UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHAMPTON

An Exploration of Teaching in Action

by

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ABSTRACT

FACULTY OF EDUCATIONAL STUDIES

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AN EXPLORATION OF TEACHING IN ACTION

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This thesis derives from my life as a teacher at Countesthorpe Community College in Leicestershire and from my attempts to describe, initially for myself, and then for others, what was happening in the classroom where I worked. Its beginnings are closely connected to the research of Michael Armstrong which he describes in Closely Observed Children. Its present form has emerged from the difficulties I found in reconciling what I knew of my existence as a teacher with demands for objective scientific enquiry.

I describe briefly the context in which I worked at Countesthorpe which was a school where students had an unusual degree of control over what and how they chose to learn. As a teacher of English and Humanities and as a tutor I was able to spend over half of each school week with the tutor group for whom I was responsible. Such an arrangement demanded that I should change my own practice and allowed me to witness significant changes in the way students acted and in the nature of the work they produced.

I describe in the thesis the conditions of my year as a teacher researcher with a small group of fifth year secondary students. I began my research by focussing upon the actions and writing of those students, some of which is described in Chapters 11 - 15.

The work of students and their responses to me are significant in changing and confirming my thinking and my ways of acting. The kind of work which I describe in those chapters informs much of this thesis. However, those students worked within a situation which was significantly of my making; my actions and reactions were as much a part of the existence of the classroom as theirs were and so I, the teacher, became part of the study.

This thesis is an attempt to describe the practice and unfold the layers of experience, belief, myth, fairy tale which are part of that practice. It contains both the struggle and an attempt to describe the struggle to articulate the complexity of practice. I have begun to formulate a discourse which arises from and attempts to reflect upon a range of human activity which is inaccessible to objective quantitative measurement. In recognising variety and difference amongst individuals and within the complexities of teaching and learning, I have attempted to avoid a smoothness of language which denies the jaggedness of individuality and the nature of knowing. Implicit in the thesis is the interconnectedness of my understandings of myself teaching, learning, writing and the lives of students learning, teaching and writing.

My aim has been to unfold experience and to write of teaching in action in a way that may resonate with the experience of other practitioners.

C O N T E N T S

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INTRODUCTION

This thesis arose originally from my experience of teaching at Countesthorpe Community College, Leicestershire, and from my encounters with the ideas and work of Michael Armstrong. It derives from my own life and actions and from my changing understanding of myself as teacher and learner. At Dartington Hall School, where I was first employed as a teacher, the most important thing I experienced was a kind of relationship between adults and children that I had not known before, and which grew from mutual respect and a serious regard for each other. At Countesthorpe a similar seriousness of thought and regard was applied to students' learning. I think the experience of Countesthorpe, from its beginning until the early 1980s, was quite exceptional. I do not believe that any other school has had quite the same combination of democratic school government, student and teacher autonomy and close student-tutor relationships for learning within the organisation of teams or mini-schools. I believe it gave me a unique opportunity for change and growth in my teaching.

What I have written is not simply the result of one year's research work but arises from my accumulated experience of being with children, teachers and learners, including experiences from my own childhood.

When I began to plan how the writing as a whole might look I drew a spiral. At the centre was self, myself, the selves of students, ourselves as teachers, learners. As the spiral moved outwards it passed through some of the experiences which have contributed to my changing understandings of myself as a teacher and learner. From the same centre and along the same outward spiral move my understandings of others' learning, of the students whom I have taught. The similarities and differences of our becoming are a part of my understandings and inform my teaching. Our struggles in thinking, changing, writing, seeking self-knowledge are reflected in each other. My experiencing of students learning informs my understanding of myself; my explanations of my own learning and beliefs are reflected in my understandings of others' being, of their becoming.

Unlike experience and unlike the complexity of the multi-layered nature of our understandings, writing is linear. The urge is to smoothness; a closure. I have not found it possible to write a spiral. I have begun to look for a mode of discourse, or a form which in some measure takes note of the experiences I try to describe. The thesis is in part a description of my struggle to write it. When I began the research, although the task didn't appear easy, it was one to which I felt equal. I found that the kinds of demand made on me by the School of Education at Leicester University ran counter to my knowledge of the classroom. I was not able to find an adequate alternative to those demands. I found my writing lacked a proper relationship with what actually happened in the classroom. There was no place for its unseen, unexpected activity; the kind of human interchange and inner life which defies the formality of the language of the thesis. My attempts to achieve distance and in some measure the objectivity of the researcher which the university demanded (a demand to which I largely acquiesced), gave rise to a feeling of dislocation and detachment from what I had thought I had known, leaving me with a vacuum which I felt I should be able to fill but could not.

When I moved to Southampton I transferred to Southampton University. My supervisor there, Bill Brookes, has given me the space to find a way to write which comes nearer to my experience and knowing, and to explore something of my understanding of myself as a teacher. I have been able to acknowledge myself as a legitimate part of what I write.

In my attempts to reach nearer to the nature of the life of the classroom and of our inner lives I have sometimes broken with the constraints of formal syntax and grammar. The jaggedness of human experiencing and being can be denied by the smoothness of narrative or discursive writing. Words polished with constant use begin to lack immediacy and vigour, lose their power. We can be deceived into thinking that we share meanings, because we use the same words. There are plenty of straightforward stories here but I have tried sometimes to use language unexpectedly; and to put words together which say something of my beliefs, of what informs my actions although it defies description; to find a different level of discourse. I have used green paper to distinguish these impressionist passages.

I begin with a brief description of Countesthorpe College and of Michael Armstrong's work. Chapters 3 - 5 centre on my own experience at school and then as a teacher at Dartington Hall School and at Countesthorpe. They are in some measure an explanation of what made me want to write about learning and teaching.

Chapters 6 - 8 describe the way I worked during my year's secondment and the difficulties which arose as a result of the dichotomy between my knowledge of teaching and the kinds of expectation I and my first supervisor had of what I might write. Chapters 9 - 15 centre on my understanding of teaching and learning in the context of a team at Countesthorpe College. Chapters 11 - 15, which consider the work of students, are on blue paper. My experience of students' work and a close study of it were reasons for my writing and inform much of my thinking. What I have written arises from and is rooted in experiences such as those described in these chapters.

The final chapter contains not conclusions but reflections. It contains three sections which touch on ideas which have arisen from this thesis and point towards further explorations.

I have known for a while that what I wanted from the beginning was to have written about teaching but I felt that it was not permissible.

I can see that running as a thread through the story.
Peculiar, mad.
Different.
Hard to actually say what I really do or think.
Afraid now as I write that I'll break the magic.
This is mine. I know I take risks
things go wrong.
Perhaps they can go worse wrong because I feel I take more, greater risks.
What I do belongs to poetry books, mysticism, fairy tale, dreams
it's unscientific, not proven, doesn't always have rules, follow rules
if you say too much the spell will be broken
it's superstitious

This is a part of me; deep down; it is a part of who I am. How I live.
What I believe and yet hardly know; have hardly known.

What kind of a way is this to behave?
Teachers are responsible
professional
you're messing about with other people's lives you know.

And yet, and yet. It is very serious.

Teaching and learning are not as nebulous as I imply; and although, for me their mystery and magic remain, I know that my actions are founded in my experiencing and in my personal knowledge.

To talk of poetry and dreams is not merely a way of avoiding the effort of trying to describe my life as a teacher, it is an essential part of my being a teacher. If I want to know more of what I think about teaching and learning I am more likely to turn to the poet and the storyteller than to a researcher in education

People, their infinite variety
uniqueness
originality
pleasure in how people are, their kindness, their ingenuity, their determination, vulnerability, resourcefulness,
their unexpectedness
humour, experiences, points of view, passions, eccentricities.
I want to believe people.

emotion/feeling; relationships and influences, good and bad

essential being
essence
at the centre, the self.
Everybody is so much more than I imagine, than they first appear.
and a potential to rise above.

1

Countesthorpe College

Countesthorpe College is an Upper School and Community College in Leicestershire. Students enter the school at 14 and can stay on into the sixth form if they wish. The school takes students from a number of different High Schools. Its catchment area has changed during the time it has been open. When it first opened in 1970 the High School buildings which are on the same campus were not completed so the Upper School housed 11 - 13 year-olds as well as older students.

In Autumn 1971 a working party met to consider the 3rd, 4th and 5th year curriculum and to make recommendations about changes that might be made. After an evening meeting and a half day conference Mike Anderson and Mike Armstrong were asked to write an interim report in which they put forward what were felt to be the inadequacies of the curriculum as it was and proposed a model for change.

Whatever individual views on the curriculum were, it seemed generally accepted that a fundamental, if not *the* fundamental aim underlying all aims at Countesthorpe was student autonomy; the curriculum was to create a situation where a student autonomy might thrive.

The 'core' system of options was felt to contradict student autonomy. Before the school opened teachers had felt it was right to impose on students a pattern of study which represented the teachers' view of education and that students would consider this reasonable as long as teachers were prepared to 'respond imaginatively to their individual experience , interest and choice WITHIN each subject area'. In practice, students rejected the teachers' judgement of what was worthwhile 'either because it really *was* inappropriate to them personally or at least because as teachers we were failing to convince them of its appropriateness.' The working party also felt that the curriculum offered an option system which did not represent a genuine choice. 'The options are determined by us, the teachers, not by the students. To many students the choices we offer them seem narrow and unimaginative. Too often, when an option fails, a student has nothing left to do and we have all too little to suggest.' There was a sense that whilst, on the one hand, teachers paid too little attention to

students' interests and experience, they failed also to convey their own commitment to their subject, leading one teacher to describe the school as 'somewhat soulless'.

The working party felt that the curriculum had failed to resolve the 'curious paradox of self-directed learning.'.

'The paradox is that for a student to direct his own learning successfully he need to have made available to him a great abundance of activities, experiences and subject matters, and all presented to him with energy and enthusiasm ..... And yet for a student to direct his own learning successfully he also needs close and sustained help and guidance from teachers who know him well - his interests, attitudes, values, abilities, quirks - and whom he knows equally well.' This implied teachers committed to what they were teaching, specialists in the secondary school, and yet with a relationship with students which went beyond the boundaries of a particular subject. It led the working party to suggest that the chief weakness in the curriculum was the split between pastoral and academic care. They looked for a way of placing the pastoral system at the centre of school organization 'yet without destroying the excitements and opportunities of specialisation'.

I have quoted from this paper extensively because these things happened before I came to Countesthorpe. I do not know how the school was at this time or what students and teachers felt as they moved towards the change.

What strikes me now is that these ideas and the debates which surrounded them were a part of the experience of those teachers who were at the school at that time, and their experiencing of them influenced their ideas and action. In retrospect I can see how these ideas and others like them informed actions and words of many of the teachers. I have little recollection of being much aware of those ideas myself when I joined a team two years after the paper was written. I have a sense of myself groping towards these ideas during my first years at Countesthorpe. The team I first worked in seemed to bear little relationship to this paper and although I was aware that things worked differently in other teams I found it very difficult to glean an idea of what might happen there.

In this paper there were only the most tentative beginnings of an

understanding of what 'student directed learning' might mean for student and for teacher. The radical change in school organisation was the beginning of changes in teaching and learning that I do not think were easy. The shifts in emphasis and point of view which it brought about facilitated and necessitated change.

The working party proposed what were sorts of minischool (which I shall call teams) within the framework of the whole school. A half year of 180 students would have a year teacher and seven tutors whose specialisms should include English, Mathematics, Humanities, Science, 2D/3D and perhaps a remedial specialist. Some teachers would remain specialists and all team teachers would provide specialist time for students outside the team. The multi-disciplinary team would organise its own teaching and students would leave the team either for long or short specialist courses or because a student might want to use specialised equipment or to work with a particular specialist on a specific problem.

The first two teams were set up for those students who would begin their fourth year in Autumn 1972. The teams were not constituted as the working party first proposed. The first teams were determined by the members of staff who were willing to become involved in them; these were teachers of English, Humanities and Mathematics and one Biologist. Each team had its own base and students and teachers were timetabled to work together in that base for half the week.

Students entering the school at fourteen would become part of a team and stay in that team with the same tutor and in the same physical area for two years (unless there were some good reason for change).

Each student arranged her own timetable with her tutor and with the agreement of parents. In the early years team-time included English, Humanities and Mathematics. Students chose a range of subjects outside this area.

By the time I came to take a year's secondmednt, teams had changed fairly considerably. In 1980 - 81 there were six teams, three in the fourth year and three in the fifth year. A student would enter one of those teams each of which received students from the three main

feeder high schools. Tutor groups were of 'mixed ability' and the allocation of students to teams was made on the basis of friendships, high school teachers' suggestions, tutors' strengths and interests and by chance.

The number of tutors and their subject specialisms varied slightly from team to team. The number of students in a tutor group varied according to a tutor's experience, subject area and teaching load. Each team organised the division of tutor groups slightly differently.

A note on Countesthorpe College's organisation and management.

The school was run by a standing committee which met weekly. Every teacher and member of the ancillary staff served on the committee for a quarter of the school year. Students also were eligible to vote in standing committee.
The head and deputies performed an executive function carrying out the decisions of standing committee; a kind of civil service for the democratic leadership! They consulted as necessary with the chair of standing committee during the week.

All matters of principle were decided by the moot. All staff, both teaching and non-teaching, and all students were members of the moot. The emphasis of the moot was not on majority voting but on working towards a consensus. That approach set the tone for most other meetings in the school.

Standing committee set up sub-committees and working parties to consider specific issues.

The finance committee allocated capitation budgets. The allowances committee decided on how scale points were allocated, trying, initially, to institute a more egalitarian system of payments than usually found within the Burnham scale.

All staff were inevitably involved in the running of the school and in decision making in a way which could not fail to affect them and their working conditions.

Countesthorpe College is no longer as I describe it in this thesis. Management styles have changed, the nature of the teams has changed fundamentally.

2

Closely Observed Children

In 1976 Michael Armstrong began his work as a teacher researcher in a primary classroom. He worked in a way suggested by David Hawkins, in an essay called 'Childhood and the Education of Intellectuals' which Michael quotes in the introduction to *Closely Observed Children*.

> The truth is that there has been relatively little close and disciplined scientific observation of the learning behaviour of young children as related to their distinctively intellectual development. It helps to work by stages as Piaget has done, but we need to see such developments in statu nascendi. Nor is such observation likely to prove fruitful under short term, transient conditions arranged for the benefit of the psychologist or psychiatrist observer. A Lorenz swims with his goslings, a Schaller lives with mountain gorillas, ethnologists live the life they would study. To expect more from the study of young childrn, for a lesser effort, seems naive indeed. The time scale of such observations is very clearly not the day or the week. The transitions and transformations of intellectual development may be rapid indeed, but they are statistically rare and must be observed in context to be given significance.
>
> The most important area of control, for making the intellectual development of children more visible, happens to coincide with the major practical aim of educational reform: to provide both the material and social guidance, under which the engagement of children with their world is most intrinsically satisfying and most conducive to the development we would study. If this seems too much to ask, we must then associate ourselves in teams which work harmoniously and with considerable overlapping of their various functions.

Michael overcame the problem of reconciling pressures of teaching with the need for space for observation and analysis by working as a teacher in Stephen Rowland's classroom. Michael did not have responsibility for the organisation and administration of the class. Stephen had a share in Michael's observations and his reflections. Michael had the time to write a detailed diary of what he observed in the classroom and the opportunity to spend more time with particular chidren than the regular class teacher would have available. Stephen Rowland read Michael's diary and regularly discussed what had happened

during the day. Both he and Mary Brown, the headmistress of Sherard School, contributed their own thought and responses to Michael's diary.

Michael's stated intention was to concentrate on the study of children's intellectual growth.

> The object of my inquiry was necessarily limited and tentative. I did not intend to assess in detail the children's attainment, nor to judge the effectiveness of particular teaching methods, nor to compare formal and informal classrooms. I wanted to study, within the context of one particular school, the character and quality of children's understanding; the insights which they display and the problems which they encounter, their inventiveness and originality and their intellectual dependence. I chose to concentrate on intellectual growth rather than social development, and on learning rather than teaching, without, I hope, ignoring the interdependence of each pair of terms.
>
> Michael Armstrong *Closely Observed Children* Writers and Readers Cooperative, 1980

It was Michael's ideas about intellectual growth, the reconstruction of knowledge, which most interested me and, subsequently, Michael's description of children's work and his commitment to children's intellectual and creative endeavours. His thinking has both challenged mine and provided a foundation for it.

Michael formed a group which met at the university as an adjunct to his research.

I was invited to belong to the group but attended infrequently since it was held during the school day. One of the group would present a piece of work which might illustrate a particular idea. At first it was Michael who made the presentation. He would explain the circumstances in which it had happened and put forward some thoughts which arose from knowledge of the child, and from reflection on the work itself.

Discussion would grow from the presentation and centre on the work presented. We could share our own responses to the piece of work and perhaps challenge or confirm some of the things that Michael had proposed.

Sometimes it was hard to say anything at all.
Sometimes I felt I had things to say but they were quite different from the rest of the group, perhaps not, many were silent.
The group could become embroiled in discussion arsing from political

viewpoints, or become entangled in misunderstandings and frustrations arising from differences in school contexts and personal beliefs.
I felt it was not always easy to contribute. I take a long time to formulate my thoughts in discussion.
Later, when I came to present work of students, discussion that arose often seemed entirely irrelevant to me. I cannot remember what I expected from them.

This kind of difficulty ran like a thread through all the similar meetings which followed those support group meetings. When individuals were more polarised either by their personal space or by experience in school the difficulties increased.

The discussions and presentations were very important to me. They offered a chance to think and talk beyond the superficial asking of 'What do I do Monday?' It gave me space to reflect upon ways of being in the classroom and how students behaved there. How they learned, what my relationship was to them and their growth of understanding.

Perhaps I was beginning to see that differences in the way students learn and in the things which engage them, compel them to learn, were greater than I had acknowledged; and that those differences required a different way of being in the classroom.

As I moved nearer to teacher as facilitator rather than teacher as provider, I looked also for ways of thinking that would inform a way of being in the classroom which had its centre of gravity amongst the students and not in the teacher.

Differences.
Changes.

Far more fruitful meetings, for me, were those organised by Michael in the evening, for local teachers. At each meeting one teacher would present a piece of work or a number of related events from the classroom where s/he worked. We would then talk about the work and the issues that it gave rise to for each of us. The teachers came from Infant Schools up to Upper Secondary and from special schools. There were different perspectives but, it seemed, much common ground. The presentation of children's work was a way of

seeing the kind of things that children do when given greater control over what and how they choose to learn; what happens when teachers no longer see themselves as the centre of classroom activity.

One of the most useful things about these discussions was the way that focus on a child's endeavours might release me from my own specific problems and questions but offer also the possibility of informing how I would return to them.

I think I also came to want more. Perhaps it was that I wanted time to follow my own thoughts; to make something more coherent of all the strands of thought, ideas and half ideas that arose at this time.

I try and tell what I am thinking largely through story telling. I wanted to identify what it was that informed the stories.

Michael's idea was to establish a chain of teacher researchers in Leicestershire who would work in such a way as to support and extend each other's work and collectively build up a picture of the nature of children's intellectual growth.

Stephen Rowland spent a year in the classroom of a teacher in another primary school, working as Michael had done, though with a less sympathetic relationship with the host teacher. His record of this year can be found in *The Enquiring Classroom*, Falmer Press, 1984.

At the end of Stephen Rowland's research year Leicestershire Education Authority offered three secondments under this scheme linked to the University of Leicester, registered for the degree of M Ed. I was granted one of these secondments to work as a teacher researcher at Countesthorpe College, where I was already a teacher. It was something that I very much wanted to do and mattered deeply to me.

I had been writing diaries connected with my work as a tutor since February 1976. I think I may have begun writing a teaching diary because initially I found it difficult to talk to other teachers about what I was doing and thinking.

It was partly because I was not sure what I was doing and because I felt I was taking risks.

I wanted to help myself remember what had happened in the classroom; to be able to write things down in the midst of what seemed confusion and perhaps begin to see patterns there; to see how one thing preceded another, led to another, or not.

Once I had fixed some things on the page I could return to think about them at leisure. I felt I was moving towards something that was better. Behaviour and thinking changed alongside each other. The writing became an important part of my thinking about what was happening in the classroom. Writing was a part of change.

My diaries continued until the Autumn of 1979 when the demands of the job left me no time to write. When I look back on those diary entries I am surprised by how much happened and how much of what I believe now was there in embryo in the early diaries. I have a sense of my early years at Countesthorpe as not being good enough; of failure and struggle, and yet the evidence of the diary suggests expansion and success alongside the worry and self-criticism.

I did have a growing desire to share what was happening. Perhaps it was because I had struggled to find a way of working, convinced that students could get more from school than I had seen them do; and now they seemed to be showing that what I had imagined was plausible and more. I also wanted to have some more solid theory through which to explain why I worked in the way I did and to describe how students worked given that situation.

I very much wanted secondment in 1980 and to be a part of the research which Michael had initiated. I wanted to make a contribution to the study of intellectual growth which Michael had envisaged.

I wanted also, to find some coherent and communicable framework and interpretation of what had been happening in my classroom. I felt at the beginning of my secondment that it was important to lay emphasis upon what students did. I felt, and still feel, that it would be useful to share something of what students did at Countesthorpe because it seems that, at that time, students had unusual opportunities to take control of their own learning; and that the work that they chose to do and how they did it was often unexpected. An understanding of how they came to work would perhaps inform the practice of other teachers and support change.

David Hawkins suggests that:

> It is often conceded that a superordinate aim of education should be the cultivation of competence in children to fashion well their own lives. But it is *not* supposed steadily that such competence is gained through exercise of it.
>
> It is supposed, rather, that self-organisation will appear magically *after*

> years of schooling subordinated to a quite different principle, according to which children are *deprived* of autonomy. They are deprived in the interest of what is conceived to be an efficient imparting of information and guidance. During all this time, and in the interest of such efficiency, children are essentially deprived of any significant exercise of autonomy in choice, discrimination, and judgement. They are reduced to a state of passivity and, often enough, of boredom. They are coerced, however politely, into a frame of organisation intended to promote their acceptance of information and exercise in specific curricular topics, those being justified, or once justified, on the ground that they are necessary to competent adult functioning.
>
> David Hawkins, *The Informed Vision*, Agathon Press, 1974.

At Countesthorpe, student autonomy was not only a declared principle, but, I believe, during the years when I was teaching there, informed the teaching and organisation of the school in a more thorough way than I have experienced at any other school.

Student autonomy not only changes how students behave in school but necessarily demands that I should think again about how I behave as a teacher. The work that I have seen students doing; the many different ways of working and developing understanding have made me want to share the possibilities with others.

My response and the changes in me arise from my encounters with students and with teachers, and from my life story, my past and my present.

3

Some memories of my schooling

The rules are something I remember most clearly about my own schooling and the consequences of obeying rules and of breaking rules. I remember the sinking feeling if I thought I was going to be told off, especially if it related to academic failure and and increasing contempt for what seemed to be totally trivial rules and for the children who were so disapproving when I broke them. At my secondary school there seemed to be any amount of rules about uniform and how it should be worn, and where and how we should be. I disobeyed the rules in the tamest of ways but it seemed to shock my peers. There was also a restrictive atmosphere of rules which terrified me because I would be shouted at and which, it seems to me now, restricted how I learnt.

Eleven years old. Monday. Silent reading presided over by the headmistress, iron grey hair wound in hoops round her head.

I forget to bring a reading book. I am not allowed in the library at break time. In desperation I ask the girls in the cloakroom. One, whom I have often heard praised for her choice of reading, offers me a book. I take it gratefully.

We sit in rows; each desk an island. I look at the book. *Biggles.* I don't think I've heard of that before. I open the page and begin to read and after two or three lines my heart sinks. I know not only that this is a book that I will not enjoy, but that it is a badly written book, and the careful tread of the head mistress comes closer, looking to see what we are reading, exchanging a word or two here and there. I pray she won't stop by me.

Perhaps I am crouched too closely over the book. She stops. 'What are you reading, Jenifer?'

'*Biggles.*'

The silence of the classroom is cracked open by the loud contempt of her voice. She is appalled by me.

The class is riveted

expands with the delight of another's discomfort

is warm with the pleasure that it is not they who are singled out.

Her voice addresses the class on and on.

And all this time my heart and mind are raging. I am holding back tears. I am shouting from within at the contemptible woman.

I couldn't have explained I had forgotten my book and then asked to go to the library.
I couldn't reject the book I'd been lent and find another.
I couldn't explain what I thought about the book.
I couldn't explain to her the injustice of her behaviour.

Rules are not all written or even spoken; rules of conduct in the class room, expectations about what was a worthy activity, restricted what I learnt and, more seriously, how I learnt. It changed my view of myself as a potential learner.
It was at this school that I think I must have developed an image of myself as the fool.
I was considered quite good at English but in the second year my teacher told me that if I controlled my artistic temperament and concentrated more on clause analysis I would do a lot better. At home it became a joke, but at school it mattered and I remember the two years with that teacher as a time when I no longer enjoyed writing.
My first five years at secondary school were not distinguished in any way that I can remember. I was not good enough at music or sport to warrant school approval and my academic record was mediocre. The school did not do any drama to speak of, which was my first love.
My main enjoyment lay in activities outside school. I was a Girl Guide, which opened up new areas of experience for me some of which were very similar to the things which students have chosen to do at Countesthorpe. My parents also encouraged and supported interests and enquiry and offered me an example in themselves.

My parents were extremely important in helping me to hold on to an idea of myself as a learner, with the potential to pursue an academic career. I sometimes wonder whether, if I had stayed at the same

school for the sixth form, I would not have got into university. I felt so much at odds with what was accepted as successful there. My mother used to tell me that at university I would be in charge of my own studies.

I spent my two sixth form years at The Friends' School, Ackworth. It seems very difficult to write about happiness.

I look back on the time with great affection.

It was as if suddenly whatever was holding me down was removed and up I leapt.

I played the flute, badly, in the orchestra. I acted in plays. I won a speech competition. I played in the hockey team, badly. I wrote for the school newspaper. I ran cross-country. I wrote and discussed poetry. I was embarrassed by my clothes. I found I was good at English Literature, that I found translating from French to English a challenge and a thrill. I read a lot of 19th century British History even though the history teacher didn't seem to like women too much.

I spent a Christmas holiday in Preston public reference library reading back copies of Punch and old newspapers in order to produce a paper about women during the first world war. At that time there was no easy access to information about women during the war, I didn't discover Vera Brittain or find out much about V.A.D.s but I began to think that *surely* women must have done more than books and men would have us believe. It didn't help much with my 'A' level exam, but I was both pleased by what I had done for its own sake and frustrated by its limitations.

The two teachers of English left at the end of my first year in the sixth form. One had constantly aggravated me by her view of *Hamlet* as an insoluble puzzle. Why, I kept asking, is this considered to be such a great play if there are so many unsatisfactory loose ends? The teacher who replaced her set us to read Tillyard's *The Elizabethan World Picture* and suddenly the play fell into place; I found the resolution of my unease and a new perspective, also, to my interest in church architecture and decoration. My English teacher taught me to look closely at a text, to look beyond it and, I realise now, to have faith in my hunches.

I found friendship, respect and stimulation amongst my contemporaries and amongst teachers. I was glad to be taken seriously; and to share with people their differences.

At Ackworth I felt very much the Quaker respect for each person as being worthy in themselves, an acceptance of others, and a celebration of differences and of community. I was able to grow at Ackworth despite my awkwardness, my gaucheness, my naivety, my crassness, my unbridled enthusiasm.

I did very well in the exams that came at the end of my first year at university. My tutor wanted to know what my plans for a career were.

I should like to be a teacher.

He exploded, mildly; What a waste!

I felt angry about his reaction. If there is any worth, do children not deserve it?

4

Dartington. A way of being.

I taught for two years at Aller Park School, the middle school section of Dartington Hall School.

At Dartington I learnt a different way of being with children; different from most schools I had known; different from many parents and children I knew.

At Dartington many phrases used to describe a way of teaching and being with children could be seen in practice rather than different behaviour which claimed that description. It seems easy to use the words, to claim all kinds of attitudes to children, but not actually enact whatever those attitudes imply. We can talk of respect for the child, of the potential of the individual, of the importance of the child's experience, of the child at the centre of her learning and in the same breath deny all that if we talk from our superior position as adults in relation to the inexperienced child.

At Dartington adults did not seem to have to maintain any kind of superior position towards children or amongst themselves.

Nor did they indulge in the kind of chumminess and self-dissonant behaviour which actually implies a condescension towards children.

Adults treated children with genuine courtesy. They treated them as other people.

At my interview with Royston Lambert, the head at that time, he told me that I would have responsibility for what happened in my classroom; I would make decisions about how and what I taught, and about behaviour and relationships. I would have no automatic recourse to any higher authority to support my actions simply because I was a teacher, an adult. Children had an equal claim on the arbitrating powers of the head and their views would carry the same weight as mine.

> A new teacher at Dartington once complained furiously to Tony Barnes, the gentlemanly head of the Middle School, that a girl had called her a bitch. 'Oh, did she?' said Tony mildly. 'What had you done to make her do that?'
>
> The teacher's assumption had been that the children should not call her

names under any circumstances. Barnes' assumption was that any child who called her a rude name must have been provoked.

David Gribble, *Considering Children*, Dorling Kindersley, 1983

The kind of responsibility and self-reliance I experienced at Dartington; the removal of a set of imposed rules that are ostensibly beyond one's control made me review assumptions I had made about reasonable behaviour in the classroom; behaviour of children; behaviour of teacher.

Very often rules in schools and expected modes of behaviour, for teachers and students, contradict what I have come to know about how we learn and how teachers and students can work well together. The ways of working that I might encourage in a classroom may also assume ways of behaving which are perhaps not sanctioned by the institution. I have sometimes found myself consumed with a preoccupation with petty regulations which seem pointless to me. I wonder, as I write, if my occasional obsession at Countesthorpe with enforcing rules about make-up, for example, was in some measure to protect my way of teaching. Though such enforcement of silly rules did nothing to enhance it!

I had been used to rules at school and although I had found many of them ridiculous I needed time before they released their hold on me and to learn how they related to me as teacher.

David Gribble quotes Tony Barnes as saying 'The point is not that there should be no rules, but there should be no rules except ones that the children can see to be necessary.'

The absence of superficial rules about things like modes of dress and seating arrangements released me from what I find to be the constant worry and preoccupation of enforcing them. It also seemed to release children from the need to have that repertoire of annoying behaviour which feeds on such preoccupations and distracts from the main purposes of the class. It didn't stop small boys hiding in the theatre curtains. It ceased to be such an issue.

If I was faced with something I thought might not be sanctioned, the wearing of hats, for example, I could ask myself 'Sanctioned by whom?' Did I mind if chldren wore hats? Were those hats preventing children from doing whatever was happening in English that day? Once I realised that it made no difference to their work that some children

wore hats, there was no need to worry about it. I did not encourage hats, nor forbid them. It was not an issue.

Rules about behaviour produced by schools and the teachers in them often convey messages about learning, about what it is and how it should be done.

I have always worried about noise. I suggest to students that they work in groups, read each other their work, ask each other advice, do some drama. And then I worry about the noise.

On teaching practice my drama lessons, even in the hall, were punctuated by calls to 'Shhh.' I was worried about other teachers' reactions. Noise means misbehaviour. Silence means hard work.

Even at Countesthorpe I worried about noise; I had the feeling that people felt the sounds that sometimes came from my classroom meant I had not got things under control. Once, at the beginning of a fifth year, a colleague handed out a CSE English comprehension paper to his entire class in order to keep them busy while he spoke to individuals. It made me feel guilty for not having quiet in my classroom while I arranged students' timetables with them, but I also felt angry. I didn't want students to be just kept quiet, to get certain restrictive messages about what is work. Nor did I sanction unruly, unthoughtful behaviour.

And yet I felt embarrassed and guilty when there were shouts of laughter, or a group noisily gathered round something interesting or a boy gazing out of the window for most of the lesson, or a couple of students making beautifully coloured title pages for an empty folder while they talked about something else, or when students did something but didn't want to record it.

All these activities are legitimate within an atmosphere of serious study.

Seriousness does not preclude laughter.

I felt that there was value in all these things at the time and yet I did feel pressured to have the group working quietly and studiously. The desire for students to be all working quietly must come from another part of my experience which contradicts student autonomy and much of what I know about how we learn. Sometimes there is too much noise for certain activities to happen successfully, sometimes noise was not to do with people learning but was thoughtless or even anti-social and that is unacceptable. Sometimes the classroom

is gently quiet. What is difficult for me is an insistence on no noise, regardless of the kind of noise and what is being achieved by it.

