

2. SECOND CYCLE - ACTION ENQUIRY, IMPROVING YOUR ACCOUNT AND DEVELOPING ACTION ENQUIRY WITHIN SCHOOLS

Comments on first reports, in the context of self and peer evaluations often reveal that the reports lack evidence on the quality of pupils' learning. In the example below Daniela De Cet shows how she avoided such criticism by integrating evidence from her pupils in her answers to her questions, *How can I develop my teaching of poetry to my GCSE classes?* and, *How can I develop the pupils' understanding of the process of writing poetry and encourage them to regard it as a 'legitimate' form of writing?*

Daniela's contribution is following by the presentation of an historical introduction to Action Research. This should enable you to relate your enquiry to the key theoretical texts in the field and to the practical enquiries of colleagues in local schools. The two articles which then follow, by Andy Larter and Kevin Eames, show how action enquiries were supported through the review and development processes in Greendown and Wootton Bassett Schools. Some of this material was used in a training programme in action research for over 80 Avon Advisory teachers and some 400 staff development tutors in the Summer of 1990.

This material raises questions about the form of educational management which can support the action enquiries of individual teachers. The approach described by Kevin Eames is very similar to the advice distributed by the Department of Education and Science in 1989 on planning for school development. Where the enquiries of staff at Wootton Bassett went further than this advice is on the issue of the evidence to substantiate judgements on the quality of pupil learning. The action enquiry approaches pioneered at Wootton Bassett and Greendown offered support for a form of professional development which focused on the quality of pupil learning.

Kevin's two year secondment to a Wiltshire Assessment Project and the pressures exerted on Greendown School before its excellent OFSTED report of 1994 took some of the energy away from the development of the action research groups. However, Moyra Evans (1995) at Denbigh School together with Pam Lomax have, over the past three years (1992-95), created a particularly impressive partnership to support an action research approach to professional and school development which is similar in form to that described by Kevin Eames later in the Guide. In 1994 the ESRC funded project, Teachers as Researchers, conducted a survey to discover which Institutions of Higher Education were judged to be centres of excellence for action research. Bath and Kingston were amongst the six institutions chosen by our peers. Project researchers will be analysing our work throughout 1995.

HOW CAN I DEVELOP THE PUPILS' UNDERSTANDING OF THE PROCESS OF WRITING POETRY AND ENCOURAGE THEM TO REGARD IT AS A 'LEGITIMATE' FORM OF WRITING?

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INTRODUCTION

My concern in this, my third action research cycle, was related to the teaching of poetry to my GCSE classes. Why this concern with poetry and with this particular age group? In short it was because poetry was the form of writing which had been most neglected in my teaching of GCSE. This was not, I hasten to add, because I did not value the writing of poetry enough, but rather because with the introduction GCSE I was not able to tackle everything at once, and, because I felt that poetry would probably be difficult to assess, I concentrated on developing assignments for other types of writing. I continued to use poetry a great deal, but the writing of poetry took on a much lower profile, and to date I have only once entered any original poetry as part of a pupil's coursework for GCSE. This imbalance between the reading and writing of poetry was in complete contrast to what happens in my lower school classes where there has always been a much healthier balance between the two.

My research questions then were: 1) how can I develop my teaching of poetry to my GCSE classes? and 2) how can I develop the pupils' understanding of the process of writing poetry and encourage them to regard it as a 'legitimate' form of writing?

I wish to include in this introduction some of the things which served to affect my concern about poetry and then try to develop two strands relevant to this concern. These are: a) why I value poetry; and b) how I went about encouraging my pupils to write, and to develop a greater understanding of the process of writing poetry.

One event which certainly affected my style of teaching poetry, and which occurred early in my career, was my involvement in a Writer-in-Residence scheme which I organised whilst teaching in my previous school. It involved a series of workshops and resulted in the publication of an anthology of the pupils' most successful writing. Our writer was a poet, Stephen Knight, and so the workshop sessions all focused on poetry. While Stephen conducted the three sessions I was able to act as a friendly "adviser/consultant". Watching Stephen provide the inspiration or trigger and then stand back to allow the pupils to think about and develop their own ideas (while still helping those who needed it) made me re-evaluate my own role when teaching creative writing. I recognised that I had played too dominant a part in what the pupils actually wrote; I had at times by trying to help, probably interfered in what the pupils wrote. In retrospect this lack of confidence in the pupils' own abilities was probably to do with lack of teaching experience and a natural wish to be "in charge" of my classes. My new outlook, to help rather than control, was further developed when I moved to Wootton Bassett School, and was certainly instrumental in developing my conscious approach to encouraging greater pupil autonomy. In fact many of the techniques and strategies I learnt from this experience are still evident in my teaching today.

Paradoxically the greater freedom offered by the introduction of GCSE did not automatically lead to my encouraging pupils to write and enter poetry as part of their GCSE coursework, but that was probably because the question of entering poetry for assessment at examination level is a difficult one. At one of the early GCSE meetings which I attended there was a discussion about this very point. There was some disagreement between those who felt that poetry should "stand alone", and those who felt that some sort of learning log or explanatory prose should accompany the poetry in order for it to be fairly assessed. My instincts at the time were to agree with the former: that aesthetically poetry should be able to stand alone and be judged on its own merit; but realistically I recognised that this could cause problems, for example one could possibly mistake what is deliberately abstract for awkwardness. Having spent some time focusing on the use of journal writing I now believe that the journal, as a record of the pupils' developing understanding of their own writing and as a way of their taking responsibility for their own work, should be recognised by both the pupil and the assessor as a valuable piece of writing in itself and is therefore worthy of being entered too. I do not necessarily mean entering the journal in its original form; it may tell a valuable story like this or a pupil may wish to translate it into some sort of commentary. Whichever form they choose, the journal can serve a valuable purpose in that even if some pupils do not succeed in producing poetry which might in itself impress the assessor, they could still show their understanding of the processes of writing poetry and of their own work.

On a final note I also attended an 'A' level moderation meeting around this time where a host of 'A' level teachers was asked to assess some poetry offered by one of the centres in the consortium. It was certainly interesting to hear such diverse comments and assessments on the same poems. While some found "Objective Corollaries in the Monkey House" 'A' grade material, others saw it as mere sixth form pretentiousness! This helped to clarify my opinions in that I could see that the response to poetry is so personal that to leave it "bare" to the assessor may, in fact, do the pupil a disservice. How would some of Stevie Smith's poems have been received at this meeting, I wonder.

So I was conscious that while I had continued to try to take my pupils forward in their understanding and appreciation of poetry, I had not been giving them the opportunity to use and so become more familiar with the form itself. It also occurred to me that if pupils are not constantly encouraged to write their own poetry, then the study of ever more sophisticated poetry could possibly alienate them even further from putting pen to paper. They might feel that their own poetry would be inadequate in relation to the poetry they are studying. This was shown by the attitude of my present 'A' level group who, when asked if they would like to enter some original poetry as part of their coursework, greeted my suggestion with a unanimously negative response. I am pleased to say that they have since produced some very successful poetry (although I have to add that this was under the guidance of the teacher with whom I share the group) but I was concerned that originally the group seemed to lack the confidence or the wish to engage in the writing poetry and of course the former can affect the latter.

I should add that in the virtual absence of poetry writing in the curriculum of my GCSE pupils I realised that I was denying them access to a form of writing which I value as both an English teacher and an individual. This is a real example of what Jack Whitehead calls the: "'I' as a living contradiction" in that I could see my own values as a practitioner being negated in my practice.

Finally one cannot talk about the curriculum anymore without taking into account the demands of the National Curriculum. It is interesting to note the decision about the place of poetry in the curriculum. In paragraph 17.29 of the National Curriculum document it says:

"We believe that, throughout the school years, all children should have ample opportunities to write poetry, either singly or in groups; this is made explicit in the programmes of study."

but it also adds:

"However, we have not included a poetry strand in the statements of attainment because we do not feel that any pupil should be required to write a poem in order to achieve a particular level of attainment."

and I wonder whether this is in recognition of the difficulty of assessing poetry.

WHY I VALUE POETRY

"Poetry is not a fanciful, trivial activity which can be lost from the curriculum. We are arguing that, with its linguistic challenge and its invitation to explore and celebrate every aspect of existence by going beyond objectivity, poetry undertakes a major role in helping people to grow. Given the proper climate, poetry gives shape to and celebrates existence; it also challenges and questions."

(from "Words large as apples - teaching poetry 11-18" by Mike Hayhoe and Stephen Parker).

While the writing of poetry is now firmly established in the National Curriculum for all years, I feel I should still try to describe its value in the classroom. As a teacher of the "verbal arts" I naturally value the "linguistic challenge" that poetry can offer and I also feel that it is the greater linguistic freedom it allows which can result in exciting work from the school children. While some pupils do find poetry to be a difficult and problematic form, many, and this very much includes less able pupils, also find it to be a release from the rules of prose. It can become a game with words and the challenge then becomes something to enjoy rather than endure.

It's not just the words, the "linguistic challenge" which is of value either, it's the ideas too: poetry's "invitation to explore and celebrate every aspect of existence..." While I wouldn't like to imply that in schools we even try to cover "every aspect of existence" I do feel that poetry can allow pupils to work on ideas in a much more creative and inventive way than they do in prose and it can also be an important forum for pupils to write on a subject about which they have strong feelings. While the exam ethic should not interfere with the decision to write poetry it is a reality for fourth and fifth year pupils, and I would like to see poetry being recognised by the pupils as a legitimate form of writing and, as such, one which is worthy of being entered for an English exam.

Personally I find it difficult to articulate why I value poetry without sounding glib or clichéd. However I was somewhat appeased by the example Jack Whitehead used to illustrate "a more general problem of describing, in language, the ethical and aesthetic qualities in a person's practice". This was a comparison of a linguistic analysis of love with the aesthetic presentation of John Donne's poem "The Extasie". In a sense there was little to compare only to contrast; aesthetics allowed the latter to have much more meaning than the former. Likewise I find it difficult in this form to express the value of poetry, perhaps because the value is so personal as well as being part of the values I hold as a teacher. I can say that I firmly believe that I should give my pupils the aesthetic experience of writing and reading poetry and will leave the rest to Ted Hughes who expresses the kind of learning which I feel is, and should be, stimulated by poetry:

"There is an inner life, which is the world of final reality, the world of memory, emotion, imagination, intelligence, and natural common sense, and which goes on all the time, consciously or unconsciously, like the heart beat. There is also the thinking process by which we break into that inner life and capture answers and evidence to support the answers out of it. That process of raid, or persuasion, or ambush, or dogged hunting, or surrender, is the kind of thinking we have to learn and if we do not somehow learn it, then our minds lie in us like the fish in the pond of a man who cannot fish."

To extend the simile, I see the role of the teacher as one which encourages children to search through that "inner life" and I personally think that poetry can be one of the rods which facilitates their capturing something of value.

THE PROCESS OF WRITING POETRY

In common with other forms of writing, poetry needs a stimulus, it needs to be shaped and crafted by the writer, using drafting, redrafting and reflection within the process of the writing. As with the other areas of writing I have worked on I wanted the pupils to take as much control as possible in the production of their work, and they would be more able to do this if their understanding of the process of writing in this particular form was developed. Again I felt it would be the use of a journal which would help pupils to develop this understanding in that it would make their thinking explicit.

I wanted to encourage pupils to focus on what they did, on what they produced and on what they discovered about the writing of poetry. I recognised that some pupils would need more help than they do with other, more familiar, forms of writing e.g. story writing. For most secondary school pupils poetry only enters their lives now and then: mainly in English lessons, but occasionally in other areas of the curriculum and perhaps in the lyrics of the pop songs they listen to (although they don't usually make the connection). I hoped that for those pupils who did find poetry difficult to write, the journal could take on another role, that of a dialogue, as well as being a place for personal reflection. Incidentally, I did not feel that the dialogue needed to be exclusively with me, but with any valued response partner.

I did not really want to go into poetry cold, starting with "Today we are going to DO poetry." However, working with an examination class and having coursework to complete does cause certain restrictions. The department is also, in many cases, working towards making the curriculum more explicit to the pupils in order to help them assess their work. This involves informing the pupils what they will be aiming to do and achieve in a given module. However in this particular case I did not want the sort of introduction which was over explicit, and because this was my first attempt, I preferred to work my way through in an investigative way. I did not want pupils to have too many preconceptions about poetry and so did not discuss it as a form at all. I did plan that when the pupils had produced their poems they would be presented in an anthology with accompanying commentaries and perhaps an introduction and conclusion.

What follows is an approach to teaching the writing of poetry which I tried this time. I had not planned the three main strands before I started, but moved about where I felt it would be appropriate to go next. Therefore I do not see these three ideas as forming a series of lessons to be followed. They are rather the story of what happened in my attempt to produce some work on poetry which would be of value to the pupils, to their development as writers, and which I hoped would meet the criteria for GCSE.

STAGE ONE

As I did not wish to begin with any exemplar material or by focusing specifically on poetry I started by introducing non-literary texts, in this case photographs, into the class as a stimulus for writing. I wanted to use a visual stimulus so that the pupils were not influenced by any writing, either its content or its style. We have in school a series of photographs with accompanying poems called "Pictures and Poems", and it was these photographs which I decided to use with the class. At first I considered using the poems too, perhaps after the pupils had written their own poems, but disregarded this as it smacked of offering them the 'official' or 'correct' versions by 'real' poets.

The photographs come in five categories entitled: "Families", "Trees and Flowers", "Creatures", "People and Animals" and "Ourselves". There are twelve photographs in each category and they are striking, often close-

up shots. I distributed a selection from each folder to each table of three to four pupils and asked each pupil to choose one photograph which they particularly liked and which they felt they could write about, although at this stage I did not mention any particular form of writing. I offered some flexibility in that if pupils could not find a photograph from their own table's selection, then they could look at another table's.

Once each pupil had selected a photograph I asked them to look at it very carefully, to look at the foreground, background, texture, etc., and to write a list in their exercise books of all the words, phrases, ideas which came to mind. I also asked them to try to think of any similes or metaphors which described any part of the photograph (the pupils were familiar with these terms having worked on some prose descriptions earlier in the year). I also asked them to "listen" to the photographs. Were there any sounds in the photographs? If so, what were they? How would they describe the sounds? I gave the pupils fifteen to twenty minutes for this, then asked them to give the photograph a final look and to note down anything more they could think of, e.g. anything which might sum up the whole of the photograph.

