Sequence 3 The Present

It is important to note that the following section you are about to read will seem quite different from the first two sections. The first two sections you have read were very organised and structured: they reflected a period in my life from which I can reflect on in an ordered and considered way. They are very much a story that has been sequenced from the narratives that I have experienced (Scholes, 1981). However, the section you are about to read is very different. It is not as ordered and jumps around a great deal: it is still a narrative. I make no apology for this. The style mirrors my experiences. In my abstract I claim that, 'I explore the on-going nature of transition between educational spaces upon myself and how this process of change is managed as I move through different stages of my career and life.' My work as an Assistant Headteacher in a new school has been about jumping around and skipping from one thing to another. It has been similar, I imagine, to being in a whirlwind: sometimes right in the centre within a relatively calm place and other times swirling fiercely on the outside having no real control but somehow managing to keep it together.

Throughout this sequence I will once again draw on a range of evidence to support the claims that I make. I am bearing in mind Bullough Jr and Pinnegar (2001) in the comment that:

> 'Self-studies that rely on correspondence bring with them the necessity to select, frame, arrange, and footnote the correspondence in ways that demonstrate wholeness.' (Bullough Jr & Pinnegar, 2001, p.18)

As a researcher I will make certain decisions to select and include material that I believe supports the claims being made. Through the process of triangulating this material I am to present my claims to the reader.

Sequence 3 is not a victory narrative. It is about just over one year of my life that has been incredibly significant in my growth and development: both personally and professionally. It is about a significant movement in my understanding of my self. It is about my significant learning in understanding how Schools can operate and work: how they are made better and can work effectively and be successful. It has been a testing period for me personally and professionally. There have been successes to write about and also failures too. What is not in doubt is the fact that over the year, the learning and reflection process has probably never been working harder to try and make sense of what has been happening. I offer the following account to you.

187

3.1 The new Assistant Headteacher

Within this section I intend to contribute to Lumby, Foskett and Fidler (2005) in their calls to evolve the methodologies that currently exist within education in order to explore issues of leadership within schools through offering my own living educational theory. I support Senge (1990) in terms of arguing that the leader needs to understand him/her self firstly before trying to lead others. I exemplify Ribbins et al. (2003) in terms of the proposed stages that Principals go through prior to taking post and further extend our understanding of these stages and Bottery (2005) who argues that 'trust' is a key aspect of leadership within schools and identifies four aspects of trust that apply to the practice of leadership.

The incorporation of leadership within my thesis is only a small aspect of the thesis. The thesis is not a thesis about school leadership but rather a thesis about how I, as an educator, go about learning from my experiences and then apply this learning in order to improve my own learning and the learning of others.

Throughout my M.A. and my time as a middle leader I spent a great deal of time reading the leadership literature and believing that by doing this it would make me a better leader and help me to do a better job. As I moved into senior leadership, and in particular into the highly effective senior team that I am now part of, I realised that reading literature about leadership on its own would not be enough to help me to improve my practice and consequently help me to make things better. I was able to draw on my reading of literature but I needed something else in order to make it work. I realised from listening and reflecting that what I needed now was to focus on my own learning through living, to help me be better at what I do. There is no doubt that I have gone through the understanding of leadership literature and this has given me grounding in understanding leadership at a theory level. I am referring to Winter's (1998) reflections on 'theory' and the idea that within action research inquiries theory comes not from the literature but from an improvisation based on our drawing on our prior professional and general knowledge resulting in our own journeys of self-discovery. However, leadership practice, I believe, is very different. I recognise that when the leadership team I am part of is faced with a challenge or issue, we do not sit around and draw on traditional theory in order to solve it, but rather we draw on our own experiences and lives in order to come to a solution: our own living theory. My evidence for this is my own reflection on the practice as it occurs. Therefore, I am arguing through my thesis that I am now in a position to better understand traditional

education leadership research because I am drawing on a different understanding of practitioner based theory which is based on a living educational theory (Whitehead, 1989) that I, alongside my colleagues, draw upon in order to improve the quality of the living educational space.

Within research I am looking to be engaged and inspired. For me, leadership is about this: it's about doing things creatively and differently. I have been through the National Professional Qualification for Headship (N.P.Q.H) and I have come out of it judged to have met the standards for school leadership, the technical standards. But this is not enough. This does not mean that I live these standards within my practice. This thesis, with respect to the small elements that are about leadership, is not about the kind of leadership that can be measured with a tick box. In order for me to be inspired and engaged I personally would like to see more leadership accounts of practice that creatively present their arguments and findings, again reflecting a methodological inventiveness (Dadds & Hart, 2001) within them. Within my own thesis I am trying to present leadership as being vibrant and engaging and passionate. This is the reason that I am including a variety of creative multi-media methods in order to collect my data. Some of the texts that I have engaged with over my research haven't been able to inspire me to make things better due to the way that they have been presented. I have not felt that they communicate with me in terms of sharing the space that they refer to. I have not necessarily felt that they embrace the 'humanness' that my standards of judgement are based on: the relationally dynamic awareness that I believe education is about. Appendix 7 explains this point in more detail. My own personal engagement is with narratives and stories that remind me of the buzz and passion involved in the profession that I am part of.

Even in my early days as a senior leader it was pretty obvious that it was the senior team making the difference within the school: it's the senior team that sets the vision and direction, recruits the staff, trains the staff and so on. Without the strong senior leadership team in place, I don't believe that Bitterne Park School would have been judged as being 'outstanding', as assessed by OfSted in March 2006. As the OfSted report commented:

> 'The headteacher and senior management team display excellent leadership and vision. They have implemented very effective strategies to improve the school since the last inspection.' (Bitterne Park School OfSted Report, 2006)

One conversation with an Advanced Skills Teacher (AST) within the school drew out the following comments:

> '….it's such a strong presence in the school….the senior team here runs things and motivates me to want to improve what I'm doing…it's about the challenge it sets…' (Conversation with AST, February 2005)

The early days of my senior leadership role were very interesting, wanting to live up to the kind of expectations set above. The following is an extract from my journal that reflects my first few weeks in post: the calm before the perfect storm.

I have used the following extract to try and demonstrate some of my early learning: how I picked up on the importance of listening to others in order to learn from them and how to value the contribution that others can make to my own learning:

> 'It has only been one and half weeks since I started, officially, my new job yet already I can reflect on many things. I am starting to realise that I have moved from a position, job and school that I pretty much knew inside out and have moved to a job and school that I don't know at all. I am fully within the part of the learning curve that can be described as the 'What the Hell am I supposed to be doing each day?' At present I sit and I wait for things to happen in a reactive way and I take a little longer over things, because I have the time to be able to this: my desk isn't over-flowing. I watch others flying around and wonder when I will start to.

> I am also beginning to realise that I have much to learn. You cannot fully prepare for this job: you can simply gain as much varied experience as possible and then build a set of skills that will allow you to learn how to do the job. Perhaps being able to demonstrate the ability to learn is the key criteria that prospective candidates need to be able to show.

> I am beginning to realise how others are looking to me for leadership: is was quite a moment when a middle manager sat across my desk from me in our first line management meeting and asked me what I wanted him to do and what I wanted from him in terms of his work with his year group. I suddenly realised that I was now the one doing the things that others had done to me for so long: that I was the one leading others. This I feel will take a different type of *living through others:* it will require me to empathise in a more

190

controlled way with them as I search to understand and also improve what they are doing.

Another aspect is the nature of moving into a school as a senior manager yet being faced with tough classes that you have to teach: the students seem to treat me as just another new teacher (how dare they!) and they don't care that I'm a senior manager. I possibly expected that they would recognise and respond to me because of my job title alone, but this view was very naïve. I have to work very hard to maintain discipline and control of my Year 10 class, drawing on my teaching experience to be able to deal with it.

However, as time goes on and I am later asked to pick up a couple of Year 10 and 11 Media groups for a teacher who leaves after neglecting her groups badly in the second term, I am able to walk into these groups and establish myself immediately: I am back to feeling more comfortable with who I am and what I am doing within the school and my confidence is growing as I develop within the role. In the empty classroom I teach in I am able to immediately create my democratic horse-shoe and immediately the feel of the teaching room is back to being my own again: immediately my relationship with these unknown groups changes to one where I know I am leading them as the teacher and we can learn together.

Over the first few weeks I have spent much of my time listening to others. Most meetings are about me listening to what is going on: asking probing questions so that I can build a picture of things. I remember asking one of my middle leaders to talk through how he worked with his year group: I know this is an area that I need to learn quickly as I have no real pastoral experience and will be relying on him a great deal. This is when leadership is made more difficult as middle managers want answers and advice whilst I'm busy listening to them. I am finding that I have to try and strike a real balance between the two: of being constructive yet listening to them and noting what is said for further thought at a later date. This requires me to build in a great deal of thinking and reflecting time in order to be able to consider the range of new issues that I am being presented with.

The sense of frustration continues to build as the more I go on the more I realise what I have yet to learn: it seems that at every turn I am realising the

limits of my own capacity! What I must not forget is that I have demonstrated over time my capacity and ability to be able to learn. This writing is, hopefully, testament to that.' (Journal entry, 13th September 2004)

before I arrive…

I was fascinated to read Evans' (1995) comments on her experiences as being the new deputy head, that she reflected on in her thesis. I can reflect on her writing and ideas. The sense, that she writes about, of sitting during her first week in post and wondering 'what next?' is a feeling that I have familiarity with. An early conversation with a fellow Assistant Headteacher during a visit to the school also reinforced this idea of not quite knowing what to do when you first arrive: of sitting and thinking what to do. This seems to be a common experience amongst new senior leaders. You move from being a teacher or middle leader where your time is pretty much planned out and you are mainly required to implement the ideas of others, to being the one with the time to establish the direction and vision. However, the reality did quickly hit home. It was with anticipation and fear that I began my career in senior management: both anticipation of the opportunities and influence I could have that would bring the students, staff and school success, and also the fear that it could go wrong. Yet despite this, I carried with me my sense of hope for the future.

The following is a summary of my key learning prior to starting at the school in September 2004 that I have taken from my learning journal. The moments I have chosen to include have been included in their entirety and I feel reflect certain key moments and thoughts in the transition process. I don't feel that I had fully prepared myself for this process: I hadn't realised the impact that it would have on me and how much it would test my resolve and spirit. I also offer this as explanation and exemplification of living educational space. I argue that living educational space is the coming together of individuals within a wider context all of which carries with it a set of values and expectations. It is the merging and engagement of these differing values and ideas that enable the creative spark to light and something new to emerge from it.

29th April 2004

I am feeling a great deal of mixed emotions through the anticipated change in schools and positions. I am considering the potential implications of my experiences of being a school-refuser. To what extent will I remember these feelings as I face this

process of change and remember the feelings of being a school-refuser as I move into a new and uncomfortable environment? I received a phone call today from my new school checking on whether I'd received the various bits of information that they had sent to me recently. It's surprising how the sound of a voice can remind you of certain things. The Head at Bitterne has a strong northern accent, reminiscent of my own accent. The sound of this stirred the feelings and emotions that I felt back on the day when I gained the job: the feeling of wanting to be working at the school. The sense that you know when something feels right and you learn to trust your own judgment. However, I am also becoming greatly aware of how my emotions are as I near the end of this particular chapter in my life at Westwood. Even within this text the two sequences are over-lapping, as I am not quite sure where one ends and the other begins. I am actually sitting here, in my office, in my chair, looking around me at those who I have recently had the pleasure of working with. I feel the comfort of the surroundings and the familiarity of the things about me. I am aware of the ingrained knowledge that I have about this place: that events and experiences have built up over the last six years. I am aware of the knowledge that I will take with me that has never been written down anywhere: the internal knowledge. This is the 'tacit knowledge' (Polanyi, 1958) that cannot be written. I am aware of how difficult it will be to leave this place….and then learn it all again for my new school.

7th May 2004

I have had contact from my new School over the last few days. I am starting to build a clearer picture in my head at present. Over the last couple of conversations I have realised that the School keeps mentioning that they want to protect and support me in my first year in the job and are trying to live this out: they have mentioned that they want to give me a Year 8 English group to teach, rather than a Year 10 to help me in my first year. My own personal response to this is that I don't mind. I feel partly defensive yet can realise why they are doing what they are doing. Perhaps my own character is coming through now as I begin to engage with the debates of the new School.

However, perhaps my greatest point to reflect on is the fact that the Head has indicated that she wants me to be one of her 'rotweilers' within the team: to be on the corridors challenging students and living out the standards of the School. This I feel will be a role that is an example of my own living contradiction in practice: I do not feel it will come naturally to me. I feel that I have built a certain style of working with students that is based on mutual respect and is also built on dealing with students in

a certain way: not a 'rotweiler' way. I think I will bring my own interpretation and personal style to this role that still allows me to live out my own values whilst completing the task. This reminds me of reading Evans' (1995) comments regarding her construction of her 'I' within her role and text:

> 'As I progressed through the enquiry however, the 'I' I started with turned into my other self – Kate – the one who was pulling herself aside and struggling with the value conflicts, the dilemmas, the problematics of practice, while the day to day work of the Deputy Head went on, informed by Kate's thoughts.' (Evans, 1995)

To what extent will I have to *live myself through* my 'other', in order to fulfil the role that I have been given? Perhaps as I walk the corridors in my new role I can become 'Arnie'?

Essentially I see this as a significant issue as I prepare for my new role. This can be seen as a re-invention of my *self* as I am asking myself to stand outside of its usual actions and perform in a certain way. This will help to create both the comfort and challenge that I am looking for within my career as my way of moving forward and improving.

