Preface

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

Figure 1: Simon Riding, July 2004

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

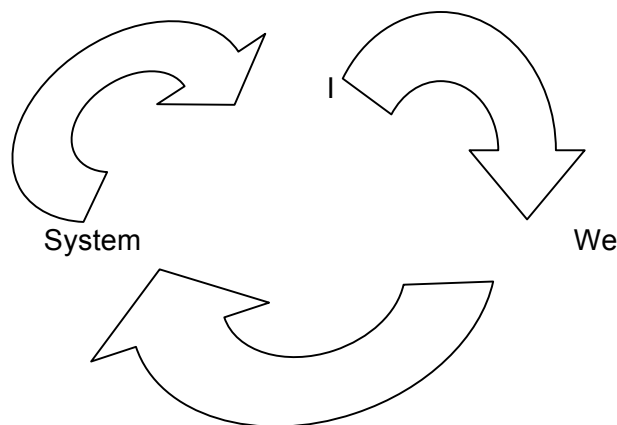In order to clarify this I offer the following model that I have developed to demonstrate these ideas:

Figure 2: Model to show cyclical influence of relationships within a wider system

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