

## Sequence 2 The Past



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

'Hi Simon

This is the only photograph with just the three of us on it, you were about 6. Don't forget I was either taking a photograph or your dad was, kids weren't as conversant with cameras then, so Angela and Samantha [my sisters] wouldn't have been allowed to use the camera.

This was taken down Witton Park.

Love Mum' (December, 2005)

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

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

## 2.1 Autobiography

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

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

‘...for some practitioner researchers, creating their own unique way through their research may be as important as their self-chosen research focus.’

(Dadds & Hart, 2001, p 166)

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

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

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

sense of them thus allowing us to research into more elements of our being as we can then inquire into more events as we look at all the elements of our life rather than just the specific educational moments. She further refers to second-person research as involving others and third person as seeking to bring in the wider community. I would argue that I have drawn on all three elements within my own research. I share similar desires as Marshall (2004) in wanting to draw more sense from my life and understand the self more in order to improve my practice thus I am:

‘...seeking to bring attention into more moments of being and action...’  
(Marshall, 2004, p2)

I further connect with her calls for each researcher to develop their own sense of first-person research as we are all unique beings that need to inquire into our own lives in such a way as to make sense of them (Marshall, 2004, p2)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

‘...all five heads trace their competitiveness back to their roots.’ (Parker, 2002, p. 34)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

(Feldman, 2003, pp 27-28)

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

Marshall & Reason (1998) further contribute to this debate when considering the nature of validity within research. They sum up two questions to test the validity: "Has this inquiry helped to develop the quality of aware action among those involved?"

"Is there evidence of improved action-inquiry capacities?"

I would argue that my thesis is a response to my whole being: it is a self-reflection and consideration of who I have been, who I am and who I might be, through my reflection. My thesis draws on the critical theory of my life and integrates this theory with the academic theory that is already out there. My actions and practice have changed as a result of my inquiry and through my application to my life of self-

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Barthes (1986) further comments:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Through my style of writing I have tried to be open and welcoming, sharing thoughts and emotions with my reader in order to build trust within the writer/reader relationship.

*Self studies should promote insight and interpretation.*

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

*The autobiographical self-study researcher has an ineluctable obligation to seek to improve the learning situation not only for the self but for the other.*

Throughout this text I am recognising the *other* within it: through my educative value of *living through others* I am living through the experiences of the *other* in order to improve their educational experiences as well as my own. My research question is focused on addressing this guideline. My application of the action research cycle to the situations in which I find myself has required me to improve my own practice whilst contributing to the education of others: others being both students and staff.

*Powerful autobiographical self-studies portray character development and include dramatic action: Something genuine is at stake in the story.*

Throughout this text I am accounting for my own progress through education, describing and analysing the changes that have taken place in my own living educational theory. Other characters have been involved within this text: both playing a minor or major role at different times. I have written about significant others that I have come across, and fleeting acquaintances that have too briefly touched me and moved on. I have also included details of key moments within my educational autobiography alongside other moments which may to others be insignificant but to me are important. This meshing of major and minor roles plays together to form an orchestration of time and place to breathe life into my own story for others.

Something genuine is actually at stake and this has changed over time. When I began this study I believed that what was at stake was the job that I was doing: that somehow I would improve the work I did simply by reflecting on it alone. However, I realised as time went on that this was not the 'something genuine'. The genuine things at stake were:

- my own sense of self-discovery and understanding, including my own well-being and ability to live through the job that I had chosen to undertake;
- the quality of education for the students that I came into contact with;
- the quality of professional learning offered to staff that I came into contact with.

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

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

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

*Self-studies that rely on correspondence should provide the reader with an inside look at participants' thinking and feeling.*

Within this text I have used transcripts, other people's writing and thoughts, other people's responses to what I have written, interviews and so on. I have attempted to set the scene within these and to integrate them into my text. Where I have used other people's responses I have used them in such a way as to allow them to speak through their own words. I have included full transcripts within the appendices. This I feel helps the reader to formulate their own responses to what they are reading.

*To be scholarship, edited conversation or correspondence must not only have coherence and structure, but that coherence and structure should provide argumentation and convincing evidence.*

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

*Effective correspondence self-studies contain complication or tension.*

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

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

1. The inclusion of a specific consideration of *how* autobiographical research is presented. I would argue that autobiographical accounts should be presented in such a way as to reflect the person writing. For instance, I have chosen to incorporate multi-media within my account as this is a reflection of the type of creative person that I am. I have chosen to incorporate images of various kinds in order to try and communicate the nature of my character. I believe the form chosen to represent research is important as it contributes to the reader's connection and understanding of the writer.
2. I would further argue that the guidelines could benefit from incorporating a need for autobiographical accounts within educational research to be able to demonstrate the connections between the *se/ves* that exist and how these various *se/ves* contribute and connect to the whole of the person. I have argued that the self exists within a multiplicity depending upon the context or situation an individual finds themselves in. The self isn't fixed but is fluid and responsive in a relationally dynamic way. It is also a living contradiction at times. I have recognised the connections between the personal and professional selves and reflected on how they influence each other at different times. This is important in accounting for who and what I am.

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

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

#### □ Preparation

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

#### □ Data collection

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

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

□ Data storage

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

□ Data analysis

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

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

Thirdly, Plummer (1983) argues for the need to ensure that validity checks occur through:

- Autocritique;
- comparison with similar work;
- comparison with official records;
- comparison through interviewing other informants.

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

□ Data presentation

Plummer argues that the researcher of life history needs to:

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

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

....and so I create the story.....

## 2.2 The School-Refuser Story

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

‘Slowly, I was learning to love my theme. Hello to journeys. *Salut* to escapes. I hope my escape leads me back to myself, by a new route, so that I can see my life and its possibilities as if for the first time.

And so this journey must be a sort of dying for me; a dying of the old self; a birth of something new and fearless and bright and strange.’ (Okri, 2002, p. 32)



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

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

- Autobiographical self-studies should ring true and enable connection.
- Self studies should promote insight and interpretation.
- Autobiographical self-study research must engage history forthrightly and the author must take an honest stand.
- Biographical and autobiographical self-studies in teacher education are about the problems and issues that make someone an educator.
- Authentic voice is a necessary but not sufficient condition for the scholarly standing of a biographical self-study.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

That is what I remember.

### 2.3 My parents

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## 2.4 Significant Others (2)



Figure 16: Image of Simon, 2004

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

'Dear S,

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

On my mark, unleash hell,

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

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

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

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



Figure 17: Image of Toni, 2005

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

and:

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

and:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## 2.5 Teaching and learning

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

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

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

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

dropping sheets movie.WMV

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The first paragraph from Toni's narrative was:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

laughing movie.WMV

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

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

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



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



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

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

course; what they thought of the teaching and learning. The students completed the following and I then photographed them. This is what they produced.