At Dartington. the removal of superficial legislation allowed me, and children, to put our minds to things that we felt to be important. I learnt something about the nature of freedom within the restrictions of a school; what I could let go and how I might behave and expect others to behave so that freedom was not abused or allowed to become chaos.

I learnt from the freedom and from the attendant responsibility which was accorded to me in the classroom; and I learnt from being with children and adults at Dartington.

> I saw how it was to be with children in a peaceful, open way.
> I saw an easiness between adults and children.
> I saw adults treat children who had behaved terribly badly with a firmness and compassion and fairness that supported and nourished and did not condemn.
> I saw adults and children engrossed in conversation; sharing joyful activity, music making, flying kites, canoeing, camping; I saw them engaged in serious pursuits together, badger watching, taking pinhole photographs, keeping bees, each learning from the other.
> And I had a chance to do these things myself.
> I also saw adults able to step back and allow children to engage in their own pursuits without adult interference.
> Despite all kinds of sophistication, children seemed able to be children for longer.
> At Dartington children directly challenged me and my assumptions and I had to recognise their criticisms and answer properly.
> I found the children were genuinely interested in what I had to say even if they didn't always agree with me. I found children appreciating me despite our differences and I felt honoured by them.
> I found the children genuinely good company.

Sometimes adults seem frightened of children and need to find ways of keeping them at bay. David Gribble suggests that manners can seem to be invented as a form of self defence.

> Unfortunately the code of conventional manners makes no demands at all on the behaviour of adults towards children. It is acceptable to domineer, abuse, shout and even to snatch, shove and slap.
>
> Gribble, op. cit.

Lack of adult reasonableness towards children need not be so extreme. Nowhere, except at Dartington, and eventually at Countesthorpe, have I seen children so thoroughly respected. It is possible to make children feel silly and unimportant in much more subtle ways.

I hate being told off. I don't like feeling small. When my first child was born I found that the way some nursing staff treated new mothers made it very difficult for us to feel confident with our new babies. They shouted, reprimanded, demonstrated with exasperation the right way to do things. They treated us like children. All of us, grown women, were glad to get home to learn on our own how to be with our babies.

It is helpful to me to remember the integrity of the other, child or adult; to recognise our need for privacy and space to follow our own paths of thought; to respect the experience of the other and give time for experience.

It is easy to ignore a child's needs, to say no because what the child requests seems inconvenient, to correct or ignore what the child is saying or doing because it doesn't coincide with your own idea of what should be done or what is right.

At a mother and toddler group I once sat with my daughter and another child, both not quite three years old, at a table set out for using glue. There were paper plates, glue, and oddments of coloured wool. I cut the wool according to the girls' instructions and handed it to them for sticking. Each arranged and stuck the wools on a plate in whatever way pleased them. Then the other girl's mother arrived and quickly rearranged her child's wool to make a face - with eyes, nose and mouth. There was the arrangement to the mother's satisfaction - that's what they were supposed to have done - but what

lesson had the child learnt?

Adults invariably have authority in relation to children; teachers to students; and so I feel the need to think, be aware, before I intervene or put forward a viewpoint.

Once a student knows that her viewpoint is equally respected, only then do I feel I can put forward my ideas with equal force.

I found students at Countesthorpe watching my face to see what was acceptable.

Choice can be another teacher's confidence trick. Choose what you like, as long as I approve of it. What does this teacher want me to do? One set of restrictions is replaced by another, perhaps more idiosyncratic.

I must listen to what you say so that you know that what you have to say is important to me.

Quite often young children say things which seem funny to adults from their different perspective but there is no need to make children doubt what they have said because of our laughter. Often what children say allows us to look at something differently; it reveals also a mind struggling to make sense of the world. If we are open to the other we are open to learn from him.

I do not assume I am right; that I know everything. As we speak together we open opportunities for us to learn together.

In one of my favourite stories from *Considering Children* David Gribble describes a nursery school teacher:

> In speaking of a three year old boy who seemed unhappy and sat at a table by himself, not joining in with any of the other children's play, she said 'I went over and sat beside him and tried to strike up a conversation.'
>
> She did not go over to give the boy something to do, or to urge him to join in, or to make him tell her what the matter was. She did not go with any clear idea of what he should be doing or how she should be helping him to do it. She did not even go to strike up a conversation. She went to *try* to strike up a conversation.
>
> Gribble, op.cit.

The teacher did not impose upon the boy.

I do not know what students will tell me. I expect anything because I cannot know what will happen.

I have felt pressure as a teacher to keep children busy. The responsibility to make sure they are not wasting their time, that they are *learning* can make me impose my idea of what is suitable upon them but until I begin to listen and observe, begin to know them, I have no sure idea of what to suggest.

If I am comfortable with who I am and am willing to admit mistakes and weaknesses and areas of ignorance then I am less likely to need to pretend to be something other than I am; or have to act in a way that is not true to the person I am.

Adolescents, particularly, do not need a teacher who does not seem to have grown up.

Falseness is easy to detect and then the other is unwilling to give of herself; and the possibilities for learning are diminished.

I don't have to try to be one of the gang.

I don't have to want to do all the same things that they do or expect them to be interested in everything I am interest in.

I do not exclude them from the passion of my learning.

I will engage with them in their own quest for understanding and welcome their teaching.

Students do not need the teacher to know everything; to always be the authority;

it is helpful to show how to begin to find something out, where to look, how to proceed;

it is helpful to be able to give support while they solve more intangible problems, personal puzzles, intellectual or not. We can not solve problems for others; we cannot learn for them. We can make a stability possible when everything else seems at sea.

I try to be honest about how I feel.

I want to be willing to apologise, to admit I'm in the wrong and also admit hurt. Sometimes the student makes it impossible. Sometimes I make it impossible for the student.

There is no need for me to say what I do not feel. Do not say 'This is boring', because you imagine the children are bored. Say how you feel. Find out what the students are thinking.

I do not have to like every student I teach.

When I work with students I find I have a strong commitment to each one.

There is a stillness at the centre which always remains.
I have a sense of commitment to the individual, whatever happens, a sense that I will not abandon my commitment to them as learners.
I remove the busy-ness of my self.
In stillness, I am open to the other.

5

Changing Experience of Countesthorpe

At Dartington there were small numbers of children, its setting was, in many ways, idyllic, and parents had chosen for the children to be there. The school had a long established experience of progressive education which could support a new teacher struggling to learn what that meant for her. Its support was in being there. I was not told what to do; that was my struggle. When I arrived at Countesthorpe, I had to learn again how to use what I had learnt at Dartington in a 14 - 18 state comprehensive school.

I was quite uneasy about a lot of what I found there; it seemed noisy, sometimes unproductive. I felt that some teachers were somehow dishonest in their relationship with students. I knew there were many things that I must learn at Countesthorpe. I felt also that I had learnt much at Dartington that had still be be learnt at Countesthorpe.

At Countesthorpe we all, teachers and students, but especially teachers, had to learn how to behave in a different way in order to use to the full the possibilities open to us. We were brought up in a quite different system of schooling, probably with very few opportunities to question what was taught us and how and with relatively limited examples of how to process the information we were given. I could look back at my own schools and know that they were not how I wanted schools to be. I could have ideas about how I might be a teacher and how I might act differently. I think I was groping towards something that I knew somehow ought to be better.

Dartington gave me the chance to see how teachers and children might behave differently.

I was able to feel how it might be.

It was important to me to be amongst people who behaved differently.

It was also important to me to have the possibility of trying things out; trying out ways of behaving that I couldn't be sure would work because they were not how I had been taught or how I had been taught to teach.

Countesthorpe gave me the opportunity to try new ways of being; with each new tutor group I hoped to move nearer to ways of acting which allowed each student to be aware of their own space and to find ways of being which most finely challenged them, most closely responded to their needs.

classroom
class
room
no room
jostling, squirming,
perpetual motion
jack-in-the-box boys,
girls like macaws
shrieking, obscenities, unstoppered not-laughter.
the classroom is like an uncomfortable shoe
it pinches
it chafes
it flops and flaps.
Minds, bodies in constant uncomfortable motion
or atrophied,
wishing they were elsewhere.
I am afraid.
The discord makes my stomach lurch.
They sneer, they leer.
They know I do not know them.
They seek my approval.
They laugh in my face.
My interest irritates. It cannot be true.
They want to talk
They pity me. She tries hard.
Be careful
Teachers are not to be trusted.
What does she want?
I am intrigued by you.
You deserve more than this.
I want so much for you. I can unlock doors for you.

Them us
I you
I thou.

Awkward adolescent bodies.
Awkward adolescent lives.
No uniform ity

listen to me

listen

I ate my tea on the coalshed last night.
They threw me out.

There are things I know that you
might be interested in

listen
talk to us

of motherhood; friendship; death; marriage; loneliness;
misunderstandings.

listen to me
listen.

There are things you must know
There are things you must learn

This worksheet is very interesting.
It is suitably simplified
to ensure that you can see how utterly important are its contents
to you.

listen to me
listen
talk with us.

What matters to you?
Does this matter?

I do this because I have to
I want to pass the exam.
I am writing. Seventeen pages;
that's good, isn't it?
See how fat my folder is.

I don't care
I do care is screaming inside

listen
listen

This is stupid
        pointless

I know it is.

dislocation

It is not a part of me or you.
We can see no sense in it.
There is no passion
The dispassionate in me proposes a strategy
                        imposes
                        the job is done, dutifully.
but you have no need of the strategy
as I sought a way round the problem, alone,
you also let your mind work.
You have breathed life into it,
kindled a little passion.

I   you
I   thou

1973 - 75

When I joined the staff of Countesthorpe College in 1973 'Teams' were beginning their second year of existence. The team to which I was appointed was newly formed. Four of the team were new to the school, two of those were probationary teachers. There were 180 students in the team and seven teachers. One of the teachers was appointed as team leader and chose not to have a tutor group himself. The other six teachers were each responsible for a tutor group. The team leader was a P.E. specialist. There were three English teachers, a Maths teacher, a teacher with a degree in Psychology who also taught Maths and a Sociology teacher.

I taught English to my tutor group and to those of the Maths teacher and the Sociology teacher whilst they taught my group. Although English, Maths and Social Studies were all taught in the same area they remained largely separate because specialist subject teachers taught their own subjects with little reference to each other. I was seen very much as an English specialist, although I was expected to be involved in Humanities work as well as English. I already had reservations about Humanities teaching and the way that the team worked in that year confirmed many of my worries. I had never liked, and had become reluctant to present, programmes of work which were to be followed more or less without question. They were often based around themes which I found restrictive. I was worried about so-called individual choice within what seemed to be a fairly inflexible framework.

I also struggled with a completely new teaching situation. My tutor group consisted of 33 fourth years, of mixed ability, though many with learning difficulties and quite a number with serious problems of various kinds. I remember that first team as rough, alien and sometimes threatening. The notion of student autonomy; the kind of relationship between student and teacher fostered at Countesthorpe made it possible for students to express dissatisfaction, to reject the suggestion of teachers, to express their feelings about school, about teachers, about the curriculum. I was not able to fill the vacuum made by negative responses nor was I able to help students to do so. We were held by our past experiences of schools; our assumptions; our expectations. Althought it was possible to refuse some notions of school and what happened there, there were not enough

pictures of what might replace what we refused. Perhaps we all had some ideas, more or less formed, of what might be possible. I certainly did not know how I could move with those students from that classroom towards the pictures that were forming in my mind.

I wasn't sure what those pictures might become. Ways of acting in the classroom which had been appropriate amongst smaller, younger, classes at Dartington were no longer appropriate. Although I could acknowledge this intellectually, the problem of acting in the classroom was different and more difficult. The ideas that I had did not translate with ease into ways of being. I had to change how I behaved in the classroom and needed to learn about those I taught and how they thought. I also felt that there were things that I had learnt about teaching, particularly whilst I was at Dartington, which I was not prepared to abandon. I had to change. I also wanted, to some extent, a change in conditions.

Whilst I felt that problems concerning how to behave in the classroom; how to teach, belonged to me and were for me to resolve, I was worried by the teaching within the team.

I was aware that somehow what we were doing wasn't appropriate - or that it wasn't right for me.

I was not sure precisely what might be better.

I felt tied in and entangled by the way the team was organised and by the way that organisation tilted the balance of how it was possible to teach.

Fourteen fifteen sixteen

Soon I may leave school

Does he love me? Why won't she go out with me? Should I? Shouldn't I?
Why is the world. We'll all be blown up anyway. This is so boring.
I think I'm rather a shy person.
I wrote this poem last night. I sat up in bed and looked out over the fields. You can see right write across to where the cars are moving along the motorway. I sat up in bed and looked out and just wrote this poem.
My mum says I've got impossible since I started at this school.
Shaz is a tart.
Can I read that? Can I read your story?
Did you see that little kid on the news last night? Horrible.
Horrible. How can they do that? There are wars everywhere. Some people say we're at war. People were killed in a pub last week.
Bombs. I get frightened sometimes.
I'd like a baby. I'd like two kids. Boy and a girl.
I can't do anything this morning. I'm too tired.
Can I go across to music?
Oo yer date.
That's really weird. It's good, though, look at this, Karen. How do you do that? I think I'd like to take some photos.
How do you spell necessary?

Fourteen fifteen sixteen

Soon I may leave school.

Perhaps I shall live alone, become a parent; face illness, loss, death; perhaps I shall face disappointment, achieve my ambitions, struggle with breakdown, become famous.

We have our dreams and fears; our plans for the future.
We cannot know the shape of life before us.

The shape of the future becomes increasingly uncertain.
Unpredictable.

At my centre is my own being; if I can come to know myself, have a sense of my wholeness and of my worth I have a greater power to act. I need the power to face those things which will happen to me and the consequences of my acting.

wholeness

a movement towards wholeness

If I can feel the possibilities of a whole self, hold on to the centre
then I hold the potential for movement
the possibility for change
know my imperfections and error; weakness; strength.

hold the possibility to become

I felt, very much, that there had to be a better way of doing things; that we were on the edge of something, but I was unable to see quite what it was.

At the end of my first year at Countesthorpe the staff of the team I was in changed. Our team leader left for another job and was replaced by one of the existing team who maintained his role of tutor. A history teacher joined the team. The nature of the way we worked changed partly because we no longer had one head of team to whom we must answer. We began to be able to discuss our practice together more openly and I began to feel I had more freedom to choose how I worked.

During the second year of that first team I taught less English and took on responsibility for the project work of some of my students who were doing CSE Social Studies. It was possible for the boundaries between English and Humanities to become less defined. I began to learn how learning changes if a student has longer, more coherent contact with one teacher across more than one subject area.

I felt that there were teams in the school who had different approaches and though they seemed to be nearer to what I was looking for, it was extremely hard to find out exactly how they worked.

I felt excluded by people who worked in the other teams whose work seemed interesting but who didn't seem to want to talk about it.

Michael Armstrong was an exception. He would willingly discuss any aspect of teaching. It was he with whom I began to talk in my first years at Countesthorpe. He began to give me a sense of his own ideas about teams, of his approach to students, about the reconstruction of knowledge. Above all he gave me a space in which to explore my own ideas of how I might teach within the framework of teams.

What do the straight walls of the classroom contain?

tables chairs

awkward adolescent bodies

awkward adolescent lives

who am I?

who are you?

I am unhappy, I am in love.
I am ambitious. I am alone.

who are you?

who am I?

In this turmoil.

Sit down. Write now. Be still.

How can they be still when what I ask is on the periphery of their lives?

I want to pass my exams. I have ambitions;
but still he cannot keep still.
The hand writes but the body squirms and twitches with other more pressing preoccupations.

love, holocaust, death, sex, friendship

he writes, words creep across the page,
now and then,
and his heart and mind rove along the hedgerows where he will seek out the wild birds and their nests.

Space, coolness, gathering dusk, animal sounds.

she writes, fast, pours the words onto the page.
flirtation, fumblings, confusion, half-truth.
she knows and does not know
romance, the swirl of her bright skirt, a stomach-lurching smile in his eyes.
comfort and uncertainty in the darkness.
Tonight, after I've got the tea, and put away the pots I'll watch a bit on T.V.
Perhaps the phone will ring.
love, marriage, domesticity, a little excitement, a feathered nest.

he writes here and there across the page
his grubby fingers hold the pen uncomfortably
grime beneath the bitten fingernails
it is painful to form the words to find the words
to-night he will reassemble the engine parts
conjure together the tiny awkward oily pieces
the paper holds the marks of his fingers,
the smudged words of his longing

stupid thick as a plank dumbo

she writes, she answers the questions
numbers words her hand is on automatic.
Remember the news last night?
famine; abortion; politicians' talk; a picket line.

she writes; dutifully, neatly, pauses, gazes beyond the window,
beyond the suburban houses,
to where there are riches and poverty, darkness and light, to where
the need cries out

to the unknown into which she will step
to answer need
to answer the cries of her own heart
of her own needs.

1975 - 77

When we started a new team in the autumn of 1975 the two Humanities teachers moved to work in other teams and a newly appointed sociologist joined us. Each summer new teams were negotiated depending on whether staff had left the school. Teams could remain basically the same though sometimes more radical changes were made. The composition of teams depended on much personal negotiation. It was very much a case of who thought they could work with whom; whether certain teachers could be better accommodated amongst certain combinations of people rather than others; whether there was an acceptable combination of subject specialisms and personal strengths. Once it was established that there were Maths, English and Humanities teachers in a team, it was a feeling of being able to work together that mattered most. I felt that teams each had a recognisable style. There were some teams where I felt I would have been less comfortable than others. In the second team that I worked in the differences between teachers seemed less pronounced, less uncomfortable. Every tutor, except the Maths specialist, took on responsibility for the English and Humanities work of their tutor group. The team was smaller and all seven team teachers had a tutor group. This year there were only 24 in my tutor group.

In this team I felt able to move freely in and out of other people's areas within the team; to seek advice or information; to compare notes; to help other students or to see students of my own who were working in other areas. Ideas could be exchanged fairly easily throughout the day. Since I taught both English and Humanities to my group I was able to see each student's work over a longer period and as a more organic whole. It was no longer necessary to make severe divisions between subjects either in terms of time or even subject matter. This flexibility had already been operating in other teams but this was my first real experience of it. CSE Social Studies and 'O' level Community Studies were examined by the presentation of project work and by skills-based exams. There was a broad range of acceptable subject matter and modes of study. I found that work in Humanities could encompass the widest range of students' interest, so my problem seemed to be how best to respond to interest or to encourage it. At this time I also became involved in teaching Parentcraft.

My tutor group included several students who needed special help with reading or spelling. The teacher for special needs had devised a plan whereby team teachers with appropriate interests and skillls took on students who needed extra help. Those students received particular support within the team and time was set aside for them each week to work with their tutor in the reading room where both student and tutor were supported by the special skills teacher. Again, I had the chance to extend my working relationship with some of my students and to work alongside another teacher from whom I could learn.

I felt at this time that there was much still to learn. I regretted that the team did not provide an atmosphere more sympathetic to my own developing ideas. Now it seems to me that I expected too much from the team; I was as much part of it as any other teacher. The changed organisation and the relative calm of this team allowed me to try out ideas and act in ways that seemed right to me and seemed to relate to the students with whom I worked. I was able to do many things for the first time that would have felt much more risky in other teams. This team was far more accommodating than subsequent teams in which I worked and I realise now that I was able to try things for the first time without feeling threatened.

I often find teaching painful and uncertain but also something from which I derive great pleasure. I think that in this second team I began to be able to see what was possible. It often seems to me both in the midst of teaching and in retrospect that things are either all bad or quite wonderful. I am able to remind myself that teaching and learning are as uneven as any other part of our lives. Elation tinged with disappointment; dullness that suddenly blooms;

promises never fulfilled, a target missed, another, better, found;

In February 1976 I began to keep a diary related to what was happening in my tutor group. I can't really remember why I began writing because at the time it was something I kept secret. I think I kept it as a way of keeping track of what was happening.

February 22 1976

4UJ 24 in the group, 13 girls and 11 boys. Until now the fourth year has been an uphill struggle. Do whatever subject you like, how you like, very difficult to introduce, grasp etc. Such a wide scope. Takes time for students to come anywhere near grasping what they might do - and enjoy doing - and more time for me to know them and offer them the right choices, ask the right questions. Very worrying time - feel that I have become too uptight about the whole situation but I still have to keep tabs on *progress* made. It is very easy to stand still for too long. Hard to know when standing still is a productive one! Incubation periods are not comfortable for teachers although I recognise the great importance of them. Half term may disrupt things rather but I feel that most students now are beginning to make positive headway. I have the advantage that the majority of my group *are* very keen on *doing* things.

Then follows a brief comment on each of the students in the group. Reading them now I find them rather 'teacherly'. The emphasis, I think, is on my expectations and on myself as the focus of their work.

Sue B A hard worker, original, thoughtful etc, etc. She has a project on the deaf going all the time, it is already very well presented and she should develop it next year for her Community Studies exam. She is also doing plenty of creative writing and shows a good command of words and a willingness to experiment with form and style. She reads a lot but like Amber she perhaps needs greater direction (?) She also needs more work for Eng Lit. She goes to the Infant School at C. every Friday and is writing a diary of what happens there. I should like to see her *thinking* more about what is happening. Observing behaviour and reactions, considering what is being learnt and how - need to discuss this with her more and find some appropriate reading - perhaps she could do some specific work on a topic in addition to her diary.

Looking back on this diary it is interesting for me to see how I was still working within my old idea of teacher as director, provider, focus of the classroom despite my wish to see students as that focus.

When I read the diary now I am surprised to find myself asking questions and wondering about things that now feel a part of me as a teacher.

When the students of this team were in the fifth year I only managed two diary entries, written in October. I was involved in teaching 'O' and 'A' level exam groups, was responsible for the teams' Parentcraft and was directing the school play. My suspicion in the second entry that I was not going to have time to make regular diary entries was well founded. The last thing I wrote was:

> Oct 76 I really enjoy working with my group this year - I enjoyed them last year, but this year is beyond compare ... well, almost! I feel I have a very good relationship with many of them, I don't always find the right things at the right time by any means but ...

In the fifth year things often seemed to go better because relationships were well established and we had managed to settle into a way of working together. Looking back, I am surpised to see how much I was doing with students then - photography, painting and drawing, practical projects, work in the community. I was freeing myself of what I had felt to be the constraints of formal 'projects' shaped by the requirements of social studies.

I was aware of my difference

I can see now that the team in which I worked accommodated the differences.

I wanted to ratify my differences.

I have a picture of stepping outside accepted forms and lving uneasily with the doubt that it gives rise to.

I wanted acceptance. Recognition perhaps, but I would not work within a form that made me uncomfortable

did not seem to work for me

did not seem to work for students with me.

It is important to me to live with my incomplete understandings of

how to cooperate with students to help them fashion their own lives, come to their own understandings.

You choose

Your choices surprise me.

I propose an idea
to the class
Try this or this
an idea of your own if you wish
you write
I begin to see the shape of you
as each one writes
as you talk with me
you unfold what is
you alone
you refuse my impositions
you expose my pretensions
you reveal your originality, your vulnerability, your vigour.

My hands trace in the air the possibilities before you for which I have no words
and you reach up and catch hold of an idea from the space between us.

You shift papers, decorate your folder, stand in the library.
You write a title, gaze through the window, talk to your friend.
How long can I keep away?
I can see a way forward. I know what you should do.
We are both uneasy with this inaction.
Right. This is what you must do. And this. And this.
I hear your sigh. Watch your hand with reluctant obedience picking up the pen.
No, I say, wait a little longer.

In the silence; amidst the talk; in the space that is yours, is the way ahead.

You speak to me of steam locomotion, of evolution, of cruelty to animals, of Victorian Leicester
you draw dream shapes, cartoon figures, meticulous designs, naive

illustrations to your stories

you write of magic, of love, of horror, of yourself, yourself, yourself

you struggle up a rock face; speak with a deaf child; dig for bottles; watch as the image emerges in the rocking tray of developer.

I come to know your commitment which is that of scholar, artist, poet, scientist, historian,

your commitment transcends the limits of the classroom
the ideas in this room are yours

I seek to acknowledge you
respond to you

We meet together in the seriousness of your choices.

1977 - 79

In the summer of 1977, I joined the team parallel to the one in which I had been working, to replace a woman teacher who was leaving. At that time both fourth year teams established science laboratories in the team area. A science teacher joined each team to teach Biology, Chemistry and General Science but not to have the responsibility of a tutor group.

I learnt a great deal from the teachers with whom I worked in this team, both in terms of practical skills and in ways of behaving. In this team I worked particularly closely with two teachers; the science teacher, who was new to the school at the time and an English teacher with whom I had already established a pattern of discussion about children's work and about teaching. Very often there was time at the end of the day to talk over things that had happened. We talked about things that students had done, or had failed to do. We wondered about what we could do next, or what we might do about a particular student and her work. We shared the pleasures of the day and our moments of despond. It gave me confidence to know that other people shared my excitement and doubts. Hearing others speak about students I knew helped me to see different possibilities for action. I was able to test theories tentatively as a result of these conversations. I was able to discard ideas or to feel more sure about them. We did not always agree. I did not always voice my thoughts. I was not always able to articulate them, but somehow the conversation helped me to work on them.

I kept teaching diaries throughout the academic year 1977 - 78 and finally gave up in February 1979 when the pressures of exam preparation and moderation became too great.

This is the team that I remember with greatest excitement. Perhaps I was more sure of what I was doing. Things that I had tried in previous years were more a part of my being in the classroom. I felt I had support from other teachers in the team even though I did also feel nervous of them and was, again, aware of differences. Working closely with the science teacher, John Crookes, and the more positive presence of art activities in the team area widened the scope of choices open to students and opened up possibilities.

My diary for 1978 - 79 is much more detailed than my first diary. There was still never enough time to write everything down. I suppose

that it was some time during these two years that I began to have the idea of writing something, a book perhaps, about the kinds of thing students did, about the kinds of thing that happened in the classroom, given the opportunity. I don't know what I thought I might write. Although I was always conscious of failures, or what I saw to be failures, I was also exhilarated by students' energy and vigorous growth.

expansion generation release opening out, growing like paper water flowers.

I was excited by what happened, by the pleasure of students in themselves and in their work.
I wanted to record what happened to celebrate those students and their work.
I don't want to say achievements
enjoyment warmth expansiveness
I wanted to record what happened on the way to those moments of delight.
to record students' determination, frustration, absorption, patience, doubts, certainties.
to record what I did; how I contributed; how what I did helped or hindered, and how cause and effect were not immediately, tangibly linked.

Much of the work achieved by those students remains very clear in my memory. Pete Garratt spent hours writing and illustrating blood-curdling and racy narratives; his work on cricket and on motor cars was never very successful, but his nest collections, his photographs of crystals and his study of pond life caught his imagination so that he had energy for them and enjoyed the problems his work posed for him.

Jonathan seemed to attempt and put aside one unsuccessful idea after another; at the end of his first term I felt I had completely failed him and his childish behaviour was beginning to wear me down. Then he began to take an interest in photography, in pinhole photography and special effects. He was often to be seen pacing up and

down, muttering about his latest scheme. He decided he would like to record parabolas on photographic paper. The work continued over weeks as he perfected a pendulum and sought ways to make a fine enough light. Having seemed restless and vacillating now he stuck tenaciously to the problems to be solved. He liked constant reference to an interested adult but did not usually require advice. Debra would have a long chat once a week to organise work and mull over ideas. A piece of work she began on the National Front - 'to try and understand what they are about so I can argue against them' - developed into work on intelligence, the origin of man and the language of prejudice. The original question was left in favour of other questions which it raised. Donna grew confident enough, in her excitement, to handle records office documents and to gain a new sense of herself, her family and the village she came from, as she traced her framework knitter ancestors well back into the early eighteenth century. Russ and Colin were interested in not a lot it seemed. Their fascination, concentration and sustained observation on a pair of locusts and their subsequent brood was remarkable; similarly their commitment to their work in a special school and the children they worked with there.

It is easy to forget the unevenness of experience in the classroom. I remember disaster or achievement; despair or elation. It is not so easy to remember worry and satisfaction jostling side by side; or the days which seemed dull. My memory shapes events so that they appear to be a steady improvement. When I reread the diaries I see change in the midst of difficulty, which in retrospect seems to obscure the change. I see things which were positive hand in hand with disappointment.

There is contradiction and paradox.
I wanted approval from colleagues.
I often felt insecure, had doubts about what happened in the classroom where I worked, especially in comparison with other people's classrooms. I continued to act in a way that I felt, for me, was right.
I did find support from other teachers although they may have been

sceptical about some of the things I did.
I had a feeling of *rightness* about much of my practice, though outside the classroom it felt peculiar.
I think I was challenging patterns of behaviour set for me: by my own experience of schools - as a child and as a student teacher; by the College of Education where I did a PGCE course; by my observations of teachers in schools of all kinds, including those which might be described as 'progressive'; by lay people's understanding of schools and education.
There is a sense of rightness at the centre of my actions which remains a fixed point; but also allows for large areas of doubt; openness to change; the unexpected; the previously unknown.
At the core was not an articulated theory, but a sense of my own integrity and the integrity of the other.
a sense of self. and of others.

I began my diaries in doubt and anxiety but not in unbelief. I wrote in order to help myself to teach; to somehow hold onto things that happened in the classroom and move on from them. The early diaries contain questions, worries, self-criticism, feelings of failure; and yet I think I must have felt that I was moving towards something better than I had known before for students and for myself.

It wasn't altogether comfortable. I have liked the role of teacher as performer; master of ceremonies. I like to hold an audience as I read stories and poetry. I liked to set up situations which magically sprang to life - here lay the perceived success of my final teaching practice - but already I was aware of children straining the seams of my well wrought plans. I set up group work on that teaching practice and the classroom could buzz with activity for forty minutes, but I was aware that children were limited by the constraints the school and my organisation imposed. There were ideas bursting out beyond those perimeters, questions and probings which did not confine themselves to neatly ruled lesson plans. There was also the first year class where I let loose insects and textured boards, shedding sand and bits of dead leaf. Those lessons now seem like a well-orchestrated performance which my supervisor applauded. They were more than performance. I still remember also the enjoyment of

those children and the life that sprang out of them and my guilt at producing such an abundance of chaos in a classroom which had been so well ordered by grammar and comprehension.

Perhaps there are two kinds of doubt: one useful, one debilitating.
There is doubt which is more nearly guilt. That I am not following the well trodden paths; that in the end the children I teach will have nothing to show for it in traditional formal terms - they won't know a noun from a cockatoo, or be able to write a précis, or spell. They will but it does not always look as if they will. And some will not.
And there is doubt that prevents dogmatism. That stops my stock response, or unthinking reliance on certain themes or courses of action.
At this moment the doubt seems easy to live with.
It is important to me that some other teachers can recognise something of value in what I do, even if it is different from their practice.
It is important to my growth as a teacher if I can share my doubts and tentativeness with colleagues rather than feel I have to defend a position.

Something that was particularly exciting about working at Countesthorpe was seeing students suddenly filled with the energy of their own imagination and intellect; realising possibilites and reaching beyond the limits; taking control of their own learning. The most important thing for me was to make that expansion possible for each student and then, to the best of my capabilities,
to offer whatever it might be that would maximise the potential for each student.

I still feel that excitement when I see students suddenly pleased with themselves, doing something that somehow had not been possible before or glad that they can continue to grow.

If I try to provide the most appropriate material, opportunities, questions for each student (and how can I be sure of that?) I cannot

rest in my observations, my own search, my own questions.

I do not act upon an unrelated theory but with my whole being of which growing theories are a part. I cannot separate one incident from another, neither exclude nor dominate.

Classroom; walls; desks; chairs;

Students; teachers; persons.
Each of us containing; each of us unfolding.

Open the box, gently.

From each intricate box a landscape unfolds, spreads out
across the room, beyond its walls.

A stony path beckons, a stream sings, mountains call.
A meadow filled with summer fragrance, straight grey roads,
lanes overhung with trees.
Well ordered streets, brick buildings, forest, the ocean's edge.

Landscapes of the mind's eye, of childhood, of possibility.

Untrodden paths invite exploration.
Comfortable rooms of the mind propose themselves.

Each person opens out the infinite unexpectedness of their inner life
and steps into it.
Landscapes overlap, meet for a moment
inner worlds, outer worlds
Some follow the same path hand in hand
for each the journey is different.

Now the wide horizons open before you.
Now thorn thickets close in, holes gape in your path, bridges are torn
away.
Wide desert, green kitchen garden.

Unknown words; familiar melodies.

We exchange travellers' tales,

redraw the charts

the shapes of our world pictures are changed.

6

The teaching context at Countesthorpe

I shall describe my group and our situation in the year before my secondment. My secondment and my role as researcher were very much influenced by the year that went before it.