I feel that I will be drawing a great deal on my 'tacit knowledge' as defined by Polanyi (1958). Essentially drawing on the things that I have long forgotten that have become ingrained within me and my practice, as I try to survive my opening time within my new position. I will be searching for Kincheloe's (2003) personal voice within my new context:

> 'Individuals cannot protect their personal autonomy unless they regain their voice in the workplace and (very important to this work) demand a role in the production of the knowledge on which the modern state and its experts ground their authority.' (Kincheloe, 2003, p. 23)

As I begin to engage within Bitterne Park and begin to familiarise myself with its workings and systems, I will begin to bring my own influence to bear upon it and begin to engage within the improvement of it. I will also need to establish my voice within the workplace, rather than regaining it: for me it will be starting from new. The students and staff won't know me and I will need to establish who I am and my identity within the School. However, part of my identity is firmly based on my action research history as a teacher-researcher.

12th June 2004

This was my first meeting of the Senior Management Team at Bitterne. We met at a hotel in Southampton on a glorious Saturday and had an agenda to consider: the next steps to improve the school; OfSted preparation; teaching and learning issues.

I was very quiet through this meeting and spent the majority of the time listening to the conversation that was going on. I was clear that I wanted to listen to learn. I was trying to begin to build a picture of the School and how it is and how the SMT approaches their role within the School. I was interested in picking up the culture and ethos of the team and also how they related to each other. I felt this to be important as I wanted to fit into the team initially and make sure that I was in-tune with what was happening and being said.

My first impressions were very positive of the team. I was impressed by the passion that they have to constantly improve the School: how critical, in a positive way, they were of the school. Each team member is strong on driving the school forward and through the discussions I picked this up: each had a carved out role. I was also struck by the importance the School places on creativity and imagination as an approach to school improvement: how they want to think divergently about issues and how they want to constantly refine the services that they are offering in order to improve the learning potential of their students. I was very struck by the School's desire to hold people within the School to account for their performance and actions: as a team, they are very direct about addressing under-performance and challenging it and will not accept excuses.

Saturday 18th June 2005 – one year on!

This is quite a significant aspect of my development. It is one year since the last meeting. The SMT met at the same hotel. It was again a glorious sunny day. However, I sensed the differences that I felt and the difference of my knowledge and contribution to the team and the school over the last twelve months. Perhaps this was felt even more as our new Assistant Headteacher for September joined us, as I did last year. This time I was not so much 'listening to learn', but fully present within the dialogue. This session was all about the preparation for OfSted and we had brought in an outside consultant to work with us. Of all the things that he talked about perhaps the most startling for me was his comments about 'love' within the school. This is the first time that I've heard 'love' talked about in the school and certainly within the senior team at Bitterne Park. I was reminded of Jack Whitehead's love and

195

it was the same type of love that I was able to connect with: the sense of family or community love. I was reminded of Cho's (2005) notion of love for learning and students. I made the connection between community love and learning and this is the essence of the values that I hold. As I was considering my own work I was able to reflect on how I was hoping to share the love that I had. I was re-reading my own text and trying to engage with the love that it radiated, even through the dark times present within it over the last twelve months. For me, even when I have been struggling, the feelings I have had have been born out of my own love to 'make things better': to connect with the others that I come into contact with and when this hasn't been able to happen, how I have tried to deal with this sense of frustration because things haven't been as easy as I used to find them.

Friday 2nd July 2004

I undertook a couple of visits in the summer term prior to starting my new job. I wanted to be able to meet those people I would be leading and also be able to find out as much information as possible. Again I felt the key thing was to be able to show I was a good listener to them: I wanted them to speak and for me to listen so I can continue to build up my knowledge of the school and its staff. I made notes from these meetings and reflected on them later. For me these are important as they reflect initial impressions and instincts of judgement that do not carry with them the baggage of the institution itself. When I reflect on these, I can sense my own naivety in terms of looking at things with simplicity.

I met with a Head of Department I would be line-managing. Some of these things he said really struck a chord with me as they are at the heart of some of my own passions: the work with Gifted and Talented and KS3; the need to bond departments and lead them with vision; the need to focus on teaching and learning and provide sound INSET. These are things that I left Westwood with strongly believing that they need to be central if improvements are to be made.

I also met a Year Co-ordinator that I would be line-managing. Again within this discussion the issue of Gifted and Talented arose and mentoring, both things that have driven me over the last few years. Interestingly, he also commented on the need to provide greater opportunities to communicate with his line manager in order to support him with his role.

Both these meetings individually may well have not provided me with detailed impressions and ideas of the School but they are able to provide a snapshot that I can begin to formulate some ideas about and this is why I have included them for the reader: they are able to provide a basic context that I was working to at the start.

When I reflect on these things they tell me a great deal about where I need to focus my work in order to help lead and move the school forward. I can conclude that I need to extend the use of the student voice within the school and also to extend the school's understanding of Gifted and Talented. I also feel that more focus needs to be given to building the sense of teams within the school: extending the productivity of staff through integration of opportunities to extend professional knowledge.

Both of these meetings were crucial in the sense of me getting something to hold onto. I was trying to begin to make some sense of the job and the needs of the role that I had. I was also trying to set out my approach from the start in relation to how I wanted to approach my role. This was why it was crucial to meet with these staff early on.

It was within my role as Assistant Headteacher that I was asked to learn from within and not rely so much on others to be able to find strength. I was asked to build my strength from within. From my significant relationships within my professional and personal life I have been able to build inner strength to be able to apply self-judgement that I used to work things out. There is no manual to get the job done right: there is no question and answer section to refer to. What I relied on was the experience and creative imagination to deal with the real situations that I faced on a daily basis. There needed to be a growing confidence and affirmation of my own ability and this came through the journey of learning that I experienced over the last few years. It was now my role to recognise others: to be the leader and recognise those I now worked with: the Heads Of Departments I line managed; the Year Co-ordinator that I led.

It is interesting to consider how my role within the School changed over time and how I moved from these initial early impressions to being able to make much clearer and precise judgements based on having built a working relationship with these people. For me this is based on being able to build a trust within these relationships. Bottery (2005) argues that 'trust' is a key aspect of leadership within schools and identifies four aspects of trust:

'…*calculative* form in which individuals, newly met and unsure of future interactions, perform mathematical-type calculations of the degree to which each can be trusted.' (Bottery, 2005, p. 7)

'*Role* trust…being a normative assertion by certain workers…that because they had been educated into and hold a certain set of values and because their profession would sanction them if they failed to live up to these values, they too could be trusted.' (Bottery, 2005, p. 7)

'…*practice* trust, in which assumptions or guesses are confirmed or disconfirmed, where relationships can be built which take trust beyond the merely logical into affective and value areas.' (Bottery, 2005, p. 7)

'…*identificatory* trust was seen as the highest level of inter-personal trust. Built up over years, this was a level of trust where individuals come to know each other so well that there is an almost intuitive knowledge of what the other will do, generating a mutual unconditional respect and trust.' (Bottery, 2005, p. 7)

These different aspects are interesting within my own perspective as I have moved from my previous school where I felt that I had gained up to the level of identificatory trust, to then find myself within a new context and having to start from the bottom. I am reminded of one conversation with Simon in 2003 at Westwood when he commented:

'…I'll miss you as a friend and a colleague. I know we'll see each other before the wedding [my wedding to Karen] but I can't imagine working like this again…' (Interview with Simon, June 2003)

Simon was my best-man at my wedding which I argue illustrates the highest level of inter-personal trust we could have had.

I feel that over time I have established growing trust that now is based on practice trust at the end of the first year in post. However, over the first two terms it was clear that staff viewed me with a great deal of mis-trust: as the stranger that I was. The acceptance came through persistence and through making an impact and difference through what I was doing. I believe that staff developed their trust in me through my

completing of tasks that had been set: for instance, of gaining *Investors in People* status, for establishing the in-house M.A. group.

Within my own workings with my middle leaders, I believe that I was able to move through *calculative* and *role* trust and by the end of my time at Bitterne Park was able to demonstrate *practice* trust. I was able to influence the work of the middle leaders and affect the direction of the school through them: of establishing clear expectations of achievement within the Year group that were beyond previous expectations; of raising the bar on expectations. As one middle manager commented during one of our discussions about the changes in his practice towards the end of my time at Bitterne Park:

> '…I've noticed that I'm actually less confident…what has opened up is my teaching ego…for the better…I'm focusing much more on the needs of the students as a result of what you've done…' (Middle Leader, July 2006)

This reflects the movement from a middle leader doing something just because their superior has told them to do, to doing it because they connect with it within their value-base.

In terms of leadership I am now setting the way that things are done rather than following somebody else's lead. My work as KS3 Strategy Manager has meant that I am the one to question the core heads of subject that I work with, challenging their assumptions about the way they work; unpicking the work they do and trying to find ways to improve it so that all students have the chance to succeed.

Leadership is about others looking to you for the answers and the direction: it is about knowing what to do and when to do it. It is about knowing and being able to recognise the bigger picture. It is about having the skills to be able to get the best from a situation as well as having the knowledge to drive things forward and make the right decisions for others to follow. I am realising more and more that others are looking to me for the answers and I need to provide them.

In the early days most of my time seemed to be about learning. As everything was new to me, everything seemed to take twice as long and felt laboured. I was not clear what to prioritise and what to let go. I was not sure what to throw away and what to file. Consequently, I held on to everything and dealt with everything intensely, as though it was life and death. I held every piece of paper close, just in case…. I spent most of my time asking questions and listening to others tell me about things: tell me

how it's done; tell me what was wrong; tell me what needed to be done. Early on I was faced with excluding students, and having to find out how I actually went about doing this. I was asked questions that I couldn't answer: even Year 7 students on the corridors asked me where a room was and I had to make it up, waving them in the opposite direction and sending them off on a wild goose-chase. I was the living contradiction and unable to admit the limitations of my learning. I felt guilty about that. I was getting used to having a secretary, and not typing everything myself. I was getting used to not knowing very much when I used to think that I knew pretty much everything. I was constantly trying to keep up my reading to build up my background knowledge on education so that I could try and get one step ahead. It was very difficult coming into a tight-knit team that was good at what it did and knew its role in things: it highlighted how distant I actually was from the reality that they had created and lived through. I wanted to *live through others*, but at the time, I couldn't even *live through* myself.

During the day to day living, the process of writing within my journal and using this thesis as a vehicle to guide my analysis and understanding of the role I have is vastly important. Crippen (2004) discusses 12 ways she suggests that new principals can be helped in their new roles. One of these ways was engaging in reflective writing which can help to direct and cleanse the thoughts of the mind. I am aware of the importance that this text will have later on when I reflect back on these early days. I am aware how this text will allow me see how I have progressed and moved forward in my understanding of the work I'm doing. I realise how it will deepen my understanding of my role and thoughts about the decisions that I have made.

In order to try and understand the job I was doing I decided to note down on a daily basis what I was doing in order to work out what the demands of the job are and to see if I was indeed accurately prioritising the tasks that I do. This took two forms: at the end of each day I planned out what I needed to do the following day and incorporated this into a diary format. I then noted during the day what I did as I went along, and checked this at the end of the day. However, there were days when it was not possible to do this as I simply had too much to do!

The following are key extracts from my journal at this time. I think they reflect examples of my daily routines and feelings in the early days.

'I am still within the phase of not quite knowing what I should be doing. However I am starting to feel that I can have an impact. I am working at my lines and responsibilities and working through how I can develop and improve them. I am beginning to offer others more in terms of suggestions and direction of what I want from them. I am realising the fine line I have to walk between supporting and guiding and also in terms of telling them what to do.

For instance I have offered a 'bookmark' for use by teachers in their planners with key ideas of lesson planning and teaching strategies on it as use as an aide-memoir; I have put the concept of 'target getting' on the agenda with those I line-manage; I have undertaken detailed analysis work of performance and progress in KS3 highlighting that the school is under-performing compared to what it should be and using this information to challenge it to improve. All this is vastly new to me, yet strangely exciting.' (21st September, 2004)

'During this week I have been leading the Business Studies department review. I had been looking forward to this, my first lead on this, because it would allow me the chance to be able to put my own thoughts and views into practice on how a department should be reviewed: mainly, that the sense of the student voice needed to come through more than it had done previously within this process. Therefore for this review I observed a couple of lessons but more importantly, I also conducted student questionnaire evaluations of the subject and also conducted student interviews of the subject. This allowed me to gauge the learning perspective within the department and to draw out the student voice. I introduced a series of tools to do this: both questionnaires and interview questions. The Head of Department had commented to his line-manager that he was feeling very positive about the way I conducted the review: a sense for me of work well-done, where I had introduced challenge into the department constructively.

For me I feel that this was a great learning curve. In my only other previous experience of the department review process, I had had a disappointing review of ICT where I felt that I had not communicated my ideas well. This time I feel that I was able to express my ideas for improvement whilst also supporting the department as well.' (14th January, 2005)

The job changes as I move through the year. I feel as my presence grows within the school I am growing as an individual with confidence of my ability to do the job. On the day-to-day level I find that I spend 90% of my time dealing with challenging students: the students that cause difficulties within the school. I find that my time is mainly about fire-fighting issues. It is hard to maintain the positivism and the sense of warmth when doing this and it is at times like this that you really need to hold onto the regenerative spirit that you have. You need to be able to hold the vision and values you believe in and not to allow the 90% to sway you. The rest of the time is split between line managing middle managers in order to try and improve their work and to help them get the best out of themselves and occasionally teaching or running other types of meetings. It is clear that the majority of my day is about being out and about delivering the vision that the Head sets for the school through the senior management team. It is about interacting with others through doing this, both staff and students.

I was again able to return to the value that I am claiming is central to my own being, living myself through others. It was crucial that through my new role and the transition in to it, that I was able to hold on to something that I firmly believed in. When the transition into the new role at Bitterne Park was tricky, I was able to draw on my prior learning and values and utilise these to drive me forward. What I offer here is evidence of how I have taken this value into my new post, through developing relationships with individuals.

I feel that the importance of embracing both action research and relying on the educational value of *living through others* is part of the process I am using to become part of the organisation: to help me build the productive relationships within the School which will help me work collaboratively and cooperatively with others. Through action research I am able to overcome the sense of powerlessness and the alienation that I may feel as I move into a new School.