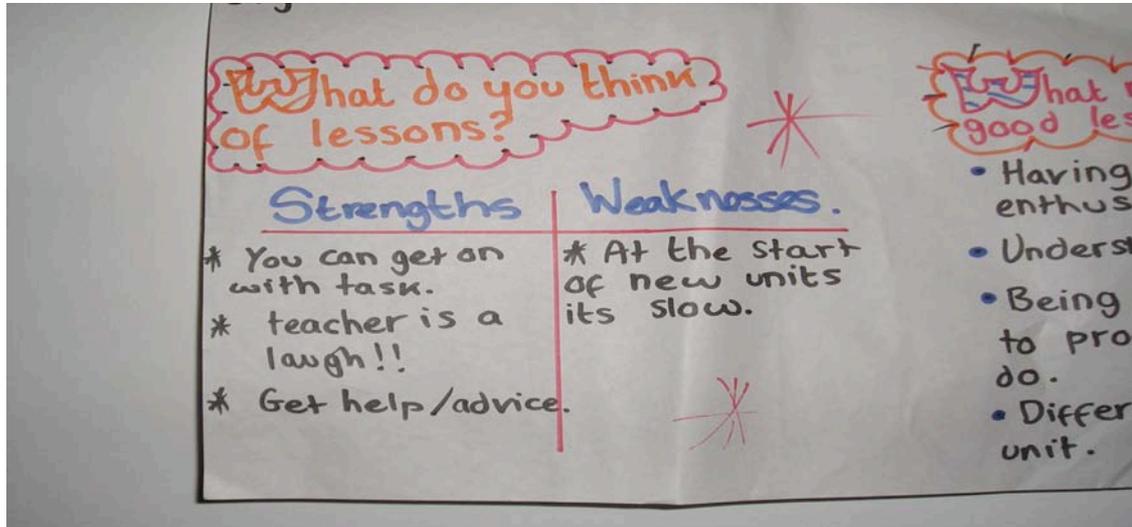


Figure 22: Extract from evaluation from Year 10 Media Group, 2004.

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

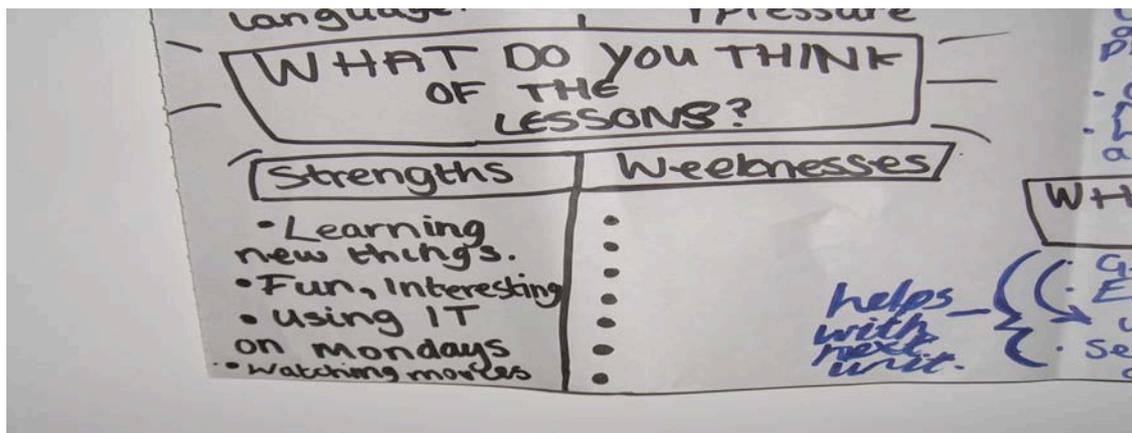


Figure 23: Extract from evaluation from Year 10 Media Group, 2004.

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



Figure 25: Extract from evaluation from Year 10 Media Group, 2004. Arrow highlights key point identified.

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

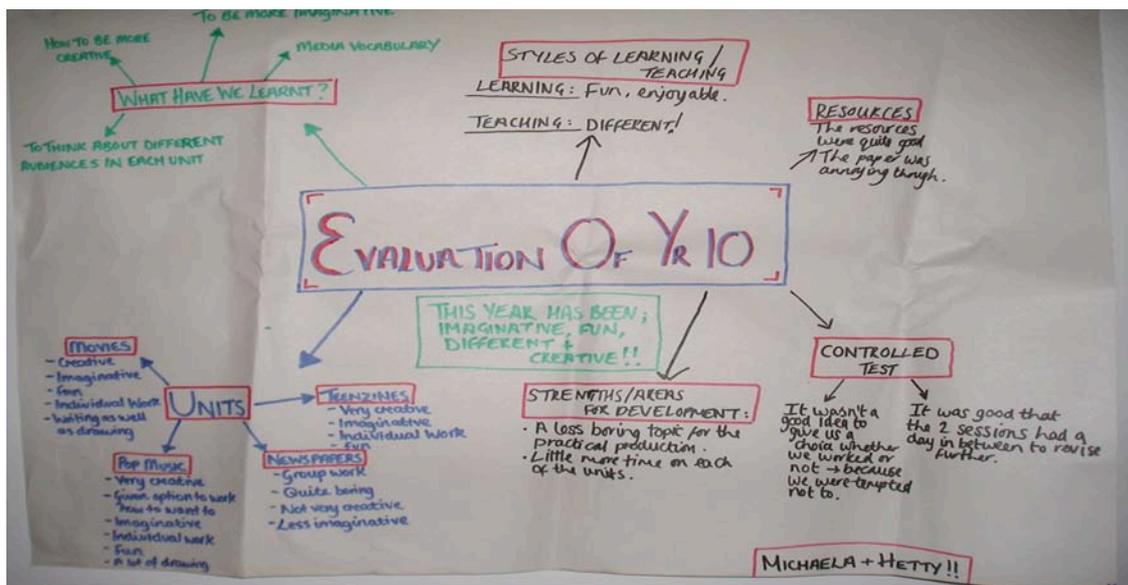


Figure 26: Extract from evaluation from Year 10 Media Group, 2004.

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

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

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

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

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

'...the process of transforming the contents of consciousness into a public form so they can be stabilized, inspected, edited, and shared with others.'