In the summer of 1979 three new fourth year teams were created, in place of the two fairly long established ones, to accommodate rising numbers. It took a particularly long time for the staff involved to re-align and agree on working space. Eventually I became one of a team of six teachers working in a team area in which I had already worked:

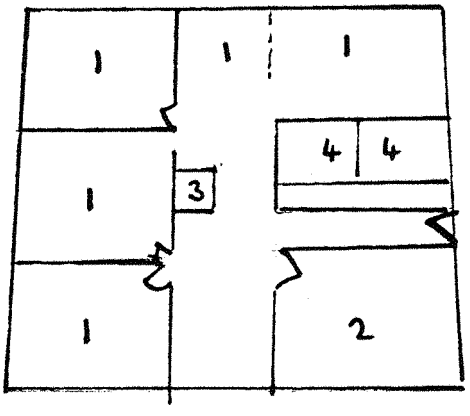
a Mathematics teacher	experienced but new to the school
an English teacher	with whom I had worked for two years and who had six years of experience working in teams
an Art teacher	experienced, new to the school although she had done her teaching practice there
a Geography teacher	a probationer
a Biology teacher	who had worked as a tutor in team for two years
myself, English teacher	six years experience of working in teams.

We also had a Science teacher attached to the team who had overall responsibility for Biology, Chemistry and General Science and who worked in the lab which was part of the area. He was an experienced teacher, appointed to the school during the summer holidays.

Each group of teachers who worked in a team had a good deal of autonomy. Each team at Countesthorpe had its individual character which depended on the personality and styles of the teachers and how they interacted amongst themselves and with their students. Allocation of space, presentation of the whole area, distribution of students amongst tutors, organisation of time and subjects within team time all contributed to the way a team operated and the way in which

it was seen by students within the team. When I first wrote this description I said I thought that the teachers, their ideas and the organisation of the team, which reflected those ideas, had the most impact on the nature of each team. The impact of the students was also considerable. Each of the tutor groups I worked with was unique. Not because of me but because of the combination of personalities in each group.

The area that was assigned to this team was a self-contained unit, separate from the main school building. This is how it was set out:



1. Tutor group areas
2. Science laboratory
3. Dark room
4. Resources / stock

There were three self-contained classrooms and a large open area which we were able to divide according to our needs but which remained fairly fixed.

Students came to the school from three feeder high schools and some from a fourth or by request.

Tutor groups were decided by teachers in the teams which were to receive them, with advice from feeder schools. Each group was more or less half and half girls and boys. Some students went to a particular tutor because of their family or individual requests. Feeder schools grouped students into small friendship groups which were put into tutor groups as they were. A group of friends might have had a particular tutor because one of their friends was to have that tutor. Inexperienced tutors were not generally given students who were expected to be particularly difficult in any way. Some tutors specifically took on a number of students with learning difficulties. Some tutors felt better able to cope with certain behavioural problems than others. Sometimes a special interest might indicate one tutor

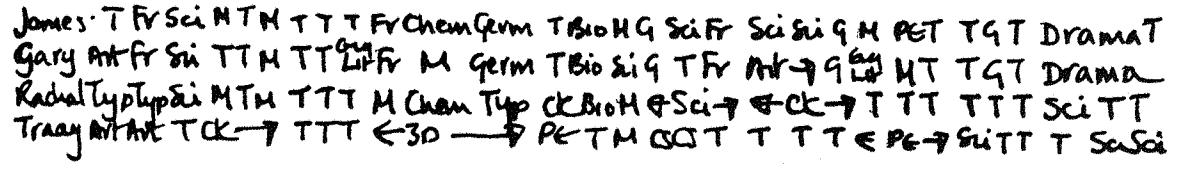
rather than another. Sometimes tutors were chosen because of their sex. We tried to create tutor groups balanced across abilities and without too many problems in one group. I think in order to work in the way tutors did at Countesthorpe it is very helpful to have a broad band of settled students balanced across abilities and without too many problems in one group in order to tackle both pastoral and academic difficulties without detriment to the quiet, the studious, the cooperative mainstream. If there are too many problems the mainstream is not able to maintain the stability that those with problems need.

Each student was able to decide on their own timetable from the master timetable and, as far as possible, tutors were able to satisfy a student's requirements as long as the student was willing to be flexible about when and with whom she might do a particular subject. Basically, half the week was allocated to team time which covered English, Humanities and Maths; and to some extent Art, Science, English Literature, Parentcraft and Drama, according to the staffing of the team. At the beginning of the Autumn term tutor and student composed a timetable together. At the beginning a timetable might look like this:

	Mon	Tues	Wed.	Thurs	Fri
1		T	T		T
2		T	T		T
3		T	T		T
4	T			T	
5	T			T	
6	T			T	

T = team time spent with tutor. Blank spaces were for specialist subjects outside the team; if the student had no specialist subject to go to then she could spend that time in the team area where there would be some team teachers available though not necessarily her own tutor. This was called Extra Team.

Here are some examples of timetables from my group during their fifth year:



How team time was organised depended very much on individual tutors and their students and was influenced also by the ethos of the team. Films, speakers and television programmes could be arranged

during team time for groups of varying size, from the whole team to a part of a group or groups. Some teachers, myself included, allocated specific time for English - story-telling, discussion, ideas for writing, etc. The darkroom was available for students' use. Art materials and the science lab were available. It was possible for tutors and students to move about the team areas and ask other tutors or students for information or materials or to share a problem. Apart from one or two specific activities team time was time for students to work in their own way on chosen tasks in the areas of English, Humanities, Art, Science, Parentcraft and possibly English Literature. Each student's organisation of the week, contact with the tutor and rhythm of working varied according to needs, personality, mood, the nature of the work in hand, etc. At the beginning of the fourth year students needed a good deal of support to help them discover how they were best able to approach the time and opportunities open to them. Although some students liked to decide upon a timetable for their activities within team time most students with whom I had contact worked according to the demands of whatever they were doing and their own feelings about it.

The two main subjects for which I was responsible in this tutor group were English and Humanities. I taught Community Studies and Parentcraft and some of the students in this group did this subject; some students were taking an exam in English Literature which I did not teach but was able to help students with in team time. I also ran a drama group.

There were four possible exams in English and Humanities. The requirements of these exams dominated the work of fifth year students.

English 'O' Level: coursework folder of 12 pieces of writing written April - April and showing variety of style, purpose etc. + a comprehension paper and a multiple choice comprehension paper.

English CSE: coursework folder of pieces of writing + five pieces of writing about novels, poetry, plays read + two comprehension papers, one literary, one based on discursive writing.

'O' Level Community Studies: One major project 8 pieces of coursework + one skills based exam paper.

CSE Social Studies A single project + a skills based examination paper.

Once we knew who was in our tutor group we would visit them in their High Schools and talk to each one, preferably individually. They usually had questions to ask about their new school. Most already knew something about it by reputation and from older friends who were already there. There were many myths and fears connected with Countesthorpe. I wanted from them a rough idea of which subjects they thought they would choose to do (though this often changed during the summer holidays) and whether they had any ideas about what they might do in team time. I would usually begin by discussing their timetable. Their response to this could give some idea of where their interests lay in general. I would ask about interests and hobbies and perhaps whether they had a burning desire to pursue any particular idea. If they had special hobbies we would probably talk about those. I might ask them about how they were going to spend their summer holidays and about any long term plans they had for their future. I tried to catch some sense of who they were as well as what they might do, but did so in the knowledge that they might seem very different when they arrived in the Autumn term. In one sense none of this was serious because we were strangers; there were the summer holidays to come before we met again and they would be coming to an Upper School, no longer High School students. Quite often ideas, even a whole timetable could change completely over the summer. All the preliminary chat could do was give me some hints about what I might have available in my classroom at the beginning of the year and some ideas and approaches I might adopt generally or with individuals.

We usually met tutors or year heads in the High Schools who would be able to tell us about each student. This would be a mixture of fairly straightforward information - family circumstances, health, attendance, probation officer's name, etc. - and personal opinion; an individual response to the student and situations connected with that student. Some of this information was useful. Information about health, disability, recent divorce or bereavement can prevent misunderstandings and time wasted. It was useful to have some of the

information hovering in the back of my mind (I forgot quite a lot of it), it might offer an explanation or offer a clue as to how I might respond. It might suggest ideas or my emphasis in plans and questions. I tried not to lay too much importance on much of the information. For many students it was a fresh start; their last chance with school before exams and work. I wanted them to be able to present themselves to me as they wanted and to accept them as I found them, not prejudiced or clouded by previous pictures of them.

Herbert Kohl, describing his own experience of an open classroom, has written:

> Particularly it means not reading IQ scores or achievement scores, not discovering who may be a source of trouble and who a solace or even a joy. It means giving your pupils a fresh chance to develop in new ways in your classroom, freed from the rules they may have adopted in their previous school careers. It means allowing children to become who they care to become and freeing the teacher from the standards by which new pupils had been measured in the past.
>
> Herbert Kohl, *The Open Classroom*, Methuen, 1987

Kohl writes from an American perspective; in my experience, at the moment, a great emphasis is not laid on scores and grades, but personal judgements can be difficult. Sometimes I found that something a teacher might tell me about a student could distort my relationship with that student because of a preconception planted in my mind or because of my response to what a teacher might say. Students were able to be different. Different circumstances and personalities could give them the chance to change.

The beginning of a new term was hectic and nerve-wracking. Students were generally with us for three days before the timetable began. They each must negotiate a timetable and have time to discuss it with their tutor, parents, friends. I needed to concentrate my attention on each student as they agreed upon a timetable with me. At the same time there were twenty-nine other students in the room, all new to the school, to each other, to me and to the ways of working that were possible. It was possible for students to become discouraged or to receive negative messages during those first few days. I felt that I wanted to convey something of myself as a teacher

and as much as possible about what might happen for students in my tutor group.

What kind of things did I have in my classroom? What kind of things might students be able to experience during the year? All the things I list have been used at some time. There may be more.

Some people leave their noticeboards empty. I preferred at the time to fill them with:

a collection of pictures, writing, oddments, around a vague theme.

material about a range of subjects, suggesting that not only English, Maths and Humanities were important in that room but Craft and Sciences also.

there might be charts, pamphlets, maps, cartoons, unusual pictures or ideas; anything I or, eventually, anyone in the classroom, found interesting, a sort of public commonplace book.

students' work - if they agreed.

There were also:

Books of all kinds - poetry, fiction, reference, handbooks, newspapers, magazines

A collection of articles, pamphlets and magazines based on subjects, mostly Parentcraft and Community Studies, that had been popular in the past and for which suitable resources were hard to find

Folders of ideas for writing that I made myself

Scrapbooks of pictures/articles that I found interesting or that I thought others would

Maps, old and new

Miscellaneous items: cogwheels, a maze, pottery, old bottles ...

Plants growing, being propagated

Fabric and a sewing machine

A typewriter

Paintings, photographs, prints, sculpture

Art and craft materials; paints, chalks, inks, glues, card, junk

Drawing boards

Dyes and embroidery wool

Pinhole cameras, materials to make pinhole cameras

Access to cameras, film, a darkroom

Access to tape recorders

Fossils, stuffed mammals, a butterfly collection etc. from the museum

A bird table

A cage of locusts

Access to the science lab

A pond nearby and a stretch of wild land.

Models - being made

People coming in to speak on one particular topic - formally and informally

Mothers with babies and small children

Somebody teaching how to spin

Costume dolls made by students

Films and videos; fiction and documentary

Slides

Television broadcasts for schools - and those produced for general viewing

Visits: museums, local shops, people, records office, London, Birmingham, different areas of Leicester, shops selling Asian food and clothing, farms, a windmill, hedgerows, along the canal, local villages, churches, pond dipping, cycle rides

Access to the school's library and resource centre

Access to a range of teachers in the team area and outside it

Work Experience

Community visits: playgroups, hospital, old people's homes, the Mission for the Deaf, the blind, disabled, in infant and primary schools

Theatre, dance, mime, music - in school and out

Other students' work, especially as it was seen in progress

All the ideas students brought with them

Some of the ideas I brought with me

In choosing what I have in the classroom, various things come into play.

I have things there that have always been successful in the past.

I have things there that are directly relevant to my discussions with individuals in the summer, for example if someone had expressed a keen interest in birds or in the place where they live or in farming,

I'll probably have a bird book, and something on bird watching, relevant maps and maybe a farming magazine or a pamphlet about rare breeds or tractors. I don't necessarily expect them to be used.

I have things there that I am interested in in a general and continuing way - poetry, child development, photography, local history, local natural history, walking, maps, etc., bicycles.

I have things there that hold particular interest for me at that particular time, and that might set me thinking in a new direction. Although it's hard to break completely with one's own main concerns I like to have refreshed my thoughts, particularly over the summer holiday. I try to see or do something new; to read; to bring a new light to my own thoughts.

The things that I do are for myself but sometimes thoughts of people in my tutor grop prompt me to try something that I might not otherwise have bothered with. If I think of what I do at all in terms of how I teach it is that I want to feel refreshed and thoughts to be moving when I encounter new students rather than responding from staleness or what seems like a fixed point.

Some evidence of my explorations will be in the classroom, the rest in my head. Students may or may not respond directly to what is there. It's not important to me whether they do or not although I always like it when something that has attracted my interest is interesting for a student too.

7

A Way of Working

Michael Armstrong and Stephen Rowland both worked within another teacher's classroom, alongside the teacher but without the overall responsibility for the class.

It was a way of working with which I discovered I felt uneasy for myself. Because the way I worked with students depended on a particular relationship and, more importantly, a long term view of each student's learning and how it might develop, I felt that to work in another's classroom would have been intrusive and would have considerably changed my actions as teacher. I am able to say now, what I was not able to acknowledge, or even perceive at the time, perhaps, that my actions as teacher were as much a part of what I wanted to record and reflect upon as were the actions of students.

I very much wanted the secondment, but because of staff changes in the team in which I worked, I felt I could not withdraw from the team completely. I made arrangements which satisfied my own thoughts about how I should like to work but also created difficulties because of a continued teaching load and responsibility towards staff and students in an exam year.

I worked with half the group with whom I had worked in the fourth year. A teacher who had already worked with me and the group during the fourth year took responsibility for the other half of the group. We worked together in an open area so that the group remained undivided in terms of working space.

The disadvantages of this arrangement were: that I remained responsible for all the work students were doing and did not always have time to pursue one activity or idea with a student at the expense of all else.

that it was an exam year so I was concerned with exam entries etc for students and students were pressured by the demands for revision and deadlines for coursework.

that I still, as one of the most experienced teachers in the team at that time, had responsibilities towards other teachers and students in the team.

It meant that I did not always discuss or even see all the aspects of a piece of work that might have been useful in an understanding of how a student was working. I was more involved in the practicalities of preparing work for exam assessment and so less able always to think about a student's activities for their own sake. The fact that it was an exam year meant that there were particular pressures and limits that may not have impinged so much in the fourth year. On the other hand, students usually have more confidence and are clearer about what they are doing in the fifth year. If one is working in a secondary school one cannot avoid the presence of exams or the problems concerning students' futures after school.

There were advantages:

I knew a lot about individual students and their work from the fourth year. They knew me. I had their trust and cooperation from the beginning of what are two hard working and fairly intensive terms before exams in the third term.

I felt that, in order to help students search out good ways to work and fruitful ideas for them to pursue, I ask a lot of students and that in the process confidences are exchanged. A student sets limits to some extent on the audience for her work. Writing for exam assessment is fairly public; even so students expect a sympathetic reader. What I come to know about how a student works and thinks derives from a position of trust. I did not want to abuse the trust.

I tend to store up hints and ideas that arise in conversation with students in order to inform subsequent conversations. I cannot predict when the ideas will emerge or when they can be ploughed back into the student's curriculum. I felt it would be difficult to work alongside another teacher in this way. Students do form an allegiance to their tutor. I preferred not to confuse the question of who was responsible to the student and to whom she was to refer.

I was interested in the whole shape of a student's work, not single pieces of work or moments within a way of working. It seemed to me that sixteen year olds' work is not so easily contained as that of a younger child; its scope is broader, the time span greater. I felt that responsibility for a tutor group would make it easier for me to have a sense of the whole.

Division of the original tutor group was difficult. It was helped by the fact that they already knew and had worked with the

teacher who was to work with the other half. They would remain in the same area so they would not be physically divided. Some stated preferences for working with me or with the new teacher. Some had needs which would be best dealt with by me or by the new teacher. Although, theoretically, friends could have had different tutors and still worked together, they preferred to stay together with the same tutor.

Other teachers have worked in secondary classrooms in the way Michael and Stephen worked in primary classrooms. For me, it felt inappropriate. I found it comfortable to be working with students whom I knew and who knew me. I felt less intrusive; that we knew each other sufficiently well for me to know when to withrdraw or for them to tell me I was overstepping boundaries. Although I had hoped to work with students who were in the other half of the group, it soon became clear that it was not possible. Their working relationship was with their tutor. I felt my interventions to be a disruptive interference. They were polite, but by breaking off a proper working relationship with them I had also broken off the possibility of considering their work.

1987. It seems to me now that I cannot separate myself from the way students worked and what I learnt from it. My way of working, my beliefs and attitudes made a difference to how students worked. I have spent years trying to deny my part in what I describe in the classroom. I am now able to acknowledge to myself that a consciousness of my being in the classroom is part of my responsibility as a teacher. I have been disconcerted, when presenting students' work to other teachers, by the response that the work that they see is fundamentally my doing. Teachers have responded to work like Rachael's conclusion to her Menphys diary (see page 142) by saying that I must have told her what to write, given her headings. My concern has been to emphasise that the work that students do arises from them and in doing so I have denied my presence in their work as the other. My actions as teacher enable and prevent actions on the part of the student. It is these actions that I have come to be able to try to convey in my writing.

I believe that I have always wanted to pay attention to my actions in the classroom but have not felt that to be legitimate.

When I teach I am often surprised and delighted at the energy that can be released; at a sense of self-realisation.

The way I worked with students at Countesthorpe depended on a kind of openness with each other which demanded mutual trust and a proper sense of individual boundaries.

If I am to work collaboratively with a student I must seek to be aware of her.

My knowledge of her will necessarily be fragmentary, incomplete, coloured by my own prejudices.

There is a seriousness about the relationship between tutor and student, a commitment, which cannot be found by the researcher who does not have responsibility. I realise that if I had not been concerned with the nature of my role as teacher it would not have been so important for me to stay with the tutor group I knew.

The kind of relationship a tutor might have with a student at Countesthorpe which is, I think, different from relationships with younger children in primary schools, could be described as a contract. Teacher and students could engage together in ideas outside themselves. They might reveal to each other something of their own intellect, emotion, imagination, spirit. Intellectual development is part of a personal commitment. There is not always reason for a student to share in the same way with an interested outsider.

David Hawkins proposes that classroom researchers should assume an ethnological approach to their study of the growth of children's intellect. Ethnologists live the life they study. Lorenz may swim with his goslings but he is not a goose. We are not children but we once were and they will grow into adulthood. We can share with them our own understandings and awareness of our own intellectual growth. Like them, we are writers, learners, artists, scientists. We are still learners and have our own knowledge of learning upon which to draw. In the classroom we are also called teachers. In our interactions with children and in our observations we cannot deny our actions as teachers and our awareness of ourselves and others as learners and doers.

> In human affairs we are participants as well as observers and the role of the classroom ethnologist, remote from and decoupled from its activity, can merge into the role of teacher who by precise and perceptive diagnosis and skill can

create for children a kind of atmosphere and responsiveness in their environment which serves not only the cause of advancing the educational act but also that of knowledge.

David Hawkins, *The Informed Vision*, Agathon Press, 1974

Self-consciousness; self-awareness; as important as observation of the child.

8

Secondment

My year's secondment came far below my expectations.
Ideas slipped away from me. I could not follow my thoughts to my satisfaction.
I searched for things to read.
I found it difficult to write.

I did not want to produce writing that was so filled with 'data' and conclusions drawn from that data that it would bear no relation to the classrooms where I and other teachers and students work.
I did not want to write a series of anecdotes about students I had worked with; though I have come to know that it is generally through stories that I try to describe my experience in the classroom.
I wanted to convey something of what happens when I am learning and teaching. When I began the 'research year', I knew there were things which informed my practice but which did not fit in to what I knew of writing in education which I therefore did not consider including in my writing. I did believe that I would find writing which would relate to what I understood to be happening amongst the students I taught and which would somehow illuminate my practice.
I lived, somehow, a double, perhaps triple life, in my early attempts to write about my experiences in the classroom and felt dissatisfied with all the outcomes.

I wanted to persuade, convert, convince; the ringing phrase.
There were things I thought I would like to write about but felt they were not permissible within the framework of a thesis.

Whilst I was teaching I encouraged students to try whatever came to mind; to trust themselves. I was able to encourage them to work in a way in which I now see that I was unable to work myself.

If a student came with no more than a scent of an idea or way of working, we would live with it for a while until, between us, something was found which the student recognised as what she wanted to

do. It was the student who made the discovery but she worked in partnership with me to discover it.

When I finally met, in the person of Bill Brookes, someone who was willing to hold a space for me, it took a long time for me to be able to use it.

There was, and there remains, a vestige of conflict between what I thought I might do, and what I ought to do, what was proper.

I had before me:

1. Michael's work.
2. Stephen's work.
3. Stephen's hypotheses, extracted from Michael's writing.
4. David Hawkins' essays in *The Informed Vision* which informed and resonated with much of what I believed to be happening in the classroom where I worked.
5. A collection of ideas - vague and not so vague - describing and explaining things that students did and that I did.
6. Worries that much of what I did and encouraged my students to do was not within a recognised pattern, that there was oddness.
7. Great delight in the things that students did do and the desire to share those things with others.

I wrote a teaching diary, daily. There seemed to be no life in it. I was no longer using the writing as a tool but as a record. I seemed to lose touch with what I was doing. I felt self-conscious about my reflections. I find my working diaries much more interesting. I wrote the early diaries because I needed to and they helped me to think as I worked from day to day. I think I also had a picture in my head of the detached observer; even whilst I was engaged in teaching I was trying to take a mental step backwards which I later suspected diminished me as a teacher also. In spite of this, a colleague, who read the diary regularly, commented that it revealed to him the nature of how I worked, something he had not previously known even though I had worked in the same team as him for three years and talked regularly about teaching and learning. I still find this surprising.

I have regrets about the lack of depth of the diary, particularly the infrequency of my own responses.

A particular problem that I found in recording events was my own reticence and my reluctance to write down things which I felt students minded my recording. I knew that my students were very supportive of my work and found myself not wanting to abuse their cooperation. Often I would want rough drafts or lists of ideas but students were reluctant to lend them to me.

There were also things associated with students' ideas and progress that I suspected were true but felt I could not ask because they were not appropriate to the kinds of conversation I had with students in the process of their work.

This is the situation which the teacher is always in. Our knowledge of events in the classroom is always partial.

When a teacher is working in normal conditions there is not time to see everything; she acts in the way that seems appropriate at the time and is governed by the circumstances. Working as a teacher researcher immediately changed the rushed conditions of my normal life as a teacher and changed what I had to write about. I found it interesting that several teachers working in the same way in primary classrooms found it difficult to take any action; reflection seemed to prevent action.

I take time outside the classroom to read and to reflect upon actions in the classroom; to explore my own understandings of how we learn. I take my changing, newly shaped understandings with me into the classroom and they are a part of my actions there. Understandings are changed by what happens; actions are informed by changing understanding.

I should have liked an 'other' with whom to share my thoughts as I worked during my year of secondment and afterwards. Perhaps I wanted someone who might listen to me, who could hear something of what I was saying. It was not possible to find this person. Whilst I was seconded there were a number of people who might have filled this role but I found that in practice no one was able to offer the kind of undivided attention that would have been helpful.

1. Supervisor, Leicester University

I had a difficult and unproductive relationship with my supervisor. Our approaches to research and to teaching were ill-suited. I understood that we had been placed together for our mutual benefit but I felt that our differences were so great that our association was largely destructive. My supervisor's view of research differed considerably from mine. I have never been able to see research in education as a 'science'. My supervisor mainly suggested mechanisms for research and thesis writing and suggested that I should use the tape recorder as a research tool, something which I resisted strongly.

I found my supervisor antagonistic, not only towards how I worked as a teacher-researcher, but also, I felt, to how I behave as a teacher and the ideas which underlie that behaviour. I responded aggressively. The result was impasse. On reflection I am not sure whether he was antagonistic to those ideas or simply so far removed from them that we were able to find no common ground upon which to work.

My supervisor's unsubtle lack of sympathy with the school where I worked and, I now feel, a complete unawareness of how I work as a teacher diverted my energies from the work at school which I thought I would do. I could not seem to fit my ideas of how I might proceed and what I knew about existence in the classroom into his view of the researcher. I did not have a clear enough idea of my own as to how to proceed. I acknowledged a necessity, for rigour, clarification, objectivity whilst rejecting 'scientific' research methods in what is essentially a human activity. I was unable to find a way of writing which acknowledged my feelings about what happens in the classroom and was academically acceptable.

My supervisor seemed quite remote from human activity and from the complex, infinite nature of teaching and learning. I found myself writing things that had no meaning for me in order to appease him and clear a space for myself. But my work and the writing I wanted to do mattered to me and I became increasingly angry. I was incensed by the kind of assumptions he made about teaching, about children and relationships, about the kinds of activity that might proceed in the classroom. There seemed no room for manoeuvre. He seemed to expect a finitude about life in the classroom, that denies reality. I

continually, pointlessly and exhaustingly took issue with him and diverted energy from my own thoughts. I am able to write this now but at the time I felt myself to be powerless. I was unable to trust my own knowledge and experience.

One of the chief difficulties was the assumption that my work should begin with one or more hypotheses which I should then set about testing and my own feeling of inadequacy and frustration in my seeming inability to comply.

> There appear to be ways in which research *ought* to be carried out and accepted bodies of knowledge or belief which must be taken into account before questions can begin to be framed. The most persistent impression is that research is a scientific enterprise, to be conducted within the concepts and methodology of appropriate disciplines.
>
> Raymond Bury, *A hermeneutic explanation of the relevance of method to research tasks arising from an inquiry in teacher training*
> PhD Thesis, Southampton University, 1982

The kinds of discipline the university proposed to me seemed at variance with what I knew about teaching. I found myself refusing to comply with the demands made by the university but not able to find a way of proceeding that I could find satisfactory. I felt very strongly that there must be written material which would have a bearing on my thinking but I could not find it; and certainly not by the methods that my supervisor proposed to me.

2. Stephen Rowland was seconded to support the scheme of which I was part and to encourage the involvement of other teachers, not on full-time secondment, to become involved in the research both as critics and supporters, and as researchers in their own classrooms.

A fairly large group of primary and secondary teachers met twice a term to discuss ideas related to the work of the full-time researchers. I am not sure on what basis teachers were invited to the Leicestershire Consultative Group. Much of the time in the first years was taken up with finding a basis upon which to work together; a language to use together.

Where there appeared to be common ground there were fundamental differences.

I came to find these meetings frustrating. I wanted a chance to

follow up my own concerns (as did others). I began to feel uneasy at the gap between what I was thinking and doing and the other teachers' thoughts. There was a repeated need to explain such things as the context one was was working in. Very often it seemed difficult to establish common ground or to understand what each other were saying. Meetings such as these had been a part of what had encouraged me to write but eventually I was frustrated by them.

The differences and misunderstandings seem to have arisen from differences in belief about children and learning and about teaching. Where the large words - freedom, autonomy, child-centred - and so on might at first seem to unite us, close encounters found divisions which seemed to create barriers.

3. Stephen read my diary and regularly visited me in school. I also met with him and the two other teachers on secondment at the same time as me. I failed to make use of Stephen's presence. Very often I was unable to explore ideas that were on my mind and I found increasingly that my concerns were different from his and from my two colleagues'.

4. Probably my most useful conversations were with John Crookes, the science teacher with whom I had worked from 1977 - 79 and whose secondment followed mine. (*Learner as Scientist. Case Studies in the Growth of Understanding.* MEd, Leicester University 1986). We were able to recognise differences but also able to accept them and to find experiences and understandings in common.

I left Leicestershire in July 1982 and continued to try to work with my supervisor through correspondence and occasional visits. In the summer of 1983 Michael Armstrong suggested that I should approach the Department of Education at Southampton University to see if I could arrange a transfer to that department.
I was accepted by Bill Brookes and the course of my writing began to change.

I had felt that I should be able to find a way of writing which was not only academic but also reflected what I knew of students' work, and of the way I worked. I was unable to acknowledge that my actions in the classroom might be a valid part of my writing, though I

had thought that I would have liked to write something more personal. I did not have the courage to write something that was not a thesis, although most of us who undertook the research came to feel that a thesis in the form proposed by Leicester University was not the most appropriate vehicle for our writing.

Bill Brookes allowed me to see that my writing was disconnected from the reality of a classroom. He released me from a subservience to a kind of formality of expression and form which is disassociated from the realities which it seeks to describe.

I hope that I encouraged students to work in the way that Bill Brookes has enabled me to work. It took me a long time before I was able to allow myself to write from my own understandings as a teacher and learner.

And yet I was able to make it possible for students to work in that way.

I have had great difficulty in allowing myself to work in a way that seemed right to me and for students I worked with.

I have been held by the institutions and demands of examining bodies which have trained me.

In October 1983 I wrote a paper for Bill Brookes in which I attempted to describe something of my actions in the classrooom and the beliefs which informed those actions. It was the first time that I had written at length for another person about myself as a teacher and about some of the things which informed my life as a teacher. It was the beginning of a long period in which I began to try and explore and describe my actions as teacher; to unfold existence and belief from beneath the layers of language.

circularity
held within the circle
how do we break the circle? teacher, another, to create disturbance

Personal Knowledge

I have come to be able to acknowledge the worth of personal knowledge for myself. I am faced with the paradox that it was personal knowledge which I valued for my students and which I endorsed for them, but which I could not embrace for myself.

I think now that it was perhaps the difference between things I worked with students to do and the values imposed by my own education which created the disturbance which motivated my research.

The medium in which we communicate is public but the context from which we speak is private. Individual response to experience and its interpretation arise from the values and beliefs which belong to an individual's personal situation, with its attendant insights and limitations.

Polanyi (*Personal Knowledge*, RKP, 1983) distinguished between the personal state which actively enters our commitments and our subjective states in which we simply endure feelings. The personal transcends the opposition of subjective and objective. It is not subjective because it submits to requirements acknowledged by itself is independent of itself. It is not objective because it is an action guided by individual passions. Polanyi also speaks of passion, a term that I would not associate with the requirements of an M Ed as it was outlined to me, but which I have associated with my own experience of knowing. At the viva for my first degree I was advised to look again at the first sonnet from Philip Sidney's *Astrophel and Stella.* The sonnet ends:

'Fool,' said my Muse to me, 'look in thy heart and write.'

I knew that I had failed to make my understandings of the poetry we had studied my own and that whilst I had read others' interpretations of the texts I had not seriously measured those interpretations against my own understandings. I had not trusted my own judgements or pursued my own first understandings of the text in order to make it my own. I knew the importance of my participation in any knowledge I was to possess; though I did not always exert myself to do so and in that poetry paper, certainly, I succumbed to other ideas about what might be expected of a student writing her finals.

I have long felt that the theories I possess should be 'felt upon our pulses' but have not been able to acknowledge its legitimacy in the face of the call for objectivity.

Whilst I was able to encourage the students I worked with to trust their own judgement and experiences I was not able to do this for myself. My encouragement of the students was tinged with doubts

about the validity of their writing *even though the power of their understandings was evident in what they wrote and in the way they spoke.*

> The personal participation of the knower in the knowledge he believes himself to possess takes place within a flow of passion. We recognise intellectual beauty as a guide to discovery and as a mark of truth.
>
> Michael Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1983

In describing existence in the classroom I must take into account not only personal situation and belief but also a range of human experience which cannot be quantified, verified, tested against objective criteria.

> Once truth is equated with the rightness of mental acceptance, the transition from science to the arts is gradual. Authentic feeling and authentic experience jointly guide all intellectual achievements; so that from observing scientific facts within a rigid theoretical framework we can move by degrees towards dwelling within a harmonious framework of colours, of sounds or imagery, which merely recall objects and echo emotions experienced before. As we pass thus from verification to validation and rely increasingly on internal rather than external evidence, the structure of commitment remains unchanged but its depth becomes greater. The existential changes accepted by acquiring familiarity with new forms of art are more comprehensive than those involved in getting to know a new scientific theory.
>
> A parallel movement takes place in passing from the relatively impersonal observation of inanimate objects to the understanding of living beings and the appreciation of originality and responsibility in other persons. These two movements are combined in the transition from the relatively objective study of things to the writing of history and the critical study of art.
>
> Polanyi, op.cit.