I am using the skills of an action researcher in order to help me to effectively do my job. When presented with an issue I am formulating ideas, gathering evidence, analysing it and then re-presenting the new challenges to carry on with. This cycle allows me to continue to strive for a better way of doing things in my School that will help us to improve.

The sense of 'living' is further developed through my relationship with staff within the school. One example of how I began to *live* through staff at Bitterne Park was through my working closely with an AST who was quite an inspirational teacher within the classroom. He had wanted to join the teacher-research group but due to workload he felt he couldn't get the time. I therefore worked with him one-to-one to help him develop individual enquiries. Through my work with him it was clear that one of his key issues was the fact that he felt he couldn't account for what he did in the classroom: he really couldn't see why he was so effective. In the classroom he did 'live' but couldn't find a way of accounting for it. Through working with him over time I brought out of him his own values and the things that drove him on: that made him tick. We were able to use this to help him analyse and account for his own practice. as he commented through one of our conversations:

> '…you encouraged me to be more reflective…I felt inspired and supported and validated but still allowed to grow and improve…' (Conversation with AST, October 2005)

Further examples of this are evident within a later section when I deal with the creation of the in-house teacher-research group at Bitterne Park.

During this time a further developing understanding of this sense of *living* was through my growing co-analysis work with my wife, Karen. Through our ability to *live through* each other we were able drive forward our own enquiries and educational lives, whilst flourishing together as a married couple as well. Through our relationship we continued to develop the life-affirming energy that was stronger when we were together and that helped us to co-create our accounts of our lives and learning. Through the process of transition and change, Karen was significant in supporting me.

In the early days I can remember simply being tired: tired through getting up early; tired from the increased demands; tired from the amount of listening required; tired of the amount of learning on a daily basis; tired from trying to keep up with what's going on; tired from trying to establish myself; tired from trying to fit in; tired from trying to make a contribution and make others feel valued. Tired. The frustration of recognising that I am a living contradiction unable to fully live out my own living educational theory within my practice adds to this feeling.

One of the middle managers reflected on this period during a later conversation:

> '…you didn't seem to be enjoying yourself at the start…you seemed distant…I remember when I first started how big this place seemed…as time went on though I began to see your humour coming through and you seemed to care more…' (Conversation with middle manager, February 2006)

This comment reflects the 'honesty' with which I want to write this account, in terms of including 'negative' comments about me as well as positive ones. What was also fascinating in the early days was the sense of my feelings and wrapped up emotions in what I was doing. I felt as though I was walking through a dark corridor that did not have a light at the end of it. I did not know what to do or how to move: I simply knew that I had to move because I knew that I couldn't stand still: I am not accustomed to standing still anywhere. There was no sense of being able to see where I was going: I simply knew that I was moving. I did not know which direction I was moving in, or if indeed it was the right direction: only time would tell.

Rayner talks about the 'presence of absence' (Rayner, 2004): I am recognising, through my own transition, the things that I am missing from my professional life that I had previously - the close-knit relationships; the tacit knowledge; the significant others. I have to draw upon the learning and knowledge capacities that I have in order to get through: I am living on my memories and using these to get by. I am not *living through others*: I am *living through myself*.

With the change in job brought a great deal of change within my own self. By half way through the second term I realised that the job was starting to affect me personally. I visited the chiropractor when I realised that the pains in my body were not going to go away on their own accord. I was informed by Specialists that I had developed rheumatoid arthritis and that the job wouldn't help this chronic condition. I realised the pain that I was going through was not going away and to simply get up everyday was the worst pain I had ever felt. This left me with some important decisions to make in terms of how I dealt with the stress of the job. I began to realise that all the comments that people made to me were beginning to ring true: that I needed some lifestyle changes if I was to carry on performing at a level I wanted to. I needed some 'me' time, as my wife called it, in order to regenerate my sense of self. I still needed to carry on changing. It was almost as if I had changed jobs but not really recognised it: my sense of *self* was not present in my new role and every day I felt that I was reminded of this.

I needed to use the significant others within my life to help me to regenerate.

3.2 Significant Others (3)

Karen, Jack and myself met on Saturday 29th January 2005 for a tutorial session. One of the key things to come out of this session was my developing understanding of myself through a reflection on the images that had been taken over the past few months: Jack and Karen were able to point to the embodied knowing that I had but was unaware of. This Ph.D. starts with an image of me looking relaxed and genuine: of me smiling. This image was taken on honeymoon and Karen was behind the camera. However, as we reflected through discussion on the nature of the job and a growing sense of losing perspective and effectiveness it became clear that I was losing my own gaze: the images were reflecting to me what others were getting from me: a tired man who wasn't inspiring and leading, but rather looking washed-out and past it already. The weight of passion and enthusiasm was dying in me and all the hopes and aspirations I carried with me previously for the improvement of humanity and the world that I had worked for were slowly disappearing. This needed to change. I offer the following collection of images as evidence of this. As with all images interpretations can be many and varied. I therefore offer some explanations to go with the images to guide the reader and explain the interpretations I have arrived at.

Figure 30: Image of me on holiday in Canada, 2004.

The above image was taken on my honey moon, before I began my job as Assistant Headteacher. My eyes and mouth reflect the genuineness of my smile and enjoyment: nothing seems forced in my expression. My wife is taking the image and

no doubt helping to bring these qualities out. I look at this person and he is a person because of the other person, his wife, around him. I am who I am because of how relaxed and happy I was at the time: how fresh I felt. I don't think this is the person that the teachers at my school, or the students, now see.

Figure 31: Image of me on holiday in Canada, 2004.

The second image above is again taken on honeymoon and perhaps more clearly reflects the sense of connection between my eyes and the person behind the camera, my wife. Again, there is sincerity to the smile and a sense of having the time and motivation to genuinely engage with the camera: there is an honesty about my expression. I look at this and I can see the confidence within me: I can recognise why I got the job I did and what my potential performance is.

Figure 32: Image of me October 2004.

The third image is taken after approximately 4 weeks in the job. Again I am out in the countryside during a weekend and I feel that this image still has the engagement of the expression with others in mind. My wife is taking the image and has captured me engaging with her behind the camera. This image is one that I feel staff could engage with: I seem alive and vibrant.

Figure 33: Image of me, December 2004.

In this fourth image I feel there is a change. This 'silly' image was taken on New Year's Eve, after my first term in post. Karen is taking the image. I feel it reflects a loss of engagement with others: I can sense when I look at it that my gaze is not with the camera: that I am trying to force a smile and not genuinely feeling it. I think this is what staff are seeing and this is why I am not as effective as I could be. I sense that I am not offering the image of myself that I want and this is resulting in a lack of effectiveness in what I do. I sense that hope is being lost.
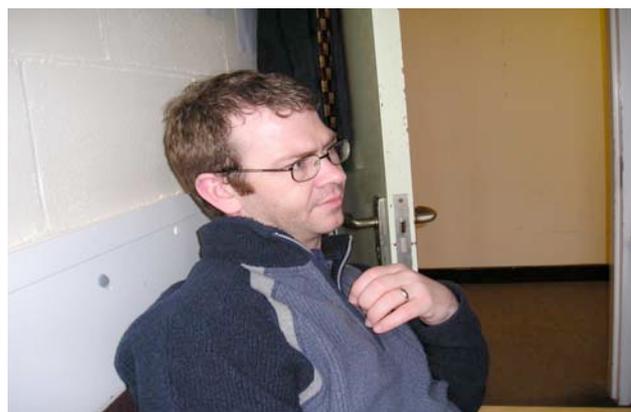
Figure 34: Image of me taken in Jack's office, January 2005.

The final image was an image taken in Jack's office on 29th January 2005. This image I feel reflects me not being 'fully present.' Whilst I was engaging with Jack and

felt more present than I have for a while, this sums up my lack of 'presence' with others that I have fallen to. Not long after this image was taken I began to physically feel the stress of the job resulting in my visits to the chiropractor and doctor. My lack of wellness was linked to the fact that I wasn't looking after myself enough and had allowed the job to hold me too much: I had forgotten all that I had learned from sequence 1 and 2 of this study and allowed myself to stop regenerating.

Perhaps one of the things that I missed was the close relationships with a significant other, in the sense of a Simon or Toni? When I was a middle leader, I had the closeness of those relationships that really helped to support, regenerate and drive me on: the sense that others depended on me. However, as I've moved into senior leadership, it's clear that the nature of relationships change and I haven't got that level of support on a day-today basis. It seems that you have to draw on something from elsewhere in senior leadership.

On March 2nd 2005 I presented to a BECTA conference about teacher research. The session was videoed and my wife also presented at this conference. I had been a little sceptical about presenting as it didn't really seem the kind of thing that linked to my area of research. However, whilst there I found myself really being present when I was speaking to the conference. I had listened to a Head speak at an NPQH session a few weeks earlier and reflected on how passionate and engaging he was to me in the audience: how personal his job was to him and how he was able to communicate his passion. As I spoke to this group I wanted to also show my passion and I think I did this. I had prepared a speech but found that when I stood up to speak I didn't want to read from it or use it. I wanted to construct a story from my heart that I believed in. The speech I had prepared couldn't and didn't do this. For the first time in months I was speaking about something I was really passionate about and was able to reach into my soul and draw out my own values and beliefs. I believe that I found my voice again. I believe that I was communicating the love I have for what I do. For the first time in months my health was not as bad as it had been: it seemed to be improving. I was feeling more positive. My wife took the photo below of me speaking to the conference.

Figure 35: Image of me speaking at BECTA conference, March 2005.

In this image I am talking to the group about the impact of teacher research in schools and I was recounting part of this Ph.D. text when I refer to the work of Toni. I used this to illustrate the powerful nature of teacher research and how it can transform the work and lives of those who engage in it. I am holding the text that I had just read out. I felt that I was moving towards my own sense of presence and reflecting my own passion for what I was saying. When I look at this image I believe that I am moving someway towards being present again with others: I believe that I am moving someway to being the person that I used to be: the person that carries with him the hope and passion of humanity through his existence and the work that he does.

3.3 Line management and the early days

As part of my job I meet with those that I line manage on a regular basis. The detailed level of line management that takes place in the school is crucial in developing the impact of the School: they really make the difference to what we do. These meetings allow me to lead these middle managers and help to guide them in the direction that the School is going. These meetings also allow me to influence and challenge these managers. My early meetings were very awkward as I tried to find out exactly how to play them and what to do. I learned through reading the minutes of others' meetings (all meetings are minuted and circulated to all SMT) and working out the types of things that I needed to be doing in them. As time went on, it became more natural as I built up a greater knowledge of those I was line managing and as I developed my own views on how to improve departments based on my own experiences.

One of the key things when working with middle managers is getting the balance right between a whole collection of issues: the level of personalisation; the level of challenge; the level of support; the level of independence; and so on. In many respects it is about adopting the right balance between the heart (emotions), the head (thoughts), and the hand (behaviour) (Sergiovanni, 1995). Within my early meetings, it was mainly about me falling into my own shell and relying on the 'businesslike' briskness of the meetings: getting the 'hand' right and ensuring that my decisions and actions were 'right'. As time went on and I became more comfortable with my role, it became about using a greater range of skills in order to try and get the best from others and to make things better: of using my 'heart' and bringing forth my own values and beliefs, and also my 'head' in terms of influencing the way that practice should be delivered. When considering the actual amount of time I had with each of these people it became obvious that each conversation had to be thought out and clear in terms of what I wanted to get from it. I realised that I had very little time with my middle managers and I needed to be able to be effective within a short space of time: this required lots of preparation on my part in order to be clear what I wanted. Whereas I believed at the start of the year I was not getting things I wanted, as time went on I learned how to get the best from the meetings I had by being well prepared and focused for each meeting. I quickly recognised when a meeting had not gone well as I came out with information I hadn't planned for or really wanted. However, as time went on, I learned to be able to influence these middle leaders outside of line

management: of catching them around the school with the intention of engaging with an idea.

One of the things that I am reminded of is the way that I have been led by my line-managers. I am reminded of the level of professional autonomy that I was given to do the job that I was employed to do as a middle leader. As I reflect on Gunter's (2003) notions of professional autonomy being a 'gift' of the leader on those led, I can conclude within my own practice that I feel I am able to strike a balance. I believe my practice is more directive than I was led as a middle leader. However I would conclude that this is required in order for the leader to assert their vision of those that they lead and the school.

From conversations with an AST the following comments were made that support this:

> '…I think it's been very collaborative…a relationship that has focused on the issues…we've discussed the problems…learning has been at the heart of it…what's come out of it is what's important in classrooms…' (Conversation with AST, March 2006)

Throughout the first year in post the nature of my line-management has changed significantly. The people I have led have changed as the demands of the job have grown. I have quickly learned the importance of key leadership traits over the year: of acting quickly if things are going wrong; of being able to spot where things might go wrong before they even do; of supporting and challenging; of being the shoulder to cry on; of giving advice and help; of being clear about the message; and so on. Alongside all of this, balancing it with a smile on your face is challenging. As one middle leader commented in conversation with me:

> '…you seem to say things which have a lot of sense and meaning, but I never feel like you're patronising…' (Conversation with middle leader, July 2005)

This reflects the significant shift in responsibility from middle to senior leadership that I have encountered.

This text is becoming more and more self-referential as it emerges and grows. Through my reflections on line-management I am reminded of my own time as a middle-leader and my experiences of line-management. I have listened to accounts from those I line-manage of the way things have been; the influences and reasons for things, and how I have used this as a vehicle to improve their practice through

improving the quality of their and their team's work. It is through line-management that I make sense of the school: I trust what my middle leaders tell, unless proved otherwise, and I quickly learn to sift through the stories to focus on the important ones: the ones that will make a difference.