(Eisner, 1993, p. 6)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

‘One of the quickest ways to apply teacher research to the pursuit of good teaching involves, simply, teachers listening to students. This ‘research on students’ is a cardinal tenet of good teaching, as the teacher details his or her observations of the student as well as his or her reaction to the learner.’

(Kincheloe, 2003, p. 39)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## 2.6 Me as teacher-learner

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Westwood Teacher Researcher Group.WMV

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

Okri (2002) goes on to say:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

'When I asked the teacher-research group why it was they wanted to turn up to the weekly meetings many of the group had comments to make:

'...it's also a slight luxury I think having the time or the incentive to question what you're doing...' (Jayne, 21<sup>st</sup> November 2002)

'...I think also ultimately we all want to improve our practice or we wouldn't be here and you feel safer because you know other people empathise or sympathise because they want to do the same thing...' (Kate, 21<sup>st</sup> November 2002)

'...it's been useful to have the group as a sounding board when you are developing a whole school policy or something ...to actually have a group that you can discuss it openly with and validate it with and get a response from people again in a fairly safe environment you can get some really good ideas from it again it's so important to find time to reflect on these things and try and take the school forward and without this two and half hours on a Wednesday I find it very difficult to do that...' (Mark, 21<sup>st</sup> November 2002)

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

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

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

O'Mahoney (2003) also argues in relation to leadership that there are:

'...four distinct phases in their first year of socialization into the principal role – idealization, immersion, establishment and consolidation...' (O'Mahoney, 2003, p.15)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

These are:

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

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

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

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

and:

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

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

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

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

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

and:

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

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

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

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

### ***A Curriculum change***

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## 2.7 Middle leadership

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

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



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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## 2.8 From Middle Leader to Senior Leader

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

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

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

Furthermore Gunter (2001) adds:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Gunter (2001) explores the various positions present within school leadership and argues for a model of:

‘...conceptually informed practice that embraces a radical professionalism in which educational professionals are users and producers of leadership knowledge, and that the site for knowledge production is a collaborative and shared space for knowledge workers in schools and other settings...’ (Gunter, 2001, p. 15)

Gunter identifies the debate present within school leadership theory and acknowledges the challenges that are present within it. Her argument is something I present within my own thesis, being a user of and producer of leadership knowledge through the autobiographical action research reflection upon my own practice over a period of time. Through my embodiment of a relationally dynamic standard of judgement, namely *living myself through others*, I have created the shared living educational space required through establishing a teacher-research group, in which collaborative knowledge production can take place.

Gunter (2001, p. 31) further identifies the concerns of the development of a model of school leadership that is very much focused on meeting easily measurable targets rather than recognising the vast sense of difference within education and practice and leadership that can exist. Gunter argues for the need to acknowledge the individual and the personal background and histories that have influenced individual values within leadership; celebrating difference rather than attempting to make everything the same. My thesis recognises this and promotes a model of leadership which recognises traditional theory and utilises this within practice in order to create a living educational theory of practice.

Gunter (2001) recognises and identifies the key dilemma facing the debate between qualitative and quantitative researchers. She comments:

‘Accounts generated from qualitative research are both exciting and problematic at the same time; exciting because they provide an account of practice that can contribute to debates about educational change, but problematic because we need to ask, whose account is it?’ (Gunter, 2001, p. 59)

How do I answer this question within my own thesis? I have incorporated within my own exciting account a clear position of where I place my work within the spectrum of research. It is a personal, autobiographical account that presents claims to originality and uniqueness and contributions to what we understand as educational knowledge. I place myself as the writer and the focus of the research at the centre of the text and draw on others in order to validate the claims that I have made. These others are

voices represented within image, video and text. I acknowledge the problems associated with such a position and such claims but hold onto the importance of phenomenology within my work: of understanding through doing and experience. In this way, my thesis is moving our understanding of educational knowledge forward.

I am aware that I am a professional educator and reflect on Wilkins (2004) and her comments in relation to this:

‘The ‘professional’ approach tends to see ‘true knowledge’ as a range of valid perceptions constructed through experience, culture and ongoing debate.’

(Wilkins, 2004, p. 9)

and:

‘The view from the ‘professional’ approach is that teachers are self-motivated professionals using evidence-informed dialogue and creativity to develop and refine the art of teaching; taking responsibility for addressing educational needs and fired by passion and moral purpose.’ (Wilkins, 2004, p. 9)

Indeed this engages me in terms of capturing the importance of passion and evidence-informed dialogue: the two ingredients that I see as crucial to improving schools and learning. It is important to note my focus on ‘learning’ rather than ‘teaching’. This is the shift in understanding that teaching is about improving the impact on learning rather than about improving the teaching skills used within the classroom.

Ribbins et al. (2003) offer the suggestion that Principals go through stages prior to becoming a school leader: namely ‘Formation’ and ‘Accession’. These stages are essentially reconstructed in the light of the individual’s experiences. I want to demonstrate my critical engagement with these ideas and offer my own insights into them. Reading these stages it reminds me very much of the growth of a young warrior into a tribal leader: a kind of rite of passage. Ribbins et al. (2003) comment on the ‘formation’ stage that:

‘Prior to the assumption of leadership roles, there is a preparatory stage in which possible candidates shape themselves and/or are shaped for prospective high office.’ (Ribbins et al., 2003, p.5)

This makes me reflect on how I have shaped myself for Assistant Headship.

### ***The Preparatory Stage***

‘One remains ignorant and powerless unless, through learning, one acquires the concepts and knowledge which dispel that ignorance and enable one to understand oneself and others, and one’s obligations and responsibilities.

Learning is essential to becoming fully a person.’ (Pring, 2000, p. 19)

I have shaped myself within the early part of my career through many experiences, for instance my NPQH training, my time spent working with the Senior Management Team of Westwood St Thomas School, my M.A. and Ph.D. and my whole school responsibility work as *Gifted and Talented* Coordinator. These experiences were both self-determined experiences that I had sought and also that had been offered to me by others. These experiences have helped ready me for senior leadership and widened my understanding of schools and how schools work. They have also given me an insight into people and how people function. As Pring (2000) identifies above, the key to improvement is through learning: the key to learning is the understanding of self and others.

