toni both were able to grow and improve from this: Simon was able to move from a position of having no idea of what it was like working in a School, to becoming an effective 2nd in Faculty. Toni has been able to become a very confident and direct leader. Simon commented in dialogue with me:

> '…you gave me confidence to move on despite the fact that I knew I had so much to learn.' (Simon, June 2003)

I feel that I have reflected some of these experiences and traits from my own character onto those I have worked with and also gained from them. These traits in my own practice have resulted in my rapid rise through the ranks. In terms of leadership, it has given me a confidence in my own decision-making and abilities to be right.

I have been very fortunate to have risen from a Newly Qualified Teacher to Head of Faculty at Westwood St Thomas School. During this time I have been able to explore the notions of leadership: what it means and what it is. As I have spent so long within one school I have really had the chance to see projects through to completion and expand my sense of understanding others: I have been able to experience the full impact of my decisions and influence. Throughout my interviews for Assistant Headship I have been tested on my understanding of leadership and asked to clarify my understanding of it in practice. Through my *National Professional Qualification for Headship* (N.P.Q.H.) experiences I have extended my understanding and practice of it.

However, I am beginning to believe that leadership is something that is not completed in isolation in a classroom or hotel somewhere whilst on a course. For me, I am growing in my understanding of seeing leadership as an extension of being able to *live through others*. If leadership is truly to influence others then it must be able to establish a *connection* between people and ideas: it must be about connecting the narrative landscapes that practitioners hold (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999). For this to occur it implies to me that leadership relies on the inter-personal nature of its practice: that without the spark of *connection*, leadership cannot flourish and that without understanding the stories that practitioners carry with them improvements cannot be made. I can draw on my relationships with Simon and Toni and how I believe I was able to draw out of them the best through the level of connection I had with them: through my appreciation of their narrative landscapes that they carried

with them. I am again drawn towards my developing understanding of the work of Connelly & Clandinin (1999) in terms of their expression of 'stories to live by'. It is through valuing the dialogical nature of education and being able to bridge the divide between idealism and empiricism within education which would help support the dialectical view of the holistic possibilities of leadership within schools. People matter. Experience matters. Stories matter. Listening matters. These are the stories that I am telling in this thesis that I want to live by, or for me, stories that I want to *live through*. This thesis is my account of the stories I have lived by and through.

It is important to acknowledge that I am taking my action-research approaches to School Leadership into a position of significant influence, as I am moving further into a leadership role. Delong (2004, p. 3) realises and acknowledges the potential impact of this. This is something that I must be aware of: the extent to which I will be able to use my action-research grounding to support the improvement work that I intend to undertake and improve the quality of learning for students. As I move further into School leadership, my influence over the learning of students will predominantly be through the way that I can influence other staff, as I move away from the frontline and begin to inhabit a position of systems influence. (Senge, 1990)

I can touch the sense of leadership that Delong (2002) promotes when she comments:

> 'I find leadership to be context specific, dependent on the gestalt and very much a problem solving, creative thinking and relationship-building exercise.'
> (Delong, 2002, p. 233)

This I feel recognises the way that leadership becomes people driven in order to improve practice.

Middle leadership, I argue, is about being able to positively influence both staff and students to improve their learning. Middle leadership is a very complex role: it is a fine balancing act, attempting to manage both those above you and those below you. It is a role that I have found both very taxing and very rewarding.

Within the next section I want to explain the transition from middle to senior leader.

2.8 From Middle Leader to Senior Leader

Within this section I intend to explore, through my own experiences and practice, Ribbens et al. (2003) stages of becoming a Principal, applying their ideas to my own development from teacher to leader to demonstrate my own critical engagement. I intend to use their model to reflect on my own practice and demonstrate how I have learned from living through this process. I also reflect on Gunter (2001) and the importance of the leader understanding the self and their own identity within their practice and Harris et al. (2003) and their arguments for the need to build up solid professional development opportunities for senior leaders. I explore Hartle and Thomas (2003) and their eleven characteristics of identifying potential future school leaders early on in their careers.

When reflecting on the positioning of this thesis, the focus of the work is not on leadership: it is not the intention of the thesis to contribute directly to our growing understanding of school leadership. There is a vast amount of current literature on school leadership. However there is an acknowledgement of leadership and how this has been shaped through my own lived experiences. Through my exploration of this I believe I have been able to respond to Gunter's (2001) comment:

> 'As yet there is no work on the pathways to middle management as a research enquiry in itself.' (Gunter, 2001, p. 79)

Furthermore Gunter (2001) adds:

> 'We do not have biographical and narrative evidence about teachers as post-holders…' (Gunter, 2001, p. 109)

She argues that there has been a greater focus on quantitative research into the role of the middle leader, rather than qualitative research, as the middle leader's role has tended to be about performance and outcomes. This thesis adds qualitative research to our understanding of the role of being a middle leader.

Poultney (2007) considers the role of the Subject Leader and reflects on what seems to be the effective characteristics of the role. She argues:

> '…that effective departments are run by Subject Leaders who have energy, enthusiasm, drive and motivation for their work, and who will be prepared to stay in post for a longer period of time to bring some stability to the work of the department.' (Poultney, 2007, p. 9)

From my own experiences I would argue that this reflects my own situation. I was a middle leader for 5 years in my first school and within this thesis I account for my time in post. I demonstrate how I have been able to move forward the department I was leading and the responses from the staff that I worked with. I provide evidence to address:

> 'The ability of a Subject Leader to have and use good interpersonal skills to build effective working relationships is agreed by all teachers taking part in this research…' (Poultney, 2007, p. 9)

I provide accounts of my relationship with 2 members of my team during the period of this research, drawing on their own writing and work as well as conversations and interviews with them. Poultney (2007) further comments:

> 'For Subject Teachers, the key effective attributes are the ability to build trust between the Subject Leader and the Team, and for the leader to be approachable when they need support with their work.' (Poultney, 2007, p.9)

Within my accounts I provide evidence of when my team members were able to show their own trust within me as their leader. For instance, through the sharing of their own written narratives of their classroom experiences that were used to help us move forward the department.

Hill (2006) argues for the need to consider the ways in which we can create the conditions for sustained leadership over a period of time:

> 'But if school leaders are to sustain their energy and enthusiasm and lead the drive for further school improvement we need to start thinking in terms of leadership that lasts – not leadership that burns brightly and then burns out. The first step is to learn from schools and leaders what sustains and motivates them in working for school improvement.' (Hill, 2006, p. 12)

The argument here is to consider how leaders continue to do the jobs that they do and maintain their drive and ambition to make things better. Within my thesis I argue that the key to understanding this is through the understanding of the self and more specifically the autobiography that accounts for the individual's being. I argue that life history and life story is linked to the individual's drive for improvement and I have approached my practice through aiming to understand what motivates me through my life to be the practitioner that I am.

Gunter (2001) explores the various positions present within school leadership and argues for a model of:

'…conceptually informed practice that embraces a radical professionalism in which educational professionals are users and producers of leadership knowledge, and that the site for knowledge production is a collaborative and shared space for knowledge workers in schools and other settings…' (Gunter, 2001, p. 15)

Gunter identifies the debate present within school leadership theory and acknowledges the challenges that are present within it. Her argument is something I present within my own thesis, being a user of and producer of leadership knowledge through the autobiographical action research reflection upon my own practice over a period of time. Through my embodiment of a relationally dynamic standard of judgement, namely *living myself through others*, I have created the shared living educational space required through establishing a teacher-research group, in which collaborative knowledge production can take place.

Gunter (2001, p. 31) further identifies the concerns of the development of a model of school leadership that is very much focused on meeting easily measurable targets rather than recognising the vast sense of difference within education and practice and leadership that can exist. Gunter argues for the need to acknowledge the individual and the personal background and histories that have influenced individual values within leadership; celebrating difference rather than attempting to make everything the same. My thesis recognises this and promotes a model of leadership which recognises traditional theory and utilises this within practice in order to create a living educational theory of practice.

Gunter (2001) recognises and identifies the key dilemma facing the debate between qualitative and quantitative researchers. She comments:

'Accounts generated from qualitative research are both exciting and problematic at the same time; exciting because they provide an account of practice that can contribute to debates about educational change, but problematic because we need to ask, whose account is it?' (Gunter, 2001, p. 59)

How do I answer this question within my own thesis? I have incorporated within my own exciting account a clear position of where I place my work within the spectrum of research. It is a personal, autobiographical account that presents claims to originality and uniqueness and contributions to what we understand as educational knowledge. I place myself as the writer and the focus of the research at the centre of the text and draw on others in order to validate the claims that I have made. These others are

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voices represented within image, video and text. I acknowledge the problems associated with such a position and such claims but hold onto the importance of phenomenology within my work: of understanding through doing and experience. In this way, my thesis is moving our understanding of educational knowledge forward.

I am aware that I am a professional educator and reflect on Wilkins (2004) and her comments in relation to this:

> 'The 'professional' approach tends to see 'true knowledge' as a range of valid perceptions constructed through experience, culture and ongoing debate.' (Wilkins, 2004, p. 9)

and:

> 'The view from the 'professional' approach is that teachers are self-motivated professionals using evidence-informed dialogue and creativity to develop and refine the art of teaching; taking responsibility for addressing educational needs and fired by passion and moral purpose.' (Wilkins, 2004, p. 9)

Indeed this engages me in terms of capturing the importance of passion and evidence-informed dialogue: the two ingredients that I see as crucial to improving schools and learning. It is important to note my focus on 'learning' rather than 'teaching'. This is the shift in understanding that teaching is about improving the impact on learning rather than about improving the teaching skills used within the classroom.

Ribbins et al. (2003) offer the suggestion that Principals go through stages prior to becoming a school leader: namely 'Formation' and 'Accession'. These stages are essentially reconstructed in the light of the individual's experiences. I want to demonstrate my critical engagement with these ideas and offer my own insights into them. Reading these stages it reminds me very much of the growth of a young warrior into a tribal leader: a kind of rite of passage. Ribbins et al. (2003) comment on the 'formation' stage that:

> 'Prior to the assumption of leadership roles, there is a preparatory stage in which possible candidates shape themselves and/or are shaped for prospective high office.' (Ribbins et al., 2003, p.5)

This makes me reflect on how I have shaped myself for Assistant Headship.

The Preparatory Stage

'One remains ignorant and powerless unless, through learning, one acquires the concepts and knowledge which dispel that ignorance and enable one to understand oneself and others, and one's obligations and responsibilities. Learning is essential to becoming fully a person.' (Pring, 2000, p. 19)

I have shaped myself within the early part of my career through many experiences, for instance my NPQH training, my time spent working with the Senior Management Team of Westwood St Thomas School, my M.A. and Ph.D. and my whole school responsibility work as *Gifted and Talented* Coordinator. These experiences were both self-determined experiences that I had sought and also that had been offered to me by others. These experiences have helped ready me for senior leadership and widened my understanding of schools and how schools work. They have also given me an insight into people and how people function. As Pring (2000) identifies above, the key to improvement is through learning: the key to learning is the understanding of self and others.

'Growing Tomorrow's School leaders' (N.C.S.L., 2003) includes a number of mini-case studies of how Headteachers have engaged in progressing their staff into leadership positions. I can reflect on how I have had such experiences. One such example is:

> 'We have also operated a higher-level *immersion programme* by taking middle managers and seconding them onto the leadership team for one or two years.' (Hartle & Thomas, 2003, p. 22)

I was fortunate enough to experience this as I was seconded on to the Senior Management Team for 6 months to gain experience. I gained from this the opportunity to learn about myself and gain a greater understanding of how school leadership works. I was able to listen to the types of debate that take place within a senior team and also begin to understand the nature of roles that people hold within a team. I was also able to begin to learn about the way that a Head runs a senior team. Hartle & Thomas (2003) further comment:

> 'Taking charge of personal development means knowing yourself, knowing what you want to achieve, identifying opportunities for growth in that direction, being proactive in getting those opportunities, and helping to create an environment that promotes learning from them.' (Hartle & Thomas, 2003, p. 38)

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Essentially, isn't this about being a reflective practitioner and also about engaging within an action research approach to self- development and fulfilment in order to improve yourself and influence those around you? I can understand and see myself within this: how I had clarity from an early stage of my career about wanting to be a Headteacher and embracing the opportunities I was offered in order to support my growth and development towards this.

My preparatory stage has taken 6 years to construct. Within my own preparatory stage, I have attempted to shape my career so that I have been able to gain experiences which I feel will place me in a solid position to one day be an effective Assistant Headteacher and one day a School Leader. I am aware that due to the nature of my promotions happening so quickly, that there will be many things that I won't have experienced and that I will come across in senior management that I will have to deal with in my own way. However, my Preparatory Stage has developed my skills of being able to *live through others* and understand the relational nature of teaching, learning and leadership. I believe that this empathetic nature is something that will be crucial in understanding others as I move into senior leadership.

I was finally successful at securing an Assistant Headteacher post in March 2004. I was appointed as Assistant Headteacher of Bitterne Park School in Southampton. I secured this post after attending five other interviews over a two year period. On each interview I was preparing and improving on the skills and knowledge that I needed in order to get the position that I wanted. Throughout this time period I was shaping myself in terms of building a knowledge base of the information that was needed in order to demonstrate to others that I was capable of doing the job and also I was building a skills base through the roles that I was undertaking within my school. The combination of building knowledge, understanding and skills attributes whilst initially securing me the position of Assistant Headteacher, also, I believe, will help me to be successful within the post when it begins.

I feel that I have gained skills of flexibility of leadership style that reflects the circumstances that I am in. I also feel that crucially I have developed a growing understanding of people and interpersonal skills of working with others that are flexible. For instance, my taking on of the role of Gifted and talented coordinator gave me an extra dimension to my leadership experience as it gave me both whole school responsibility and the experience of managing and leading a variety of staff. Very often, middle leaders only lead their own teams and become closeted in terms

of doing this. Being the Gifted and Talented co-ordinator demanded that I demonstrate flexibility within my leadership to lead a cross-section of staff. All of these, I believe, are crucial elements required to be an effective leader. I feel that I have gained the knowledge of what roles are within schools and of key central educative initiatives of for instance, Performance Management and Secondary Strategies. I feel that from the experiences that I have had, I have gained a growing confidence of communication with others and a wide understanding of how Schools work.

Within the Preparatory Stage Ribbins (2003) further comments:

> 'As part of this general process of formation, such leaders are socialised into various social and institutional norms and values – into codes of taste, morality, values, belief, authority and the like by three key agencies: family, school and reference groups.' (Ribbins et al., 2003, p. 5)

I believe that I can trace the three aspects identified by Ribbins et al. (2003) of family, school and reference groups within my own career development. It is clear to identify the importance of family within the development of my own career. Within Sequence 2.I reflect on being a school-refuser and outline the ways in which my youth and family have influenced my current values and ideas.

Beyond this, the growing and continued support from my wife is a clear value and source of support and challenge and is helping to extend my understanding and qualifying of life. I further deal with her influence over me in Sequence 2.

Further to this, within School I have been able to experience a great number of roles through for instance teacher-governor and Professional Association representative. This has widened my understanding of the workings of Schools and the work that they do. Alongside this the observation of others within this role has also aided this. Beyond this my work within a teacher-research group and through the NPQH programme are examples of reference groups that have influenced my work greatly.

Day (2004) acknowledges how certain characteristics come to bear on all teachers in terms of defining and constructing the self, commenting:

> 'Teachers' professional identities – who and what they are, their self-image, the meanings they attach to themselves and their work, and the meanings that are attributed to them by others – are, then, associated with both the subject they teach (this is particularly the case with secondary school

teachers), their relationships with the pupils they teach, their roles, and the connections between these and their lives outside school.' (Day, 2004, p. 53)

Further to this Ribbins et al. (2003) comments in relation to the nature of influence over the perspective leaders:

'Sometimes the individual experiences consistent influences and conditioning within and between these and related agencies; on other occasions, there is inconsistency even contradiction. Taken as a whole, these agencies shape the prospective leader's personality and/or character by generating a concept of self, and the rudiments of a work style and outlook.' (Ribbins et al., 2003, p. 5)

I can reflect here on the influence that my previous Headteacher at Westwood has had on me and also the influence my previous Deputy has had on me mainly over the last three years of my time at Westwood St Thomas School. These two influences have indeed been consistent in helping to determine the type of leader that I am growing into, the professional identity I have and in many ways have conditioned me to doing things in a certain way. However, my own noted differences in the way that the new Headteacher at Westwood St Thomas' School is approaching his post is perhaps providing the necessary contradiction in approach that I require in order to form my own preparation for Headship: by providing me with alternative models to draw experience from.

In summary it could be argued that the Preparation Stage is characterised by self development alongside the support of others. It is the combination of these, of *self* and *other*, which help shape leadership candidates. I would argue that through my Preparatory stage I have gained valuable experience which I believe, as a middle leader, will support me as a senior leader.

The Accession stage

However, I'm arguing that leaders should provide personal accounts through their own unique living educational theories of learning that demonstrate the nature of their influence over others. My contribution is *living myself through others* through which I account for the nature of the educational influence that I have.

During the 'Accession' period Ribbins et al. (2003) comment:

'Following an initial period of preparation, candidates for principalship, as for other forms of leadership, during this phase of their career life-cycle develop, rehearse and test their capacity and readiness by comparison with existing office holders and prospective rivals.' (Ribbins et al., 2003, p. 6)

Whilst I am acutely aware that I cannot challenge my potential rivals to pistols at dawn, I feel that this is something that is particularly relevant to my own experiences. Over the past three or four years as a middle leader I have found myself attempting to record the actions of others that I have followed and to reflect on the way they have carried out tasks or made certain decisions within certain situations. In particular I have reflected on the way in which the senior leaders in Westwood have dealt with me and managed me; reflecting on the decisions they have made and how these have been articulated. I have found myself growing more and more frustrated at times when I have disagreed with the way things have been handled and felt helpless to change it. This has further reinforced my need to be in senior leadership.

I have also found through my limited experience of interview situations that I have grown in confidence within my own ability. I feel that the experience I have gained from going on interviews for Assistant Headteacher posts over the last couple of years has been instrumental in readying me for a school leadership role. For instance, I remember my first interview for Assistant Headship two years ago at a School in Hampshire. I gained an interview and was surprised. I had only been teaching for four years. I found myself moving through the first day with 12 other candidates. I didn't get invited back for the second day and the feedback was really honest: they felt that I simply didn't have the required experiences and that it was too early in my career. I can compare this to another interview that I went on 18 months later in March 2003: an Assistant Headteacher post at Bitterne Park School in Southampton. This was a job that I really wanted and was asked back to the second day with three others from an initial 14 candidates. I got to the last two candidates and the school appointed an advisory teacher with much more experience. During feedback the school could only say that the reason I didn't get the job was due to the fact that I didn't fill their specific criteria: they wanted someone to run the Arts College specialism and as he was a music advisory teacher, he got it. Ironically, or it may be destiny, that this is the School that I was appointed to in March 2004 and ended up working with this candidate in post. These experiences have been crucial in readying me for the role of Assistant Headteacher that I have obtained: each interview has brought me back to my own school with greater confidence: I haven't been

disheartened as I have always felt as though I am already doing this ahead of my time so I haven't been bothered by it. Each interview has also allowed me to test myself against my potential rivals and allowed me to move through the Accession stage.

Between my two interviews at Bitterne Park there was approximately twelve months. During this time I moved on significantly in my career and my understanding of leadership. I think one of the key things in terms of me getting the job the second time round was the fact that during the interview I was much more relaxed and confident about my own ability: I actually enjoyed the experience. I remembered that I needed to be a 'person', not just a machine. This is also a reflection on the School itself in terms of making me feel relaxed during the process. I had also extended my skills and knowledge about schools and leadership and also developed my experiences: primarily of taking on whole school leadership of *Gifted and Talented* and also gaining experience of working on a Senior Management Team. By this time in my career I was also really wanting a new challenge and wanting to leave Westwood. I think all these factors coupled together meant that I went into the interview convinced and confident that this was the right job, in the right School, at the right time for me.

Ribbins et al. (2003) further comment about the Accession stage:
> 'Accession is, as such, a developmental period which is geared to the accomplishment of two crucial tasks: first, the preparation and construction of oneself as a credible candidate for office; and, second, the acquisition of marketable performance routines that are designed to attract and convince prospective talent-spotters and appointment panel members and selectors.' (Ribbins et al., 2003, p. 6)

For me, this holds the importance of image and how the image of the *self* is constructed for others.

This reminds me of Sartre's (2003) sense of being in terms of the *Other* when he comments:
> 'By the appearance of the Other, I am put into the position of passing judgement on myself as on an object, for it is as an object that I appear to the Other. Yet this object which has appeared to the Other is not an empty image in the mind of another. Such an image in fact, would be imputable wholly to

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the Other and so could not "touch" me. I could feel irritation, or anger before it as before a bad portrait of myself which gives to my expression an ugliness or baseness which I do not have, but I could not be touched to the quick.'
(Sartre, 2003, p. 246)

Within the whole interview process I was aware that this sense of the projection of the *self* to the *other* was crucial. Being interviewed is a difficult process as it can hit at the heart of a person as it can reflect the self clearly.

For me this also hits at the heart of leadership and teaching. Some teachers in my experience are still unwilling to engage with teacher-research because of the fear of what the mirror they hold up to themselves may reveal: they are afraid of the image of themselves that the *other* holds within their mind. In terms of leadership, I am aware that *others* have indeed maintained mental pictures of me based on my actions: my task as a leader is to understand why *others* feel the way they do and be able to deal with the images those *others* hold of me. This thesis attempts to include some of the images others hold of me.

This developmental stage of the preparation for leadership is crucial and very delicate. The construction of the 'self' I feel is central to succeeding in leadership: it is about being able to build the character that is resilient and at the same time personable. It is about being able to live with the outside character whilst the inner one is trying to get out or be suppressed depending on the context. I am aware of the contradiction of self that I carry: the situations where I am relaxed within my own middle leadership role, yet when in an SMT, I change, become tense and find it difficult to relax. Perhaps this is an issue of the multiplicity of self that exists within the context of the school leadership role (Hill and Stephens, 2005). Essentially the use of the word 'construction' is central here. Educational leadership interviews are about being able to construct the experiences and skills needed in order to be able to convince others that you can do the job. It is also about 'packaging' the product in such a way that sells the contents. I am particularly aware of the element of 'performance routines' that establish the leader as the leader: what does a leader do that makes others think that they are the leader? Perhaps I draw upon my own real sense of democratic leadership here: why will others put their faith in me? When I go into an interview situation I am really clear about why I deserve to be in school leadership: I am clear about how the experiences that I have had have readied me for the position of school leader.

Taysum (2003), drawing on Ribbens et al. (1997) model of leaders, agrees with this concept of the importance of understanding the self as a leader, commenting:

> 'Therefore, it is of paramount importance that leaders analyse their constructs and re-construe them if they are to learn and if they are to develop as people and leaders. This process can be assisted if there is a knowledge pool that reveals leadership activity within a holistic framework because a leader's career cannot be isolated from a leader's life as partner, parent, relative, friend, citizen or the many other roles adopted by a leader during the interplay between struggle and agency. A leader is a complex spiritual, emotional, intellectual, dynamic and creative human being. Therefore, to further understand leadership a leader needs to build and test a sense of self.'
> (Taysum, 2003, p. 11)

Taysum identifies a couple of key issues here that this thesis aims to explore. I have already indicated the mininal research base to support the role of Assistant Headteacher within schools which would mean that the knowledge pool referred to is not available to assist the self analysis. Secondly, the identification of <u>professional</u> and <u>personal</u> *self* linking to construct the leader is engaged with also in this thesis, highlighting the need for self-reflection on the part of the leader.

For me, the Accession stage has been about gaining the position of Assistant Headteacher: my first attempt at senior leadership. It has been about going through a number of interviews and eventually being able to convince somebody that I could do the job if employed. However, I realise that as soon as I begin this role, I am again back into the Preparatory stage, beginning to ready myself for the next promoted senior role that I need to go for. Therefore, this implies that these stages are indeed cyclical and can very much be linked to the action research cycle itself.

Reading Gunter (2001) I am drawn by her use of language when investigating the nature of school leadership, in particular her links to Lacan's notion of identity of self and other:

> 'Identity is not just the product of the individual but is a socialised and socialising process in which identities can be received as well as shaped.'
> (Gunter, 2001, p.4)

and,

'How the self is represented and allowed to be represented is interwoven with social and political issues of age, disability, gender, race and sexuality. In this way the individual is the object of someone else's gaze, and can be grouped according to abstract categories and essentialised as being a typical example.' (Gunter, 2001, p.4)

This connects very much into my relationally dynamic standard of judgement of *living myself through others*. It is the relational links between *self* and *other* that allows both individuals involved in the relationship to grow. The democratic sense of *living myself through others* reflects the desire to allow both *self* and *other* to develop through the relationship: both parties are able to gain from the relationship. I would argue that this is something I have demonstrated through my relationships with Simon, Toni, Dan and Sophie, as exemplars.

Over the past five years I have distinctly felt myself to refine the approach I take to my work. When I first arrived in teaching I wanted to move quickly into leadership: something in my mind and the way that I think pushed me to realise that I could make a difference in education, so I believed. Time really seemed to be an issue. In a junior management role I can recognise my own living contradiction when I remember myself being very aggressive in my approach: not fully understanding how to relate to people or to get the best from them. I sought the challenges and tackled them head on. I tended to see their faults and weaknesses rather than focusing on their strengths. As I developed I found my approach changing. I feel that I am a leader that wants to lead by example: that wants to be able to show others what I expect from them.

I think that this is reflected through my email signature that I give within my emails. I sign my emails 'strength and honour'. This is a saying that I have gained from the film *Gladiator*, as I draw on the references from this text. I do not see this as a negative connotation, but rather see it form an inclusional perspective. For me this reflects the sense of leading from the front and capturing the sense that the qualities of 'strength' and 'honour' are encapsulated within these words: I relationally want to be able to give and live out these qualities, whilst also promoting them in others: I want others to have 'strength' within their lives, whatever it is to them, and the 'honour' to live out their lives productively and meaningfully. For me life is about integrity to the job you do and the people that you come into contact with. I believe that through spreading strength and honour amongst those I come into contact with that the future of humanity has a greater chance of bettering itself. Having honour is quite a traditional

value and perhaps one that today's generations know little about. However I want Mankind to have the strength to live their lives and the honour to do so in a way that allows themselves and others to grow.

I do however believe that I was able to create an atmosphere of enjoyment around my Faculty: I don't think that I took myself too seriously. I feel that I began to understand accountability, as my understanding of democratic styles of leadership grew, and this was something that I had been working on to apply much more with those that I work with. I felt that others would see me as someone who really cares about the students and, as one ex-colleague wrote in a leaving card, someone who so much 'wants to make things better'.