I have learned a great deal of information about how to do certain things that I didn't know before: I have learned how to exclude someone; I have learned about the things I am line-managing directly, for instance Investors In People, Learning Resource Centre etc.; I have learned new processes like the way assessment levelling is approached by Southampton L.A.

There are also other things I have learned which can't always be measured: I have learned about leadership and how it is very different in different schools; I have learned about priorities and the importance the Headteacher has in setting the priorities in a school that then reflects the work that goes on in that school; I have learned about challenging people more to be better at what they do; I have learned how to give feedback, drawing on my previous experiences but also learning as I go along and by listening to others; I have learned how to listen very closely; I have learned how to organise and liase with others; I have learned how to pace myself; I have learned that others need to trust me and once this is established, more things are given to me to lead; I have learned that the first four weeks were very quiet and then the work load kicked in; I have learned that confrontation can be very useful and productive; I have learned that leadership is about having answers and challenging others to be better at what they do; I have learned not to settle for second best; I have learned the importance of having a senior team around you that is supportive yet also challenging to keep you on your toes; I have learned that if you say you will do something people expect you to do it; I have learned that leadership is also about sharing the responsibility of your senior managers and that you need to build productive relationships with them if you are to get the best from them; I have learned to be confident in my own views and appraisals of situations; I have learned that leadership is fun and rewarding and interesting and hard-work; I have learned that I still have a lot to learn about leadership and that transition will take time as the step up from middle to senior leadership is quite a jump, particularly for a relatively young and inexperienced leader.

The first half-term has very much been about surviving: about showing others that I will still be here and that I am not going to quit. It has been about just getting through

212

and making a small difference where I can. It's about playing safe: about picking the things you know a little about and making a small difference there where you feel comfortable to make a difference. It's about not stretching yourself, but playing inside the limits, whilst you get settled. For me, it was about letting others know that I knew a little about the use of school data for improvement and using this knowledge to challenge the suppositions that were being made in KS3.

As I begin to close on the end of my first term in role I am beginning to wonder what I have learned, what I have done well, what I need to improve on and where I need to go next.

What have I learned?
I am beginning to recognise the vast amount of knowledge that I need in order to be able to do this job effectively: how I need a sound base on divergent curriculum knowledge, for instance, in order to be able to deal with the vast range of issues that I need to deal with. I have learned how this job is about people: dealing with a whole range of people constantly. The sense of inter-personal communication is massive and on a day to day basis I move from talking to good students, to bad students, to good teachers, to bad teachers, to other senior managers, to LEA, to office staff and so on. The essence of this job is about being able to communicate to others. However, I am learning that this requires understanding of others and the ability to be able to *live through* them if you are to motivate and improve what they are doing. I am learning that I will never know everything and that I need to be able to ask and go to others if there are gaps in my own understanding.

What have I done well?
I believe that the essential thing I have done this term is demonstrated my ability of *listening to learn*. I have patiently built up my understanding of the context of the school and the roles that people have within the school. I have listened to how things are done and worked through my own ideas on how to improve what happens. I feel that this has cast me as a quiet and calm member of SMT. However I do now believe that I need to become much more vocal than I have been as I begin to find my feet and talk with much more confidence on issues that I have been part of.

What do I need to improve on?
I need to work on establishing my presence amongst staff. With those I directly work with I think that I have established myself. However, I need to get out into the wider

staff and make myself and my vision known. I feel that some of this will come through my running the cover system next term, as part of my learning experience. I need to also develop my own sense of divergent and creative thinking. As I begin to see the light and understanding more about the role then I believe that my own creativity will start to out itself. I still feel compartmentalised rather than believing in my own confidence to do the job. However, my style of leadership is starting to kick in. One member of staff stopped me in the corridor the other day to say thank-you for sending him a thank-you letter for his work on a project. Comments have been made that he is well-motivated this year, more than usual.

At the end of the term I had taken over 'cover' for the following term. This immediately elevated me within the school as somebody who needed to quickly get to know staff and the people that I was working with. One great moment was in the final morning briefing on the last day. Up to this point I had said very little in weekly staff briefings: at the start of the term the Headteacher kept asking me if I had anything to contribute, and I would desperately try and find something, but there wasn't anything. However, as the term went on I began to say a few things. But during the last briefing I was able to talk about something to do with cover and crack a small joke, which made staff laugh. This was significant: it allowed me to connect with people in a whole-scale way that I hadn't as yet.

The second half of the term can be characterised as consolidating the work from the first half-term and also of challenging others more. It has also been about establishing my own style and building on team-building in order to bring others on board. For instance, establishing my Investors in People working party, establishing my Gifted and Talented working party and developing my KS3 strategy group. This kind of work during the second half of the term has allowed me to come into contact with a wider range of staff and also be able to spread my own vision of what I want from them. Also of significance is the way in which I have helped to change the process of Department Reviews: a system by which we self-review the effectiveness of departments within the School. I realised through my experience of the first Review that the process didn't involve a sense of student voice: it was all about the role of the teacher and focused on learning as something that was being done to the student. I wanted to find out from the students what they thought, so I brought in student interviews within the first Review. This went really well as students were being asked for their opinions which they hadn't been before. I further intend to

improve this by bringing in student questionnaires on their learning to enhance the quality of the analysis of the Departments and give a greater voice to the students.

During my first term I am conscious of how I have become very closeted within my own office. I sense that I have lost the balance between being visible and present around the school compared to being visible and present to those that I line-manage. This job seems to be about balances and being able to create them in order to produce some form of harmony within and around. During my first term I don't believe that I achieved this. However, as time went on, I do believe that I was able to achieve this more.

By the time term two had arrived I was returning after a much-needed break. Reflecting on term 1 I could recognise that I was pretty much dead on my feet and that my stress levels were sky-high. A well deserved rest helped to put that back in order and provided switch-off time to re-charge the batteries.

The start to term two was about learning how to 'do-cover': I was responsible for sorting out cover this term, something each member of SMT did once every two years for a term. The first phone-call arrived on the Monday evening as we were back at School on the Tuesday. It's surprising how time-consuming cover actually is and you don't appreciate it until you actually do it. However, I got myself into a pattern of working over the term that allowed me to deal with it. It certainly is true that it helps you to get to know staff by doing it. It helped to get me into the heart of the School: people were coming to me from day one of me doing it and this was good because it increased my presence.

This experience of cover has been crucial in establishing my own presence around the school: the role of doing cover gives you a great deal of "power" and staff realise this. Staff have been talking to me and this has really made me feel a part of the school: probably the singularly most important experience of the year. I have learned a great deal about staff and their ways from their reactions to events and the whole process of cover. This knowledge will be central in my development within the School.

I have been involved in planning and delivering a whole school INSET day on Assessment for Learning, which I am also picking up as a whole school issue. This involves the actual INSET day and also a follow up in terms of establishing a working

party to push this issue through the whole school. I believe that part of my brief is to develop the opportunities that staff have to get involved within the school: Gifted and Talented working party; *Investors In People* working group; Assessment For Learning working group. All these things that I have set up have drawn in a wide number of staff into the running of key issues that they may well not have had a voice in previously.

I have continued to develop my work for the re-submission of *Investors in People*. I have applied some of my previous thinking on this that I developed at my previous School through for instance, developing an *Investors In People* Management Group made up of a cross-section of staff and through implementing a whole staff questionnaire. I would argue that these two things are examples of how my life as a teacher-researcher has influenced me within my everyday practice. I am not aware of others using these tools previously in order to ascertain the feeling of the staff within the School.

Through term 2 it has really been about surviving and trying to establish my own presence within the school. It has been a very difficult term: my health has been bad and this has increased the pressure that I have been under.

Throughout this term I have moved from being an additional member of the senior team to being a full member that has a growing understanding of the school and the issues that it faces. I have become somebody that others go to, to find help and to get questions answered. I have developed my growing sense of giving staff voice within the school: my work with my *Investors In People* working party; my Gifted and Talented working party; and my Assessment For Learning working party have all helped to extend my growing network of relationships within the school.

However, over-riding this has been the fact that I have been ill for 8 weeks, most of term 2, with rheumatoid arthritis and having to deal with the daily pain that this brings. This has meant that the late nights at school have caused me great pain to have to deal with, struggling at times to be able to move about: embarrassed to tell anyone I work with and making excuses of 'having hurt myself at the gym', for fear of seeming "weak". There is some suggestion that this has been brought on by my own work ethos: the sense of not switching off and regenerating as I attempt to really improve my practice and learn how to effectively do the job.

It was at the end of this term that I began to forward think more in terms of what I was doing and what I wanted to achieve. I believed that I was in a position of knowledge about the school and the people in it and believed that I could contribute more to it than I had been doing.

The easiest way to describe what I have had to live through in term 3 is to describe it as non-stop madness: there are so many plates in the air that I've lost count; there's no point in having an office because I never get to see it; and I carry so much in my head that I never get to commit to paper. This term has been non-stop. The focus for everything has been on improving and tinkering with what happens to try and squeeze every last ounce of success out of it.

The first key thing has been the preparation for re-assessment of the *Investors in People* accreditation. This took a great deal of time in readying the School and liasing with the assessor. Fortunately this was successful and we were re-accredited with the standard.

There has also been the continued development and push for the Challenge Award in order to recognise the work that we're doing in relation to providing for our most able students. This has involved starting from scratch in terms of the school provision as it hasn't been a priority until now.

There has also been the developing of the Assessment for Learning across the School via the running of a group focused on developing it within departments. One key aspect of this was the fact that during one session I brought in students to teach staff how to improve their assessment practice. This was a real move forward within the School in terms of how it provides professional development for staff through utilising student voice. In the 2006 OfSted, assessment practice was highlighted as being outstanding.

I have also begun work on Continuous Professional Development, which is something that I am picking up from September 2005. I have begun to develop the strategy for this through changing the approaches to it. For instance, of shifting the focus of CPD to the individual rather than the team focus that it previously had.

There has been the detailed work on setting up the in-house M.A. programme that will be dealt with later on within this Sequence. Alongside this has been the links

217

established with Creative Partnerships, a national organisation that looks to support creative initiatives within education through promoting action research as a methodology for improvement.

There has been the production of the school calendar, which has taken a great deal of time and co-ordination.

There has been the planning for the KS3 Regional Director visit to the school to assess the effectiveness of our practice.

There has also been the preparation for my own school based NPQH assessment.

I think the key thing to all these things is that staff, and in particular the senior team, now have the confidence in me to deliver and perform at this level. Term one was like the initial test of survival; term 2 was like turning up the pressure to see if I could crack; and coming through that into term 3 means that I am up to full pace and have the confidence of my peers to do the job. As one of the senior team commented to me that the changes in me had been noticed at the top.

By the end of my third term it is possible for me to be able to begin to summarise the year that I have experienced. O'Mahoney (2003) established a model based on how school leaders developed over four phases:

	Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3	Phase 4
Time:	Term prior to take-up	Term take-up	One term later	Two terms later
Phase:	Role Idealization	Immersion	Establishment	Consolidation
Role image:	Looking at the role	'Learning the ropes'	Defining the role	Feeling accepted

(O'Mahoney, 2003, p. 15)

For me, perhaps it was more about the sense of having and losing the love that I had: phase 1 was about idealising the love; phase two was a forgetting of the love; phase 3 was losing all love; and phase 4 was re-gaining the lost love.

I am arguing through this that the learning curve of moving into Senior Leadership from middle leadership is massive. I would argue that it requires a significant amount or preparation and readying, yet in practice, it is still a shock to the system when in post. The difficulties I have faced have been about attempting to manage the transition and establish myself in such a way as to maintain credibility whilst fitting in. Ultimately, it was the realisation and belief that things would improve and that it would take time. It was about having the self-confidence and belief that I could make things better.

3.4 The dark

It seemed that the dark was what the early days seemed like. I got up in the dark, I drove to work in the dark, I spent the day in the dark (literally and metaphorically) and I came home in the dark. The light only seemed to arrive when I saw my wife's face: the light was there as I remembered the love inside me for her. It was at times like these that I was reminded of one of the interview questions that I was asked for this job. At the time I thought it very odd, but perhaps now I realise how important it was. I was asked, 'Where do I get my support from?' and at the time I answered without hesitation, from my wife. I didn't even need to think about. Within my language this was a question about life-affirming energy. The importance of having strong relationships, significant others, to fall back on is crucial in order to support you when you most need it in the, at times, very lonely job of being a senior leader. Yes, you draw on inner strength of character, personal conviction and your values. But you also need to be able to draw on the strength of others to help spark the life-affirming energy. Perhaps this is where I get my hope from: perhaps this is where I get my strength from.

I began to wonder whether the light was earned through getting out and about more. Maybe I needed to get out in the corridors even more than I did: to create my presence in the school and make it felt: to *live through* the school and the community. Through time, this would be achieved.

My holding on to teacher-research and communicating my standard of judgement of *living myself through others* was a significant way in which I moved through this period.

3.5 More teacher-research

I am starting to believe that teacher-research seems to follow me wherever I go! I had not long been in post before I was drawing on my experiences from my 'previous life' as a teacher-researcher in order to help others with their practice. I started in senior leadership with the aim to make things better and improve the quality of the living educational space through living out my living educational standard of judgement of *living myself through others*. I needed a way of approaching this so I could embrace it fully. I agree with Coulter's (1999) use of Bakhtin's notion of dialogue and the potential power of understanding this as a way of expressing teacher-research. What I show below are examples of Bakhtin's *contextual meanings*: the meanings that I associate with practitioner knowledge as opposed to the *dictionary meanings* that I associate with traditional academic research. The following are three examples of how I used my own teacher-research within my role to help myself and other teachers or students, prior to my establishing a teacher-research group within the School. I have included analysis of these moments that demonstrate my contextual understanding of these events and their importance. The three moments are:
1. Working with an NQT;
2. My work with a Year 7 group that I taught;
3. My work with my wife's school.