‘Growing Tomorrow’s School leaders’ (N.C.S.L., 2003) includes a number of mini-case studies of how Headteachers have engaged in progressing their staff into leadership positions. I can reflect on how I have had such experiences. One such example is:

‘We have also operated a higher-level *immersion programme* by taking middle managers and seconding them onto the leadership team for one or two years.’ (Hartle & Thomas, 2003, p. 22)

I was fortunate enough to experience this as I was seconded on to the Senior Management Team for 6 months to gain experience. I gained from this the opportunity to learn about myself and gain a greater understanding of how school leadership works. I was able to listen to the types of debate that take place within a senior team and also begin to understand the nature of roles that people hold within a team. I was also able to begin to learn about the way that a Head runs a senior team. Hartle & Thomas (2003) further comment:

‘Taking charge of personal development means knowing yourself, knowing what you want to achieve, identifying opportunities for growth in that direction, being proactive in getting those opportunities, and helping to create an environment that promotes learning from them.’ (Hartle & Thomas, 2003, p. 38)

Essentially, isn't this about being a reflective practitioner and also about engaging within an action research approach to self- development and fulfilment in order to improve yourself and influence those around you? I can understand and see myself within this: how I had clarity from an early stage of my career about wanting to be a Headteacher and embracing the opportunities I was offered in order to support my growth and development towards this.

My preparatory stage has taken 6 years to construct. Within my own preparatory stage, I have attempted to shape my career so that I have been able to gain experiences which I feel will place me in a solid position to one day be an effective Assistant Headteacher and one day a School Leader. I am aware that due to the nature of my promotions happening so quickly, that there will be many things that I won't have experienced and that I will come across in senior management that I will have to deal with in my own way. However, my Preparatory Stage has developed my skills of being able to *live through others* and understand the relational nature of teaching, learning and leadership. I believe that this empathetic nature is something that will be crucial in understanding others as I move into senior leadership.

I was finally successful at securing an Assistant Headteacher post in March 2004. I was appointed as Assistant Headteacher of Bitterne Park School in Southampton. I secured this post after attending five other interviews over a two year period. On each interview I was preparing and improving on the skills and knowledge that I needed in order to get the position that I wanted. Throughout this time period I was shaping myself in terms of building a knowledge base of the information that was needed in order to demonstrate to others that I was capable of doing the job and also I was building a skills base through the roles that I was undertaking within my school. The combination of building knowledge, understanding and skills attributes whilst initially securing me the position of Assistant Headteacher, also, I believe, will help me to be successful within the post when it begins.

I feel that I have gained skills of flexibility of leadership style that reflects the circumstances that I am in. I also feel that crucially I have developed a growing understanding of people and interpersonal skills of working with others that are flexible. For instance, my taking on of the role of Gifted and talented coordinator gave me an extra dimension to my leadership experience as it gave me both whole school responsibility and the experience of managing and leading a variety of staff. Very often, middle leaders only lead their own teams and become closeted in terms

of doing this. Being the Gifted and Talented co-ordinator demanded that I demonstrate flexibility within my leadership to lead a cross-section of staff. All of these, I believe, are crucial elements required to be an effective leader. I feel that I have gained the knowledge of what roles are within schools and of key central educative initiatives of for instance, Performance Management and Secondary Strategies. I feel that from the experiences that I have had, I have gained a growing confidence of communication with others and a wide understanding of how Schools work.

Within the Preparatory Stage Ribbins (2003) further comments:

‘As part of this general process of formation, such leaders are socialised into various social and institutional norms and values – into codes of taste, morality, values, belief, authority and the like by three key agencies: family, school and reference groups.’ (Ribbins et al., 2003, p. 5)

I believe that I can trace the three aspects identified by Ribbins et al. (2003) of family, school and reference groups within my own career development. It is clear to identify the importance of family within the development of my own career. Within Sequence 2.I reflect on being a school-refuser and outline the ways in which my youth and family have influenced my current values and ideas.

Beyond this, the growing and continued support from my wife is a clear value and source of support and challenge and is helping to extend my understanding and qualifying of life. I further deal with her influence over me in Sequence 2.

Further to this, within School I have been able to experience a great number of roles through for instance teacher-governor and Professional Association representative. This has widened my understanding of the workings of Schools and the work that they do. Alongside this the observation of others within this role has also aided this. Beyond this my work within a teacher-research group and through the NPQH programme are examples of reference groups that have influenced my work greatly.

Day (2004) acknowledges how certain characteristics come to bear on all teachers in terms of defining and constructing the self, commenting:

‘Teachers’ professional identities – who and what they are, their self-image, the meanings they attach to themselves and their work, and the meanings that are attributed to them by others – are, then, associated with both the subject they teach (this is particularly the case with secondary school

teachers), their relationships with the pupils they teach, their roles, and the connections between these and their lives outside school.’ (Day, 2004, p. 53)

Further to this Ribbins et al. (2003) comments in relation to the nature of influence over the perspective leaders:

‘Sometimes the individual experiences consistent influences and conditioning within and between these and related agencies; on other occasions, there is inconsistency even contradiction. Taken as a whole, these agencies shape the prospective leader’s personality and/or character by generating a concept of self, and the rudiments of a work style and outlook.’ (Ribbins et al., 2003, p. 5)

I can reflect here on the influence that my previous Headteacher at Westwood has had on me and also the influence my previous Deputy has had on me mainly over the last three years of my time at Westwood St Thomas School. These two influences have indeed been consistent in helping to determine the type of leader that I am growing into, the professional identity I have and in many ways have conditioned me to doing things in a certain way. However, my own noted differences in the way that the new Headteacher at Westwood St Thomas’ School is approaching his post is perhaps providing the necessary contradiction in approach that I require in order to form my own preparation for Headship: by providing me with alternative models to draw experience from.

In summary it could be argued that the Preparation Stage is characterised by self development alongside the support of others. It is the combination of these, of *self* and *other*, which help shape leadership candidates. I would argue that through my Preparatory stage I have gained valuable experience which I believe, as a middle leader, will support me as a senior leader.

### ***The Accession stage***

However, I’m arguing that leaders should provide personal accounts through their own unique living educational theories of learning that demonstrate the nature of their influence over others. My contribution is *living myself through others* through which I account for the nature of the educational influence that I have.

During the ‘Accession’ period Ribbins et al. (2003) comment:

'Following an initial period of preparation, candidates for principalship, as for other forms of leadership, during this phase of their career life-cycle develop, rehearse and test their capacity and readiness by comparison with existing office holders and prospective rivals.' (Ribbins et al., 2003, p. 6)

Whilst I am acutely aware that I cannot challenge my potential rivals to pistols at dawn, I feel that this is something that is particularly relevant to my own experiences. Over the past three or four years as a middle leader I have found myself attempting to record the actions of others that I have followed and to reflect on the way they have carried out tasks or made certain decisions within certain situations. In particular I have reflected on the way in which the senior leaders in Westwood have dealt with me and managed me; reflecting on the decisions they have made and how these have been articulated. I have found myself growing more and more frustrated at times when I have disagreed with the way things have been handled and felt helpless to change it. This has further reinforced my need to be in senior leadership.