My previous 2nd in Faculty, Simon, commented on his leaving card to me:
> 'Dear Simon
> It is hard to aspire to be the best in a system, which is so bound up with rules, stress and burn-out, but you have showed me a way through the maze. Whenever I felt that one more day on the treadmill would drive me to despair, you cheered my soul, raised my head and lifted my spirit. I may teach one more year or twenty more years but I will never work with anyone who has such a great passion for 'making things better'.
> Good luck with all your future hopes and dreams.
> Stay as sparkling as the first day I met you.' (Simon Ratcliffe, 2003)

I think Simon was somebody who responded well to my approaches to leadership. His words of 'making things better' are words that have stuck with me a great deal: I think he has eloquently summed up my approaches, desires and feelings about education.

This particular card was all the more important in its symbolic nature as the front picture of the card was a still of Steve McQueen as Captain Virgil Hilts in *The Great Escape* with the quote from McQueen of, 'Racing is life. Anything before or after is just waiting.' For me, change the 'Racing' for 'Education' and the metaphor is complete.

I think I can note that at this point I am not out to try and learn from an imposing 'top-down' model of leadership: that I think there is a 'right' answer out there and there is knowledge that I must learn in order to be a school leader. What I think I am doing is

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exploring how my own understanding of my own experiences have and are preparing me for school leadership and how I can interact with the material that already exists about being a good leader producing a synthesis and equality within educational research that uses theory and practice to make things better. I believe that it is this synthesis that will bring about a greater understanding of what leadership means to me and allow me to do it more effectively. I feel that it is essential that this action-research approach to this work is maintained: it is essential that I am *living through* the experience that I am writing about: that I am not simply reflecting on school leadership once I am there, but rather that I am looking at how I can ready myself for it, very much in the form of a training model. In many respects I am looking at the journey that I need to undertake and I am writing about that journey as I undertake it, rather than sitting comfortably at my destination and reflecting whilst I drink my wine and laugh about those times things got a little 'tricky'.

Essentially what I am advocating is a model of School leadership that develops knowledge about its practice from those within it. Gunter (2001) comments in relation to knowledge production:

> '…and so it seems that what we need is an approach to knowledge production that focuses on the use and production of knowledge in which the knowledge worker in the classroom and the university can engage in dialogue about the same questions, participate in the same networks and engage in both radicalism and practicalities at the same time.' (Gunter, 2001, p. 10)

This ultimately, in terms of my own understanding, is advocating an action-research approach to practitioner and leader knowledge creation in which a synthesis between the use of and production of knowledge can harmoniously be linked in order to further the understanding that we have of knowledge of leadership within schools.

Perhaps as I move into School leadership I need to maintain a reflection on my own experiences and bear in mind how I have been able to develop professionally because of the enabling powers that others have given to me. Gunter (2003) comments:

> 'Illustrative of this is teacher professional autonomy and Ball (1987) shows that it is in the gift of the Headteacher rather than a professional entitlement of the teacher.' (Gunter, 2003, p. 41)

If this is indeed true, how disappointing it is that teacher professional autonomy has been seen as a 'gift'. I think this is something that I need to bear in mind: will those I lead feel professional autonomy or feel stifled by me? My view is to enable, to

empower and to liberate those staff that I lead and to recognise, where I can, their sense of professionalism and use this to improve the learning that takes place.

I can reflect on opportunities that I have been given through my previous Headteacher at Westwood, throughout most of my research. I was allowed a great deal of support and autonomy to be able to follow my research interests and never felt a sense of pressure to look at particular issues. What was perhaps most encapsulating about the support provided was the sense that he was a part of what was happening: he felt very inclusive and part of the teacher-research that was taking place within his School. He attended many of the Saturday meetings of the Westwood teacher-research group and I sense that he had a genuine belief that teacher-research was one of the ways to improve the quality of learning and teaching within the School itself.

This was able to provide a real feeling of being supported and valued by the Headteacher: these made me want to work and support him. This is a key learning issue that I need to remember: I need to consider how I can demonstrate to my staff that they are valued, or how I can *live through* them.

I can also reflect on how I was line managed as a middle leader. I would classify this as a loose-tight approach to leadership, where I was given a great deal of professional autonomy to work and lead my own Faculty. This was a successful strategy in many respects; however there were times when I wanted more direction which would have helped. Line management should have the potential to aid the development of the middle leader and help drive forward improvements in learning. In my middle leader experience, I can recognise that I would have liked more focus on this.

It is clear however that I partially disagree with Gunter's views that:

> 'Teachers-as-researchers is important, but they cannot or should not replace professional researchers who are currently located in HEIs.' (Gunter, 2003, p. 53)

and:

> 'Professional training and experience as a researcher is important, and cannot be learned by teachers at the same time as doing the job of teaching or leading or managing.' (Gunter, 2003, p. 53)

Essentially I would argue for a synthesis between teachers-as-researchers and the work of academics within universities: a synthesis that draws on the experiences and potentials of each with the aim being to promote a knowledge base that is rooted in practice but is supported through rigorous reflection. My argument is to further recognise the academic within the professional practice and embrace that practitioners can support and drive forward academic knowledge. However, I strongly disagree that teachers cannot learn to become researchers whilst being a teacher. My view of methodological inventiveness supports the view that learning to become a researcher is something that emerges through engagement with research rather than something that is learned. For me, it is the essence of what I do as a teacher-researcher which improves my practice. It is my understanding of action research improvement cycles which are essentially internalised which help me to improve my practice as I am focusing on the work that I do within the classroom. It is my responsibility as a leader to actually promote this type of work within my school as it is the action-reflection cycle which will help my staff to actively reflect on their practice which will help them to improve what they are doing. With respect to Universities it is their position, in my view, to support the knowledge production process that takes place within Schools and to encourage and enable teacher-research to be more widely spread.

Embedded within Gunter's argument is the essential basis that there is a 'right' way to conduct research: a traditional view that research incorporates a process that you follow. For me the sense of 'methodological inventiveness' (Dadds & Hart, 2001) is central to teacher-research.

One example of the desperate need for teachers-as-researchers is the recognition made in the NCSL report *'Deputy and Assistant Heads: Building leadership potential'* (Summer 2003) highlighting the key point that there is at present little to no research base regarding the roles of Deputy Heads or Assistant Heads existing within the educational community. It highlights the fact that there is a need to build a knowledge base on these positions and then to be able to build professional development to support these roles. There needs to be a knowledge base produced from within the role, which is what part of this thesis is about. This is part of this thesis' original contribution to knowledge. Essentially there needs to be an action-reflection cycle in place in order to establish what these roles are about and before a programme of support can actually be put in place to support them.

Barker (2003) identifies what she claims are the characteristics demonstrated by teachers during their early careers if they are to potentially proceed onto headship. She comments:

> 'Eventually the Headteachers agreed that the six attributes were essential to being able to cope with early headship and also that the characteristics were recognisable in teachers early on in their careers:
>
> • showed empathy
>
> • possessed an aura
>
> • were reflective practitioners
>
> • held a realistic self belief
>
> • had drive
>
> • possessed astuteness
>
> And the word 'capacity' was widely used as heads considered what they saw in the teachers…the capacity to cope with the demands of the role, which the heads felt in many ways defied training.' (Barker, 2003, p. 17)

I believe that through this thesis I am trying to demonstrate that I have these attributes, some greater than others.

Furthermore, this report draws on the study completed by the Centre for Organisational Research (2001) which identified the characteristics needed in order to be able to develop leaders of the future. (Hartle & Thomas, 2003, p. 13)

> 'The identification and development of potential leaders requires a systematic and creative approach and it is too important a task to be regarded as a peripheral activity or one that should be left entirely to individual choice.' (Hartle & Thomas, 2003, p. 12)

This echoes the comments by Harris (2003) in demanding the need for specific training of potential School Leaders through targeted programmes. What is also interesting is the sense of being 'systematic' and 'creative': of establishing an approach to leadership within education that can challenge orthodoxy and reinvent itself.

Further to this the NCSL identifies a framework of five stages of school leadership: emergent, entry to, established, advanced, and consultant (2003, p. 14). In many respects I am in the position at present of both emergent and entry to leadership: I

have taken on leadership and management responsibilities and also I am preparing for and getting ready for senior leadership within a school. Sequence 3 of this thesis will deal with my movement further into established leadership.

I am particularly interested in being able to reflect the essence of this approach within my own senior management role. I am highly aware of the importance that training can play within my senior role and the responsibility I carry for those that I lead. I am aware of the importance and intention that I have in coaching my middle leaders through their roles. In case studies completed Hartle & Thomas (2003) comment:

> 'All staff are supported through a *quality training system* that involves internal and external courses as well as regular *coaching* sessions. All middle managers are given a weekly coaching session with a member of the senior team.' (Hartle & Thomas, 2003, p. 22)

Hartle & Thomas (2003, p. 45) argue there are eleven characteristics that attempt to distinguish high potentials for leadership within individuals compared to solid performers. These are:

1. *Seeks opportunities to learn*

I feel that this is very much a characteristic of my own approach to my career as I have realised the importance of building experience of situations and events: engaging within an M.A. programme, then a Ph.D., and also within the NPQH alongside the experiences of being involved with the SMT and other responsibilities that I have held. My learning has also been on-the-job learning: it has been the learning about people and situations that has been the practical learning.

2. *Acts with integrity*

I sense that this is perhaps linked to the context of professionalism: the constant aim to try and improve the quality of the living educational space and placing the priority on improving the chances that students and staff have. My own sense of integrity is deeply ingrained from my upbringing: my strong sense of justice and doing things right that I hold and try and live out through my life. This sense of integrity is firmly rooted within my value base.

3. *Adapts to cultural differences*

This I feel will be tested more so as I move schools for my first career change. However, the changing culture reflected through the three Headteachers that I have worked for at Westwood St Thomas and their very differing styles has helped me to

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be able to respond to differing cultures. However, a key issue here is the way that transitions are managed: how I move between roles.

4. *Is committed to making a difference*

Again, I feel that this is reflected through the embracing of change within education and responsiveness and openness to embrace change within my role and the real desire to help others. This further resonates with my whole being and belief of improving the quality of the living educational space: of looking at a situation and wondering how it can be improved to the benefit of those involved. I believe that this reflects and echoes Senge's (1990) sense of 'creative tension': the sense of wanting to make things better leading to the creative energy to do so and desire to close the performance gap between where we are now and where we want to get to. This thesis is my detailed exploration of how I have attempted to live out this ideal.

5. *Seeks broad business knowledge*

I believe that I have extended my knowledge of schools through the different roles that I have had: Head of Faculty; Assistant Head of Year; Gifted and Talented co-ordinator. Within these contexts I believe that I have developed my own knowledge and understanding of management, leadership and generally of how schools operate.

6. *Brings out the best in people*

I certainly believe that I have been able to work effectively with people and crucially this thesis is my reflection on how I believe I can *live through others* in order to bring the best out of them. It is further evidence that through these relationships with significant others <u>that</u> I have been able to bring out the best in them, whether that is staff or students.

7. *Is insightful – sees things from new angles*

I believe I have creatively organised my curriculum through introducing Media Studies as a core option for students and the way in which I have approached change within my Gifted and Talented role through focusing on attainment and achievement rather than a pastoral focus as it was before I took over it. Furthermore the original contribution to knowledge within this thesis of living educational space, living myself through others and the sustained autobiographical reflections, are further examples of seeing education from new angles.

8. *Has the courage to take risks*

Again, the decision to remove literature from the core and replace with a one year GCSE in Media Studies for all reflects my courage to take this risk when it hasn't been tried before. This reflects the ability to stand for the principles that I have. Furthermore, this is about being able to make changes and respond creatively to the environment. Again, the originality of this thesis in its form is further evidence of this.

9. *Seeks and uses feedback*

My reflective practice throughout my teacher-research work has focused my ideas on this and I believe that this thesis is an on-going contribution to this. The form of this thesis, in terms of valuing the voices and contributions that others have made in making me the person I am is further evidence, I would argue, of my seeking and using feedback.

10. *Learns from mistakes*

I feel this is directly linked to the previous point. Through my use of the action-research cycle I am able to actively reflect on my practice and I am able to improve what I am doing. I am not afraid to make mistakes, learning something from them.

11. *Is open to criticism*

I am more willing now than I have been before to be criticised for my actions or lack of actions: perhaps this is due to establishing some kind of perspective on the work that I do and coming to a better understanding of my *self*: of the strengths and weaknesses; good and bad points.

I would argue that the Hartle & Thomas (2003) characteristics could be further enhanced through incorporating the characteristic of 'reflection on life history'. I would argue that an educator's ability to understand and account for their own autobiographical experiences is crucial in enabling them to then understand their professional life. This is the basis of this thesis.

The transition

2ⁿᵈ March 2004

The day I got my job!

I believe that transitions are important within my explanations of my own living standard of judgement and within the clarification of my meanings. I believe that through the transitions I am able to engage with and develop my own meanings. Whilst through the transitions I sense tinges of sadness I also recognise the positives within them for helping me grow as a person.

Perhaps I need to go back to July 2003 in order for me to be able to fully explain the nature, feelings, emotions and passions welling up inside of me in relation to this particular experience. I have worked at Westwood for six years, all my teaching career. I think this has been partly as a result of my own character: I am the type of person that becomes very settled in one place and situation. I like having the one pair of shoes that become comfortable; I like having one coat that keeps all I need in it; I liked working at one school.

In July 2003 I found myself in the position as Head of Faculty losing three out of my team of six staff: some would argue that this was particularly careless! However, the members of staff that I was losing were people that I had directly trained. I lost my *Graduate Trainee Programme* teacher, who I trained and passed the standards with; I lost an *Newly Qualified Teacher*, who I trained via the *Graduate Trainee Programme* route as well; and I also, most significantly of all, lost my second in Faculty, a teacher who had arrived a couple of years earlier as an NQT from Ireland and who had had such a significant and profound affect on me and my life that he would end up being my best-man at my wedding. I lost Simon Ratcliffe. The Headteacher was also leaving, and this was of great significance to me as he was a man I greatly respected and admired.

My wife also left the school, although my fiancée at the time. We had worked together for three years and first met at the school.

I remember the day that they all left: an emotional and symbolic day for me. Something seemed to leave with them. I think that there comes a point in your time within a school when it no longer becomes possible or desirable to get up after you've been hit to the ground. I certainly felt hit to the ground and didn't really want to get up again. In the past, when other influential staff had left I'd always looked to the future with positivism and pride, but this time it was different. I felt as though I myself had outstayed my welcome at the party: I was the only one left in the corner singing songs about the old days when the lights were turned on. It seemed that my own

ability to re-energise had been lost. I had lost some of the people that helped contribute the life affirming energy to my practice. It had been my intention to be leaving myself in the summer of 2003, but I hadn't been successful in gaining promotion. The following year, up to the point at which I secured my new position, was draining. I seemed to have lost the passion: seemed to be ghost-like in my presence. I really felt I'd out-stayed my welcome. I felt that I had started to become part of the problem rather than part of the solution. I began to accept things as they were rather than trying to make them better. I remember the following things from the past that I had done that helped to give me the spirit and presence needed to continue doing the job, although now in a ghost-like shell:

I remember setting up a table-football game within the English office and running a mini-league with the Faculty. I used a school desk, drew a pitch on it with a marker, built goals from pens and blu-tac, and invented rules. This became a focal point in building the team-spirit and many hours, too many hours, were spent playing and discussing issues related to both the game and education.

I remember spending time with Simon, going for drinks after work and building commitment through the relationship that developed. I remember talking a lot with him. I remember driving forward my vision through the investment in this and also gaining his total support for it.

I remember feeling the sense of Simon and Toni both depending on me: for ideas and strength to help them get through.

I lost these feelings and memories, resigning them to the filing cabinet marked 'the old days'.

I can remember the tension within me as I moved closer to leaving and saying good-bye to Westwood, a place that had been such a large part of my life for so long and that I had loved working in. I remember feeling the sense of leaving behind the comfort and a place I know so well, as I moved into the unknown.

……………………………………………………………………………

I returned to Westwood for the Evening of Achievement Celebration on 30 November 2004. This I feel gave me the closure from this chapter of my life. I was surprised and

pleased that people remembered me. At the end, students came up to me and asked how I was: Dan was one of them, Sophie another. Dan's mum also came over and said they still talked about me at home. I was pleased at this: I felt a pride. I also knew that I was like the clown at the circus that had just taken his make-up off and everybody could see him in reality. I realised it was time to move on. I felt a sense of being uncomfortable enough in conversation that these people were becoming strangers and that I had moved on. It was a pleasure: but it was also time to go. The curtain came down. The audience had already left. There was no applause.

Sequence 3 The Present

It is important to note that the following section you are about to read will seem quite different from the first two sections. The first two sections you have read were very organised and structured: they reflected a period in my life from which I can reflect on in an ordered and considered way. They are very much a story that has been sequenced from the narratives that I have experienced (Scholes, 1981). However, the section you are about to read is very different. It is not as ordered and jumps around a great deal: it is still a narrative. I make no apology for this. The style mirrors my experiences. In my abstract I claim that, 'I explore the on-going nature of transition between educational spaces upon myself and how this process of change is managed as I move through different stages of my career and life.' My work as an Assistant Headteacher in a new school has been about jumping around and skipping from one thing to another. It has been similar, I imagine, to being in a whirlwind: sometimes right in the centre within a relatively calm place and other times swirling fiercely on the outside having no real control but somehow managing to keep it together.

Throughout this sequence I will once again draw on a range of evidence to support the claims that I make. I am bearing in mind Bullough Jr and Pinnegar (2001) in the comment that:

> 'Self-studies that rely on correspondence bring with them the necessity to select, frame, arrange, and footnote the correspondence in ways that demonstrate wholeness.' (Bullough Jr & Pinnegar, 2001, p.18)

As a researcher I will make certain decisions to select and include material that I believe supports the claims being made. Through the process of triangulating this material I am to present my claims to the reader.

Sequence 3 is not a victory narrative. It is about just over one year of my life that has been incredibly significant in my growth and development: both personally and professionally. It is about a significant movement in my understanding of my self. It is about my significant learning in understanding how Schools can operate and work: how they are made better and can work effectively and be successful. It has been a testing period for me personally and professionally. There have been successes to write about and also failures too. What is not in doubt is the fact that over the year, the learning and reflection process has probably never been working harder to try and make sense of what has been happening. I offer the following account to you.

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3.1 The new Assistant Headteacher

Within this section I intend to contribute to Lumby, Foskett and Fidler (2005) in their calls to evolve the methodologies that currently exist within education in order to explore issues of leadership within schools through offering my own living educational theory. I support Senge (1990) in terms of arguing that the leader needs to understand him/her self firstly before trying to lead others. I exemplify Ribbins et al. (2003) in terms of the proposed stages that Principals go through prior to taking post and further extend our understanding of these stages and Bottery (2005) who argues that 'trust' is a key aspect of leadership within schools and identifies four aspects of trust that apply to the practice of leadership.

The incorporation of leadership within my thesis is only a small aspect of the thesis. The thesis is not a thesis about school leadership but rather a thesis about how I, as an educator, go about learning from my experiences and then apply this learning in order to improve my own learning and the learning of others.

Throughout my M.A. and my time as a middle leader I spent a great deal of time reading the leadership literature and believing that by doing this it would make me a better leader and help me to do a better job. As I moved into senior leadership, and in particular into the highly effective senior team that I am now part of, I realised that reading literature about leadership on its own would not be enough to help me to improve my practice and consequently help me to make things better. I was able to draw on my reading of literature but I needed something else in order to make it work. I realised from listening and reflecting that what I needed now was to focus on my own learning through living, to help me be better at what I do. There is no doubt that I have gone through the understanding of leadership literature and this has given me grounding in understanding leadership at a theory level. I am referring to Winter's (1998) reflections on 'theory' and the idea that within action research inquiries theory comes not from the literature but from an improvisation based on our drawing on our prior professional and general knowledge resulting in our own journeys of self-discovery. However, leadership practice, I believe, is very different. I recognise that when the leadership team I am part of is faced with a challenge or issue, we do not sit around and draw on traditional theory in order to solve it, but rather we draw on our own experiences and lives in order to come to a solution: our own living theory. My evidence for this is my own reflection on the practice as it occurs. Therefore, I am arguing through my thesis that I am now in a position to better understand traditional

education leadership research because I am drawing on a different understanding of practitioner based theory which is based on a living educational theory (Whitehead, 1989) that I, alongside my colleagues, draw upon in order to improve the quality of the living educational space.

Within research I am looking to be engaged and inspired. For me, leadership is about this: it's about doing things creatively and differently. I have been through the National Professional Qualification for Headship (N.P.Q.H) and I have come out of it judged to have met the standards for school leadership, the technical standards. But this is not enough. This does not mean that I live these standards within my practice. This thesis, with respect to the small elements that are about leadership, is not about the kind of leadership that can be measured with a tick box. In order for me to be inspired and engaged I personally would like to see more leadership accounts of practice that creatively present their arguments and findings, again reflecting a methodological inventiveness (Dadds & Hart, 2001) within them. Within my own thesis I am trying to present leadership as being vibrant and engaging and passionate. This is the reason that I am including a variety of creative multi-media methods in order to collect my data. Some of the texts that I have engaged with over my research haven't been able to inspire me to make things better due to the way that they have been presented. I have not felt that they communicate with me in terms of sharing the space that they refer to. I have not necessarily felt that they embrace the 'humanness' that my standards of judgement are based on: the relationally dynamic awareness that I believe education is about. Appendix 7 explains this point in more detail. 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.

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, I don't believe that Bitterne Park School would have been judged as being 'outstanding', as assessed by OfSted in March 2006. As the OfSted report commented:

> 'The headteacher and senior management team display excellent leadership and vision. They have implemented very effective strategies to improve the school since the last inspection.' (Bitterne Park School OfSted Report, 2006)

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)

The early days of my senior leadership role were very interesting, wanting to live up to the kind of expectations set above. The following is an extract from my journal that reflects my first few weeks in post: the calm before the perfect storm.

I have used the following extract to try and demonstrate some of my early learning: how I picked up on the importance of listening to others in order to learn from them and how to value the contribution that others can make to my own learning:

> 'It has only been one and half weeks since I started, officially, my new job yet already I can reflect on many things. I am starting to realise that I have moved from a position, job and school that I pretty much knew inside out and have moved to a job and school that I don't know at all. I am fully within the part of the learning curve that can be described as the 'What the Hell am I supposed to be doing each day?' At present I sit and I wait for things to happen in a reactive way and I take a little longer over things, because I have the time to be able to this: my desk isn't over-flowing. I watch others flying around and wonder when I will start to.
>
> I am also beginning to realise that I have much to learn. You cannot fully prepare for this job: you can simply gain as much varied experience as possible and then build a set of skills that will allow you to learn how to do the job. Perhaps being able to demonstrate the ability to learn is the key criteria that prospective candidates need to be able to show.
>
> I am beginning to realise how others are looking to me for leadership: is was quite a moment when a middle manager sat across my desk from me in our first line management meeting and asked me what I wanted him to do and what I wanted from him in terms of his work with his year group. I suddenly realised that I was now the one doing the things that others had done to me for so long: that I was the one leading others. This I feel will take a different type of *living through others:* it will require me to empathise in a more

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controlled way with them as I search to understand and also improve what they are doing.

Another aspect is the nature of moving into a school as a senior manager yet being faced with tough classes that you have to teach: the students seem to treat me as just another new teacher (how dare they!) and they don't care that I'm a senior manager. I possibly expected that they would recognise and respond to me because of my job title alone, but this view was very naïve. I have to work very hard to maintain discipline and control of my Year 10 class, drawing on my teaching experience to be able to deal with it.

However, as time goes on and I am later asked to pick up a couple of Year 10 and 11 Media groups for a teacher who leaves after neglecting her groups badly in the second term, I am able to walk into these groups and establish myself immediately: I am back to feeling more comfortable with who I am and what I am doing within the school and my confidence is growing as I develop within the role. In the empty classroom I teach in I am able to immediately create my democratic horse-shoe and immediately the feel of the teaching room is back to being my own again: immediately my relationship with these unknown groups changes to one where I know I am leading them as the teacher and we can learn together.

Over the first few weeks I have spent much of my time listening to others. Most meetings are about me listening to what is going on: asking probing questions so that I can build a picture of things. I remember asking one of my middle leaders to talk through how he worked with his year group: I know this is an area that I need to learn quickly as I have no real pastoral experience and will be relying on him a great deal. This is when leadership is made more difficult as middle managers want answers and advice whilst I'm busy listening to them. I am finding that I have to try and strike a real balance between the two: of being constructive yet listening to them and noting what is said for further thought at a later date. This requires me to build in a great deal of thinking and reflecting time in order to be able to consider the range of new issues that I am being presented with.

The sense of frustration continues to build as the more I go on the more I realise what I have yet to learn: it seems that at every turn I am realising the

limits of my own capacity! What I must not forget is that I have demonstrated over time my capacity and ability to be able to learn. This writing is, hopefully, testament to that.' (Journal entry, 13th September 2004)

before I arrive…

I was fascinated to read Evans' (1995) comments on her experiences as being the new deputy head, that she reflected on in her thesis. I can reflect on her writing and ideas. The sense, that she writes about, of sitting during her first week in post and wondering 'what next?' is a feeling that I have familiarity with. An early conversation with a fellow Assistant Headteacher during a visit to the school also reinforced this idea of not quite knowing what to do when you first arrive: of sitting and thinking what to do. This seems to be a common experience amongst new senior leaders. You move from being a teacher or middle leader where your time is pretty much planned out and you are mainly required to implement the ideas of others, to being the one with the time to establish the direction and vision. However, the reality did quickly hit home. It was with anticipation and fear that I began my career in senior management: both anticipation of the opportunities and influence I could have that would bring the students, staff and school success, and also the fear that it could go wrong. Yet despite this, I carried with me my sense of hope for the future.

The following is a summary of my key learning prior to starting at the school in September 2004 that I have taken from my learning journal. The moments I have chosen to include have been included in their entirety and I feel reflect certain key moments and thoughts in the transition process. I don't feel that I had fully prepared myself for this process: I hadn't realised the impact that it would have on me and how much it would test my resolve and spirit. I also offer this as explanation and exemplification of living educational space. I argue that living educational space is the coming together of individuals within a wider context all of which carries with it a set of values and expectations. It is the merging and engagement of these differing values and ideas that enable the creative spark to light and something new to emerge from it.

