

PART THREE

14 EDUCATIVE RELATIONSHIPS

A) WITH ERICA HOLLEY

Erica Holley is a teacher at Greendown School in Swindon. She is researching her own professional practice in an M.Phil. programme with the University of Bath. Over the past year she has produced three papers with the following introductions. As her supervisor I am attempting to share her values and learn how she creates such a high quality of educative relationships with her pupils and colleagues. The focus in her papers is on educative relationships and they move from an individual pupil, to a whole class and to a teacher in a monitoring and appraisal process. However as Erica says,

(1) I CAN SPEAK FOR MYSELF - JULY 1992

Introduction

This paper looks at the work I undertook from July to December 1991 with one of my year ten students, Poppy. It shows us working in a collaborative and supportive way to improve the quality of our work. It also demonstrates how I developed my practice through reflection and why I became increasingly confident to question academics who attempt to speak for me. Recognising that my practice was worth describing was a great move forward for me and so was the recognition that academics who attempt to speak for me so often get it wrong.

I have a memory from the novel “The Adventures of Tom Sawyer” by Mark Twain. It’s when Tom is lost deep underground and to find his way out he ties a kite line to a rock and carefully edges his way through many passages. He doesn’t let go of the kite line until he is sure of where he is and he knows there is no need to wind it back to his safe starting place. Since starting my research I’ve felt a bit like Tom Sawyer holding fast to a kite line. I have edged out from my original question about improving the talk of girls in my classroom; I’ve cautiously tried to understand and to improve my practice but throughout I’ve held on to the ideas about talk in the classroom presented in academic journals and books. Researchers who are not teachers have written about what teachers should try to improve in talk and what those improvements should look like and too often I’ve accepted those models. I’ve tried to write honestly and openly about what I’ve done but too often I’ve failed to write in my real voice or about my real concerns because I’ve held on to that kite -line of what I think I should be concerned about and what I assume writing in an academic way should look like.

In a recent pamphlet, “Democracy and Education”, Anthony O’Hear (1991), Professor of Philosophy at Bradford University and a member of the Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education, stated that all education is “irretrievably authoritarian and paternalist”. My paper shows an education which is collaborative

and supportive and which denies O'Hear's assertions. While he has argued that education is a "transaction between unequals" which will "result in a change in the knowledge, wisdom and values of the pupil" I will show that my work with a student allows parity in dialogue despite the unequal power relationship, and that the work we undertake enables *both* of us to change because of our insights and our developing understanding of our own educational development.

The pamphlet provided another focus for my work and for this paper. His view of education denies mine. As my students and I live out our experiences in the classroom we negate O'Hear's descriptions of education as 'authoritarian and paternalist'. I cannot accept his call for an education system which is "divisive, elitist and inegalitarian". My rage that an academic, remote from the classroom, could deny my experience and my values in his writing, pushed forward my work as a teacher-researcher.

O'Hear's pamphlet also enabled me to recognise that my practice is worth describing because it attempts to live out values which are important to me. That recognition has helped me to let go of the line. I now feel confident to describe my practice in a way that I was reluctant to do so before. I can no longer be silent when someone in O'Hear's position is distorting and undermining the very things I care about in education.

O'Hear denies completely what I attempt to do in my work in the classroom. As a teacher I also try to be a reflective practitioner systematically researching my own practice in order to improve the quality of learning for my students and for myself. When I began this research I felt supported by the teacher research movement and people like Jean Rudduck and John Elliott who seemed to understand that a new form of educational knowledge was being created by teachers producing accounts of their work in the classroom. However even academics like Elliott and Rudduck sometimes only pay lipservice to teachers as researchers and remind me of parents who can't let their children grow up. They say they want to encourage teachers to be reflective practitioners but then devalue the use of it all to the teaching profession. In doing so they too deny my experience.

In her book which explores reading and culture Jane Miller (1990) uses seduction as a metaphor to show how women are excluded from literary theory. For women read teachers as the metaphor fits. Thus teachers are seduced by academics who simultaneously include and exclude us in their writing about teaching. Our presence is taken for granted and yet denied and we are enticed into narratives which reduce us by exalting us. They speak for us. I can speak for myself.

Recent articles on initial teacher training in the British Educational Research Journal by John Elliott (1991) and Jean Rudduck (1991) stress the importance of critical reflective thinking in teaching. Both criticise government plans to shift initial teacher training from Higher Education to schools because they believe that all student teachers need frameworks for thinking about what they do and that these frameworks can only be provided by people like themselves.