From these experiences emerged the Bitterne Park teacher-research group. These moments have been chosen as significant developmental points in my journey towards introducing a teacher-research group into the school. The first two moments were unsuccessful in terms of developing the practice of either myself or others successfully. However, the third moment was successful I argue in re-inspiring me back towards teacher-research.

Moment 1 – Working with an NQT
The first example I came across was an NQT English teacher within the School. I worked with her during the first three weeks in the School. When I first met her she seemed to want to learn: she seemed connected to the fact that I was an English teacher also. I was pleased that I organised with her to video one of my Year 10 English lessons. I had worked with her, giving her a scheme of work and ideas and she asked to observe me. I suggested she videoed me as I felt that I had some improvements to make with the Year 10 group and video evidence of my practice

221

would be useful. I was clear with her that I was also finding it tricky in the classroom as the students were simply responding to me as a new teacher: they didn't care that I was an Assistant Headteacher. I suppose the real difference was that I had a level of experience to draw on in order to deal with the situations that arose. However, I was also hoping that this would instigate her to allow me to video her lesson as she said she was having some difficulties with the start of the year with some groups.

The first part of this process began with her videoing me in the classroom. This was particularly striking to me in a number of ways: the things that she focused on highlighting her concerns; the fact that she was willing to engage in this activity with little prompting (was this because she was genuinely interested or was it because of my position influencing her?); also the way I was in the classroom being a very different teacher from the teacher I was at my previous school. To take this further, considering how I seemed less relaxed and more controlling maybe reflected my desire in the early days of my new job to try and be authoritative and in control. This in many ways is not a reflection of my own values: not reflecting my sense of democracy and further enhances the living contradiction that I was at the time. However, maybe during this point of transition I am returning to the base instincts that I have and these are essentially controlling and didactic in nature: I am falling on my reserves to see me through this dark corridor which I fumble through.

Bitterne Park Year 10.WMV

Figure 36: Video clip of me teaching Year 10, 2004.

The above clip is of me teaching a Year 10 English lesson. I watch this clip and I can see the faults in my approach. Who is that man standing at the front of the class? He must be important because he's taking himself so seriously. This clip was so influential in me realising the contradiction that I was living. I remembered back to my 'democratic' classroom; I remembered back to Dan and Sophie; I remembered back to the inspirational and creative practitioner that I was….and then I watch the clip again, and I want to cry. This was part of a turning point when I realised that I needed to find my own sense of *self* again.

However, the important aspect of this whole sequence of events was that the NQT allowed me to video her practice: I videoed her teaching a Year 9 group. She was lacking in confidence within her practice and felt she wasn't doing very well as an NQT. She was a little nervous about this at first but then threw herself into it. I wanted to video her lesson to try and capture the positive aspects as well as the things that needed working on to show her that she was doing well. After the session, she came to me very confident and said that she would be happy for me to use the video to help others open up their practice. I felt this reflected the beginnings of somebody who could recognise the importance of community and research.

However, this is where this relationship fizzled out. The work with the NQT stopped at this point. I reflected on why this was. I asked her to engage further but she seemed very reluctant. At the time, my own workload was growing and one thing led to another and the work with her stopped. As I reflected back on this I realised that I had made a grave number of mistakes within this dialogue that I feel led to the outcome: I didn't invest enough time with her in order to really analyse her practice; I didn't view her video tape with her to unpick what was going on; I didn't really approach this as an investigation with the passion that I had had when working with Toni or Simon in sequence 1 and 2 of this thesis. I didn't live myself through her and establish the connection I needed to. With all these factors combining together this was a very unsuccessful start to introducing teacher-research into Bitterne Park: I desperately hoped that I had not shot myself in the foot with this.

Moment 2 – Working with a Year 7 Group
As this didn't work I then decided that looking at myself on video again with Jack and Karen on Saturday 2nd October 2004 would be useful to get other perspectives. During this session with Jack and Karen I began to realise that I needed to touch again the feelings, passion and emotions that I had reached only six months earlier. I needed to regain the connections and the gaze that was able to hold and engage the other. I again wanted the relationships with students like Daniel and Sophie, but I felt like the stranger at a party that nobody really wanted there. I was no longer part of Westwood St Thomas and at this point not a full member of Bitterne Park. The transition was in process and I wished that it would hurry up. I videoed part of a Year 7 lesson, when I was asking them about their understanding of assessment criteria: taking the perspective of not starting with the imposed criteria but asking them what they wanted to be assessed on and how they should be assessed. The following extract is from the 20 minute *dialogue*, as opposed to Bakhtin's *monologue*, we had

as a whole group. The clip reflects part of a conversation where two students talk about their feelings in response to peer assessment and how they feel about others looking at their work. I have included this to try and demonstrate the importance in the value that I have of being able to understand the emotional feelings that others have if we are to fully understand how to help others to improve and move on. This is my embracing of Coulter and Wiens (2002) references to the need for teachers to be able to publicly justify their decisions to those who have a stake within the educational process. I asked this question of the group because I feel without an understanding of the emotional aspects of human nature we will find it difficult to improve what others are doing.

Year 7.WMV

Figure 37: Video clip of me teaching Year 7, 2004.

For me the power and importance of this sequence is about me engaging with the classroom practice that I needed, in order to gain a firm footing in something that was tangible and real to me. This was me starting to get out and about and engaging with students again. However, it is also where the reflection stopped at the time. Nothing further was done in order to reflect on practice at this point and this is why this was an unsuccessful moment.

Moment 3 – Working with my wife's school
A further key element of the early days for me was on Thursday 25th November 2004 when I delivered a session to a group of sixth form Gifted and Talented mentors at my wife's School. My wife asked me if would deliver a session about mentoring to them. I agreed and this date was set. I sensed that this was a great opportunity to extend my own presentational skills but also to extend the connectivity between myself and my wife as co-researchers. The day before this event, a few obstacles were put in the way. However, recognising that I wanted to make the possible probable and recognising what this meant to Karen I really wanted to find a way to sort this out.

At this moment in time I was able through this experience to move into Bakhtin's notion of the carnivalesque: I was able to step outside of my role of senior leader, put on my mask of educator and enjoy the moment. I was not particularly enjoying my new role at Bitterne Park at this moment in time and this moment allowed me to re-

engage and find the passion that was inside me again. I was able to transform my own personal boundaries (Rayner, 2004) that I was living through at this moment in order to try and find a better personal social order within my own practice and life. The transition between roles and living educational spaces was being eased through teacher-research and reflection.

The session was videoed by two of the students and lasted for about three hours. It focused on being a mentor within a Gifted and Talented (G&T) programme. It was interesting that it was videoed by two students who used to go to Westwood and who I have researched with in the past. When I reflected on the video I could see myself again: the self that was present in sequence 1 and sequence 2 of this thesis. I was in a classroom, I was relaxed, I was in my horse-shoe shaped democratic feeling classroom; I was cracking jokes and engaging with the students, I was building relationships and I was enjoying the teaching and learning process. I knew that I was a kind of guerrilla-teacher: I was going in, doing a job and then leaving. The feelings I was having were feelings that I hadn't had since leaving Westwood. I didn't feel the pressure of getting it right. It seemed to flow.

The following video clips that I have incorporated below reflect key moments from the experience. This one example of the type of video evidence I am drawing on within my thesis to support the claims that I am making about the practitioner and person that I am: to demonstrate my learning through living. It is my belief that incorporating such evidence is crucial in order to support the claims that I am making within the thesis. I am drawing on Eisner (1988; 1993) in his assertions of the need for the educational community to embrace the power of visual communication in understanding meanings created through education experiences.

This first clip is from early in the session. I think it reflects my attempts to open up the boys and get them to respond in a much more relaxed and free way. I am attempting to bring my humour into the session: the clip reflects the seriousness of their faces combined with the relaxed way I introduce humour as a way of engaging them in the session. The clip starts and is very quiet and serious: the boys clearly are unsure of me and I am aware that I need to make them feel more comfortable with me and the environment. This clip also reflects my own personal sense of being relaxed and enjoying what I am doing: it demonstrates me being fully present.

Bishops.wmv

Figure 38: Video clip of me teaching Year 12's, 2005.

The second clip from this session I feel reflects the way that the boys are beginning to respond and open up with me. The clip shows how the boys respond to a comment that I made during the session and I feel it captures the way in which they are connecting with me. It is a very brief clip but one boy expresses his feelings and emotions of anger over an issue. I have included this to demonstrate how I have been able to get this complete stranger to open up within 45 minutes of meeting him. I am attempting to demonstrate the importance in place on the human connections with people in order to promote learning.

Bishops movie 2.WMV

Figure 39: Video clip of me teaching Year 12's, 2005.

The third clip reflects again the connection that is being made between me and the group: a further reflection of how I am bringing the group into the session. It also reflects how relaxed I am and how I am trying to *live through* those in the room by finding some level of connection. The clip is of me talking through my choice of images on a slide and asking the group to explain why I had made certain choices: there is no other meaning behind this other than again using the material to connect with the group and keep them interested. At this moment in time I am not interested in the learning of knowledge or fact, but rather of making and maintaining connects between myself and the students.

Bishops movie 3.WMV

Figure 40: Video clip of me teaching Year 12's, 2005.

Video clip 4 is of a moment, or as Eisner (1988) would claim, one of the 'minor miracles' that happen everyday within education, when Karen came into the room to finish the session off. I had been working with the students for 2 hours at this point. At the time, the experience seemed nothing. I didn't even realise that these two

moments were even taking place. However, through the use of video and of reflection on the video, the meaning of this short clip influenced my whole understanding of my educational relationship with my wife.

The clip carries with it the memories of how I related within this context: it was able to prompt the detailed reflection on that moment and the wider experience that I had in order to help inform my future practice. The clip carries within it two significant elements.

Significant moment 1

The clip captures me and Karen together in frame, when I look at her and smile. You cannot see Karen's response as she has her back to the lens. Karen's presence is able to draw from me this response and this smile: I am also able to show her this smile in return attempting to live through her and draw from her a connection. I sense a connection through this: an acknowledgement between the two of us.

This connection at this moment in time, I believe, is firmly nested in Cho's (2005) notion of love and is something that I can embrace within the educational relationship that I have with Karen. It is difficult to determine who the teacher is and who the student is: we are both teachers and both students, willing to teach and learn from each other.

This supports my argument for a relationally dynamic standard of judgment that exists within this clip. The two practitioners are working together, seeking to understand and further the quality of education provided through working together with each other at that moment in time. Both myself and Karen are co-enquiring at that moment.

This is one of the aims of this relationship evidenced within the video clip. We are both co-enquiring and looking to create new educational understandings through our creative research approaches that reinforce our methodological inventiveness (Dadds & Hart, 2001). For me this emerges through the quality of the educational relationships that I can create with those that I come into contact with in order to help to make things better.

Significant moment 2

Towards the end of the clip I make the comment 'oh yes' and move towards the interactive whiteboard. This happens through my listening and engaging with Karen: no words are exchanged between us, but there is a connection between us where we understand each other and what is happening. This further supports the relationally dynamic standards that we live through in terms of each of us understanding the other through our non-verbal connections. Through this clip there is communication between us but no words are exchanged between us. It is on this level that we wish to influence education and make things better through the relationships that we build.

In frame are husband and wife, both working for the same means connecting their beliefs and values in terms of provision for the most able: in frame are two educators living out their educational standards of judgement. At this moment we are connecting our separate educational lives in the search for one desire: to improve the education within that room. It is as if our accounts merged for that instant. This is something that happens from time to time. As co-researchers this clip brings together not only me and my wife, but also a student behind the camera who we have both co-researched with. For me this clip carries with it the originality of mind present within this thesis of demonstrating a relationally dynamic standard of judgement within our practice. This further exemplifies Rayner's idea of inclusionality (2006) as a relationally dynamic awareness of space and boundaries that is connective, reflexive and co-creative. For me, this clip embodies this notion. It demonstrates the value I carry with me of *living myself through others*, of recognising the value of the other within educational relationships and using this to help make things better.

Bishops movie 4.WMV

Figure 41: Video clip of me teaching Year 12's, 2005.

I went back to the School on Thursday 9th December to complete a follow up session with the mentors. By this stage the mentors had completed their first mentoring interview. This session was much more difficult to complete as I could sense that the end of term was nigh: I was tired coming to the end of my first term and so were the students. However, I could not let them or my wife down.

We explored a number of issues surrounding their experiences so far which were quite interesting. One particular comment from one of the mentors really stood out. This was a student who wasn't at the first session yet his comments were very

detailed and analytical and I think reflected his ability to reflect on the experiences he was having and be able to formulate ways forward.

Bishops Movie 5.WMV

Figure 42: Video clip of me teaching Year 12's, 2005.

As I watch through the rest of the tape from this shorter session I begin to think how much these students are actually picking up about teaching and the process of learning. They themselves are talking about issues that face teachers everyday: they are reflecting on these issues. The issues such as: how to engage others; how to improve what they are doing; how to build relationships; how to provide materials at a suitable level. Their level of interest and engagement is fascinating.

Although I have only spent two sessions with these students I am taking a great deal from it. I will be taking to my own School a clear format and framework to establish mentoring for G&T. I am also taking a re-established interested and passion for G&T, as I have now a major responsibility for its development within my new role. I am also taking with me the need to engage in more student voice activity.

I have offered these brief examples of teacher-research as the early ways in which I have attempted to formulate my views on teacher-research within my school. I am arguing that through teacher-research I have been able to continue to reflect on my own practice in order to help me to regenerate my own sense of self and also as a way of connecting with others. Through the engagement of action research spirals I have worked through teacher-research in order to re-inspire and regenerate my own passion and living educational theory for improving the quality of the living educational space. It was through these early experiences that I was able to formulate my plans to further establish a community of teacher-research and enquiry within my School and local education authority.

Within the next section I want to demonstrate how I took these early experiences and action research spirals of teacher-research into a much bigger setting.