29th *April 2004*
I am feeling a great deal of mixed emotions through the anticipated change in schools and positions. I am considering the potential implications of my experiences of being a school-refuser. To what extent will I remember these feelings as I face this

process of change and remember the feelings of being a school-refuser as I move into a new and uncomfortable environment? I received a phone call today from my new school checking on whether I'd received the various bits of information that they had sent to me recently. It's surprising how the sound of a voice can remind you of certain things. The Head at Bitterne has a strong northern accent, reminiscent of my own accent. The sound of this stirred the feelings and emotions that I felt back on the day when I gained the job: the feeling of wanting to be working at the school. The sense that you know when something feels right and you learn to trust your own judgment. However, I am also becoming greatly aware of how my emotions are as I near the end of this particular chapter in my life at Westwood. Even within this text the two sequences are over-lapping, as I am not quite sure where one ends and the other begins. I am actually sitting here, in my office, in my chair, looking around me at those who I have recently had the pleasure of working with. I feel the comfort of the surroundings and the familiarity of the things about me. I am aware of the ingrained knowledge that I have about this place: that events and experiences have built up over the last six years. I am aware of the knowledge that I will take with me that has never been written down anywhere: the internal knowledge. This is the 'tacit knowledge' (Polanyi, 1958) that cannot be written. I am aware of how difficult it will be to leave this place….and then learn it all again for my new school.

7th May 2004

I have had contact from my new School over the last few days. I am starting to build a clearer picture in my head at present. Over the last couple of conversations I have realised that the School keeps mentioning that they want to protect and support me in my first year in the job and are trying to live this out: they have mentioned that they want to give me a Year 8 English group to teach, rather than a Year 10 to help me in my first year. My own personal response to this is that I don't mind. I feel partly defensive yet can realise why they are doing what they are doing. Perhaps my own character is coming through now as I begin to engage with the debates of the new School.

However, perhaps my greatest point to reflect on is the fact that the Head has indicated that she wants me to be one of her 'rotweilers' within the team: to be on the corridors challenging students and living out the standards of the School. This I feel will be a role that is an example of my own living contradiction in practice: I do not feel it will come naturally to me. I feel that I have built a certain style of working with students that is based on mutual respect and is also built on dealing with students in

a certain way: not a 'rotweiler' way. I think I will bring my own interpretation and personal style to this role that still allows me to live out my own values whilst completing the task. This reminds me of reading Evans' (1995) comments regarding her construction of her 'I' within her role and text:

> 'As I progressed through the enquiry however, the 'I' I started with turned into my other self – Kate – the one who was pulling herself aside and struggling with the value conflicts, the dilemmas, the problematics of practice, while the day to day work of the Deputy Head went on, informed by Kate's thoughts.' (Evans, 1995)

To what extent will I have to *live myself through* my 'other', in order to fulfil the role that I have been given? Perhaps as I walk the corridors in my new role I can become 'Arnie'?

Essentially I see this as a significant issue as I prepare for my new role. This can be seen as a re-invention of my *self* as I am asking myself to stand outside of its usual actions and perform in a certain way. This will help to create both the comfort and challenge that I am looking for within my career as my way of moving forward and improving.

I feel that I will be drawing a great deal on my 'tacit knowledge' as defined by Polanyi (1958). Essentially drawing on the things that I have long forgotten that have become ingrained within me and my practice, as I try to survive my opening time within my new position. I will be searching for Kincheloe's (2003) personal voice within my new context:

> 'Individuals cannot protect their personal autonomy unless they regain their voice in the workplace and (very important to this work) demand a role in the production of the knowledge on which the modern state and its experts ground their authority.' (Kincheloe, 2003, p. 23)

As I begin to engage within Bitterne Park and begin to familiarise myself with its workings and systems, I will begin to bring my own influence to bear upon it and begin to engage within the improvement of it. I will also need to establish my voice within the workplace, rather than regaining it: for me it will be starting from new. The students and staff won't know me and I will need to establish who I am and my identity within the School. However, part of my identity is firmly based on my action research history as a teacher-researcher.

12th June 2004

This was my first meeting of the Senior Management Team at Bitterne. We met at a hotel in Southampton on a glorious Saturday and had an agenda to consider: the next steps to improve the school; OfSted preparation; teaching and learning issues.

I was very quiet through this meeting and spent the majority of the time listening to the conversation that was going on. I was clear that I wanted to listen to learn. I was trying to begin to build a picture of the School and how it is and how the SMT approaches their role within the School. I was interested in picking up the culture and ethos of the team and also how they related to each other. I felt this to be important as I wanted to fit into the team initially and make sure that I was in-tune with what was happening and being said.

My first impressions were very positive of the team. I was impressed by the passion that they have to constantly improve the School: how critical, in a positive way, they were of the school. Each team member is strong on driving the school forward and through the discussions I picked this up: each had a carved out role. I was also struck by the importance the School places on creativity and imagination as an approach to school improvement: how they want to think divergently about issues and how they want to constantly refine the services that they are offering in order to improve the learning potential of their students. I was very struck by the School's desire to hold people within the School to account for their performance and actions: as a team, they are very direct about addressing under-performance and challenging it and will not accept excuses.

Saturday 18th June 2005 – one year on!

This is quite a significant aspect of my development. It is one year since the last meeting. The SMT met at the same hotel. It was again a glorious sunny day. However, I sensed the differences that I felt and the difference of my knowledge and contribution to the team and the school over the last twelve months. Perhaps this was felt even more as our new Assistant Headteacher for September joined us, as I did last year. This time I was not so much 'listening to learn', but fully present within the dialogue. This session was all about the preparation for OfSted and we had brought in an outside consultant to work with us. Of all the things that he talked about perhaps the most startling for me was his comments about 'love' within the school. This is the first time that I've heard 'love' talked about in the school and certainly within the senior team at Bitterne Park. I was reminded of Jack Whitehead's love and

it was the same type of love that I was able to connect with: the sense of family or community love. I was reminded of Cho's (2005) notion of love for learning and students. I made the connection between community love and learning and this is the essence of the values that I hold. As I was considering my own work I was able to reflect on how I was hoping to share the love that I had. I was re-reading my own text and trying to engage with the love that it radiated, even through the dark times present within it over the last twelve months. For me, even when I have been struggling, the feelings I have had have been born out of my own love to 'make things better': to connect with the others that I come into contact with and when this hasn't been able to happen, how I have tried to deal with this sense of frustration because things haven't been as easy as I used to find them.

Friday 2nd July 2004

I undertook a couple of visits in the summer term prior to starting my new job. I wanted to be able to meet those people I would be leading and also be able to find out as much information as possible. Again I felt the key thing was to be able to show I was a good listener to them: I wanted them to speak and for me to listen so I can continue to build up my knowledge of the school and its staff. I made notes from these meetings and reflected on them later. For me these are important as they reflect initial impressions and instincts of judgement that do not carry with them the baggage of the institution itself. When I reflect on these, I can sense my own naivety in terms of looking at things with simplicity.

I met with a Head of Department I would be line-managing. Some of these things he said really struck a chord with me as they are at the heart of some of my own passions: the work with Gifted and Talented and KS3; the need to bond departments and lead them with vision; the need to focus on teaching and learning and provide sound INSET. These are things that I left Westwood with strongly believing that they need to be central if improvements are to be made.

I also met a Year Co-ordinator that I would be line-managing. Again within this discussion the issue of Gifted and Talented arose and mentoring, both things that have driven me over the last few years. Interestingly, he also commented on the need to provide greater opportunities to communicate with his line manager in order to support him with his role.

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Both these meetings individually may well have not provided me with detailed impressions and ideas of the School but they are able to provide a snapshot that I can begin to formulate some ideas about and this is why I have included them for the reader: they are able to provide a basic context that I was working to at the start.

When I reflect on these things they tell me a great deal about where I need to focus my work in order to help lead and move the school forward. I can conclude that I need to extend the use of the student voice within the school and also to extend the school's understanding of Gifted and Talented. I also feel that more focus needs to be given to building the sense of teams within the school: extending the productivity of staff through integration of opportunities to extend professional knowledge.

Both of these meetings were crucial in the sense of me getting something to hold onto. I was trying to begin to make some sense of the job and the needs of the role that I had. I was also trying to set out my approach from the start in relation to how I wanted to approach my role. This was why it was crucial to meet with these staff early on.

It was within my role as Assistant Headteacher that I was asked to learn from within and not rely so much on others to be able to find strength. I was asked to build my strength from within. From my significant relationships within my professional and personal life I have been able to build inner strength to be able to apply self-judgement that I used to work things out. There is no manual to get the job done right: there is no question and answer section to refer to. What I relied on was the experience and creative imagination to deal with the real situations that I faced on a daily basis. There needed to be a growing confidence and affirmation of my own ability and this came through the journey of learning that I experienced over the last few years. It was now my role to recognise others: to be the leader and recognise those I now worked with: the Heads Of Departments I line managed; the Year Co-ordinator that I led.

It is interesting to consider how my role within the School changed over time and how I moved from these initial early impressions to being able to make much clearer and precise judgements based on having built a working relationship with these people. For me this is based on being able to build a trust within these relationships. Bottery (2005) argues that 'trust' is a key aspect of leadership within schools and identifies four aspects of trust:

'…*calculative* form in which individuals, newly met and unsure of future interactions, perform mathematical-type calculations of the degree to which each can be trusted.' (Bottery, 2005, p. 7)

'*Role* trust…being a normative assertion by certain workers…that because they had been educated into and hold a certain set of values and because their profession would sanction them if they failed to live up to these values, they too could be trusted.' (Bottery, 2005, p. 7)

'…*practice* trust, in which assumptions or guesses are confirmed or disconfirmed, where relationships can be built which take trust beyond the merely logical into affective and value areas.' (Bottery, 2005, p. 7)

'…*identificatory* trust was seen as the highest level of inter-personal trust. Built up over years, this was a level of trust where individuals come to know each other so well that there is an almost intuitive knowledge of what the other will do, generating a mutual unconditional respect and trust.' (Bottery, 2005, p. 7)

These different aspects are interesting within my own perspective as I have moved from my previous school where I felt that I had gained up to the level of identificatory trust, to then find myself within a new context and having to start from the bottom. I am reminded of one conversation with Simon in 2003 at Westwood when he commented:

'…I'll miss you as a friend and a colleague. I know we'll see each other before the wedding [my wedding to Karen] but I can't imagine working like this again…' (Interview with Simon, June 2003)

Simon was my best-man at my wedding which I argue illustrates the highest level of inter-personal trust we could have had.

I feel that over time I have established growing trust that now is based on practice trust at the end of the first year in post. However, over the first two terms it was clear that staff viewed me with a great deal of mis-trust: as the stranger that I was. The acceptance came through persistence and through making an impact and difference through what I was doing. I believe that staff developed their trust in me through my

completing of tasks that had been set: for instance, of gaining *Investors in People* status, for establishing the in-house M.A. group.

Within my own workings with my middle leaders, I believe that I was able to move through *calculative* and *role* trust and by the end of my time at Bitterne Park was able to demonstrate *practice* trust. I was able to influence the work of the middle leaders and affect the direction of the school through them: of establishing clear expectations of achievement within the Year group that were beyond previous expectations; of raising the bar on expectations. As one middle manager commented during one of our discussions about the changes in his practice towards the end of my time at Bitterne Park:

> '…I've noticed that I'm actually less confident…what has opened up is my teaching ego…for the better…I'm focusing much more on the needs of the students as a result of what you've done…' (Middle Leader, July 2006)

This reflects the movement from a middle leader doing something just because their superior has told them to do, to doing it because they connect with it within their value-base.

In terms of leadership I am now setting the way that things are done rather than following somebody else's lead. My work as KS3 Strategy Manager has meant that I am the one to question the core heads of subject that I work with, challenging their assumptions about the way they work; unpicking the work they do and trying to find ways to improve it so that all students have the chance to succeed.

Leadership is about others looking to you for the answers and the direction: it is about knowing what to do and when to do it. It is about knowing and being able to recognise the bigger picture. It is about having the skills to be able to get the best from a situation as well as having the knowledge to drive things forward and make the right decisions for others to follow. I am realising more and more that others are looking to me for the answers and I need to provide them.

In the early days most of my time seemed to be about learning. As everything was new to me, everything seemed to take twice as long and felt laboured. I was not clear what to prioritise and what to let go. I was not sure what to throw away and what to file. Consequently, I held on to everything and dealt with everything intensely, as though it was life and death. I held every piece of paper close, just in case…. I spent most of my time asking questions and listening to others tell me about things: tell me

how it's done; tell me what was wrong; tell me what needed to be done. Early on I was faced with excluding students, and having to find out how I actually went about doing this. I was asked questions that I couldn't answer: even Year 7 students on the corridors asked me where a room was and I had to make it up, waving them in the opposite direction and sending them off on a wild goose-chase. I was the living contradiction and unable to admit the limitations of my learning. I felt guilty about that. I was getting used to having a secretary, and not typing everything myself. I was getting used to not knowing very much when I used to think that I knew pretty much everything. I was constantly trying to keep up my reading to build up my background knowledge on education so that I could try and get one step ahead. It was very difficult coming into a tight-knit team that was good at what it did and knew its role in things: it highlighted how distant I actually was from the reality that they had created and lived through. I wanted to *live through others*, but at the time, I couldn't even *live through* myself.

During the day to day living, the process of writing within my journal and using this thesis as a vehicle to guide my analysis and understanding of the role I have is vastly important. Crippen (2004) discusses 12 ways she suggests that new principals can be helped in their new roles. One of these ways was engaging in reflective writing which can help to direct and cleanse the thoughts of the mind. I am aware of the importance that this text will have later on when I reflect back on these early days. I am aware how this text will allow me see how I have progressed and moved forward in my understanding of the work I'm doing. I realise how it will deepen my understanding of my role and thoughts about the decisions that I have made.

In order to try and understand the job I was doing I decided to note down on a daily basis what I was doing in order to work out what the demands of the job are and to see if I was indeed accurately prioritising the tasks that I do. This took two forms: at the end of each day I planned out what I needed to do the following day and incorporated this into a diary format. I then noted during the day what I did as I went along, and checked this at the end of the day. However, there were days when it was not possible to do this as I simply had too much to do!

The following are key extracts from my journal at this time. I think they reflect examples of my daily routines and feelings in the early days.

'I am still within the phase of not quite knowing what I should be doing. However I am starting to feel that I can have an impact. I am working at my lines and responsibilities and working through how I can develop and improve them. I am beginning to offer others more in terms of suggestions and direction of what I want from them. I am realising the fine line I have to walk between supporting and guiding and also in terms of telling them what to do.

For instance I have offered a 'bookmark' for use by teachers in their planners with key ideas of lesson planning and teaching strategies on it as use as an aide-memoir; I have put the concept of 'target getting' on the agenda with those I line-manage; I have undertaken detailed analysis work of performance and progress in KS3 highlighting that the school is under-performing compared to what it should be and using this information to challenge it to improve. All this is vastly new to me, yet strangely exciting.' (21st September, 2004)

'During this week I have been leading the Business Studies department review. I had been looking forward to this, my first lead on this, because it would allow me the chance to be able to put my own thoughts and views into practice on how a department should be reviewed: mainly, that the sense of the student voice needed to come through more than it had done previously within this process. Therefore for this review I observed a couple of lessons but more importantly, I also conducted student questionnaire evaluations of the subject and also conducted student interviews of the subject. This allowed me to gauge the learning perspective within the department and to draw out the student voice. I introduced a series of tools to do this: both questionnaires and interview questions. The Head of Department had commented to his line-manager that he was feeling very positive about the way I conducted the review: a sense for me of work well-done, where I had introduced challenge into the department constructively.

For me I feel that this was a great learning curve. In my only other previous experience of the department review process, I had had a disappointing review of ICT where I felt that I had not communicated my ideas well. This time I feel that I was able to express my ideas for improvement whilst also supporting the department as well.' (14th January, 2005)

The job changes as I move through the year. I feel as my presence grows within the school I am growing as an individual with confidence of my ability to do the job. On the day-to-day level I find that I spend 90% of my time dealing with challenging students: the students that cause difficulties within the school. I find that my time is mainly about fire-fighting issues. It is hard to maintain the positivism and the sense of warmth when doing this and it is at times like this that you really need to hold onto the regenerative spirit that you have. You need to be able to hold the vision and values you believe in and not to allow the 90% to sway you. The rest of the time is split between line managing middle managers in order to try and improve their work and to help them get the best out of themselves and occasionally teaching or running other types of meetings. It is clear that the majority of my day is about being out and about delivering the vision that the Head sets for the school through the senior management team. It is about interacting with others through doing this, both staff and students.

I was again able to return to the value that I am claiming is central to my own being, living myself through others. It was crucial that through my new role and the transition in to it, that I was able to hold on to something that I firmly believed in. When the transition into the new role at Bitterne Park was tricky, I was able to draw on my prior learning and values and utilise these to drive me forward. What I offer here is evidence of how I have taken this value into my new post, through developing relationships with individuals.

I feel that the importance of embracing both action research and relying on the educational value of *living through others* is part of the process I am using to become part of the organisation: to help me build the productive relationships within the School which will help me work collaboratively and cooperatively with others. Through action research I am able to overcome the sense of powerlessness and the alienation that I may feel as I move into a new School.

I am using the skills of an action researcher in order to help me to effectively do my job. When presented with an issue I am formulating ideas, gathering evidence, analysing it and then re-presenting the new challenges to carry on with. This cycle allows me to continue to strive for a better way of doing things in my School that will help us to improve.

The sense of 'living' is further developed through my relationship with staff within the school. One example of how I began to *live* through staff at Bitterne Park was through my working closely with an AST who was quite an inspirational teacher within the classroom. He had wanted to join the teacher-research group but due to workload he felt he couldn't get the time. I therefore worked with him one-to-one to help him develop individual enquiries. Through my work with him it was clear that one of his key issues was the fact that he felt he couldn't account for what he did in the classroom: he really couldn't see why he was so effective. In the classroom he did 'live' but couldn't find a way of accounting for it. Through working with him over time I brought out of him his own values and the things that drove him on: that made him tick. We were able to use this to help him analyse and account for his own practice. as he commented through one of our conversations:

> '…you encouraged me to be more reflective…I felt inspired and supported and validated but still allowed to grow and improve…' (Conversation with AST, October 2005)

Further examples of this are evident within a later section when I deal with the creation of the in-house teacher-research group at Bitterne Park.

During this time a further developing understanding of this sense of *living* was through my growing co-analysis work with my wife, Karen. Through our ability to *live through* each other we were able drive forward our own enquiries and educational lives, whilst flourishing together as a married couple as well. Through our relationship we continued to develop the life-affirming energy that was stronger when we were together and that helped us to co-create our accounts of our lives and learning. Through the process of transition and change, Karen was significant in supporting me.

In the early days I can remember simply being tired: tired through getting up early; tired from the increased demands; tired from the amount of listening required; tired of the amount of learning on a daily basis; tired from trying to keep up with what's going on; tired from trying to establish myself; tired from trying to fit in; tired from trying to make a contribution and make others feel valued. Tired. The frustration of recognising that I am a living contradiction unable to fully live out my own living educational theory within my practice adds to this feeling.

One of the middle managers reflected on this period during a later conversation:

'…you didn't seem to be enjoying yourself at the start…you seemed distant…I remember when I first started how big this place seemed…as time went on though I began to see your humour coming through and you seemed to care more…' (Conversation with middle manager, February 2006)

This comment reflects the 'honesty' with which I want to write this account, in terms of including 'negative' comments about me as well as positive ones. What was also fascinating in the early days was the sense of my feelings and wrapped up emotions in what I was doing. I felt as though I was walking through a dark corridor that did not have a light at the end of it. I did not know what to do or how to move: I simply knew that I had to move because I knew that I couldn't stand still: I am not accustomed to standing still anywhere. There was no sense of being able to see where I was going: I simply knew that I was moving. I did not know which direction I was moving in, or if indeed it was the right direction: only time would tell.

Rayner talks about the 'presence of absence' (Rayner, 2004): I am recognising, through my own transition, the things that I am missing from my professional life that I had previously - the close-knit relationships; the tacit knowledge; the significant others. I have to draw upon the learning and knowledge capacities that I have in order to get through: I am living on my memories and using these to get by. I am not *living through others*: I am *living through myself*.

With the change in job brought a great deal of change within my own self. By half way through the second term I realised that the job was starting to affect me personally. I visited the chiropractor when I realised that the pains in my body were not going to go away on their own accord. I was informed by Specialists that I had developed rheumatoid arthritis and that the job wouldn't help this chronic condition. I realised the pain that I was going through was not going away and to simply get up everyday was the worst pain I had ever felt. This left me with some important decisions to make in terms of how I dealt with the stress of the job. I began to realise that all the comments that people made to me were beginning to ring true: that I needed some lifestyle changes if I was to carry on performing at a level I wanted to. I needed some 'me' time, as my wife called it, in order to regenerate my sense of self. I still needed to carry on changing. It was almost as if I had changed jobs but not really recognised it: my sense of *self* was not present in my new role and every day I felt that I was reminded of this.

I needed to use the significant others within my life to help me to regenerate.

3.2 Significant Others (3)

Karen, Jack and myself met on Saturday 29th January 2005 for a tutorial session. One of the key things to come out of this session was my developing understanding of myself through a reflection on the images that had been taken over the past few months: Jack and Karen were able to point to the embodied knowing that I had but was unaware of. This Ph.D. starts with an image of me looking relaxed and genuine: of me smiling. This image was taken on honeymoon and Karen was behind the camera. However, as we reflected through discussion on the nature of the job and a growing sense of losing perspective and effectiveness it became clear that I was losing my own gaze: the images were reflecting to me what others were getting from me: a tired man who wasn't inspiring and leading, but rather looking washed-out and past it already. The weight of passion and enthusiasm was dying in me and all the hopes and aspirations I carried with me previously for the improvement of humanity and the world that I had worked for were slowly disappearing. This needed to change. I offer the following collection of images as evidence of this. As with all images interpretations can be many and varied. I therefore offer some explanations to go with the images to guide the reader and explain the interpretations I have arrived at.

Figure 30: Image of me on holiday in Canada, 2004.

The above image was taken on my honey moon, before I began my job as Assistant Headteacher. My eyes and mouth reflect the genuineness of my smile and enjoyment: nothing seems forced in my expression. My wife is taking the image and

no doubt helping to bring these qualities out. I look at this person and he is a person because of the other person, his wife, around him. I am who I am because of how relaxed and happy I was at the time: how fresh I felt. I don't think this is the person that the teachers at my school, or the students, now see.

Figure 31: Image of me on holiday in Canada, 2004.

The second image above is again taken on honeymoon and perhaps more clearly reflects the sense of connection between my eyes and the person behind the camera, my wife. Again, there is sincerity to the smile and a sense of having the time and motivation to genuinely engage with the camera: there is an honesty about my expression. I look at this and I can see the confidence within me: I can recognise why I got the job I did and what my potential performance is.

Figure 32: Image of me October 2004.

The third image is taken after approximately 4 weeks in the job. Again I am out in the countryside during a weekend and I feel that this image still has the engagement of the expression with others in mind. My wife is taking the image and has captured me engaging with her behind the camera. This image is one that I feel staff could engage with: I seem alive and vibrant.

Figure 33: Image of me, December 2004.

In this fourth image I feel there is a change. This 'silly' image was taken on New Year's Eve, after my first term in post. Karen is taking the image. I feel it reflects a loss of engagement with others: I can sense when I look at it that my gaze is not with the camera: that I am trying to force a smile and not genuinely feeling it. I think this is what staff are seeing and this is why I am not as effective as I could be. I sense that I am not offering the image of myself that I want and this is resulting in a lack of effectiveness in what I do. I sense that hope is being lost.

Figure 34: Image of me taken in Jack's office, January 2005.

The final image was an image taken in Jack's office on 29th January 2005. This image I feel reflects me not being 'fully present.' Whilst I was engaging with Jack and

felt more present than I have for a while, this sums up my lack of 'presence' with others that I have fallen to. Not long after this image was taken I began to physically feel the stress of the job resulting in my visits to the chiropractor and doctor. My lack of wellness was linked to the fact that I wasn't looking after myself enough and had allowed the job to hold me too much: I had forgotten all that I had learned from sequence 1 and 2 of this study and allowed myself to stop regenerating.

Perhaps one of the things that I missed was the close relationships with a significant other, in the sense of a Simon or Toni? When I was a middle leader, I had the closeness of those relationships that really helped to support, regenerate and drive me on: the sense that others depended on me. However, as I've moved into senior leadership, it's clear that the nature of relationships change and I haven't got that level of support on a day-today basis. It seems that you have to draw on something from elsewhere in senior leadership.

On March 2nd 2005 I presented to a BECTA conference about teacher research. The session was videoed and my wife also presented at this conference. I had been a little sceptical about presenting as it didn't really seem the kind of thing that linked to my area of research. However, whilst there I found myself really being present when I was speaking to the conference. I had listened to a Head speak at an NPQH session a few weeks earlier and reflected on how passionate and engaging he was to me in the audience: how personal his job was to him and how he was able to communicate his passion. As I spoke to this group I wanted to also show my passion and I think I did this. I had prepared a speech but found that when I stood up to speak I didn't want to read from it or use it. I wanted to construct a story from my heart that I believed in. The speech I had prepared couldn't and didn't do this. For the first time in months I was speaking about something I was really passionate about and was able to reach into my soul and draw out my own values and beliefs. I believe that I found my voice again. I believe that I was communicating the love I have for what I do. For the first time in months my health was not as bad as it had been: it seemed to be improving. I was feeling more positive. My wife took the photo below of me speaking to the conference.

Figure 35: Image of me speaking at BECTA conference, March 2005.

In this image I am talking to the group about the impact of teacher research in schools and I was recounting part of this Ph.D. text when I refer to the work of Toni. I used this to illustrate the powerful nature of teacher research and how it can transform the work and lives of those who engage in it. I am holding the text that I had just read out. I felt that I was moving towards my own sense of presence and reflecting my own passion for what I was saying. When I look at this image I believe that I am moving someway towards being present again with others: I believe that I am moving someway to being the person that I used to be: the person that carries with him the hope and passion of humanity through his existence and the work that he does.

3.3 Line management and the early days

As part of my job I meet with those that I line manage on a regular basis. The detailed level of line management that takes place in the school is crucial in developing the impact of the School: they really make the difference to what we do. These meetings allow me to lead these middle managers and help to guide them in the direction that the School is going. These meetings also allow me to influence and challenge these managers. My early meetings were very awkward as I tried to find out exactly how to play them and what to do. I learned through reading the minutes of others' meetings (all meetings are minuted and circulated to all SMT) and working out the types of things that I needed to be doing in them. As time went on, it became more natural as I built up a greater knowledge of those I was line managing and as I developed my own views on how to improve departments based on my own experiences.