I have also found through my limited experience of interview situations that I have grown in confidence within my own ability. I feel that the experience I have gained from going on interviews for Assistant Headteacher posts over the last couple of years has been instrumental in readying me for a school leadership role. For instance, I remember my first interview for Assistant Headship two years ago at a School in Hampshire. I gained an interview and was surprised. I had only been teaching for four years. I found myself moving through the first day with 12 other candidates. I didn't get invited back for the second day and the feedback was really honest: they felt that I simply didn't have the required experiences and that it was too early in my career. I can compare this to another interview that I went on 18 months later in March 2003: an Assistant Headteacher post at Bitterne Park School in Southampton. This was a job that I really wanted and was asked back to the second day with three others from an initial 14 candidates. I got to the last two candidates and the school appointed an advisory teacher with much more experience. During feedback the school could only say that the reason I didn't get the job was due to the fact that I didn't fill their specific criteria: they wanted someone to run the Arts College specialism and as he was a music advisory teacher, he got it. Ironically, or it may be destiny, that this is the School that I was appointed to in March 2004 and ended up working with this candidate in post. These experiences have been crucial in readying me for the role of Assistant Headteacher that I have obtained: each interview has brought me back to my own school with greater confidence: I haven't been

disheartened as I have always felt as though I am already doing this ahead of my time so I haven't been bothered by it. Each interview has also allowed me to test myself against my potential rivals and allowed me to move through the Accession stage.

Between my two interviews at Bitterne Park there was approximately twelve months. During this time I moved on significantly in my career and my understanding of leadership. I think one of the key things in terms of me getting the job the second time round was the fact that during the interview I was much more relaxed and confident about my own ability: I actually enjoyed the experience. I remembered that I needed to be a 'person', not just a machine. This is also a reflection on the School itself in terms of making me feel relaxed during the process. I had also extended my skills and knowledge about schools and leadership and also developed my experiences: primarily of taking on whole school leadership of *Gifted and Talented* and also gaining experience of working on a Senior Management Team. By this time in my career I was also really wanting a new challenge and wanting to leave Westwood. I think all these factors coupled together meant that I went into the interview convinced and confident that this was the right job, in the right School, at the right time for me.

Ribbins et al. (2003) further comment about the Accession stage:

'Accession is, as such, a developmental period which is geared to the accomplishment of two crucial tasks: first, the preparation and construction of oneself as a credible candidate for office; and, second, the acquisition of marketable performance routines that are designed to attract and convince prospective talent-spotters and appointment panel members and selectors.'  
(Ribbins et al., 2003, p. 6)

For me, this holds the importance of image and how the image of the *self* is constructed for others.

This reminds me of Sartre's (2003) sense of being in terms of the *Other* when he comments:

'By the appearance of the Other, I am put into the position of passing judgement on myself as on an object, for it is as an object that I appear to the Other. Yet this object which has appeared to the Other is not an empty image in the mind of another. Such an image in fact, would be imputable wholly to

the Other and so could not “touch” me. I could feel irritation, or anger before it as before a bad portrait of myself which gives to my expression an ugliness or baseness which I do not have, but I could not be touched to the quick.’

(Sartre, 2003, p. 246)

Within the whole interview process I was aware that this sense of the projection of the *self* to the *other* was crucial. Being interviewed is a difficult process as it can hit at the heart of a person as it can reflect the self clearly.

For me this also hits at the heart of leadership and teaching. Some teachers in my experience are still unwilling to engage with teacher-research because of the fear of what the mirror they hold up to themselves may reveal: they are afraid of the image of themselves that the *other* holds within their mind. In terms of leadership, I am aware that *others* have indeed maintained mental pictures of me based on my actions: my task as a leader is to understand why *others* feel the way they do and be able to deal with the images those *others* hold of me. This thesis attempts to include some of the images others hold of me.

This developmental stage of the preparation for leadership is crucial and very delicate. The construction of the ‘self’ I feel is central to succeeding in leadership: it is about being able to build the character that is resilient and at the same time personable. It is about being able to live with the outside character whilst the inner one is trying to get out or be suppressed depending on the context. I am aware of the contradiction of self that I carry: the situations where I am relaxed within my own middle leadership role, yet when in an SMT, I change, become tense and find it difficult to relax. Perhaps this is an issue of the multiplicity of self that exists within the context of the school leadership role (Hill and Stephens, 2005). Essentially the use of the word ‘construction’ is central here. Educational leadership interviews are about being able to construct the experiences and skills needed in order to be able to convince others that you can do the job. It is also about ‘packaging’ the product in such a way that sells the contents. I am particularly aware of the element of ‘performance routines’ that establish the leader as the leader: what does a leader do that makes others think that they are the leader? Perhaps I draw upon my own real sense of democratic leadership here: why will others put their faith in me? When I go into an interview situation I am really clear about why I deserve to be in school leadership: I am clear about how the experiences that I have had have readied me for the position of school leader.

Taysum (2003), drawing on Ribbens et al. (1997) model of leaders, agrees with this concept of the importance of understanding the self as a leader, commenting:

‘Therefore, it is of paramount importance that leaders analyse their constructs and re-construct them if they are to learn and if they are to develop as people and leaders. This process can be assisted if there is a knowledge pool that reveals leadership activity within a holistic framework because a leader’s career cannot be isolated from a leader’s life as partner, parent, relative, friend, citizen or the many other roles adopted by a leader during the interplay between struggle and agency. A leader is a complex spiritual, emotional, intellectual, dynamic and creative human being. Therefore, to further understand leadership a leader needs to build and test a sense of self.’  
(Taysum, 2003, p. 11)

Taysum identifies a couple of key issues here that this thesis aims to explore. I have already indicated the minimal research base to support the role of Assistant Headteacher within schools which would mean that the knowledge pool referred to is not available to assist the self analysis. Secondly, the identification of professional and personal self linking to construct the leader is engaged with also in this thesis, highlighting the need for self-reflection on the part of the leader.

For me, the Accession stage has been about gaining the position of Assistant Headteacher: my first attempt at senior leadership. It has been about going through a number of interviews and eventually being able to convince somebody that I could do the job if employed. However, I realise that as soon as I begin this role, I am again back into the Preparatory stage, beginning to ready myself for the next promoted senior role that I need to go for. Therefore, this implies that these stages are indeed cyclical and can very much be linked to the action research cycle itself.