After the brainstorming I gave the class some time to look at what they had written and to underline or mark what they considered to be their best or favourite ideas, words, phrases, etc. Encouraging the pupils to select from their own work not only maintains their ownership, but develops their ability to be discriminating about their own ideas. I then moved on to the journal as I wanted the pupils to reflect on these decisions before they went any further. I asked the pupils to write a journal entry in which they considered why they had selected the photograph and to reflect on their selected ideas/phrases. This way they had to think carefully about the decisions they had made and in a sense to justify them. Although this preliminary work leaned towards descriptive writing of some sort, I asked the pupils to say, if given the choice, which type of writing they would do and why. I originally thought that I might then ask those who hadn't selected poetry to say why, but realised that this would not necessarily tell me much. Those who had not chosen poetry had not necessarily consciously decided not to write poetry, but had rather, positively selected another form.

It was following this stage that I finally mentioned poetry and told the class that I wanted each of them to write a poem about their photograph. As I had not done any introductory work specific to the writing of poetry and did not want to start being prescriptive about poems themselves (all the preliminary work was relevant but could have been used for other types of writing too), I felt the best revision exercise would be to get the pupils to write haikus (a Japanese form of poetry which has three lines of five syllables in the first line; seven and five respectively.) While this is a frequently used form in schools, especially with the younger pupils, I still felt it would offer the pupils the opportunity to "tune in" to poetry writing through action or practice. One of the most basic and important lessons in poetry is the significance of every word because as Ted Hughes says, "A word is its own little solar system of meanings"; and the haiku, with its total of seventeen syllables, forces the writer to do just that and consider each word. Most, if not all the pupils, were familiar with the form of the haiku, but I did remind them and asked them to think about the 'nature' or purpose of the haiku i.e. it is an attempt to capture the essence of its subject. I asked the pupils to take any perspective of their photograph for their haikus e.g. they could try and sum up the whole photograph or focus on one part of it. When the pupils had developed a haiku they were happy with, working through the writing process of drafting and redrafting, I asked them to write a journal entry about their haikus.

After this I asked the pupils to write another poem based on any aspect of their photograph, and this time with the freedom to use any form of poetry they wished. I said that they could use an idea from their haikus or move away completely into another area. I did not mention length or style of poetry at all. The pupils drafted out their poems for the next lesson, at the beginning of which, I asked them to write a journal entry saying what they liked about their poems and what they felt still needed working on. I did quite a lot of this journal writing in lesson time as I have found that journals are often more comprehensive, more detailed, and therefore more useful to the pupils, if written in the silence and working atmosphere of the classroom. Pupils then redrafted their poems and wrote another journal entry where they reflected on their finished poems and also considered what they felt they had learnt about the process of writing poetry through this work.

In some ways the journal writing was less free than in previous work I have done in that I asked the pupils to "reply" to some specific questions, but as I have been considering different forms of writing, I have also recognised that the journal can be more or less directed by the teacher. When pupils were considering an issue e.g. stereotyping, I felt that they needed the freedom to record or even discuss any thoughts which they had. They could select what was important later on. With this work on poetry I felt that it would help the pupils, at times, to have specific things to think about. Writing their journals would also mean that they had recorded their thoughts on their poems at the time of writing, and would be interesting for the pupils to look at when they came to write about their poems as part of the finished product to be entered for their GCSE.

THE SELECTION OF PUPILS

Trying to select case studies for the purposes of this report was difficult in that there was so much of interest going on across the ability range. In the end I decided to focus on two pupils of differing abilities who both struggled with poetry.

Claire is quite an able pupil who had the highest reading quotient (122) in the class. She is not, however, the most able in English - her coursework so far has been graded in the low 'B's. While she has some interesting ideas her written work does not always flow smoothly. I selected Claire as one of the pupils on whom to focus because in her journals she stated how much she disliked poetry, how difficult she found it, and yet in those same journals showed a real sense of development.

Anthony, on the other hand, interested me because of the apparent lack of real engagement in his poetry writing which was then reflected in his journal. He is in the middle to lower range of my mixed ability class (he has a reading quotient of 100) with his coursework grades being in the 'D' category. He is an extremely pleasant pupil and is quick and lively in oral work, but does not like redrafting so his work has been disappointing.

CLAIRE

The photograph Claire chose to work from was of a wood at sunset with the setting sun shining through the trees. Her brainstorm showed that she did have lots of ideas to start with and her first journal entry shows just how engaged she is with the subject of the photograph:

"I choose this photograph because it reminds me of my home, where I walk over the hills. It reminds me of happy memories of my old dog and my 2 new dogs when they played in the grass and tried to chase rabbits and get up trees after birds. It reminds me of everything I want out of life. Peace, love and natural things. Not smokey old cities with hi tec this and hi tec that.

I like muck and and this reminds me of it.

I choose the mysterious phrase (Claire is referring to the word 'mystery' in her brainstormed list of words) because I don't want to know everything about nature I want to keep on finding new things and exploring them.

I like the idea of life, movement and texture it gives me the complete feeling of being alone and alone with nature.

I like the fact that there is no pressure in the trees noone is asking you to keep on doing things and keep getting at me.

Noone to hurt you appealed to me because I hear of alot of rapes mugging, stabbings in the city. I like the fact of being out in the wilderness where noone can get at me."

When asked to say which type of writing, based on the photograph, she would like to do Claire continues:

"I'd like to write about this photograph as a discriptive story with life and texture explaining the beauty and life in the forest.

A clip out of a diary I kept on a forest maybe. Telling people the benifits of the forest the way technolgy has ruined the world we choose to live in.

I could even write about this as a debate for an Environmental issue making people understand forests and making them know there is life in forests. They are not just trees, lifeless lumps of wood.

In any piece I do I will, if I can, make people begin to take notice of the forest, make them understand wildlife and the natural beauty surroounding them. What they try to destroy. The magic of life."

It's clear from her journal just how engaged and involved Claire felt at this stage. She is full of ideas, memories and sensations which could be channelled into writing. In his book "Poetry in the Making" Ted Hughes said that to write poetry you have to:

"...imagine what you are writing about. See it and live it. Do not think it up laboriously, as if you were working out mental arithmetic. Just look at it, touch it, smell it, listen to it, turn yourself into it. When you do this the words look after themselves, like magic."

This Claire has obviously done and yet what happened immediately after served to stop her creative flow. At this stage I introduced the haiku, asking the pupils to work on a haiku which expressed or summed up either a part or the whole of their photographs. Claire wrote four haikus, choosing the last as her best:

*Tranquil trees stand tall
Spanning over fresh spring grass
Noises all around.*

At this point Claire's journal records a very different attitude to the previous entry. Her dislike of writing poetry comes through strongly and it appears that being forced into writing the haiku did not help her to focus her ideas, but rather served to disperse all those she had. Hughes also recommends that children should, "develop the habit of all-out flowing exertion, for short, concentrated periods, in a definite direction." While Claire's journal had allowed this, the haiku did just the opposite. Unlike her future journals, too, Claire does not discuss or analyse the haiku in any detail.

"I don't like writing haikus or any sort of poetry (whether this is poetry or not I don't know)

I don't seem to make the sound right. It doesn't seem to flow.

The photo gave me a lot of ideas, descriptions, stories and things like that but when it came to Poems all my ideas and inspiration goes, just blanks out.

When I thought of a story I thought of colours, heard noises, smelt the forest smells. It reminded me of where I live. Then when I came to writing the Haiku I lost it all.

I looked at the picture heard nothing and thought hardly anything from that point I had no imagination.

I found describing the picture in a Haiku was hard to do. I couldn't think of the words to describe several things at once. To do a better Haiku I should've enlisted the help of a Thesaurus or something similar.

The Haiku I choose at the end I thought was the only one I wrote that actually began to describe the photo. I also found it difficult to pack the whole photo into a few words with certain syllables."

While this lacked any analysis of the haiku itself, I felt it would serve as an invaluable record for Claire of her feelings at this point. Even though she was only asked to write a three-lined poem, she obviously felt a great tension: "I looked at the picture heard nothing" When it came to the longer poem Claire wrote a first draft with some strong images and it is perhaps the release from the restriction of the haiku form; the fact that she is more able to think of ideas; and the fact that Claire is "reasonably pleased" with parts of her poem, that make her discuss the poem itself in much more detail. At this stage Claire's poem looked like this:

THREE DAYS INTO MARCH

*Tranquill trees stand tall,
As a spring sun rises majestically into the sky
A wisp of fresh breeze stirs gently,
rattling twigs, swaying branches
brushing leaves gently together
A soft blanket of grass spans the floor,
Old leaves still wither.
A silent timeless world of aging beauty
has a power to cure and heal
Unlike an ugly world of technology,
Which spews Death and destruction from an acrid mouth.*

*The forest is a haven of peace and purity,
A sensuous world where a natural conflict takes place
Against man and all his Evil.*

In a lengthy journal Claire says:

"I am reasonably pleased with the 1st and 2nd verses of my poem. The first verse I have tried to paint a picture in the readers mind. Some of the describing words could be better so the next stage is to run through finding better words for things.

In the second verse I tried to compare it with an opposite form. In this case a technology world City verses forest type thing. I tried to make out the benefits of the forest and what it can do.

The 3rd verse still needs a lot of working on. I think it needs to be longer like the other verses and I need to play around with the words so the mind can conjure up pictures not necessarily the same as someone else's mind.

I am still comparing the forest in verse 3 trying to make it sound one of the best places on earth especially if you don't like the hustle and bustle of a city.

I haven't decide whether to do a verse 4 or 5 yet. If I do they will probably be about a night in the forest compared with the city and persuading people not to spoil the forest.

I haven't really decide to do this but I may add it to see what the poem runs like with two more verses added on.

I found poetry very hard to write. It took a lot of thinking to get words in the right place and I still haven't finished. Thinking of things to write about isn't hard but finding the words to describe them is. It also has to be the right type of word to fit into the rhythm of the poem. I feel I need to set myself more of a rhythm so the poem is easy to read and rolls of the tongue better. I think I need better similes and metaphor so people can compare it to things they all ready know.

Thinking about it lines like 'man and all his Evil' might not appeal to people and might... on if that is what she thinks of humans I don't want to know. Some people though may agree. So I might, for the benefit of those who don't agree, have to tactfully point out what I mean.

I also think I need to put more Heart and effort into the first 3 verses before I start the 4th and 5th verses."

While she is obviously more involved with her longer poem than with her haiku, Claire again states how difficult she finds writing poetry. However even with the struggle, and perhaps because of it, Claire brings up some very interesting points about poetry eg "... I need to play around with the words so that the mind can conjure up pictures not necessarily the same as someone else's mind." Here Claire acknowledges an important concept in the writing of poetry and the use of imagery. Likewise, without any prompting she, along with a number of other pupils, mentions 'rhythm' and her wish that her poem "...is easy to read and rolls of the tongue better." I found this interesting as at this stage I wanted pupils to find their own way into

their poems without too much of a contribution from me; I wanted to see what they could do on their own. Claire's concern with rhythm therefore became her own rather than her simply following my advice. This is just the sort of autonomy I wish to encourage, not an independence without direction, but a chance for pupils to take responsibility for finding their own directions.

Claire's next draft looked like this:

*Tranquill trees stand tall
as a spring sun rises magestically into the sky
A wisp of fresh breeze stirs gently,
rattling twigs, swaying branches,
brushing leaves gently together.
Old leaves still decay.*

*A silent timeless world of ageing beauty
has the power to cure and heal
Unlike an ugly world of Tecnology,
Spewing Death and Destruction from an acrid mouth.*

*The forrest is a haven of peace and purity
A senuos world where a natural conflict takes place
Against man and his Evil.
The battle is useless there is no winner.*

After working on her poem again Claire continues to analyse the content of the poem and writes this time about the use of specific words. I wrote after her redrafted poem: "Considering how difficult you say you find poetry, I think you've done a pretty good job!" as I felt that in her journal and in conversation Claire was perhaps being over critical and I was concerned that she was not taking enough enjoyment from her writing. However it was probably that very dissatisfaction which drove her to continue working on and improving her poem.

*"In this new draft I have taken out 'A Soft blanket of grass spans the floor.' because I didn't really like it. I found I couldn't change it to sound right in the poem so I left it out.
I used my Haiku as a base for the poem using the first line of the Haiku as the first line of the poem. I found that easier to start it off and I think it was a good idea to use that aid to help me as I don't consider myself to be a poet.
I think my favourite verse was verse two. It was the one I most felt strongly about. Verse one sort of got going verse two aired my views about the differences of the photo and the other world. I also tried to use words to my own advantage. 'Acrid' was one of them. I used it in my own way which gave it a more interesting line.
The 3rd verse I absolutly got stuck on. I could not find anything to finish it off. I had had a break from poetry and that had dislodged any ideas i had for verse 3. I had verses in my mind of how they would sound and what they would say but I took the break and I cannot get going again. Even now I am not happy with the way things turned out. I don't think that the 3rd verse is quite what I had expected.
I am not that impressed with the last line but I still cannot think of ways to change it."*

Here Claire shows very clearly that she "knows" her poem and understands how it works. Although Claire's final comments on her poetry writing so far turned into a list of what she had learnt there were still some important observations about her own work:

*"I think out of the poetry lessons I have had I have learnt to use less words but each word has a purpose and I learnt to use good describing words as well. Whether that reflex in my poem or not I don't know but thats what I hope to have done.
Doing a Brainstorm first was a good idea because I normally go blank at poetry. I can try and think of a discription to get all the words down I may need later. I think that you can set poems out as you like because however you read some poems they make sense.
I also learnt to use words to my own advantage. Like changing the meaning very slightly. Acrid was one example. It is a word for describing a smell (bitter). I used it to describ a voice (bitter). That way you can change words just slightly to fit your needs.
I found out that poetry needs a lot of thought and attention.
My personal thing I found out was I seem to need to do poems all in one go I can't from break from them and restart the poem. I seem to lose all my thoughts during any break I take.
I also found out that Haiku's helped tremendously."*

Even in this first attempt at a poem I felt that Claire's struggle to get things right and the problems she had were part of a very important learning process. In other forms of writing language is usually seen as the tool, something which enhances the content. Here Claire is beginning to toy with language in a slightly different

way: "I also learnt to use words to my own advantage" and I wonder whether she would have used 'acid' in the way she did in a story. At least in poetry she has recognised that, "you can change words just slightly to fit your needs." I also feel that Claire's journal served as a release for the frustration she felt and yet at the same time helped her to focus on her problems and her learning.

ANTHONY

Anthony's whole approach to writing poetry could not have been more different. The photograph he chose was of a large, mature blossom tree in bloom. His original list of words was very short containing no interesting words or phrases and his journal was likewise short and uninspiring:

"I chose this photograph because it looked attractive, and reminded me of a hot sunny day. I chose phrases which remind me of spring, because the tree in the picture looks as though it has got blossom on it. I would write a poem about this tree because it looks like the sort of tree that a poem good be written about."