Elliott seems to want to protect student teachers against disillusioned competent teachers while Rudduck perceives teachers as increasingly experiencing the school day as “an intense and unremitting series of pedagogic, pastoral and administrative demands” with little time for reflective practice. Rudduck’s call for a ‘language of consciousness’ and Elliott’s ‘model of professionalism’ seem to court teachers and yet to spurn us. They seem to offer no way in which the reflections of competent teachers can be used to show educational development.

My account of work with Poppy thus highlights a tension between the educational theory presented by academics and my own understanding of competent practice in teaching. As I wrote this paper I became determined to judge the quality and effectiveness of my professional practice by reference to my own educational standards which I understand by reflection on what I do in the classroom. Such reflections create a new form of educational knowledge which is grounded in practice and it challenges those academics who attempt to talk for me.

Working with Poppy

Why Poppy? In July 1991 I was still interested in improving the kind of conversations I had with girls in my classroom. I interviewed a number of girls from the class I knew I was to teach for the following two years. I talked to them about their humanities work and intended to follow up work with all of them. I tried to build up a picture of them as learners and wanted to find out about what motivated them. When I talked to Poppy I began to understand that her writing was important to her because she became more enthusiastic and talked more personally about it than anything else.

The part of the discussion about her writing went like this:

Erica: *Have you got any strengths that I can build on in the humanities area?*

Poppy: *Writing.*

Erica: *Any particular form of writing?*

Poppy: *Any form. I just love it.*

Erica: *How do you go about it?*

Poppy: *Well, I just write it usually. I don’t think about it. You’re supposed to plan it out but I never do. I always find it goes wrong if I do that.*

Erica: *Do you draft out?*

Poppy: *No, I don’t do that either.*

Erica: *I see. Right.*

Poppy: I usually edit as I go along, which most people seem to find difficult but...

Erica: You find OK?

That conversation in July formed an unwritten agenda for me in my future work with Poppy. I intended to encourage her to think about her writing and to encourage her to draft and re-draft her work because that seemed to be a good thing to do in order to improve her writing.....

We talked in the classroom during a morning session. It took place amid a lot of activity as students were going in and out of the room to do observations, surveys etc. Poppy and I were interrupted a number of times and there's a lot of background noise on the tape. What's difficult in transcribing this is not being able to show the body language. At times in the transcript I appear to be going on a bit but it was in response to Poppy's intense look of interest and head nodding. I felt that she was willing me to carry on so that I'd get to what she wanted to pick up on. The main reason we talked was to look at her ideas for a piece of writing. The transcript shows our mutual engagement, with ideas being teased out and respected. We started by looking at the list of ideas she might write about.

Extract from a classroom conversation 18- 10- 91

Erica: Right, show me this thing. I'm really looking forward to this.

Poppy: I don't know why. It's like a brainstorm of my ideas - there are so many.

Erica: (reads) "Looks"

Poppy: Whether you think they're good or...

Erica: Oh right "Clothes, Jokes" What do you mean, jokes? Don't understand that.

Poppy: Can't remember now actually.

Erica: People making fun of them?

Poppy: Could be. Yes.

Erica: " Friends. Enemies" (Reads a list) Got any more? That about sums up the human race. I'm not sure what you mean by "taste" Is that about anxieties about peer group then?

Poppy: Yes.

Erica: Can I write something on this book?

Poppy: Yes

Erica: (Writes " Is that peer group pressure?") " Physical appearance." Those things always interest me. How people feel about themselves.

Poppy: Yes

Erica: Whether they are too fat, too thin, too ugly, too beautiful. Whether their hair is too long, too short or whatever.

Which one of these... choose, say, three things that you think you've got enough ideas about to explore a bit further.

Poppy: Could be any of them - except allergies or diseases. I wouldn't do that one.

Erica: Well look, why don't we start off with things that you've got anxieties about?

Poppy: All of these actually.

Erica: Things that are most, sort of, make you most anxious and then- if you're going to write

Poppy: Yes, you have to know something about them.

Erica: Yes. OK. Do you want to start at the bottom and go up or at the top and come down?

Poppy: " Guilt" - All the time!

Erica: OK - about what sort of things?

Poppy: Something you think you've done wrong. You think you've offended someone.

Erica: Guilt about how you treat other people or what you say? Work? Not much?

Poppy: Not on the whole.

Erica: Scrub that one?

Poppy: Yes

Erica: Ok. Sex?

Poppy: Frequently

Erica: That's anxieties about growing up and wondering what is it?