I must have a belief in order to act in the classroom. Doubt engenders instability and a tendency to inaction, so it has been an important part of my acting that I should explore my beliefs and doubts. The disturbances engendered by doubts return my thoughts to the theories I hold. The exploration is essentially circular. We may modify or confirm the theory or we may find that we must reject a theory and make a shift in understanding.

Intellectual growth is a personal journey, looking out and looking in, in which we may return again and again to central concerns but which does not proceed towards an ultimate all-encompassing truth.

> Knowledge is so conceived it is not a series of self-consistent theories that converges towards an ideal view; it is not a gradual approach to the truth. It is rather an ever increasing *ocean of incompatible (and perhaps even incommensurable)* alternatives, each single theory, each fairy tale, each myth that is part of the collection forcing the others into greater articulation and all of them contributing via this process of competition to the development of our consciousness.
>
> Paul Feyerabend, *Against Method*, Verso, 1974

As a teacher, a learner, a writer I have to be able to live with incommensurability; to find space for myself and create space for students which accepts variety and difference. I have had to face the difficulty of finding a way to write which acknowledges variety and difference and to work with language in such a way as to avoid the kind of smoothness which denies the jaggedness of individuality and of the nature of knowledge.

I have found difficulties in sharing my understandings with others and have found also that I must accept that a number of people who seem superficially to share many ideas with me in practice are fundamentally different. Very often I find myself disappointed by what seems to be a need to remain in control. Even people who claim to operate individual learning and choice seem to be still holding on to the power. I wanted to say that I was not like this, that I simply let things happen and to look at what did happen. This thesis is a part of my attempt to acknowledge my existence as a teacher.

Self-consciousness, an awareness of my own beliefs and prejudices is as important for me and for my acting as teacher as my observations of students. Each depends on the other.

This thesis is as much about my own actions and understanding of myself as learner as it is about the students with whom I worked. I have tried to get to know something of the conditions and actions which made possible the kinds of learning I attempt to describe in this study.

I have been held by a belief in a kind of objectivity which

denies personal belief and circumstance: and which had inhibited action because somehow it denied what I knew of the classroom. Raymond Bury argues that the researcher's viewpoint is crucial.

> He is *part of* the problem he wishes to understand. He is therefore firmly placed at the centre of the study. His subjective view of how things should be is as much a subject of the study as the observations he has made.
>
> Bury, op. cit.

This is essential to my situation, in which I attempted to describe the actions of students whom I taught and in a situation significantly of my own making. I specifically chose not to work in another teacher's classroom because of my perceptions of being a teacher and to work with students whom I had already taught for a year.

Not only was my viewpoint important as researcher, but also my actions and beliefs as a teacher of those students.

I did not wish to limit my thinking to observable behaviour but to take into account my memories and perceptions;

> There is a valid form of inquiry which interprets purposes and the meanings that situations have for participants in them. This form of inquiry deals with a range of human experience, inaccessible to objective quantitative measurement, prediction and verification.
>
> Bury, op. cit.

It seems to me now that at the centre of our lives as teachers are beliefs which inform our practice in the classroom and which are not separate from our lives as a whole. In teaching we give of ourselves and so we are vulnerable. How we behave reflects beliefs we hold about ourselves, about children, about learning and knowing. Because we are vulnerable we devise ways of protecting ourselves which become part of our practice. To require a teacher to change her teaching is also to ask her to change herself in some way. We can feel hurt and defensive. Action can be inhibited.

In order to change the way I act, especially the way I act as teacher, I must change my understanding; I must be able to have some feeling about how I act. I do not change suddenly. I look back and see that the state that I was in is no longer the state I am in now. I cannot identify a moment of change. I can no longer feel how it was

before. As I am now, I cannot imagine how I was before.

My vulnerability amongst children, amongst colleagues, amongst parents and others who demand our accountability makes belief necessary; whatever the beliefs may be. It seems to me that my beliefs, teaching as an element of my being and my vulnerability make change both difficult and essential to my action as teacher.

Change generally comes when I can no longer live comfortably with the way things are. I remain the same and I am different.

I can sometimes see that there must be difference; in my actions, in my knowing, But I can not reach the different state. And when I become aware that a shift has been made, I cannot identify a moment of change. If I cannot identify these moments in my own growth; how am I to note them in the lives of others? I can note external events. I can observe incomprehension; and a realisation. I can see struggle. I cannot identify a point at which 'change' took place. I can be aware of conditions which seemed to make transitions easier. I would not expect to replicate those conditions for an other, different learner.

I have become aware of actions of mine which seem to allow for greater possibility;

fecundity

warmth of the incubator.

Change precipitated by disturbance.

by chance

coincidence

accidents

When I began writing I wanted to make people change. I believed it was possible. I acknowledged scepticism and perhaps fear in connection with the patterns of working which emerged at Countesthorpe but felt that people could be brought to an understanding of what was happening. I began to work on a thesis in the conviction that I could describe what was happening in the classroom and others would believe that it was good; that teachers would be converted on the evidence of children's work. I had something of the zeal of the missionary. Although I did not expect others to teach as I taught I felt that the presentation and analysis of children's work would inspire change.
To what would they be converted? How? By the power of my words? By the quality of the students' work?

There were people who saw the work of students, who worked in the classroom alongside me, and they still asked 'How does this come about?'
I could not see what it was they could not see.
I was not able to understand why they did not see.
I was constantly disconcerted and disappointed by my failure to communicate, or by other teachers' failure to recognise the kinds of thing I was talking about.

When I talk to other teachers about children's work or about things that have happened in the classroom:
there is recognition - and perhaps the thought 'so what?'
there is the question, 'Yes, but <u>how</u> do you do this? make this happen?'
And disbelief, 'Yes, but how did you direct the student?/ tell her what to do? outline what she must write?'
And the dismissal (or agreement) well of course, what is extraordinary about this? There is nothing extraordinary. I have come to know what students in certain conditions, may do. I have also come to realise that what the other teacher claims is not always the same as I am trying to describe. It appears to be the same. The same words may be used. There are differences.

There is a gap between description and action. The description of something done, something happening diminishes it. However carefully the words are chosen they contain the action, give a particular complexion to the story. Much of my writing, looking back, is laced with qualifications; but, nevertheless, however, on the other hand.

Describing an event minimises what might be happening; there are so many possibilities, incidentals, variables. The myriad thoughts and related happenings of which we are not aware. Do not know.

In describing even the smallest incident in the life of a classroom we leave out nuances of speech, tone, expression; a bird flying past the window, an ill-digested breakfast; connections made and missed, chances seized, opportunities ignored.

The line of prose, the phrase, the sentence, the overloaded word, contain and limit the action.

There is a difficulty if I believe I can make it clear.
Greater difficulty if I believe I can make it clear within the structure of the formal essay which school and university have ingrained in me so thoroughly.
The formal language of research moves further away from a classroom existence.
Novelists and poets have found freedom to use words to imply the ebb and flow of life, of thought and emotion and the trivialities, irrelevances
the humdrum and the surge of the spirit.
An incompleteness remains.
The myth is to believe in an ultimate clarity.
There is resonance.
I am different from the person who wrote last year.
How I read what you have written depends on times and circumstance.
What I saw in a book when I was twenty, cannot be found now. The words remain the same.
As we read a description we bring to it what we know and we remain ignorant of the flow and liveliness of the original situation.
Sometimes I look at my diaries and think, Is that all? Is that all he did? What *did* I have to be pleased at? And then I bring to mind the circumstances of the child and classroom, an atmosphere, perhaps, and a feeling present in the air. It is easy to be disappointed in the description. (described, contained)
I can read the story of a student's work. It seems too smooth. I can fool myself and maybe the reader into believing that it came easily, flowed easily. The words round out the uncertainties, false starts, moments of boredom, disillusion. And the words transform events into something maybe more than they were. Make us forget the unevenness of being in the classroom; of reaching towards meanings.
Minute description does not help, details proliferate but do not bring illumination.
When I first met Bill I knew somehow that formal writing denied my experience of learning and of teaching.
What I found tremendously difficult was to believe it.
I could not escape from the straitjacket of essay writing that I knew.
The classroom is a series of moments, impressions, acting on the wing.

On reflection, I can always know I ought to have done better, but I must remember how I am constantly in motion in the classroom. Reflections can be ploughed back into my understanding, inform subsequent action. I must beware self-indulgence, laziness, unkindess.

I work always in the knowledge that I act now and can only work to extend, to deepen my understanding; increase the sensitivity which is the basis of my action.

I must act now and so it is my responsibility to know more nearly what are the foundations of my actions.

9

Students and teacher: first encounters

When students arrived at the college, at fourteen, they already had nine years of schooling behind them.
And the influences of their family and friends and others.

They came with fears, prejudices, perhaps misinformation, maybe some hope about the school, because of the way it had featured in the local press; because of its place in local folk history.

They came holding all their past experience of schools, teachers, classrooms, subjects, exams.

They held an idea of what was 'proper work'; what was likely to be expected of them in the classroom and what might be acceptable as 'English' and 'Humanities'.

They knew what they had done to be successful in the eyes of teachers; how they had failed to please, though not always why. They had different ideas of personal achievement and how that related to their achievements in school.

In the fourth year students listened and looked for teacher responses and for other clues in the classroom which gave them an idea about what was acceptable.

In my classroom, where the possibilities were probably more than they had experienced in their High School, I felt it was important to reassure students.

I knew that they would find much of their early experience in the classroom disconcerting.

When a tutor returns to work in the fourth year, after working with students whom she has known for two years, it is easy to forget the difference the two years can make. I often expected too much from the fourth year students in terms of independence, decision-making, ability to structure and sustain work. I felt disappointed, frustrated. It was important to remember we were starting again. These were new people. However much I felt I had changed and grown each year, each new year held a different form, could not be as I expected.

If I have too clear an idea of what might happen, or too firm an

expectation, I can fail to respond to real possibilities presented by a group and the individuals in it.

You may do anything you like.
It may be difficult to do anything at all.
Realisations about what may be possible begin at the students' first interview with their tutor.
For some it is what they have been longing for;
or it makes something possible that they had perhaps hardly imagined and now they can hardly believe their luck.
For others it is terrifying.

> It sounds a good idea but so what, it's school.
>
> It sounds a good idea but I'm not sure what I'll do about it.
>
> It's fantastic and I'm going to be a changed person....but in practice it's harder than it seems.
>
> Oh yes, we've chosen our own projects before ..... and out they come with those dull tired old 'Projects' which somehow haven't involved a real choice, choice which has demanded some thought about what they would like to learn, what they need to do, for themselves.

It makes some angry.

> Teach us. Tell us the syllabus. Yes, but what have we got to do?
>
> We've come to school to learn, not to muck about.
>
> Tell me what to do and I'll do it!! Anything! No, not that ..... No, none of those things ..... *I* know what I'll do.

You may do anything you like
can take away all security and leave only the inaction of fear.
Too many constraints, too many directions given, close down the possibilities; do not allow time for change; realisation; growth.
It is not comfortable.
Students expect teachers to tell them what to do. Even if they don't want to be told. For most students who came to Countesthorpe choice had only been a small part of their experience of school. It had probably been choice within clear boundaries. It certainly was not central to their experiences.
If I am to learn, who is responsible for my learning?

In terms of how students began to work and what they chose to do much of what I did was remedial. Some students seemed to recognise possibilities immediately; some gradually realised the situation and themselves; some resisted a long time; some perhaps never were able to see, or perhaps saw but could not move; it is not easy; past failures or success can inhibit change; development; maybe we cannot see the change; maybe it comes later. It takes students a while to be aware; to feel confident enough to cope with the range of possibilities; the freedom of thought and action that is possible.

It has taken me a very long time to be able to accept it for myself.

You may do anything you like.
No, there are still limitations: you cannot just walk out of school
or study chimpanzees in the wild
or spend all day roller-skating.
No, but I must listen to these desires and see how they can be accommodated; how can they fit in; what do they tell me? how can they help in making a choice? There are all kinds of possibilities that students may have come not to expect.

You may do anything you like.
Sometimes the answer is obvious. Mostly, I need time and space; some quietness.
I need time to shed fears; I want to please, what will please this teacher?
Please yourself.
It is too indulgent to please myself; I may not choose the right thing. What is the right thing?
There must be a proper way of doing this.
What is proper? What seems the proper way to you?
I need time to listen to myself; to hear what it is I should like to do; to listen to my inner need.
I need to allow myself.
I need to know myself. Have self-respect. Trust myself.
I tried to give students space for themselves.
It is something I have found enormously difficult to allow myself.

I spend time preventing students from starting work; stopping them from plunging precipitately into the first thing that comes to mind. Are you sure? Read a little. Do you really want to do that? Caution.

I do not want you to do anything out of a dreadful sense of duty. I don't want you to do something to please me. I have never liked the idea of students doing something just in order to relieve the tension of not having decided.

I shall take you seriously. I expect you to take your own work seriously.

Perhaps, in students' experience, 'projects', 'own choice' have had low status in terms of the whole school curriculum and give rise to the notorious cars, babies, football projects which initially seem to be largely scrapbooks.

For quite a few students, copying from books is a perfectly acceptable way of working. For some this is a continuation of former practice, for others it offers the reassurance of pages covered. One girl, in her fourth year especially, measured her success in terms of the thickness of her folder; that it was filled largely with pamphlets copied out in her own hand did not seem to concern her.

I am willing to let a student pursue a piece of work that entails a lot of copying, of cutting out and sticking in. It reminds me of the child in the playgroup who spends a long time standing and watching before joining in. It allowed students to observe the conventions of working in this school without harassment. It gave them time to think what they might really want to do; space to accept the new conditions.

As students work on such projects I give them ideas for working on it in different ways; accept the work but also offer other opportunities - to draw, or browse through books or whatever came up. I will talk with them in general, hoping to make it easier for them to see what to do next. If a student tires of her project, it can come quietly to a conclusion; if it maintains its hold on her, she will return to it.

Some students came to the school filled with energy, knowing exactly what they wanted to do; somehow sensing all that was possible and surging forward with a great sense of release.

Some found a conflict between their expectations of school, their

parents' expectations, their sense of duty and what I was offering to them. This conflict was often expressed through conflict with me as I refused comfortable accumulation of facts, demanded that questions should be asked. I think I have been intolerant of some children who wanted to do well in exams and resisted my refusal to accept blandness.

I want students to have confidence in their own experience and knowledge and recognise its validity.

I want them to learn: that I will try to work out, with them, the best way to proceed so that they pursue their own purposes and aims in the way most appropriate and effective for them.

that I value each of them as individuals and expect them to respect the existence of others in the group.

that my classroom is not a free-for-all so that noise levels and moving about take into account the well-being of others in the room.

I like to see students absorbed in their work; so interested in what they are doing that it comes up in conversation, in break times, after school, in the street ...

I like to see students tussling with a problem that they cannot let go until they feel they have resolved it for themselves, for the time being.

I do not want students to feel that I mysteriously know all the right answers; the proper way of doing things.

I would like them to feel: that they didn't have to take up my suggestions;

that I often don't know things;

that I do not know how they should set about doing something, but that I will work hard to help them to decide on the best way for them.

I want students: to find pleasure in their activities at school;

to feel confident about drawing conclusions and forming opinions;

to be able to reflect upon their experience;
to be able to see each other as inspiration and as partners in their various pursuits.

Some students came with clear ideas about what they might do and how they wanted to do it.

Some started gently; took an idea that interested them and worked on that dutifully, competently, and in so doing allowed themselves time to consider what they might do that was going to be more important to them.

Some worked in fits and starts; sometimes involved, committed to ideas of their own, at others disenchanted, grudging of time spent doing anything, or perhaps dutiful but dispassionate.

Some never really seemed to find anything that really engaged them thoroughly or perhaps experienced one or two glorious moments.

Some worked to a slow realisation of what was possible, of what they could do.

Some had activities and experiences outside school which engaged them more thoroughly or took more energy than school could.

I would hope that students would be involved in or exposed to a very great range of experiences and ideas but I would not necessarily expect a formal response in terms of written work or even discussion. There is value in the thing itself. Do we insist on a tangible product of teaching/learning of however poor quality rather than let each student take the experience into her own store in her own way and make of it what she will? We cannot know what happens once the experience has occurred. A stone is thrown into a pond. Ripples flow outwards.

I do not insist on a response. I do not forget the thing has happened. It is a part of my knowing about these students.

There may be talk that is not heard - amongst students, at home, with another adult.

The idea may re-emerge months, even years, later.

It may work into something a person is already thinking about, concerned with.

It may make some kind of mysterious internal connection.

It may make an individual respond very positively and literally or it may elicit a response which does not seem immediately connected

with the experience.

We cannot know what part of a whole will be important to others, what they will perceive, how they will respond.

I think that what I tried to do at the beginning of a new year was to put messages into the classroom about the kinds of things that were possible there; to suggest as many possibilities as I could for students who were looking for ideas and to open up possibilities for those whose notion of what kind of work was possible was limited by past experience. Very often I gave students permission to do what they already wanted to do but hadn't thought was acceptable.

In a single group there are up to thirty individuals including the tutor. Up to thirty individuals' ideas, values, experiences, questions, answers, contradictions, puzzles, obsessions, skills, made available or not in the classroom,

exchanging,
arguing,
copying,
sharing,
supporting,
inspiring,
romancing,
germinating.

What I decide to study comes from myself.

It is influenced by things around me, things I see and read and do, and by people; some people more than others.

My experience of the world and of others may be the source of inspiration, but I must also look within myself.

Within; without.

Students bring their whole selves.

I would want there to be in the classroom something that can come to meet them; it might be an object; experience; attitude; person; atmosphere; expectation; it is there

so that they have the chance to extend the possibilities they can imagine

so that they can respond in a way that they had not been aware of

so that they can be made aware of things that they had not

known before or had not thought about before
so that they can find an answer to some unknown longing
or formulate the question that had been in their mind but they didn't realise was there
or find a way round something that had always been a difficulty
or really do what they wanted to do but more and differently from how they had thought possible
so that they can become utterly absorbed in what they are doing
so that they can enjoy themselves,
be delighted.

I always think of the first term of the fourth year as a time of worry and uncertainty. I feel that nothing seems to happen. I have a sense of chaos and lack of achievement. Is it perhaps because I want to see products? It seemed to me that other teachers had something to show for what had been happening in the classroom. I didn't seem to be able to find many completed or even readily comprehensible pieces of work during the first term of the fourth year. Things were incomplete and tentative. Very often students wanted to discard work done at the beginning of the year when they came to look at it later. I think the sense of chaos is right. This was a time of change. Students did produce work but it was not necessarily an end in itself. We need time to think about how we might work; what we really want to study.

I am always surprised then to see when I look back at diaries written at the beginning of the fourth year how much students had achieved and how much of what became, later, very important for students, had its beginnings in that first term. The beginnings, the seeds of what became a crucial piece of work were often there in the first months of the new year, perhaps in the first weeks, or even days.

The work may not have started then but the idea might be mentioned in one way or another and later, even a year or more later, the idea might reappear. It might not appear in the same guise as when it was first imagined.

Despite my negative feelings about the fourth year group which was to become the group I worked with during secondment I find on rereading my diary that students were engaged in all kinds of activity and that quite a few had already begun some work which was going to be of major importance to them.

In the midst of beginnings, change, uncertainties, it can feel as though nothing is being achieved.

> 1.9.79 ... Angela's interest was taken by a folder I have called *The Family*. She is quite concerned about the old - and at Broughton Astley had mentioned to me she might like to spend time at an O.P. home or club, so she has begun writing about her grandfather and her great aunt ...
>
> Oct. 1979 There are now three family trees in progress, Angela Gurnhill, Carol Jones and Mandy. Angela has already made one trip to the records office and confirmed a number of dates. She also took down a long list of names from the 1971 census and was going to check with her grandfather to see whether any names belong to their family .....
>
> Note: Who am I? Where do I fit in the scheme of things? Important to 14 - 16 year olds.

Angela's family tree became her main project for the 'O' level Community Studies exam. She traced her family to the seventeenth century and met members of her family of whose existence she had not previously known.

> 9.10.79 Gary has been working on his play for children now at home and at school for just over a fortnight. He was temporarily distracted this morning by the arrival of the plans for making a Dalek, from the BBC. He was also worried that maybe he should return to his work on make-up and costume in the theatre, but was delighted that, unless he thought it was important, he could continue with his play. He has written a draft of the plot in rough, written the play in neat and in so doing changed a number of ideas but kept his eccentric central character, Mrs. One-off. Yesterday he tried some dialogue but he had started this without his plot since I had it and he was very dissatisfied with what he had done. He felt it dragged on for too long. It did really - there was so much to explain in the first section - so we spent a long time discussing how most of those ideas could be presented clearly and interestingly without too much spoken explanation. He then was able to feel more enthusiastic about the play again. I think that dialogue and stage directions often look worse written down than when performed

(witness a good few contemporary playwrights!)

Today, having received the Dalek plans and having bought the first issue of the Dr. Who comic, Gary spent his time on outlining characters and describing costume for them. We'll try and improvise the main bulk of the play tomorrow in drama. The play is based on a struggle of good and evil, and five apples must be rescued from various planets so that Planet Glob can continue to exist as it is without being overcome by the wicked Kronos. It is true that Dr. Who is usually concerned with a struggle between good and evil but I had not felt in reading Gary's plot how much he is influenced by that series until he began to talk. He does like the Narnia books very much ..... Gary is very conscious of struggles between good and evil and is interested in the eccentric hero who arrives, not so much like Superman, in the nick of time - but who saves people and situations with magic. He wrote of this in his childhood memories and suggested this struggle as the theme for a science fiction drama we discussed in the drama group.

Gary completed the play. A group performed it and toured primary schools with it in July and September. It was tremendously well received by the children in primary schools. All the students who took part in the production seemed to enjoy it enormously; many used it as the basis for a piece of work. Gary refused to use it as part of his exam assessment. I think the play is good enough to be used by professional companies. Gary's main project and his work in primary schools seems to link in.

9.10.1979 Rachael Chambers, today, said she felt that she had had enough of her work on the mentally handicapped and I suggested she put it aside for a while - perhaps until she is able to go to Birkett House. She has worked well, in fact the work combines personal and factual writing. She has found relevant articles from newspapers and has been to her local library for further help. However, there comes a stage with such a subject when, without relevant personal experience the facts become dry and not very relevant. We have not been able to find *Bernard* or anything similar for Rachael to read, so that straight information about day centres or special education is more difficult to handle.

Rachael said she could not decide whether to start on an autobiography or a child study. I suggested she could start on both (there are often times in both such topics when there is not a lot to do). After some deliberation she agreed on this. She took the child development chart to use with Georgina this evening and we discussed ways of starting the autobiography. I mentioned the possibility

of combining chronological events with collective chapters covering holidays or friends or celebrations in general and then left her. I saw that she was making a list of ideas but haven't discussed anything else today.

Rachael's work at the playgroup for the mentally and physically disabled and her study of Georgina became the two things to which she attached most importance during her two years in the team. The autobiography took nearly eighteen months to materialise, and then in an unexpected form.

Carol chose the Great Central Railway as a project because her father was interested in it. I sometimes got rather annoyed by his grip on the project.

> Carol has left her work on the Great Central Railway for a long time now - mainly because, she says, her father can't get an important (and very big) book from the library. I felt that in some way she had given up responsibility for the work and was leaving things to her father. Anyway, I began looking through some of the information we have available with her and feel her enthusiasm is revived - more by a reminder of how interesting it is than anything. I spent quite a while flicking through old photographs of the railway while she commented on the pictures. She knows an enormous amount about the railway already and has quite a lot of knowledge about the different engines and when they were built ..... After break I went to find her again and found her looking through a number of books which I thought she had returned to the library. She had also a book of photographs belonging to her grandfather.

Each student comes as she is. Carol came complete with father and grandfather - father came to parents' evenings to discuss the project! - and much as I would have liked to change that, that was Carol's situation. In the end I felt the project was very much hers, but still wondered if there had been other things she would rather have done.

Looking through my diary I notice that I seem to spend quite a lot of time doing things like flicking through books, looking at photographs. Idly passing the time, it seems, but as I reread this passage about Carol I think of the need just to be with students, sit quietly, reassure them, allow them time to think, aloud or not, allow them to see the value of what they are doing or to accept that maybe

changes should be made, new directions sought, or conclusions arrived at so that something new can begin.

- In my relationship with students I felt the need to be silent but to be open.
- A silence need not exclude but may make things possible for the student.

I felt I wanted to be open to anything a student might convey to me.

The student may or may not consciously tell me things. They may be conveyed through words, actions, omissions, nuances of expression or movement.

I would not know what those things were. I might not even know until later what had been significant. I was not looking for anything specific - hence, openness; a receptiveness to whatever might arise. As soon as I look for some specific kind of idea/words/thoughts I distort or destroy what might happen through my own preconceptions and preoccupations. If I am wanting to hear certain things then I may well miss something that it would be more fruitful for the student for me to be aware of.

There were some things which students told me which I felt I would rather not know, but I held them in my awareness of the student in case it should be useful. Usually, if a student actually told me something it meant that they wanted me to know and therefore be capable of acting as a result of knowing.

I don't always fully know what I have learnt.
I rarely act on that immediately. It becomes a part of a store of associations and information connected with a student.

I store these things in order to help each student to learn/to grow in understanding; whatever that student wants to learn/understand.

Often the student herself does not know fully what that might be - if the student does know it is not always easy for her to articulate or convey to someone else what that might be.

It is very hard not to impose.

I wanted to *make it possible* for students to pursue their own

interests in their own ways; to grow in understanding; beginning wherever they were and growing in a way that was theirs.
Most students were very aware of their own growth in understanding, particularly of themselves.

I think I also *gave permission* for students to work in the way they wanted.

This was important at the beginning of a new fourth year when students had different expectations of schools, teachers and their own behaviour in schools.

It was also important as exams drew near. Students wanted to continue doing whatever they were doing, but sometimes worried that this would not adequately satisfy examiners. They were aware of that double standard and were made aware through me of what was possible and not possible and what had to be done specifically for the exam.

I both knew and did not know my students. In one sense I do not expect to know them at all. They are apart, other, live within their own circle.

I listen to them with my whole self as far as that is possible. That is, I am open to any hint about themselves that they may give me that will help me to respond to their needs in a way

that is constructive for them

that will help them to pursue their own concerns in so far as I can understand them or be distantly aware of them.

I cannot say that I ever <u>know</u> what students want to do except in the most general way. That knowledge is for them.

What I felt I could do was learn as much as I could of their searchings, leanings, predilections, wonderings, so that my interventions could be of the greatest use to them.

I am not sure whether it would be at all a good thing to have very precise information about the direction a student wants to take in tackling ideas or feelings.

I think it is not possible to have such precise information but I think, also, that the surer I am of my own idea of what a student is doing the more likely it is to be at variance with the student; the greater my confidence in my analysis the more likely I am to overwhelm the student's ideas and impose my own.

My confidence must be such that I need not prove the rightness of my perceptions or conceal my errors. I have confidence in the other.

When I wrote earlier of silence, I meant a silence that was receptive and enabling. It is not always silence that is needed. Sometimes I find it necessary to talk, a lot. I sometimes 'burble on' and feel afterwards that not a lot has been done in terms of offering help, but find the response after some time has elapsed. Very often it is a question of proposing a whole range of ideas and ways of proceeding, in a fairly casual and non-committal way so that a student may take or leave any of what is said. Sometimes when I feel my students know me a little, I may well be quite intense as I propound ideas of my own, in the knowledge that students don't feel any compulsion to agree or to take up those ideas. It seems to give students space to think, perhaps some focus for their thoughts rather than being left in a vacuum. It reminds me of when, as a child, I asked my mother what I could do. After she had offered a reasonable list of suggestions I went and did something else. She cleared my mind of those things I didn't want to do.

Although I wouldn't want to know precisely what concerned a student in tackling ideas (I would find that knowledge inhibiting) it is important to me to be able to share with a student an enthusiasm and curiosity in whatever she is tackling. The subject outside the teacher and the student allows them to meet in some measure and to make exchanges, focussed on the object of their attention.

Each student is at the centre of her work and at the centre of my work with her.

I try to begin wherever the student may be.

I have a room filled with possibilities; I bring myself, my ideas, interest, my experience; circumspectly.

Messages are exchanged. Students learn about me, learn things about how they can behave, how they might learn. I learn about them.

10

Conversation

Currency of the classroom
between student and teacher
student and student
teacher and teacher

when the role of the knower is interchangeable, each speaks to the other from her own experience;

the focus of the conversation most often lies
outside themselves
in an interest or enthusiasm in which they are both willing to share

Listening is more important for me than speaking;
I think it is important that each student is allowed the validity of his own knowledge and experience.
Conversation; the raised eyebrow, the throwaway remark, intense intellectual argument, gossip; silence; confrontation, question and answer; ruminations, thinking aloud, wondering, telling stories, pursuing questions, joking; playing about with words and with ideas.
It is through a growing sense of each student and an acknowledgement of their concerns and ways of being that I try to help students to grow, and to pursue issues that are important to them.
It is as if we each speak and listen and then plough back what we hear into the common pursuit of learning.
He gathered the child's presence into his own store.
Awareness of the whole person informs my approaches to a student and what ideas I might offer. The awareness becomes part of the fabric of what I know, what I offer; I do not want to allow it to dominate.
What a student told me of his experiences at primary school helped me to understand his feelings about writing.
I found that a girl had undertaken a major piece of work to which a member of her family was very much opposed. I could not have stopped the work, had I known, nor would I. Although the experience was

painful in some ways it seemed also a statement which the girl was determined to make about herself.

It is important to me that there is talk in the classroom.

Talk is at the centre of my relationship with each student and crucial to how we proceed together.

All students were involved in talk but each created their own rhythms of working and their own relationships with me.

Conversations might take place idly, and more seriously during breaks, at registration and after school. They might refer directly to what a student was studying, but would also include talk of how weekends were to be spent, television viewing, part-time jobs, events in the national news, a film just seen in school, books read, jokes, who was going out with whom, why x was in a bad mood, football, politics, moral issues .... From these conversations came enjoyment and friendship; a sense of each other; new ideas. For students it was possible that such a casual conversation might give rise to an idea to learn or do something not thought of before. For me, there was always the possibility that such conversations would give me hints as to what I might successfully suggest to indiviudals or groups at a later time. It also made being at school a greater pleasure.

There was the possibility that we could be a community of teachers and learners.

Conversations during lessons were generally more serious in intent though might well include gossip and laughter. The main purpose of conversations between myself and a student alone was to focus together on whatever was important to the student at that time.

> 17.11.80 Gary returned with his poem 'You can see time'. He said I had really got to him and he had kept rereading the poem all the night before, haranguing me in his bath in the process. We talked again. Both Pat and Nigel agreed the poem was confused.
>
> Gary said a) *he* knew what it meant.
>
> b) it sounded nice
>
> c) there *were* bits he thought confused but he was not really ready to do anything about it.
>
> 18.11.80 Kate had written a very nice piece about catching mice on the haystack when she was a child. She began to talk about other things - how she kept worms in her pocket and how her father brought home orphaned pheasant chicks one day to

rear. I asked her if she was glad she had spent her childhood on a farm and she said she was but she had taken it for granted at the time. I talked a bit about my Manchester childhood. She talked about the farms she had lived on and how they blurred into one. We compared notes on great uncles and Kate began to talk about sisters, half sisters, step-sisters, the complications of family life after a separation,..... Debra, and Kate herself, commented on how complicated her family seemed. I was reminded as we talked of James Britton's observations on how we need to talk, to reflect on experience, refine it, test it against the reactions of others.

Until recently I took it for granted that I would share my experience and perceptions with students and felt sometimes that I imposed too much. I have found that for some teachers it is not a natural thing to do and yet they expect students to 'write from experience'. As always, it's a case of being aware. In talking with Kate my contribution made our conversation more of an exchange than a one-sided story - in which one of us dominated or bored the other. Our sharing of experiences and reflections was interesting to both of us, was not possible without the other.

11.11.80 Katie had a blank sheet of paper in front of her. What was she doing? A story. A new one? Yes. She didn't seem to have any concrete ideas and I despaired rather - saying she had so many things on the go. She said she'd do her long story (though I then felt guilty). She said she'd aim to finish it for next week. She has decided in the course of the morning to make Sara begin as a housemaid rather than a scullery maid since she wanted her to become a nursery maid and that could seem a more plausible jump. She began looking at the plans of the house in *The Servants' Hall* first of all to find where she might sleep. I mentioned the book of advice to nursery maids that JR has but she decided she didn't want to see it until she got to the relevant point in the story. It might distract her yet again.