3.6 The Bitterne Park Teacher-Research Group

Figure 43: Image of Bitterne Park Teacher-Research Group, 2006.

Within this section I share with you the narrative of how I set up and ran the teacher-research group at Bitterne Park School. In my abstract I claim that, 'This thesis reflects on the potential impact of enabling teachers to engage as teacher-researchers within their own school and accounts for the process I went through in order to make this happen.' Through this narrative I refer to Wilkins (2004) and the calls to promote more use of dialogue to improve practice and Day (2004) and his calls to acknowledge the links between personal and professional identities. Bottery (2005) argues for greater awareness of the community within education and Rayner (2005) argues for a greater understanding of inclusionality: both of these I believe I am able to demonstrate. Dadds and Hart (2001) call for an acceptance of methodological inventiveness within research and Hemsley-Brown (2005) reflects on the importance of L.A.'s roles in promoting teacher-research. Throughout this section I provide a living account of these ideas as I engage with them through my narrative.

I think it's fair to say that Bitterne Park is a School that was not in a position to embrace teacher- research when I first arrived at the School. There was not a culture of it. I had some work to do in order to get to the position I would like to be: in order to achieve the above image of practitioners engaging in action research on-site through a programme of dialogical reflection. The image is taken from one of the sessions we held on the in-house M.A. programme. For me it articulates what Continuous Professional Development should be about in schools: teachers, working as a collaborative community, individually researching their practice, with the sole aim to improve the quality of the educational space that they are part of. I believe that the experience that I describe below is an example of Reason's (2005) fourth

characteristic of action research being an emergent process: a project that emerges over time and is not a smooth story.

When I first arrived at Bitterne Park my key responsibilities didn't mention teacher-research: twelve months on and I have now got recognition on my key responsibilities for teacher-research links. I believe that I am now firmly in a position to be able to significantly influence the school through utilising action research as a tool to aid school improvement. I believe I am now in a position to influence the L.A. approaches to teacher-research. I believe I can now influence other teachers to improve the learning of students. The School is very wiling to learn and in many cases is willing to embrace learning from within through, for instance the use of its Advanced Skills Teachers, but it has not fully embraced reflective practice and the joined up thinking of in-house teacher-research. For me the introduction of teacher-research was about being able to embrace the notion of 'professionalism' that Wilkins (2004) identifies:

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

I believed that through providing the educational space for teacher-research to occur that I would be able to find a group of staff who could see the benefits of reflective practice and therefore engage within research aimed at improving individual practice. This view, alongside my changes to Continuous Professional Development provision and ethos that demanded individuals take responsibility for their own learning and development, was central to my vision. I believed that I would be able to establish collective standards of judgement within the group in order to improve the learning that takes place within classrooms. This was the vision. But why was it my vision?

I have a clear view that teachers-as-learners is central to help improve schools and making learning better for the students. I can align myself to Reason and McArdle (2006) in their views on organizational learning:

> 'Firstly we want to contribute an action research perspective on organizational development – one that encourages continual inquiry, development, and curiosity in our selves and in those we work with – rather than seeing OD as 'a set of techniques'. Secondly, we want to assert that at their best – through creating processes and structures for collaborative inquiry – action research

and organization development can be profoundly emancipatory.' (Reason & McArdle, 2006, p. 1)

I feel it is my responsibility as a school leader to be able to provide the opportunities for staff to be able to engage in teacher-research: to encourage curiosity within the school and to promote imaginative self-learning. I am aware that not all staff will buy into this, but through my experiences, where staff have engaged, it has significantly affected their practice and their lives as educators. I agree with Day (2004) in recognising the importance of personal and professional lives:

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

My experiences of working with teacher-researchers have reflected to me the massive potential that it offers for improving their practice. For instance, the clarity with which Toni, described earlier within this thesis, was able to reflect on the person she was in the classroom was so crucial in the improving of her practice. Day (2004) further supports this:

'Teachers will define themselves not only through their past and current identities, as defined by personal and social histories and current roles, but also through their beliefs and values about the kind of teacher they hope to be in the inevitably changing political, social, institutional, and personal circumstances…' (Day, 2004, p. 57)

For me to realise my dream and vision it would take many months of work.

The story begins back in September 2004. I had only just arrived at the School, but I wanted to 'play'. The following is taken form my journal.

20-09-04
I have made my first contact with Bath University to enquire about the possibility of setting up a teacher-research group within the school using TTA (Teacher Training Agency) funding to support this. I am awaiting a response

from Bath as it may be necessary for me to deliver the units due to the geographical distance of a lecturer coming to Southampton.

This has come about through a discussion with an Assistant Headteacher and CPD Co-ordinator, who mentioned that some staff had asked him about the possibility of studying for an M.A. last year through a more traditional distance model. He told them to see me as we had previously talked about the fact that I was interested in this line of work. I am waiting for staff to see me about this to discuss their needs. I am aware of the fact that I am new and that staff may still be wary of me and have yet to get to know me and this may make them reluctant: I may need to prompt them. One thing that I was cautious of from the start was the sense of not becoming too focused on this, as it was only one aspect of my job. I was aware of the potential of becoming side-tracked by it and thus narrowing my relationships and role within school. Bottery (2005) reflects this concern commenting:

'…strong 'inclusivity' implies 'exclusivity': for individuals with similar tastes and values to constitute a 'community', others who do not share these must be excluded. By strongly identifying with people of similar values and beliefs, walls may be built to divide others who are different from ourselves.' (Bottery, 2005, p. 8)

This was something from the start that I took care not to lose sight of. I wanted so much for this group to be inclusional (Rayner 2005) but not to be exclusive. I wanted to be able to transform the practice of others through enabling them to engage with their own practice. I wanted to transform the boundaries that existed through the establishment of this group, still enabling staff to maintain their own sense of identity within their own practice but also providing the space for staff to come together and share these values with others in a supportive and transformative way. I wanted in one way to reflect my own classroom from Westwood within this meeting space: I wanted it to be democratic and I wanted to be able to facilitate the learning that could take place within it. I can think back to my time at Westwood and how during my time with the teacher-research group there, there developed an 'us' and 'them' culture. This I accounted for in Riding (2003).

October 2004

Unfortunately, I was unable to secure Training and Development Agency funding from Bath University for this academic year, so that has had to be pencilled in for next year.

I gained a response in December 2004 from Bath University (see Appendix 3 for full text) which was both positive and negative: I realised that things wouldn't naturally happen overnight, but I was desperate to get this work up and running within my school. I therefore realised that I would need to look at alternative providers and funding in order to make what I knew was possible, probable.

I could easily have given up here, left it until next year and moved on to the stack-load of work sitting on my desk. However, undeterred and convinced of the need for this type of work to begin within the school, I contacted Oxford Brookes University, having had some contact with them in my previous school. They were able to deliver what I wanted and a plan was devised to deliver M.A. units in-house during my second term in post. I am still a firm believer in the power and potential of unlocking teacher-researchers within schools to be able to carry out their work to improve student learning. Sharp (2004) reflects this commenting on the empowerment to teachers who use research and engage with it, specifically identifying action research as a way of getting teachers into reflective practice.

January 2005

However, out of curiosity I then approached a researcher from Bath Spa University about the possibility of using them as a provider for an in-house M.A. teacher-research group. This gained a positive response. I have worked with this researcher over the previous 5 years and she was as enthusiastic as ever to support my ideas. With this in mind I began to put out the feelers to staff to see who was interested in this idea. I provided staff with a memo and briefed them during staff briefing for a couple of weeks. I held discussions with staff who had questions about the M.A. I had planned. I was expecting interest from maybe 10 staff. I was surprised that more were interested. For me, this was another example as to why teacher-research is the way forward in empowering teachers to improve their practice.

As an introduction to this, I worked with three teachers who were involved in a school exchange to America from my school, who were going to research into something there. I worked with them for a session and found that they were very receptive to the ideas I was suggesting: the ideas particularly associated with action research and the

how to go about creating the narrative accounts of their learning through using action research as a methodology. They were all keen to continue to get involved in teacher-research further. During the session with them I covered general approaches to action research and what kinds of data they could gather in order to build a research project. I shared with them the narrative account from Toni that is in the early part of this thesis. One of the teachers, an AST in Drama, was incredibly impressed with this text and the extent to which it gave an honest account of the reality of the experiences in the classroom. He was adamant that all teachers should be able to read this type of text as it really rang true in terms of experiences in the classroom. Perhaps this is one thing that I had forgotten: the power of educational narratives to touch others and help them engage with the issues that they face on a daily basis. I would work a great deal with this particular member of staff later on.

The process

The whole process began with me having informal discussions with staff about their desire to engage within further study: a quick chat in the staffroom; a brief word on the corridor; dropping it into a meeting, and so on. The feedback that I was getting was very positive. I was surprised that so many were keen, yet cautious about how many would actually commit. When I asked why they hadn't already got involved in further study, the same answers were coming out: not enough time; cost too much; don't know how to start. I held brief discussions with the Head to let her know I was intending to do this. As usual, she was very positive for me to just get on with it. My first formal contact was through putting out a detailed memo to staff going through the process and answering brief questions. I asked staff to attend a lunchtime meeting about it. I had been in e-mail contact with the University researcher and I had indicated that I hopefully expected 10 staff to show an interest. However, realistically, I was worried that I may not achieve this. To further support this I mentioned the idea of teacher-research in staff briefing a couple of times. This whole process was part of my way of raising the issue of teacher-research within the school and letting people know about it: part of the information element of the cycle and of creating the interest and need.

At the first lunchtime meeting I waited in the room, not certain how many would turn up. I felt a little under pressure: I'd made promises to Bath Spa of how many I could get, yet in the back of my mind was the fact that I was still relatively new within the school and that I wasn't confident that I had staff behind me. I had prepared the reasons and arguments with Bath Spa as to why it should still go ahead with 6 staff! I

waited. The room began to fill. A smile came on the inside of me. I began to count in my own head: 25 staff had turned up. I was shocked! Had I done enough photocopies? With this flow of growing confidence I went through the outline of how I saw things happening for a teacher-research group, which was basically not really knowing. I was honest: we'd make it up as we went along. One thing I was clear on: this could probably be the largest group of teacher-researchers anywhere. There wasn't any real established master plan: more like it was to be made up as we went along. Staff left, mostly committed to getting involved, for a variety of reasons. I went away to plan the first session with staff and to confirm to the researcher that more than I thought were interested!

One member of the group later commented about this part of the process:

> '…going part time I think it kind of lost my confidence in me as a professional and this note came round to everybody – it was an opportunity to do something for myself. The fact that we did not have to pay for it as well was a big incentive if I am honest. I just thought this is the kind of kick that I needed and I went to that first meeting and I was really nervous which I didn't expect to be – I was interested to see who else was going to be there and I just thought – yes, I can do this. There was a spark somewhere, I am not sure what the spark was but I think I thought maybe I needed to do some brain work again with the opportunity to it.' (Interview with group member, May 2006)

This was perhaps the kind of response that I was hoping for: the fact that I was trying to ignite sparks in staff and engage them in thinking about their work.

At this point I will introduce some of the vast number of correspondences that I undertaken in order to get the teacher-researcher group off the ground. I have included these to contribute to the narrative that I am telling in order to help me explain the circumstances under which I was operating. These e-mails will also allow me to communicate with the reader using the voices of the people involved to add a greater authenticity to them. The work on this started in detail around March 2005. By this time I had informally discussed my ideas with the researcher from Bath Spa University and she had generally been interested in my proposals. I wrote to her with some thoughts. Even at this stage I had a reasonably clear idea of how I wanted things to look. A full account of the emails exchanged is available in Appendix 4 and 5.

'Dear…..

Can I share with you a few thoughts about the teacher-researcher group that I want to establish. What I want is something similar to what we had at Westwood. We need to be able to link it to the award of an M.A. We could deliver say 6 sessions in twilight, 3-5pm. Over a period of 6-8 weeks. We focus on action research and teaching teachers how to do action research and give them a chance to share their work each week. We could use named units or generic units. We then give teachers the time to write their work and gather evidence for their assignments. I can see us running one unit per term – 3 units per year. You could deliver all the sessions or I would be happy to supplement some sessions as well.

Cost.

I need to know what this would be. I was hoping we could register staff through TTA so that staff didn't have to pay anything. Would there be any other charges involved? This would be where I would have to find sources of funding if it was needed. I would like to start ASAP. I haven't gone public to the staff yet but informally I have a lot of nods from people.

Please can you let me know what you think.

Strength and honour

Simon' (March 2005)

She responded positively, passing my suggestions on to others in the University. She later responded that the University had agreed to my suggestions and would work with us.

Having gained the agreement from Bath Spa to support the programme I needed to try and find sources of funding. I knew there was nothing in the budget for it, so I needed to be creative. I also then needed to get information out to staff to confirm their interest: I realised that I was working to a tight schedule to get everything in place.

I further clarified the outline for the programme that I wanted with her and this was agreed: dates and modules. I was beginning to picture the reality of what this programme would be. The intensity of this was building: I was worried about many things as it was all new and very frightening. I remembered what I had gone through at Westwood and how I had not been leading things then: it feels very different when you're on the front-line rather than leaving it to someone else. I wondered often at this time whether or not the first session would simply be me and the researcher sitting in a room as nobody else turned up for it.

As I continued to formulate my ideas for this group I began to think back to the teacher-researcher group at Westwood St Thomas and reflect on what I felt were the successes and failures of it: I wanted to make sure that I didn't fall into any of the same mistakes as I really wanted this group to work and grow. I drew on my own Masters dissertation (Riding, 2003) for ideas and inspiration. I was constantly searching for way to positively influence and make things better. The following email clarifies this thinking.