Poppy: *Exactly*

Erica: *Scrub that one then?*

Poppy: *“Secrets”. If you’ve got secrets you don’t want anybody to know so you get worried about them.*

Erica: *Right and you can’t share them. So they’re... that might be difficult for a character.*

Poppy: *It would be*

Erica: *You’re still having to draw that line between what’s Poppy and what’s character. And that might be for your private writing that you don’t want other people to read, that you don’t want me to read or an audience*

Poppy: *You can have secrets about other things though.*

Erica: *Like what?*

Poppy: *I don’t know. Secrets I haven’t got secrets about.*

Erica: *Right. So you could make them up. (Yes) Fine. “Past”*

Poppy: *Pretty wide that isn’t it?*

Erica: *Yes because it links with secrets, in a sense.*

Poppy: *Yes it links with a lot of things.*

Up until that point I felt that we’d been skirting around what was concerning Poppy. We were at ease with each other and had given each other room to talk about ideas. It wasn’t my aim to get Poppy to open up her private self to me because that could leave her in a vulnerable position. I wanted her to feel confident enough to write about what was important to her. She did open up though, in a way which showed that she trusted me to listen to her and to accept that her concerns were important. I knew after I said ‘families’ that Poppy wanted to explore this further. She kept nodding and affirming what I said. I talked about divorced families as a hunch. I had no knowledge of Poppy’s family circumstances.....

(2) ACCOUNTABILITY: RENDERING AN ACCOUNT - NOVEMBER 1992

Introduction

In July 1992, having described my practice with one year 10 student, Poppy, in which I showed how we had worked together in a collaborative and supportive way to improve the quality of our work, I wanted to put that practice into context by

describing what I'd done with the rest of her class. Was I able to show that I could work collaboratively and supportively with other students? How had my work with Poppy and the understanding I'd come to about dialogue informed my work with the rest of her class?

My work with Poppy had taken place among her class, 10 Mh, and yet I wrote about Poppy as if we'd been in a room on our own. I'd seldom mentioned 10Mh in my paper, only once recognising they were there by writing that Poppy and I .." talked in the classroom during a morning session. It took place amid a lot of activity as students were going in and out of the room to do observations, surveys etc. Poppy and I were interrupted a number of times and there's a lot of noise on the tape." (Holley 1992)

Writing about one student as if the others didn't exist is like writing about the eye of the storm: it appears calm, peaceful and intense but ignores a whole lot of other things that are going on in the classroom. There isn't just her class to consider either, as what goes on in the rest of the school affects our work too. The image of a Russian doll comes to mind as I write: a student, her class, her teacher, the school, the local education authority, the DFE and so on.

My original intention, then, was to write about my practice with 10Mh over the year September 91 to July 92. It seemed a logical step to take and a simple enough paper to write; but it wasn't. A lot got in my way. This year I have understood the curse "may you live in interesting times". These times are 'interesting' because of government policies that affect the work of all schools and the people in them.

Since writing that paper about Poppy I have read much about what teachers should be doing and how they should be doing it. The writers haven't always been academics but have often been politicians, and their missives on education and teaching have had an effect on the way my school and its curriculum is managed and has inevitably touched on my work in the classroom, with 10 Mh and other classes.

The National Curriculum is still being amended with far-reaching consequences for teachers and students. Professor Paul Black who helped devise the government's tests for students recently accused ministers of a " *monumental cock-up* " (*The Guardian* 1991) over changes to the National Curriculum. He believed that changes were disruptive and teachers were beginning to think that the curriculum wasn't worth taking seriously because it was bound to keep changing. At the beginning of September 1992 when the government announced yet another 'further review' of English teaching Melanie Phillips of *'The Guardian'* was moved to write that the constant changes in the curriculum indicated,

" a turbulence of constantly changing politicians and advisers, driven by panic and political opportunism to change their minds all the time. But there is one deeper, unpalatable reason for such neurotic behaviour. It is that the government simply does not trust its teachers to exercise their professional judgement. As a result, it

feels driven not merely to lay down broad parameters but to describe in ever closer detail what they must do' (The Guardian 11.9.92)

The message that “ *the government simply does not trust its teachers*” seemed to me to be mirrored by the way changes were made in my school and I began to feel, as the year progressed, that the school managers didn't trust its teachers' professional judgements either.

It now seems important not to simply put my work with Poppy into context by writing about her class, but to put my work in the classroom with 10 Mh into the wider context of school and politics. Not to do that would be to distort the experience of what I did.....

(3) ACCOUNTING FOR MY WORK - JUNE 1993

Introduction

Until recently my research has centred upon my concerns as a classroom teacher as I've tried to understand and improve the quality of dialogue and collaborative work that takes place between myself and my students. I've characterised the work I do with students as collaborative because “*It allows parity in dialogue despite the unequal power relationship*” and the work we undertake “*enables both of us to change because of our insights and our developing understanding of our own educational development*” (Holley 1992). I believe that collaborative work based on dialogue is crucial to improving the quality of education in school so I now want to look at another aspect of my work in school, as head of the humanities department and as an appraiser, to see if I can live out those values when working with colleagues.