The talk moved on to her problems with working and Gary joined in. I said they had similar problems, and we talked about what I had said to Gary and how I had told him I would write to his mother. Oh yes! says Katie, *threaten* me more! Gary gave a cry of recognition. I laughed. The talk moved then to Katie's step-mother and Katie's reluctance to have her receive such a letter (and mine in fact). Katie talked at length about her step-mother and her present arguments with her. She decided, in the course of the conversation, that she mothered her brother which drew her to defend him. I said it wasn't surprising since she *had*

been his mother for a few years. I talked about my own mother - about her mother's death (at about the same age as Katie was when her mother died) and how she had missed her more as she had grown older. Katie mentioned what she could remember of her mother, her hands, her voice when she shouted; Gary joined in also as we talked about acting in a way which we know annoys a person but we can't stop!

Katie talked also about her childhood again. Telling stories about herself in the third person (something I used to do) and her lonely journey to junior school - with a mountain dog to the prison camp in the morning and on her trusty steed cantering home in the afternoon. I am not sure quite why I'm recording this except the conversation seemed an important one to all three of us at the time.

After break I noticed Katie was reading Raymond Chandler rather than getting down to the job in hand. She saw me looking and put the book away - there *is* a problem with settling to work here. I then spent some time with Katie looking at *The Servants' Hall*, examining the plans, looking at pictures of rooms. I found an account of a housemaid's day by accident. We spent most of the lesson exploring what a house might have been like, who might have lived there, what they would have done, how they would have spent their day.

I feel dissatisfied with this account. It needed to have been written nearer the time of the conversation, but the afternoon was spent with Stephen etc. and the details of what happened have become blurred. I wrote notes immediately after the morning. It was impossible to note things down as they happened. Nevertheless, I feel this kind of interaction is important, it seems to me it *is* part of the whole fabric of learning and certainly the context from which that learning emerges.

This kind of conversation which moves around outside anything that might be identified as 'proper' school work is important. Sometimes it is not what is said but how it's said that is important. I often tried for a light touch, a kind of breath holding, in conversation with students.

Sometimes we find ourselves saying things that we didn't know were there - that is true of writing too - in conversation it can be difficult to hold on to what you are thinking or trying to express, but other people's voices can help you to say the next thing or bring a new perspective.

To say something aloud in the presence of another can confirm what had

before seemed only part of a dream; can expose chimera; can send the speaker scuttling back to the workings of her own mind.
Conversation like this one may or may not give me clues for later talk with students, for ideas that might be suggested; things which may not come to my mind immediately. They may just give me a feeling; hint at a way of talking. I may forget the conversation, later happenings may remind me.
This time it felt as if the important interaction was between Gary and Katie.
It was the kind of conversation in which I was involved yet distant. Its subject was at once of no concern of mine and yet also being made available to me.
Intrusion would be if I then, on the basis of what I had heard, decided and imposed my decision on Katie as to what she might do, how she should organize her writing.

In my desire to make sense of the world, to make meanings, I look inwards and out to the world and the community of which I am part. I look to others with whom I can share my explorations and who inform my thinking. I look also for an other who will hear me; and who might offer back to me something of what he hears.

I look for a teacher. An other who will listen and allow me to hear my own voice; who might be able to offer from their experience something which helps me to see how I might act. I seek the luxury of talking with someone who engages seriously and on equal terms, in ideas which concern me; who is willing to meet me on common ground with generosity and commitment. and who will allow me to go my own way.
In my relationship with a teacher; in my relationship with a student I seek to engage with the other.

> To have respect for children is more than recognizing their potentialities in the abstract, it is also to seek out and value their accomplishments - however small these may appear by the normal standards of adults. But if we follow this track of thinking one thing stands out. We must provide for children those kinds of environments which elicity their interests and talents and which deepen their engagement in practice and thought. An environment of "loving" adults who are themselves alienated from the world around them is an educational vacuum. Adults involved in the world of man and nature bring that world with them to children,

> children, bounded and made safe to be sure, but not thereby losing its richness and promise of novelty. It was this emphasis which made me insist upon the third pronoun in the title, the impersonal "It" alongside the "I" and "Thou". Adults and children, like adults with each other, can associate well only in worthy interests and pursuits, only through a community of subject matter and engagement which extends *beyond* the circle of their intimacy.
>
> David Hawkins, *'I, Thou and It,'* in *The Informed Vision*, Agathon Press, 1974

Conversation with each student was crucial to my relationship with students.

Although conversation could seem rambling, almost casual, much conversation was intense as a student made demands upon me as a teacher which related directly to her specific needs.

The tentativeness of the first term always remained, but largely it gave way to a much more equal discourse between teacher and student.

Once a student felt in control of her own learning then I felt it was my responsibility to respond to her with rigour and commitment.

I found that if a student felt confident about what she wanted to do then skills could be taught quickly and directly, without fear of imposition. When students used the records office to research family histories there was only limited time available. For example, I found I was able to give instructions about using Parish Registers which is quite a complex task but which they quickly grasped because of their needs. They then went on to use such a skill with a degree of sophistication which they developed to their own requirements.

When engaged in the exploration of ideas and feeling, conversation would range through many levels. I do not wish to impose on a student. What I must do is acknowledge that my actions affect students and that I have responsibility for my actions. To decide to say nothing is a part of my responsibility as is the decision to speak. For this reason I want to know more of my actions and the beliefs on which they are based.

Sometimes I felt that I had very little idea of how a student might proceed, especially in something like a child study when I never met the child who was being studied. The student would have all the new material immediately available to her; I worked at one remove. When Rachael began her study of a two year old I wrote in my field notes:

> I can only share my interest in children with Rachael, helping her to find her way through relevant texts and opening up possibilities but eventually leaving the use of that material to Rachael since she knows the child. Certainly, initially the most useful thing I feel I can offer is ways of looking, and access to certain ideas about the development of young children.

I felt that this was the project over which Rachael had most control. At the end of the fifth year Rachael wrote:

> It was very much Jeni's influential attitude which encouraged my interest into the developmental observation of a friend's daughter. I feel that this project of all was influenced very much by Jeni due to her interest and understanding of babies and young children. Jeni's suggestions were always, I found, introduced with an interesting basis which could be followed and observed in many directions.

I can see now that I always work at one remove.
The more sure I felt the student was of her own material the more certainly I made my contribution, feeling that the student would make of it what she could, what she wished.

A learner has her own raw material; her own assumptions, experience; knowledge. Sometimes that seems self evident, as when a student chooses to study her own family, an area near her own home, or someone known to her. If she chooses a period in history, a problem such as pollution or the nature of families it might seem that received knoledge of such a subject was more public and shared. It may be that the teacher is in possession of more facts, but the student holds an idea of what she wishes to discover; of what she already knows.

It may be that a student has a less strong hold on what she wishes to do; but she will discover it in conversation with her teacher.

I must allow space for discovery;
time to feel comfortable with a subject
I must try to offer challenges
offer the kind of discomfort which gives rise to questions
and change

provide information

tools to work with

teach skills that are relevant when the need arises

open up avenues and possibilities

What I must guard against is enforcing my viewpoint

imposing my framework

seeing from my eyes only.

Holding back does not imply witholding information or a point of view, but acknowledging that it is the student who will decide how her work will proceed.

Students liked conversations in different ways. Some liked them little and often, some were always referring to me for confirmation, the answer to a question, or with their latest thought. Others liked fewer but longer conversations which might range over all their current work and perhaps into the future.

I think what many students like is the luxury of another's undivided attention, in which their concerns are paramount and are of importance to the sharer in the conversation.

We can find confirmation in the other.

In speaking we formulate thoughts that may have been vague and give credence to what had before only been in our minds.

The listener who can echo our thoughts and can search out a truth in them, helps us by questioning and by simply hearing what we have to say.

> Reduced to himself, man is much less than himself, whereas in the light of openness to the other the possibility of unlimited growth is open to him.
>
> Georges Gusdorf, *Speaking*, Northwestern University Press, 1965, (transl. Paul T. Brockelman)

The teacher can offer us a sureness which allows us to move into dangerous, uncharted waters.

1 1

Autobiography

Every year some students wrote autobiographies. The fifth year, especially, seemed to be a good time to be writing abut their lives and their sense of themselves. Sometimes they wrote in direct response to something that happened in their lives at that time: divorce; a death; a birth.

I did not lay particular emphasis on autobiographical writing; I did make opportunities for it to happen and, I now assume, acknowledge its importance in such a way as to make students feel comfortable about it.

The encouragement I gave to autobiographical writing was based on what seemed its appropriateness and its popularity.

I do value autobiography, particularly for fifth year students.

I must be aware of the wholeness and inviolability of the students I encounter; and of myself.

I consider myself in a position of privilege in relation to a person's writing and have a responsibility towards the writing and the writer.

That they be taken seriously. That they be respected. That I recognise the writing as part of, yet separate from the writer.

Any kind of sharing can only be done in a spirit of mutual trust and it is only useful if it seems appropriate to the individuals involved.

There is always self-revelatory writing in the classrooms where I work, though not from every student. It is something that other teachers have commented on. It is not something I expect. Quite the opposite. It is not something I expect from any student though I am ready to accept it.

I do create opportunities for it to be written.

I do know that it is a kind of writing that students enjoy, are absorbed by.

I am often surprised, moved, disconcerted by the writing.

I found Rachael's writing about her sister difficult because I felt, as reader, intrusive. Rachael, on the other hand, had no qualms about it being read by strangers - or anyone else for that matter. it

was, she felt, a true account and held no reason for censorship.

I do not see this kind of writing as a way for me to discover the secrets of the students' inner selves. It may well give me hints - as any conversation might do - about what else a student might like to do or read or think about, but not necessarily. It does allow me to extend my own understanding of human experience and of myself; and to enter a shared quest for understanding.

Autobiographical writing, at least 'Childhood Memories', was first introduced to me at college as a means of getting children to produce 'good writing'. It seemed fair enough that we write best about what we know best (though my tutor didn't seem to think too much of my 'Childhood Memories'). The subject did seem to produce a better than average crop of interesting writing from a class. The reading of an extract from *Kes*, what about the bit where he fills his boots with tadpoles? or a story about some ferocious teacher, then the sharing of anecdotes and you're off.

Did I consider what it meant for the writer? Good writing seemed separate from the children who wrote, rather an end in itself, something I had caused to happen. It began to seem rather manipulative and despite the lively writing, I became reluctant to suggest childhood memories as a subject for writing. Part of the liveliness comes from having heard stories and poems by professional writers. Something of their style seems to rub off. In my first teaching job I used to read aloud separately; so that the reading was not directly linked to a writing session, though its influence might still appear.

Adolescents mostly like writing about themselves, about their lives past and present, are rather bound up in thinking about themselves. Although fifteen may seem a little premature for an autobiography, it has a strong appeal for some and even more undertake at least some writing about their lives.

A good autobiography is more than a list of events and people known. I think it should give some sense of who the autobiographer is; an idea of the shape of his thoughts and feelings and how they came to be that way. I think that it is this element of self-portrayal and self-discovery that is attractive to the adolescent writer of autobiography.

Autobiography

a chance to celebrate

to recreate events ... as you remember them now, as you would like them to be, as you perceive them now a picture

savouring the past

a readiness to face the past ..... some things are too painful to be exposed in public writing

coming to terms with / exploration of philosophical questions/
matters of living
personal truths

desire to talk about one's life - and view of oneself

experiment test it out

a presentation of oneself

the person one has been how that relates to the present

one's image

one's ideas

the chance to make a statement for yourself and others about the kind of person you believe yourself to be

it is a part of a desire for self-knowledge: reflection on the past helps us to make a picture of the present and possibly the future; it is not finite; we need to be able to pause a moment, stem the flow in order to take a breath

Students seem to enjoy the *writing* of autobiography.

Writing can be discovering.

Sometimes I begin writing and find on the paper things I did not know about myself; things that I had not been aware of thinking; but which seem to fit into a pattern, make sense with what I already know. Writing about past and present helps to give an order to the pellmell confusion of living which allows us to move on.

In writing autobiographically the process is important, and the possibility it gives to the writer of being able to look back on what he has written, later.

Writing helps us to put things behind us; not out of the way but integrated into the whole. It can release us from the past and its restraints.

Writing about myself; telling a story.

Writing for myself; using writing as a means of exploration.

Writing for myself.

An autobiography is a personal construction. Form and language are integral to the whole. Form is as important as content in conveying the picture.

Beware, as Gary says, words are slippery and unmanageable. Memory is elusive; full of tricks, and words can't be found to describe the memory; they fall short of the imagination, distort how it feels.

Autobiography was, mostly, written.

It could also be photographs, scrapbook, drawings.

The writing was a part of the wider activity of autobiography: remembering, sharing anecdotes with friends; reminiscing; talking to the family about the past; looking through old photographs; finding 1st year birthday cards, early drawings, school reports; discovering things not already known about the past; remembering, reminding, reflecting, dreaming.

The writing gave a reason to talk to parents and other members of the family in a way which gave rise to new understandings and a feeling of changed, often strengthened, relationships. This was something students commented on, enjoyed.

The writing was often revealing for parents, too - they commented on this!

Autobiography is written.

Once I have committed myself to writing anything that is not private I acknowledge that I am willing to share what I have written and that the writing is open for others to enter into dialogue with it.

Autobiography is not a private diary, locked and hidden in a drawer, nor is it a personal log book which is written in contract with the teacher. It is written with a partly known, partly unknown audience in mind. Once it has been written it has become available for others to respond to and take from.

Sometimes an idea or persistent concern takes time before we are able to properly identify it. We may have feelings about what it is or how it may be but somehow seem unable to bring it into focus or

give it form so that it becomes more manageable, understandable. Students quite often have an idea of something they want to *write* but find it difficult to give their teachers or themselves more than the vaguest hint of what it might be. On the other hand, they recognise it as soon as they are able to see it. It is not that they don't know what to do; they feel some desire or disturbance but are unable to answer or resolve it satisfactorily. Sometimes a teacher offers a possibility which exactly matches the need, more often teacher and student tentatively explore possibilities together. I felt that I could only offer approximations and possibilities. I try to hear what the student is really saying; draw upon my own knowledge and experience in relation to it and think also of messages I have gathered from the student in the past. Suggestions that are then offered enter the space between student and teacher and may or may not be used by the student in any way she wishes.

Desires and disturbances are often both persistent and elusive. Some desires for experiencing and knowing repeatedly rise to the surface and cannot be satisfied; are not satisfied for years, maybe, or even at all. Some desires fade or are satisfied by different means than first anticipated. Some change so that the means of satisfaction changes also. If an immediate solution cannot be found, deep concerns can be lived with in a way which allows them to be used and responded to as an important part of an individual's knowing. If we bludgeon (however charmingly or subtly) a student into an immediate solution to her problem or an approximation of her desire then perhaps the knowing that might have arisen is diminished. I feel pressures which demand an end product and students, heads down, busily occupied; to let things rest, to leave what seem to be good ideas alone, to let a student apparently forget them seemed risky. I think I felt other teachers and colleagues considered this an evasion of responsibility. I believe it is an important part of students taking control of their own learning.

Rachael

Rachael proposed to write an autobiography at the beginning of her fourth year and in the summer term. On neither occasion did anything materialise. She couldn't find a satisfactory way to begin. So when Rachael thought of starting her autobiography again, in the

autumn of the fifth year, my response was fairly low key. She could not decide how to start. I offered a number of suggestions but none seemed very helpful to her. She was daunted by the thought of cataloguing the mountain of trivial events that had made up her life so far; it was not what she wanted to do. She responded to my suggestion that she should base her writing on a series of photos and planned to sort through the family photo box. I think she did this and enjoyed doing so. It didn't get her any nearer to the writing.

I have no record of Rachael ever mentioning autobiography again until the end of the year. It was certainly not something I was going to encourage her to pursue, especially as Rachael repeatedly affirmed that she didn't like writing about herself. Towards the end of September she came to me with what seemed a quite separate idea. She intended to do a piece of work based on the Seven Ages of Man, using someone she knew as a focus for each age. I had introduced the Seven Ages of Man to her during the previous summer term. It was an idea I quite often suggested to students as the basis for a piece of writing. it was a way to write about an imaginary person, conveying a sense of who they were and how their life was, by describing seven moments or events in their life which corresponded to the seven ages described in Shakespeare's play. Rachael had taken up the idea and had written a story that I had felt to be rather unsatisfactory. When Rachael mentioned the Seven Ages again I did not even remember she had written the story. In retrospect, I can see how the idea would appeal to Rachael and offer her an opportunity for reflection and speculation in a way that corresponded to her way of thinking. At the time this did not enter my head although I was aware that she had particular ideas in mind. In her introduction to the writing Rachael acknowledged the story as the source of her ideas: 'The basic idea for this project came to me after intervening in a piece of English based upon the same idea and which influenced me into a collection of writing containing much more depth.'

The idea was not properly raised again for five months. It does not mean to say that it had been forgotten. When we discussed it again in February 1981 I felt that Rachael was still trying to formulate what it was she knew she wanted to do. Again my role was to offer a number of alternatives, hoping that one or more might help her to put her thoughts into more concrete form. I felt that Rachael

probably knew the main gist of what the work was to be but was still searching for the way into it. One thing that Rachael had become clearer on is that she felt it should be predominantly creative writing. By this, she meant writing that was based on her own thoughts, experiences and feelings rather than writing largely founded upon information from books or taken from interviews. Soon after we had talked about the Seven Ages I was ill and then began maternity leave; Rachael completed *The Seven Ages of Man* at home and in discussion with her parents.

The finished product was the autobiography that she had been unable to contemplate in its conventional form. It is a collection of writing which 'builds a picture' of herself and ingeniously solves some of the problems of writing a life history at sixteen. She was most particular that she 'did not want to indulge into anyone else's private lives that were not related' to her, so she built up a self-portrait by considering seven ages of man, from birth to death, in terms of personal knowledge and her relationships with members of her own family who span those ages. The form which Rachael found placed her sixteen years within the context of a lifetime. It opened the way for an exploration and consolidation of her views of herself and of her closest relationships. There is the desire to consider those things which make her uniquely herself, but also to explore concepts, relationships and emotions which are fundamental to human growth.

The Seven Ages of Man has seven sections and an introduction and conclusion.

The first, *Babyhood*, included:

i. a description of what Rachael saw to be a baby's needs, mother's responsibilities and the relationship between the two.

ii. "Why my mother wanted a baby."

iii. "Why I want a baby."

Rachael's interest in small children, and especially her study of a neighbour's child meant that she had much first-hand experience of at least one small child. There is an emphasis in all three pieces of writing on the mother-child relationship which Rachael considers from the point of view of both the child and the potential mother. Small children were high on the list of Rachael's conscious interests at this time.

Why I want a baby

I never asked the question where do babies come from? but I was always anxious to have a baby of my own and recall several times when I asked my mum if she would buy me a baby. She would understandably say yes and would buy me a dolly which I would imagine to cry, feed, smile and wet its nappy.

As I became older I would often elaborate my imagination introducing other people and introducing communication of speech to my dolls. I would often introduce a man to be my husband and like my mother and father loved and communicated with me I would love and care the same for my dolls. I looked upon my dolls as friends who helped me pass the hours of cold wintry days when school friends weren't available.

Then when I reached secondary school and I began to understand the facts of life more detailed I realised the true relationship between mother and father and the contact especially related between mother and child was more than friendship and convenience when other children or people weren't around as I began to communicate with other children younger than myself I began to understand the important relationship which is locked between children and their dolls.

In 1979 my mother's friend Chris gave birth to a little girl called Georgina and because she lived only a few doors away I became quite close to Georgina and spent a lot of time with her observing her development and relationship with others. As I watched I envied the close relationship between Georgina and her mother and was amazed to watch Georgina's independence grow. I realised that my relationship with Georgina was very close and I tended to be motherly towards her and perhaps more protective than her real mother.

Because of this my enthusiasm grew and my influence to have a baby of my own was more important to me. Of course I agree that one must be suitably prepared to bear and look after a child and a couple must realise the substantial needs of a child. A child needs love, care, understanding and communication to aid developments and of course a child cannot provide these essentialities herself.

I think that the reason I want a baby is for protection. I feel that if one is a little sheltered and shy a baby protects this and brings other people to you but the main reason to want a baby is to be able to turn dependence into independence and to be able to look upon a child and be proud that their developments are owing to the relationship between the child and myself and the skills I have portrayed.

I think that in a marriage a child is very important to complete the family and more important to show the true love of man and wife.

> Having a baby is important to a woman who wants to complete her role in life and once the challenge is fulfilled there is the pleasure of watching the child grow and develop into a new intelligent human being of one's own flesh and blood.
>
> It is also important to me to be able to use the developed skills I have achieved to introduce a new human being into the world.

Babies and small children have always been important in Rachael's life. The question which she poses - 'Why do I want a baby?' - is a difficult one. In her answer she reflects upon her own maturing self and contemplates how her understanding of motherhood changed as her experience broadened. She then has a context for the more direct motives she gives for wanting a baby. In the last section Rachael takes a more general standpoint. She touches on her philosophy about the nature of marriage, of womanhood and parenthood. Finally she brings the thinking back to her own situation. Not only does she feel that childbearing would be the fulfilment of herself as a woman but also of her own self in that she wants to 'use the developed skills I have achieved to introduce a new human being into the world'. Rachael has concentrated not on the nature of babyhood but on motherhood. Its contemplation is an important part of her life as she writes. It is a part of the picture she draws. Drawing upon her personal history, her present view of her developing ideas and her relationships with parents and with the little girl, Georgina, Rachael has a working model for further contemplation.

My First Day At School is Rachael's only attempt to recreate part of her earlier life. It is a long piece. Rachael makes a definite effort to write in the voice of a child and convey something of a child's world through detailed description and a consciousness of experience through the senses. I find it a self-conscious piece. Far too long. It was something Rachael enjoyed writing. She attached a good deal of importance to it as an expression of 'the real self'. This feeling that the roots of one's self are to be found in childhood is one shared by many writers. The kind of revisiting that Wordsworth makes in Tintern Abbey allows the writer to reflect on something within that person which has remained part of him and which informs

the person he is now. It is a part of the answer to the question which forms the basis of much autobiographical writing: Who am I?

The stage 'Lover' presented Rachael with her first practical difficulties, since she had not experienced romantic love. What at first may have seemed a difficulty became an advantage. A conventional autobiography, written in adolescence is usually the subject of one, or at most two chapters of an autobiography written in later life. The framework Rachael chose released her from the limitations of her own experience and allowed her to address herself to questions about her life that were of immediate concern to her and that were to become part of her future. Her decision to write about her sister extended the scope of the stage 'Lover' to include a consideration of loving relationships within a family. Rachael also made it an opportunity to reflect upon an aspect of her own past which she perhaps was only able to consider because her relationship with her sister had changed. The story she tells is a vital part of her life story at that time. I can see that Rachael may not have written about it in a chronologically ordered autobiography where the emphasis seems to lie with events. The seven ages framework puts a distance between.

My sister

My sister is 3 years older than I and as we have grown up together there have been many changes in our relationship and more important in her own.

As children we were very close and had an intimate relationship but as we grew we tended to grow apart.

Sue had a will of her own and she often wickedly showed negligence to me and said I would show her up. Of course at times in every childhood there is often bitchiness and cruel words spoken often regrettably too but in my sister there was a jealous streak because I was the youngest and my sister imagined I was holding my parents' love by a force and she said she was being rejected and wasn't loved, but she was and more so than I but she didn't realise it. She didn't want to listen. She through her own jealousy neglected the love my parents gave to her and often it was sad for me that she looked upon me with such hatred.

My attitude to my parents was very close and I have always been a homely person. I often wondered whether as a child the closeness I conveyed was the point of attack in my sister's eyes, maybe because she found it hard to show her

love and emotions she saw possessiveness over me and so took her revenge,

Although I was very close to my parents and loved them very much as a child I never made a point of trying to steal all their love, I wanted also to give my love to my sister but found it hard because I received no recognition from her,

My sister from the very firt day I was born grew a very jealous streak which she often used against my parents possessively if they showed any sign of affection towards me alone,

When I was born she was bought a life size doll which she loved and cared for, This was bought so as not to bring up any signs of jealousy or mental strain due to personal feelings of neglect very often intervened between children and for the first few years we got on well together, She showed very little possessiveness but occasionally showed jealousy like any child if I was getting more attention,

Occasionally we talked over childish problems and involved each other into our dreams, We played very happily together and with other children,

When I began junior school my sister was in her last year and would soon move up to Leyslands, a secondary school, and here I began to notice the change in our relationship, I would very often proudly go to see my sister at lunch time but if she was with her friends she would ignore me, I was a very emotional child and took home my problems to mum and I often brought this aspect bitterly to her, She would talk me around and for another day I would be happy but the rejection of my sister's love meant very much to me, I tried desperately to talk to her but she had little time and would ignore me and push me aside, Home life was dull apart from the evenings when I had friends for tea, Even then I often ended up crying because she would insult me or show me up in front of my friends, Being a very timid child this sort of relationship disrupted my steady routine and at school there was always a change in my mental abilities,

I saw often friends with their sisters and was envious of the relationships conveyed between them and I felt as though I was missing out on something very important,

When my sister was 14 she began to bring home friends but spent more time at friends' houses, I took little notice in her relationship with boys until she came home with a boy called X to whom she showed a close affection and I noticed a change in her attitude to people around her,

It was noticeable that there was young love conveyed between them, Sue became a lot easier to talk to and she began at last to respect her elders, I was still not the little girl she would take to the shops but she involved me in her activities occasionally,

The first experience of love began while on a pony trekking holiday in the Black Mountains and they arrived home quite involved with each other. I was at first a little jealous of the relationship conveyed between them because I saw between them the love I had always been deprived of by my sister but I was also very happy because my sister was a lot happier both socially out of the home and in the family. Now she had someone she could depend on if necessary. For two years their relationship continued and she became a much securer person and I personally found her a lot easier to talk to.

When their relationship broke Sue was very hurt and needed all the love and affection we could give.

Over the next year Sue had many boyfriends but friends were all they were.

Then along came Frank who had admired Sue for over 6 months but being a rather shy person it took him 6 months to make an advance towards her.

Their first date was to a flying school dinner dance. During this memorable occasion he was presented with with an award for the Best Pilot of the Year for light aircraft.

When Sue arrived home she was very impressed by Frank and it was noticeable that their friendship was going to be more than just friends.

Frank was born in Bicester, Oxfordshire but through his education and work had travelled the country. At eleven years old Frank was sent to boarding school and then advanced to Southampton University where he got a degree. Because of this he had experienced very little home life and the introduction to our parents was obviously very important to him. Although rather shy with us at first his relationship with the family grew very close.

Before meeting Sue Frank had applied to join the Navy as a pilot. His entrance date was April. By this time he had been dating Sue for 6-7 months and their relationship was developing into love so this was to be a testing time for their romance. Unfortunately Frank although entered in as a sub-lieutenant his ambition of a flying career in the Navy was not to be. So after much discussion he decided to leave the Navy. He left the Navy 8 months later and took a job with British Aerospace as an Aero Dynamist.

During these months many letters passed between them, their meetings were few but one could see that their relationship was strong. Over the next few months their love between each other grew and the experience of their love brought Sue closer to her family.

After 18 months talk of marriage was in the air and during the preparation her closeness to the family returned to that of when she was a child and I think through this she realised how much she had neglected love from her own family

through her own jealousy.

During these months our relationship with each other grew closer and our involvement with each other was something I had longed for. Although she is now living away from home in Bristol we seem to be closer than ever and as the old saying goes -

"Absence makes the heart grow fonder."

Rachael did not find this easy to write because of the strong emotions bound up in it. I was taken aback when I read it, especially as Rachael so often claimed that she found writing about herself difficult, if not impossible. The language of the first section, about the relationship between the two sisters, reflects the intensity of emotion felt and the difficulty of the writing. Perhaps by bringing her consideration of this relationship within the scope of a piece of writing about love Rachael eases some of the intensity that a direct analysis of it may have had and which may have been impossible to write. The writing reflects the complexity of the subject not resolved; the emotions strongly felt, contradictory, confusing. Rachael may well modify the views she expresses here, perhaps, now, be surprised at what she has written. The writing has already modified the experience. She can stand away from it a little. Rachael hardly touches on the nature of romantic love. She has found a way to confront a part of her experience that was important to her; the limits and point of view made it safer for her.

Oten our attention is drawn to autobiographies of children whose lives have already taken dramatic, perhaps even tragic shape. As we read them the events alone command our attention. Perhaps the writing down of things that have happened is a first stage; I am wary of writing that is somehow sensationalised not by the writer but by the reader. In some ways I have found Rachael' writing about her relationship with her sister more difficult to receive than stories of deprivation or cruelty or disaster. In the latter we face our feelings of pity and perhaps regret, on behalf of the writers. Those feelings are ours and often not felt by those children who write about them. They write down what happened, in the same way a child that comes from a more settled background can write down an account of a family holiday or how she and her brothers and sisters spend summer evenings. The one has a familiarity that seems ordinary, the other

might describe something that we feel should not have to happen to a child or that amazes us because it is something that we haven't imagined.

They are both part of a statement the writer makes about his life.

> In the quietness of self-knowledge I am able to act.
> As I know myself I do not need to impose myself
> a resolution of disturbance releases me to act.

Whatever our life experience; however comfortable our childhood may appear, we can grow through quiet reflection upon our lives.

Sara, who came from a stable, warm and loving family, wrote a long autobiography. She commented on how lucky she was. In the writing is an appreciation of her family; a recognition of things that she perceived to be important.

Her autobiography was very important to her at the time; writing it, seeing it written down, allowed her to reflect on her good fortune, she began to identify the things about her family life that she valued and also to see where there might be limitations. She began to write about her relationships outside the family and explore her difficulties there. She was changing as she wrote; as she wrote she changed. her writing gave rise to talk amongst her contemporaries in which they explored together something of themselves and their understanding of each other. Her autobiography was more than a monument to a happy childhood, although it was that.

I value Rachael's writing because of the way she has been able to use the writing of it to explore things that really matter to her. They are part of her. The writing is not polished, not smooth because it is at work.

Perhaps the stages of Soldier and Middle Age 'doomed' Rachael's enthusiastic approach not only because they were outside the realms of her experience but also because they did not seem to hold any relevance to her present concerns as Lover had done and Old Age and Death were to. She was interested in the nature of a soldier's experience in war. She had already written two pieces of fiction based on the experiences of a soldier. *Soldier* is the shortest piece in the collection and does not really reflect the importance which

Rachael attached to the conversation which was its source. It gave her an opportunity to talk with her father in a way that she had not done before and to learn something of his life that she had not previously known. It is the conversation that was important, not the writing.

Rachael translated Justice into Middle Age, and devised her own definition of it:

> What I really wanted to achieve was middle age, the time in one's life when families begin to separate. Children leave home to get married and start their own lives, leaving the parents at last free once again from any ties.
>
> Curiously, and with no other ideas, I placed the question before my mum.
>
> "Being middle-aged is the time when children leave home and begin their independent lives. What were your feelings when Sue got married and left home?"
>
> At first she though my question rather funny because she said "Cheeky devil, I'm not middle-aged." I explained my difficulty and as best she could she answered my questions.....

Rachael's definition remains within her acceptance that marriage and child-bearing are unquestionably the natural course of events. She sees it as a time of renewed freedom, but her emphasis is on independence, rather than her mother's perception of her life at that time. Independence is a theme that runs through *The Seven Ages of Man* and holds greater interest for her in this section than does middle age. I have a sense of Rachael standing on the brink of her own adulthood; her moving towards independence from her parents and greater dependence on her own resources.

The Seven Ages led Rachael to consider aspects of a lifetime in a way that students often do in a more random fashion. In the piece of writing about her grandfather's death I felt that Rachael had found new insights into that event in the course of having had to shape the experience in writing. *My Grandfather* also draws attention to Rachael's interest in fundamental issues concerning human existence. The writing is a resting point along the way, from which to take bearings and as a foundation for further exploration.

My Grandfather

> From a very little girl old enough to appreciate another person I had a very close relationship with my grandfather. I spent a great deal of time by his

side. Grandpa as I sometimes called him was always prepared to listen and we always talked over problems together.

My grandfather had only one child, my mother, and I think my grandfather looked upon me as another child.

I was always said to be grandpa's little girl and I was always proud to be so.

Even when I got to the age of five and was to begin school my relationship with my grandfather changed very little. I was unable to spend as much time as I liked with him but I was not deprived of his love.

When I had difficulties at school with work or friends Grandpa always listened and helped to work things out and so I became quite dependent on him being there.

I always took heed of what Grandpa said hopefully making him proud. I was very proud of my grandfather and now that he is not here to talk to I realise how dependent I was upon him and how much I appreciated him.

My grandfather died in 1976 on the 1st March. I was eleven years old and still dependent on those around me. Grandpa, especially, as I looked to him as mother, father and guardian who knew all of my problems, was a substitute for others at any time I needed someone.