Reading Gunter (2001) I am drawn by her use of language when investigating the nature of school leadership, in particular her links to Lacan’s notion of identity of self and other:

‘Identity is not just the product of the individual but is a socialised and socialising process in which identities can be received as well as shaped.’  
(Gunter, 2001, p.4)

and,

‘How the self is represented and allowed to be represented is interwoven with social and political issues of age, disability, gender, race and sexuality. In this way the individual is the object of someone else’s gaze, and can be grouped according to abstract categories and essentialised as being a typical example.’ (Gunter, 2001, p.4)

This connects very much into my relationally dynamic standard of judgement of *living myself through others*. It is the relational links between *self* and *other* that allows both individuals involved in the relationship to grow. The democratic sense of *living myself through others* reflects the desire to allow both *self* and *other* to develop through the relationship: both parties are able to gain from the relationship. I would argue that this is something I have demonstrated through my relationships with Simon, Toni, Dan and Sophie, as exemplars.

Over the past five years I have distinctly felt myself to refine the approach I take to my work. When I first arrived in teaching I wanted to move quickly into leadership: something in my mind and the way that I think pushed me to realise that I could make a difference in education, so I believed. Time really seemed to be an issue. In a junior management role I can recognise my own living contradiction when I remember myself being very aggressive in my approach: not fully understanding how to relate to people or to get the best from them. I sought the challenges and tackled them head on. I tended to see their faults and weaknesses rather than focusing on their strengths. As I developed I found my approach changing. I feel that I am a leader that wants to lead by example: that wants to be able to show others what I expect from them.

I think that this is reflected through my email signature that I give within my emails. I sign my emails ‘strength and honour’. This is a saying that I have gained from the film *Gladiator*, as I draw on the references from this text. I do not see this as a negative connotation, but rather see it form an inclusional perspective. For me this reflects the sense of leading from the front and capturing the sense that the qualities of ‘strength’ and ‘honour’ are encapsulated within these words: I relationally want to be able to give and live out these qualities, whilst also promoting them in others: I want others to have ‘strength’ within their lives, whatever it is to them, and the ‘honour’ to live out their lives productively and meaningfully. For me life is about integrity to the job you do and the people that you come into contact with. I believe that through spreading strength and honour amongst those I come into contact with that the future of humanity has a greater chance of bettering itself. Having honour is quite a traditional

value and perhaps one that today's generations know little about. However I want Mankind to have the strength to live their lives and the honour to do so in a way that allows themselves and others to grow.

I do however believe that I was able to create an atmosphere of enjoyment around my Faculty: I don't think that I took myself too seriously. I feel that I began to understand accountability, as my understanding of democratic styles of leadership grew, and this was something that I had been working on to apply much more with those that I work with. I felt that others would see me as someone who really cares about the students and, as one ex-colleague wrote in a leaving card, someone who so much 'wants to make things better'.

My previous 2<sup>nd</sup> in Faculty, Simon, commented on his leaving card to me:

'Dear Simon

It is hard to aspire to be the best in a system, which is so bound up with rules, stress and burn-out, but you have showed me a way through the maze.

Whenever I felt that one more day on the treadmill would drive me to despair, you cheered my soul, raised my head and lifted my spirit. I may teach one more year or twenty more years but I will never work with anyone who has such a great passion for 'making things better'.

Good luck with all your future hopes and dreams.

Stay as sparkling as the first day I met you.' (Simon Ratcliffe, 2003)

I think Simon was somebody who responded well to my approaches to leadership. His words of 'making things better' are words that have stuck with me a great deal: I think he has eloquently summed up my approaches, desires and feelings about education.

This particular card was all the more important in its symbolic nature as the front picture of the card was a still of Steve McQueen as Captain Virgil Hilts in *The Great Escape* with the quote from McQueen of, 'Racing is life. Anything before or after is just waiting.' For me, change the 'Racing' for 'Education' and the metaphor is complete.

I think I can note that at this point I am not out to try and learn from an imposing 'top-down' model of leadership: that I think there is a 'right' answer out there and there is knowledge that I must learn in order to be a school leader. What I think I am doing is

exploring how my own understanding of my own experiences have and are preparing me for school leadership and how I can interact with the material that already exists about being a good leader producing a synthesis and equality within educational research that uses theory and practice to make things better. I believe that it is this synthesis that will bring about a greater understanding of what leadership means to me and allow me to do it more effectively. I feel that it is essential that this action-research approach to this work is maintained: it is essential that I am *living through* the experience that I am writing about: that I am not simply reflecting on school leadership once I am there, but rather that I am looking at how I can ready myself for it, very much in the form of a training model. In many respects I am looking at the journey that I need to undertake and I am writing about that journey as I undertake it, rather than sitting comfortably at my destination and reflecting whilst I drink my wine and laugh about those times things got a little 'tricky'.

Essentially what I am advocating is a model of School leadership that develops knowledge about its practice from those within it. Gunter (2001) comments in relation to knowledge production:

'...and so it seems that what we need is an approach to knowledge production that focuses on the use and production of knowledge in which the knowledge worker in the classroom and the university can engage in dialogue about the same questions, participate in the same networks and engage in both radicalism and practicalities at the same time.' (Gunter, 2001, p. 10)

This ultimately, in terms of my own understanding, is advocating an action-research approach to practitioner and leader knowledge creation in which a synthesis between the use of and production of knowledge can harmoniously be linked in order to further the understanding that we have of knowledge of leadership within schools.

Perhaps as I move into School leadership I need to maintain a reflection on my own experiences and bear in mind how I have been able to develop professionally because of the enabling powers that others have given to me. Gunter (2003) comments:

'Illustrative of this is teacher professional autonomy and Ball (1987) shows that it is in the gift of the Headteacher rather than a professional entitlement of the teacher.' (Gunter, 2003, p. 41)

If this is indeed true, how disappointing it is that teacher professional autonomy has been seen as a 'gift'. I think this is something that I need to bear in mind: will those I lead feel professional autonomy or feel stifled by me? My view is to enable, to

empower and to liberate those staff that I lead and to recognise, where I can, their sense of professionalism and use this to improve the learning that takes place.

I can reflect on opportunities that I have been given through my previous Headteacher at Westwood, throughout most of my research. I was allowed a great deal of support and autonomy to be able to follow my research interests and never felt a sense of pressure to look at particular issues. What was perhaps most encapsulating about the support provided was the sense that he was a part of what was happening: he felt very inclusive and part of the teacher-research that was taking place within his School. He attended many of the Saturday meetings of the Westwood teacher-research group and I sense that he had a genuine belief that teacher-research was one of the ways to improve the quality of learning and teaching within the School itself.