In writing this account of my practice I am attempting to show what it is to work with students and colleagues to improve our work in school. In the telling of this story I am holding up my work to public criticism because I am accountable for the work I do and my accountability links me to others, students and staff. I believe that my integrity as a teacher and head of department can only be sustained by my willingness to be open to informed criticism of my work and to be held to account in this way.

The main part of this paper will be a description of the work I did with David Ross from November to March 1993 as a part of the appraisal system. I was the appraiser, David the appraisee. All teachers in the UK now have to be appraised and at Greendown our appraisal policy statement says

“All staff have a right and a duty to be part of an appraisal process. Our appraisal scheme is based on the fundamental concept that teachers are competent professionals who continually wish to improve their practice and that of their students. We have adopted a view of appraisal which is based on the concept of professional research and development where staff accept a research role which will enable them

to evaluate their own performance and undertake professional development. Such evaluation must, within our appraisal system, involve a sharing of experience with other professionals, in which judgements are directed at the further development of teaching and educational management". By stating that teachers will "research, evaluate and share 'appraisal becomes a process which encourages reflective practice and dialogue with others in order to improve the quality of education within the school and is therefore something I am happy to be involved in.

But life in a school isn't always so straightforward and simple. Instead of rushing into a description of the work David and I did, I just want to pause to place our work in context. Our work took place alongside a new, formal system of monitoring staff in school; such a monitoring system wasn't intended to be collaborative or based on dialogue and such a contradiction in my working life was difficult. My educational values have never been so immediately challenged and denied by the people I work with. It's important then that you understand what was going on around us when David's appraisal was taking place.

The monitoring system

The monitoring system was introduced in September 1992 despite widespread criticism and hostility to it by the majority of teaching staff. It was to be carried out by three groups of senior managers: the head and deputies; senior teachers in charge of Key Stages in the school and heads of department. All were required to visit classes, observe teachers and complete a check-sheet to show whether the teacher concerned had achieved the list of 'basic' and 'higher level' competencies. The governors' policy entitled "*Institutional quality assurance and the professional development of staff*" stated that the system of monitoring basic practice "*defines minimum classroom performance indicators and defines minimum professional practice through the use of performance indicators for all staff... the indicators are designed to be as objective and simple as possible although some degree of qualitative judgement is inevitable*" (Nov. 92)

The monitoring system was described to parents in a newsletter thus "*Greendown has been redesigned ... one result of this has been the introduction of systems for quality control to regularly check and assess the quality of teaching... We have set up a classroom 'quality control' system where all staff are regularly observed teaching and where standards of performance of staff and students can be improved... as part of this Senior staff undertake regular monitoring sessions... As from this September the Head and Deputies conduct regular surveys of a whole class ... Key Stage Senior Teachers make regular inspections of the classwork and homework completed by students; Heads of Departments visit subject teachers and advise on specialist techniques, assessment and the introduction of the National Curriculum.*" (Parents Newsletter 1992).

The management team seemed to think that monitoring and appraisal complemented each other but I couldn't see how. Monitoring to me was a system of surveillance which measured a teacher's competence against a set of criteria defined by the management team; appraisal was about reflective understanding, collaboration and

dialogue between teachers. This was a terrible contradiction for me. As David's head of department I was expected to monitor and judge his teaching according to what the management said were 'hard-edged' objective criteria set out on the checklist; as David's appraiser I was expected to engage in a dialogue about his practice and support his attempts to improve it. Andy Larter described the contradiction exactly " *You can't imply, through some checklist, that someone is incompetent and then... at a later date, say, 'Really you are competent. It's just nobody's perfect' You can't be Big Brother one week and the Good Shepherd the next " (Larter 9/10/92)*

I wasn't isolated in my concerns about monitoring; they were shared by many of the staff. A senior advisor in the County was invited into the school to talk to the first group of 'monitored' staff about the process. Their comments were noted for discussion and included the following points out of a list of sixteen:

- "- teachers felt that the monitoring sheet should be changed in the light of experience. They felt it operated like a checklist.*
- they were concerned as to how the information was to be used. They didn't want it linked to pay policy.*
- they asked who the senior management talked to as a result of monitoring*
- there is confusion between monitoring and appraisal.*
- teachers were unclear about the purposes of monitoring"*

Such points highlighted the confusions about the monitoring process. My department used the words *'tiresome, ineffective, insensitive, insulting and punitive'* to describe the whole business. And there I was in the middle of it expected to appraise and to monitor.