I remember very clearly the morning when my mother came into my bedroom which I assumed to be like any other day when mum woke me up for school, but it was not so. I remember mum saying that grandpa was dead but I didn't quite understand what she was saying. I had never thought about losing grandpa and found it impossible to believe that he was no longer there.

I was very emotional and suffered a lot of mental strain when grandpa died. Although I had a close relationship with everyone in my family grandpa was an exception. The person I looked up to with respect for he taught me respectability and I now discouraged myself not knowing what to do. I was very dependent upon my grandpa, he gave me security and love which helped to develop my skills and now I had only myself to rely upon because no one else could give me quite the same understanding.

As you can imagine I took very badly the death of my grandpa as I could still not believe that the grandpa I told my troubles to and looked to with pride was no longer there. I repeatedly asked where grandpa was and only finally believed he was dead when I went to the chapel of rest to see his body. I was asked by my mother if I would like to see him and although I was unsure about it I felt it was important to do so to satisfy my discouraged thoughts. It appeared to me perhaps a little morbid but as I looked upon my grandpa I felt the same

warmth and strength I had when I spoke to him. I now realised that he wasn't going to be there in person when I visited grandma but I knew he would always be there by my side advising me the direction to take.

After a while I appreciated the loss of my grandfather was for his best after all he had suffered for many years without me actually experiencing his suffering, but I had lost one of the most important things in my life but I did learn through his death my own independence and the true strength of love between two persons which before I had obviously taken for granted.

Perhaps one of the reasons why Rachael found, in retrospect, the writing about her grandparents 'most interesting' is that it made her aware of something that she had not previously articulated and had now become a part of her conscious knowledge. Writing was discovering. It was also self-revealing. It 'brought out ..... true emotional feelings' and 'pinpoints ..... [her] soft-hearted temperament.' Emotions, feelings, relationships in the family and her own growing independence; all these are a part of Rachael's writing in the Seven Ages project which builds a picture of herself.

Rachael begins her writing with a description of her relationship with her grandfather and keeps returning to this throughout the passage. She then describes the event, in her life, of his death and its effect upon her. Finally she summarises the main thing she feels she has learnt. The writing is circuitous, turns back on itself, is repetitive, but that is part of the work the writing is doing. The writing also brought back memories to her so suffused with emotion that, as she says in her conclusion, it was hard to continue writing. The memories are brought back in such a way that she relives the past in recreating it. The emotion lies not so much in her account of what happened but in her recollections and exploration of what it means to her.

The writing is personal and to be shared. It is an exploration, and it opens up for discussion issues that we continue to confront throughout our adult lives. Rachael considers her relationship with her grandfather and its very particular importance to her; she remembers and reflects upon the death of someone loved dearly; she recognises the death as a point of change in her own life, as the beginning of her own growth towards independence.

My Grandfather arouses strong emotions in those who read it. It is an emotional piece both in its content and the rhythm of its expression. Some people have felt a sense of outrage that such a thing should be allowed in school at all, feeling that it was an invasion of privacy or that such experiences and feelings have no place in school. Why does this piece of writing give rise to such strong reaction? Death is an emotive subject. This is also a very exposed piece; because Rachael is making discoveries as she writes, she is less able to disguise the rawness of the experience. She is not afraid of this kind of exposure. It is a trait of adolescent writing that those unused to it find disconcerting and even distasteful. Many writers of autobiography record their concern for 'the truth', honesty; such concern is evident in Rachael's conclusion. None of the experiences a sixteen year old writes about are very distant from them. The one that Rachael describes in *My Grandfather* still has its rough edges and, in fact, in the process of writing it Rachael is taking early steps in shaping the experience that will allow it to become an integral part of her self. There is an innocence about Rachael's account because it is her first and only experience of death.

Perhaps adult reaction to such writing reveals more about the nature of the reader's fears than the writer.

Rachael has not written from an abstracted viewpoint nor from self-indulgence. She has written about her experience of the death of someone close to her and what, as she reflects, that experience has taught her. What she has chosen to write is her own. It belongs to her and is a serious part of her.

It is a part of how she learns and what she chooses to learn; it is not confined to a file marked 'Personal'; it is integral to her development and to her whole growing understanding.

One year a student asked me if she could write a diary about her mother. I wasn't clear what she wanted to do, but gave her the exercise book she asked for. When I saw the writing it emerged that her mother had had a breakdown. The diary was her response to her mother and the breakdown, both before she discovered what was happening and during the time her mother was in hospital. Once written, the diary was read by a wide circle of the girl's contemporaries. I would not have suggested this and was tentative

when a student asked Sally if she could read the diary. Sally was willing and happy for people to read what she had written. Now it seems to me that maybe it was useful for her and others to be able to read and talk about something that is not often discussed openly and for Sally to be able to share her own reactions and to know the responding is responsibility.

> Facing their own silences, my students write of death, of hate, of love, of living, of loss. They put down words which reveal a mother plunging a knife into a father while a girl looks on; a student tells of a failure - to kill herself; another student carries her father in her arms, rocking him, trying to comfort him against the pain of cancer in the night.
>
> I tell them that they do not have to write of these things. I tell them they should not write of such matters if it bothers them. They tell me it feels good, and then look guilty. I tell them I know. It helps, somehow, to put words on paper. I tell them it gives me distance, in a way, it makes what cannot be believed, a fact. I tell them I cannot understand why it feels good to write of such terrible things, but I confess it does feel good, that it is my way of achieving a kind of sanity.
>
> *The Feel of Writing - and Teaching Writing* from *Learning by Teaching*, Donald M.Murray, Boynton/Cook, 1982

These things are a part of us. Affect our understandings; change the course of what we learn and how we learn it. In being able to accept the challenge of disturbance in whatever part of my life it occurs, I become stronger, I come to know myself a little more and to make a little more sense of the world in which I live.

Autobiography is sometimes difficult to write; we are not always ready to expose the more tender parts of our experience. If we write, we are willing to share, it may still be painful. The over-riding emotion that arises from writing autobiography is pleasure. Autobiography; my life; my story; my self. Affirmation; acceptance; celebration; realisation. The writing has its roots in the past, its meaning in the present.

Conclusion to *The Seven Ages of Man*

> Now I have completed this project I feel well satisfied with the results although due to lack of time I was unable to complete as much as I had hoped for.
>
> I had in my plans hoped to provide in each section at least three pieces

of writing but my lack of knowledge in some sections proved difficult,

I had a very enthusiastic approach to the first two sections Babyhood and Schoolboy due mainly to my interest in small children,

My first day at school was a very memorable occasion which like many memories was locked in the back of my mind recalled only by myself but I think there is a need to express childhood memories if you are wanting to convey the real self,

Lover was the stage which at first proved difficult as I have not yet indulged with a boy with whom I could say I love, but then I thought of my love for my sister and also her experience of love and so here I saw a piece of writing which conveyed more than one kind of love,

It was not an easy piece of writing to write as it contains a large amount of personal feeling but it proved very interesting especially to my mother the relationship between her two daughters,

Although our relationship together as youngsters was rather aggressive and cold due to lack of love our relationship is now much closer and although separated by many miles there is sisterly love between us which was never before conveyed between us as children,

Reaching the stages of soldier and middle age doomed my enthusiastic approach a little as although I had planned in my mind the writing of each stage I did not realise the amount of knowledge needed to fulfil my initial idea which was to place myself as a soldier another idea was to express the needs of a soldier but this too had its difficulties and so neither were completed,

The writing I did achieve though, about my father, I found very interesting and surprisingly just by intervening into this one stage of his life I felt considerably closer to him,

When I cam upon middle age I realised I knew nobody close to me who is middle aged and I did not really want to indulge into anyone else's lives that were not related to me,

What I really wanted to achieve was middle age the time in one's life when families begin to separate, Children leave home to get married and start their own lives leaving their parents at last free once again from any ties,

Curiously and with no other ideas I placed the question before my mum,

"Being middle aged is the time when children leave home and begin their independent lives, What were your feelings when Sue got married and left home?" Sue being my only sister,

At first she thought my question was rather funny because she said "Cheeky devil, I'm not middle aged,"

I explained to her my difficulties and as best she could she answered my questions thus providing my piece of writing for middle age,

The last two stages Old Age and Death were to me now as I look back my most interesting as I now realise the importance of an elderly person in one's relationship, especially my own,

Writing about my grandparents brought out my true emotional feelings for my family,

My grandfather especially in *Death* was a very interesting piece of writing to put down onto paper, I was always very close to my grandfather but until indulging into such writing I did not realise how dependent on each other we were and especially how much I appreciated my grandfather,

The writing about my grandfather's death did bring back memories to me and it was very hard to continue my writing, I was very conscious about putting my visit to the chapel of rest as I didn't wish anybody to say I was morbid but seeing this last glimpse of my grandfather meant such a lot to our relationship that I could not let him go without saying goodbye, I appreciate very much Jeni's words guiding my consciousness in the right direction,

My poem about my grandfather was a very enjoyable task of which I am very satisfied,

Although this last section is rather sad I feel that it conveys a lot about my own emotional feelings and the relationship brought about between relations,

I feel that this project pinpoints just in this last section my soft hearted temperament which can often be taken advantage of,

The whole collection builds a picture of myself, Although I may appear altogether soft hearted I do have a temper like everybody and my childish tactics are still alive in my maturing mind,

Like my family History into which I recently indulged in another piece of coursework I feel now much closer to my family around me and feel in many cases a stronger understanding of their relationship with me,

The writing is only a small part of Rachael's whole experience of *The Seven Ages of Man* project.

The idea of writing something that might be described as autobiography was present in Rachael's mind at the beginning of the fourth year - at least eighteen months before the writing was finally complete. Shakespeare's Seven Ages of Man had been introduced to Rachael in her final year at High School. The idea of constructing some idea of the nature of a man and his life from fragments of his

experience probably appeared late on in the fourth year, when Rachael wrote the story about the soldier.

These notions, combined with others, made their presence felt long before Rachael could see how they might be used. They were associated with a concern that runs throughout Rachael's work: the nature of being, of humankind.

The questions raised in *The Seven Ages of Man* are asked elsewhere in Rachael's thinking and writing. What is the nature of an individual's life as it is lived? How does it feel? What are my feelings? How can I fit this into a personal view?

The writing is a time for review and breath-taking in a journey that is unlikely to be completed. It is not the end of a process. It does draw together feelings, experiences, ideas, so that they can be viewed from outside. Almost as they are written they are overtaken by their writer. Looking at the writing nine months later, Rachael found it difficult to recognise the person she had been when she wrote it.

Rachael had time for reflection and speculation both conscious and dreaming, before writing and separate from the act of writing.

Rachael spent a lot of time talking to her parents directly about the content of what appears in the writing, about how she might solve certain problems which her task posed, and in ways which may have seemed related and unrelated to what she actually wrote. I have no idea what she talked of. The talking was at least equal in importance to the writing.

Rachael felt the talking changed relationships within her family; the talking and the writing changed understandings; not only for Rachael but for her mother also and perhaps for others.

Our awareness of students' activities and changing understanding is only a fragment of a much wider and diverse process than we can ever know of or need to know of.

The writing was part of the whole.

The writing was not easy. There were times when Rachael wished she hadn't started it. Away from the discussions and the sharing it was a solitary task. She told me later how much she had enjoyed it. She would go up to her room, close the door and begin. In searching round to try and convey something of the absorption, the pleasure and the commitment she felt, Rachael compared the writing to a hobby; it

was like, she said, taking up a piece of embroidery. I have a sense of her alone with her thoughts and her writing, drawn into it with that kind of exclusive concentration that fine embroidery demands; finding pleasure in it, despite its demands and difficulties.

The comparison gives me a great deal of pleasure.

In her conclusion Rachael draws attention to her consciousness of the act of writing itself and its influence upon her. Writing as a physical act. Writing which gives rise to emotion, changes perceptions, brings out, makes connections, as well as being used to try and convey something to another.

Gary

In *One for One*, Gary writes to give meaning to a personal experience, confronting also an area of human experience which Rachael tackles in writing about her grandfather's death. In a sense, Gary's writing is more public than Rachael's, because it seems that in the course of her writing Rachael's ideas emerge and become more defined whereas Gary already had his images and the main idea in mind when he began to write it. The events have been transformed by his imagination. And his writing is carefully, self-consciously, even, crafted.

One for One

It was cold outside as I approached the beckoning warmth of the back door, I was met by my mum and my brother both warmly wrapped against the ferocity of the wind outside,

My prospects of a warm night were shattered when I crossed the frontier of the door, "Uncle Des has died" those four words hit me suddenly and completely unexpectedly, Uncle Des who had only had a heart attack 4 - 6 months earlier, had just been to the doctor's a week or two previous and was reported to be recovering well,

This awful situation was made worse when I thought of his daughter who was meant to be having her baby round about that same night, It's funny isn't it when things like this happen,, the things that you say that usually come out wrong, "He could have lived a bit longer," I said, really meaning "Why did he have to go now?" "It's not his fault you know," retorted my sister,

I knew that, but didn't try to explain, It seemed a waste of time, The only thing I was concerned about was the baby I hoped he had seen, the little baby that he had been waiting so long for, the little baby that may not yet have been born,

Later that night my older sister Karen came over, It was then that I was to learn that the baby had been born an hour before my uncle's death, and that he had known about his granddaughter's birth,

I was going to go to the funeral but at the last moment I chickened out, afraid really of seeing a dead body, I was at home the day of the funeral, and as my mum had said I fetched in the washing once it started to rain,

Though, outside I was greeted by the sight of the year's first snow, which was settling fast and coming down like a blizzard, As I was unpegging the washing I didn't bother to repress my stinging watery eyes, I was quite touched

that nature and heaven should offer this tribute, well, that's how I'd like to think of it, to my uncle, who should have to die at this time. I don't think many people will be able to forget Uncle Des this Christmas, a Christmas that will be quite different to usual.

The little baby born on the same night of death will be one month old then. Our family have a birth for a death. One for One, as to say.

I wrote this in my diary at the time:

"..... a piece of writing which he wrote quickly and with concentration (not always present most of the time). He enjoyed writing this and feels he will write some form of longer autobiographical piece now. ..... His uncle died only last week and somehow the newness of the experience is evident in the clumsiness of the writing. Nevertheless the writing is important in the way it recreates the events of last week and puts them in a context which I feel Gary created before he began to write. I wonder if a suggestion of this kind had not been put to the group in a general way, whether Gary would have written about this. The writing reflects a common human need to order events - especially personal experiences of this kind - though I do not think on this occasion it is the act of writing which gave rise to the order particularly. The sleet mingling with Gary's watering eyes and the balance of the birth and the death seem to be already sought and found. The writing is more of a record and acknowledgement.

It is crafted with one main image in mind, 'One for One'; this title was the first thing Gary wrote at the head of the page.

He endows greater meaning to two family events, a birth and a death.

The personal, his own emotions and awkwardnesses.

A sense of pattern which relates to his own feelings and outward to a larger sense of order.

A story that helps to explain; eases
adjusts into his life.

Mark

Mark decided to start on his autobiography in the middle of December. It began with a piece that I had had to nag him to complete, though at the time I was unaware of its contents.

> When I first came to Countesthorpe College, I hated the place, the teachers, I hated coming to school and I was not prepared [to] give it a try, Well I went on thinking that for about a term trying to hate the place more than I did but as I found I began to like the place (slowly),
>
> I found that if I tried to help myself it became easier to work and to get on with making new friends, My work became better and I began to like the school, to like the teacher, and I liked coming in a bit more,
>
> So by the end of the fourth year I felt better about the school though I was still mad-headed,
>
> By the fifth year I was going to give the school a try, After spending the holiday talking about the college with Dave Marples I feel better than I had ever felt before, well I found it much better know[ing] what I was in for, Well now I like coming, I like all the teachers, I like the whole school, I feel I am part of the school for once though I am not totally at ease well not yet anyway,

I was surprised, when Mark showed me the writing, by his choice of subject and his unexpected honesty. I had suggested to the whole group a range of ideas for writing about themselves. The idea that Mark had taken up was 'change'. I couldn't have predicted that Mark would choose to write about his rather painful progress through the college; the suggestion was there, open-ended and rather tentative as usual. This is what he made of it. The same suggestions gave rise to *One for One.*.

It is an uncomfortable, uncertain piece of writing. The final sentence captures Mark's ambivalence. 'I feel I am part of the school for once though I am not totally at ease well not yet anyway.'

This writing gave rise to a long conversation between us and a spate of absorbed fairly uninterrupted writing. We talked about Mark's feelings about the College and then on to his childhood and his mother who is in a wheelchair and the difference that makes to her life and his. Much of what Mark talked about was not written down and initially I was conscious of a discrepancy between Mark's detailed and animated conversations and his rather brief written accounts. Mark

wrote at the end of his life story, "As you can see my life is pretty empty, maybe that's why when anything different like a holiday happens it's a big thing to me." Rachael wrote 'I think there is a need to express childhood memories if you are wanting to convey the real self.' Obviously such memories make up a large part of most adolescent autobiographies and students comment on how important they feel childhood to be as they look for the roots of their individuality. Contemplation of one's perhaps more stable, less transitory childhood has a long literary tradition. James Britton suggests it is through such writing some sense of order may grow in the writer's consideration of life as a whole.

Mark's autobiography was largely a celebration of good memories. Perhaps that was important to him as a positive foundation from which he might view himself, build up a picture of himself. The ordinary, smetimes rather unhappy fabric of his life is not something he wants to or is ready to write about, but like many others he has enjoyed reliving 'memories long forgotten'. In his account of the tree house, particularly, there is a sense of savouring the past, an attempt, as Gary says, to 'try and recreate a happy memory' and 'get it as good as it was'.

Mark had already written about the tree house in the fourth year and told me about it several times. He brought the short piece of earlier writing into school and reworked it in this episodic form which has something of a *Boy's Own* flavour about it.

The Treehouse

The tree house was built when we were in the last year of Cosby School, After looking for a place for it, it ended up in the back garden, nested in four sycamore trees, First we made a base from four dead tree trunks cut to size and tightly put in the "v" between the tree and branch, then lashed to stop any movement, The sides were made by nailing pieces of wood to the tree trunks, The roof was made the same way as the floor, So there was a roof, four sides and a floor, It took about ten weeks to build, good job the work was done by two of us Dave and I, Well a few years later an extension was added over nextdoor's garden, but this started a war up, next door the two girls did not like the extension,

About a year later we were asked by the people to pull it down, what could we do so down it came,

The gang changed names about once a week. We had night operations attacking an old farmhouse. Dave's two older brothers had guard of the farm we had to get in. A basic rule was every man for himself. We all had maps of the farm. Funny why we only got in once over the wall from the back as Dave was at the front.

We spent time after school and Saturdays do raids on places till we were about 11 when the treehouse came back into use as a den and the extension was added. A wood floor plastic sides and roof for speed.

One Sunday when I was at Dave's house in "B.A." he had some old carpets for the treehouse. Well their radio could get radio Delhi so as a joke we walked to Cosby, carpets rolled up on our heads with radio Delhi sound playing. It was so funny looks we got from passing cars.

One Christmas John, another friend, went out carol singing round the estate, well we made £2.00 and spent it all on candy and ate it all in the treehouse. I still feel sick when I think about it.

The 1978 war was the next highlight. The next door had two girls about six and eight and they kept trying to break up the treehouse. It all happened when we made the extension over their garden.

War

The war started because the treehouse was extended over the next door's garden. The two girls there about 6 and 8 years old started a war with us.

The war went on for two years attacking each other. Them trying to get up in the treehouse, us trying to stop them with anything like dropping down things like apples, pears, batteries and water.

Man Trap

A man trap was made to stop anyone from getting over the fence by jumping from their coal shed to our compost heap and up the rope ladder into the tree house. So a four foot deep three feet wide hole was dug into the compost heap, then covered with twigs and grass so you could not see it. After that a branch was tied back like a "Jap" man trap so if you got past the hole you got hit by the branch. As we sat in the treehouse we could see down into next door's garage and saw a lot of beer bottles on the floor. No one was around so down we went on a rope. We went down and round to the front and just our luck empty but there was about six bottles of fruit juice though so we came out with the fruit juices up into the tree house where we drank them. Then we put the empty bottles back.

The final end

The tree house had been down for about a year but some bits were still up, So Gary and Peter Gillot had offered to help me take them down, So with two axes we started to take bits down, It was not long before Pete fell down, After a bit he felt OK and carried on helping, By now we were at the ropes, Gary took the axe behind his head to chop a piece of rope and hit Pete on the head, Just was not his day,

I found that I was easily dismissive of Mark's work, but Mark enjoyed writing his autobiography and was pleased with it when he had finished. When I looked more closely at what he had written I saw that it had much to recommend it, despite its limitations. It is easy to make too much of what he wrote but not in terms of its importance to him and the difference it made to his view of himself. It is easier to dismiss it for its lack of fluency, poor spelling and bad handwriting.

The Treehouse reminds me of the fragmentary nature of memory; the events of several years are evoked by a series of jokes, moments, isolated incidents. Mark picked out 'highlights' and a good thing too, autobiographical writing can be terribly dull! The second section picks out two incidents which Mark remembers vividly; the carpet joke and the carol singing blow-out. They are moments that Mark feels he can recreate, now, for himself. They remain so vivid that even now he feels sick when he thinks of those sweets; his account of the walk from 'B.A.' ends with 'It was so funny the looks we got from the passing cars', it is as if he can still savour the excellence of the joke.

There is something pleasurable about reliving moments in one's past, especially good ones. Already, the childhood events Mark tries to recreate have a particular feeling about them and a completeness which separates them from the confusions and uncertainties of the present. *The Final End* is perhaps the 'final end' of something more than the treehouse itself. It signals an end to all those adventures which had the treehouse as their focus. In Mark's autobiography the treehouse becomes an image of his childhood. The title of this last section, with its double finality rings a death knell to those times. Most of the treehouse had been dismantled but 'some bits were still up'. It seems hardly worth the trouble of describing how these came

down, but it is the logical conclusion to the history of the tree house. Nothing of it remains amongst the trees to remind Mark of those days. Now Mark's writing is our only reminder. As in the rest of the narrative the meat of this section concerns what happened to the people in relation to the house. On this occasion it is Pete's two accidents. The 'final end' of the treehouse is tragi-comic. Mark's concluding remark, 'Just was not his day', makes me think it was no one's day, really. It was the end of the treehouse.

I particularly like the last three sections of this story: *War, Mantrap* and *The Final End.* The incidents that Mark relates have a familiarity about them. The success of the mantrap was entirely in its conception and creation. It remains forever sprung ready in our imaginations waiting for that unwary invader to leap from the coalhouse to the compost heap! It reminds me not only of the intensity of the moments but also the vivid possibilities of the imagination. Such writing reminds us of our own childhoods. This is another pleasure of such writing. It is often passed amongst friends to be read. The remembering jogs other people's memories and the sharing brings more anecdotes.

As Mark says, 'I have enjoyed doing this project mainly because it brought back memories I have long forgotten.'

Tracey

Whilst writing about childhood is often a beginning, students' concerns may lie elsewhere or their childhoods may demand to be treated in some other way than a series of recreated memories. Tracey wrote only one piece of autobiography with, it seemed, a sense of urgency to get the words on paper, and of great satisfaction when it was completed.

Tracey wrote this piece about her mum after I had read Adrian Mitchell's description of his parents from the anthology, *Worlds*, published by Penguin. Both his parents were dead when he wrote about them so his writing is retrospective; it has a completeness and considered quality that I wouldn't necessarily expect from an adolescent writing about the same subject. His writing conveys his love and appreciation of his parents and the significance of their influence upon the person he is now. Tracey was very excited by his writing and very keen to begin writing herself. She was insistent that she wanted to write something very similar, looking back on the past, rather than taking up any of the suggestions I had made for writing.

My mum

My mum was seventeen when she married, innocent and naive, she was eighteen when I was born, my dad was at the local pub, My mum was weak she had a haemorrhage, my dad was still in the pub, When she brought me home there was housework to be done, My father had done nothing, I got older I was one and a half when my sister was born, My nana looked after me while my mum was in hospital, Where my dad was I do not know, I only know he was not with my mum, My sister's birth was not as complicated as mine was, My mother brought us up and kept the house clean, When I was two and my sister was barely six months my mother found a job by this time my father had not been coming home at night and when he did come home he was drunk, He used to rip the chairs practically apart to look for money which might have fallen down the sides of the chairs so he could buy fags or beer or whatever he swallowed, Eleven months after my sister was born my mum gave birth to my brother, she was in labour eighteen hours, my father was not there, my mum had to have an operation, my brother was born with a bad eye, he was to return to hospital a month after he had left, My brother grew into a handsome little lad with a mass of blonde curls, my mum did not have any more children for three and a half years, how she managed to look after us and

keep us clean I shall never know. By now I was three years old. I could look after myself a bit more, so it gave my mum time to look after my brother and sister. My mum and dad were back together again the years passed by, three years later my mum had her last baby. She had another difficult birth but she survived again, this time the doctor told my mother she could have no more children, she was sterilised shortly after my sister was brought into the world. We were taught to fend for ourselves as much as we could by our father but we all got things pretty easy by our mother. She probably didn't want us to go through what she had been through. My mum had never been able to talk to her mum about personal matters so she had to learn the hard way, her father was a hard man but then so was mine. When my sister was two years old my dad walked out, I've not seen my dad since and I have no wish to either. My mum is now happily married again to a man I think the world of he cares for us and keeps us and I never once hear them moaning about, my stepfather has adopted my little sister because he has known her since she was more or less a baby and he treats her like his own, not that he doesn't any of us as well cause he does but my little sister never knew her real father, they still have their worries but on the whole we're very happy.

Tracey's writing about her mother and her own past gives me a sense of family folklore. Since it concerns her mother and her estranged father it is about a part of the past which is in some sense over. The rhythm and phrasing and the wisdom of the writing derive from Tracey's family and culture. With economy and a sense of the dramatic, Tracey has described six or seven years of her mother's married life. The story's fluency and pace hold the reader's attention. She deals well with the passage of time, incorporating it into the progress of the narrative by marking passing years with a record of new births and Tracey growing older. These references to herself remind us that this is the background of Tracey's childhood and so of particular significance to her view of herself. The bulk of the writing is devoted to a past that cannot now be changed. In writing this Tracey seems to have imposed an order upon her experience which is part of her own coming to terms with the experience.

Tracey's choice of what to include in this narrative and her choice of details and elaboration convey a particular view of her mum and dad. The sequence of events is stated with a boldness which forestalls any equivocation; one which suggests the writer's absolute

commitment to her point of view. Tracey may well question and perhaps modify her views later but at the time of writing they were a fixed point in her view of herself and her family. Ted Hughes talks of the myths we create in story writing as those we need; that they have a healing quality. The same might be true of writing such as Tracey's.

> You think of one myth rather than another because that myth is the one that belongs to you at that moment.
>
> Ted Hughes, *Myth and Education* in *Children's Literature in Education*, Ward Lock Educational, 1970

Tracey begins by describing her mother at the time of her marriage as 'innocent and naive'. She then tells of the consequences of that naivety but also how she 'learnt the hard way'. Tracey reflects on how this history relates to her and speculates a little about family influences and their consequences.

When Tracey writes about the present her tone is far less assured. Sentences are longer, statements are qualified by 'but', 'on the whole', 'not that he doesn't any of us as well'. The present is far more difficult to write about in a tidy way. Strands are left untied. There are uncertainties and complexities about the immediate present which can be eliminated from one's view of the past. Although events do not change, one's view of them may do so. Calling upon the imagination and language a writer may change outward events to articulate a particular truth. It allows us to present ideas and perceptions in a way that relates to present understandings, to our sense of how past events relate to the people we are now, and to the particular image we might want to portray.

Many students were conscious of the significance of *writing down* their memories, emotions, experiences. Rachael described her Seven Ages as 'a very interesting piece of writing to put down on paper'. Kate wrote, at the end of her autobiography:

> I have enjoyed writing this autobiography because it has helped me to understand why I am the sort of person I am. Some parts of it I wrote made me feel a bit depressed to see it down on paper but to omit them would have been like telling an untrue story.

Seeing it 'down on paper' can change how the writer sees what she has written. Although Kate did not expose her new understanding of herself to the public gaze in her autobiography, the writing did give her new insights into her life and her nature. She was ready to begin to face some parts of her life history.

In his introduction to a collection of writing called *Memories*, Gary wrote:

> The trouble with memories is that they must remain so. They are one of the most personal things you have. They are always touched by your imagination to make them that much more than they were. And therefore if you go back to recreate a happy memory you can never seem to get it as good as it was. The same goes for writing down memories. However hard you try you can never get down on paper just what is in your mind.

Although we have memories they belong to the past and it is impossible to reconstitute them just as they were experienced. We remember something as being good but cannot piece together the fragments that made it so. It is their intangible, elusive quality that so frustrates Gary. Memories are valued partly because of the part they play in our pasts, our sense of self. Memories, which take up a great deal of autobiographical writing are part of our inner lives. Things that have happened have been felt quite uniquely; they are part of individuality; in sharing them, they are also an expression of a shared humanity.

Things that have happened in the past remain there. I cannot relive exactly an experience. When it happened it was part of the ever changing, arbitrary flow of its present. Now the experience has changed in becoming a memory.

> Memory shapes experience into a distinct mode ... Past experience, as we remember it, takes on form and character, shows us persons in stead of vague presences and their utterances, and modifies our impression by knowledge of things that come after, things that changed one's spontaneous evaluation. Memory is the great organiser of consciousness. It simplifies and composes our perceptions into units of personal knowledge. It is the real maker of history - not recorded history, but the *sense of history* itself, the recognition of *the past* as a completely established (though not completely known) fabric of events,

continuous in space and time, and causally connected throughout,

Susan Langer, *Feeling and Form*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1953

Gary wanted to recreate experiences as they were. What he remembers has been distorted, edited, elaborated upon. In remembering we do experience again, though the experience cannot be the same as it was before. We can relive.

We can fix the past, separate from us now, so that we can reflect upon it; with hindsight; from the person we are now.

Writing helps us to reflect and makes it difficult. The words I have at my disposal overwhelm what I am searching to say; distort what I tried to mean.

Gary felt frustrated by the discrepancy between what he had in his mind (and that itself he felt to be inadequate) and his powers to translate that on to paper. Such is the task of the writer; the task that these students saw for themselves. Not all wished, as Gary did, to recreate events exactly, but all seemed concerned to convey the truth of what they had to say; 'a true picture', 'as I really am', 'as it really happened', 'my true self', 'just what is in your mind'; they were all concerned to put it down on paper.

When I first began writing about autobiography I was very conscious of it as a literary form which a writer may use. I feel now that my emphasis began with form to which the writer brought content. Now I feel that form rises from the experience. It is important for the writer to be able to listen to and then express his own self; at least the part of the self the writer is willing to declare.

As I reread these students' writing, it does seem that form relates to experience written. Looser, less structured pieces are nearer to unfolding thought.

Once the writing is consciously for an audience the nature of what is written changes. The writer may choose words, impose shape upon the material to give a changed meaning not necessarily any less worthwhile or less truthful, but different. An awareness of audience perhaps makes a writer more aware of the possibility of sharing experience with others and the potential commonality of the experience.

Students were concerned with writing down the truth, 'as it really was', but those truths change. Autobiography, particularly written at fifteen, is not finite. We need to be able to pause a moment, stem the flow, in order to take breath. It is a chance for reflection before moving on. The truth of an autobiography is the truth understood by the writer at the time of writing. Perhaps the word which better describes what students sought is not truth but integrity.

I am struck, reading through my writing about autobiography, how defensive I have been. Other people's reactions to students' writing contribute to my defensiveness: people saying - it is not within the realm of a school teacher to encourage this kind of writing; personal reflection is outside the school's brief,

it is too private, too sensational,

self-indulgent, not real work;

or praising the writing because it was *so* honest, *so* self-revelatory, welcoming it as a panacea to all kinds of personal, social, psychological problems.

I need to remember that what the reader might find shocking or pitiful is a part of another's life.

I need to reflect upon my own response to personal writing and what it tells me about myself. Students can detect a desire for sensation or pity and can respond by providing it in the writing; or by not writing anything that is important to them; or by writing nothing.

Personal writing is a serious and legitimate pursuit in school and should hold equal weight with any other work a student does.

It is not separate from but integral to an individual's learning. It is not appropriate for every student at any given time.

I now see autobiography, life story, personal writing as essential to our education; I see it in broader terms than the literary form of autobiography which I offered to students in the fifth year.