However, although Anthony said a poem would be his choice of form, he did not seem to be particularly engaged with his work. He only wrote one haiku and his entire redrafting consisted of substituting "prepared" for "waiting" in his third line. The haiku ran:

*Blossom tree stands tall
Above all other nature
Prepared for winter.*

Although he included the correct number of syllables in each line, I did not feel that Anthony had really tried his best to express or sum up some aspect of his photograph. Yet in his journal he wrote:

"I am pleased with my Haiku because, the picture that I chose was off only a tree with a fence in the background, and making up a Haiku to go with the picture brings out the tree in more detail. I think that my Haiku flows and links together fairly well. Writing the first version took a fair bit off thinking, but after finishing it, I thought that it was worth while. The hardest bit about writing my Haiku, was writing the last line, because I could only have a maximum of five syllables."

Here I feel Anthony goes through the motions of journal writing: "I think that my Haiku flows and links together fairly well," but he has not really thought about his ideas or the writing process. Indeed the blossom tree in the photograph is in bloom and so the idea of its being "prepared for winter" is an odd one. Neither does he say anything about the language or ideas in his haiku. I suspect he wrote both without too much thought. Also he was far too satisfied with what was a very mediocre haiku.

However, what happened next was interesting because Anthony tried to 'translate' the haiku into a longer poem and its lack of creative interest becomes more apparent to him in the longer version. The first draft read as follows:

*The blossom tree stands tall,
in the field, with no worry at all.
The wind blows gently through the leaves,
A typical spring day.
The birds and the bees flying from one tree to the next.*

While I would flinch at "with no worry at all" recognising it as a poor attempt at rhyme rather than a sophisticated attempt at personification, I expected Anthony to be quite satisfied with it. Instead his journal entry below shows Anthony's recognition of the lack of quality in his poem:

"I think that my poem, is not good. Poetry is something that I feel that I don't like, and I'm not very good at. I think, to be able to write poetry is a talent that you have either got or you haven't got. To make it a bit better I think I could change some of the words, to similes, for instance in line one."

It is possible that Anthony was trying to justify the fact that his poem was "not good" by saying that he is not very good at writing poetry. He did acknowledge that he could improve his poem but only in a very general way.

When it came to redrafting Anthony changed very little:

*The blossom tree stands tall,
at the edge of a field, with no worry at all.
The wind is blowing gently through the leaves,
A typical spring day.
Bee's flying from one tree to the next.*

although he did at least recognise that it was a photograph of spring, not autumn! In his journal though Anthony shows that he does actually recognise much of what is wrong with his poem:

"I think that my poem still needs a bit more work doing on it. I am a little bit happier than what I was before. What I would like to do is replace some of the words for words with the same meaning. The words, I feel are not as descriptive as words in a poem should be. I am not sure weather to scrap two or three lines, and completely re-write them. I also think that this poem might be better in the form of a Haiku, as a Haiku helps to get rid of all the words like and, the, etc as these words can appear to be a bit boring."

He has recognised that the language is not interesting enough and that the whole thing needs tightening up. Anthony then shows that he has started to work on these ideas. There is the beginning of another draft in his exercise book:

*A Blossom tree stands uprightly tall,
at the edge of a field,
With no worry at all,
A gentle breeze is blowing through the trees*

There are a few promising changes here. "Uprightly", although used clumsily with "tall" is, at least, a better word. He changes the second line, breaking it into two which emphasises what is now line 3 and the rhyming of "breeze/ trees" is a nice touch. Unfortunately Anthony did not continue with his redrafting and his journal, completed over two days simply pays lip-service to the questions asked:

"21/12/89

I have learned that writing poetry is a difficult thing to do even when your not trying to make words rhym.

22/12/89

I have learned how to use a thesaurus. Poetry can make you think, for different words with the same meaning"

When it came to producing his final anthology Anthony did not include his attempts at redrafting, using his second version as his final draft. His commentary, although quite lengthy, does little more than state the obvious e.g.:

"In the first line I was trying to give the impression of a big tall blossom tree wich is higher than all other objects around."

Here he simply explains the line rather than discussing it. I think part of Anthony's problem was that, unlike Claire, he did not bring to his chosen photograph any personal associations or his imagination, he simply tried to describe it. He did not "See it and live it" as Hughes recommended; there was no real engagement with the subject and so Anthony's poem was likewise uninspired. I do not believe this was to do with lack of ability as some pupils of lower ability than Anthony managed to produce much more lively poems which came from their engagement with the subject. One example was Jeff who produced a lively piece on a praying mantis and the evidence of his engagement is in his journal:

"I like Praying Mantis and most insects and the photo reminds Me of some horrer films I've seen before. The praying mantis has got his pray as well and I can rember the realy wild show showing two preying mantis and as soon as the person put them to gether the Female ripped the other Females head off."

Anthony, instead, shows in both his poetry and his journal, a lack of engagement which thus makes for some dull writing. In a sense it was a spiralling problem - he wasn't very engaged, he didn't write an interesting poem and so he wasn't interested in developing it. It may be Anthony's choice of photograph did not help, but it might also be that he is not used to drawing on the sort of language and ideas needed in poetry. At this stage I was unsure about how to inspire Anthony.

STAGE TWO

After working so intensely on these poems I felt the pupils needed some sort of break. My experience tells me that writing poetry is, for most pupils, more of a creative struggle than other forms of writing. In story writing there is always the narrative line to keep one on course. Even discursive writing usually has the preparatory work to signal the direction in which to go. However in poetry I feel that there is more of a creative strain in that the language must all work together in a more intensive way than prose. I felt that, because of this, the pupils needed a break from this intensity, perhaps a "reflective space" - a time to be released from the composing process, but which would hopefully encourage a freshness of thought and reflection on return. So I moved to another piece of writing - an unaided personal response to a short story. To a certain extent this maintained the pupils' need to look closely at a text but released them from creativity.

After this I wished to move back to poetry, but I wanted to do something quite different. Apart from writing a haiku, pupils had been free to choose or use any form they wished for their first poems and I felt this freedom was important at this stage as I didn't want the pupils to be burdened by form. This time I wanted to look at the place of style or form in poetry, but again I very much wanted the pupils to develop their understanding of writing poetry through using form rather than looking at it. I did not want to use the 'Here's an example of' school of poetry writing where the pupils look at a number of disconnected examples of various poetic techniques, as this can sometimes lead to these techniques being crammed in the pupils' poems in an ad hoc fashion. Instead I tried an interesting idea of one of my colleague's, Paul Siebert. He had used a poem with a very strict form called "There was a man of double deed" (appendix 1), with the pupils in order to increase their awareness of syllables, rhyme and similes, by getting them to write their own versions and using the exact framework of the original. While this did provide examples of poetic techniques they all had to work together in the poem. The poem has a rigid pattern and when teaching it Paul had used a grid in which to insert the recurring words and for the pupils to then use in order to 'fill in' their own poems. I started by asking pupils to find the patterns in the poem first and then to make the grid to fill in. Like the haiku this was not simply an exercise in discipline, but more in the way one can be creative within form - how a form might actually help generate ideas.

I liked the idea of moving the pupils from total freedom to quite rigid rules because it provided them with a complete contrast in the experience of writing poetry. Most of the pupils' first poems had not rhymed and had been written in free verse so here was a totally different 'school' of poetry. I used this strategy for the learning experience rather than the final product, I wanted the pupils to have a rigorous challenge with language and form.

APPENDIX 1

"There was a man of double deed"

There was a man of double deed
Who sowed his garden full of seed.
When the seed began to grow,
'Twas like a garden full of snow.
When the snow began to melt,
'Twas like a ship without a bell.
When the ship began to sail,
'Twas like a bird without a tail.
When the bird began to fly,
'Twas like an eagle in the sky.
When the sky began to roar,
'Twas like a lion at the door.
When the door began to crack,
'Twas like a stick across my back.
When my back began to smart,
'Twas like a penknife in my heart.
When my heart began to bleed,
'Twas death, and death, and death indeed.

Anon

CLAIRE

Looking at Claire's work is again interesting because in a sense the opposite happened this time. With the photograph poem Claire struggled to start whereas she found the strict format at first easier to work with:

"Once I started this poem I knew straight away I would have to complete the poem all in one go. All the ideas came to me at once which gave me a problem of putting them in order. I found it easier to hum the poems way of Rhyming which gave me a permant pattern to follow. Once I had a pattern established the words and ideas just seem to fit into place. The poem just seemed to come in one go. For some of the ideas I had I found it difficult to make pairs of words that rhymed. I managed to complete a full circle ending with the cat dying. I had to work on some of the similies as they are not clear to some people. I feel I could work on it more.

I feel I need words people can understand and relate to without explanation. As some people who read my first draft need some help to understand why I used some words I did. This I have to change or I wouldn't have put in my best effort."

What Hughes refers to as the, "all-out flowing exertion" seems to have worked for Claire here. Again she has found her own way of dealing with writing her version: "I found it easier to the poems way of Rhyming which gave me a permant pattern to follow." Without having read this particular journal entry I read and discussed Claire's poem with her and asked her to explain some of the similies to me as they didn't immediately make sense, e.g. one line ran:

*"When the world turned into slush
Twas like a sudden downward rush."*

Claire could explain what she meant by some of her similes but they didn't work as they stood. I explained to Claire that the similes had to make sense within the restricted form she was using and she recorded this in her next journal entry:

*"....I found that the ideas I used were difficult and did not fit into the small amount of words we were allowed .
I need to use more effective and less difficult ideas."*

The problem with this poem's form is that a number of rules need to work together and the rigidity of the rhyme scheme means that it is difficult to change a few lines in isolation, and this is the problem Claire encountered. In her journal she says:

*"As in my last record of this poem I pointed out that I needed simpler similes because of this I have started my poem again trying my best to use simple and understandable images that take no explaining to be understood.
I found that when I tried to change just a few lines of my poem I had to change most of it so I got really fed up and had to start again. When I started the poem, as I have only done a few lines, I have tried to use more or less the same ideas but make them easier to understand. So far up to now I have had no problems with the rhythm but I have had problems getting the correct number of cyllables in a line.
I still have a bit of work to do on the poem and I need to really try hard at it."*

Although Claire is again struggling with her poem she is also aware that her poem has to synthesize a number of different elements and by writing her journal I feel that she makes what she has to do clearer for herself.

Claire's final version is quite successful:

'There was a cat with flowing fur.'

There was a cat with flowing fur
who had a childish raucous purr.
When the purr at once did end,
twas like the cat had lost a friend.
When the friend had waved goodbye,
twas like a bird who'd learnt to fly.
When the bird had flown away,
twas like a rack without the hay.
When the hay appeared again,
twas like a horse with waving mane.
When the mane grew very wild,
twas like a dog had killed a child.
When the child was buried deep,
twas like a man that could not weep.
When the weeping turned to fears,
twas like the world had showed its fears.
When the world was all dryed up,
twas like the flowing fur was cut.

However she is still critical saying in her final commentary:

"I didn't really like this poem as there was no room to expand ideas. I knew I would have to write all the poem in one go to get the right effect. I succeeded in doing that but a lot of the comparisons I used did not really make any sense. They were things that did exactly the opposite to what I said like I compared a noise to a sunny mountain glade. I thought that worked but when someone else read it they needed an explanation."

Yet Claire shows that she is continuing to make decisions about her own work and developing her own attitude towards writing poetry: "I don't think this is my type of poem. It has too many rules and if there is one thing I hate when I am trying to express myself are rules I found hard to stick to. I prefer abstract poems, not poems with the rules already set for you."

ANTHONY

I thought Anthony might cope better with this format than with free verse but he had huge problems. There were many pupils, like Claire, who struggled to get the similes right or to get the correct stresses in the lines, or who even just ran out of ideas, but Anthony was one of the few pupils who seemed to struggle with everything! He had couplets which didn't rhyme, similes which didn't work and, I suppose naturally, it was only half finished. Anthony's journal does not throw much light on things either:

"At the moment my poem is only half finished, because half way through I ran out of ideas. I like the opening to my poem the best."

This last comment rather amused me as he didn't have much else to like anyway. I suspect that the problem was twofold: while Anthony did find this a difficult task he was not engaged enough to put in the necessary effort. He did go on to complete this poem but his final version does not work and includes some similes which have not been thought through, e.g.

*"When the rainbow had to flow,
Twas like a drift of melted snow"*

Also the lasy four line of his poem did not even rhyme which was possibly the simplest element of the whole poem. In his journal Anthony is honest about his work:

"I found it hard to make the word at the end of the line rime with the last word of the previous line, and infact didn't in every line as you can see from the poem."

Anthony also continues to explain his poem on a rather basic level e.g.:

*"In line two, I wrote:
'Who tried to paint a wall in rain'
By this I meant he was trying to paint a wall while it was raining, and not that he was trying to paint a wall with rain water."*

Although there were some parts of Anthony's poem which did work and so, in that sense, he had achieved something, there was still little to encourage him. To quote Ted Hughes once again, he said of writing poetry: "Do not think it up laboriously, as if you were working out mental arithmetic" and it may have been that this was Anthony's problem here.

STAGE THREE

For the final piece of work I had two strands which I wanted to pull together. The first was to bring together, in some way, the pupils' experiences of writing poetry so far. They had worked in two extremes, writing their first poem in any form they wished (much of it free verse) and the second using a rigid pattern. I wanted the pupils to realise now that form can be both strictly and loosely used in poetry. The other element I was interested in was related to the idea of argument. Several of my colleagues in the English department have been developing interesting ways of covering the discursive element of the GCSE criteria and in conversation with one particular colleague, Liz Ross, we discussed how poetry could cover this area as well as falling into the creative area. The relevant criteria, from paragraph 8c of the NEA English syllabus B, are as follows:

"Within the 5-7 assignments candidates must show their ability

- (1) to produce and sustain argument, to handle and present ideas, and to persuade;*
- (2) to write imaginatively and expressively and to recount real and imagined experience in any appropriate form such as narrative, description or drama."*

While I would still want my pupils to have the opportunity to argue or persuade in prose at some point in the course, there is no reason why poetry should not fulfil these criteria aswell. As Terry Gifford says: "The writing of poetry...has a part to play in the development of a confident personal view of the world and in the education of a sensitive alert person. The writing of poetry brings together feeling and thinking. The exercise of the imagination is not separate from the development of opinions." It is also my experience that many pupils stereotype poetry in the ballad or descriptive mold and forget that it can be discursive, persuasive and political and so I felt this would be a good opportunity for my pupils to write and use poetry in this way.

Although I hadn't wanted to rely too much on using exemplar material, I did want the pupils to see political or issue-based poetry in action and so I decided to use a poem that I had previously used at both 'O' level and

GCSE, Edwin Brock's "5 Ways to Kill a Man," (Appendix 2). It is a satirical poem about the way mankind has developed ever more sophisticated and easier methods to kill man and is finally a warning of the living death of the twentieth century. It has a pattern but the stanzas are written in free verse and I have found it to be very useful for mixed ability groups because of the accessibility of its content and style.