One of the key things when working with middle managers is getting the balance right between a whole collection of issues: the level of personalisation; the level of challenge; the level of support; the level of independence; and so on. In many respects it is about adopting the right balance between the heart (emotions), the head (thoughts), and the hand (behaviour) (Sergiovanni, 1995). Within my early meetings, it was mainly about me falling into my own shell and relying on the 'businesslike' briskness of the meetings: getting the 'hand' right and ensuring that my decisions and actions were 'right'. As time went on and I became more comfortable with my role, it became about using a greater range of skills in order to try and get the best from others and to make things better: of using my 'heart' and bringing forth my own values and beliefs, and also my 'head' in terms of influencing the way that practice should be delivered. When considering the actual amount of time I had with each of these people it became obvious that each conversation had to be thought out and clear in terms of what I wanted to get from it. I realised that I had very little time with my middle managers and I needed to be able to be effective within a short space of time: this required lots of preparation on my part in order to be clear what I wanted. Whereas I believed at the start of the year I was not getting things I wanted, as time went on I learned how to get the best from the meetings I had by being well prepared and focused for each meeting. I quickly recognised when a meeting had not gone well as I came out with information I hadn't planned for or really wanted. However, as time went on, I learned to be able to influence these middle leaders outside of line

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management: of catching them around the school with the intention of engaging with an idea.

One of the things that I am reminded of is the way that I have been led by my line-managers. I am reminded of the level of professional autonomy that I was given to do the job that I was employed to do as a middle leader. As I reflect on Gunter's (2003) notions of professional autonomy being a 'gift' of the leader on those led, I can conclude within my own practice that I feel I am able to strike a balance. I believe my practice is more directive than I was led as a middle leader. However I would conclude that this is required in order for the leader to assert their vision of those that they lead and the school.

From conversations with an AST the following comments were made that support this:

> '…I think it's been very collaborative…a relationship that has focused on the issues…we've discussed the problems…learning has been at the heart of it…what's come out of it is what's important in classrooms…' (Conversation with AST, March 2006)

Throughout the first year in post the nature of my line-management has changed significantly. The people I have led have changed as the demands of the job have grown. I have quickly learned the importance of key leadership traits over the year: of acting quickly if things are going wrong; of being able to spot where things might go wrong before they even do; of supporting and challenging; of being the shoulder to cry on; of giving advice and help; of being clear about the message; and so on. Alongside all of this, balancing it with a smile on your face is challenging. As one middle leader commented in conversation with me:

> '…you seem to say things which have a lot of sense and meaning, but I never feel like you're patronising…' (Conversation with middle leader, July 2005)

This reflects the significant shift in responsibility from middle to senior leadership that I have encountered.

This text is becoming more and more self-referential as it emerges and grows. Through my reflections on line-management I am reminded of my own time as a middle-leader and my experiences of line-management. I have listened to accounts from those I line-manage of the way things have been; the influences and reasons for things, and how I have used this as a vehicle to improve their practice through

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improving the quality of their and their team's work. It is through line-management that I make sense of the school: I trust what my middle leaders tell, unless proved otherwise, and I quickly learn to sift through the stories to focus on the important ones: the ones that will make a difference.

I have learned a great deal of information about how to do certain things that I didn't know before: I have learned how to exclude someone; I have learned about the things I am line-managing directly, for instance Investors In People, Learning Resource Centre etc.; I have learned new processes like the way assessment levelling is approached by Southampton L.A.

There are also other things I have learned which can't always be measured: I have learned about leadership and how it is very different in different schools; I have learned about priorities and the importance the Headteacher has in setting the priorities in a school that then reflects the work that goes on in that school; I have learned about challenging people more to be better at what they do; I have learned how to give feedback, drawing on my previous experiences but also learning as I go along and by listening to others; I have learned how to listen very closely; I have learned how to organise and liase with others; I have learned how to pace myself; I have learned that others need to trust me and once this is established, more things are given to me to lead; I have learned that the first four weeks were very quiet and then the work load kicked in; I have learned that confrontation can be very useful and productive; I have learned that leadership is about having answers and challenging others to be better at what they do; I have learned not to settle for second best; I have learned the importance of having a senior team around you that is supportive yet also challenging to keep you on your toes; I have learned that if you say you will do something people expect you to do it; I have learned that leadership is also about sharing the responsibility of your senior managers and that you need to build productive relationships with them if you are to get the best from them; I have learned to be confident in my own views and appraisals of situations; I have learned that leadership is fun and rewarding and interesting and hard-work; I have learned that I still have a lot to learn about leadership and that transition will take time as the step up from middle to senior leadership is quite a jump, particularly for a relatively young and inexperienced leader.

The first half-term has very much been about surviving: about showing others that I will still be here and that I am not going to quit. It has been about just getting through

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and making a small difference where I can. It's about playing safe: about picking the things you know a little about and making a small difference there where you feel comfortable to make a difference. It's about not stretching yourself, but playing inside the limits, whilst you get settled. For me, it was about letting others know that I knew a little about the use of school data for improvement and using this knowledge to challenge the suppositions that were being made in KS3.

As I begin to close on the end of my first term in role I am beginning to wonder what I have learned, what I have done well, what I need to improve on and where I need to go next.

What have I learned?
I am beginning to recognise the vast amount of knowledge that I need in order to be able to do this job effectively: how I need a sound base on divergent curriculum knowledge, for instance, in order to be able to deal with the vast range of issues that I need to deal with. I have learned how this job is about people: dealing with a whole range of people constantly. The sense of inter-personal communication is massive and on a day to day basis I move from talking to good students, to bad students, to good teachers, to bad teachers, to other senior managers, to LEA, to office staff and so on. The essence of this job is about being able to communicate to others. However, I am learning that this requires understanding of others and the ability to be able to *live through* them if you are to motivate and improve what they are doing. I am learning that I will never know everything and that I need to be able to ask and go to others if there are gaps in my own understanding.

What have I done well?
I believe that the essential thing I have done this term is demonstrated my ability of *listening to learn*. I have patiently built up my understanding of the context of the school and the roles that people have within the school. I have listened to how things are done and worked through my own ideas on how to improve what happens. I feel that this has cast me as a quiet and calm member of SMT. However I do now believe that I need to become much more vocal than I have been as I begin to find my feet and talk with much more confidence on issues that I have been part of.

What do I need to improve on?
I need to work on establishing my presence amongst staff. With those I directly work with I think that I have established myself. However, I need to get out into the wider

staff and make myself and my vision known. I feel that some of this will come through my running the cover system next term, as part of my learning experience. I need to also develop my own sense of divergent and creative thinking. As I begin to see the light and understanding more about the role then I believe that my own creativity will start to out itself. I still feel compartmentalised rather than believing in my own confidence to do the job. However, my style of leadership is starting to kick in. One member of staff stopped me in the corridor the other day to say thank-you for sending him a thank-you letter for his work on a project. Comments have been made that he is well-motivated this year, more than usual.

At the end of the term I had taken over 'cover' for the following term. This immediately elevated me within the school as somebody who needed to quickly get to know staff and the people that I was working with. One great moment was in the final morning briefing on the last day. Up to this point I had said very little in weekly staff briefings: at the start of the term the Headteacher kept asking me if I had anything to contribute, and I would desperately try and find something, but there wasn't anything. However, as the term went on I began to say a few things. But during the last briefing I was able to talk about something to do with cover and crack a small joke, which made staff laugh. This was significant: it allowed me to connect with people in a whole-scale way that I hadn't as yet.

The second half of the term can be characterised as consolidating the work from the first half-term and also of challenging others more. It has also been about establishing my own style and building on team-building in order to bring others on board. For instance, establishing my Investors in People working party, establishing my Gifted and Talented working party and developing my KS3 strategy group. This kind of work during the second half of the term has allowed me to come into contact with a wider range of staff and also be able to spread my own vision of what I want from them. Also of significance is the way in which I have helped to change the process of Department Reviews: a system by which we self-review the effectiveness of departments within the School. I realised through my experience of the first Review that the process didn't involve a sense of student voice: it was all about the role of the teacher and focused on learning as something that was being done to the student. I wanted to find out from the students what they thought, so I brought in student interviews within the first Review. This went really well as students were being asked for their opinions which they hadn't been before. I further intend to

improve this by bringing in student questionnaires on their learning to enhance the quality of the analysis of the Departments and give a greater voice to the students.

During my first term I am conscious of how I have become very closeted within my own office. I sense that I have lost the balance between being visible and present around the school compared to being visible and present to those that I line-manage. This job seems to be about balances and being able to create them in order to produce some form of harmony within and around. During my first term I don't believe that I achieved this. However, as time went on, I do believe that I was able to achieve this more.

By the time term two had arrived I was returning after a much-needed break. Reflecting on term 1 I could recognise that I was pretty much dead on my feet and that my stress levels were sky-high. A well deserved rest helped to put that back in order and provided switch-off time to re-charge the batteries.

The start to term two was about learning how to 'do-cover': I was responsible for sorting out cover this term, something each member of SMT did once every two years for a term. The first phone-call arrived on the Monday evening as we were back at School on the Tuesday. It's surprising how time-consuming cover actually is and you don't appreciate it until you actually do it. However, I got myself into a pattern of working over the term that allowed me to deal with it. It certainly is true that it helps you to get to know staff by doing it. It helped to get me into the heart of the School: people were coming to me from day one of me doing it and this was good because it increased my presence.

This experience of cover has been crucial in establishing my own presence around the school: the role of doing cover gives you a great deal of "power" and staff realise this. Staff have been talking to me and this has really made me feel a part of the school: probably the singularly most important experience of the year. I have learned a great deal about staff and their ways from their reactions to events and the whole process of cover. This knowledge will be central in my development within the School.

I have been involved in planning and delivering a whole school INSET day on Assessment for Learning, which I am also picking up as a whole school issue. This involves the actual INSET day and also a follow up in terms of establishing a working

party to push this issue through the whole school. I believe that part of my brief is to develop the opportunities that staff have to get involved within the school: Gifted and Talented working party; *Investors In People* working group; Assessment For Learning working group. All these things that I have set up have drawn in a wide number of staff into the running of key issues that they may well not have had a voice in previously.

I have continued to develop my work for the re-submission of *Investors in People*. I have applied some of my previous thinking on this that I developed at my previous School through for instance, developing an *Investors In People* Management Group made up of a cross-section of staff and through implementing a whole staff questionnaire. I would argue that these two things are examples of how my life as a teacher-researcher has influenced me within my everyday practice. I am not aware of others using these tools previously in order to ascertain the feeling of the staff within the School.

Through term 2 it has really been about surviving and trying to establish my own presence within the school. It has been a very difficult term: my health has been bad and this has increased the pressure that I have been under.

Throughout this term I have moved from being an additional member of the senior team to being a full member that has a growing understanding of the school and the issues that it faces. I have become somebody that others go to, to find help and to get questions answered. I have developed my growing sense of giving staff voice within the school: my work with my *Investors In People* working party; my Gifted and Talented working party; and my Assessment For Learning working party have all helped to extend my growing network of relationships within the school.

However, over-riding this has been the fact that I have been ill for 8 weeks, most of term 2, with rheumatoid arthritis and having to deal with the daily pain that this brings. This has meant that the late nights at school have caused me great pain to have to deal with, struggling at times to be able to move about: embarrassed to tell anyone I work with and making excuses of 'having hurt myself at the gym', for fear of seeming "weak". There is some suggestion that this has been brought on by my own work ethos: the sense of not switching off and regenerating as I attempt to really improve my practice and learn how to effectively do the job.

It was at the end of this term that I began to forward think more in terms of what I was doing and what I wanted to achieve. I believed that I was in a position of knowledge about the school and the people in it and believed that I could contribute more to it than I had been doing.

The easiest way to describe what I have had to live through in term 3 is to describe it as non-stop madness: there are so many plates in the air that I've lost count; there's no point in having an office because I never get to see it; and I carry so much in my head that I never get to commit to paper. This term has been non-stop. The focus for everything has been on improving and tinkering with what happens to try and squeeze every last ounce of success out of it.

The first key thing has been the preparation for re-assessment of the *Investors in People* accreditation. This took a great deal of time in readying the School and liasing with the assessor. Fortunately this was successful and we were re-accredited with the standard.

There has also been the continued development and push for the Challenge Award in order to recognise the work that we're doing in relation to providing for our most able students. This has involved starting from scratch in terms of the school provision as it hasn't been a priority until now.

There has also been the developing of the Assessment for Learning across the School via the running of a group focused on developing it within departments. One key aspect of this was the fact that during one session I brought in students to teach staff how to improve their assessment practice. This was a real move forward within the School in terms of how it provides professional development for staff through utilising student voice. In the 2006 OfSted, assessment practice was highlighted as being outstanding.

I have also begun work on Continuous Professional Development, which is something that I am picking up from September 2005. I have begun to develop the strategy for this through changing the approaches to it. For instance, of shifting the focus of CPD to the individual rather than the team focus that it previously had.

There has been the detailed work on setting up the in-house M.A. programme that will be dealt with later on within this Sequence. Alongside this has been the links

established with Creative Partnerships, a national organisation that looks to support creative initiatives within education through promoting action research as a methodology for improvement.

There has been the production of the school calendar, which has taken a great deal of time and co-ordination.

There has been the planning for the KS3 Regional Director visit to the school to assess the effectiveness of our practice.

There has also been the preparation for my own school based NPQH assessment.

I think the key thing to all these things is that staff, and in particular the senior team, now have the confidence in me to deliver and perform at this level. Term one was like the initial test of survival; term 2 was like turning up the pressure to see if I could crack; and coming through that into term 3 means that I am up to full pace and have the confidence of my peers to do the job. As one of the senior team commented to me that the changes in me had been noticed at the top.

By the end of my third term it is possible for me to be able to begin to summarise the year that I have experienced. O'Mahoney (2003) established a model based on how school leaders developed over four phases:

	Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3	Phase 4
Time:	Term prior to take-up	Term take-up	One term later	Two terms later
Phase:	Role Idealization	Immersion	Establishment	Consolidation
Role image:	Looking at the role	'Learning the ropes'	Defining the role	Feeling accepted

(O'Mahoney, 2003, p. 15)

For me, perhaps it was more about the sense of having and losing the love that I had: phase 1 was about idealising the love; phase two was a forgetting of the love; phase 3 was losing all love; and phase 4 was re-gaining the lost love.

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I am arguing through this that the learning curve of moving into Senior Leadership from middle leadership is massive. I would argue that it requires a significant amount or preparation and readying, yet in practice, it is still a shock to the system when in post. The difficulties I have faced have been about attempting to manage the transition and establish myself in such a way as to maintain credibility whilst fitting in. Ultimately, it was the realisation and belief that things would improve and that it would take time. It was about having the self-confidence and belief that I could make things better.

3.4 The dark

It seemed that the dark was what the early days seemed like. I got up in the dark, I drove to work in the dark, I spent the day in the dark (literally and metaphorically) and I came home in the dark. The light only seemed to arrive when I saw my wife's face: the light was there as I remembered the love inside me for her. It was at times like these that I was reminded of one of the interview questions that I was asked for this job. At the time I thought it very odd, but perhaps now I realise how important it was. I was asked, 'Where do I get my support from?' and at the time I answered without hesitation, from my wife. I didn't even need to think about. Within my language this was a question about life-affirming energy. The importance of having strong relationships, significant others, to fall back on is crucial in order to support you when you most need it in the, at times, very lonely job of being a senior leader. Yes, you draw on inner strength of character, personal conviction and your values. But you also need to be able to draw on the strength of others to help spark the life-affirming energy. Perhaps this is where I get my hope from: perhaps this is where I get my strength from.

I began to wonder whether the light was earned through getting out and about more. Maybe I needed to get out in the corridors even more than I did: to create my presence in the school and make it felt: to *live through* the school and the community. Through time, this would be achieved.

My holding on to teacher-research and communicating my standard of judgement of *living myself through others* was a significant way in which I moved through this period.

3.5 More teacher-research

I am starting to believe that teacher-research seems to follow me wherever I go! I had not long been in post before I was drawing on my experiences from my 'previous life' as a teacher-researcher in order to help others with their practice. I started in senior leadership with the aim to make things better and improve the quality of the living educational space through living out my living educational standard of judgement of *living myself through others*. I needed a way of approaching this so I could embrace it fully. I agree with Coulter's (1999) use of Bakhtin's notion of dialogue and the potential power of understanding this as a way of expressing teacher-research. What I show below are examples of Bakhtin's *contextual meanings*: the meanings that I associate with practitioner knowledge as opposed to the *dictionary meanings* that I associate with traditional academic research. The following are three examples of how I used my own teacher-research within my role to help myself and other teachers or students, prior to my establishing a teacher-research group within the School. I have included analysis of these moments that demonstrate my contextual understanding of these events and their importance. The three moments are:

1. Working with an NQT;
2. My work with a Year 7 group that I taught;
3. My work with my wife's school.

From these experiences emerged the Bitterne Park teacher-research group. These moments have been chosen as significant developmental points in my journey towards introducing a teacher-research group into the school. The first two moments were unsuccessful in terms of developing the practice of either myself or others successfully. However, the third moment was successful I argue in re-inspiring me back towards teacher-research.

Moment 1 – Working with an NQT

The first example I came across was an NQT English teacher within the School. I worked with her during the first three weeks in the School. When I first met her she seemed to want to learn: she seemed connected to the fact that I was an English teacher also. I was pleased that I organised with her to video one of my Year 10 English lessons. I had worked with her, giving her a scheme of work and ideas and she asked to observe me. I suggested she videoed me as I felt that I had some improvements to make with the Year 10 group and video evidence of my practice

would be useful. I was clear with her that I was also finding it tricky in the classroom as the students were simply responding to me as a new teacher: they didn't care that I was an Assistant Headteacher. I suppose the real difference was that I had a level of experience to draw on in order to deal with the situations that arose. However, I was also hoping that this would instigate her to allow me to video her lesson as she said she was having some difficulties with the start of the year with some groups.

The first part of this process began with her videoing me in the classroom. This was particularly striking to me in a number of ways: the things that she focused on highlighting her concerns; the fact that she was willing to engage in this activity with little prompting (was this because she was genuinely interested or was it because of my position influencing her?); also the way I was in the classroom being a very different teacher from the teacher I was at my previous school. To take this further, considering how I seemed less relaxed and more controlling maybe reflected my desire in the early days of my new job to try and be authoritative and in control. This in many ways is not a reflection of my own values: not reflecting my sense of democracy and further enhances the living contradiction that I was at the time. However, maybe during this point of transition I am returning to the base instincts that I have and these are essentially controlling and didactic in nature: I am falling on my reserves to see me through this dark corridor which I fumble through.

Bitterne Park Year 10.WMV

Figure 36: Video clip of me teaching Year 10, 2004.

The above clip is of me teaching a Year 10 English lesson. I watch this clip and I can see the faults in my approach. Who is that man standing at the front of the class? He must be important because he's taking himself so seriously. This clip was so influential in me realising the contradiction that I was living. I remembered back to my 'democratic' classroom; I remembered back to Dan and Sophie; I remembered back to the inspirational and creative practitioner that I was….and then I watch the clip again, and I want to cry. This was part of a turning point when I realised that I needed to find my own sense of *self* again.

However, the important aspect of this whole sequence of events was that the NQT allowed me to video her practice: I videoed her teaching a Year 9 group. She was lacking in confidence within her practice and felt she wasn't doing very well as an NQT. She was a little nervous about this at first but then threw herself into it. I wanted to video her lesson to try and capture the positive aspects as well as the things that needed working on to show her that she was doing well. After the session, she came to me very confident and said that she would be happy for me to use the video to help others open up their practice. I felt this reflected the beginnings of somebody who could recognise the importance of community and research.

However, this is where this relationship fizzled out. The work with the NQT stopped at this point. I reflected on why this was. I asked her to engage further but she seemed very reluctant. At the time, my own workload was growing and one thing led to another and the work with her stopped. As I reflected back on this I realised that I had made a grave number of mistakes within this dialogue that I feel led to the outcome: I didn't invest enough time with her in order to really analyse her practice; I didn't view her video tape with her to unpick what was going on; I didn't really approach this as an investigation with the passion that I had had when working with Toni or Simon in sequence 1 and 2 of this thesis. I didn't live myself through her and establish the connection I needed to. With all these factors combining together this was a very unsuccessful start to introducing teacher-research into Bitterne Park: I desperately hoped that I had not shot myself in the foot with this.

Moment 2 – Working with a Year 7 Group
As this didn't work I then decided that looking at myself on video again with Jack and Karen on Saturday 2nd October 2004 would be useful to get other perspectives. During this session with Jack and Karen I began to realise that I needed to touch again the feelings, passion and emotions that I had reached only six months earlier. I needed to regain the connections and the gaze that was able to hold and engage the other. I again wanted the relationships with students like Daniel and Sophie, but I felt like the stranger at a party that nobody really wanted there. I was no longer part of Westwood St Thomas and at this point not a full member of Bitterne Park. The transition was in process and I wished that it would hurry up. I videoed part of a Year 7 lesson, when I was asking them about their understanding of assessment criteria: taking the perspective of not starting with the imposed criteria but asking them what they wanted to be assessed on and how they should be assessed. The following extract is from the 20 minute *dialogue*, as opposed to Bakhtin's *monologue*, we had

as a whole group. The clip reflects part of a conversation where two students talk about their feelings in response to peer assessment and how they feel about others looking at their work. I have included this to try and demonstrate the importance in the value that I have of being able to understand the emotional feelings that others have if we are to fully understand how to help others to improve and move on. This is my embracing of Coulter and Wiens (2002) references to the need for teachers to be able to publicly justify their decisions to those who have a stake within the educational process. I asked this question of the group because I feel without an understanding of the emotional aspects of human nature we will find it difficult to improve what others are doing.

Year 7.WMV

Figure 37: Video clip of me teaching Year 7, 2004.

For me the power and importance of this sequence is about me engaging with the classroom practice that I needed, in order to gain a firm footing in something that was tangible and real to me. This was me starting to get out and about and engaging with students again. However, it is also where the reflection stopped at the time. Nothing further was done in order to reflect on practice at this point and this is why this was an unsuccessful moment.

Moment 3 – Working with my wife's school
A further key element of the early days for me was on Thursday 25th November 2004 when I delivered a session to a group of sixth form Gifted and Talented mentors at my wife's School. My wife asked me if would deliver a session about mentoring to them. I agreed and this date was set. I sensed that this was a great opportunity to extend my own presentational skills but also to extend the connectivity between myself and my wife as co-researchers. The day before this event, a few obstacles were put in the way. 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.

At this moment in time I was able through this experience to move into Bakhtin's notion of the carnivalesque: I was able to step outside of my role of senior leader, put on my mask of educator and enjoy the moment. I was not particularly enjoying my new role at Bitterne Park at this moment in time and this moment allowed me to re-

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engage and find the passion that was inside me again. I was able to transform my own personal boundaries (Rayner, 2004) that I was living through at this moment in order to try and find a better personal social order within my own practice and life. The transition between roles and living educational spaces was being eased through teacher-research and reflection.

The session was videoed by two of the students and lasted for about three hours. It focused on being a mentor within a Gifted and Talented (G&T) programme. It was interesting that it was videoed by two students who used to go to Westwood and who I have researched with in the past. When I reflected on the video I could see myself again: the self that was present in sequence 1 and sequence 2 of this thesis. I was in a classroom, I was relaxed, I was in my horse-shoe shaped democratic feeling classroom; I was cracking jokes and engaging with the students, I was building relationships and I was enjoying the teaching and learning process. I knew that I was a kind of guerrilla-teacher: I was going in, doing a job and then leaving. The feelings I was having were feelings that I hadn't had since leaving Westwood. I didn't feel the pressure of getting it right. It seemed to flow.

The following video clips that I have incorporated below reflect key moments from the experience. This one example of the type of video evidence I am drawing on within my thesis to support the claims that I am making about the practitioner and person that I am: to demonstrate my learning through living. It is my belief that incorporating such evidence is crucial in order to support the claims that I am making within the thesis. I am drawing on Eisner (1988; 1993) in his assertions of the need for the educational community to embrace the power of visual communication in understanding meanings created through education experiences.

This first clip is from early in the session. I think it reflects my attempts to open up the boys and get them to respond in a much more relaxed and free way. I am attempting to bring my humour into the session: the clip reflects the seriousness of their faces combined with the relaxed way I introduce humour as a way of engaging them in the session. The clip starts and is very quiet and serious: the boys clearly are unsure of me and I am aware that I need to make them feel more comfortable with me and the environment. This clip also reflects my own personal sense of being relaxed and enjoying what I am doing: it demonstrates me being fully present.

Bishops.wmv

Figure 38: Video clip of me teaching Year 12's, 2005.

The second clip from this session I feel reflects the way that the boys are beginning to respond and open up with me. The clip shows how the boys respond to a comment that I made during the session and I feel it captures the way in which they are connecting with me. It is a very brief clip but one boy expresses his feelings and emotions of anger over an issue. I have included this to demonstrate how I have been able to get this complete stranger to open up within 45 minutes of meeting him. I am attempting to demonstrate the importance in place on the human connections with people in order to promote learning.

Bishops movie 2.WMV

Figure 39: Video clip of me teaching Year 12's, 2005.

The third clip reflects again the connection that is being made between me and the group: a further reflection of how I am bringing the group into the session. It also reflects how relaxed I am and how I am trying to *live through* those in the room by finding some level of connection. The clip is of me talking through my choice of images on a slide and asking the group to explain why I had made certain choices: there is no other meaning behind this other than again using the material to connect with the group and keep them interested. At this moment in time I am not interested in the learning of knowledge or fact, but rather of making and maintaining connects between myself and the students.

Bishops movie 3.WMV

Figure 40: Video clip of me teaching Year 12's, 2005.

Video clip 4 is of a moment, or as Eisner (1988) would claim, one of the 'minor miracles' that happen everyday within education, when Karen came into the room to finish the session off. I had been working with the students for 2 hours at this point. At the time, the experience seemed nothing. I didn't even realise that these two

moments were even taking place. However, through the use of video and of reflection on the video, the meaning of this short clip influenced my whole understanding of my educational relationship with my wife.

The clip carries with it the memories of how I related within this context: it was able to prompt the detailed reflection on that moment and the wider experience that I had in order to help inform my future practice. The clip carries within it two significant elements.