This was able to provide a real feeling of being supported and valued by the Headteacher: these made me want to work and support him. This is a key learning issue that I need to remember: I need to consider how I can demonstrate to my staff that they are valued, or how I can *live through* them.

I can also reflect on how I was line managed as a middle leader. I would classify this as a loose-tight approach to leadership, where I was given a great deal of professional autonomy to work and lead my own Faculty. This was a successful strategy in many respects; however there were times when I wanted more direction which would have helped. Line management should have the potential to aid the development of the middle leader and help drive forward improvements in learning. In my middle leader experience, I can recognise that I would have liked more focus on this.

It is clear however that I partially disagree with Gunter's views that:

'Teachers-as-researchers is important, but they cannot or should not replace professional researchers who are currently located in HEIs.' (Gunter, 2003, p. 53)

and:

'Professional training and experience as a researcher is important, and cannot be learned by teachers at the same time as doing the job of teaching or leading or managing.' (Gunter, 2003, p. 53)

Essentially I would argue for a synthesis between teachers-as-researchers and the work of academics within universities: a synthesis that draws on the experiences and potentials of each with the aim being to promote a knowledge base that is rooted in practice but is supported through rigorous reflection. My argument is to further recognise the academic within the professional practice and embrace that practitioners can support and drive forward academic knowledge. However, I strongly disagree that teachers cannot learn to become researchers whilst being a teacher. My view of methodological inventiveness supports the view that learning to become a researcher is something that emerges through engagement with research rather than something that is learned. For me, it is the essence of what I do as a teacher-researcher which improves my practice. It is my understanding of action research improvement cycles which are essentially internalised which help me to improve my practice as I am focusing on the work that I do within the classroom. It is my responsibility as a leader to actually promote this type of work within my school as it is the action-reflection cycle which will help my staff to actively reflect on their practice which will help them to improve what they are doing. With respect to Universities it is their position, in my view, to support the knowledge production process that takes place within Schools and to encourage and enable teacher-research to be more widely spread.

Embedded within Gunter's argument is the essential basis that there is a 'right' way to conduct research: a traditional view that research incorporates a process that you follow. For me the sense of 'methodological inventiveness' (Dadds & Hart, 2001) is central to teacher-research.

One example of the desperate need for teachers-as-researchers is the recognition made in the NCSL report *'Deputy and Assistant Heads: Building leadership potential'* (Summer 2003) highlighting the key point that there is at present little to no research base regarding the roles of Deputy Heads or Assistant Heads existing within the educational community. It highlights the fact that there is a need to build a knowledge base on these positions and then to be able to build professional development to support these roles. There needs to be a knowledge base produced from within the role, which is what part of this thesis is about. This is part of this thesis' original contribution to knowledge. Essentially there needs to be an action-reflection cycle in place in order to establish what these roles are about and before a programme of support can actually be put in place to support them.

Barker (2003) identifies what she claims are the characteristics demonstrated by teachers during their early careers if they are to potentially proceed onto headship. She comments:

‘Eventually the Headteachers agreed that the six attributes were essential to being able to cope with early headship and also that the characteristics were recognisable in teachers early on in their careers:

- showed empathy
- possessed an aura
- were reflective practitioners
- held a realistic self belief
- had drive
- possessed astuteness

And the word ‘capacity’ was widely used as heads considered what they saw in the teachers...the capacity to cope with the demands of the role, which the heads felt in many ways defied training.’ (Barker, 2003, p. 17)

I believe that through this thesis I am trying to demonstrate that I have these attributes, some greater than others.

Furthermore, this report draws on the study completed by the Centre for Organisational Research (2001) which identified the characteristics needed in order to be able to develop leaders of the future. (Hartle & Thomas, 2003, p. 13)

‘The identification and development of potential leaders requires a systematic and creative approach and it is too important a task to be regarded as a peripheral activity or one that should be left entirely to individual choice.’ (Hartle & Thomas, 2003, p. 12)

This echoes the comments by Harris (2003) in demanding the need for specific training of potential School Leaders through targeted programmes. What is also interesting is the sense of being ‘systematic’ and ‘creative’: of establishing an approach to leadership within education that can challenge orthodoxy and reinvent itself.

Further to this the NCSL identifies a framework of five stages of school leadership: emergent, entry to, established, advanced, and consultant (2003, p. 14). In many respects I am in the position at present of both emergent and entry to leadership: I

have taken on leadership and management responsibilities and also I am preparing for and getting ready for senior leadership within a school. Sequence 3 of this thesis will deal with my movement further into established leadership.

I am particularly interested in being able to reflect the essence of this approach within my own senior management role. I am highly aware of the importance that training can play within my senior role and the responsibility I carry for those that I lead. I am aware of the importance and intention that I have in coaching my middle leaders through their roles. In case studies completed Hartle & Thomas (2003) comment:

‘All staff are supported through a *quality training system* that involves internal and external courses as well as regular *coaching* sessions. All middle managers are given a weekly coaching session with a member of the senior team.’ (Hartle & Thomas, 2003, p. 22)

Hartle & Thomas (2003, p. 45) argue there are eleven characteristics that attempt to distinguish high potentials for leadership within individuals compared to solid performers. These are:

*1. Seeks opportunities to learn*

I feel that this is very much a characteristic of my own approach to my career as I have realised the importance of building experience of situations and events: engaging within an M.A. programme, then a Ph.D., and also within the NPQH alongside the experiences of being involved with the SMT and other responsibilities that I have held. My learning has also been on-the-job learning: it has been the learning about people and situations that has been the practical learning.

*2. Acts with integrity*

I sense that this is perhaps linked to the context of professionalism: the constant aim to try and improve the quality of the living educational space and placing the priority on improving the chances that students and staff have. My own sense of integrity is deeply ingrained from my upbringing: my strong sense of justice and doing things right that I hold and try and live out through my life. This sense of integrity is firmly rooted within my value base.

*3. Adapts to cultural differences*

This I feel will be tested more so as I move schools for my first career change. However, the changing culture reflected through the three Headteachers that I have worked for at Westwood St Thomas and their very differing styles has helped me to

be able to respond to differing cultures. However, a key issue here is the way that transitions are managed: how I move between roles.

*4. Is committed to making a difference*

Again, I feel that this is reflected through the embracing of change within education and responsiveness and openness to embrace change within my role and the real desire to help others. This further resonates with my whole being and belief of improving the quality of the living educational space: of looking at a situation and wondering how it can be improved to the benefit of those involved. I believe that this reflects and echoes Senge's (1990) sense of 'creative tension': the sense of wanting to make things better leading to the creative energy to do so and desire to close the performance gap between where we are now and where we want to get to. This thesis is my detailed exploration of how I have attempted to live out this ideal.