As with "There was a man of double deed" I asked the pupils, in groups, to find the patterns in the poem and to work out what each stanza was about. We discussed the poem as a class and how poetry can have a strong message. I then asked the pupils to make a list of all the issues, whether personal, local, national or global, about which they felt strongly. Then I explained that they would be writing a poem on an issue and so asked them to choose from their lists either the issue they felt most strongly about or an issue about which they would like to write a poem. I had considered asking them all to imitate the form of "5 Ways to Kill a Man" as suggested in John Foggini's booklet "Making a Poetry Anthology" but decided against restricting them in this way. However I did give the pupils this option.

These proved to be some of the most stimulating sessions on poetry of all. I feel that a number of factors contributed to this; primarily the fact that the pupils set their own agenda, deciding upon the issue and the form themselves, but also because of a growing confidence in their ability to handle poetry. In my journal on 17/3/90 I wrote:

"I am really enjoying these sessions because I feel there is a real dialogue between myself and the pupils. They know what they are doing or aiming to do better than I in some cases..."

The pupils tackled a wide range of topics ranging from the more domestic subjects like bullying and smoking to much wider issues like political leadership, the environment and capital punishment. The results were on the whole very good, the poems being the best many had written. The styles varied widely too. Several of the pupils tried, at first, to imitate the style of "5 Ways to Kill a Man" but I steered some away from it because it was restricting their ideas. Many others used a more controlled form than previously and one boy who, like Anthony, hadn't been particularly switched on to poetry wrote a successful 'rap' warning young people to stay away from drugs.

CLAIRE

Claire decided that she would write about the ways people stereotype certain types of people. As she wanted to use the "5 Ways" format I suggested that she might find it easier to write about the types of people who find themselves discriminated against. This she did focusing on hippies, punk rockers, travellers, yuppies and finally the physically handicapped. I feel that her poem is an interesting imitation as she incorporates the humour of the original and importantly she has managed to imitate Brock's "sting in the tail" in the final stanza, something that some pupils missed. The final draft looked like this:

'5 Ways to make people Discriminate Against you'

*There are many cumbersome ways to make people
discriminate against you.*

*You can take on the ways of the sixties and
parade around showing off. To do this
properly you require a crowd of people
laughing at you, a pair of flares
long hair with a centre parting and a
festival to meet others like you.*

*Or you can take a headful of hair,
spiked and gelled in a traditional way,
and attempt to wear a pair of Doc Martins.
But for this you need a mohican, some
safety pins and a pair of tight black
jeans to struggle into.*

*Dispensing with formalities you may, if
time allows, travel around in a caravan. But
then you need acres of farmland, not to
mention herbs, lucky charms, homemade
clothes, hooped earrings and a few
rough horses to pull your caravan.*

*In the age of fast cars, you may flash
your filofax around your victim*

*and dispose of him by placing your
Ferrari keys in front of his nose.
All you then need is a car to go with
the keys, a carphone, a pair of
flash sunglasses and a few people who
are inferior to you.*

*These as I began are cumbersome ways to make
people discriminate against you.
Simpler, direct and much more neat is to put
yourself in a wheelchair and continue
to live.*

In her commentary Claire covers why she wrote the poem, some analyses of parts of her poem, and in general I feel there is a much more positive and confident voice than in her early journals:

"This poem originated because I feel strongly about the subject of discrimination against someone by what you see. Everyone discriminates (against) other people whether they know it or not so I tried to point out different types of people that we knowingly or unknowingly discriminate against. Some are clear cut cases and some are not. I consider discrimination unfair and embarrassing as I know from personal experience.

.....There are certain aspects of the poem which I feel worked well. In stanza two the line 'spiked and gelled in the traditional way.'

appealed to me. To start off with I had read Edwin Brock's poem in which he says 'shaped and chased in the traditional way.'

I was working on the punk theme so 'spiked and gelled' just seemed to fit in nicely.

The more you look into the poem the more you see into it. I read my line over and over again realising that in this country punks have become a kind of tradition. They go hand in hand with London and feature regularly on postcards. Although the line was an accident it turned out better than I thought.

.....The main aim of my poem was that we discriminate against people in different ways. I ended the poem with a disabled discrimination as that is possibly the worst. Most people do it whether they know it or not.

If you see someone in a wheelchair then you tend to take them as being talkless (voiceless) and helpless pieces of meat. If they are with a friend you talk to the friend about them, eg "would he like a drink?" instead of "would you like a drink?" A lot of disabilities do not affect the brain although there are some exceptions.

When I first wrote the poem I was confused. I took a person eg; punk, and told people how to discriminate (against) them. Now I have changed it to how people recognize them and how to become one. I felt that worked better."

Claire's poem certainly has a message which I think works well in the poetic form. Her journal suggests that she feels more in control and despite problems ("When I first wrote the poem I was confused...") there is far less of her frustration with the process of writing than in her earlier journal entries. This more positive attitude towards her work is also shown in the conclusion to her anthology when she says:

"At first I did not like poetry but now I find it is a stronger and more noticed way of sharing the way I think with other people. I had difficulty getting started but now I am pleased with most of my work. I feel it shows, especially five ways, my way of thinking and how I feel people could do better.

I do this by showing their faults, by what they are doing wrong.

The main difficulty was when I had ideas, they came too fast to be expressed to their limit. I should have done more work and written every idea I had, maybe next time I will do better.

I still feel as I mentioned in my writing that a few poems could be done a bit better but on the whole I am pleased with the way things turned out."

Claire's poems and journal show that she has learnt a good deal through writing them and it is especially pleasing to see the value that Claire sees in the poetic form: "...now I find it a stronger and more noticed way of sharing the way I think with other people."

ANTHONY

I was beginning to despair of Anthony, not so much because he was not writing successful poems, but rather because although he remained pleasant and amenable, there seemed to be a complete lack of real interest and engagement and so I was concerned that he wasn't actually learning very much. When I talked to the pupils about their choices Anthony said that he did not feel terribly strongly about any issues. I recommended he think about something in school and struck lucky as he did manage to find sufficient things in school about which he felt strongly. Although Anthony did not turn into a poet overnight, I did feel that there was some progress in this final poem and I think this was because he was, finally, engaged in the subject of the poem. The poem, again using the format of Edwin Brock's "5 Ways to Kill a Man" looked like this in its final draft:

'FIVE WAYS TO NAUSEATE A FOURTH YEAR BOY'

*There are many ways to nauseate a fourth year boy,
You can charge him the highest rate in the country
for his dinner,
Give him pies that have a concrete crust on the top,
Or bake beans that taste like rubber,
To do this all you need is a contract to say no other
canteen may be opened,
A food supplier who sells last months pies,
And a cheap bake bean manufacturer like lop crop.*

*Or you can give him a forum lesson, thats
as boring as a wet weekend in John O'Groats,
For this all you need is a collection of
worksheets that make out there's no hatred in the world,
A classroom, a desk and a teacher to stand
over you and make you do it.*

*Failing the last two methods,
You can bore him to death with an assembly,
To do this all you need is an empty assembly hall,
a row of chairs to sit on,
And a teacher who's as boring as
speaking to a train spotter wearing a pac a mac.*

*If you want to really annoy him,
you can give him lessons in ancient caravans
that have a heating system that only
works in the summer,
no blinds or curtains, so the sun shines in your eyes,
and gives you a headache.
All you need to do to obtain one of these caravans,
is to find a building firm selling off caravans,
they no longer want.*

*But more simpler and far more easier,
would be to shove him on a Home Economics course,
with an investigation to carry out.*

His imitation captures some of the original techniques although his final stanza is rather abstruse - it sounds too much like a private joke. I was pleased to find that Anthony's journal on this poem was significantly longer, and so more detailed, than his previous entries:

"I chose this subject to write about because, there isn't really anything that I feel strongly about like animal rights, and pollution and any other rubbish people moan about. So I thought as some things about school really annoy and get to me, I would do a poem about it.

In the first verse I was trying to get over the fact that school meals in Wiltshire are the highest in the country, and the quality of the food is not very good.

In verse two I was trying to drop a very big hint that forum lessons are the biggest waste of time I have ever experienced in my life. In line four where I mentioned worksheets I was referring to "happygrams" worksheets and "I'm comfortable" and most of all "how do I feel." I think these work sheets are really pathetic. In the last line, where I write "and a teacher to stand over you and make you do it" I was trying to get over the image of the sort of teacher who won't give up on anybody, and continuously waste their time by telling you off, and telling you that it is important.

In the third verse, I was trying to get over the image of a really boring assembly, where you feel forty minutes is an hour, and the teacher droans on for ever and ever, about something that is of no interest what so ever to you.

The fourth verse was meant to put over the lousy conditions we have to work in during some lessons. When it came to verse five I got stuck, at the moment I've mentioned something about the home economics course. The main changes I made were adding more lines to each verse. The reason I did this, was because I felt there wasn't enough."

When it came to Anthony's final commentary in this poem he extended and developed a few points too. His introduction shows his own voice coming through:

"I chose to do something like this, instead of doing something on a serious subject, because I don't feel that strongly about many things, and the odd ones that I do I prefer to keep to myself. I would like to get one thing straight about this poem though, and that's that it is only a joke, and is not meant to offend anybody."

and his discussion of verse three is much more detailed:

"In verse three I was joking again. Some assembly's are boring but not as boring as I made out. I wrote in the ingredients that you needed an empty assembly hall, which was questioned by several people. By this I meant that you needed an assembly hall which was empty so you could get everyone into it. A row of chairs, this is for every one to sit on and the final remark:

'and a teacher who's as boring as speaking to train spotter wearing a pac a mac'

I was trying to get you to think about them really boring teachers that go on and on for ever, and everyone is getting a back ache, and you think that they have been talking for six hours when it's only been forty minutes."

Anthony has then, by becoming more engaged in his subject, been able to write much more in both poetic and journal form. Perhaps it is because he is finally writing on a subject where he can in Ted Hughes' words, "See it and live it" that he has finally been able to use the poetic form to some purpose.

EVALUATION.

My original question for this research was: how can I develop the writing of poetry in my GCSE classes taking into account my continued wish to encourage a greater understanding of how poetry works (the writing process) and my wish to continue to encourage a greater degree of autonomy in pupils of this age.

I feel that Claire's work shows that there certainly was a development in her writing, knowledge about and understanding of writing poetry. Her first poem, although not changed dramatically from the first draft, is still an improved version and she certainly shows the ability to use some powerful language:

*"Unlike an ugly world of Technology,
Spewing Death and Destruction from an acrid mouth"*

Yet it is not simply the product which shows Claire's development, it is also her journal which is a very honest account of her struggle with poetry and which opens up her progress to the reader and more importantly to Claire herself. I had nothing at all to do with Claire's poem except for encouraging her in her own decisions as I could see from her journal that she was able to direct herself in the writing process.

With the second poem I did take a more verbal role, as I didn't feel that all Claire's similes were working. This was an example of my intervening when I felt that my help was required. In some ways I feel teaching poetry is like teaching someone to ride a bike - you let them wobble a bit in the hope of their finding their balance, but if they look like falling off, you reach out to help! Although the structure of Claire's second poem was fairly sound I felt she could be pushed to improve the quality of her similes and so I encouraged her to think about them.

In the final poem I wanted pupils to think more about form, but to be free to select their own; and I wanted to see how successful issue based poetry could be. Claire imitated Brock's poem well and so her form was successful. As for the idea of argument I think Claire's poem is a successful attempt at an argument against stereotyping. It's not as sophisticated as some others managed to produce but it is the sort of poem which I would be happy to use as a starting point for a discussion on stereotyping with one of my classes, and I feel her message has been conveyed in an interesting way.

In all I felt that while there were many more accomplished poets in the class Claire's work shows the struggle to write and to say something meaningful in a particular form; a progression in the quality of her writing; and finally a real sense of Claire taking responsibility for developing her own writing and style.

I deliberately selected Anthony as one of the least successful poets in the class. While Anthony's first attempt at a poem based on a photograph of the blossom tree produces a fairly weak poem I would also argue that it is because he doesn't reflect upon the poem in any real way that his writing suffers. I tried to talk to him about making the poem more interesting, using similes/metaphors, but while he began to redraft this wasn't followed through, and there is at least some sense in his journal of his realising part of what is wrong with his poem.

Moving on to Anthony's attempt at a 'style' poem, I think the fact that the final poem does not work at the end is due partly to how difficult he found this to do and but also due to lack of engagement. It is interesting to note that while Claire didn't like poetry at first, her journals were still extremely detailed and seemed to be a release for the struggle she was encountering. Anthony, on the other hand, writes very little in his journals and his progress seems to match that.

It was the final poem which showed Anthony's best attempt and his journal was much longer and more detailed. It is a very localised poem in that it refers to his school and apart from the last verse, would be instantly recognisable to most pupils. Teaching in a "caravan" (a mobile classroom) certainly struck a chord with me and I agree wholeheartedly with Anthony's comment in his final commentary:

"I won't say too much about these because I would end up in a political argument about money and scarce resources."

However, despite the fact that I agree with him, I also think he has at least moved some way to writing a poem which has some meaning, both for an audience and more importantly, for Anthony himself. The engagement which I wished for earlier did come at last and although the poem is not as smoothly constructed as it could be, I feel there is evidence of a message and a structure. In his final introduction to his anthology Anthony has not been put off poetry completely but recognises his lack of ability:

"I like poetry that has been written buy other people, but when it comes to writing my own poetry, I don't like it at all."

The main reason for my looking at poetry was because it is a valued form of writing, and valued for its own sake. I believe it is an aesthetic form which is part of shaping the whole person and that may be why I found that the sessions on poetry were the most stimulating teaching I have done with the class. There is a certain "intimacy" created when trying to shape meaning together and in some sense I felt there was an atmosphere of the pupils writing rather than doing a piece of coursework. Most of the pupils found these sessions quite difficult but many have said in their recent course summary statements (preparing for Records of Achievement) that they had enjoyed the work on poetry. I feel the value of writing poetry can be very clearly seen in Claire's work. Even pupils like Anthony, for whom the process was difficult, found some satisfaction in at least one poem. Poetry is the one form of writing which is rarely, if ever, covered in the rest of the curriculum and I am more satisfied now that it has integrated into my GCSE teaching.

When it came to the pupils compiling their anthologies and writing introductions and conclusions I found that many struggled to say something significant about poetry in general; they were much more at ease writing about their own poems. However a really pleasing factor was that a few pupils actually decided to write the introductions and conclusions to their anthologies in poetry rather than in prose, and did so quite successfully. Anna, for example, used a variation on Brock's idea of a recipe to express her final thoughts on poetry and it seems to be an appropriate note on which to end.

CONCLUSION

A poem, is like a recipe:
Full of ingredients.
Requiring patience to complete
And challenge to perfect.