There are three main strands to my present understanding of auto-biography. They are intertwined.

life story: events, people, feelings, places, times,

coincidences, that combine to make us each the person we are.

personal concerns (I use that phrase for want of a better, to describe an idea which I have had since before I began this thesis)

those things which preoccupy us from moment to moment and throughout our lives as important to us as individuals and which provide the impetus and energy for what we learn or want to learn and the ways in which we set about learning.

personal writing writing which helps us to get in touch with ourselves, helps us to know ourselves, formulate ideas, wrestle with problems, expurgate or welcome emotions;

writing that is essentially of the self, for the self, and concerns the intellect, the emotions, the spirit.

26.1.87 "It is the divine side of man, his inward action, which means everything, not a mass of information; for that will certainly follow and then all that knowledge will not be a chance assemblage, or a succession of detail without system and without a focussing point." Kierkegaard.

From self-knowledge I move outwards towards greater understanding and in moving outwards we may come to move inwards again towards further understanding of ourselves. A formal autobiography is one way of coming to a greater knowledge and understanding of ourselves and of ideas and situations which are not ours alone.

Personal writing in school is sometimes criticised. Yet, now, there are 'life skills' lessons on the timetable where students can tick boxes or fill in questionnaires in the hope of greater personal understanding. As if it is separate.

I am concerned that it does not seem entirely acceptable to consider education of the emotions, let alone the spirit. What is it to educate the 'whole child'? I do not believe the emotions to be separate from the intellect.

I feel cautious about those who leap upon personal writing as the answer to children's problems, especially those considered less able. It is important, not as a solution to problems, but as a part of every

person's spiritual and intellectual growth whatever their age or potential. Autobiography may only be appropriate to a proportion of people. Personal writing can be important for us all.

This kind of writing is very close to its writers; it needs to be seen as part of a person's whole experience; an important part of the whole.

I think it is important for me, the teacher, to accept it, however it is, and to respond in humility; be aware, also, that even if a child writes things we might find shocking or pitiful, that in itself is not useful unless it is written for the writer rather than for the sensation.

Given the opportunity this kind of writing is not exceptional.

I keep returning to the idea that from our lives come the ideas that are important for us, the questions that we will pursue, the skills we will seek to learn. From knowledge of ourselves we can move outwards.

We do not have to sit at our desks constantly trawling our inner depths;

> by reading and action in areas quite outside ourselves we come to understand more about ourselves
> and in looking inward we may come to an understanding of ideas beyond our obvious experience.

12

Rachael

Rachael began her fourth year with some work on Downe's Syndrome. Later she went weekly to work in a local pre-school playgroup for children with severe mental and physical disabilities. She attended the playgroup regularly and in the summer holidays spent a week at the seaside with some of the children.

Rachael didn't really want to stop going to the Menphys playgroup, but decided that the pressures of her timetable and exams made it impossible to continue visiting regularly in her fifth year. Perhaps partly because of a reluctance to end her association with the playgroup, it took her a while to write this conclusion to her diary.

> I feel that my achievements during my visits to Menphys have been very rewarding. They have given me a thorough understanding of the love and affection needed so much by these children and I have in myself developed that source of control upon a mental or physically handicapped child.
>
> I openly admit that when the suggestion was made that I should work at Menphys I shuddered away the thought. Althought it was an achievement I very much wanted to fulfil.
>
> I have, like persons of my age, begun at the bottom for the children at Menphys are minutely abnormal and the upset of further abnormalities with older children or adults could change my views entirely.
>
> I have during this time learnt so much from the children which I have noted in my diary events but I have also learnt things unknown about myself.
>
> Seeing young children mental or physically handicapped as a child was not distressing. It was more of a fascination and I thought like blacks separated from whites they were just another race.
>
> It wasn't until I began to work at Menphys that I started to understand what Mental and Physical Handicap really meant.
>
> These handicaps are very depressing but in this depression I found a lot more. I found a deep secure love.
>
> To me a mental and physical handicap means more than helplessness insecurity or DIFFERENT as is the word so often used to separate these children from normal human beings.
>
> The main thing I have learnt to understand is the opposite of this word

DIFFERENT. These children are to me inseparable from human beings known as normal. They may be physically different or even minutely mentally abnormal but they are still living human beings and this small difference should not be used to separate one community from another.

Altogether I found more love and affection from these children and I found no difficulty in fitting into their environment.

The main thing I have achieved is the total security of living in this world. This may seem strange and to put such a thing into words is very difficult but this explanation I will try to express. These children to me have proved to be in no way alone in the world. The ease of control upon them was apparent from the beginning to the end of the term I spent with them.

The world too is in their situation. It is proposed to be an uncontrollable, insecure place but it is fighting its way to freedom and survival and this situation was where I saw the reflection of these children. All the time they are fighting to survive and with our help could prove this. I have found the help I can give them and that is love, trust, strength and security. I have faced them and have found no difference. This is how everyone should see these children.

For this achievement I thank everyone at Menphys both for the joy I have had and for the educational facts.

Rachael

This is what I wrote in my diary after I had first read Rachael's conclusion:

2.6.80 I also read today Rachael's diary of her holiday with the Menphys children and her conclusion to five monthes spent going to the Menphys centre on Friday mornings..... I am struck by its openness and honesty. I knew that Rachael was nervous about going to Menphys but had asked to go and I could have had no idea that she had 'shuddered away the thought'. I want to discuss Rachael's last ideas about the world; 'The world, too, is in their situation ....' I think I understand what she means but want to discuss that with her more.

3.9.80 I spoke to Rachael briefly today about this comparison. She said it simply seemed to her that the handicapped children and their struggle was similar to the whole world situation which she feels is a struggle for survival - more than our own situation is.

And this is Stephen Rowland's comment:

Very interesting comparison which fits in with her general feeling that she has

learnt not just about such handicapped children, but about herself and ourselves. That her experiences was as a mirror to her wider experience - a kind of paradigm for a "learning situation".

My first reaction to reading this conclusion was emotional. I still find I am moved when I read it, but I didn't record that response in my diary and find it difficult to say now.

And yet things like this make me feel glad and a sense of wonder; just having said that makes me feel how treacherous it is to try and put this into words.

The conclusion is a highly charged piece of writing; strongly personal. I find it moving because of the sense it gives of struggle, of the confrontation of difficulties and fears, of change in understanding and an attempt to explore that. When I first read the conclusion I was glad about it. I also felt ashamed of my own unawareness of these strands of Rachael's thought. I took the piece of writing to the first meeting of the Leicestershire Consultative Group and presented it for discussion to a group of teachers there. I used the piece again at a day conference. In both cases the group of teachers were from primary and secondary schools, in the second there were some from Higher Education. On both occasions reactions surprised me.

People found it too emotional, particularly primary teachers. It was charged with being sentimental, overblown. Teachers involved with fourth and fifth year students accepted its tone as quite typical of adolescence and recognised something they felt to be important; but there were also the charges:

- that this must be an exceptional student. I suppose she was, but only in the sense that she was Rachael and not Gary or Andrew or Carol.
- that I had told her what to write. I find this astounding. I couldn't imagine telling a person to write that conclusion. Certainly what was written came as a great surprise to me.

What had I done?

The main things I remember are:

- nagging her from June onwards to write the conclusion, but not making her.
- jotting down, or saying, a list of things she could include

like what she had learnt about the childrn, herself, perhaps, best and worst things, what she might do in future in relation to this work, what she enjoyed, found difficult. I don't know precisely what I did do but it would have been along these lines.

- waiting for her to rewrite her holiday diary with the addition of photographs before she felt ready to write the conclusion.
- allowing her the option to continue going to the playgroup.

I have felt angry when people cannot accept this as Rachael's own work. it seems obvious to me that it can only be hers. I want to say to people, look, this is possible, this is important for children, we should create the conditions that allow them to work and think in this way.

I was taken aback by Rachael's conclusion because I had not been aware of the preoccupations it reveals. I had concentrated on the two boys whom she felt were not given sufficient attention. Most of our talk each week was about these two children and the kind of things she might do with them to stimulate them and arouse them. When I looked back through her diary I realised that the question of what 'handicap' might mean runs throughout her diary entries.

In May 1981 I worked back through Rachael's diary tracing the themes raised in her conclusion. This is a part of what I wrote:

May 1981

Amongst a wide range of activities open to each student in team time at Countesthorpe is the chance to work in another group within the local community. Not every student is interested enough to do so but many find the work attractive. There are opportunities to help in local playgroups, at Evergreen Clubs, in a sheltered workshop, in schools and so on. Some students, like Rachael, arrive at the College knowing that they would like some experience of this kind, others are infected by the enthusiasm of fellow students and some feel it would develop their understanding - either giving depth to something in which they are already interested or providing a previously neglected dimension to their learning, some are just curious. As with anything else such a step and choice of placement arises out of discussion between student and tutor. Rachael initially thought that she would like to work in a primary school - simply for the experience it would offer her. However she had already started some work on mental handicap and became interested in the idea of working amongst mentally handicapped children. I felt that a placement at the Menphys playgroup would

kill two birds with one stone - both the experience outside school and the opportunity to gain first-hand information about handicap. The playgroup is a good one and has proved a satisfying and thought provoking placement for many students. It is also a demanding one, some students find their first encounters with the handicaps of those preschool children very upsetting, and at the same time it is not the kind of place where you can sit on the sidelines, there is so much to do.

Rachael agreed to go to the Menphys centre, really, as she told me recently, to see what it was like. She was to spend one morning a week there and set off with no grand plan of what she might learn there. We discussed various ways of working and things to do but such discussion is not particularly useful until the student has some idea of what her placement is like. We did agree that she would probably monitor the progress of two or three of the children with whom she worked. This idea is present in her first entry to the diary she kept. Although the idea of keeping a record of one or two children remains to some extent, her diary reveals a far wider range of preoccupations than either of us guessed at when she embarked on her visits.

In her written reflection upon her work in the fourth and fifth year, Rachael has this to say about the work she did at the Menphys centre:

> Although I have always been interested in teaching, I was now influenced into a new area and, as a course of voluntary work, attended Menphys, a day centre for children 6 months to 5 years with mental or physical abnormalities which resulted in my Menphys Diary. My help was obviously appreciated when I was asked to attend a holiday at Sutton-on-sea. I found that I had achieved a great thing in life by just communicating with these children who appreciated my being there and who depended upon me as a mother. My interest with these children was helped as we fought together as a team.
>
> I place no reward upon myself for I have experienced and learnt that one does not alone cure an abnormality but together one receives the secure affection of another human being, and although there may seem no apparent change I who have worked closely have noticed a great deal.

This brief reflection identifies Rachael's central concerns arising from her involvement with young handicapped children; concerns which shape her thinking and arise consistently, often persistently, throughout her diary. Rachael took the opportunity offered her to go to the Menphys centre with particular interests in mind. She had always been interested in teaching and

recent reading and research about mental handicap had made her feel that first hand experience of such handicaps would give her a greater understanding than she couold acquire from books and papers alone. So Rachael was predisposed to attend and benefit from the experience; but I could not have predicted how Rachael might specifically use this experience, or which of the multitude of possibilities offered by such an experience she would seize upon and exploit for her own purposes.

In the second paragraph of this reflection Rachael identifies what was the focus of her thinking from her very first visit and which culminates in a statement of beliefs about normality and abnormality in the conclusion to the diary:

> ... I have experienced and learnt that one does not alone cure an abnormality but together one receives the secure affection of another human being and although there may seem no apparent change I who have worked closely have noticed a great deal.

Rachael's conclusion to the diary is the culmination of weeks of thought on fundamental issues rooted in practical experience. She is able to write with conviction, and with the authority of experience, about what she has learnt about the nature of being human and what she understands about being a handicapped child. She outlines what she has learnt, the nature of that experience and then makes a statement of her beliefs about handicapped children. Rachael refers to the personal rewards and achievements of her experience and makes it clear that she considers that it is from the children that her new understanding has come. Like many people of her age, she regards personal achievements and increased self knowledge as important as any other aspect of learning, but in her conclusion Rachael lays her emphasis upon her changed view of things, whilst accepting that that view could be modified once more with further experience.

Rachael describes something of the nature of the change her views have undergone, identifying her work at Menphys as the beginning of her new understanding. She describes the view she held before her visits as something belonging to childhood, when the handicapped were a curiosity seen as separate, "another race". Now she is able to say;

> The main thing I have learnt to understand is the opposite of this word DIFFERENT. These children are to me inseparable from human beings that are known as normal. They may be physically different or even minutely mentally abnormal but they are still living human beings and these small differences should not be used to separate one community from

another.

Her diary reflects the growth of understanding, the details which she could return to to support her thesis of the essential humanity of the children she worked with. Each individual observation returns always to the central questions, and Rachael's preoccupations. Each piece of evidence contributes to Rachael's reconstruction of knowledge. She challenges those who describe the children as "DIFFERENT" and who use this to separate their community from the community of "human beings that are known as normal". She calls into quesion our conception of humanity and what is understood by normal and abnormal. Rachael found much to depress her at Menphys and did not close her eyes to the problems which the children face but she found so much more. She was accepted into a world, generous in its love and affection.

Rachael then moves on to look beyond the children themselves. She says that the children are "in no way alone in the world". She compares the children's situation to that of the world, and, discussing this with me later suggested that the handicapped child's struggle for survival had much in common with the world itself, "fighting its way to freedom and survival". They have more in common with the world as a whole than perhaps you or I have. Here Rachael's conclusion reflects the nature of her experience in which she has looked inward and learnt "things uunknown" about herself, looked closely and discovered a great deal about handicapped children, and looked outward and has been able to reflect upon the nature of humanity and the world itself.

I have seen quite a lot written about the worth of 'community involvement' for secondary school children. Very often it is an option for the 'less able' or an option timetabled alongside PE. I have read strong justifications for community involvement programmes and have felt not only did they 'protest too much' but they also fell short somehow of what might be possible.

It was possible at Countesthorpe for work in the community to be an essential strand in a student's intellectual and emotional growth.

Rachael's work at Menphys wasn't peripheral but central to her development - academic, social, personal. It allowed her to take herself seriously, and be accepted seriously by adult workers, as a proper contributor to necessary work. It became a part of her view of herself as emerging into adulthood.

In going out to learn about something outside herself she learnt about herself. Whenever I asked students who were working in the

community what they thought they had learnt, their first response was "about myself". That self knowledge is a valid and necessary part of intellectual growth.

Self knowledge often seems to arise out of close scrutiny or interaction with events/ideas outside myself and in knowing myself I come to form an understanding of things outside myself and to form ideas about what is important for me to know, to learn, at that moment.

13

Gary

Gary's work on children's imagination began, in some ways, by chance. The college had a full-time crèche for the children of adults attending daytime classes. Students from the college helped at every session. Most of the students involved in the crèche tended to be girls and I was keen for boys to work there too. I had sown the seeds of the idea amongst my group. In the fourth year two boys went to the crèche regularly for about a term and when they decided they wanted a change, two places fell vacant. Jacqui had long wanted to help at the crèche but didn't want to go alone so I suggested the idea to Gary who was already friendly with Jacqui and who seemed quite interested in children. He had some reservations about doing so but eventually agreed and returned from his first visit to the crèche in great excitement. Before the two students had first visited the crèche I had talked to them about what they might do and what might arise from their time there. I suggested a diary was important but also that other students had found a particular focus of interest - a child study, perhaps, drawing and painting, play with sand, water and dough, children's books and stories, children's talk. Gary was full of enthusiasm fr the children in the crèche. He had decided he wanted to study children's imagination.

First impressions

To tell the truth I didn't think I would enjoy helping out in the crèche when I saw these horrible little children running, screaming and generally making a nuisance of themselves. My feelings were not the ones I'd expected myself to experience, in my mind's eye I had pictured myself as a father figure type of friend who they could turn to. My feelings were not particularly enlightened when I was nearly run over by 'James Hunt' riding a farm tractor.

At first a little boy called Gary (skill name) came up to me and asked me my name. I answered him but found myself talking down to him. He seemed to talk very well and soon put me at ease. He liked to play games such as football and tick and at first didn't seem very inventive. After a little while, though, I found myself talking to the kids at their level, and they weren't just little babies screaming all the time, they became real people, with whom I could

associate with,

In play they came up with various games and their imagination was fantastic. They could transform anything at all into just what they wanted, a stick would become a snake, then a fire hose, an axe, anything at all.

The particular theme that I played upon was one of a fire. The little Wendy house in the crèche was suddenly ablaze with people trapped inside. As a group they played well but did not seem to take notice of what the others were doing. They were in their own worlds and could not make up their minds as to what they wanted to be. I think jealousy was partly responsible for this because everyone seemed to want to be what everyone else was. Then when they'd changed, after about five minutes they'd want to change again.

One of the reasons I liked students to work in the community was the way it placed them in a real situation in which they were responsible for themselves and others. They were not practising. They were acknowledged as young adults. They were faced with situations in which they must act and also deal with the consequences of their actions. I found it to be one of the times when the interplay of growing self knowledge and the exploration of the world outside the self is most striking.

In Gary's 'First Impressions' is the sense of his changing feelings and perceptions, involvement, enjoyment, delight, tentative explorations; and, what is not evident in the writing, dozens of questions about young children and about imagination.

Quite often students had misgivings before they began community work. It was a challenge.

The reality changed their ideas about themselves and about the people whom they encountered.

It changed their behaviour, or how they thought they were going to behave.

The reversal of Gary's expectations challenged some of the assumptions he had made; he was able to let himself see small children from a different viewpoint from the one he thought he would assume.

Once Gary decided to pursue his ideas about children's imagination he became thoroughly involved with the children at the crèche and loved playing with them and being part of their games. His own imaginative life and his love of drama were a contributiong factor

to his interest, his enjoyment and his way of working with the children.

Gary decided he wanted to see how imagination, or imaginative play, might change as children grew older. I agreed he should have a chance to work in a variety of schools. In the summer term he went to an infant school in the village where he lived but he only made three visits before he contracted glandular fever and was away from school.

In the Autumn Term I arranged for Gary to work in a primary school. I had wanted him to go to a more open school but the combination of Gary's full timetable and the requirements of schools made it impossible. He was given a group of four children from a class of 10-11 year-olds. He was given some work to do with them on his first visit, but put in a room separate from the rest of the class. Gary enjoyed the afternoon and although he claimed not to enjoy writing about what happened, wrote extensively. He was left in the library on his first visit, to await his group.

> Four kids came into the classroom, a little uncertain, but putting on a brave face. These were closely followed by Mr. S who gave me some sheets of paper and asked me to do some poems on police with them. 'Sure,' I said, not very sure at all but not wanting to start off badly on the very first week. When Mr. S had made his exit I breathed a sigh of relief and introduced myself to the kids. Their names were Tracey, Amanda, Steven and, wait for it, Gary. This reminded me of my first few weeks in the crèche when there was a little kid called Gary there. Let's stop this reminiscing and get back to this week.
>
> I asked them what they had done so far for the Police Relations week ....
>
> .... After talking about the police for a while I asked them to write a poem on the subject. Mr. S's idea was not greeted with a great deal of enthusiasm, and they moaned for about five minutes until I told them that Mr. S would see the poems at the end of the afternoon. It was quite clear that they didn't treat me as a teacher or anything like that, but more as someone who gains authority through Mr. S.
>
> The poems they wrote made it quite clear to me that their authors were not enjoying this idea at all. All of the poems run along the same line. Policeman on his beat - sees robber - catches him. Gary was the only person to take the idea any further, he took his criminal to court and had him put on probation....
>
> It was quite obvious that the idea had not taken off, and when I said we

would leave the poems for a while there wasn't exactly a lot of opposition.

Gary then went on to talk to the group; they began by talking about brothers and sisters since one of the girls had a sister in Gary's class but then Gary steered the conversation on to TV and then to books and films. All these are great interests of Gary's. He was disappointed that they didn't enjoy books, and that films held little interest. It became quite a joke between us that Gary was quite authoritarian and prescriptive about what he wanted the group to do although he would soon have challenged me had I approached him in that way. However he very firmly stood his ground. Sometimes he was looking for particular things, at others, I think, he simply had a very clear picture of what might happen and somehow forgot individuality along the way!

Gary usually talked with me both before and after each visit. Very often I was quite critical but, although Gary took notice of what I had to say he didn't feel constrained to act on it.

Gary's visits to this group demanded a constant assessment and readjustment of his thoughts and expectations. His ideas could easily be tipped upsidedown by the response of the group. It happened throughout his work on children's imagination. Contact with children found out the weaknesses in a structure of ideas, substantiated tentative inquiry, challenged assumptions. He seemed to be always struggling with ideas; about children, imagination, writing, teaching, himself; I have a picture of constant movement; instability, realignment, change.

24.11.80

I took Gary to Glenhills and discussed before he went and on the way what he was going to do. An hour and a half is a long time, and I thought that perhaps the work he had prepared would not sustain them (or him) for that long. He had chosen some pictures for them to write about. They were quite specific pictures, single portraits, fairly empty scenes. I was worried that they wouldn't give the children enough to go on. He said that he had tried to find similar pictures to the ones I had given my group from time to time. I said that perhaps the pictures did not offer enough variety of opportunity; but he should suggest that the stories are merely springboards. He objected to this. He wanted them to write about the pictures quite specifically. He was insistent on what he expected from them. This made me laugh, pointing out to him how much people

(especially him) would object if I was that specific in my demands from them, I think of a poem Gary had written earlier in the term;

Feelings for the 9.9.80

I hate it,
Not being able to write,
Put my feelings down
On a wafer thin
Piece of waiting paper,
I know what I want to write,
But then again,
I don't,
Sitting here,
Staring
At three pictures,
Pictures of people,
With wide and varied
Emotions and feelings
I wonder what they're thinking,
Laying there
On a cold black table,
Searching,
Penetrating
The film of
Glossy paper,

Gary wrote later of the pictures he had chosen, 'Jeni pointed out that if she asked us to do something so specific we would probably have a fit at her. I listened and accepted her point but still wanted to carry on with what I had planned. I realise now that I had a much clearer idea of what to do than I had previously thought.'

Gary also became worried about his role at this time - neither teacher nor child, fearing that the group took advantage of him. I think that Gary had a difficult group. It had no cohesion and kept changing. In his last lesson young Gary whom Gary liked a lot but who was obviously a bit of a handful was away and Gary had less trouble. He also felt the lesson was a success because the writing was greeted

with enthusiasm by the group. He had given the idea of being lost in a forest as the starting point for their stories. He says:

> The idea proved the most successful thing that I have done with the children, I think this was because they weren't tied to any particular theme, Anything could have happened, they could have met something out of the supernatural, had a Secret Seven type of adventure or just tried to find their way out of the forest reflecting on the wild life and the nature around them,

Gary thoroughly enjoyed that afternoon, mainly, he said later, because he felt in control of the situation. His main preoccupation during the time he was going to the school was the problem of his role and his worry that things were not quite as he would have liked. Once he was away from the pressing demands of being in a classroom he wrote three extended pieces which returned to his thoughts about children's imagination.

> 12,1,81
>
> This afternoon I had a long chat with Gary, mostly about his work on visits to schools, He said that he had come to something of a full stop with his writing and was not sure what to do next, I told him that he will need an introduction and conclusion to the work and some sort of comparison between the different experiences, Also some general comments on what he had learnt in the course of doing the work, He immediately said that he had learnt a great deal about himself in the course of teaching, but I can't remember that he elaborated on this too much, I suggested that it would be important to write down that as well as his ideas about children's imagination, He spoke of some of the differences between the groups and his own surprise that he got on much better with the youngest children than he had with the older ones, He said that what struck him most about the children at the crèche was the way they kept to familiar, everyday things and happenings - homes, policemen, dentists etc, and only the oldest children seemed really able to step outside their experience in fantasy,
>
> ..... Gary also decided to write about his difficulties in the primary school and try and explore why they occurred ..... I suggested Gary should do some reading now, particularly *Closely Observed Children*, and then write about the writing he has, He agreed also that it would be worth talking to Debra - he has already looked at her folder and was impressed with the work she had done with her children, He seemed envious, I took the liberty of suggesting that she had not gone in with such fixed ideas as he had and we laughed about his

determination not to take up my idea about how he might use the pictures for writing.

17.2.81

Gary is still writing his conclusion. It is taking him ages, but he is thinking about it and struggling with ideas in a way that is almost palpable. He was not able to finish it over the weekend because he said he needed to refer to me. I had given him a list of possible things to include in the writing and he couldn't get past the idea of relating what he had learnt to his own imaginative life as a child. I wasn't sure why he allowed himself to stop here - other students, I think, would have ignored that idea and used some of the others. I explained yesterday a little of what I meant - that he had constantly referred to his own childhood when trying to understand the children he encountered, and his own imagination now is very important to him - his acting, his writing, his reading and his enjoyment of certain kinds of TV programme. I don't know whether he accepted my suggestion that he should ignore those two ideas if it was not part of his thinking now, however he continued to write this morning.

He asked me to read one paragraph only - which was about the hidden but significant power of the imagination - as exemplified in the efficacy of dreams in relieving the weight of problems with which a person might be preoccupied. I reminded him of what I had said before about why we read and write and that I thought that sometimes writing and reading novels or poetry acted in the same way dreams can do. I referred to the story of the rabbit who went for a bounce, told him of a girl I once taught who wrote of night and darkness at a time she was trying to come to terms with death, mentioned his own use of writing. I said that in some ways his poems were not really poems but just an opportunity for him to work out ideas and he agreed with this. I talked a little about the kind of books he read and why - the moral order suggested by such writers as Tolkein, C. S. Lewis and Ursula LeGuin. He set to write again and I, aware of having emphasised the sorting of problems said also it could involve fantasy, flights of fancy and a celebration of something too. "Yes, like Christmas," Gary said. "You just want to recreate what it was like."

Gary completed his conclusion the following day. I think it shows how much Gary had thought about the imagination and how his practical experience raised issues which challenged and developed his original pictures of the imagination. In discussing the conclusion with Gary I drew my ideas for what he might include mainly from previous talks, his writing and what seemed to be his

interests. What Gary wrote seems to go beyond the kind of limits I set. Although the conclusion does take up ideas I contributed the thoughts are his own, revealed in statements of belief and more tentative and exploratory passages. The conclusion picks up threads that run through the record of his visits and, I feel, begin to explore imagination in a new way.

Children's Imagination Conclusion

I didn't really go to the crèche in order to do a project on imagination, it just evolved that way. I think that this maybe was because most of the things I like are pretty much rooted in imagination. The comics that I like are all about science fiction and superhuman beings. The same goes for the television programmes, Dr. Who, Blake's Seven, Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy, etc. I think that I like these because the characters in them are what I dream of being in my imagination. And invariably these characters can influence me into doing things to make me more like that particular persn. For instance, I once read a Paddington book where he turned a pretty desolate piece of garden into a beautiful flower bed. And because I was so into the book I imagined that I could do the same and so proceeded to imitate him. This just shows that imagination does affect your life, it influences you to do things, to try and make things usually nicer, or to imitate things you see being done, and wish that you were doing too.

This was what the children in the crèche used to do. All of the things were usually adventurous for the boys, Policemen, Firemen, etc. and housewife type games for the girls which just goes to show that this age group's imagination is slightly sexist and based on stereotyped images of the people around them.

I feel that this is a very important point about imagination, it is based on only things that you are aware of. Crèche children are aware of and therefore imagine being grown ups because it seems that far away from them. When they reach ten to twelve, being a parent will not seem so strange and intrigue them so much. But now they have become aware of the limitless void of space, and therefore that may take the place of the what would now seem simpler games of their earlier childhood.

When I first started this project I was quite disappointed because they weren't doing things that were particularly imaginative, well to me anyway. But since then I have realised that imagination is on levels according to age, for reasons I have already mentioned.

Imagination is a very personal thing and memories are often influenced by it, by hyping them up to make them seem better. For instance I remember quite clearly playing dumpers on my pillow, all I used to do was push my fist up and down on the pillow imagining that it was pushing bricks, rubble etc. ..... When talking to Jeni about my experiences in the crèche I often used memories such as this as a reference point, something as a comparison to what they were doing so that it would help me to get a clearer view of understanding them.

Imagination is something that you can use when you want to, but it is very hard to control once you get carried away with it. Little kids imagine monsters under the bed, this is usually built up from something very small until it gets so real that it really terrifies them. A pile of clothes on a bed or chair in the dark, with just a little bit of light shining on them, can take many forms usually because it is dark they are horrible scary things. And you can imagine things like ghosts and phantoms, things that you can't see except in your mind's eye.

Our drama lessons demonstrate well that imagination is a personal thing. Though we all start off with the same situation and the same starting point, it is our imagination that determines how we react to that situation and because everybody's imagination is different that's why everyone takes a different path from that central starting point. The drama lesson that I took also demonstrates this point and although I've already said this earlier in the project I feel that I should include it in the conclusion. Because of imagination being, well, can be a private thing, the children didn't seem to show any creative ideas physically. But when talking to them afterwards I realised that most of the adventure had been taking place inside their head, where they had imagined all sorts of way out things in their own worlds so although on the outside nothing appears to be happening on the inside you could be having a really exciting adventure.

Imagination was just a word that meant little pictures in the mind and good ideas when I started. But now I see that it is a lot more complicated than that. Dreams are a form of imagination, the subconscious imagination. In your dreams you often relate to difficulties and problems, and these dreams are often vivid and seem so real, that when you wake up the problem isn't so great any more because you've sorted that particular difficulty out in the dream.

This in turn leads on to how we explore situations in our writing. Both problems and happy events that we're so taken up with that we just have to write them down to get them over not necessarily to other people but to ourselves as well. I have been told about a 13-14 year old girl whose mother was dying .....

she started to examine her situation in writing. In her mind she connected death with darkness, night and things of that kind. And it wasn't until one particular piece of writing that her teacher realised what she was doing trying to figure out was was happening and make things clearer for herself.

Reading books is also connected with imagination in this way. Many of the books that I enjoy reading are very much based on good versus evil, a very strong moral standing point. And this point comes over much stronger reading a book because your imagination allows you to become that character. So very often you end up sharing that character's anxieties and feelings. And therefore you also get a clearer view of what you yourself think and that point has come much nearer home from reading that book, more so than any lecturous account could do.

So my views of imagination have changed and I think would have changed more if I had been able to carry on with my project. I would have liked to have explored more with the drama to see if they became more able to display their imagination physically rather than keeping it to themselves. Being as I thought that my last lesson was the best, I think that I had found the right formula for the sort of writing that I would have liked them to do. So I think that I would have preferred a few more lessons to do more of this. I feel that making models could also have been beneficial, as the infant children and me gained quite a lot from the lesson making robots. Mainly because it would demonstrate how much more they model their creations on something in their imagination than the younger children did.

I don't think that reading material helped me very much. Although Michael Armstrong's book *Closely Observed Children* helped me more than any other. It made me realise not to expect too much from the kids, especially in written accounts which seem to be communicated in a much more detailed way orally. It also provided another example of exploring things in imagination in a story called *The Rabbit that bounced* which looks at loss, being locked out of things and even death itself.

So imagination as well as being something that we use for pleasure in things like writing and reading is also very important in man's development. Without someone to have the imagination to invent many of the things we use in everyday life man wouldn't have evolved.

Therefore a large part of our life is affected by that thing called imagination.

When I first read the conclusion through I felt frustrated that it should be whisked off for assessment and that Gary had to turn his

attention to other, for him, less significant areas of thought. It often seems as if a conclusion is just a beginning. It seems like a plateau reached before continuing exploration. It looks back and consolidates Gary's thinking to date but it also throws up new questions. There are confusions and contradictions. It is not the conclusion of Gary's thinking about the imagination. The following year, when Gary began an 'A' level psychology course he wanted to continue his investigations into the imagination but felt frustrated by the constraints of the 'A' level exam syllabus. Gary's thinking during the fourth and fifth year and his experiencing with children had raised many questions that he could not have asked any earlier nor was he ready to answer them. 'A' level exams did not offer him a chance to pursue his interests in a way he had hoped he might.

Gary's thinking was not confined to children's imagination. his work at the crèche and at the school made him reassess assumptions about himself and others; he began to learn something about himself as a teacher and as a writer. Gary's project, *Children's Imagination*, arose from the person he was, from his life. Its shape, its development, Gary's thinking arise from Gary himself as actor, writer, from his experiencing of other people and his interest in them, from his own life of the imagination. The work is a part of him; shaped by him, shaping him. Imagination is a theme that ran through Gary's life and continues to do so.

14

Debra

Debra taught a group of seven second and third years at Thistley Meadow Primary School. She recorded what happened each week, whether it was science or project work or her own ideas for writing; the focus of most of her thinking was the children's writing. Her diary took on a fairly regular pattern: an explanation of what she had prepared for the lesson and what she hoped might happen; a description of the lesson and her reactions and reflections and then the pieces of writing the children had done, each with a commentary. Debra is a serious writer, herself, and was able to draw often from her own experience and understanding of writing in her approach to the children and their writing.