> 'Dear researcher
> would be happy to vary the methods of delivery and in some ways would help keep staff interest. Could I deliver as an associate tutor some stuff? At some point I think it's important that a real-life tutor works with the group – experience from early days at Westwood group was that this is what really got people involved as people come with the pre-conceived idea of university academics as 'gods' with the right answers - staff only later realise that the 'answers' they seek are actually within themselves! Could we then mix and match - some face-2-face from you - some video conference (I'll have to check that we have facilities, but I think we do) and some from me mentoring the group? The mix and match could be a real strength as it gives the group a greater sense of independence from the start.
> strength and honour
> Simon' (March 2005)

I was then invited to become an Affiliated Field Tutor for Bath Spa University, essentially allowing me to teach on the M.A. programme. This was really important as I was cautious about being attached to one tutor and simply having put all our eggs in one basket: this way I felt that I would be able to get involved and take on a more direct and central role in determining the group. I was absolutely clear that I

238

was in the best position to know my school and know my staff and their needs and this I felt allowed me to take the responsibility of this group directly, with the University support behind me.

I began to wonder about the potential further impact of this type of work. I realised that I hadn't even begun this group yet but was aware of how I have high aspirations in all that I do. I began to consider how I could influence Southampton Local Authority in terms of introducing teacher research into a wider field. I was certain that this type of initiative was something that would contribute to improving the quality of learning within the authority.

My creativity began to consider the possibilities. It's as if when you get one result, you suddenly become hungry and start searching for more. I wanted more. So alongside this I began to explore the potential of linking to another local organisation that could potentially support the work we were doing. 'Creative Partnerships' were a national organisation that aimed to support creativity in the area through promoting action research as a methodology: essentially bringing together education and the Arts. Up to this point, they seemed to have struggled with really promoting themselves: nothing really seemed to be happening. Certainly within my School, there wasn't much happening. They had been into school and spoken to some people but not really got anywhere. I saw a potential link! I e-mailed speculatively a contact there. This worked and a representative from Creative Partnerships came into school to talk to me and agreed in principle to support our work. This was a major success: it meant that we could fund the researcher to mentor the sessions, rather than me trying to beg the funding from the School.

Creative Partnerships later contacted me after the first session that we ran and commented:

> 'Hi Simon
>
> I just wanted to say I think the M.A. session was fantastic.… I will be in touch with further ideas I have had
>
> Thanks …..' (16 May 2005)

Towards the end of the first unit I further began to develop my ideas in relation to extending the potential influence of teacher-research within Southampton. I realised, however, that this could be a much greater challenge as it was attempting to influence a much greater range of people outside of my direct influence: I was attempting to influence systems at a much greater level.

So at this point I had been able to establish all the characters that I needed for my play: I had a University Tutor, Creative Partnerships, the staff of the school, the University, the Headteacher and myself. We were all able to play our parts.

Session 1 of the Bitterne Park Teacher-Research group
4th May 2005
This was the first session of the in-house teacher-research group at Bitterne Park School. This had been a 9-month challenge to try and get this group up and running. It had taken a great deal of negotiation and manoeuvring in order to make it happen. However, it is something that I strongly believed would help to improve the quality of learning that took place in classrooms and so I wanted to make it happen. Bottery reflects the sense of importance and feeling that I have with regards to the power of teacher-research:

> 'Similarly, whilst much teacher CPD seems concentrated upon the elevation of pedagogic skills, little is written on the integrity of educators in their relationships with students and yet, once more, perceptions of trust are critical in the development of a rich and productive teacher-student relationship.' (Bottery, 2005, p. 8)

When I had first spoken to the researcher and Creative Partnerships they both seemed under the impression that this group would start in September 2005. I had other ideas! I wanted it to start as soon as possible: we had all the ingredients ready to go and I wanted to make it happen.

I wanted to keep the first session brief and focused. I needed to get across to staff that this was important, yet not put them off. It was a fine balancing act. I didn't have a 'Dr.' in front of my name to add credibility to my ideas: I didn't even have a wealth of experience in the bank at the School to draw on: I hadn't built trust to any great extent. I felt very isolated and out on a limb. During this session I wanted to go over the key details of the outline of the course again and to introduce the group to the idea of action research and how they could ask themselves the following question in

relation to their own practice, 'How can I improve….?' (Whitehead, 1989) I felt that this question tapped into the fundamentals of any teacher: we all have things that we can improve. The group seemed quiet and nervous at first. Four or five of the group stood out as they were immediately open about the things that they wanted to improve in their practice. Others were a little more reserved. Due to my previous experience of this type of work I was prepared for it to take time to embed itself at the start.

Figure 44: Image of me and a member of the Bitterne Park Teacher-Research Group, 2005.

The above image from the session is of me working alongside one of the teacher-research group. We are working on her research proposal and the image was captured by the university researcher working with us. The image captures some of the relationally dynamic qualities that I attempted to embrace within my own practice and provide the space to flourish within the group: of practitioners working together to improve practice through collaboration and reflection. I draw on the sense of enjoyment we are both getting from that moment and the total engagement and pleasure that we are both receiving from beginning to develop a research project to work on.

Session 2 of the Bitterne Park Teacher Research Group
11 May 2005

I was astonished that 20 members of staff had officially signed up to be a part of this group. For this session the researcher came to deliver it. Prior to the meeting I was a

bit nervous: I went to the shop during the afternoon to get the refreshments for the group: I wanted to make sure that this was available to break the ice and refresh staff. I wanted to make sure that all the facilities were ready: the interactive whiteboard and internet access ready. As usual in a school, a thousand other things came up to take me away from this preparation. However, the researcher turned up and my contact from Creative Partnerships, an organisation that I had managed to get to fund some of the group's work. The group turned up and so it was a good start. I really believed that I was able to create the living space for teacher engagement and reflection on their own practice. I agree with Reason and McArdle (2006) in their views that action research:

> '…typically involves creating spaces in which participants engage together in cycles of action and critical reflection.' (Reason & McArdle, 2006, p. 4)

From my own experiences of action research I know that the spaces in which I have and do engage are multiple internal and external spaces: they are real and imagined spaces; they are creative and critical spaces. I engage with my journal, with others, through discussions, through dialogues, through teaching and so on. It is this type of engagement and space that I wanted to help to create for my own staff.

The session began slowly: I could sense that staff weren't quite sure what to expect from the researcher. However, she worked with them over the next two hours to bring their ideas forward with clarity. Staff:

□ considered a research question within an area of their practice they'd like to improve;

□ considered models of action research and teacher-research and how they felt about them;

□ narrowed down their question from initial vast projects to smaller, more manageable small scale enquiries;

□ observed research mentoring in action through watching a researcher research mentor me in role play;

□ mentored each other through engaging in dialogue with each other to clarify their understanding of their own projects;

□ collaborated and developed contacts within the group to help them with their work in order to begin to strengthen the sense of community within the group;

□ began to develop a small plan of action for their project in terms of how they could go about collecting data to support their claims.

At one point, the researcher role-played research-mentoring with me and this worked quite well. For the first time I spoke briefly about this Ph.D. to the staff of Bitterne Park: this was unusual. I never talk about my research to Bitterne Park staff, yet I know at Westwood I did talk about it a great deal. I think this is something about the reserved nature of the role I have at Bitterne and my greater desire to improve and inspire others rather than considering my own needs. The image below is of me being quizzed on my research by the researcher.

Figure 45: Image of Bitterne Park Teacher-Research Group with the University Researcher research mentoring me, 2006.

During the session the level of discussion and debate was inspiring. It felt good again to be a part of a research community that had a common purpose. I was feeling that a real flow of life affirming energy (Whitehead, 1989) was passing through the group as individuals were living through the stories and recounts of others. I think this is something that will grow as time goes on though, and as people become much more comfortable with this work. I really felt the sense of a shared living educational space emerging from the discussions.

I asked for feedback informally from staff the day after and the general response was very positive. One member of staff said that she 'felt it helped to liberate her'. She felt that she had become blinkered in the way she was working, doing the same old things over and over again and that the session had begun to waken her to think creatively about her practice again. This type of feedback was brilliant to hear. I was beginning to feel that I was developing a presence within the School and influencing

the work of the staff within the School. We moved on to the next session with anticipation.

Further to this, staff had paired up with a research mentor within the group in order to support and help each other through the research process: a kind of a critical friend approach. One of the group commented about this:

> 'When it was first suggested that we had to work with somebody else I was really quite anti working with somebody else. Particularly I think because a lot of people in the group were people I would not have necessarily had much to do with in the day to day school life.' (Interview, May 2006)

However, she then went on to pair up with one member of the group and commented:

> 'I definitely feel I can trust her and I believe she feels the same way and as a result not only is it a mentoring relationship I think a very solid foundation for a friendship has come from it as well so it has really paid dividends to be able to work with somebody which my initial opinion of – I didn't wasn't to do it because I was going to do it by myself – has been completely turned on its head and quite surprisingly really.' (Interview, May 2006)

This sense of 'trust' was something that was vitally important in engaging teachers within this programme; trust needed to be present on many levels. Cordingley (2004) argues for the importance of practitioners working together to interpret and reflect upon the significance of their own research in order to improve the quality of work and evidence produced (Cordingley, 2004, p. 83). The above comments highlight this in terms of being able to work alongside someone else to motivate and help move enquiries along. Within my own understandings this was evidence of the shared living educational space emerging from this group within the School.

Further Sessions

We continued for a further five sessions during this unit, moving staff along and helping them to engage in enquiry. Some of their work for this first unit is available on:

www.teacherresearch.net

 and clearly reflects the approaches we took to mentoring this unit.

Our whole approach was to be creative and different. From my own experiences of studying for my M.A., I was aware of what worked well and what didn't work well. So for instance, one of the things we did when it came to sorting out assignments was to make assessment a more informal process: rather than asking for written essays as the only form of assessment, we opened up a range of ways of being assessed that included producing materials or using the cfkeep website. This I feel motivated staff and engaged much more as they didn't feel that they simply had to regurgitate materials from libraries but could rather actually account for their own learning in a flexible format that allowed them to communicate their own living educational theories. This reflected the sense of methodological inventiveness (Dadds and Hart, 2001) that I felt was a crucial aspect of this. I agree with their comments:

> 'Perhaps the most important new insight for both of us has been the awareness that, for some practitioner researchers, creating their own unique way through their research may be as important as their self-chosen research focus.' (Dadds and Hart, 2001, p. 166)

This is certainly something that I was growing to understand and I feel that the examples of teacher-researchers' work below is evidence of my attempt to embrace a flexible approach to assessment of practitioner knowledge. This work in itself simply reflects good assessment practice that we use in schools. Below are examples of how these assignments were presented:

Donna Chipping completed an assignment on *Work Based Mentoring and Action Research* at http://www.cfkeep.org/html/snapshot.php?id=51952540922866

Rachele Morse completed an assignment on *Freeing the imagination* at http://www.cfkeep.org/html/snapshot.php?id=40142960511281

A fuller account of the opening sessions was created by the researcher at http://www.cfkeep.org/html/snapshot.php?id=96583899014242

In conversation with a group member she commented about using the snapshots to assess:

> 'I found very much with the snapshots that you could read your article, you could jot down your notes that you knew were going to go on to TLTA and then another time you could actually then look at a part of snapshots and it was very much you could look at it, put it down, it was saved, it was safe and

you could go back to it, review it, change it and it evolved over a period of time.' (Interview, May 2006)

Further units were planned in negotiation with Bath Spa University, and the second unit of the programme began in October 2005. This unit was based on carrying out small scale action research enquiries and followed a similar format to the first unit.

During the second meeting of the second unit at the School I was interviewed by the co-tutor of the course. I was supposed to be presenting at a BERA conference, however I couldn't make it due to the fact that I was visiting my family. The researcher wanted to use video interview within her presentation at the conference. The full transcript is available in Appendix 6. I include this to demonstrate the nature of reflection that was taking place at this time and how I was valuing my learning from experience in order to improve the quality of the living educational space. However, one key question I was asked, was to reflect on how my experiences of the teacher-research group at Bitterne Park were different to those at Westwood.

> 'There is a significant difference – the role I have has suddenly jumped from being a part of the group to initiating the group, which is a very different role to fall into itself. This group is more practical – we are getting down to things, rather than the Westwood group, which had a more theoretical, analytical discussion base. This one is more about actually getting down and doing things here. The key difference partly reflects the school. I think. It's partly about introducing this because we are a highly achieving effective school and I wouldn't take time away from the job staff are doing every day. That would be a concern. Obviously our priority is the kids not the staff. I think that's where the difference is – we don't really have the time to sit around and theorise – whereas the Westwood group had because they had different aspirations.' (Transcript, 12 October 2005)

For me these comments began to acknowledge how I had moved from follower to leader within the school. I was beginning to see how teacher-research through reflection could enhance the work of the teacher rather than being seen as a 'bolt-on'. I was seeing the 'action' element of action research as being the key, rather than the theory behind it; as it was the action that would ultimately improve the quality of learning that took place within classrooms.

246

On the back of the success of the teacher-researcher group at Bitterne Park School, I began to make contacts to try and enhance its reputation and move it further forward in terms of being able to get national recognition for it. I am aware that other teacher-researcher groups exist across the country. For instance, the account in 'CPD Update', February 2006 of the links between London South Bank University and the London Borough of Southwark, where an in-house M.A. programme has been established along similar lines to the group I established at Bitterne Park and the group that I accounted for at Westwood St Thomas. I made contact with the Training and Development Agency who were very interested in the project and the impact it was having. They came to visit the group at the school and to talk to teachers who were involved. From this meeting, I was invited by the regional director to go with her to talk to Wokingham L.A. as they were looking to set something similar up in their L.A. but had no real idea of where or how to start.