To produce it you require:
A creative style.
Effective methods
And an active imagination.

First, turn your brain to high and weigh out the idea.
Then, stir in the stanzas,
Mix in the figures of speech
And beat until a rhythmic consistency is obtained.

Be descriptive and expressive,
Pay attention to presentation.
Prepare for numerous attempts
And remain calm with the would be contributor.

For a variation on the main theme,
Flavour it with rhyme.

Finish, by tidying up vocabulary
And wiping the bad punctuauation and spelling errors clear.

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2.2 HISTORICAL INTRODUCTION TO ACTION RESEARCH 1953 - 1995

Stephen Corey's (1953), 'Action Research to Improve School Practices', was the first systematic attempt to define the characteristics of this form of research in education. Corey says that the expression action research and the operations it implies come from at least two somewhat independent sources, Lewin and Collier. Lewin attempted to study human relations scientifically and to improve the quality of these relations as a consequence of the inquiries. Collier, during the period (1933-45) when he was Commissioner of Indian Affairs used the expression action research and was convinced that the administrator and the layman must participate creatively in the research, 'impelled as it is from their own area of need'.

Corey's thesis was that teachers, supervisors, and administrators would make better decisions and engage in more effective practices if they were able and willing to conduct research as a basis for these decisions and practices. He refers to action research as the process by which practitioners attempt to study their problems scientifically in order to guide, correct, and evaluate their decisions and actions. He saw this process as a cooperative activity which would support democratic values. He believed that the failure to see the necessity for cooperation in curriculum research had marred the attempts of many communities to improve their schools. He was particularly interested in gaining the cooperation of parents.

In his comparison of traditional research in education and action research, Corey stated that they are alike in that each is difficult to do well. In 1953 A great deal had been written in an attempt to improve the procedures of traditional research. Very little had been written, in the field of education, that was particularly helpful to persons who were interested in action research. Most of the references to this kind of investigation had to do with attempts to improve human relations.

As Carr and Kemmis (1983) point out, after enjoying a decade of growth in the 1950s, educational action research went into decline. They show how a 'technical' Research, Development and Dissemination model of educational change became established which diverted legitimacy from the small-scale, locally organised, self-reflective approach to action-research.

The recent upsurge in interest in action research owes a great deal to the work of the late Lawrence Stenhouse and his collaborators, including Jean Rudduck, at the Centre of Applied Research at the University of East Anglia. For example the work of the Ford Teaching Project 1973-1976 directed by John Elliott and Clem Adelman involved teachers in examining their own attempts to develop inquiry/discovery approaches to learning and teaching. John Elliott established the Classroom Action Research Network based at the Cambridge Institute of Education. This Network has changed its name to the Collaborative Action Research Network and between 1986-1994 was co-ordinated by Bridget Somekh. Bridget became Depute Director of the Scottish Council for Research in Education in 1994. Bulletins and other publications (Ghaye & Wakefield 1993) have been produced by the network from a series of international, national and local, conferences. John is now back as Professor of Education at the University of East Anglia and his book, *Action Research for Educational Change* (Open University 1991) relates action research to such issues as the National Curriculum, Appraisal and Professional Development. Clem Adelman is Professor of Education at the University of Reading where he is continuing his support for teachers (Adelman 1983).

Further evidence for the massive upsurge of interest in action research during the 1980s can be seen in the Spring Issue of *Dialogue* 1985 Vol 1. No.2., in 'Research Intelligence' Autumn 1985 (A publication of the British Educational Research Association) and in the MED

course by action inquiry at Sheffield Polytechnic, now Sheffield Hallam University. This was moved forward by Phil Parkin, Gordon Bell and Michael Bassey. There was also strong support for the teacher/researcher movement provided by Professor Jean Rudduck and colleagues at the University of Sheffield (Rudduck 1985). Jean has now moved to a chair at Homerton College, Cambridge. Michael Bassey became President of BERA in August 1991 and I can recommend his three papers in *Research Intelligence*, over 1990/91, on Educational Research.

There is a lesson to be learnt from Avon L.E.A's attempt to impose an action research approach to professional development on its teachers. A DES course 'Supporting Teachers in their Classroom Research' (April 1985 - April 1986) with Jack Whitehead and Maureen Barrett and helped by Terry Hewitt of Sir Bernard Lovell School, provided over twenty teachers with support, as they analysed their classroom practice. An action research perspective on curriculum review and evaluation developed in ten schools with some fifty teachers as part of the Avon TRIST initiative (March 1986-87). For the following two years 1987-89 Avon continued to support action research through the STRICT initiative (Supporting Teacher Research into Classroom Teaching) and finally in 1990 an action research approach to professional and institutional development became accepted as policy for Avon L.E.A. The action research programme in the Summer of 1990, which followed this policy decision, involved some 80 advisory teachers and some 400 staff development teachers. However the financial cutbacks in the authority has meant that the necessary support services could no longer be provided. Terry Hewitt is currently writing up a Ph.D. Thesis which will include an analysis of what happened to these action research initiatives in Avon.

The development of the basic action-reflection spiral, which has been used by action-researchers in the School of Education at the University of Bath began, as I said earlier, with the local curriculum development project of a group of Wiltshire teachers. A cycle begins as outlined in the action research planner at the beginning of this booklet, with the individual's experience of educational problems in action of the kind, 'How do I improve this process of education here?'. It has the form,

- 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

The inclusion of the individual 'I' experiencing problems because of the negation of values (the experience of being a living contradiction) emphasises that the individual is investigating his or her own practices with the intention of improving their quality. Given this base it might be assumed that action researchers reject the contributions to educational theory of the traditional disciplines of education. Indeed this was a legitimate criticism which teacher/researchers made of their own research reports at a CARN conference in 1984. (See CARN Bulletin No. 6 1984, available from CARE, University of East Anglia, Norfolk)

I acknowledge the danger that action researchers do not pay sufficient attention to the problems of validating their accounts of practice or to the contributions which psychology, philosophy, sociology and history can make to the construction of educational theory. For this reason action researchers associated with the School of Education of Bath University

are encouraged to keep themselves informed of developments in the traditional disciplines. We also inform ourselves of work in other action research communities. For example we are drawn to the analyses of 'technical rationality' offered by Schon (1972) and Carr and Kemmis (1986).

In his book, *'The Reflective Practitioner - How Professionals Think In Action'*, Schon argues that the dominant epistemology of practice is that of 'Technical Rationality'. By this he means the view that our professional activity consists in 'instrumental problem solving made rigorous by the application of scientific theory and technique.' I certainly see this model embedded in the institutional context of my professional life where it is part of the power relations which structure research and practice. I also see it in the normative curricula of my professional colleagues in schools. Even when I question the model of technical rationality, as a practitioner, educator and researcher I am aware that I may be colluding with an institution that perpetuates it.

In his examination of the emerging awareness of the limitations of technical rationality Schon makes the point that this rationality views professional practice as a process of problem solving. In problem solving problems of choice or decision are solved through the selection from available means of the one best suited to established ends. But, says Schon, with this emphasis on problem solving, we ignore problem setting, the process by which we define the decision to be made, the ends to be achieved, the means which may be chosen.

In educational practice, problems do not present themselves to the practitioner as given. Ron King, during his time as a lecturer in the Mechanical Engineering Department of Bath College of Further Education has documented the way he has constructed problems from the feeling of unease he shared with colleagues about the nature of their teaching and their student's learning (King 1987). The crucial insight we have learnt from this work is that recognised by Schon. Although problem setting is a necessary condition for technical problem solving, it is not itself a technical problem.

Schon asks his readers to reconsider the question of professional knowledge. He asks us to search for an epistemology of practice implicit in the artistic, intuitive processes which some practitioners do bring to situations of uncertainty, instability, uniqueness, and value conflict.

"When someone reflects-in-action, he becomes a researcher in the practice context. He is not dependent on the categories of established theory and technique, but constructs a new theory of the unique case. His inquiry is not limited to a deliberation about means which depends on a prior agreement about ends. He does not keep means and ends separate, but defines them interactively as he frames a problematic situation. He does not separate thinking from doing, ratiocinating his way to a decision which he must later convert to action. Because his experimenting is a kind of action, implementation is built into his inquiry. Thus reflection-in-action can proceed, even in situations of uncertainty or uniqueness, because it is not bound by the dichotomies of Technical Rationality.

Many practitioners, locked into a view of themselves as technical experts, find nothing in the world of practice to occasion reflection. They have become too skillful at techniques of selective inattention, junk categories, and situational control, techniques which they use to preserve the constancy of their knowledge-in-practice. For them, uncertainty is a threat; its admission a sign of weakness. Others, more inclined toward and adept at reflection-in-action, nevertheless feel profoundly uneasy because they cannot say what they know how to do, cannot justify its quality or rigor...For these reasons the study of reflection-in-action is critically important."

The present development of educational action-research owes much to the work of Wilf Carr and Stephen Kemmis and they have defined action research as;

"Action research is a form of self-reflective enquiry undertaken by participants (teachers, students or principals for example) in social (including educational) situations in order to improve the rationality and justice of (a) their own social or educational practices, (b) their understanding of these practices, and (c) the situations (and institutions) in which these practices are carried out (classrooms and schools, for example). It is most rationally empowering when undertaken by participants collaboratively, though it is often undertaken by individuals and sometimes in cooperation with 'outsiders'. In education, action research has been employed in school-based curriculum development, professional development, school improvement programs and systems planning and policy development (for example, in relation to policy about classroom rules, school policies about non-competitive assessment, regional project team policies about their consultancy roles, and State policies, about the conduct of school improvement programs)."

See also Kemmis & Henry (1984)

Debates on action research during the 1980s can be studied in Stephen Kemmis' response (Kemmis 1985) to Rex Gibson's *'Critical Times for Action Research'* (Gibson 1985), and by following the implications of Rob Walker's report on *'Breaking the grip of print in curriculum research'* (Walker 1986), in the paper on *'Action Research and the Politics of Educational Knowledge'* (Whitehead and Lomax 1986).

According to Kemmis, Gibson criticises *'Becoming Critical'* on twelve counts,

- 1) *it is intensely uncritical (ie. it doesn't practice what it preaches);*
- 2) *its prescriptions are likely to result in increased conformity (ie. it would produce its own rigid orthodoxy);*
- 3) *it is naive about group processes:*
- 4) *it prefers the group over the individual, and in in-group over the out-group.*
- 5) *it is bedazzled by the notion of "science";*
- 6) *it rejects objectivity, yet privileges its own view of reality;*
- 7) *it is characterised by hubris (ie. it lacks modesty in its claims and perceptions);*
- 8) *it is highly contradictory (actually, not a bad thing in the human conditions, but the book doesn't recognise its own contradictions);*
- 9) *it has far too much respect for the authority of critical theory;*
- 10) *it is an elitist text masquerading as an egalitarian one;*
- 11) *it insufficiently acknowledges that action research at the three levels of interpersonal (e.g. classroom), institutional (e.g. school or L.E.A.), or structural (e.g. economic, political, ideological) involve different activities and levels of difficulty for would-be action researchers, and*
- 12) *in its seeming preference for the institutional and structural levels, it is attempting to set action research off on a course very different from its present practice. Kemmis, S. 1985 p3-4.*

Kemmis (1985) meets each criticism clearly and persuasively. Where I see a problem however is with the logical form of both these discourses in that they are purely propositional. Both Gibson and Kemmis appear to believe that they can communicate the nature of action research through the sole use of the propositional form. In my own view of

action research, educational knowledge has a dialectical form which is not amenable to systematic representation in a purely propositional form (Whitehead and Lomax 1987). In this respect I am drawn to Rob Walker's report '*Breaking the grip of print in curriculum research*' (Walker 1986)

Walker attacks our use of the conventional literary forms through which we communicate our research. I support his view that curriculum research adds to the 'accretion of established structures, reinforcing attitudes, values and practices and legitimizing the existing distribution of knowledge'. Even when the content of what we say attempts to change radically the nature of educational knowledge we are still trapped within the web of the propositional form.

I agree that there is a need to shift the ground more dramatically, '**not just to change the words, but to change the language, and to change it to something closer to the vernacular, not further away from it**'. As I have attempted to achieve this through my research I have come into conflict with individuals and groups who are invested with institutional power to sustain the dominant view. These conflicts with professional colleagues are focussed upon the nature of educational values and the oppositional struggle between the power of truth and the truth of power. These conflicts have been considered in other places (Whitehead 1990, 1993) What follows constitutes my understanding of developments from 1986 to 1995 with particular reference to action research associated with the School of Education of the University of Bath and the Faculty of Education of Kingston University.

Given my assumption that educational theory is being constituted by the explanations which learners give for their own educational development I want to organise this section in terms of the contributions already made by our colleagues, other researchers and by the contributions which I think you are in the process of making.

On returning from the *First World Congress on Action Research and Process Management* (10-13th July 1990 at Griffith University, Brisbane), I was charged up with the energy which comes from feeling that one's research is contributing to some form of global initiative. One of the first papers I was given in Brisbane, referred to the academic staff development unit at Queensland University of Technology. You can imagine my delight at seeing the work of Jean McNiff (1988) and Kevin Eames (1990) being used as the basis for an action research approach to academic staff development. Jean has made an outstanding and original contribution to our work. Her Ph.D. Thesis '*An explanation for an individual's educational development through the dialectic of action research*', is in the University Library and is the basis of her book *Teacher as Learning: An action research approach* (McNiff 1993).

I owe a personal debt to Jean McNiff, Pam Lomax and John Elliott for bringing my ideas on educational theory to a wider audience. In Chapter Three of her book, *Action Research: Principles and Practice* (McNiff 1988), Jean outlines my ideas on the creation of a living educational theory. John Elliott, in a special issue of the *Cambridge Journal of Education* (Vol. 19, No.1, 1989), relates the work on educational theory, of a number of international contributors, to the paper, "Creating a living educational theory from questions of the kind, 'how do I improve my practice?'. Since her first analysis of the action research initiative at Bath (Lomax 1986), Pam has supported the work at Bath, with personal warmth, great energy, and constructive criticism (Lomax, 1989 1990,1991,1994)

I must emphasise that the growth of the idea of a living educational theory is not a matter of applying my ideas to your practice. The growth of the idea rests upon your decision to understand your professional practice from your own points of view as professionals who

are exercising their own creative and critical powers in generating valid explanations for their own educational development as learners.