Significant moment 1

The clip captures me and Karen together in frame, when I look at her and smile. You cannot see Karen's response as she has her back to the lens. Karen's presence is able to draw from me this response and this smile: I am also able to show her this smile in return attempting to live through her and draw from her a connection. I sense a connection through this: an acknowledgement between the two of us.

This connection at this moment in time, I believe, is firmly nested in Cho's (2005) notion of love and is something that I can embrace within the educational relationship that I have with Karen. It is difficult to determine who the teacher is and who the student is: we are both teachers and both students, willing to teach and learn from each other.

This supports my argument for a relationally dynamic standard of judgment that exists within this clip. The two practitioners are working together, seeking to understand and further the quality of education provided through working together with each other at that moment in time. Both myself and Karen are co-enquiring at that moment.

This is one of the aims of this relationship evidenced within the video clip. We are both co-enquiring and looking to create new educational understandings through our creative research approaches that reinforce our methodological inventiveness (Dadds & Hart, 2001). For me this emerges through the quality of the educational relationships that I can create with those that I come into contact with in order to help to make things better.

Significant moment 2

Towards the end of the clip I make the comment 'oh yes' and move towards the interactive whiteboard. This happens through my listening and engaging with Karen: no words are exchanged between us, but there is a connection between us where we understand each other and what is happening. This further supports the relationally dynamic standards that we live through in terms of each of us understanding the other through our non-verbal connections. Through this clip there is communication between us but no words are exchanged between us. It is on this level that we wish to influence education and make things better through the relationships that we build.

In frame are husband and wife, both working for the same means connecting their beliefs and values in terms of provision for the most able: in frame are two educators living out their educational standards of judgement. At this moment we are connecting our separate educational lives in the search for one desire: to improve the education within that room. It is as if our accounts merged for that instant. This is something that happens from time to time. As co-researchers this clip brings together not only me and my wife, but also a student behind the camera who we have both co-researched with. For me this clip carries with it the originality of mind present within this thesis of demonstrating a relationally dynamic standard of judgement within our practice. This further exemplifies Rayner's idea of inclusionality (2006) as a relationally dynamic awareness of space and boundaries that is connective, reflexive and co-creative. For me, this clip embodies this notion. It demonstrates the value I carry with me of *living myself through others*, of recognising the value of the other within educational relationships and using this to help make things better.

Bishops movie 4.WMV

Figure 41: Video clip of me teaching Year 12's, 2005.

I went back to the School on Thursday 9th December to complete a follow up session with the mentors. By this stage the mentors had completed their first mentoring interview. This session was much more difficult to complete as I could sense that the end of term was nigh: I was tired coming to the end of my first term and so were the students. However, I could not let them or my wife down.

We explored a number of issues surrounding their experiences so far which were quite interesting. One particular comment from one of the mentors really stood out. This was a student who wasn't at the first session yet his comments were very

detailed and analytical and I think reflected his ability to reflect on the experiences he was having and be able to formulate ways forward.

Bishops Movie 5.WMV

Figure 42: Video clip of me teaching Year 12's, 2005.

As I watch through the rest of the tape from this shorter session I begin to think how much these students are actually picking up about teaching and the process of learning. They themselves are talking about issues that face teachers everyday: they are reflecting on these issues. The issues such as: how to engage others; how to improve what they are doing; how to build relationships; how to provide materials at a suitable level. Their level of interest and engagement is fascinating.

Although I have only spent two sessions with these students I am taking a great deal from it. I will be taking to my own School a clear format and framework to establish mentoring for G&T. I am also taking a re-established interested and passion for G&T, as I have now a major responsibility for its development within my new role. I am also taking with me the need to engage in more student voice activity.

I have offered these brief examples of teacher-research as the early ways in which I have attempted to formulate my views on teacher-research within my school. I am arguing that through teacher-research I have been able to continue to reflect on my own practice in order to help me to regenerate my own sense of self and also as a way of connecting with others. Through the engagement of action research spirals I have worked through teacher-research in order to re-inspire and regenerate my own passion and living educational theory for improving the quality of the living educational space. It was through these early experiences that I was able to formulate my plans to further establish a community of teacher-research and enquiry within my School and local education authority.

Within the next section I want to demonstrate how I took these early experiences and action research spirals of teacher-research into a much bigger setting.

3.6 The Bitterne Park Teacher-Research Group

Figure 43: Image of Bitterne Park Teacher-Research Group, 2006.

Within this section I share with you the narrative of how I set up and ran the teacher-research group at Bitterne Park School. In my abstract I claim that, 'This thesis reflects on the potential impact of enabling teachers to engage as teacher-researchers within their own school and accounts for the process I went through in order to make this happen.' Through this narrative I refer to Wilkins (2004) and the calls to promote more use of dialogue to improve practice and Day (2004) and his calls to acknowledge the links between personal and professional identities. Bottery (2005) argues for greater awareness of the community within education and Rayner (2005) argues for a greater understanding of inclusionality: both of these I believe I am able to demonstrate. Dadds and Hart (2001) call for an acceptance of methodological inventiveness within research and Hemsley-Brown (2005) reflects on the importance of L.A.'s roles in promoting teacher-research. Throughout this section I provide a living account of these ideas as I engage with them through my narrative.

I think it's fair to say that Bitterne Park is a School that was not in a position to embrace teacher- research when I first arrived at the School. There was not a culture of it. I had some work to do in order to get to the position I would like to be: in order to achieve the above image of practitioners engaging in action research on-site through a programme of dialogical reflection. The image is taken from one of the sessions we held on the in-house M.A. programme. For me it articulates what Continuous Professional Development should be about in schools: teachers, working as a collaborative community, individually researching their practice, with the sole aim to improve the quality of the educational space that they are part of. I believe that the experience that I describe below is an example of Reason's (2005) fourth

characteristic of action research being an emergent process: a project that emerges over time and is not a smooth story.

When I first arrived at Bitterne Park my key responsibilities didn't mention teacher-research: twelve months on and I have now got recognition on my key responsibilities for teacher-research links. I believe that I am now firmly in a position to be able to significantly influence the school through utilising action research as a tool to aid school improvement. I believe I am now in a position to influence the L.A. approaches to teacher-research. I believe I can now influence other teachers to improve the learning of students. The School is very wiling to learn and in many cases is willing to embrace learning from within through, for instance the use of its Advanced Skills Teachers, but it has not fully embraced reflective practice and the joined up thinking of in-house teacher-research. For me the introduction of teacher-research was about being able to embrace the notion of 'professionalism' that Wilkins (2004) identifies:

> 'The view from the 'professional' approach is that teachers are self-motivated professionals using evidence-informed dialogue and creativity to develop and refine the art of teaching; taking responsibility for addressing educational needs and fired by passion and moral purpose.' (Wilkins, 2004, p. 9)

I believed that through providing the educational space for teacher-research to occur that I would be able to find a group of staff who could see the benefits of reflective practice and therefore engage within research aimed at improving individual practice. This view, alongside my changes to Continuous Professional Development provision and ethos that demanded individuals take responsibility for their own learning and development, was central to my vision. I believed that I would be able to establish collective standards of judgement within the group in order to improve the learning that takes place within classrooms. This was the vision. But why was it my vision?

I have a clear view that teachers-as-learners is central to help improve schools and making learning better for the students. I can align myself to Reason and McArdle (2006) in their views on organizational learning:

> 'Firstly we want to contribute an action research perspective on organizational development – one that encourages continual inquiry, development, and curiosity in our selves and in those we work with – rather than seeing OD as 'a set of techniques'. Secondly, we want to assert that at their best – through creating processes and structures for collaborative inquiry – action research

and organization development can be profoundly emancipatory.' (Reason & McArdle, 2006, p. 1)

I feel it is my responsibility as a school leader to be able to provide the opportunities for staff to be able to engage in teacher-research: to encourage curiosity within the school and to promote imaginative self-learning. I am aware that not all staff will buy into this, but through my experiences, where staff have engaged, it has significantly affected their practice and their lives as educators. I agree with Day (2004) in recognising the importance of personal and professional lives:

'Teachers' professional identities – who and what they are, their self-image, the meanings they attach to themselves and their work, and the meanings that are attributed to them by others – are, then, associated with both the subject they teach (this is particularly the case with secondary school teachers), their relationships with the pupils they teach, their roles, and the connections between these and their lives outside school.' (Day, 2004, p. 53)

My experiences of working with teacher-researchers have reflected to me the massive potential that it offers for improving their practice. For instance, the clarity with which Toni, described earlier within this thesis, was able to reflect on the person she was in the classroom was so crucial in the improving of her practice. Day (2004) further supports this:

'Teachers will define themselves not only through their past and current identities, as defined by personal and social histories and current roles, but also through their beliefs and values about the kind of teacher they hope to be in the inevitably changing political, social, institutional, and personal circumstances…' (Day, 2004, p. 57)

For me to realise my dream and vision it would take many months of work.

The story begins back in September 2004. I had only just arrived at the School, but I wanted to 'play'. The following is taken form my journal.

20-09-04
I have made my first contact with Bath University to enquire about the possibility of setting up a teacher-research group within the school using TTA (Teacher Training Agency) funding to support this. I am awaiting a response

from Bath as it may be necessary for me to deliver the units due to the geographical distance of a lecturer coming to Southampton.

This has come about through a discussion with an Assistant Headteacher and CPD Co-ordinator, who mentioned that some staff had asked him about the possibility of studying for an M.A. last year through a more traditional distance model. He told them to see me as we had previously talked about the fact that I was interested in this line of work. I am waiting for staff to see me about this to discuss their needs. I am aware of the fact that I am new and that staff may still be wary of me and have yet to get to know me and this may make them reluctant: I may need to prompt them. One thing that I was cautious of from the start was the sense of not becoming too focused on this, as it was only one aspect of my job. I was aware of the potential of becoming side-tracked by it and thus narrowing my relationships and role within school. Bottery (2005) reflects this concern commenting:

'…strong 'inclusivity' implies 'exclusivity': for individuals with similar tastes and values to constitute a 'community', others who do not share these must be excluded. By strongly identifying with people of similar values and beliefs, walls may be built to divide others who are different from ourselves.' (Bottery, 2005, p. 8)

This was something from the start that I took care not to lose sight of. I wanted so much for this group to be inclusional (Rayner 2005) but not to be exclusive. I wanted to be able to transform the practice of others through enabling them to engage with their own practice. I wanted to transform the boundaries that existed through the establishment of this group, still enabling staff to maintain their own sense of identity within their own practice but also providing the space for staff to come together and share these values with others in a supportive and transformative way. I wanted in one way to reflect my own classroom from Westwood within this meeting space: I wanted it to be democratic and I wanted to be able to facilitate the learning that could take place within it. I can think back to my time at Westwood and how during my time with the teacher-research group there, there developed an 'us' and 'them' culture. This I accounted for in Riding (2003).

October 2004

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Unfortunately, I was unable to secure Training and Development Agency funding from Bath University for this academic year, so that has had to be pencilled in for next year.

I gained a response in December 2004 from Bath University (see Appendix 3 for full text) which was both positive and negative: I realised that things wouldn't naturally happen overnight, but I was desperate to get this work up and running within my school. I therefore realised that I would need to look at alternative providers and funding in order to make what I knew was possible, probable.

I could easily have given up here, left it until next year and moved on to the stack-load of work sitting on my desk. However, undeterred and convinced of the need for this type of work to begin within the school, I contacted Oxford Brookes University, having had some contact with them in my previous school. They were able to deliver what I wanted and a plan was devised to deliver M.A. units in-house during my second term in post. I am still a firm believer in the power and potential of unlocking teacher-researchers within schools to be able to carry out their work to improve student learning. Sharp (2004) reflects this commenting on the empowerment to teachers who use research and engage with it, specifically identifying action research as a way of getting teachers into reflective practice.

January 2005

However, out of curiosity I then approached a researcher from Bath Spa University about the possibility of using them as a provider for an in-house M.A. teacher-research group. This gained a positive response. I have worked with this researcher over the previous 5 years and she was as enthusiastic as ever to support my ideas. With this in mind I began to put out the feelers to staff to see who was interested in this idea. I provided staff with a memo and briefed them during staff briefing for a couple of weeks. I held discussions with staff who had questions about the M.A. I had planned. I was expecting interest from maybe 10 staff. I was surprised that more were interested. For me, this was another example as to why teacher-research is the way forward in empowering teachers to improve their practice.

As an introduction to this, I worked with three teachers who were involved in a school exchange to America from my school, who were going to research into something there. I worked with them for a session and found that they were very receptive to the ideas I was suggesting: the ideas particularly associated with action research and the

how to go about creating the narrative accounts of their learning through using action research as a methodology. They were all keen to continue to get involved in teacher-research further. During the session with them I covered general approaches to action research and what kinds of data they could gather in order to build a research project. I shared with them the narrative account from Toni that is in the early part of this thesis. One of the teachers, an AST in Drama, was incredibly impressed with this text and the extent to which it gave an honest account of the reality of the experiences in the classroom. He was adamant that all teachers should be able to read this type of text as it really rang true in terms of experiences in the classroom. Perhaps this is one thing that I had forgotten: the power of educational narratives to touch others and help them engage with the issues that they face on a daily basis. I would work a great deal with this particular member of staff later on.

The process

The whole process began with me having informal discussions with staff about their desire to engage within further study: a quick chat in the staffroom; a brief word on the corridor; dropping it into a meeting, and so on. The feedback that I was getting was very positive. I was surprised that so many were keen, yet cautious about how many would actually commit. When I asked why they hadn't already got involved in further study, the same answers were coming out: not enough time; cost too much; don't know how to start. I held brief discussions with the Head to let her know I was intending to do this. As usual, she was very positive for me to just get on with it. My first formal contact was through putting out a detailed memo to staff going through the process and answering brief questions. I asked staff to attend a lunchtime meeting about it. I had been in e-mail contact with the University researcher and I had indicated that I hopefully expected 10 staff to show an interest. However, realistically, I was worried that I may not achieve this. To further support this I mentioned the idea of teacher-research in staff briefing a couple of times. This whole process was part of my way of raising the issue of teacher-research within the school and letting people know about it: part of the information element of the cycle and of creating the interest and need.

At the first lunchtime meeting I waited in the room, not certain how many would turn up. I felt a little under pressure: I'd made promises to Bath Spa of how many I could get, yet in the back of my mind was the fact that I was still relatively new within the school and that I wasn't confident that I had staff behind me. I had prepared the reasons and arguments with Bath Spa as to why it should still go ahead with 6 staff! I

waited. The room began to fill. A smile came on the inside of me. I began to count in my own head: 25 staff had turned up. I was shocked! Had I done enough photocopies? With this flow of growing confidence I went through the outline of how I saw things happening for a teacher-research group, which was basically not really knowing. I was honest: we'd make it up as we went along. One thing I was clear on: this could probably be the largest group of teacher-researchers anywhere. There wasn't any real established master plan: more like it was to be made up as we went along. Staff left, mostly committed to getting involved, for a variety of reasons. I went away to plan the first session with staff and to confirm to the researcher that more than I thought were interested!

One member of the group later commented about this part of the process:

> '…going part time I think it kind of lost my confidence in me as a professional and this note came round to everybody – it was an opportunity to do something for myself. The fact that we did not have to pay for it as well was a big incentive if I am honest. I just thought this is the kind of kick that I needed and I went to that first meeting and I was really nervous which I didn't expect to be – I was interested to see who else was going to be there and I just thought – yes, I can do this. There was a spark somewhere, I am not sure what the spark was but I think I thought maybe I needed to do some brain work again with the opportunity to it.' (Interview with group member, May 2006)

This was perhaps the kind of response that I was hoping for: the fact that I was trying to ignite sparks in staff and engage them in thinking about their work.

At this point I will introduce some of the vast number of correspondences that I undertaken in order to get the teacher-researcher group off the ground. I have included these to contribute to the narrative that I am telling in order to help me explain the circumstances under which I was operating. These e-mails will also allow me to communicate with the reader using the voices of the people involved to add a greater authenticity to them. The work on this started in detail around March 2005. By this time I had informally discussed my ideas with the researcher from Bath Spa University and she had generally been interested in my proposals. I wrote to her with some thoughts. Even at this stage I had a reasonably clear idea of how I wanted things to look. A full account of the emails exchanged is available in Appendix 4 and 5.

'Dear…..

Can I share with you a few thoughts about the teacher-researcher group that I want to establish. What I want is something similar to what we had at Westwood. We need to be able to link it to the award of an M.A. We could deliver say 6 sessions in twilight, 3-5pm. Over a period of 6-8 weeks. We focus on action research and teaching teachers how to do action research and give them a chance to share their work each week. We could use named units or generic units. We then give teachers the time to write their work and gather evidence for their assignments. I can see us running one unit per term – 3 units per year. You could deliver all the sessions or I would be happy to supplement some sessions as well.

Cost.

I need to know what this would be. I was hoping we could register staff through TTA so that staff didn't have to pay anything. Would there be any other charges involved? This would be where I would have to find sources of funding if it was needed. I would like to start ASAP. I haven't gone public to the staff yet but informally I have a lot of nods from people.

Please can you let me know what you think.

Strength and honour

Simon' (March 2005)

She responded positively, passing my suggestions on to others in the University. She later responded that the University had agreed to my suggestions and would work with us.

Having gained the agreement from Bath Spa to support the programme I needed to try and find sources of funding. I knew there was nothing in the budget for it, so I needed to be creative. I also then needed to get information out to staff to confirm their interest: I realised that I was working to a tight schedule to get everything in place.

I further clarified the outline for the programme that I wanted with her and this was agreed: dates and modules. I was beginning to picture the reality of what this programme would be. The intensity of this was building: I was worried about many things as it was all new and very frightening. I remembered what I had gone through at Westwood and how I had not been leading things then: it feels very different when you're on the front-line rather than leaving it to someone else. I wondered often at this time whether or not the first session would simply be me and the researcher sitting in a room as nobody else turned up for it.

As I continued to formulate my ideas for this group I began to think back to the teacher-researcher group at Westwood St Thomas and reflect on what I felt were the successes and failures of it: I wanted to make sure that I didn't fall into any of the same mistakes as I really wanted this group to work and grow. I drew on my own Masters dissertation (Riding, 2003) for ideas and inspiration. I was constantly searching for way to positively influence and make things better. The following email clarifies this thinking.

> 'Dear researcher
> would be happy to vary the methods of delivery and in some ways would help keep staff interest. Could I deliver as an associate tutor some stuff? At some point I think it's important that a real-life tutor works with the group – experience from early days at Westwood group was that this is what really got people involved as people come with the pre-conceived idea of university academics as 'gods' with the right answers - staff only later realise that the 'answers' they seek are actually within themselves! Could we then mix and match - some face-2-face from you - some video conference (I'll have to check that we have facilities, but I think we do) and some from me mentoring the group? The mix and match could be a real strength as it gives the group a greater sense of independence from the start.
> strength and honour
> Simon' (March 2005)

I was then invited to become an Affiliated Field Tutor for Bath Spa University, essentially allowing me to teach on the M.A. programme. This was really important as I was cautious about being attached to one tutor and simply having put all our eggs in one basket: this way I felt that I would be able to get involved and take on a more direct and central role in determining the group. I was absolutely clear that I

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was in the best position to know my school and know my staff and their needs and this I felt allowed me to take the responsibility of this group directly, with the University support behind me.

I began to wonder about the potential further impact of this type of work. I realised that I hadn't even begun this group yet but was aware of how I have high aspirations in all that I do. I began to consider how I could influence Southampton Local Authority in terms of introducing teacher research into a wider field. I was certain that this type of initiative was something that would contribute to improving the quality of learning within the authority.

My creativity began to consider the possibilities. It's as if when you get one result, you suddenly become hungry and start searching for more. I wanted more. So alongside this I began to explore the potential of linking to another local organisation that could potentially support the work we were doing. 'Creative Partnerships' were a national organisation that aimed to support creativity in the area through promoting action research as a methodology: essentially bringing together education and the Arts. Up to this point, they seemed to have struggled with really promoting themselves: nothing really seemed to be happening. Certainly within my School, there wasn't much happening. They had been into school and spoken to some people but not really got anywhere. I saw a potential link! I e-mailed speculatively a contact there. This worked and a representative from Creative Partnerships came into school to talk to me and agreed in principle to support our work. This was a major success: it meant that we could fund the researcher to mentor the sessions, rather than me trying to beg the funding from the School.

Creative Partnerships later contacted me after the first session that we ran and commented:

> 'Hi Simon
>
> I just wanted to say I think the M.A. session was fantastic…. I will be in touch with further ideas I have had
>
> Thanks …..' (16 May 2005)

Towards the end of the first unit I further began to develop my ideas in relation to extending the potential influence of teacher-research within Southampton. I realised, however, that this could be a much greater challenge as it was attempting to influence a much greater range of people outside of my direct influence: I was attempting to influence systems at a much greater level.

So at this point I had been able to establish all the characters that I needed for my play: I had a University Tutor, Creative Partnerships, the staff of the school, the University, the Headteacher and myself. We were all able to play our parts.

Session 1 of the Bitterne Park Teacher-Research group
4th May 2005
This was the first session of the in-house teacher-research group at Bitterne Park School. This had been a 9-month challenge to try and get this group up and running. It had taken a great deal of negotiation and manoeuvring in order to make it happen. However, it is something that I strongly believed would help to improve the quality of learning that took place in classrooms and so I wanted to make it happen. Bottery reflects the sense of importance and feeling that I have with regards to the power of teacher-research:

> 'Similarly, whilst much teacher CPD seems concentrated upon the elevation of pedagogic skills, little is written on the integrity of educators in their relationships with students and yet, once more, perceptions of trust are critical in the development of a rich and productive teacher-student relationship.' (Bottery, 2005, p. 8)

When I had first spoken to the researcher and Creative Partnerships they both seemed under the impression that this group would start in September 2005. I had other ideas! I wanted it to start as soon as possible: we had all the ingredients ready to go and I wanted to make it happen.

I wanted to keep the first session brief and focused. I needed to get across to staff that this was important, yet not put them off. It was a fine balancing act. I didn't have a 'Dr.' in front of my name to add credibility to my ideas: I didn't even have a wealth of experience in the bank at the School to draw on: I hadn't built trust to any great extent. I felt very isolated and out on a limb. During this session I wanted to go over the key details of the outline of the course again and to introduce the group to the idea of action research and how they could ask themselves the following question in

relation to their own practice, 'How can I improve….?' (Whitehead, 1989) I felt that this question tapped into the fundamentals of any teacher: we all have things that we can improve. The group seemed quiet and nervous at first. Four or five of the group stood out as they were immediately open about the things that they wanted to improve in their practice. Others were a little more reserved. Due to my previous experience of this type of work I was prepared for it to take time to embed itself at the start.

Figure 44: Image of me and a member of the Bitterne Park Teacher-Research Group, 2005.

The above image from the session is of me working alongside one of the teacher-research group. We are working on her research proposal and the image was captured by the university researcher working with us. The image captures some of the relationally dynamic qualities that I attempted to embrace within my own practice and provide the space to flourish within the group: of practitioners working together to improve practice through collaboration and reflection. I draw on the sense of enjoyment we are both getting from that moment and the total engagement and pleasure that we are both receiving from beginning to develop a research project to work on.

Session 2 of the Bitterne Park Teacher Research Group
11 May 2005

I was astonished that 20 members of staff had officially signed up to be a part of this group. For this session the researcher came to deliver it. Prior to the meeting I was a

bit nervous: I went to the shop during the afternoon to get the refreshments for the group: I wanted to make sure that this was available to break the ice and refresh staff. I wanted to make sure that all the facilities were ready: the interactive whiteboard and internet access ready. As usual in a school, a thousand other things came up to take me away from this preparation. However, the researcher turned up and my contact from Creative Partnerships, an organisation that I had managed to get to fund some of the group's work. The group turned up and so it was a good start. I really believed that I was able to create the living space for teacher engagement and reflection on their own practice. I agree with Reason and McArdle (2006) in their views that action research:

> '…typically involves creating spaces in which participants engage together in cycles of action and critical reflection.' (Reason & McArdle, 2006, p. 4)

From my own experiences of action research I know that the spaces in which I have and do engage are multiple internal and external spaces: they are real and imagined spaces; they are creative and critical spaces. I engage with my journal, with others, through discussions, through dialogues, through teaching and so on. It is this type of engagement and space that I wanted to help to create for my own staff.

The session began slowly: I could sense that staff weren't quite sure what to expect from the researcher. However, she worked with them over the next two hours to bring their ideas forward with clarity. Staff:

☐ considered a research question within an area of their practice they'd like to improve;

☐ considered models of action research and teacher-research and how they felt about them;

☐ narrowed down their question from initial vast projects to smaller, more manageable small scale enquiries;

☐ observed research mentoring in action through watching a researcher research mentor me in role play;

☐ mentored each other through engaging in dialogue with each other to clarify their understanding of their own projects;

☐ collaborated and developed contacts within the group to help them with their work in order to begin to strengthen the sense of community within the group;

☐ began to develop a small plan of action for their project in terms of how they could go about collecting data to support their claims.

At one point, the researcher role-played research-mentoring with me and this worked quite well. For the first time I spoke briefly about this Ph.D. to the staff of Bitterne Park: this was unusual. I never talk about my research to Bitterne Park staff, yet I know at Westwood I did talk about it a great deal. I think this is something about the reserved nature of the role I have at Bitterne and my greater desire to improve and inspire others rather than considering my own needs. The image below is of me being quizzed on my research by the researcher.

Figure 45: Image of Bitterne Park Teacher-Research Group with the University Researcher research mentoring me, 2006.

During the session the level of discussion and debate was inspiring. It felt good again to be a part of a research community that had a common purpose. I was feeling that a real flow of life affirming energy (Whitehead, 1989) was passing through the group as individuals were living through the stories and recounts of others. I think this is something that will grow as time goes on though, and as people become much more comfortable with this work. I really felt the sense of a shared living educational space emerging from the discussions.

I asked for feedback informally from staff the day after and the general response was very positive. One member of staff said that she 'felt it helped to liberate her'. She felt that she had become blinkered in the way she was working, doing the same old things over and over again and that the session had begun to waken her to think creatively about her practice again. This type of feedback was brilliant to hear. I was beginning to feel that I was developing a presence within the School and influencing

the work of the staff within the School. We moved on to the next session with anticipation.