*5. Seeks broad business knowledge*

I believe that I have extended my knowledge of schools through the different roles that I have had: Head of Faculty; Assistant Head of Year; Gifted and Talented co-ordinator. Within these contexts I believe that I have developed my own knowledge and understanding of management, leadership and generally of how schools operate.

*6. Brings out the best in people*

I certainly believe that I have been able to work effectively with people and crucially this thesis is my reflection on how I believe I can *live through others* in order to bring the best out of them. It is further evidence that through these relationships with significant others that I have been able to bring out the best in them, whether that is staff or students.

*7. Is insightful – sees things from new angles*

I believe I have creatively organised my curriculum through introducing Media Studies as a core option for students and the way in which I have approached change within my Gifted and Talented role through focusing on attainment and achievement rather than a pastoral focus as it was before I took over it. Furthermore the original contribution to knowledge within this thesis of living educational space, living myself through others and the sustained autobiographical reflections, are further examples of seeing education from new angles.

*8. Has the courage to take risks*

Again, the decision to remove literature from the core and replace with a one year GCSE in Media Studies for all reflects my courage to take this risk when it hasn't been tried before. This reflects the ability to stand for the principles that I have. Furthermore, this is about being able to make changes and respond creatively to the environment. Again, the originality of this thesis in its form is further evidence of this.

*9. Seeks and uses feedback*

My reflective practice throughout my teacher-research work has focused my ideas on this and I believe that this thesis is an on-going contribution to this. The form of this thesis, in terms of valuing the voices and contributions that others have made in making me the person I am is further evidence, I would argue, of my seeking and using feedback.

*10. Learns from mistakes*

I feel this is directly linked to the previous point. Through my use of the action-research cycle I am able to actively reflect on my practice and I am able to improve what I am doing. I am not afraid to make mistakes, learning something from them.

*11. Is open to criticism*

I am more willing now than I have been before to be criticised for my actions or lack of actions: perhaps this is due to establishing some kind of perspective on the work that I do and coming to a better understanding of my *self*: of the strengths and weaknesses; good and bad points.

I would argue that the Hartle & Thomas (2003) characteristics could be further enhanced through incorporating the characteristic of 'reflection on life history'. I would argue that an educator's ability to understand and account for their own autobiographical experiences is crucial in enabling them to then understand their professional life. This is the basis of this thesis.

***The transition***

***2<sup>nd</sup> March 2004***

The day I got my job!

I believe that transitions are important within my explanations of my own living standard of judgement and within the clarification of my meanings. I believe that through the transitions I am able to engage with and develop my own meanings. Whilst through the transitions I sense tinges of sadness I also recognise the positives within them for helping me grow as a person.

Perhaps I need to go back to July 2003 in order for me to be able to fully explain the nature, feelings, emotions and passions welling up inside of me in relation to this particular experience. I have worked at Westwood for six years, all my teaching career. I think this has been partly as a result of my own character: I am the type of person that becomes very settled in one place and situation. I like having the one pair of shoes that become comfortable; I like having one coat that keeps all I need in it; I liked working at one school.

In July 2003 I found myself in the position as Head of Faculty losing three out of my team of six staff: some would argue that this was particularly careless! However, the members of staff that I was losing were people that I had directly trained. I lost my *Graduate Trainee Programme* teacher, who I trained and passed the standards with; I lost an *Newly Qualified Teacher*, who I trained via the *Graduate Trainee Programme* route as well; and I also, most significantly of all, lost my second in Faculty, a teacher who had arrived a couple of years earlier as an NQT from Ireland and who had had such a significant and profound affect on me and my life that he would end up being my best-man at my wedding. I lost Simon Ratcliffe. The Headteacher was also leaving, and this was of great significance to me as he was a man I greatly respected and admired.

My wife also left the school, although my fiancée at the time. We had worked together for three years and first met at the school.

I remember the day that they all left: an emotional and symbolic day for me. Something seemed to leave with them. I think that there comes a point in your time within a school when it no longer becomes possible or desirable to get up after you've been hit to the ground. I certainly felt hit to the ground and didn't really want to get up again. In the past, when other influential staff had left I'd always looked to the future with positivism and pride, but this time it was different. I felt as though I myself had overstayed my welcome at the party: I was the only one left in the corner singing songs about the old days when the lights were turned on. It seemed that my own

ability to re-energise had been lost. I had lost some of the people that helped contribute the life affirming energy to my practice. It had been my intention to be leaving myself in the summer of 2003, but I hadn't been successful in gaining promotion. The following year, up to the point at which I secured my new position, was draining. I seemed to have lost the passion: seemed to be ghost-like in my presence. I really felt I'd out-stayed my welcome. I felt that I had started to become part of the problem rather than part of the solution. I began to accept things as they were rather than trying to make them better. I remember the following things from the past that I had done that helped to give me the spirit and presence needed to continue doing the job, although now in a ghost-like shell:

I remember setting up a table-football game within the English office and running a mini-league with the Faculty. I used a school desk, drew a pitch on it with a marker, built goals from pens and blu-tac, and invented rules. This became a focal point in building the team-spirit and many hours, too many hours, were spent playing and discussing issues related to both the game and education.

I remember spending time with Simon, going for drinks after work and building commitment through the relationship that developed. I remember talking a lot with him. I remember driving forward my vision through the investment in this and also gaining his total support for it.

I remember feeling the sense of Simon and Toni both depending on me: for ideas and strength to help them get through.

I lost these feelings and memories, resigning them to the filing cabinet marked 'the old days'.

I can remember the tension within me as I moved closer to leaving and saying good-bye to Westwood, a place that had been such a large part of my life for so long and that I had loved working in. I remember feeling the sense of leaving behind the comfort and a place I know so well, as I moved into the unknown.

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I returned to Westwood for the Evening of Achievement Celebration on 30 November 2004. This I feel gave me the closure from this chapter of my life. I was surprised and

pleased that people remembered me. At the end, students came up to me and asked how I was: Dan was one of them, Sophie another. Dan's mum also came over and said they still talked about me at home. I was pleased at this: I felt a pride. I also knew that I was like the clown at the circus that had just taken his make-up off and everybody could see him in reality. I realised it was time to move on. I felt a sense of being uncomfortable enough in conversation that these people were becoming strangers and that I had moved on. It was a pleasure: but it was also time to go. The curtain came down. The audience had already left. There was no applause.