The growth of living educational theories thus rests upon the adequacy and explanatory power of practitioners' reflections on their educational development. I want to mention five initiatives which I think are particularly significant in understanding how living educational theories can contribute to improvements in the quality of pupils' learning, the professional development of teachers, a good social order and cultural renewal. The stories of these initiatives have yet to be told. Two are focused upon the school based research groups supported between 1989-1993 by Andy Larter at Greendown School, Wiltshire; Kevin Eames (1990) at Wootton Bassett School, Wiltshire. One is focused on my attempts to support teachers such as Peter Breese and Jackie Williams at Culverhay School, whilst Chair of Governors (Whitehead 1990). The third is the County wide initiative on an action research approach to professional and institutional development supported by Avon L.E.A. (Hewitt 1990). The fourth is the partnership between Moyra Evans and Pam Lomax and Denbigh School and Kingston University in developing an action research approach to professional and school development, (Evans 1995).

Andy Larter's contribution to our work rested not only in his support for the Greendown Action Research Group. In his MPhil Thesis '*An Action Research Approach to Classroom Discussion in the Examination Years*', he presented his account in the form of a dialogue on the grounds that this form enabled him to adequately represent the nature of his educational development. As he said in his article, '*A Question of Dialectics*' (Lomax 1989),

"One of my desires is to close the gap between theory and practice; this seems to me to be a good thing to do. I have tried to write a thesis which speaks to the educational research establishment as well as to a wider professional audience. I think that in using the form of the dialogue I have gone some way towards bringing these two branches of activity together."

Andy's paper presented to the CARN International Conference in April 1991 is included below to show the way in which the action research approach developed at Greendown. Kevin Eames' contribution can be seen in three related activities. Firstly through his MPhil Thesis, '*The Growth of a teacher's attempt to understand, writing, re-drafting, learning and autonomy in the examination years*' (Eames 1987), through his justification of action research as an appropriate medium for teacher researchers (Eames 1988) and for his editing of the collection of papers from the Bassett Action Research Group (Eames 1990). Mary Gurney has also produced an excellent challenge to the restrictive paradigm of traditional research in her summary of the first chapter of her PhD Theses (Lomax 1989). In September 1990 Kevin Eames started a 2 year secondment from his post as Head of English at Wootton Bassett School to work on the Wiltshire Assessment Programme. He retained a supporting role with the research group at Wootton Bassett. Mary Gurney is now working as an educational psychologist with the Gloucestershire authority and is helping to promote an action research approach in this part of the education service.

Terry Hewitt (1995) is analysing Avon's attempt to develop the most extensive L.E.A. network of support for action researchers in the country. Through the Avon L.E.A. STRICT (Supporting Teacher Research Into Classroom Teaching) programme, Terry helped teachers in more than twenty Avon Schools to produce reports on their classroom research. Whilst the teachers received no formal accreditation for their enquiries, the support offered by Avon L.E.A for action research was for a brief period, the most extensive and coherent in the Country. Part of Terry's Ph.D. research is an analysis of his work in the enquiry, '*How do I improve my support for the action-research initiatives in Avon?*'

The teacher researcher group at Culverhay School was integrated, in the early 1990s, into the implementation of the institutional development plan and the group invited me, as

Chair of Governors to participate. I was particularly pleased with this invitation because it should have enabled me to improve the quality of my contribution to the educational management of the School in promoting an action research approach to professional development. It offered me the opportunity to understand the nature of the power relations which might be encountered in a Chair of Governors working with a school-based research group. Ron Adam's (1990) Thesis has been under restricted access for five years. I think he has made a fundamental contribution to our understanding of the politics and ethics of educational knowledge and I hope to draw on his insights in my analysis of my attempt to promote an action research approach to professional and school development whilst a Chair of Governors.

Pam Lomax, was the first academic from another institution to see the value in our ideas. Her article, 'Action researchers' action research: a symposium' (Lomax 1986) marks the public recognition of the significance of our research community to the wider research community. Pam Lomax's book 'The Management of Change' (Lomax 1989) contains further contributions from our community and shows other contributors integrating insights from our research into their own. As editor of Research Intelligence, the newsletter of the British Educational Research Association, she included information on our work. Pam also convened a Teacher Researcher Day at the Annual Conference of the British Educational Research Association in September 1990. This included contributions from Kevin Eames, Andy Larter, Erica Holley (Greendown Action Research Group) and Jack Whitehead. We organised and contributed to the symposium, Action Research, Educational Theory and the Politics of Educational Knowledge at BERA '91 at Nottingham Polytechnic and played a major part with Moira Laidlaw and Zoe Parker in organising World Congress 3 on Action Learning, Action Research and Process Management at the University of Bath in July 1994. Pam has been particularly successful in her partnership with Moyra Evans in establishing a teacher researcher group in Denbigh School, where the teachers' accounts are being submitted for accreditation to Kingston University. In February 1995 I wrote to Peter Mortimer, the Director of the London Institute of Education and to Professor John Macbeth at Strathclyde University, to explain why an understanding of this partnership between Denbigh and Kingston should be included in their research into school improvement and school effectiveness. I have also written to David Blunkett and the Labour Party Education Policy Group with a copy to Don Foster, the Lib.Dem spokesperson, to explain why I think this approach to professional development and school improvement should be included in national educational policy.

I now want to turn to the contributions from other researchers to see to what extent their work may be useful in assisting us to generate and test a living educational theory for professional practice.

In addition to the books already mentioned (McNiff 1988, Lomax 1989) I would like to mention the a number of others.

Becoming Critical - Education, Knowledge and Action Research. Carr,W. & Kemmis,S. Falmer Press, 1986.

This is a substantially revised edition of their first text published by Deakin University Press in 1982. Their central argument is that,

"the different views of educational reform implicit in different views of educational research and defends the idea that the teacher is a member of a critical community made up of teachers, students, parents and others concerned for the development and reform of education. The professional responsibility of the teacher is to offer an approach to this task: to create conditions under which the critical community can be galvanized into action in support of educational values, to model the review and improvement process, and to organize it so that colleagues, students, parents and others

can become actively involved in the development of education. The participatory democratic approach of collaborative action research gives form and substance to the idea of a self-reflective critical community committed to the development of education."

Carr and Kemmis have developed the idea of action research as critical educational science. They have drawn extensively upon the work of Jurgen Habermas at the University of Frankfurt. Habermas (1971) distinguishes three forms of knowledge and their associated cognitive interests; the technical, the practical and the emancipatory. His critique of modern society, which is closely mirrored by Carr and Kemmiss becomes a critique of technical rationality which is seen to dominate the way in which society understands itself and by which the dominant interest groups legitimate thier oppressive political, economic and social practices.

"In education, research which has a critical theory thrust aims at promoting critical consciousness, and struggles to break down the institutional structures and arrangements which reproduce oppressive ideologies and the social inequalities that are sustained and produced by these social structures and ideologies." (See Van Manen below p.176)

The idea that a living educational theory is being created from the explanations which individual learners give for their own educational development as they engage in action enquiries of the kind, 'How do I live more fully my values in my practice?', has a different base to 'critical' action research. It is not predicated upon critical theory. It is generated on the basis of questions of the kind, 'How do I improve my practice?'. It may well be that researchers may need to adopt such a critical stance before making a creative leap into seeing that they can create a living educational theory from explanations of their own educational development.

Learning from Experience - Principles and Practice in Action-Research, Winter,R. Falmer Press, 1990.

The original contribution of this text lies in its approach to the concept of 'rigour' in action research. Winter defines six principles for the conduct of action-research; Reflexive Critique; Dialectical Critique, Collaborative Resource; Risk; Plural Structure; Theory, Practice, Transformation.

a) Reflexive Critique

".. having begun with an account which claims to be a series of descriptions and authoritative judgments (whether of expert professional knowledge or of competent common sense knowledge), our critique will begin by making explicit its reflexive basis in the personal interpretive systems of those concerned. We thereby establish that the basis of the account is not simply factual (and thus indisputable) nor a universal law derived from an agreed body of knowledge (and thus necessarily true). This in turn extablishes that, concerning the situation of which the account has been given, a number of alternative accounts could be relevant and important. Reflexive critique in this way open up lines of argument and discussion."

b) Dialectical Critique.

As far as I understand the basis of dialectics it is a process of coming to understand through question and answer. The nucleus of dialectics is contradiction and the art of the dialectician is expressed in presentations which show how both our the capacity to analyse into separate components and the capacity to generate a holistic view through the power to synthesise, are held together. Dialectics is usually associated with explanations of change and transformation. Winter characterises dialectical critique in terms of the 'Context of

Necessary Relationships' the 'Overall Unity but Diversity of Elements' and the 'Inherent Tendency for Phenomena to Change'.

c) Collaborative Resource

By Collaboration Winter means that everyone's point of view will be taken as a contribution to resources for understanding.

"Focussing on the contradictory elements of a viewpoint enables us to give full recognition to those fleeting glimpses of ideas which we normally dismiss as 'irrelevant' because they don't fit in with the rest of our conceptual framework. What is being suggested here is that the rationally unified expression of a viewpoint is only the verbal tip of a psychic iceberg: the resources we possess for transcending a viewpoint are scattered among a lifetime's accumulation of ideas. They will include our general moral and political concepts, ambiguous images from our dreams, and scenarios from our favourite films and novels, as well as specific professional hypotheses. In seeking to assemble intellectual resources with which to carry out an analysis, we should cast our net as widely as possible (cf. the well-known technique of 'brainstorming') knowing that the appraisal of the usefulness or otherwise of these ideas will come later, as an essential phase of the work."

d) Risk

Winter emphasises that he is being slightly ironic in calling this principle 'Risk'. He is drawing attention to the importance of seeing that in conducting action research we are accepting that our own actions, ideas and values are open to change.

"So if we propose to observe a colleagues class, let us also propose that the colleague should observe us; if we wish to analyze pupils' work, let us do so within a mutual exchange of materials and interpretations; if accounts are to be broken down into their component contradictions, let us make it clear that our own accounts will be similarly analyzed; and if professional categories and practices are to change as a result of the project, let us ensure that our own categories and practices are among the first to change."

e) Plural Structure

Winter points out that actions researchers are not uninvolved observers but implicated participants in the research process and that accounts must be presented in terms of the multiplicity of viewpoints which make up the situation. How we present such accounts is part of the new heuristic of action research. We need a number of different forms of presentation to see which ones can most adequately convey claims to educational knowledge in a way which is open to public criticism and test. In his work on researching lived experience Van Manen considers the importance of different forms of writing under the headings; Attending to the Speaking of Language; Silence - the Limits and Power of Language; Anecdote as a Methodological Divide; The Value of Anecdotal Narrative; Varying the Examples; Writing Mediates Reflection and Action; To Write is to Measure our Thoughtfulness; Writing Exercises and the Ability to See; To Write is to Show Something; To Write is to Rewrite. (Van Manen pp 111-135).

f) Theory, Practice, Transformation

It is my contention that you will be creating a living form of educational theory in your explanations for your professional development as you continue your enquiry, 'How do I improve my practice?'. As Winter says,

"It is this final argument, that theory and practice need each other and thus comprise mutually indispensable phases of a unified change process, which presents the strongest case for practitioner

action-research - as an activity which represents both a powerful (i.e., rigorous and worthwhile) form of practical professionalism and a powerful (i.e., rigorous and valid) form of social inquiry."

Researching Lived Experience - Human Science for an Action Sensitive Pedagogy, Van Manen, M. Althouse Press, 1990

I have already drawn attention to the importance of this text in the definition of critical theory (p176) and in the section dealing with the significance of writing in research (pp 111 - 135)

Qualitative Research in Education: Focus and Methods, Sherman, R.R. & Webb, R.B., Falmer Press, 1988.

There are three contributions to this book which I think you will find particularly useful.

Inside Lives: The Quality of Biography. Jack Campbell.

Putting Life into Educational Research. Ivor Goodson and Rob Walker.

Qualitative Research and the Uses of Literature. Maxine Grene

Research Methods in Education. Cohen,L. & Manion, L, Second Edition, Croom Helm, 1985.

There is an excellent introduction to the nature of inquiry and the book contains much valuable information in sections dealing with Historical Research; Developmental Research; Surveys; Case Studies; Correlational Research; Ex Post Facto Research; Experiments, Quasi-experiments and Single-case Research; Action Research; Accounts: Triangulation; Role-playing; The Interview; Personal Constructs; Multidimensional Measurement.

Action Research for Change and Development. Zuber-Skerrit, O. Griffith University Press, Brisbane, 1990.

This collection of papers represent the contributors to the "International Symposium on Action Research in Higher Education, Government and Industry" (20-23 March Brisbane 1989). It is divided into three sections; Reflections on the Foundations of Action Research; Methodology; Case Studies. The defining characteristics of action research as constructed by Herbert Altrichter, Stephen Kemmis, Robin McTaggart and Ortrun Zuber-Skerritt are;

"If yours is a situation in which;

People reflect and improve (or develop) their own work and their own situations

by tightly interlinking their reflection and action

and also making their experience public not only to other participants but also to other persons interested in and concerned about the work and the situation, i.e. their (public) theories and practices of the work and the situation

and if yours is a situation in which there is increasingly

Data-gathering by participants themselves (or with the help of others) in relation to their own questions

Participation (in problem-posing and in answering questions) in decision-making

Power-sharing and the relative suspension of hierarchical ways of working towards industrial democracy

Collaboration among members of the group as a "critical community"

Self-reflection, self-evaluation and self-management by autonomous and responsible persons and groups

Learning progressively (and publicly) by doing and by making mistakes in a "self-reflective spiral" of planning, acting, observing, reflecting, replanning, etc.

Reflection which supports the idea of the "(self-) reflective practitioner"

Then Yours is a situation in which ACTION RESEARCH is occurring.

(Altrichter, H. et al, 1990)

Action Research in Classrooms and Schools, Hustler, D, Cassidy, T & Cuff, T. (Ed). Allen and Unwin, 1986.

The Chapter on *Teachers' Professional Knowledge* by Carol Cummings and David Hustler is worth reading. This could usefully be followed by James Calderhead's chapter on 'The Development of Knowledge Structures in Learning to Teach' in the book; *Teachers' Professional Learning*, Calderhead, J, Falmer, 1988

***Doing Research - A Handbook for Teachers*, Walker, R. Methuen, 1985.**

Like the book by Cohen and Mannion, 'Doing Research' contains an excellent introduction to a range of research methods. Walker wrote the book for "teachers who attend (and run) courses which include an element of applied research, action research or evaluation, especially those involving a practical assignment or dissertation."

Chapter Four, 'Techniques of Research' ends with this warning;

"It is important not to lose sight of the intent and purpose of the project, or to design complex and demanding research or evaluation studies that might drain energy better put to other purposes. In educational research, perhaps more than in any other area of social and human research, the context of use should never be subsumed to questions of a technical kind. The temptation is to let technical questions displace educational questions. It is a temptation that needs to be resisted."

***Quality in Teaching - Arguments for a Reflective Profession*. Carr, W. (Ed) Falmer, 1989.**

The three parts of this book are all worth reading. They deal with the philosophical and social context of teaching, teaching as a profession and the professional development of teachers. Of particular importance to our enquiries is Clem Adelman's contribution on 'The Practical Ethic Takes Priority over Methodology'.