Further to this, staff had paired up with a research mentor within the group in order to support and help each other through the research process: a kind of a critical friend approach. One of the group commented about this:

> 'When it was first suggested that we had to work with somebody else I was really quite anti working with somebody else. Particularly I think because a lot of people in the group were people I would not have necessarily had much to do with in the day to day school life.' (Interview, May 2006)

However, she then went on to pair up with one member of the group and commented:

> 'I definitely feel I can trust her and I believe she feels the same way and as a result not only is it a mentoring relationship I think a very solid foundation for a friendship has come from it as well so it has really paid dividends to be able to work with somebody which my initial opinion of – I didn't wasn't to do it because I was going to do it by myself – has been completely turned on its head and quite surprisingly really.' (Interview, May 2006)

This sense of 'trust' was something that was vitally important in engaging teachers within this programme; trust needed to be present on many levels. Cordingley (2004) argues for the importance of practitioners working together to interpret and reflect upon the significance of their own research in order to improve the quality of work and evidence produced (Cordingley, 2004, p. 83). The above comments highlight this in terms of being able to work alongside someone else to motivate and help move enquiries along. Within my own understandings this was evidence of the shared living educational space emerging from this group within the School.

Further Sessions

We continued for a further five sessions during this unit, moving staff along and helping them to engage in enquiry. Some of their work for this first unit is available on:

www.teacherresearch.net

 and clearly reflects the approaches we took to mentoring this unit.

Our whole approach was to be creative and different. From my own experiences of studying for my M.A., I was aware of what worked well and what didn't work well. So for instance, one of the things we did when it came to sorting out assignments was to make assessment a more informal process: rather than asking for written essays as the only form of assessment, we opened up a range of ways of being assessed that included producing materials or using the cfkeep website. This I feel motivated staff and engaged much more as they didn't feel that they simply had to regurgitate materials from libraries but could rather actually account for their own learning in a flexible format that allowed them to communicate their own living educational theories. This reflected the sense of methodological inventiveness (Dadds and Hart, 2001) that I felt was a crucial aspect of this. I agree with their comments:

> 'Perhaps the most important new insight for both of us has been the awareness that, for some practitioner researchers, creating their own unique way through their research may be as important as their self-chosen research focus.' (Dadds and Hart, 2001, p. 166)

This is certainly something that I was growing to understand and I feel that the examples of teacher-researchers' work below is evidence of my attempt to embrace a flexible approach to assessment of practitioner knowledge. This work in itself simply reflects good assessment practice that we use in schools. Below are examples of how these assignments were presented:

Donna Chipping completed an assignment on *Work Based Mentoring and Action Research* at http://www.cfkeep.org/html/snapshot.php?id=51952540922866

Rachele Morse completed an assignment on *Freeing the imagination* at http://www.cfkeep.org/html/snapshot.php?id=40142960511281

A fuller account of the opening sessions was created by the researcher at http://www.cfkeep.org/html/snapshot.php?id=96583899014242

In conversation with a group member she commented about using the snapshots to assess:

> 'I found very much with the snapshots that you could read your article, you could jot down your notes that you knew were going to go on to TLTA and then another time you could actually then look at a part of snapshots and it was very much you could look at it, put it down, it was saved, it was safe and

you could go back to it, review it, change it and it evolved over a period of time.' (Interview, May 2006)

Further units were planned in negotiation with Bath Spa University, and the second unit of the programme began in October 2005. This unit was based on carrying out small scale action research enquiries and followed a similar format to the first unit.

During the second meeting of the second unit at the School I was interviewed by the co-tutor of the course. I was supposed to be presenting at a BERA conference, however I couldn't make it due to the fact that I was visiting my family. The researcher wanted to use video interview within her presentation at the conference. The full transcript is available in Appendix 6. I include this to demonstrate the nature of reflection that was taking place at this time and how I was valuing my learning from experience in order to improve the quality of the living educational space. However, one key question I was asked, was to reflect on how my experiences of the teacher-research group at Bitterne Park were different to those at Westwood.

> 'There is a significant difference – the role I have has suddenly jumped from being a part of the group to initiating the group, which is a very different role to fall into itself. This group is more practical – we are getting down to things, rather than the Westwood group, which had a more theoretical, analytical discussion base. This one is more about actually getting down and doing things here. The key difference partly reflects the school. I think. It's partly about introducing this because we are a highly achieving effective school and I wouldn't take time away from the job staff are doing every day. That would be a concern. Obviously our priority is the kids not the staff. I think that's where the difference is – we don't really have the time to sit around and theorise – whereas the Westwood group had because they had different aspirations.' (Transcript, 12 October 2005)

For me these comments began to acknowledge how I had moved from follower to leader within the school. I was beginning to see how teacher-research through reflection could enhance the work of the teacher rather than being seen as a 'bolt-on'. I was seeing the 'action' element of action research as being the key, rather than the theory behind it; as it was the action that would ultimately improve the quality of learning that took place within classrooms.

On the back of the success of the teacher-researcher group at Bitterne Park School, I began to make contacts to try and enhance its reputation and move it further forward in terms of being able to get national recognition for it. I am aware that other teacher-researcher groups exist across the country. For instance, the account in 'CPD Update', February 2006 of the links between London South Bank University and the London Borough of Southwark, where an in-house M.A. programme has been established along similar lines to the group I established at Bitterne Park and the group that I accounted for at Westwood St Thomas. I made contact with the Training and Development Agency who were very interested in the project and the impact it was having. They came to visit the group at the school and to talk to teachers who were involved. From this meeting, I was invited by the regional director to go with her to talk to Wokingham L.A. as they were looking to set something similar up in their L.A. but had no real idea of where or how to start.

A further account of the interconnectiveness of the approaches to teacher-research is available from the following link. This reflects how the emergence of the group at Bitterne Park was beginning to influence and connect with the work of other local groups. This is available on:

http://www.cfkeep.org/html/snapshot.php?id=53600144995004

However, perhaps more importantly my plans to extend the impact of this project across Southampton L.A. also began to take off. In a meeting I led between the L.A., the T.D.A , Bath Spa University and the school, there was an agreement to launch a project supported by all four of them to deliver an M.A. action research enquiry unit in the summer term from Bitterne Park School. All secondary schools in the L.A. would be invited to send staff. The unit would run similarly to the units we had already run. This would take a great deal of input from me to help coordinate this, but as I believed so passionately in it, it was something that I was prepared to do. This reflected closely to the argument of Hemsley-Brown (2005) in terms of how L.A.s can support teacher-research:

> 'More specifically, for example, local authorities had played an important role in working with schools to conduct action research within their own school and had encouraged and supported the use and interpretation of data, and drawn attention to specific research relevant to the issues….encouraged practitioners to work in partnership with the local university and had initiated a research programme to investigate a specific topic relevant to the teachers themselves. The key message was that research was valued within the local

authority and it was more likely to be used in a supportive climate.' (Hemsley-Brown, 2005, p. 18)

I believe that I had got to the point that reflected that the L.A. actively supported teacher-research within Southampton and were willing to do something about encouraging it. I would argue that I had been central in bringing this into Southampton and planting the seed of teacher-research through my ability to demonstrate that it could be done with creativity, imagination and persistence. I believe that because I was able to demonstrate an example of what I was arguing for that I was able to convince others of its merit.

It is important for me to consider the impact of the work of this teacher-researcher group. When considering the impact I need to be clear on what I determine 'impact' to be. I agree with Reason (2005) in his comments:

> 'The practical outcome of an inquiry such as this goes beyond an 'outcomes based' measure of the original presenting problem' (Reason, 2005, p. 16)

My measure of impact of this work is beyond simply looking at X and Y and attempting to see if Z has directly improved: it is far deeper in terms of understanding the nature of human learning and the motivation of the human to want to make things better and thus influence and improve the lives of others. The teachers that got involved in this work were not simply looking to improve their own practice, but rather to improve the lives and chances of those that they taught. This reflected Cordingley (2004) and her claims that teachers were more willing to get involved in research if they could see the benefits for their students' learning. One member of the research group commented so well on this point:

> '…I think because of that it actually made me think a little bit more about my planning again, about trying to be creative, using different teaching methods and teaching styles to try and engage the learning of the different styles. I think as a result of that the youngsters in my classes particularly the group that I worked on initially saw a very different teacher in front of them. They certainly produced some superb work as a result of it and I think I got more out of that year 8 group than I would have done if I hadn't been involved in the teacher research and I think that has now permeated through my teaching more and I am definitely looking at the scheme of work and thinking yes I could just turn to page whatever but lets have a look at what else is out there to teach those learning objectives. As the result of it I think I have become a better teacher.' (Conversation with Teacher-researcher, March 2006)

Beyond this, the quality of educational relationships established within the group have been central to the group's success. These quality relationships opened up dialogues between members that supported communication within the school and contributed to moving the school forward. The living educational space was opened up. One member of the group commented through discussion:

'….I've had the chance to speak to people and work with people that I wouldn't necessarily talk to…this is a very large school and there are some staff I've never really talked to about teaching, yet this group gave me the chance to do that…' (Conversation with teacher-researcher, June 2006)

The impact is also evident at a personal level for staff. Many staff gained from the feeling of taking control over their own careers again and reclaiming their own sense of ownership over their professionalism; some staff simply felt the improvement in their motivation as they were discovering the tools to help them improve their practice. One researcher commented in conversation:

'…I think it has influenced me in the sense of as a teacher, professional and personally has changed the way I have thought about teaching as the profession. I think to a certain extent I have just resigned myself that I would be in teaching until I was 65 and that was going to be it – where I think being involved in action research I think it has given me a drive and a direction again in my career – I feel very much more confident that if I want to go further there is the option to go further and I think I have developed skills that will help me pursue that. Whether I end up as a Headteacher one day or not I am not really sure but I definitely know now that I would like to go to senior management and be part of the running of the school…' (Conversation with teacher-researcher, May 2006)

One member of the group has a husband who works at another school. During conversation she commented to me:

'I know through speaking to my husband about going it – he actually at his school looked to be in charge of CPD into getting King Alfred's College in Winchester in running a similar module at his school and he is actually engaged in it as a result of that as well so that is more of a personal spin off but certainly something another school in Hampshire is doing as a result of me saying that this is really good…' (Conversation with teacher-researcher, July 2006)

Listening to this really made me smile: it reinforced for me the importance of networks and boundaries and how these can be permeated in order to make things better. Rayner's (2004) notion of seeing boundaries as being permeable and positive is so important in recognising that the potential influence I have had over the establishment of other groups is a good thing. By providing the conditions for something to flourish, there is a greater chance that it will. I can reflect on how my own involvement in other teacher-research groups led me to establish one for myself and this has now influenced others to establish their own. This form of regeneration and growth within education is so important in order to make things better on a larger scale.

However, in terms of impact across the school I have not been as successful. The work that was undertaken was not fully disseminated across all staff until June 2006 when one member of the teacher-research group ran a staff training session for all staff on the work she had been doing with her group of student-researchers. This in itself was limited. This session went extremely well and gained some really excellent feedback from staff. However, I was disappointed that I had not pushed this earlier in order to extend the span of influence across the school. One member of the research group supported this commenting:

> '…I think it is really important that it is shared with other people in the school and I am not convinced that everybody in the school realises how successful some people feel who have actually got on with their projects. If that feel good factor could be shared more – people are more likely to know when it is going wrong rather than pat themselves when it is going right – I think we can get more people involved and certainly it is something that needs to permeate all levels in the school.' (Conversation with teacher-researcher, July 2006)

I agree with these comments and need to take note of this when I begin to plan for the next teacher-researcher group at my next school.

Reflections

One of the key issues has been the constant reflections using this Ph.D. as a form of action-reflection within my work: having and making a space where reflection can take place and where I can formulate my action through reflection of what I have done and am doing. This text is a multi-media space where I can organise and consider what I do and why I do it: it is a place where I can qualify my actions and

thoughts. Through the teacher-researcher group others were able to access this type of reflection as well. One of the group commented:

> 'It has given me the space to think…you very often don't get that during the day because this place moves so fast…'(Interview, May 2006)

Reflection is also through the dialogues that have taken place with people within the Senior Team: being able to go to them with questions that have been instigated, not only through the necessities of the job, but through the needs of action reflection; demanding that you find out answers to questions you have. The dialogical nature of this enquiry means that I value this form of reflection greatly and use it as part of the way that I develop as a human being and educator. This is something that I attempted to promote within others through the research group. One member of the group commented:

> '..I don't think I've ever talked so much about my classroom ever…'
> (Interview, June 2005)

The sense of renewal is essential to consider. How do I renew and refresh myself to go back in every day? How do I begin each day afresh in order to make the informed decisions that I do? For me, the most essential time of day is at the end of the day when I am driving home. This provides me with the time for reflection that I need: provides me with the time to think about the day and the choices that I have made and how I could have done things differently or not. This is the space that I created for others through the teacher-research group. During this time, after discussion with Jack, I decided to start recording some of these internal monologues on a digital tape recorder, to keep a record of my thoughts. Through this I was able to listen to the range of ideas that I had as I wrestled with key issues.

This was also a time for me to renew my own personal visions (Senge, 1990) and re-assert what I believed in within my own mind.

As I reflect on the role I have I am beginning to see that the nature of my influence over others has changed. The first part of my Ph.D seems to be about my interaction with students and staff on quite a personal and focused level. As I have moved roles the focus seems to have shifted somewhat: it's not directly about students anymore, although parts of my Ph.D. attempt to re-claim these days of teaching. My role is more about influencing the work of other teachers. My work with an NQT was unusual in this sense and I feel that this was my early attempt to hold onto my middle

management role by working alongside an NQT. However, the majority of my role is about influencing Heads of Department and whole School direction by strategically looking at how the School can improve.

3.7 Reflections on the Year

When I came into the job of Assistant Headteacher I found myself bringing with me a whole host of ideas that I had built up over time. I had my experiences as being a teacher, middle leader, teacher-researcher and so on. I had my experiences of being a living person with a life history. I also had a great deal of stored knowledge about Schools and leadership that I had read about. Bringing all this with me in my head meant that I felt well-equipped to meet the challenges of the role. I was bringing a sense of unity about schools and leadership that existed within the mythical folklore pages of texts, but didn't exist within reality. However, it wasn't quite this simple.

I am reminded of another dreamer in my past who had so significantly tried to live the dream and hold on to it for his entire life, only to realise once he came face to face with the dream that it wasn't quite the same in reality as it had been in his head: dreams rarely are. Gatsby lived his life waiting for the moment when his dreams became reality, and it was at the precise moment that this happened that he realised the difference and distance between the two things. I first came across Gatsby as a University-dreamer as an under-graduate: something grabbed me about him, and I could connect with his sense of holding on at any cost to the dream. Perhaps I connected with the need to never be satisfied through the dream and to always strive for that something that is out of reach: that something that would always drive me on to make things better and improve the quality of the living educational space. At this moment in the novel <u>The Great Gatsby,</u> Gatsby finally comes face-to-face with his childhood sweetheart one afternoon after years of dreaming about this moment, only to then realise that his dream had far out-weighed the reality before him:

> *'…I saw that the expression of bewilderment had come back into Gatsby's face, as though a faint doubt had occurred to him as to the quality of his present happiness. Almost five years! There must have been moments even that afternoon when Daisy tumbled short of his dreams – not through her own fault, but because of the colossal vitality of his illusion. It had gone beyond her, beyond everything. He had thrown himself into it with a creative passion, adding to it all the time, decking it out with every bright feather that drifted his way. No amount of fire or freshness can challenge what a man can store up in his ghostly heart.' (The Great Gatsby, 1990, p. 92-93)*

Perhaps Gatsby's passion here is like the text that I am writing: my text and practice is to me like Daisy is to Gatsby. Perhaps this will fall short of my dreams. During the early part of my first year in post I found myself becoming more and more frustrated with the fact that I didn't really seem to be making a great impact: I didn't feel I was making the grand sweeping changes that I expected I would. My experiences were telling me what good ideas I knew I had, but in reality I wasn't able to live these ideas out. For instance, I knew that establishing teacher-research could significantly help to improve practice within the classrooms of the school, but by term two I still hadn't established this. Other examples also existed. Through reflection, I realised that I had brought with me the realms of the *possible* but the practice of making them *probable* was proving to be quite different. It was through reflection with Jack Whitehead during term two that I realised that one of the reasons why I was not making the possible probable was due to the fact that I was not taking care to regenerate myself, which in turn was contributing to my values not being lived out in my practice. The ideas were sound: the way I was delivering them was not. Finding out what is possible is one thing: but it takes a whole host of other skills to make it probable. I was becoming a living contradiction in my practice. I had always envisioned that I would be this dynamic, young senior manager who would take education by storm and wow everybody. This, I didn't feel, was happening. I was working 60 hours per week by term two and this was simply taking all my creative senses and draining them dry. I realised that I needed to change this if the possible was to become probable within my practice. I needed to be able to communicate to others my own sense of delight and pleasure that I got from doing the job I was doing, and this simply wasn't happening. The sparkle had gone and it needed to return. I needed to be able to light up the room when I entered it again.

As I sit in my study and begin to reflect on my first year in post the last 11 months seem to start to begin to make sense. I can sit here as a part of a Senior Management Team that is succeeding: we have just received the GCSE results that have once again gone up from the previous year, 59% to 64% 5 A*-C. I personally have had a successful year on the whole: Investors in People success; KS3 results going up; the departments I line-manage moving forward well.

The key aspect over the last year for me is the sense of transformation and the impact that I have had within this aspect. I feel that I have helped to contribute to the transformation of the school that is necessary in order to continually improve: nothing stands still. Throughout the year the impact of changing the CPD system;

establishing a teacher-research group; influencing the teaching and learning debate through focusing on the learning aspects; establishing working groups to create a staff voice within the school and so on. I feel that this has been an example of the creative responses I have made to the School and those that I work with. My originality of mind has helped to move the school forward by introducing fresh ideas and innovations.

However, the devastating news within my own personal life over-shadows all of this and I am once again reminded of how the life story influences the practitioner that I am: I hear that my father has lung cancer and he immediately begins chemotherapy. How he and my mum desperately need to draw on their own life-affirming energy at this time. I am suddenly drawn to the fact that his absence within this text is really noticeable. Why haven't I given him a voice within it? I know that he isn't the kind of man that would write anything, unlike my mum. But why haven't I shared with the world who he is? I suddenly feel tinges of guilt over-riding me: I feel a sense of taking for granted someone who was always there. I spend my time just thinking of him and the memories: the endless days he spent watching me play football when I was growing up, standing in the pouring rain and snow watching his son; I remember how he worked a lot to support us; I remember how he would always do anything for us at any time; I remember him putting the Christmas decorations up and nearly falling off the ladder one year; I remember him snoring on the settee, a lot….and the memories could go on. I should be preparing for the new School year that starts in a couple of days, but instead I'm thinking of him, 250 miles away up North with my mum and sisters looking after him and I'm down here. My life now is my autobiography: in one week's time, when I'm in School, my life will still be my autobiography. This is the most important thing in my head at the minute and is influencing the educator that I am. I am again reminded of the multiplicity of selves that exist within me: the way in which this event profoundly influences me personally and professionally. However, perhaps ironically my dealing with this event in my life is through gaining the success and the sense of being able to make things better at work: compensating for this emotional roller coaster through controlling the work that I do. This embraces Hill and Stephens (2005) who comment with regard to multiplicity of selves:

> 'Success in one or more important domains, along with the resulting positive effect, development, and confidence, can be exported to other selves and situations.' (Hill and Stephens, 2005, p. 134)

Perhaps this is where my own regeneration of spirit will come from.

Sequence 4 The Future

This section of the thesis is written for the *other*: the person that I am not. It is written so that the *other*, the person that I wish at times I was, may be able to clearly understand what I believe are some of the implications for the *other*. I wish at times I was the *other* and that I could benefit from being the *other* within my own life. I think that I would then be able to always make things better: I think that I might not make so many mistakes in my life.

This sequence offers a form of a conclusion to the explanations I have given throughout this thesis of the nature of the educational influences I have within the spaces and relationships of my personal and professional life as an educator. It is not an ending, but rather a beginning and starting point for what comes next. I offer these explanations as a way of accounting for the nature of my life. The explanations centre around three original contributions:

1. living educational space;
2. living myself through others;
3. life-story.

Within this final sequence I wish to conclude this thesis in summarising the significance of the insights these three contributions offer. I want to clarify that *living myself through others* is my own life-affirming energy and contributes to my own living educational theory. These three contributions are not mutually exclusive; they are connected and joined up and I will refer to them throughout as I conclude the nature of my understanding of them.

4.1 Living educational space

My hope is not to show people the way or impart some great wisdom through this thesis: but rather it is about sharing my own story with others and from this being able to instigate discussion and dialogue about the nature and importance of teacher-research and living educational theory. I am aware of what I believe I have learned from interacting with others through their writings and through the dialogues that I have had with them, but perhaps my own limited vanity and lack of self-belief creeps in and I don't want to accept that others can learn from what I have written. However, I am drawn to one conversation with an AST at Bitterne Park who I asked about the movement of the school to heavily focus on *learning* rather than *teaching*:

> '…I think it was your good self.…I don't think we'd have got there and so quickly and I don't think it would have been articulated so clearly…I don't recall in any of the meetings I've been a part of anybody but yourself commenting that we needed to focus on learning…I quite categorically think it's you Simon…' (Conversation with AST, July 2006)

Sometimes I allow myself a smile when others recognise my influence. I believe that my account is a personal autobiographical account of one person's journey. It is not a finished story but simply the beginning of something much bigger: a lifetime of action-reflection, a lifetime of 'living life as inquiry' (Marshall, 1999).

I argue within this thesis that recognising and understanding the nature of the living educational space is important in improving the education of myself and others. I explain in chapter 1.5 what I mean by living educational space and its importance within my living educational theory. This thesis accounts for how I have embarked upon understanding my own place within this living educational space and then established the conditions to enable others to consider their own places within their living educational space (Chapter 3.6). I argue within this thesis that it is important for an individual to understand themselves before trying to understand others (Sequence 2). Through this thesis I have provided accounts of how I improved the quality of the living educational space within my classroom, my department, and through a teacher-research group to influence the work across a whole school.

Within this thesis I argue the need for others to recognise the living educational space and to recognise their contribution towards establishing this (Chapter 3.6). I argue that others need to take the responsibility for improving the quality of the living educational space they are part of recognising that they can influence, change and

improve the quality of it. Through doing this I argue that individuals can recognise the value of the contribution that they can make to this space.

I argue that through recognising the living educational space a creative dialogue is able to take place from which something new and exciting can emerge; where improvements in the quality of learning can take place (Sequence 2 & 3). For me, it was the establishing of a teacher-research group within my school that provided opportunities for individuals to explore their own living educational spaces.

In this thesis I have provided the evidence to support my belief that understanding living educational space promotes a dialogical and relationally dynamic awareness of educational relationships and through this the quality of the education that takes place can be enhanced (Chapter 1.5, 1.6, 2.4, 3.2, 3.6).

4.2 Living myself through others

Through this thesis I am arguing that practitioners need to reflect upon and account for their own living educational theory as a way of improving the quality of the living educational space that they inhabit. My actions through this thesis have been about establishing the conditions for this to happen. For me, I have explained, clarified and demonstrated the original relationally dynamic standard of judgement of *living myself through others* and how I strive to live my life by this standard. This standard guides my practice and through it I am able to live out my life fully to be the person that I want to be. This standard is my life-affirming energy that I carry with me and contributes to my own living educational theory.

One of the claims that I want to make within this thesis is the need for making teaching a research-based profession that embraces living educational theory. I whole-heartedly embrace the revised teacher standards from the Training and Development Agency (2007) that comment:

> 'All teachers should have a professional responsibility to be engaged in effective, sustained and relevant professional development throughout their careers…' (T.D.A. Professional Standards for Teachers, 2007, p.3)

Part of the originality within this thesis is to demonstrate a sustained form of personalised professional learning through engaging in continuous professional development in the form of accounting for my own living educational theory.

I am also in support of Furlong and Oancea (2005) in their claims to review what constitutes quality within educational research, with the view to establishing a research community that comfortably nurtures, supports and promotes research in a variety of modes to develop personalised professional learning. My desire is to see stories of teacher-research valued in a living way and publicly disseminated in order to account for practice and to then use this resource for impact in order to encapsulate the future of education based on research from within it. What I embrace is the need for teachers to engage within the knowledge production about the profession and contribute towards directing the future of the profession. I see the unintended humour from Gorard and Taylor (2003) in the introduction to the British Educational Research Journal (B.E.R.J.) when they comment that their journal is 'school-based' when none of the papers contained are actually written by practicing teachers. I then read with anticipation the first editorial from Hammersley-Fletcher (2008) for Management in Education journal where she calls for an increase in the

number of reflective articles contained within the journal and that it being important to 'listen to the voices of those doing the work that researchers comment upon'. (Hammersley-Fletcher, 2008, p. 2) My work as a senior leader has been about empowering teachers to be able to account for the embodied knowledge they hold about learning within their classrooms and to enable them to put this into the public domain. This body of collective knowledge exists within my school, about my school that is produced by those who directly contribute to moving the School forward. This coincides with the Editorial in B.E.R.J by Torrance, Sikes, Cooper and Stronach (2005) when they comment:

> '…what we are concerned with in educational research is knowledge production…' (Torrance, Sikes, Cooper & Stronach, 2005, p. 137)

I couldn't agree more. However, my argument is that who produces this knowledge is where the debate is. I firmly believe that the voice of teachers who engage in the job of teaching and learning everyday of their lives should be heard within this and that policy should be seeking to enable this to happen more frequently. Furthermore, the arguments of Carr & Kemmis (1986) still ring true in developing the teacher-research movement:

> 'The reasons why teachers have become researchers vary. Some teachers have become researchers because they are the products of a period of intense intellectual and social ferment: they are committed to a view of themselves that is bound to reflect upon their educational practice; to justify it and transcend its limitations. Others have been drawn into research and evaluation roles as they have been required to debate and justify innovative practices for which they have been responsible. Still others have more or less spontaneously arrived at the general idea of the teacher-researcher simply as a reasonable aspiration for a professional. And some have been enthused by a time of major change in education in which teachers and schools have been offered greater autonomy and responsibility in curriculum matters.' (Carr & Kemmis, 1986, p. 1)

Interviews with members of the Bitterne Park teacher-research group highlighted a number of key points about the provision for teacher-researchers within schools and how they saw their own potential impact on education.

One AST commented in relation to why they became involved:

> 'I think it's given a number of colleagues a real boost and focus…staff get fired up and motivated by it…the whole department gained from one member being involved in it…it really helped get to the core of what learning is about…' (Conversation with AST, March 2006)

This comment resonated with my own sense of *living myself through others*; of living theories creatively engaging in a relationally dynamic way in order for something new and creative to emerge. On a wider perspective, I have been able to engage with individuals and provide the living educational space for the type of work described above to happen. However, what is significant within this thesis is that I place great value on practitioners learning from other practitioners how to improve their practice.