A further account of the interconnectiveness of the approaches to teacher-research is available from the following link. This reflects how the emergence of the group at Bitterne Park was beginning to influence and connect with the work of other local groups. This is available on:
http://www.cfkeep.org/html/snapshot.php?id=53600144995004

However, perhaps more importantly my plans to extend the impact of this project across Southampton L.A. also began to take off. In a meeting I led between the L.A., the T.D.A , Bath Spa University and the school, there was an agreement to launch a project supported by all four of them to deliver an M.A. action research enquiry unit in the summer term from Bitterne Park School. All secondary schools in the L.A. would be invited to send staff. The unit would run similarly to the units we had already run. This would take a great deal of input from me to help coordinate this, but as I believed so passionately in it, it was something that I was prepared to do. This reflected closely to the argument of Hemsley-Brown (2005) in terms of how L.A.s can support teacher-research:

> 'More specifically, for example, local authorities had played an important role in working with schools to conduct action research within their own school and had encouraged and supported the use and interpretation of data, and drawn attention to specific research relevant to the issues….encouraged practitioners to work in partnership with the local university and had initiated a research programme to investigate a specific topic relevant to the teachers themselves. The key message was that research was valued within the local

authority and it was more likely to be used in a supportive climate.' (Hemsley-Brown, 2005, p. 18)

I believe that I had got to the point that reflected that the L.A. actively supported teacher-research within Southampton and were willing to do something about encouraging it. I would argue that I had been central in bringing this into Southampton and planting the seed of teacher-research through my ability to demonstrate that it could be done with creativity, imagination and persistence. I believe that because I was able to demonstrate an example of what I was arguing for that I was able to convince others of its merit.

It is important for me to consider the impact of the work of this teacher-researcher group. When considering the impact I need to be clear on what I determine 'impact' to be. I agree with Reason (2005) in his comments:

> 'The practical outcome of an inquiry such as this goes beyond an 'outcomes based' measure of the original presenting problem' (Reason, 2005, p. 16)

My measure of impact of this work is beyond simply looking at X and Y and attempting to see if Z has directly improved: it is far deeper in terms of understanding the nature of human learning and the motivation of the human to want to make things better and thus influence and improve the lives of others. The teachers that got involved in this work were not simply looking to improve their own practice, but rather to improve the lives and chances of those that they taught. This reflected Cordingley (2004) and her claims that teachers were more willing to get involved in research if they could see the benefits for their students' learning. One member of the research group commented so well on this point:

> '…I think because of that it actually made me think a little bit more about my planning again, about trying to be creative, using different teaching methods and teaching styles to try and engage the learning of the different styles. I think as a result of that the youngsters in my classes particularly the group that I worked on initially saw a very different teacher in front of them. They certainly produced some superb work as a result of it and I think I got more out of that year 8 group than I would have done if I hadn't been involved in the teacher research and I think that has now permeated through my teaching more and I am definitely looking at the scheme of work and thinking yes I could just turn to page whatever but lets have a look at what else is out there to teach those learning objectives. As the result of it I think I have become a better teacher.' (Conversation with Teacher-researcher, March 2006)

Beyond this, the quality of educational relationships established within the group have been central to the group's success. These quality relationships opened up dialogues between members that supported communication within the school and contributed to moving the school forward. The living educational space was opened up. One member of the group commented through discussion:

> '….I've had the chance to speak to people and work with people that I wouldn't necessarily talk to…this is a very large school and there are some staff I've never really talked to about teaching, yet this group gave me the chance to do that…' (Conversation with teacher-researcher, June 2006)

The impact is also evident at a personal level for staff. Many staff gained from the feeling of taking control over their own careers again and reclaiming their own sense of ownership over their professionalism; some staff simply felt the improvement in their motivation as they were discovering the tools to help them improve their practice. One researcher commented in conversation:

> '…I think it has influenced me in the sense of as a teacher, professional and personally has changed the way I have thought about teaching as the profession. I think to a certain extent I have just resigned myself that I would be in teaching until I was 65 and that was going to be it – where I think being involved in action research I think it has given me a drive and a direction again in my career – I feel very much more confident that if I want to go further there is the option to go further and I think I have developed skills that will help me pursue that. Whether I end up as a Headteacher one day or not I am not really sure but I definitely know now that I would like to go to senior management and be part of the running of the school…' (Conversation with teacher-researcher, May 2006)

One member of the group has a husband who works at another school. During conversation she commented to me:

> 'I know through speaking to my husband about going it – he actually at his school looked to be in charge of CPD into getting King Alfred's College in Winchester in running a similar module at his school and he is actually engaged in it as a result of that as well so that is more of a personal spin off but certainly something another school in Hampshire is doing as a result of me saying that this is really good…' (Conversation with teacher-researcher, July 2006)

Listening to this really made me smile: it reinforced for me the importance of networks and boundaries and how these can be permeated in order to make things better. Rayner's (2004) notion of seeing boundaries as being permeable and positive is so important in recognising that the potential influence I have had over the establishment of other groups is a good thing. By providing the conditions for something to flourish, there is a greater chance that it will. I can reflect on how my own involvement in other teacher-research groups led me to establish one for myself and this has now influenced others to establish their own. This form of regeneration and growth within education is so important in order to make things better on a larger scale.

However, in terms of impact across the school I have not been as successful. The work that was undertaken was not fully disseminated across all staff until June 2006 when one member of the teacher-research group ran a staff training session for all staff on the work she had been doing with her group of student-researchers. This in itself was limited. This session went extremely well and gained some really excellent feedback from staff. However, I was disappointed that I had not pushed this earlier in order to extend the span of influence across the school. One member of the research group supported this commenting:

> '…I think it is really important that it is shared with other people in the school and I am not convinced that everybody in the school realises how successful some people feel who have actually got on with their projects. If that feel good factor could be shared more – people are more likely to know when it is going wrong rather than pat themselves when it is going right – I think we can get more people involved and certainly it is something that needs to permeate all levels in the school.' (Conversation with teacher-researcher, July 2006)

I agree with these comments and need to take note of this when I begin to plan for the next teacher-researcher group at my next school.

Reflections

One of the key issues has been the constant reflections using this Ph.D. as a form of action-reflection within my work: having and making a space where reflection can take place and where I can formulate my action through reflection of what I have done and am doing. This text is a multi-media space where I can organise and consider what I do and why I do it: it is a place where I can qualify my actions and

thoughts. Through the teacher-researcher group others were able to access this type of reflection as well. One of the group commented:

> 'It has given me the space to think…you very often don't get that during the day because this place moves so fast…'(Interview, May 2006)

Reflection is also through the dialogues that have taken place with people within the Senior Team: being able to go to them with questions that have been instigated, not only through the necessities of the job, but through the needs of action reflection; demanding that you find out answers to questions you have. The dialogical nature of this enquiry means that I value this form of reflection greatly and use it as part of the way that I develop as a human being and educator. This is something that I attempted to promote within others through the research group. One member of the group commented:

> '..I don't think I've ever talked so much about my classroom ever…'
> (Interview, June 2005)

The sense of renewal is essential to consider. How do I renew and refresh myself to go back in every day? How do I begin each day afresh in order to make the informed decisions that I do? For me, the most essential time of day is at the end of the day when I am driving home. This provides me with the time for reflection that I need: provides me with the time to think about the day and the choices that I have made and how I could have done things differently or not. This is the space that I created for others through the teacher-research group. During this time, after discussion with Jack, I decided to start recording some of these internal monologues on a digital tape recorder, to keep a record of my thoughts. Through this I was able to listen to the range of ideas that I had as I wrestled with key issues.

This was also a time for me to renew my own personal visions (Senge, 1990) and re-assert what I believed in within my own mind.

As I reflect on the role I have I am beginning to see that the nature of my influence over others has changed. The first part of my Ph.D seems to be about my interaction with students and staff on quite a personal and focused level. As I have moved roles the focus seems to have shifted somewhat: it's not directly about students anymore, although parts of my Ph.D. attempt to re-claim these days of teaching. My role is more about influencing the work of other teachers. My work with an NQT was unusual in this sense and I feel that this was my early attempt to hold onto my middle

management role by working alongside an NQT. However, the majority of my role is about influencing Heads of Department and whole School direction by strategically looking at how the School can improve.

3.7 Reflections on the Year

When I came into the job of Assistant Headteacher I found myself bringing with me a whole host of ideas that I had built up over time. I had my experiences as being a teacher, middle leader, teacher-researcher and so on. I had my experiences of being a living person with a life history. I also had a great deal of stored knowledge about Schools and leadership that I had read about. Bringing all this with me in my head meant that I felt well-equipped to meet the challenges of the role. I was bringing a sense of unity about schools and leadership that existed within the mythical folklore pages of texts, but didn't exist within reality. However, it wasn't quite this simple.

I am reminded of another dreamer in my past who had so significantly tried to live the dream and hold on to it for his entire life, only to realise once he came face to face with the dream that it wasn't quite the same in reality as it had been in his head: dreams rarely are. Gatsby lived his life waiting for the moment when his dreams became reality, and it was at the precise moment that this happened that he realised the difference and distance between the two things. I first came across Gatsby as a University-dreamer as an under-graduate: something grabbed me about him, and I could connect with his sense of holding on at any cost to the dream. Perhaps I connected with the need to never be satisfied through the dream and to always strive for that something that is out of reach: that something that would always drive me on to make things better and improve the quality of the living educational space. At this moment in the novel <u>The Great Gatsby,</u> Gatsby finally comes face-to-face with his childhood sweetheart one afternoon after years of dreaming about this moment, only to then realise that his dream had far out-weighed the reality before him:

> *'…I saw that the expression of bewilderment had come back into Gatsby's face, as though a faint doubt had occurred to him as to the quality of his present happiness. Almost five years! There must have been moments even that afternoon when Daisy tumbled short of his dreams – not through her own fault, but because of the colossal vitality of his illusion. It had gone beyond her, beyond everything. He had thrown himself into it with a creative passion, adding to it all the time, decking it out with every bright feather that drifted his way. No amount of fire or freshness can challenge what a man can store up in his ghostly heart.' (The Great Gatsby, 1990, p. 92-93)*

253

Perhaps Gatsby's passion here is like the text that I am writing: my text and practice is to me like Daisy is to Gatsby. Perhaps this will fall short of my dreams. During the early part of my first year in post I found myself becoming more and more frustrated with the fact that I didn't really seem to be making a great impact: I didn't feel I was making the grand sweeping changes that I expected I would. My experiences were telling me what good ideas I knew I had, but in reality I wasn't able to live these ideas out. For instance, I knew that establishing teacher-research could significantly help to improve practice within the classrooms of the school, but by term two I still hadn't established this. Other examples also existed. Through reflection, I realised that I had brought with me the realms of the *possible* but the practice of making them *probable* was proving to be quite different. It was through reflection with Jack Whitehead during term two that I realised that one of the reasons why I was not making the possible probable was due to the fact that I was not taking care to regenerate myself, which in turn was contributing to my values not being lived out in my practice. The ideas were sound: the way I was delivering them was not. Finding out what is possible is one thing: but it takes a whole host of other skills to make it probable. I was becoming a living contradiction in my practice. I had always envisioned that I would be this dynamic, young senior manager who would take education by storm and wow everybody. This, I didn't feel, was happening. I was working 60 hours per week by term two and this was simply taking all my creative senses and draining them dry. I realised that I needed to change this if the possible was to become probable within my practice. I needed to be able to communicate to others my own sense of delight and pleasure that I got from doing the job I was doing, and this simply wasn't happening. The sparkle had gone and it needed to return. I needed to be able to light up the room when I entered it again.

As I sit in my study and begin to reflect on my first year in post the last 11 months seem to start to begin to make sense. I can sit here as a part of a Senior Management Team that is succeeding: we have just received the GCSE results that have once again gone up from the previous year, 59% to 64% 5 A*-C. I personally have had a successful year on the whole: Investors in People success; KS3 results going up; the departments I line-manage moving forward well.

The key aspect over the last year for me is the sense of transformation and the impact that I have had within this aspect. I feel that I have helped to contribute to the transformation of the school that is necessary in order to continually improve: nothing stands still. Throughout the year the impact of changing the CPD system;

establishing a teacher-research group; influencing the teaching and learning debate through focusing on the learning aspects; establishing working groups to create a staff voice within the school and so on. I feel that this has been an example of the creative responses I have made to the School and those that I work with. My originality of mind has helped to move the school forward by introducing fresh ideas and innovations.

However, the devastating news within my own personal life over-shadows all of this and I am once again reminded of how the life story influences the practitioner that I am: I hear that my father has lung cancer and he immediately begins chemotherapy. How he and my mum desperately need to draw on their own life-affirming energy at this time. I am suddenly drawn to the fact that his absence within this text is really noticeable. Why haven't I given him a voice within it? I know that he isn't the kind of man that would write anything, unlike my mum. But why haven't I shared with the world who he is? I suddenly feel tinges of guilt over-riding me: I feel a sense of taking for granted someone who was always there. I spend my time just thinking of him and the memories: the endless days he spent watching me play football when I was growing up, standing in the pouring rain and snow watching his son; I remember how he worked a lot to support us; I remember how he would always do anything for us at any time; I remember him putting the Christmas decorations up and nearly falling off the ladder one year; I remember him snoring on the settee, a lot….and the memories could go on. I should be preparing for the new School year that starts in a couple of days, but instead I'm thinking of him, 250 miles away up North with my mum and sisters looking after him and I'm down here. My life now is my autobiography: in one week's time, when I'm in School, my life will still be my autobiography. This is the most important thing in my head at the minute and is influencing the educator that I am. I am again reminded of the multiplicity of selves that exist within me: the way in which this event profoundly influences me personally and professionally. However, perhaps ironically my dealing with this event in my life is through gaining the success and the sense of being able to make things better at work: compensating for this emotional roller coaster through controlling the work that I do. This embraces Hill and Stephens (2005) who comment with regard to multiplicity of selves:

> 'Success in one or more important domains, along with the resulting positive effect, development, and confidence, can be exported to other selves and situations.' (Hill and Stephens, 2005, p. 134)

Perhaps this is where my own regeneration of spirit will come from.