"Thus the disappointment on reading teachers' action research reports as purveyed by Hustler et al. (1986), McNiff (1988) and Elliott (1985). Without attributing any blame or incompetence to the teachers involved, what these accounts reflect is the belief that an aspect of teaching can be improved if it more effectively achieves a desired outcome. What these cases lack is the hard, joint theorizing on the relationship of values, action and consequences prior to the devising of fresh options for action. An understanding of teaching as a species of practical ethic is lacking. These accounts read like the

pursuit of certitude, of effectiveness or predictability and in this sense are indistinguishable from the positivistic, single-item, cause-effect research which the promulgation of teaching as a practical ethic has tried to replace..... It may be that the arguments for action research as an acceptable means of educational research have been won, but there is no reason for complacency, a malaise that may be encapsulated by the response, 'well you've got to let teachers start somewhere'. action research stands or falls by its demonstrable relevance to the practical ethic of education, as well as whether it is reliable, valid and refutable as a methodology."

I would also add that it stands or falls by its capacity to generate a valid form of educational theory for professional practice.

Towards a Theory of Schooling, Hamilton, D. Falmer, 1989.

Learning about Education - an unfinished curriculum. Hamilton, D. Open University Press, 1990. . Falmer, 1990.

These two texts by David Hamilton need studying because of the distinction he draws between Schooling and Education. If you experience Schooling in terms of institutional structures and arrangements which reproduce repressive ideologies, social inequalities and hierarchical forms of control, then these two texts are required reading. They present an historical understanding of the development of Schooling and help to explain how Schooling, as distinct from Education, has become embedded so firmly within the power relations which sustain our present social structures.

Education and the Social Order 1940-1990. Simon, B. Lawrence and Wishart. - A very readable account of the development of the comprehensive schools over this period.

The State and Educational Change. Simon, B. (1994) Lawrence and Wishart. This contains a re-vitalising case for the study of the History of Education.

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2.3 GETTING ENQUIRIES GOING ON WHOLE SCHOOL DEVELOPMENT

2.3.1 ACTION RESEARCH AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AT GREENDOWN COMMUNITY SCHOOL

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Paper presented at the International Conference of the Classroom Action Research Network 19 - 21 April 1991 at the University of Nottingham

In 1987, when I had completed an M. Phil at the University of Bath, I thought it would be great to investigate the organisation and growth of the new school I was working in. It seemed an ideal chance to investigate the practical concerns of teachers as they built the new school curriculum together. After various attempts to set up a "learning group", and with the advent of LMS, the headteacher and governors of Greendown School decided to finance an action research group. Ten members of staff at Greendown School are registered for higher qualifications. We form the Greendown Action Research Group and we meet every week to investigate areas of concern in our research, to look at a paper written by a colleague, to read from the wider field of educational research or to get on with writing in the company of other researchers. All but one of us is registered at the University of Bath: one colleague was already registered at Portsmouth Polytechnic when he was appointed at Greendown.

We are funded from quite separate sources: four are funded directly from the school's INSET budget; four are funded by the LEA; two are funded by a combination of school and TVEI money. We all made bids to the various sponsoring bodies and obtained the necessary funds for registration at the University of Bath. Although the school allows us to "sign out" occasionally when we have non-contact time, there is no secondment available. However, there is provision for supply cover under the school's "Research and Development" scheme. (see below)

Over a period of two years, the group has changed as colleagues have left the school and as we have become more accustomed to the rigours of working together and undertaking educational action research. My own research is an attempt to work collaboratively with colleagues in evaluating an action research approach to institutional development in terms of the professional development of staff and the quality of students' learning. A substantial part of my research is concerned with coordinating the internal work of the group. I've collected audio and video recordings of our sessions to enable me to make claims about the quality of my own contribution to the work of the group. I've also worked closely with two colleagues in particular and investigated the quality of my collaboration with them as they tried to answer questions like "How can I improve my practice?" (Whitehead 1989) I wrote about this in a paper (Larter 1990) which was circulated within the group and at B.E.R.A. conference 1990.

Another strand of my own research is about a wider form of professional development and also involves working with colleagues. In his paper "Knowledge, Power and Teacher Appraisal", John Elliott asks,

"Does a form of appraisal which creates a sub-system of surveillance and control over teachers constitute a strategy for eliminating those pockets of professional culture which still resist the transformation of schooling into a manufacturing process?" (Elliott op. cit. in "Quality in Teaching: Arguments for a reflective profession" ed. Wilfred Carr Brighton: Falmer Press 1990)

Elliott thinks that it does because it attempts to control the conditions under which teachers' knowledge is constructed. I agree with him. Consequently at Greendown, we have formulated our own research and development scheme with the emphasis on dialogue. It uses, to quote one colleague, a "bubbling up" model rather than an imposed checklist of spurious competence. My own action enquiry is moving forward with the question "How can I attempt to improve the quality of research and development at school so that it works for the good of teachers and students?" I coordinated a working party which wrote the following proposal.

REVIEW AND DEVELOPMENT AT GREENDOWN:

WHAT IS REVIEW AND DEVELOPMENT FOR?

- i) to undertake professional development for all staff
- ii) to improve the process of education for all our students
- iii) to manage changes to the curriculum and the institution.

These three are placed in order of importance. Within this process, we see five interlocking phases which we think will help us to achieve the three aims above. These are reconnaissance; planning; acting; evaluating and reporting. Here is a systematic way of planning for and going through this process.

A REVIEW AND DEVELOPMENT PLANNER

- A) What do I want to get better at as a member of Greendown staff?
- B) What have I experienced or seen that gives me this concern?
- C) What do I intend to do in order to improve in this area of my work?
- D) How will I find out if I have improved my work? What can I use to show that my students' education has improved?
- E) How will I describe this process (i.e. A,B,C,D) so that it informs colleagues of what I have done?

This would be the basis of all R&D. The questions are probably best answered in discussion with a colleague or colleagues and notes kept for future reference. They can then be used in any further discussion and/or for any writing that goes on.

RECONNAISSANCE PHASE

(What do I want to get better at as a teacher? What have I experienced or seen that gives me this concern?)

This can be carried out in any part of the school, from an individual classroom to the management team. It can be carried out by an individual or by a group. Reconnaissance is the process where, as a school, we find out where we are growing from so that we can grow towards the school's values and aims. By reading the policy documents issued at the end of last year, we should all be able to sort out what the school's aims and values are. For example, on page 1.1 of the "Systems and procedures for staff" document, there is a clear statement which shows one of the values of the school:

"we assume that students will respond positively to encouragement, that they will behave in a civilised and mature way and that they are morally 'equal' to adults."

What does this mean when we have to deal with students who do not respond positively to encouragement? How do we go about educating students to behave in a civilised manner? There are many questions of this kind that we can ask of ourselves as we try to put the system of values and aims as described in the document, into operation. Do we live out those aims and values in our daily work? Whatever the answers to this question are, we can describe how we go about our work in light of the aims and values of the school. This phase of the R&D process would be done through dialogue with colleagues, by simply observing and making brief notes about what one sees.

Once this process has been carried out, and we would suggest that there will probably be many concerns it throws up, the problem is one of isolating the most important concern. Our recommendation would be that deciding what is the most important issue, again, this would best be done through dialogue. The teaching team would seem to be appropriate but not absolutely necessary as there are other places that dialogue can go on in school. For example, the subject team would also be appropriate.

PLANNING PHASE

(What do I intend to do in order to improve in this area of my work?)

This is where you imagine what we might do to try and make things better. How might you go about "develop[ing] personal qualities in the student" for example? What changes do you have to make in your work so that you can teach the National Curriculum more effectively? In what ways would you change your practice so that you offered equal opportunities? Depending on what area of your work you are concerned to develop, the aim of this phase is, quite simply, to plan an intervention.

ACTING PHASE

(How will I find out if I have improved my work?)

Once this plan is made, it needs to be acted upon. As you act, you would gather information which you think will help to make judgments about whether your plans are actually helping you to achieve what you want to achieve. This could be in the form of students' written work, journals, participant-observation, video film, audio recording or whatever is manageable and available.

EVALUATING PHASE

(What can I use to show that my students' education has improved?)

Using the evidence gathered over time, we ought to be in a position to make judgments, based on evidence, that what we have attempted has been successful or not. This could form the basis of a discussion with colleagues or it could be in the form of a brief piece of writing. The aim of this phase is for there to be a personal outcome which states, in a summative way, what we have all done during a period of time, say a year. We would recommend that all teaching staff write a brief paper for discussion with a group of colleagues - again the teaching team seems to be an appropriate forum - to negotiate and draw up the following year's plan.

REPORTING PHASE

(How will I describe this process so that it informs colleagues of what I have done?)

We think that once this stage has been gone through, then the most important aspect of R&D has been completed. This is the primacy we place on professional development. However, perhaps there is still some work to be done on things like making a fuller report available for the management team to act upon as necessary. It is, after all, now part of a legal requirement that all schools make an annual R&D plan. How can a school do this without some recourse to the work undertaken during any year by its staff? We recommend that teams make reports as part of their regular minutes, although this may not be necessary every week. The Headteacher and Curriculum School Directors will also discuss R&D with colleagues occasionally. We also recommend that all staff draft a short report of say 500 words which outlines their work on R&D during the year.

From these papers we envisage several more possible areas for discussion. First of all, there is the possibility, a strong one, that colleagues working on a similar concern would contact each other and talk about what they have done. Second, there should be discussion in teaching teams and the formation of a composite report from each team of their work over the year. This would be based on the team's minutes, end of module reviews and the papers written by individual teachers. Third, subject coordinators could meet with their teams, interview as individuals and, through this dialogue, form personal goals for the coming year.

Thus, there is a matrix of dialogue in which institutional goals, negotiated with senior staff, personal goals, individually formed through discussion, and team goals, discussed and negotiated in teaching/subject teams.

All these papers would then be sent to a working party who would draft a report for the whole teaching staff. This report would then be presented in a pair of staff meetings. In the first, a briefing would take place in which the report was outlined. In the second, all staff would have a right to reply in which they could suggest amendments and alterations before the report was ratified. **Part of this process would be the guarantee that none of this report would be used for any purposes by the governing body of the school. Any institutional development plan should be quite separate.**

The R&D discussion paper was accepted, after some debate, by the management team and by curriculum team leaders. In the desire to improve the quality of in-service support for teachers' own professional development, the management team has provided time for all teachers in the form of about one supply day per teacher. This can be used for a variety of individual purposes - to enable classroom triangulation and the use of a "critical friend"; to enable teachers to write up their reflections on their practices; to enable colleagues to meet and discuss their work; and so on. (The action research group, as members of teaching staff, will also have this supply time available.) The intention is that teachers themselves set the agenda for their own development and choose their own "critical friend."

After the first phase of the R&D process, I have had no negative response. Colleagues at school have said they think the idea and the work makes sense: they have enjoyed the discussions it has opened up with their peers and the focus of their own practice within the institution.

As the process of Research and Development develops, the action research group will have more involvement in supporting colleagues - for example, a training day has been set aside when all of us will play a major part in discussions about such things as reconnaissance, finding a focus, gathering evidence, working

with colleagues as critical friends and writing research reports. **All** members of teaching staff are involved, from headteacher to probationers: an exciting prospect.

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2.3.2 GROWING YOUR OWN AT WOOTTON BASSETT SCHOOL

Supporting The Development Of Action Researchers Within An Action-Research Approach To Whole-School Development.

Kevin Eames
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Wiltshire
March 1990

What is this paper about?

It's an attempt to illustrate, for teachers who may be new to action research, how I became an action researcher over the past few years. I hope that my experiences will provide some short cuts for those who are setting out on the same path - and their number will grow strongly, I think, owing to the commitment of LEAs like Avon to action research, especially in the light of the Department of Education and Science's "Planning for School Development" (December 1989), which suggests an action research approach to school development plans, and their evaluation. The focus in the paper is primarily upon myself, because action research demands that the researcher should examine his own practice and educational development, rather than anyone else's.

Readers of the British Journal of In-service Education will be able to plot the development of this approach to action research through a number of previous contributions (Whitehead,A.J. 1977/80/83, McNiff,J., 1984, Lomax,P., 1986, Whitehead,J., 1987). My own contribution is intended to extend the action research approach from a classroom base (Eames,K. ,1987) into whole-school development.

Why bother?

Because I think that action research is of immense importance to the professionalism of teachers. It's a form of knowledge produced by teachers, and primarily aimed at communicating with teachers, and at being used by teachers. Although it's "home-grown", it also satisfies legitimate demands for accountability, since it constitutes a demonstration that teachers are evaluating and improving their classroom practice in a methodical and rigorous manner.

Becoming an action researcher

Although all teachers are potentially action researchers (and I think I was one for a long time without realising it) action research as a methodical, professional approach to developing and evaluating classroom practice doesn't just happen of its own accord; it must be supported by the structures and personnel of each institution and of the local authority, and each teacher involved must do it, and talk about it, if he or she is to understand the power of the form, and the possibilities for its use. In the following account, I hope that the ways in which my own development as an action researcher were supported will become apparent.

Stage One: Learning about Learning. Ten years ago, as a newly-appointed head of English in a large 11-18 comprehensive school on the outskirts of Swindon, I became involved in the "Learning about Learning" project, organised by Pat D'Arcy, the Wiltshire English adviser. This was a cross-curricular, cross-phase initiative which brought together teachers from all over the county for a series of meetings where they would teach a characteristic lesson from their own specialist area to the rest of the group. The discussion and writing which followed each presentation focused on the reactions of the other teachers as learners: How did they respond? What difficulties did they have as learners? How might learning be clarified and made easier?

By trying to understand their own learning processes, the teachers on the project were encouraged to develop and share classroom strategies for supporting learning. This exploration of classroom practice was further encouraged by a residential "Summer Institute", in which members of the project worked together for a week or so with teachers from a neighbouring county. The residential institutes were backed up by writing weekends, which gave participants the chance to write about and discuss accounts of their own classroom strategies for improving learning, as well as sharing the writings of other teachers and academics; where possible, the accounts were published by Wiltshire County Council as booklets in the "Learning about Learning" series, and have proved interesting to those teachers who have come across them, if my own experience is reliable, in that the accounts of practice given in the booklets have suggested strategies to adapt and try out in the classroom. The booklets have also been noted in the more academic press (1), and have been used by teachers as far afield as West Germany, Hong Kong and California; they have proved an effective method of sharing practice.