I asked another member of the group to reflect on her experiences of teacher-research during the M.A. programme; she had researched into creating student-researchers out of one of her teaching groups:

> '…I started off doing the MA programme simply from a purely selfish point of view in that I just want a qualification that could open other doors to different jobs but I've actually ended up finding it to be a much more rewarding experience and for the kids as well – I had a conversation with my MA cohort yesterday and they are just singing the praises of the whole programme because it has given them so much from me as a teacher so I just had a really positive time. And all the relationships and the people that I have met and the opportunities that it has given me – I never would have anticipated. Being asked to speak at those conferences and it's overwhelming really – it's been a great experience – I've thoroughly enjoyed it.' (Interview, 2006)

This was beginning to remind me of the cycles of research and how I was hearing similar points to the ones made from the Westwood St Thomas teacher research group, accounted for in my M.A. dissertation (Riding, 2003). It also reminded me of my own account of how I became bitten by the bug of research. The key point here perhaps is that teacher-researchers always seem to begin with the aim of getting the qualification but then realise that it is something more, particularly when they begin to realise that the work they are doing is having a direct impact on those that they teach. The movement seems to be a real transformation of practice incorporating a deep shift in the way that they consider and reflect on their practice.

Curious about this, I further asked another member of the group if she would talk through her personal reasons for getting involved:

> '…I was a bit stagnant and in a bit of a rut and needed to do something different so I took the opportunity of doing the MA really just to give me something else to do because quite frankly the job was becoming quite repetitive and a little bit easy and I just wasn't being challenged by anything. So that was the reason why I got involved in the programme.' (Interview, 2006)

I could connect to this in terms of remembering that I had similar reasons for wanting to get involved in teacher-research. I connect to the links that both this person and the previous person makes, in terms of exploring their own living educational theory, particularly in recognising the living contradiction and desire to explore and find the life-affirming energy to regenerate the spirit. I read this comment and I am reminded of the need to consider the living educational space and to see it as liberating and a place of powerful transformation. I argue that it is the living educational space that needs to respond to the comments of this teacher to inspire and energise them. I believe that it is time to listen to those that are within the profession and allow them the power to direct the future of it.

This was further supported when I invited her to expand on this point:

> '…I suppose I wasn't giving an awful lot of myself to the kids anymore and I was really just going through the motions and my first action research project was about enhancing creativity within the National Literacy Strategy and was a very personal thing because I had a real issue and have had right since the beginning five years ago ……..But on a personal level I wanted to bring more of myself to the job than I used to when I was first starting but I was feeling in the last couple of years that I've very much been regurgitating the same resources and the same lessons because it was easy and it was just an easy ride.' (Interview, 2006)

For me, the challenge of individuals accounting for their own educational influence through accounting for their own living educational theories is the type of activity that can inspire practitioners to focus on their practice again. She commented:

> '…I seemed to consider what I was doing and I found that having to explain myself on a video tape quite daunting but I learned a lot from it about myself…' (Interview, 2006)

This individual was exploring her own practice through self-reflection and then accounting for this through the explanation of her own living educational theory.

I was curious as to how members of the group felt that their practice had changed as a result of engaging with teacher-research:

> '…I think it definitely changed with the group that I have been targeting, it changed hugely actually because I have become more focussed on the individual children and not just the ones that I've been using as my guinea pigs so to speak – it has actually spilled out on the whole of the rest of the group and they have really become my focus group in terms – not necessarily in my planning because that makes it sound like I don't plan for somebody else and I do but because they are my SAT's year group as well and I've put an awful lot into their lessons and a lot more into the teaching - they have become very much a focus for me and I really hope that the results show that. It has spilled over into my other teaching in that I'm just a little bit more enthusiastic about what I am doing on a day to day basis. I'm not sure that the tangible benefits in terms of results will be the same with the other group but I hope the personal benefits for the children of having a more enthusiastic more focussed teacher will have given additional benefits such as increased confidence perhaps or increased enjoyment of the subject because I may be giving a little bit of myself.' (Teacher-researcher, 2006)

For me this highlighted again the potential impact of engaging within teacher-research within a school and how the focus on individual projects by teachers could potentially improve teaching and learning across all aspects of practice. The accounting for the nature of an individual's influence over others through reflection on practice was in this case seeing perceived benefits for teacher and student.

I was curious as to the potential impact of teacher-researchers engaging within communities of research and how these communities could potentially help and support teacher-researchers:

> '…My main source of help has been one particular member of the group and I think that she and I are very similar people, very similar professionals, we are both quite focussed….But we do share very similar professional values and very similar drives for high achievement and ambition within the classroom. I think that because we both have quite a lot of professional respect for each other in the capacity, we know each other quite well as

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teachers now we support each other and she has given me an awful lot in terms of encouragement of what I have been doing and almost like a competitive edge – we both have this. I think that is really healthy. We bring out the best in each other with a slightly competitive edge but we are equally very supportive of each other. That kind of mentoring relationship has been really valuable because I think if I was left to my own devices as a researcher I probably would not have had the impetus to keep going in the same way whereas when you are accountable to somebody else and you are consciously wanting to show them what you have been producing and have their feedback and have their encouragement that really drives you forward. If it was just me on my own in my classroom I don't think I would have applied myself as hard because I would have had nobody to account to other than myself.' (Interview, 2006)

I think this is similar to one of the ways that I describe my relationship with my wife, as a co-researcher. This supports the sense of needing that significant other to lean on for support and guidance as you progress through your research. I am again reminded of the sense of 'being worthy' and the need to feel this in relation to that significant other. It further supports the need to establish communities of enquiry to provide the required accountability and validation in order to support teacher-researchers through their work.

I asked another member of the group about her views on research prior to engaging within this group of teacher-researchers and how she saw the benefits of it within her own work:

'…To be fair the only real experience of doing research in a traditional sense was during my degree really –what I did do was called a project and I was one of two people on my course in this particular class doing Romany linguistics and I had to research the disappearance of a vowel sound in Latvia or somewhere but it basically meant long hours trapped in the library with the journal of the Gipsy Law Society 1897 or something. I did enjoy it but it wasn't the most inspiring of research because it didn't actually have any impact on anything and it gave me my credits and I did quite well but in the grand scheme of things it was useless but with this there are real genuine benefits for myself but also for real people, real children who it actually does matter to and that's the difference I think. I think that it is just as valid if not more valid to be a teacher researching in a classroom with children who you have close contact with on a daily basis because you can actually start to see

that it is making a difference to those children and I think a lot of traditional research is valuable but its not often that the researchers get to actually apply the findings and I think that is the difference. So you've got the government driving new strategies and new initiatives etc but its us that have to put it into practice and its us that then sees the loopholes in the system and see the gaps in the research.' (Interview, 2006)

These comments reflect a tension between the perceptions of 'traditional research' and 'practitioner research'. However, I sense from the above comments a frustration of wanting to see and feel action and impact from research that is immediately useful and practical to everyday practice; research for a personal purpose. I argue within this thesis for the engagement with action research cycles that are focused on actions and having impact on practice and learning.

I was particularly interested in finding out what the teacher-researchers thought about the way that we had set the assessment process for the M.A., using a flexible method that enabled a teacher-researcher to submit their assessment in formats other than writing a traditional essay:

'…It's more accessible for the reader I think. So even though the language that I'm using hopefully is as sophisticated as it would be in a traditional essay I hope that because it is structured in a different way that it will be more accessible and people will be prepared to sit and read it a little bit more it is broken down into smaller sections.' (Teacher-researcher, 2006)

I would further add that the value of the work being on the web and being accessible form their means that the dissemination of the work is much easier for other practitioners to engage with.

Through my reflections it has been my intention to encourage others to embrace their own sense of 'personal mastery' (Senge, 1990, p. 173) within their practice as I myself have embraced this. I believe that these experiences from these teachers have enabled them to be able to live and breathe and embrace their own living educational visions alongside my own. I believe that their experiences have enabled them to clarify their own values as they live them each day in their classrooms. During an interview with a member of teacher-research community at Bitterne Park, she commented about my practice and my influence on her:

'I don't think we have ever had an official meeting until today on this level but certainly we have had lots of discussions especially when we have been in the computer rooms and it is just that extra pair of eyes and it is almost

someone else saying to you – you are doing really well – well done – I don't think often in teaching that happens.' (Interview, May 2006)

This is part of my own living educational theory that I have attempted to promote within my practice: of recognising the positives within others and embracing appreciative inquiry. Alongside this, by these teachers engaging in teacher-research they have been able to increase their own levels of motivation through understanding and embracing their own personal mastery: by regaining the sense of control over what happens within their classrooms. These teachers no longer feel that things are being 'done to them', but rather that they have control over the learning that takes place and there professionalism is allowed to live. This member of the group further commented during her interview about my practice and character:

'…and you are someone who is very positive and someone who is very approachable and I know that if I was pulling my hair out and at the moment I feel that things are quite calm but if they weren't I know that I could knock on your door and you would be all ears and very helpful and very calming and reassuring and look at something in balance and weigh up what was going well and what was not going so well and then point me in the right direction.' (Interview, May 2006)

This again supports my views on schools, education and approaches to the job: getting the results whilst remembering my own belief in the positives of humanity.

For me this thesis enters the debate that is emerging throughout education with regards to where the source of power over the production of knowledge lies. I believe that knowledge production about the profession needs the voice of practitioners well-supported within it. I believe that a greater synthesis needs to exist between researchers and practitioners in order to produce that knowledge. Three years ago, the emergence and then consequent withdrawing of the Best Practice Research Scholarships (B.P.R.S.) in England was frustrating. On the one hand the scholarships provided outstanding independence for teachers to be able to have freedom over their research practice and account for their own educational influence. However, on the other hand, once this process was underway, the rug was pulled from under the feet of the profession just at the point when the voice from within the profession could really have been heard. Furlong (2003) argues for the need to address the issues surrounding the production of knowledge within education are refers specifically to his evaluation of the B.P.R.S scheme:

'What we felt we were witnessing in our evaluation of the BPRS scheme was a sophisticated form of 'knowledge transfer' (though we came to recognise that the term itself is seriously inadequate). By working collaboratively with teachers in their own and other schools and with those in H.E., and by deploying research skills themselves, teachers were able to use research based knowledge in the development of their own practice.

But knowledge transfer of this sort cannot happen alone; it still needs a professional research community. We found the research communities were essential in two ways. They were necessary in the support of projects: providing readings, helping in research designs etc. In essence, professional researchers had to be prepared to 'give away' their skills to classroom teachers. They were also essential in that projects themselves needed to be informed by high quality research.' (Furlong, 2003, p. 17)

His arguments call for the greater understanding of how educational research can impact on practice and be more accessible. My argument is that there is still a need to further promote and support the work of teacher-researchers to account for their own learning within their own institutions as this is the greatest way to utilise research to directly impact on practice and consequently on learning. There is a need to assess the contribution of this work through living standards of judgement that are responsive to the material produced and do not necessarily require or demand that the work produced is following a traditional academic framework.

Sebba (2004) further supports the use of knowledge production from within the profession commenting:

'A great emphasis is needed on improvement driven by users rather than by the suppliers (researchers and funders) of research.' (Sebba, 2004, p. 42)

Sebba (2004) further argues for the need to provide positive experiences for practitioners in order to support the development of an evidence-informed profession. This is further supported through the arguments of Snow (2001) in her presidential address to AERA, where she commented:

'The…challenge is to enhance the value of personal knowledge and personal experience for practice. Good teachers possess a wealth of knowledge about teaching that cannot currently be drawn upon effectively in the preparation of novice teachers or in debates about practice. The challenge here is not to ignore or downplay this personal knowledge, but to elevate it. The knowledge resources of excellent teachers constitute a rich resource, but one that is

largely untapped because we have no procedures for systematizing it. Systematizing would require procedures for accumulating such knowledge and making it public, for connecting it to bodies of knowledge established through other methods, and for vetting it for correctness and consistency. If we had agreed-upon procedures for transforming knowledge based on personal experiences of practice into 'public' knowledge, analogous to the way a researcher's private knowledge is made public through peer-review and publication, the advantages would be great. For one, such knowledge might help us avoid drawing far-reaching conclusions about instructional practices from experimental studies carried out in rarefied settings. Such systematized knowledge would certainly enrich the research-based knowledge being increasingly introduced into teacher preparation programs. And having standards for the systematization of personal knowledge would provide a basis for rejecting personal anecdotes as a basis for either policy or practice.' (Snow, 2001, p. 9)

I would argue that through my own work I have attempted to do this through the establishment of a community of enquiry within my School and Local Authority that draws on a multi-generational model of knowledge production through bringing together practitioners, researchers, students and local authorities. By multi-generational I mean people who are working at different non-hierarchical levels of knowledge production and who have at the heart of their work the intention to make things better for others. I am arguing that I have helped contribute to this debate through the way that I have enabled teachers to account for their learning and practice. I have done this through engaging them in debate and dialogue about their practice and then been able to offer this work for assessment through Bath Spa University. However, disappointingly is the fact that the B.P.R.S. scholarships dried up.

One of the key points that I am arguing for within this thesis is the need to be really clear on the roles that teachers and universities can take in order to be able to effectively work together to improve the quality of education for students. I want the research community to embrace teacher-research and prove Lomax (1998) wrong when she comments:

> 'There is an element of this [Balkanisation] operating in the UK, where the divide between new paradigm research and traditional scientific research is still detrimental to the former.' (Lomax, 1998, p. 3)

This thesis contributes to this debate in moving forward the new paradigm of teacher-research in terms of its subject matter, presentation, methods and conclusions. It is vital that a clear understanding and rationale is established so that a harmony can be created that allows teachers to drive forward the school improvement and effectiveness debate from within, supported by universities helping to legitimise the professional knowledge produced. McNiff (2003) recognised this argument in her presentation on South African Schools. Essentially this is about making knowledge useable. From the story that I have written about my own experiences relating to this, I hope that others can begin to understand the importance of embracing this stance and of helping to create the conditions that would allow this to occur. I am supporting Bassey (1992) in his claims to justify all research that is conducted systematically and critically as being valuable and worthy. I am particularly advocating the sense of embracing his 'creative research' which I have promoted through my own enquiries and through those of other teacher-researchers that I have helped.

From this, others may learn how to establish, embed and create teacher-research within their schools. Indeed the stance advocated by Cordingley (2004) is somewhere close to the stance I believe in:

> 'Research or evidence-informed practice has the potential to support teaching and learning precisely because it involves teachers in becoming learners again, and so developing their understanding of how their students feel, and in modelling learning for their students. Hence evidence-informed practice does not merely mean bringing new information about what works to bear on professional practice, it becomes part of an on-going learning process on the part of the practitioner. This does not mean, however, that research and/or evidence-informed practice is an end in itself. Its worth to practitioners still depends upon its capacity to enhance teaching and learning.' (Cordingley, 2004, p. 80)

From my experiences throughout this story, I believe that I have been able to offer the evidence that supports this view. I believe that I have demonstrated that I have once again become a learner and learned alongside firstly my students and secondly staff. From these learning experiences I have been able to improve my practice. For me, this was about embracing the notions of action research. Others, from engaging with this account may well be able to appreciate the value of action research and may well be convinced to engage with it themselves. I further go on to embrace Cordingley (2004) when she comments:

'I want to argue that research and/or evidence-informed practice is, at its heart, a learning process for practitioners which is underpinned by the same pedagogical principles that operate in classroom practice. If practitioners are to use evidence, they need to work together to interpret it and to reflect upon its significance for their own particular context.' (Cordingley, 2004, p. 83)

This is central to my approaches to establishing teacher-research within my School: of being able to build a community of enquiry that is able to collectively move forward with their practice through dialogical experiences that engages with key questions relevant to their own practice.

Others may well begin to appreciate the importance that their own stories and narratives play within their own educational lives and begin to see the links between their professional selves and personal selves. This belief is vital within my own living educational theory that I carry with me each day. Others may well begin to account for themselves through their own stories and begin to value this form of enquiry. I am acknowledging Parker (2002) in his exploration of the impact of school leader's life histories on their leadership and how the two things are linked. Through this, others may well learn how they can make things better from this, for the sense of humanity and those that they educate.

Others may learn about the tremendous difficulty of managing transitions and changes within educational life and begin to clearly understand the importance of recognising this and then doing something to try and smooth the process. From my own story others may be able to recognise the difficulties that I have been through and how I have been able to eventually recognise the difficulties associated with transitions between roles and schools. This has been a very painful process that with hindsight, could have been made easier if I'd known then what I know now.

Form the account of my learning and the incorporation of others' voices within this text it is my hope that others may learn of the need to actually support teacher-research in a growing climate where sources of funding for teacher-research are drying up quickly. It is my hope that changes in the way research is funded will be addressed so that teacher-researchers have some element of control over funding to be able to use it to improve their practice and the learning of students. I wonder how much of the vast funding budget given to support academic researchers can actually be accredited to actually improving the learning of any students. I am reminded of the voices within this text: of Karen, of Sophie, of Dan, of Simon, of Toni, of Mark, of

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Jack, of the University researcher, and so on. However, from the accounts I have included I can evidence that the stories of the teachers included within this thesis have actually improved the learning of students they have come into contact with: they have actually improved the quality of the living educational space, in however small way that was.

4.3 Life story

I am arguing through this thesis that the starting point for an individual in developing their own living educational theory is through understanding and accounting for their own life story that has influenced the educator that they are (Sequence 2). I believe that this is the beginning to understanding and improving practice.

I believe that through individuals gaining a greater insight into their own lives and the meanings attached to events within their own lives, practitioners can recognise their own living values and standards of judgement that they live their lives by and that emerge through their practice.

I make the claim in my abstract, 'I further argue for the need to consider how practitioner accounts are assessed in order to ensure that the future of education is driven forward through the development of teachers as researchers influencing what educational knowledge is and how it is produced.' This journey has essentially been a journey of self-discovery for my own needs. This journey has been one that I have been able to learn a great deal from over the period of time that it has taken. This journey has added to my own growing understanding of my practice as an educator and allowed me to understand my own living educational theory that is emerging over time. I believe that I have been able to embrace Senge's (1990) sense of reflecting on one's thinking whilst acting: being able to reflect on my own practice whilst undertaking the job on a day-to-day basis. This I believe I have done whilst being a teacher, middle-leader and senior-leader. This has enabled me to reflect on and understand in detail what my own values are as an educator and leader and through this understanding I have been able to then articulate these to those that I lead. I am acknowledging that I am the product of my life and I am the educator and leader that I am because of the life that I have lived and the life that I am living.

Through this thesis I have experienced a number of transitions: of place (Chapters 2.8, 3.4); of people (Chapters 1.6, 2.3, 2.4, 3.2); of role (Chapters 2.8, 3.4); of thought (Chapters 3.3, 3.4, 3.5); and of being (Chapters 1.3, 3.7). I have argued for the need to recognise transitions as a positive influence and through sustained reflection being able to see difficult moments to live out my own values more fully within my practice. Through transitions I have been able to articulate and clarify my own living educational theory. For instance, through the following transitions:
□   between schools from Westwood St Thomas to Bitterne Park School
□   between roles of middle manager to senior leader

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□   from my father's life to his death from cancer

□   from no children to the birth of a daughter

□   from being single to marriage

□   from the loss of significant others to the discovery of significant others

□   from no teacher-research to teacher-research.

I argue within this thesis that these transitions are part of the fabric of life, professional and personal, which I live out every day. I argue that they are not compartmentalised into separate areas of my life, but rather that they are one large fabric from which I reflect on in order to make sense of the world I am part of. From this understanding I seek to improve the quality of the living educational space.

The image below is the image that I want to conclude this thesis with. I am aware of how futile that actually sounds: although it is the writing that is concluded within this space, the process is by no means completed or ended. The multi-dimensional space will simply change. I may not necessarily account for my learning again in such an exclusive and sustained way, but my accounting for myself is something that will continue: it is how I will feel worthy of the life that I have. It has to: that's the job that I do. I can return to the title of this thesis and ask myself: have I contributed to my own and others' learning? I know the answer is 'yes'. This thesis is testament to this. I have attempted to demonstrate how I have learned from the experiences that I have had, and how I have lived through and responded to them as they have emerged within my personal and professional life. Have I made things better for others? I believe that I have and the evidence in this thesis demonstrates this. Have I lived through others? Again, I believe that this thesis demonstrates that I have.

Below is an image taken whilst on holiday in 2005. It is an image of me and my wife. I feel that this image carries with it and communicates my real sense of hope for the future. This is the reason why I want to conclude with it: I feel it communicates my hope for humanity through the engagement that I have within my gaze: I believe that I am fully present within this image. I believe that I am fully living. I look at this image and I can see the connection that I have with my wife: my source of inner strength that I draw on to help me be the person that I am. I look at this image and things don't seem so bad after all. I look at this image and I'm reminded of who I am and why I exist. I look at this image and I plan for the future.

Figure 46: Image of me and Karen in the Maldives, 2005.

Epilogue

I am in a position to provide the concluding comments about this thesis. What you are just completing reading is the snapshot of my life and my career: it is the briefest of images of how I learn through living. It is an account of what I do and why I love what I do. It is an explanation of the living relationally dynamic standard of judgement of *living myself through others*. Once again though, I find myself in a position of embarking upon yet another transition, as I have been successful on my first attempt in gaining further promotion to Deputy Headship in Wiltshire. The cycle begins again of improving the quality of the living educational space through reflection upon my own living educational theory. It is without doubt that my learning and rigorous reflection over the last two years of my career as an Assistant Headteacher provided a sound platform for me to be able to move on. I have been fortunate enough to be a part of a School and Leadership Team that has been assessed by OfSted under inspection as 'outstanding' (Grade 1) in March 2006. I feel the pride and passion that this draws from me. I also recognise how I have helped over the last two years to make things better. I am once again facing the future with renewed hope and inspiration that I can make things better in my new School for those that I come into contact with. It is this sense of regeneration which is once again strong within me of improving the life chances and learning of those I come into contact with that drives me on each day. I will finish this thesis in the same manner in which I started it: with hope for the sense of humanity and love for those around me.

Appendix 1 Transcript

The following is a transcript from talk with Japanese Visitors to Westwood St Thomas School, 10 March 2004. The meeting took place at school in the afternoon. I had not met any of the visitors before. A Researcher who I had worked with had asked me to speak to the group and talk about my experiences of Continuous Professional Development within school and particularly the M.A. programme that I was part of. I had not formally planned what I would say: I simply began talking. The words were recorded on a tape recorder and then transcribed by me.

'Welcome

We have introduced ourselves and I am Simon Riding Head of English at Westwood. In September, I am going to Southampton, to a new school, which is about 20 miles away. This is my first school and I have been a teacher for five and a half years.

I am very pleased to say that I have been a teacher-researcher and it is because I have been a teacher-researcher that I am the teacher I am today.

I would like to talk through a brief history of the teacher-research group we established here at Westwood. It began four years ago and the beginnings of it were because of Stuart Jones. He had an idea to bring teacher-research here

Because he felt it would be an opportunity for staff to look at their own practice and improve what we are doing. We had quite low exam results and it wasn't as it should be. Stuart had done some research himself to get his MA and doing that he had come across the idea of action research. In discussion with the University of Bath, A researcher and Jack, and through those discussions he decided to set up an in-house MA.

In Britain, the traditional view of INSET or training is you do a one-day course. You go somewhere else, London perhaps, and spend a day there in a hotel. But nothing happens. You talk about students we don't have, who are passionate and smiling … but we have students who don't want to learn. We saw INSET as a day out of school. That's of no value. What we wanted to do was to be able to deliver something in-house, in the school. We are using the

expertise of the University, their links with the international context but also use what we know, our own school, our own students. Put these into a 'pot' and see what we come out with in the end.

The first MA module was focusing on teaching and learning. It was really only in the second module that we brought in action research. It was really like opening peoples' eyes. In such a model there is something you want to improve. The simplicity of an action research model; you go through a methodology and you ask yourself if you have succeeded or not. That is simply good teaching and learning process. Now part of that was using the knowledge people had who went to those meetings, who wanted to understand, wanted to get involved.

Our meeting was once a week. Twelve members of staff who wouldn't normally talk to one another talking about how you can improve your practice in school. What can I do better? You think of the theoretical side from the University, 'Well actually this is what theory says about this…' Mix all these together and you come up with lots of ideas and you can then go away and try to improve. What was important, was that every member of staff who went to those meetings accepted they could do their job better and I think that is one of the hardest things for teachers to admit… that we can do it 'better'. The difficulty is convincing people who have been teaching many, many years that they are willing to do this, they can always improve. You will come across barriers, particularly in the British system where people are scared about someone watching them doing their job because they feel insecure   … and that they can make it better for their students.

So, we set up this group four years ago to see what we could do - normally two modules every year. We have had people coming into the group, going out of the group but on the whole most people are coming towards the end of their MA like myself, coming onto PhDs. They are in-house as well. The other main benefit is that has been free, just funding from the government, which has meant you can get an MA for nothing

You give in terms of time though. It has all been linked to what we are actually doing in the classroom. The usual way for teachers to do their research is to go away and do something completely alien to them. I teach

English every day in the classroom and I want to do my job better so it is linked to what you are doing in the class every day, so it doesn't become a burden.

If we move onto the importance of the group, as a school we are starting to see that each of the research projects have filtered into the whole school improvement. Now, looking at the different enquiries, we are starting to ask How can we make use of these, we are starting to use the skills that people have more. People have got good research skills; those who have actually thought it through know how to do action research. And that is useful in terms of improving what is going on in classrooms. That's the massive thing – it's making a culture in the school of openness. To bring on board mentoring, a willingness to work with others, breaking down barriers between subjects, across the English Department, the Humanities Department, the Science Department can freely talk with the Geography Department and History teachers in that particular research group. So I am constantly talking about this – it breaks down barriers within the school and that's the key I think the fact that it has been regular as well units are usually for eight weeks at a time and then you tend to have a break where you can go away and collect all your data and then you have another unit a couple of moths later think meetings weekly, once a week same place, same time and so you just get into a pattern. Then it is all voluntary. There is a real need, a real desire for people to work together.

In terms of the evolution of what's next? It is trying in the school to use the skills that we have got and that have been a part of three or four years now take more responsibility for the group, A successful group like this one will eventually start to worry less about the University side. And take more responsibility for running itself. If we are building good researchers they can eventually take more responsibility for themselves. Now that is not replacing the academics in the University, they have a different role. Once we have got a certain level of skills in the group it is letting that group run itself. … the University. Whereas when we first started four years' ago it was almost like a begging child and eventually the child in the group has grown up and we are now in a position what we do still need though is still the support of the University to help It does take time … it has taken us four years. And to take more responsibility. Individuals can deliver sessions, improving practice.