How did this stage move me towards being an action researcher, though? It did so in the following ways, I think:

- I reflected on my own learning processes, and tried to apply my growing understanding to improving my classroom practice.
- I tried to use the theoretical insights of academic writers (2) to help me understand what was happening in my own classroom.
- I began to realise the power of teachers working and talking collaboratively to help each other develop their own classroom practice.
- I wrote accounts of my own classroom practice, and read the accounts of other teachers. Through this, I came to see the importance of defining my own understanding in writing, and of learning from the writing of other teachers and writers about education.

I wasn't yet an action-researcher, although I was moving in that direction. I was giving accounts of my classroom practice, trying to explain why the things I did worked (or not), and these accounts were available to be discussed and adapted by other teachers. However, there were a number of elements missing, which I want to deal with in the next section. I must emphasise, though, the role of the English adviser and the opportunities she provided for collaboration, exploration, discussion, and publication. Without such practical and firm support, I wouldn't even have got this far.

Stage Two: Bath University. As a development from the "Learning about Learning" project, a group of participants was encouraged by the Wiltshire English adviser to submit proposals to Bath University for research leading to an M.Phil. degree. I was one of the two teachers who actually went through with the application, and it was through the research that I did at Bath, and through the support and advice of Pat D'Arcy, Andy Larter (my fellow researcher from the "Learning about Learning" group), and Jack Whitehead (a lecturer at the university), that I gradually made the transition to being an action researcher.

My first two research reports were along the lines of my booklets in the "Learning about Learning" series. They were narrative, descriptive, and focused in detail on the learning of one pupil. They tried to integrate a discussion of academic theory with my developing perceptions of what was happening in my own classroom.

It wasn't until I had presented my second report to a validation group meeting, that I understood what was lacking. Fundamentally, I needed to clarify why I was taking the actions that I did. Teaching is a value-laden activity, and we take action to improve our classroom practice, when we see that what is happening doesn't fit with what we want to happen. In my case, I was teaching in a school which, at that time, was very transmission-orientated. Pupils were like so many little vessels to be filled with knowledge by their teachers. I wanted to give them more control over their writing than the dominant learning climate allowed, since I held autonomy in learning to be an important aim of education, and I felt that pupils would learn more effectively if they were allowed greater control over decisions affecting their writing. As a result of my increased understanding, which came about through discussions with Pat D'Arcy, Jack Whitehead, Andy Larter, and others, my next two reports used the five-part action-reflection cycle, and took the following form:

- a specific description of the problems I had identified, where what was happening didn't correspond to what I wanted to happen;
- a description of a possible solution (or solutions) to the problems identified;
- an account of what happened when I tried to put my solution(s) into action;
- an evaluation of how successful my solution(s) had been, in the light of the evidence I had collected;
- a modification of my understanding as a result of this process, and a restatement of my ideas and actions to enable me to continue the process of improving my practice.

I learnt from this stage that:

- the five-part cycle helped me to maintain the detailed case-study element of my research, while giving shape and clarity to the context-rich data which emerge from classroom action and reflection;
- the five-part cycle, as part of its form, made it necessary for me to clarify my developing understanding of what I was doing and why I was doing it;

- the cycle, as part of its form, made it necessary to take action in order to improve my teaching, and to redefine and replan problems, solutions and actions in the light of the action taken.

Thus, I realised how the form could have a direct effect on my classroom, and could lead to a continual and methodical process of improving practice and understanding. Again, though, I could not have reached this point on my own; the support of the local authority was essential in terms of funding for fees and remitted time; the English adviser was continually supportive in terms of positive criticism of the work I was doing; the university gave support through Jack Whitehead's attempts to get me to see how I might present my research using the five-part cycle; Andy Larter provided me with an example of an action-researcher who got there well before I did, and showed me how to do it.

Stage Three: The School Research Group. Once I had grasped the power of the five-part cycle of action and reflection, I was able to begin supporting other researchers. After a break following my M.Phil., I had started some further research at Bath University, and I became aware that there were other teachers in the school who were also involved in research at the university. Four of us formed the nucleus of a research group, which was intended to provide mutual support by circulating relevant reading material and through meetings to discuss drafts and future directions.

The others, apart from myself, were the deputy head, who was writing a dissertation as part of his M.Ed. studies; a teacher from the design faculty who was carrying out an M.Phil. by action research, and a teacher from the English faculty, who was working as part of a cross-phase group funded by the English adviser, whose members were working towards an Advanced Diploma in Educational Studies at Bath University. Jack Whitehead was the supervisor for both Paul Hayward, the design teacher, and Daniela De Cet, the English teacher. He also gave his time willingly to advise Chris Kirkland, the deputy head. The kind of work produced by the group is illustrated by publications such as "How can we improve professionalism in education through collaborative action research?" (3)

I learnt from this stage that:

- a group of researchers in a school could support each other effectively;
- this mutual support created a climate in which members of the group felt able to discuss their research and their teaching openly and honestly;
- the presence of an experienced action researcher was valuable, since I could advise on problems similar to those I had already encountered myself.

We were supported by:

- the English Adviser, who provided supply cover for Daniela on an occasional basis so that she could attend meetings at the university, or spend some time writing up research reports;
- the local authority, who provided help with fees and remitted time for the other three members of the group;
- the university, through Jack Whitehead;
- the recently-appointed headmaster of Wootton Bassett School, who was strongly supportive of the individual and collaborative work done in the group.

Stage Four: action research in the English faculty. If action research is to do the things I claimed for it earlier in the paper, it's got to be more than just a way of working for a few privileged academic researchers. In June and July 1989, therefore, the English faculty tried using an action-research approach to evaluating its policy on reviewing and profiling, taking advantage of the time created by the departure of our examination groups. (Each teacher was kept free of exam invigilation for four consecutive forty-minute periods, to help with writing his/her report.)

Appendix A is a case-study, based on our evaluation, which was presented at a one-day conference on action research attended by Wootton Bassett School's heads of faculties and senior management. In the case-study, I tried to demonstrate how our evaluation worked, using an action-planner which the conference was considering.

The evaluation demonstrates, I think, the five-part cycle in action:

- We had a concern (to find out how our policy was working) which we wanted to investigate.

- We worked out a way of doing it, by clarifying once more the principles and intentions of our policy. At the same time, we decided how we were going to collect the information.
- We took action by looking at pupils' written work and their review sheets, and by carrying out interviews.
- We wrote our reports and reflected on what we had learnt about the operation of our policy.
- We planned the changes to our practice which we felt were needed to bring it into line with our principles and intentions.

I learnt from this stage that:

- action research was useful in clarifying our ideas about what we were doing, and by following the five-part cycle we were able to plan and carry out improvements in our practice;
- it was collaborative, and involved the whole faculty;
- time needed to be made available for teachers to write their reports, as you can't ask teachers to do it on top of all the work they have to do normally.

The headmaster was fully supportive of what we were trying to do, and all members of the faculty found it a worthwhile exercise.

Stage Five: action research in the whole school. As a result of the experience gained in the first four stages described above, the headmaster decided that an action-research approach to implementing and evaluating the National Curriculum would best serve our purposes. This decision was reinforced by the publication of "Planning for School Development" (DES, Dec. 1989).

So far, the following steps and decisions have been taken:

- A one-day conference for heads of faculties and senior management was held in Feb. 1990, to discuss the principles of action research, and the experiences of the research group and the English faculty; to formulate preliminary concerns for investigation by faculties; to consider practical ways of making action research work as a normal part of curriculum development and evaluation.
- The research group is being enlarged. One member of each faculty will receive 0.05 FTE remitted time per week to work as the faculty's "designated researcher". He/she will investigate his/her own practice within contexts decided by the faculty as a whole, using the five-part action/reflection cycle. He/she will be registered at Bath University for an advanced diploma, with fees paid by the LEA, and will contribute his/her growing experience of action research to the faculty's understanding and practice as a whole.
- The present system for curriculum development, consisting of standing committees and development groups, is to be dismantled. Co-ordinators for each area (e.g. information technology, assessment, active learning) will have 0.1 FTE remitted time per week to work with faculties, to plan and review action/reflection cycles with them.
- Two of the five teacher-development days per year are to be given over to producing and discussing action-research accounts of practice within faculties.
- Time needs to be found to enable teachers who are not members of the research group to examine aspects of their practice using the five-part action/reflection cycle. This will come from a combination of teacher-development days; individual supply days built into each faculty's allocation; time freed by examination classes leaving; curriculum co-ordinators and/or "designated researchers" taking over individual teachers' timetables for a morning or an afternoon.

At this stage, support from the headmaster is fundamental; nothing can move without it. The LEA is also providing financial support, and Bath University will support members of the research group. Teachers will be able to support each other, though, in these first steps towards making real the collaborative, methodical professionalism that teaching needs.

Conclusion

I hope that this account of my own development as an action researcher has clarified some possible methods of supporting and encouraging action research within schools. Ways need to be found to enable teachers to use the five-part action/reflection cycle; to circulate and use the accounts produced; to work

collaboratively; to be aware of, and use within their practice, already published educational theory. If we can do it, we will have evolved a powerful form for improving and understanding our practice, which will have immense significance for the professionalism of all teachers, not just the ones in our own schools.

NOTES

(1) For example in references in Martin, N. "Mostly About Writing" Heinemann (1983) and Protherough, R. "Encouraging Writing" Methuen (1983).

(2) For example the work of James Britton, Frank Smith, Donald Graves, Donald Murray, Nancy Martin, Janet Emig, Ann Berthoff etc.

(3) Eames, K. (ed.) "How can we improve professionalism in education through collaborative action research?" Bassett Action Research Group, Wootton Bassett School, Swindon, Wilts.

(APPENDIX A)

USING ACTION RESEARCH IN EVALUATION AND CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT

**A Case Study: The English Faculty's Evaluation
of Reviewing and Profiling
June-July 1989**

The only model we've got so far for the kind of approach to curriculum development which we're trying out on a whole-school basis is the evaluation carried out by the English faculty last summer. Obviously, it's only a first attempt, and in our discussions at the one-day conference, we will develop and adapt it suitably. In this account of what we did, I'll try to use the headings from the "Action Planner", to see how they fit.

1. What issue did we want to find out about/evaluate?

We decided that we wanted to evaluate our profiling and reviewing policy in the fourth year.

2. How did we think we could go about finding out about/evaluating this issue?

We decided, as part of the agenda in two faculty meetings that we wanted to investigate the following questions: - Does our reviewing system help pupils to develop responsibility for their own writing, talking and reading by:

(i) Acknowledging what they have achieved in writing, reading and talking?

(ii) Identifying areas which need further improvement?

(iii) Giving an account of how far they have fulfilled targets for improvement from previous units of coursework?

(iv) Enabling pupils to "map" their overall development as talkers, readers and writers?

- Does our reviewing system draw pupils' attention to the specific objectives of the coursework unit in question? Do they understand how they can achieve these objectives? Do they keep them in mind during the unit?

- Does our reviewing system link effectively with the CSS in the fourth and fifth years?

- Do pupils understand the reasons for our reviewing system? Do they support it?

3. What specific actions did we take to get what we wanted?

4. What evidence did we need to tell us what we wanted to know, and how did we collect it?

a. I'll take these questions together, because we didn't distinguish between them at the time. Here is an extract from the write-up I did of our discussions, which I presented in a form I thought would help us all to proceed in a methodical way, using a common approach:

b. We decided that we would focus on one pupil. I'll inform each class teacher this week of the identity of the lucky one. Please look at all the written work that he/she has produced, and see if it provides evidence which shows how far (or otherwise) our reviewing system is doing what we want. Please look at each of the questions, and, in each case, comment on (i) any ways in which the pupil's work fits our intentions, and (ii) any ways in which it does not. We also agreed to interview our chosen pupil (during a reading lesson?), to get at information which was not easily obtainable by looking at writing alone. See next section, though.

c. We decided also that we would give a questionnaire to each class. On reflection, that will be too time-consuming an operation, and I'd propose that, instead, we take the following questions as a focus for the interview. Take them as a guide, and improvise if necessary, to get to what you are looking for. (Incidentally, taping the interview is useful for reflection. It can also serve as part of GCSE oral assessment, if so desired.) The following questions:

- How helpful were the written reviews you've done this year in writing your Course Summary Statement? Can you give examples?

- How useful were the reviews in helping you to see what you had achieved in each piece of work? Can you give examples from your work?
- How useful were they in showing you what things you needed to improve? Examples?
- Did looking back at previous targets help you to improve? Can you give examples?
- Do you feel that writing the reviews puts you more in charge of your own work? What are your reasons for your view?
- When you are writing a draft of a coursework piece, how far do you keep in mind the objectives set at the start by the teacher or the worksheet? Does it help to improve your writing? Can you give examples?
- What do you think this system of reviewing your learning is supposed to do? Do you think it does that?

d. Presentation. Please would everyone follow this format:

- Briefly answer questions as in b. above.
- Give brief overall assessment of (i) successes and (ii) problems.
- Suggest practical ways of improving the problems, both in our own classrooms and departmentally.

5. On what date did we meet with the rest of the faculty to share the evidence? How did we organise the meeting?

We decided to meet on Monday 3rd July. We would each have a report to present to the rest of the faculty, and to the headmaster and the county's adviser for TVEL, who would act as a kind of validation body, to check that we were asking the right questions and answering them in a rigorous and methodical way. Each member of the faculty was asked to prepare enough copies of his/her report for each faculty member, as well as one for Hylton and for Elaine Long (who wasn't, in the event, able to make the meeting). Hylton took his copies home over weekend for a pleasant and relaxing read. Here's another extract from the write-up, which illustrates how we went about it:

e. Timing. Could we all have a rough draft of our individual reports (max. 2 sides A4) by Tues 20th June, for discussion during faculty meetings? These can then be typed by Sharon during the following week (no faculty meeting that week, as a gesture towards the time taken, and I'll ask Tony to keep those involved off invigilation on Monday 26th June). We will each have a word-processed report to present on 3rd July. (If you want to do it yourself, the new Amstrad is in the English office. I'll try and get the questions onto a file, which will save everybody a bit of work.)

6. After the meeting, what had we learnt about the issue we wanted to find out about/evaluate?

To illustrate what we found out, I've attached a couple of examples of the reports we wrote on individual pupils.

7. As a result of what we learnt through this cycle, what issue did we then want to improve?

We decided that we wanted to improve the following:

(i) Keeping the criteria for each unit in the forefront of pupils' minds in the course of the unit (by encouraging them to jot down ideas about how they were sticking to the criteria which we would remind them of).

(ii) The "intensity" with which reviews were carried out (by carrying out the reviews in class, under high-pressure "think-writing" conditions).

(iii) Simplifying the prompt sheet (by selecting the appropriate questions we wanted the pupils to think about, and by reminding them of the criteria established at the beginning of and during the unit of coursework).

(iv) The reviewing of oral coursework (by getting the kids to jot down learning-log comments at the end of discussion sessions, and by making more frequent reference to the oral coursework checklist in order to familiarise them with the kinds of things they could comment on).

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