We have got many present about action research and explain action research to and that's the kind of model we arrived at not deliberately and we think that is the way forward for us. It is to allow the group to do more of the teaching itself. Using the skills that we have established there.

In terms of the support that we have had from the University, there has been email contact, usually with Jack and A researcher and contact during emails so we email very often and we draft and they give responses back and we have one on one meetings in terms of the group and we have also accessed summer school units members of staff have build their units through summer schools, at the University so again that has helped to supplement the MA qualifications. The next steps? It is trying to strike a balance between new members and also being able to stir more established members of the group on the same level. There is a group that has grown up together for four years across a series of units. The key thing is to bring new blood. That's the most difficult bit – it's convincing staff to it's like staff management. It is always very uncomfortable to come into a group where people know each other very well. And you don't know anything that they know. A lot of thought needs to be given to how you integrate new people into your group and I think a lot of the new staff in year three were a bit confused because we were happily talking about action research and so on and they didn't understand this. We need to give more thought about how we integrate new people in how you after for different needs, the needs of established people so taking account of that is really important.

Mentoring is a massive step. We are playing ourselves, as a real mentoring school now because four years ago before this group was set up there was no real mentoring in this school. Any mentoring that went on wasn't really any good at all. That's why we have mentoring of new staff academics from the University mentoring us there is a great deal of networks within the school where we are supporting each other, such as Mark Potts, I am having email discussions with him about I am writing a PhD and we are currently having an argument through emails so that is fantastic and the other great thing is that he is my deputy head. And we have this argument going on about what things mean and so it kind of breaks down barriers The boss in the meetings will say You will do as I say and you will agree with me but here we all argue

with one another which is fantastic. Because we are getting better at staff mentoring each other and of students so there is more mentoring going on now of staff who have improved their grade, improved their learning. There is a tutoring system set up where students get the chance to be mentored. And training going on for mentors too so it is really recognizing that mentors need training and that has all rally come about as a result of the MA group. I think just going back to that point of different levels of people in the school working together, it was fantastic because the old head that we had came to a number of meetings and he would sit next to a member of staff in their second year of teaching and we have got a video of this and you wouldn't recognize that this is a head talking to a second year member of staff. It just breaks down all the barriers there is no worrying about Oh What can I say ..? It's such an open discussion and that's what helps to release a lot of emotions and yet to have that openness. I think that is brilliant!

It is the external recognition. We have a running brief called the Investors in People who look at the strengths of an organization to involve its workers in its organization. What we were recognized for is that we do have the in-house MA group set up and those who are involved in it say how empowered they are and how happy they are because it gives them because it gives them recognition for what they are doing that nationally what we are doing is OK. Now having a number of teacher researcher groups in the county and there is a model. In the past I think there was a difficulty because it costs money to enroll at Universities and what we have now got and we have had for three years is the funding Now the big funding is now the funding has stopped .. what happens when the funding runs out? How is the next generation of teachers going to be paid to go to groups to do their MAs?

What we now find is that work by the group is referring to other people's work within the group. Mark's MA dissertation is drawing on my work so we are no longer lining up just textbooks from University shelves. The knowledge we have created – it gives a real validity to it. This is my dissertation so when you read it you get references to website, to A researcher's website, to Jack's website it is referring to other teacher researchers' work and we are saying that as teachers have left the school to promotions and to move to other jobs, the knowledge of this group is like spreading the word. Spreading stories about what it is like and this is starting to get other people involved. There is

a colleague of mine in another local school, who has got interest because they have never had the opportunity to get involved because they don't have a teacher researcher group.

This networking, the working with other schools, this bringing other people on board, you can see it growing. In terms of education, four years is nothing! Imagine that in fifty years time these kinds of groups will have sprung up and there will be an expectation for producing research. If I teach English in my classroom it is pretty much the same for Jo Bloggs teaching English down the road in his classroom. The beauty of the websites set up, A researcher\ jack's websites is that I can access work that is going on in Canada, work that is going on all over the world because now I can read the reports that are put on the web. You almost get to know these people, although I have never met them. They become names that you get to know like Jacqueline Delong I have seen her name so many times on the website that I know her, so we can refer to each other and what you are doing in your classrooms is the same as I am doing in my classroom The more we can build in these networks the better I think it will be. So many staff want to get involved but they just don't know how to we never anticipated that this work here would still be going on four years' later. A year and that would be it but because there was such an amount of momentum to keep it going You realize what people want. It has probably been the single most important thing that I have been involved in and for the school in the last few years…' (Riding, 10th March 2004)

Appendix 2 Teacher Narrative

The following is a narrative written by Toni. This narrative was written in 2001. I asked my department at the time to write a brief narrative account of an episode that they felt was something they wanted help in dealing with. We then shared and discussed the narratives as a team looking to find solutions and ways of moving practice forward. I further used this narrative in my work with Advanced Skills Teachers in 2004 in order to demonstrate the type of honesty and trust I was looking to establish in my work with them. One response from one of the A.S.T.s was:

> 'I can't believe the way that she sums up everything that I come into contact with when working with staff…she captures exactly what they are thinking…every N.Q.T. should have to read this…'(Comments from A.S.T., March 2004)

Toni wrote:

> 'The teacher had always found this group to be a challenge. There had only been a handful of lessons where the teacher had felt any feeling of success on hearing the bell. Oh the bell, it seemed to be highly ironic that something so trill and a sound so intrusive could be viewed as a joyous signal of relief. It often seemed to the teacher that they had been holding their breath for fifty minutes and the bell was the green light for that luscious exhale. The teacher often felt exasperated, every new approach foiled, every new 'positive start', diminished to a whimper of 'You can go now…' as the last student made their exit.
>
> The bell to signal the end of break was like the tolling of a terrible summons for the teacher, as the sound of too many 'e' numbers bounded up the stairs, the teacher beamed insanely as the persistently entwined male students literally pulled, pushed and finally fell into the classroom. The teacher, who cunningly used the OHP as a place of safety and centre of control, had already raised the defence barriers, and she tentatively raised her pen in an effort to take the register. Welcomes and smiles were barely issued when the necessity for a resounding, 'SILENCE!' fell on deaf ears. And so the lesson would commence, with the invisible teacher darting from one scene of chaos to the next. The major achievement at the end of the lesson was the fact that the teacher had resisted the claustrophobic comfort of the stock cupboard, 'Excellent – progress!' She mused.

This was not it! This was not what she had worked so hard for. How many late nights and closeted weekends had been experienced in order to reach this state of existence? The teacher realised that something had to change, before she did (into a raving lunatic, clinging onto the threads of self-confidence). What were the main issues? She thought that this was a good starting point for progress; immediately the names and faces of the more entertaining students ran through her mind. Talking, play fighting, immaturity and off task behaviour seemed to be the main culprits in the line-up. But what was causing these issues? Other staff were also experiencing difficulties with this group, so it surely couldn't be her fault! They were a difficult group; it had been recognised; however this did not offer any solutions. Why are these students climbing on the tables? Oh they're a difficult group. Why are these students having a slanging match across the room? Oh, they're a difficult group? Why are you cowering in the cupboard? They're a difficult…I'm finding some lined paper.

The teacher revisited past lesson observations and successful lesson plans. There were lots of positive points, excellent, a great place to work from, build on the successes and the challenges will present new learning opportunities. This group had a serious morale problem, they were bottom set, yes THEY **were** BOTTOM SET! The teacher was not meeting serious literacy needs in her constant efforts to say an entire sentence without the words, silence, quiet, or put him down replacing the constructive words of encouragement. Perhaps it was the tasks, perhaps they were too difficult, or maybe her expectations were just too high. It seemed puzzling to the teacher that it could be the tasks that were at fault, she was teaching Literacy Progress Units, which are designed for groups of similar ability. Perhaps it was the seating arrangement in the classroom. This was an irritating issue for the teacher, as seating plans had failed and she was on her third arrangement of tables. At times it seemed as if she was attempting any one of several World Records in her efforts to decide on a suitable solution to what she had dubbed 100 ways to design a classroom, soon to be released in the popular press.

This all led her to one awful, daunting conclusion as to what the key issue was: her! What had happened to the inspired and creative teacher, who specialised in Special Needs and low ability teaching? What had happened to that ability to turn any adverse situation into moment of comedy? Gone was

the desire to make every lesson count, to make every lesson perfect and gone was that one thing prized above all else in the hectic world of a career: motivation. But those things weren't gone, they'd just become buried underneath that baggage of all baggage: the lack of self-confidence. She realised that the constant effort to achieve all those things that had made her successful had become her metaphoric albatross. This filled a small portion of her being with a precious and much sought after quality: hope.

It was not this group that was a challenge; her ability to cope and balance all the incredible changes in her life was the real challenge. The group had amalgamated in her mind as some kind of caricature, a symbol of 'bad behaviour' and a culture of immaturity. She thought about them again, there was A researcher, quiet as a mouse and always smiling. There was John, fantastic on a one to one basis, he was always eager to impress and for his work to be valued. They all wanted attention in one bizarre way or another, they all wanted someone to take an interest in them and to say you've done something, good let's continue. However, having seventeen children all wanting attention and not being able to express themselves in a conventional way was a difficult situation. The teacher decided that there was not going to be any easy quick fix solutions with this group, they needed time and attention and she needed to reassess her method of giving them what they required.

This was going to be difficult journey, but she had already taken the hardest step, to realise that there was a lot in that group to be positive about. This wasn't going to be a 'fresh start', or a 'new approach', but something a lot simpler. The teacher was going to start to believe that what she was doing in that fifty minutes was going to make a difference, no matter how small. And most importantly of all she was going to smile.' (Bowden, 2001)

Appendix 3 E-Mail

The following is an email from Bath University received in December 2004. This email was received in response to my request to try and gain funding for the establishment of a teacher-research group within my school. The email highlights the fact that I wouldn't be able to collaborate with the University as they weren't in a position to help me to achieve my vision at that moment in time.

'Dear Simon,

I do apologise for the delay in my response to your original enquiry but I have been discussing your request with a number of colleagues here at the Department. In particular, I have been talking with [name], the Course Administrator for the MA Programme, and also [name], who coordinates the work of the TTA-funded teachers on the Programme. I have copied them into my response, so that they are aware of the situation.

You may be aware that we are currently in the final, third, year of obtaining funding from the TTA for teachers to follow units on the MA Programme. Having looked at the uptake figures for 2004-2005 with [name], the situation is that we have already used up the 100 places that we were allocated for this academic year. I am sorry to pass on this news, Simon, as I am very enthusiastic about the possibilities of working with the group of teachers you mentioned.

All is not lost, though, as we have put in an application to the TTA for a further tranche of funding for teachers for 2005-2008. Though I do not anticipate that we will know whether we have been successful or not until early in the New Year, we have been told that the application has been looked at initially and the TTA do not want any further information from us at this stage. I am hoping that that is a positive sign! If we are successful, that would mean that teachers could start being funded by the TTA to work with us on the MA from September 2005 onwards. I hope that this would be a possibility for the teachers you have in mind, Simon.

Moving on to the question of the teaching, the pattern that the TTA requires is for teachers to take two units in each academic year. The way that we have done that is to offer, first, one unit that is presented formally and then

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offer a second unit as an Educational Enquiry, which allows the teacher to carry out some small-scale research connected to the issues raised in the first unit. I am sure that you can see that there are clear logistical issues in terms of staff travel time and staff costs of having a group of students in Southampton that the tutor visited for the twenty hours face-to-face contact over an eight week period, which is our normal pattern. I am also afraid that the suggestion you made that you yourself might be able to teach the group is also not possible, primarily on cost grounds but also because of the University's Quality Assurance hurdles that you would need to pass through before you could be approved to teach on a University Programme. This, as I am sure you will realise, is of course no reflection on your abilities, Simon.

My feeling is that a compromise arrangement is possible. This would involve the teachers taking the first unit at a distance, whereby they would receive a pack of hard copy or electronic materials, be allocated a tutor in the normal way, communicate with the tutor electronically or by post, but also have the tutor come down to have face-to-face meetings with the teachers twice or three times over the eight week period to talk with the group and with individual teachers about the content of the unit and also about assignments. The second unit could then be an Educational Enquiry, as mentioned above.

I hope you will find this suggestion of interest, Simon. Do please get back to me, or to [name] or [name], if you have any further comments. Please bear in mind that I will be away from the office on an overseas teaching engagement from tomorrow for about ten days, so I apologise in advance if there is a delay in any reply.

With best wishes,
[name]' (December 2004)

Appendix 4 E-Mail

The following collection of emails contains my correspondence with the University researcher that eventually mentored the teacher-research group that I established within my school. This correspondence demonstrates the dialogue and the depth of groundwork required to bring my plans to fruition.

'Dear researcher

Can I hare with you a few thoughts about the teacher-research group that I want to establish. What I want is something similar to what we had at Westwood. We need to be able to link it to the award of an MA. We could deliver say 6 sessions in twilight, 3-5pm. Over a period of 6-8 weeks. We focus on action research and teaching teachers how to do action research and give them a chance to share their work each week. We could use named units or generic units. We then give teachers the time to write their work and gather evidence for their assignments. I can see us running one unit per term – 3 units per year. You could deliver all the sessions or I would be happy to supplement some sessions as well.

Cost.

I need to know what this would be. I was hoping we could register staff through TTA so that staff didn't have to pay anything. Would there be any other charges involved? This would be where I would have to find sources of funding if it was needed. I would like to start ASAP. I haven't gone public to the staff yet but informally I have a lot of nods from people.

Please can you let me know what you think.

Strength and honour

Simon' (March 2005)

'Hi Simon,

I'm very happy about this proposal and I've forwarded agreement and your email to Steve Coombs so he can OK the detail and add any detail about costing beyond my travel/subsistence and refreshments on site for the group -

he keeps on stressing the TR group must be cosseted!

Best regards
A researcher' (13 March 2005)

'Hi Simon,

We got a YES from (him) as long as your school pays my expenses - travel, subsistence etc and we get good quality refreshments for the sessions (yes - that IS just what he said!) He is determined that teacher researchers get the best treatment in their school and their work is integral to school improvement…

Best regards
A researcher' (17 March 2005)

'Dear A researcher
fantastic news!!!!!!
Can you let me have an idea for the cost of the expenses per session so that I can put a bid into creative partnerships to support this? Was my outline for the programme O.K.? Would it be a named unit or a general teacher-research unit? i need to get the flyer out to staff early next week to get them signed up and committed to it. Have you got some dates? Could Tuesdays or Wednesdays be OK? Possibly starting week beginning - 18 April (an going on)
25 april
2may
9 may
6 june
13 june
lots of questions - getting really excited!
strength and honour
Simon' (19 March 2005)

'Dear Simon,

I am really excited about this teacher research venture with you too!

Brainstorming ideas at the moment - nothing decided just some ideas but we'll firm everything up later today as I know you need to advertise

How about if ... we look at my travelling down for the 'session' on one day and staying over night so I can return to school the following day - that way I can mentor face to face and help the teachers to get their work onto KEEP toolkit snapshots while it is still fresh in their minds. I am aiming to complete a first MA module with you by the end of July.

I'm thinking of 'structured' sessions for these new teacher researchers so course work is effectively assessed as an on-going process and they have a representation of their ideas (which they can amend as wished) over the several weeks we work together - ie not leaving writing up to the end but using Bath Spa's more flexible assessment arrangements.

I am first drafting a new MA module you might like to pilot with me - it is VERY draft at present but I'll attaching it so you can get a 'feel' for it. We have a school-based mentoring module, TT500M and a module for induction tutors TT502DL but I've a feeling TT500MAR might be best. We can tailor the action research foci to individuals' needs and wishes.

My suggestion is a mentoring focus ie as research mentors with your group acting as mentors for one another and you'd be 'living yourself through others' as you see their emerging knowledge coming through.

Looking forward to hearing from you so we can firm up plans our today

A researcher' (20 March 2005)

'Dear A researcher
would be happy to vary the methods of delivery and in some ways would help keep staff interest. Could I deliver as an associate tutor some stuff? At some point I think it's important that a real-life tutor works with the group – experience from early days at Westwood group was that this is what really got people involved as people come with the pre-conceived idea of university academics as 'gods' with the right answers - staff only later realise that the

'answers' they seek are actually within themselves! Could we then mix and match - some face-2-face from you - some video conference (I'll have to check that we have facilities, but I think we do) and some from me mentoring the group? The mix and match could be a real strength as it gives the group a greater sense of independence from the start.
strength and honour
Simon' (March 2005)

'Hi Simon,

The MA mentoring modules are designed to be distance learning so varying the input will work fine – I totally agree about working face to face especially till the group is getting well underway together. We can supplement this with video mentoring and e-mentoring as you'd wish.

You don't strictly need to - but I would love you to apply for the part time affiliated tutor post at Bath Spa

This is shaping up well - I really like the idea of 'mixing and matching'.

Best regards,
A researcher' (31 March 2005)

'Dear A researcher
hope you are well!
Am feeling very inspired by all this am now up to 11 staff wanting to get involved just from this school at present. Will keep it just this school for first unit and could possibly open it up to Southampton local schools for next units. Am meeting the group early next week to give more details about the course etc. and finalise arrangements. Lots to do!!! Lots of new teachers involved and wanting to carry on learning which is really good - really enthusiastic about it all
strength and honour

simon' (21 April 2005)

Appendix 5 E-Mail

The following collection of email correspondence is with Creative Partnerships, the main funding provider behind the project. It was through this negotiation that I was able to secure the external funding to allow the teacher-research group to exist.

'Dear ………….

I hope the information I have sent is ok. I now have approx. 25 staff from Bitterne Park interested in this. We are meeting on weds briefly to go through final details.

The first session with bath is on 11th May. Bath has confirmed that all is ok at their end. I have on the programme an introductory session on weds 4th May where I thought it would be useful for creative partnerships to have an input in this to talk through the partnerships idea and to go through what it is staff can get from this. Staff won't have a clear idea of their projects but will have given some thought to it. I suggest we run a 1 hour session on this. If you can't make it, you could send info through as I will meet with the group anyway.

Please let me know what you think

Simon riding (25 April 2005)

'Hi Simon

That sounds absolutely fine; it's really exiting to be involved in your idea. I will give you a ring this week to confirm times etc...

Thanks ………' (25 April 2005)

'Hi Simon,

Since your MoU is for presentation and I suspect will become a model for other schools - if you agree – I thought you might like to see the mock up

(he) made for another project . I like the ideas and graphics,

I also wonder if we should, perhaps, look at running two groups so everyone feels they get sufficient personal attention at Bitterne Park. I am sure if we think creatively we can create a CPD centre for BSUC!

Just so full of admiration for your getting such a large group together!

A researcher' (25 April 2005)

'Hi Simon

I just wanted to say I think the MA session was fantastic. A researcher is very good at what she does, I will be in touch with further ideas I have had

Thanks …..' (Creative Partnerships, 16 May 2005)

 'Dear A researcher

Just got note from creative partnerships - they want to support us more and have just sent through a report commenting:

'It seems that there could be possibilities for helping you to develop as a centre for teacher research, innovation and good practice in Southampton, and I would hope to gain support from the LEA on this. '

This is really good - my plan to take teacher-research into Southampton LEA has just been strengthened - not only that, but the links with bath spa could mean that bath spa becomes the HE link in Southampton, if it was agreeable. Creative partnerships have some weight in Southampton and this could be very useful.

strength and honour

Simon' (June 2005)

'Hi Simon

Fantastic session again - how do you do it??? I have never worked with such a large and well motivated – and talented group - must be you!

How would you feel about creating the Bitterne section with all our various snapshots, spidergrams, PLTAs and commentaries including your Day in the Life of ... to post up on TR.net as we've discussed??

I am aware I asked if you could help me run the site and if you would like to run this part it would terrific

Also - we need to think about getting a research journal underway ...
Cheers and huge thanks - for making me feel so welcome at Bitterne.

A researcher' (22 June 2005)

Appendix 6 Interview Transcript

The following is a transcript of interview of me conducted by the University researcher during the first module of the M.A. programme. The interview was videoed and then transcribed by the researcher and sent to me.

'Transcript Simon Riding 12 October 2005

The successes have been the level of engagement of staff. That's the key issue. If you provide the opportunity and take away the barriers not to do it that is when you get people involved. For us it is engaging with HE as an organisation – for us it engages that extra element which was the learning at staff level. That's very often something that gets taken for granted or doesn't fully get developed. It is also about providing professional development that is on site and is relevant. That is about taking the individual forward developed via the whole school initiative – it is actually emerging improvement from the bottom up rather than taking it from the top down

How different is it from the initiation of the Westwood group?

There is a significant difference – the role I have has suddenly jumped from being a part of the group to initiating the group, which is a very different role to fall into itself. This group is more practical – we are getting down to things, rather than the Westwood group, which had a more theoretical, analytical discussion base. This one is more about actually getting down and doing things here. The key difference partly reflects the school. I think. It's partly about introducing this because we are a high achievement effective school and I wouldn't take time away from the job staff are doing every day. That would be a concern. Obviously our priority is the kids not the staff. I think that's where the difference is – we don't really have the time to sit around and theorise – whereas the Westwood have because they had different aspirations.

Do you think the funding that has come from Creative Partnerships has in any way influenced how the group has developed?

There's always that side when you have got external funding – you are trying g to keep them happy and you are trying to manage their input into it. , It's always part of the agenda. to work with them and you are trying to bring their input into what Is going on – that is always a difficult thing to do – however, at the Westwood group we had initiated BPRS scholarships but that's more individual based. People had individual control whereas as in this professional development is being controlled by an external source that wants accountability for what the group is doing.

If you were at the conference on Saturday what would you want to bring out as the main points that you think are of relevance to your presentation?

The key issue is that we need to return to some form of individualised funding so that teachers are not held accountable to external organisations such as Creative partnerships but have got their own control over their own professional development. Secondly I think it is putting o the agenda the fact that teacher research is about improvement and that out of this group there are initiatives developing that are driving forwards school improvement itself. Thirdly there's the fact that people turn up at all is demonstrating that there is a level of engagement from staff. There's a need for it being tapped into here.

Do you think it's likely you will have other schools allied to staff development here?

Yes. The key next step for us is taking this to the whole of the local authority I have already had tentative discussions with Southampton. We have schools in Southampton where they want to get involved with this. They want something to be provided within the local authority that caters for research, further study, and teacher research – whatever you want to call it. There is a need for it. The next step for us is to be able to bring other people in from outside – we have started to do that already buy bringing an employee of creative partnerships enrolled with u, in partnership with us however, the primary focus for me is to move this group forward for teachers as researchers.

Do you think it is phase dependent – does this have to be a secondary group?

Not essentially no – however, I think there is commonality that we are all secondary – we will have common themes. I think bringing in primary colleagues in I personally don't think would be as beneficial for us – although we have a common agenda. I think the level of discussion we have is very much about teaching in our school, in our specific phase. There is a need for primary teacher research however I don't think amalgamating the two would be best.

How much impact have you seen from the work of this group which started last May on the strategies and realities for improvement in your own school?

I think that the key issue is this. The staff. The simple answer is do we see anything solid on the ground? No however what we are seeing is that staff within the group are picking up themes that they are dealing with in everyday work. So, for example one member of the team is doing work with second year teachers in coaching programme and she has taken that forward now, using this as a vehicle to find out more about the coaching and mentoring process and she is reflecting on the work she is doing with teachers. So essentially it gives staff another way of reflecting on things they do every day but as yet can I say there is any direct link between our school's improvement and this group – as yet, no because it is still early days.

If you were going to give somebody else advice about setting up a group say the CPD coordinator in a secondary school what might you say to them?

Come to me and I will only charge you £1000!'

Appendix 7 Critique of a piece of research

'Collaborative Practice: the basis of good educational work' (James, 2007) appeared in *Management in Education The Journal of Professional Practice, 21(4).* The article was written by an academic researcher from the University of Bath. The aim of the article was to:

'…describe the three elements of collaborative practice drawing on empirical illustrations and develop a model which depicts collaborative practice.' (James, 2007, p. 33)

The researcher draws on previous research conducted in order to inform the article, commenting:

'We researched into the nature of primary schools in Wales in disadvantaged settings.' (James, 2007, p. 32)

The three elements of collaborative practice referred to are 'collaboration' or 'joint working', 'reflective practice' and 'the primary task'. James goes on to draw on established theory in order to explain these terms used and then sums up in one paragraph how the term applied to the schools researched.

The outcome of the article is to propose a model of collaborative practice using 'collaboration', 'reflective practice' and 'the primary task' as the basis for the model.

It is this type of writing and research about schools that causes me concerns for a number of reasons.

The article chooses not to allow a voice to anyone else other than the named researcher. There is no reference or voice from anyone actually being researched or anyone who has contributed to the researcher's understanding of the ideas being presented. This strikes me as the professional researcher wanting to be in the position of 'giving' the knowledge created to the world: suggesting that the professional researcher account is the one that has weight and adds authority to the work. The article does not identify whether or not the 'silent voices' were invited to contribute.

A further concern that I have with this example of research is that the work is through my understanding of Sebba (2004) where the work is clearly being disseminated through the journal but I wonder what actual impact the research is having.

Fundamentally the research has been conducted into what constitutes 'good educational work' and is simply identifying what practice already exists within the schools looked at. The research does not offer any new insights into school effectiveness or improvement but simply describes what is already being done. Therefore, the ideas are being disseminated but there is no impact from the role of the researcher on the researched: the researcher has not offered the schools any ideas but simply reports what they are doing.

One fundamental omission from this work is the identification of the impact of this work on the students. There is a strong argument that school leadership is about influencing and improving the life-chances of students: this article does not mention students at any point. If we are going to describe the 'basis of good educational work' I would have expected there to be some focus on the students as that is what education is all about.

This is one example of where I believe the current work on education research is not contributing to the improvement debate within education. As a practitioner I read this article and I feel that it contributes little to my understanding of the work I do. As a practitioner-researcher I read this and I wonder what the aim of this research is: it seems to purely describe a position that already exists thus contributing little to educational knowledge.

Within my own research I was published in Management in Education Journal with my article on, 'How can I manage the implementation of the National Literacy Strategy?' (Riding, 2003b) This article was significant because I realised that I was writing and accounting for my life and learning within the same format and style as James (2007) above. Within my own article I incorporated something of myself: I framed my work around Henry V and drew on that metaphor to explain my work; I accounted for my own practice and indicated how my research was impacting on my practice. However, I denied others their voice in the account and I was not sufficiently focused on how my research had actually impacted upon students and their learning. From this reflection I was able to move towards the style and presentation of research that I have adopted within this thesis, attempting to address the issues above.

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