My teaching

As I began to prepare for my first English lesson with the children of Thistley Meadow, I wondered how on earth I was going to think of an idea that in turn could inspire ideas for seven children, seven years younger than me!

Eventually I thought back to my days at Junior School (not so very long ago!) and remembered how much I enjoyed writing poems and stories to interesting pictures. Then again - maybe I enjoyed it, but would they? I decided to go ahead with the idea and to my mind it was a great success.

At first I didn't know which way to approach the lesson -whether to carry it through as though it was an extension of the normal lessons, or to make it different in some way. Also I couldn't decide how I wanted to be 'known' by them - as Miss Reynolds (as Mrs. K introduced me) or simply Debra.

I thought that maybe if they called me Miss Reynolds they'd think of me more as a proper teacher and not just another pupil. But was that such a good thing?

There were so many things to think about before I even began the actual lesson!

Finally I decided that they should call me Debra, and discovered that it was in fact to my advantage to be 'in between' (neither teacher nor fellow pupil) as they treated me as a friend but still with respect.

I also decided that I would compromise with the lessons and try and keep the same order and organisation that Mrs. K holds in her class but with a more relaxed atmosphere where they would feel at ease to talk freely to me when they

wanted,

During my first lesson with the group I was very conscious of the fact that I was addresing a whole group of children and they were all listening! It was quite novel at first because I just wasn't used to speaking to any amount of people I didn't know (of course I didn't know them, then) and managed to hold their attention,

When we have English lessons at the College now, I often wondered how Jeni managed to talk to a whole class without ever looking one particular person straight in the eye all the time - now I know!

As the weeks went by I thought nothing of it and I felt as though I'd been teaching such lessons for years!

I never realised before how much work could go into the preparation of a lesson or how much serious thinking was needed to find the right approach for a certain subject,

All the lessons I prepared for my group were experiments for me, where I tried to find out which ideas they responded to best, After only four lessons where they produced written work though, I think I would need to carry on for several more weeks preparing lessons of different kinds before I really did find the style of approach that suited them - and me best of all,

My basic methods of teaching changed towards the last few weeks in that I tried to become much stricter! It wasn't because they were terribly misbehaved or cheeky, but because I became so eager to see their written work that I expected them to 'get on with it' all the time and produce as much as possible, Much as I didn't want to, I also tried to be less familiar, as they began to treat me more as a friend and less as a teacher, and I was afraid that their work would suffer for it,

Of course, I couldn't change the strong relationship that I already had with Samantha, and I certainly didn't want to, but I did not try to form any new bonds with anyone inside my teaching time,

Looking back, I don't think that this was the right thing to do, as I think that my friendships with the members of the group could have grown only to a certain point, where I'm sure they would still have held a certain amount of respect for me anyway,

Apart from this new course of action which I don't think they noticed all that much anyway - I would say that I improved in my efforts as the weeks went by, I became more aware of their needs from me and as I gradually discovered what they expected of me as a teacher - I was more able to give it,

Conclusion

Visiting Thistley Meadow Primary School has been a very interesting and enlightening experience for me, and I feel that I have learnt a lot over the past four months..... I have had a small glimpse 'behind the scenes' of the running of the school, and I have, in fact, been part of it. Now I can finally appreciate if only in a small way, the thinking that lies behind even the shortest of lessons.

During my time at Thomas Estley, my High School, I visited my old Junior School and worked there for several weeks, but didn't achieve nearly as much as I did at Thistley Meadow. I think the fact that I was allowed to have a class of my own, and work with them as a teacher would gave me an insight that couldn't have been obtained any other way.

It boosted my confidence a great deal to find that I could hold a group's attention for any length of time - and they were actually interested in what I was saying! I also got a lot of satisfaction from reading their work, and thinking that my previous planning and ideas had been their inspiration.

At the beginning I truthfully thought that my English lessons with the group would turn out to be a complete shambles. I pictured the seven of them sitting there, talking amongst themselves, not taking notice of me and I even tried to think of ways that I could persuade them to work!

Of course, I learnt that I was quite capable of capturing their attention and their interest, and to my delight I discovered that they actually enjoyed doing the work I set for them. I think that if I hadn't got a good response from them it would still have been a worthwhile experience, but I wouldn't have enjoyed it half so much, and I don't think that I would have been able to write about it in an enthusiastic way.

Their written work and responses on the whole pleased me, but surprised me too. I didn't really imagine before that someone with the lowest academic abilities in the group would produce the sort of writing that pleased me most - but that was how it turned out, the 'someone' being Samantha.

I am only just beginning to learn how to explain what is possibly going on in their imaginations when they are writing, and what experiences might lie behind the things they write. I have tried to analyse Samantha's writing in this way, and would like to do a lot more of it.

When I was working with the children I felt as though I had aged 10 years some of the time! One of the members of the class asked me how old I was and when I told him 16 he replied "Oh god!"

In my own mind I *know* that I have learned a great deal and benefited

enormously from my experiences at Thistley Meadow, but it's very difficult for me to put all my thoughts down on paper and to express just what I feel.

All I can say is that I more than enjoyed my visits, and hope that I will have the opportunity to do something of the same kind again one day.

'Delight' strikes me as important.

Delight; a moment of exhilaration; a moment of sureness after uncertainty; of order out of dislocation; when what I tentatively imagined is realised; when things that did not fit seem to fit together in a new pattern.

Delight; pleasure in learning.

Delight; self-realisation.

And surprise. Debra was pleased. She was also surprised. She found that the child with 'the lowest academic abilities in the group' produced 'the sort of writing' that pleased her most. Surprise is a part of learning. It is likely that when I am immersed in doing something the surprises come; and adjusting my ideas to accommodate or come to terms with the surprise I change and grow.

I learnt about myself. Both Gary and Debra said this. They learnt they were able to do things they had not been sure they could do, perhaps not even imagined they could do. They learnt about themselves. I don't know what they learnt. That is not for me. They were sure. More sure of themselves. More self-assured.

Gary and Debra both see themselves as writers. Both were engaged in teaching, not pretending or practising, but for real. Their commitment to writing and the serious demands for commitment made on them by their situation in the schools they visited affected how they learned and what they learned. There was an intensity of learning; a lot at many levels; not always what they or I expected; in a short space of time; and room for more, later, at leisure. It seemed that both students were able to accept the children as serious writers like themselves. They both came to feel that they did not need to know best or have to tell how but rather were able to relate their own understanding of writing to the children writing. They both seemed able to treat children as serious, ordinary other people. Gary acknowledges the three year old who put him at ease and made him feel

that the children in the crèche were not 'little kids but real people with whom [he] could associate'. Debra regretted that she did not let relationships with her group become more familiar, but both she and Gary were preoccupied with the role they played in relation to the older children. They were 'in-between', neither child nor adult. It dominates because it was an important part of the reality of their experience with the children. They both turned to thoughts of discipline, formality, vestiges of earlier experiences of school. We turn back to what we have known; think back. Past experience binds us and drives us to make changes. How can we know something different? We are vulnerable in the classroom. How do we come to trust ourselves not to depend on the old ways which are somehow not right for us?

As teachers and writers, Gary, Debra and I share similar tasks. I was searching less successfully than they for a way of writing about teaching. Since I worked with them I have found new ways of writing. The limitations of Gary and Debra's writing were a part of my own limitations.

Gary reluctantly read and actually enjoyed *Closely Observed Children.* As a result he wrote about some of the writing the children had done. He was impressed by the seriousness with which Michael considers children's work.

> One of the main things Michael Armstrong is trying to say in his book is that we should not dismiss children's writing as mindless scrawl, but take the story for for what it itself is, and look at those qualities. Imagination in the ten-year old group of children was indeed most evident in their writing and not so much in their play.

I was impressed, envious perhaps, of the way Gary was able to write about the writing the children had done. It is something I find extremely difficult. I find now, even when asked to analyse recognised writers, that the old nausea returns from my sixth form days when I first began Literary Criticism. His approach is very much 'Eng Lit'. What is important to *me* now is the seriousness with which he approached the writing. It is one of the things that is most important to me about Michael Armstrong's work and his influence on me. Children are not merely practising, waiting for the day when they will be, magically, grown up. They are serious practitioners, in the

same way that adults may be. They work within the same or similar cultures, sharing traditions. Writing, teaching, we shared.

Debra took a collection of pictures to her first lesson.

> I thought this would be an easy idea to start with, rather than just telling them something to write about, because the kids would be able to have the pictures in front of them whenever they decided they were ready to write and could interpret the pictures in their own way. For instance, if it was a picture of a fairy, they may write a poem about fairies, write what it's like to live in fairyland - and so on, there are so many ideas you can get from just one simple picture - if - you have any imagination, which is what they'll be proving to me, and hopefully their choices of pictures will give me more idea about what kind of things they like to write about.

Debra felt the lesson went well, and although the boys all wanted the picture of the steam train, their talk, their choice of pictures and their writing gave her plenty to think about. She wrote about each child's writing and was particularly taken with a girl called Samantha.

The third time Debra did any writing with the children she suggested that they should write about being somebody different for a day. Samantha was adamant that she could not imagine being anything other than herself. After some discussion Debra gave in to Samantha's protests.

> She promptly showed me the doll that she had with her and asked if she could write a poem about it. I agreed for argument's sake!
>
> The end result is what I consider to be her best piece of work so far. It's interesting, well planned, and she conveys her thoughts well.
>
> The first time I read it I was really pleased with it and it made me wonder if it's so good because it was an idea that she had in her mind from the start or just because she's touched on the right subject that she finds easy to write about.

The doll
Dolls sit on the shelf
All day long it must be boring

I would like to be a doll for
a day or two,
In the pram with a cover
but no dinner,

How difficult it seems to be able to write about a piece of writing. Interesting? Well planned? I like it. Every time I come back to it I find pleasure in it. Its simplicity, perhaps. Its wistfulness. It's not enough to say "I like it." Is it? Yet to compare it to oriental poetry or to a number of contemporary American poets seems to crowd it out. If I am to take writing seriously then I should like to share my own real response with the writer. That seems more useful to the writer than evaluation or analysis.

At the end of her visits Debra wrote about Samantha and her writing. Debra writes fluently. I wrote about Debra writing about Samantha's writing. I write fluently. Rereading it now, what both Debra and I have to say seems superfluous, heavy-handed, removed both from the experience of writing and of being in the classroom. Our response to a piece of writing is our own. The response can be valuable to the writer; an evaluation much less so. I want to recognise the integrity of the writers, their commitment to writing within an existing tradition and culture at this time.

15

Andy

Andy was a student for whom the focus of his life lay very consciously outside the limits of school. He tolerated school politely and carried out some appointed tasks. I had had a tremendous struggle to find Andy absorbing things to do. I felt he did things in school as a kindness to me. He liked to patronise me. My genuine ignorance and interest in the farm where he worked provided him with the chance to be the expert in school; a place, I suspect, where hitherto he had been made to feel the dunce. I have a sense of worry and dissatisfaction until a student reveals a happiness with what he is doing, a feeling of being at ease, of enjoyment, of excitement perhaps, anger and puzzlement, maybe, but above all, involvement.

Andrew came to the school with serious difficulties in reading and writing. Unsurprisingly, he was loth to write anything at all. At my insistence he wrote, every Monday morning, as an absolute minimum, a diary of his weekend work on the farm. Not only did he not write, he hardly spoke. I had to work hard at getting him to talk to me. He used to grin a lot, especially at some of the things I said to him, and would talk eventually after considerable prompting. In the fifth year I assumed that farming would continue to be the main focus of his work and he didn't challenge that assumption. In fact he persuaded his mother and the school to arrange a day a week's work experience on the farm. By the beginning of October his enthusiasm was rapidly disappearing. He spent more and more time involved in art work and creative writing and not until the end of November did he come back to his work in Humanities. He said he wanted to write about his other interests - ferrets, his motor bike, shooting.

30.11.80 On Friday Andy came into the team area and began working without me noticing him. At the end of the lesson he produced the following piece of writing and a broad grin:

My Life

My name is Andrew Ellard and I live in a small village called Kilby. There is not a lot to do in Kilby but I would rather live there than in any town. Because there is not a lot to do in Kilby I have got a lot of

hobbies like shooting, fishing, bottle collecting and I collect beer mats and beer cans, match boxes and horse shoes. But I don't have much time at the weekends because I work on the farm. I live in a council house at the top of Kilby. My address is 2, Wistow Close, Kilby, Leicester. This house is where I was born. My dad was born in Kilby and all my brothers and sister. My mam was born in Wigston. My Grandma and Grandpa on my mam's side live eight houses down the road and my other grandpa used to live three houses down the road. My grandma died a week before I was born. My grandad lives up Leicester with my aunty. My dad used to be a farm worker on a farm just across the road from the one I work on now. Then he used to work at Stibbes up Leicester making bits for farm implements.

..... Up until now he has written either about the farm or about things from his own imagination ..... As he told me when he brought me this he has not yet finished it but was clearly well pleased ..... We had talked earlier in the week about Andy changing direction and doing some work on things that interest him outside the farm but we had not discussed exactly what he might choose or how he might go about it. This piece of writing was done without any reference to me at all.....

Kilby is important to Andy and he states his preference for living there in the second sentence; somehow that puts him in his context. He gives a reason, also, for his many hobbies, which did surprise me slightly because I didn't expect him to express reasons for doing particular things (not that I thought he wouldn't have them but that he would be less likely to identify and articulate them). I knew about the three active hobbies but nothing of his collections. He told me that his mother refused to go into his bedroom because it was so cluttered. After the brief introduction to himself (introducing areas of interest to which he intends to return later) he then sets forth on his family. Where grandparents live, where parents and he himself were born, and then begins his father's potted biography. When I suggested with a question mark in my voice that he might be interested in setting out a family tree he was enthusiastic. Like so many others of his age he had a definite interest in setting himself in a family context wider than immediate brothers and sisters. I think this piece of writing is a step forward for him, though I have not identified clearly enough why.

How could I be so restrained? I was delighted. I was mentally throwing my hat in the air and whooping with glee - more than likely I was actually bouncing about. Andy had sat quietly for more than a

year, had done as he was told or as little as he could get away with, had smiled; and school, or at least anything I was able to offer, seemed of no interest or relevance to him whatsoever. Here he was initiating something, animated about something, opening up somehow, writing in a way that held meaning for him and for me. It seems that Andy was writing, perhaps for the first time, because he really wanted to do so. The writing is assured. He seems to be ordering a sense of himself. It led to the writing of his grandfather's biography. It was as if this particular piece of writing opened the way for him to consider a whole area of his experience which was of real importance to him; and to his own learning and development.

This sense of a door opening after a piece of writing of this kind was common.

> 9,12,80 I spoke to Andy who was not really in the mood for writing so I began to write out a family tree under his guidance. In fact he does not know a great deal about his family, not even knowing his grandmother's name, although he talked a great deal about his grandfather who lived on the roads as a child. Andy is obviously fond of grandpa who sounds a very interesting man ..... He tells Andy a lot about his life and how to poach, how to snare rabbits and other country lore. He makes a lot of things - fishing tackle and wooden dolls which he seems to destroy when they are finished. Andy really didn't want to do any writing, saying he could think of nothing to say so he started on a map of the river where he goes fishing.
>
> 8,1,81 Andy came to see me at the beginning of the morning to check which lessons he had and said he had got "all the stuff about me grandpa." ..... He is going to talk to me about it this afternoon, suggesting that he should miss some P.E. in order to do so. I shall look forward to that!
>
> That afternoon Andy was keen to write, and I saw him only briefly.
>
> 8,1,81 My grandad was born in 1902 and till 1908 he had been in every workhouse in the country..." and then, later, "... until he was six then his mother and father were broke up and his mother ....."

It took Andy quite a long time before he really got started. On the next day he wrote:

> 9,1,81 My grandad was born in 1902 and his name is Eric Youson from 1902 until 1908 he had been in every workhouse in the country.

Three days later Andrew had still not solved the problem of getting himself into the writing of this biography.

> 12.1.81 I ..... found that he had started again and written a little more than before. He said he had made several starts. He reflected that his grandfather was an excellent story-teller - he'll give you some straightforward information, like when he was born, and then pop in a story. "He doesn't know he's doing it," Andy said.

Andy's problem, with which I sympathise, is not simply how to begin, but how to convey all that information he has stored in his head. How to communicate the interest which his grandfather was able to lend to it. Andy has to include essential factual information, but there are also the stories and the flavour of the man and his life. Maybe this is what Andrew was trying to get right when he began his writing. He was really taken with the claim that his grandfather had been in every workhouse in the country. How could he best use that? write that down?

> My grandad 12 of the 1st 1981
>
> My grandad's name is Eric Youson he was born in 1902. He was on the road until he was six or seven. When he was on the road he used to ask people for jobs. He would sometimes he would get to do potato picking for about a shilling a week all over the country. When he used to do these jobs he would sleep in the nearest workhouse but he would have to be in the workhouse before six o'clock. When you got in they would make you have a bath and then they would feed you. The adults had a piece of dry bread and a piece of cheese and a cup of tea and the children had the same but milk. If they wanted sugar in their milk they won't get the cheese. Then they would go to their beds. Then in the morning they would have to do a job to pay for the food they had eaten. They were not allowed to leave the workhouse until they had finished. Then my grandad was back on the road looking for another job. By the time he was six or seven he reckons he had been in every workhouse in the country.
>
> When they were on the road they had to get food. My grandad told me how he would get potatoes out of the field. He would dig a hole in the side of the ridge and pull one spud out and fill the hole back up. He would do this until he had enough to fill a 7lb's corned beef tin. When they couldn't get to the next workhouse they would sleep in a ditch but sometimes he said they would sleep in a barn which was so overrun with rats that one of them had to stay awake to keep

them from eating you. My grandad knew someone called the Orange Duke who used to work in the pub and sleep in the barn and he got eaten by rats and all they left of him was his bones and the buttons off his coat and the eyes of his boots. Eric was seven when his mother got married and had some more children. Then when he was nine he was playing cowboys and indians. He got shot in the eye with a sucker gun and lost the sight of his left eye. When he was twelve he went to work at a big house as a button boy he used to polish shoes and lots of errands. Then he got another job when he was about fifteen as a stable boy. In that he had to muck the stables out and feed all the horses but when he had got some money saved up he went to the pub and got drunk and was put into prison for drunk and disorderly for one month. When he got out of prison he had to look for another job. He got one in a warehouse on a night shift for five years but one night he rushed around and got all his jobs done and went to lay down at about one o'clock in the morning and his boss started to call him and he was calling him but Eric could not get up because he said that one and two o'clock is the most likely time that the body is nearest to death as possible. When his boss found him he told him he was disappointed in him and that he didn't want people working for him so my grandad had to find another job. That day he went down the pub to see if there was any work around when he was in the pub his friend came into the pub and told Eric that there was a job at the paint factory so Eric went to the place where his friends had said for him to go and he got the job. What he had to do is mixing paints and he had to know where all the different colours were.

I enjoy this life story every time I read it. Andy has excellent material, but he has put the words together so that they do more than record information. At the beginning of the fourth year, in a week Andy might only write "I went to the farm. I fed the beasts. I swept out the yard." At the same time that he was writing the biography he wrote this description of his grandfather's house:

My Grandad's House Andrew Ellard 19.1.1981

My grandad's house has got a funny smell like a wet cloth drying in front of the fire. And he's got a big clock on the sideboard which has got a big tick which sort of echoes all around the room. There's a table, and two chairs are in the middle of the room. There's a big log fire which you can hear in between the ticks of the clock. In the kitchen it is dark and there is a smell of yesterday's dinner in the air. My grandad's asleep and snoring in the rocking

chair. There's a pot of tea on the table which has been there for about an hour.

The tea cups on the table which have got tea leaves all up the sides of the cups. The smoke of my grandad's Park Drive goes into the corner and my nana takes about ten minutes to get a Number 6 out and light it. Then my grandad will go and make the fire up and make another pot of tea with the same tea leaves that were in the pot. And then my grandad would pick up a book and read it until he heard the baker disturb the peace. And while all the time that this is going on my nana is sat there in her arm chair staring into the flames of the log fire.

Andrew admired his grandfather but felt he didn't always live up to the old man's expectations. He said his grandfather often criticised him, particularly about his ignorance. The relationship between the two seemed to change whilst Andrew was writing the biography and it marked an important time for Andrew and a change in him.

Andy had seemed to like talking about the farm and possessed a store of practical and theoretical information about the care of and breeding of cattle. When I went with him to the farm to take photographs I had, for the first time, a sense of him at ease with himself, a sense of his competence and love of 'the beasts', but at the end of the fifth year he didn't seem so certain that he wanted to work on the farm.

Perhaps because of his difficulties and his stated preference for being on the farm, I limited my horizons for Andrew. I assumed in the fifth year that he would prefer to centre his work on the farm. I should not make assumptions. Maybe the farm was a beginning and became a routine; it was a way of making a space for him, perhaps even a gap in his defences.

When I read Andy's writing I feel some sense of regret; of loss; but he and I could not have moved any faster.

Andrew made me wonder what school had already done to him and what it could offer him in the two years he was at Countesthorpe.

I do not want to make assumptions about what students can and cannot do, about what will or will not interest them, is or is not appropriate.

Andy constantly surprised me; it was the surprises that made me sense something of his inner life which was well hidden by his outward appearance.

I felt he had locked inside himself a turmoil of fears and uncertainties and a richness of imagination and a heritage that he found difficult to express. I wanted him to be able to exorcise some of his fears, to be able to have a better understanding of himself and some control over his own life. It was as if there were all kinds of things going on inside him that needed a release; a way out.

Andy said he preferred P.E. to anything else at school, and maybe a bit of science.

His enjoyment of the sequence of poems about farming in *Moortown* by Ted Hughes was tangible. He especially liked the poems about the farm worker. He spent a long time poring over them.

Andy teased by the farmer's sons but also one of the gang
slow moving
embarrassed by praise
grinning.

It is too easy to be sentimental about a boy like Andy; to make something of his story that isn't there. Farm boy makes good. Andy had nothing to say about his work in English and Humanities. He did not like writing. It was difficult for him to string words together into sentences, let alone sentences into paragraphs. He still couldn't spell well. Reading was a chore. It even looked as if he wanted to pass up the opportunity he had for full time work on the farm.

Perhaps because of all those things the writing I have included here stands out. It suggests something about Andy that was unexpected.

Andy's reading age improved dramatically in the two years he was at Countesthorpe. I don't think that it improved simply because he had individual help from a specially trained teacher of reading (neither did she). I believe Andy grew to have a greater sense of himself; he grew towards greater autonomy of being. He had the chance to know himself as a writer with things he wanted to say; and as a holder of knowledge.

Academic; non-academic. Reading and writing - high status. Practical activity - low status. Hence the increasing number of written assignments in traditionally practical subjects; and what kind of writing? how appropriate?

It is possible to deny children who find reading and writing easy access to serious practical involvement; and to limit the scope of written work for those for whom it is more difficult.

There is a kind of dislocation which denies the intellectual in the practical and ignores practice in the growth of intellect.

If I rely entirely on secondhand information I can become disassociated from how I respond to things, from how the world seems to be to me. I find I trust my own judgement less; lose belief in the power of my own thoughts and discoveries. When I am involved, in the classroom, I must act. When there is time for reflection it is important that I recall the action and how it felt.

Students who engage in practical activities are often not given the opportunity to explore their discoveries in writing; to use writing to work on disturbances.

I was ready to limit Andrew's horizons for him. Perhaps I imagined he 'didn't have it in him'.

Writing is important to me. I acknowledge that it does not hold that importance for everyone.

I do believe that everyone should have the chance to be able to write and accept themselves as a writer should the need arise.

I am often surprised by students; as a result of the surprises I find myself each time able to be a little more open, more accepting, versatile.

THE MAN ON THE STREET

A day last week I was walking a busy street walking against the wall so I didn't get pushed, Then I heard a man shouting at the top of his voice, He was stood on top of the statue in the middle of the town, The man sounded like he was drunk, But what he was saying was making sense he was talking about the next war and why there should not be another one, I stood and listened to him for a few minutes and then the Police came and dragged him away to the police car but he was laughing as they took him away to the station to talk to him, Perhaps he was glad that they had caught him, The next day he was in the newspapers accused of robbing a bank, But the thing is in the paper he had a broken nose and two black eyes, But when I saw him in the street he was O,K,

Andrew Ellard

16

Learning, teaching, writing.

1. Learning

How do I begin to think about what I do in the classroom?

resonance

I begin to know myself, within myself, this is how I act.

Fear, what do we fear?
Power, what power do I hold? How much do I want to hold on to the power?
You know best. You have a picture of how things should be.
They are based on what you already know.
What makes you doubt what you already know? What explanations do I make for my failures?
Are the failures my own? of teaching? of the children? of learning?
Are these failures? In whose eyes is there failure?

Where do I look to explain my own actions and the actions of others?
Do I need explanations?
I tell stories. The meanings I form today are changed tomorrow.
I write the story and move on;
I am locked in the story.
I change the story.
I try to reach, in stillness, to beyond the story.
The narrative is contained, linear, exclusive, selective;
it can suit my purpose, but I must remember that it is not how it was, how it is.
Even in an encounter between two people the details of that encounter are infinite; much of what happens in an encounter is unknown by one or both people; unnoticed, deemed irrelevant, half guessed at, an encounter is part of the past, the present, the future. I cannot encompass it, only reach towards my part in it.

When I hear a story from a teacher I often want to peer around its corners. What else was happening? What has been taken from, omitted from, the story which I hear?

Some stories make me feel cross or guilty; is it the finity of them I wonder, that tires me? No room for the fluidity and awkwardnesses of teaching and learning; no room for the discomfort.

A young teacher was felt to be having difficulty with students' exam folders. Students didn't seem to be doing as well as they ought. I was asked to help him and advise him how to proceed, to improve, to do better.

We sat together in a small room, the folders spread between us. He spoke of what he had done; what he had planned students could do next; how students were interested or not.

I can remember, mostly, the yawning space between us, the difficulty of saying anything; the feeling that I was failing him, that I was not providing any support. Certainly I could not do what my colleague before me had done for him: provide suggestions, instruct on what to do next, make the young teacher feel better.

I felt that it would not be helpful to tell him how I did things.

I could have provided some ideas which 'work' but may not have worked for this man and his students.

I could have talked about students - as autonomous, as individuals, as full of potential, original, dependable, quirky, but that was not the experience of the other teacher, and talk of that kind does not reflect how I behave in a classroom.

The teacher was full of ideas, lots of good ideas; he was disappointed that his students didn't seem to take these ideas up and that if they did they didn't seem to do what he had imagined they might.

We were sitting in different places.
I didn't know how to shift the focus.

I was unable to find a space in which he and I might work together.
Our conversations were out of kilter.

I was not always able to explain what I did. Nor did I wish to impose myself on others. I hid beneath a cloak of eccentricity.
I did believe that there were principles which informed my actions which others should be able to see and understand. That was not so.
Now I have written towards the heart of my teaching. I have written myself a confirmation. I think that now I am able to hear teachers and to make it possible for them to begin with themselves.
What I was often able to do for students I would not allow myself or other teachers.

Why do teachers set the agenda?
In my experience teacher-trainers invariably set the agenda, even, or perhaps, especially, when faced with experienced teachers. There are teachers who attend trainings who seem to prefer to be told, to await instruction, who measure the success of a training by the volume of written handouts they take away with them.
When did they begin to feel this way about themselves as learners?
Do they feel different about other things they set out to learn?
I have recently heard teachers complaining, of Inset days organised as a result of the 1988 Education Reform Act, that they were treated like children.
(I ask myself if adults deserve to be treated better than children or should we think again about how we do treat children?)

I have often attended trainings which have been amusing, instructive, even, but absolutely peripheral to the burning personal issues which I bring from my experience of the classroom and which I would like a chance to raise with other teachers. Very often training is absolutely irrelevant to the nature of being in the classroom. The time is filled with an imposed content. There is no space for the teacher's sense of self. The imposition can breed resentment, guilt, feelings of inadequacy and failure, or an anger which fails to identify its source. Even if a teacher takes ideas from a training which she feels she can incorporate into her classroom practice, that is often because she is able to integrate those ideas into the sense she already has of herself as a teacher.

Each teacher lives with unsolved problems, uneasiness, knowledge of successful moments in the classroom, questions, half-formulated, inarticulate ideas or theories, certainties which may or may not contradict received points of view.
Once the stopper is removed, the space may be filled with uncontrolled demons. How do you keep order? How do you make people think the way you do?
Fill the space with content, with your own priorities, use control in self-defence.

After a first degree I took a PGCE course.

At the beginning of our first English method lectures we were presented with a thick wad of sample comprehensions, probably in chronological order, finishing with a fairly open-ended comprehension based on an extract from *The Day of the Sardine* by Sid Chaplin.

As I remember it, we were asked to come to a conclusion about which was the best comprehension or perhaps the one which was most suitable or fruitful for secondary school students. I don't remember if anyone gave a reply; I felt that there was little point in responding since the answer the lecturer desired was so very obvious. We were to choose the open-ended questions about the everyday story of working-class folk. If anyone had been so bold as to suggest any of the other comprehensions she would have given the delighted and scornful lecturer an opportunity for a most useful teaching point, a little homily for all of us English graduates about the realities of life beyond university and to dissuade us from thinking we might be so misguided as to introduce Blake or Shakespeare or to approach texts as practical criticism.

What still angers me about that lecture is the assumptions that the lecturer made about us and the nature of the comprehensions and the blithe way the lecture continued, preaching a child-centred approach from the podium. Now that comprehension seems as dry and predictable as those other comprehensions we were to dismiss in 1970.

When someone else presumes to hold the right answer I assume defiance or submission. Usually defiance. If I submit, I simply go underground and feed my resentment. I had specifically chosen a college rather than a university. There were those on the course who had been teaching for several years. Nearly all of us had done something other than move from our grammar schools to university and on to teacher training. I had the feeling that I knew there was much to learn but that I did not want to be told; nor did I want to be told that my background and assumptions were all wrong before I had a chance to explore them, or even share them with others.

My feeling was that they, the teacher educators, believed they held the knowledge, they were the experts and we must unlearn what we had learnt at university and learn ..... I am not sure what; to write lesson plans, perhaps. We were set tasks, to prepare resources or to perform activities that we might set children. I generally failed to

do them well. I can still feel my resistance to them. We were rarely asked to write, though we were constantly given ideas for getting children to write. My writing was dismissed. I suppose I learnt how it feels if your writing does not come up to par.

My best experiences were drama sessions where we did the drama for ourselves. We didn't pretend to be children doing something. We could take on the drama as we were.

The other good experiences were the activities we organised ourselves, amongst art, music, drama and English specialists and the talk that we constantly engaged in.

I can remember feeling how much I had to learn but that my time seemed filled with irrelevances, trivia.

Teachers need time in training to work for themselves; to answer their own needs. If they have not felt themselves to be independent, autonomous learners; if they have not felt how it is to trust one's own self and to know something of how to proceed in response to our own concerns, how can they offer that opportunity to those they teach?

When we arrived at college we were often told by our (ex-grammar school teacher) tutor that we would have to forget university English now; that our attitudes and experience were not valid in the context of teaching ordinary children.

It seemed as if we had no common ground on which to meet and that we were in the wrong.

I couldn't feel comfortable with many of the things that I was asked to do.

I think I must have been an intolerable student.

At a recent conference I was involved in a journal commission. The others involved in the organisation of the commission felt that we should provide some material, some concrete experience on which to base our journal writing; a kind of springboard, perhaps. I am still not quite clear what was intended. I felt, still feel, that we did not need any kind of artificial agenda; I think that the group of experienced teachers who met together to discuss journals and their

uses each could have begun to write in their journals from day one about matters which concerned them and these matters would have become the stuff of that commission and in writing and talking we might have come to understand more about the nature of journals, and of think writing. As it is, it is very difficult to let go, to allow the unknown. it is disturbing not to know what is going to come to the surface; to feel that maybe you won't be able to respond, or know the answer, or hand over the information.

What I feel is that someone in the group may have had the answer; that I am not ashamed to say I don't know or I am not sure. What I am sure of is that we need to be in touch with our own concerns, to begin to be able to formulate the questions which drive us or which prevent action; that in writing whatever comes to mind we face those things which are important to us, which are dominant in our lives, in our thinking at that time. Writing quietly, freely, can be a kind of self-exposure. It surprises us, sometimes. It is the beginning of an unfolding.

Our concerns are central.

We are not always aware of what they are.

I like to listen to my inner voices; to sit in quietness and allow the words to come. discovery.

Once we begin this writing we then move back to interact with others, to feed our thoughts, to talk, to let the ideas which have come to the surface fester, ferment, none of these.

Teaching, acting; there is no time for reflection as we are at work in the classroom and yet we have within us a basis for action.

At one point I worked with a small group who preferred to write and talk rather than engage in collage. The talk drifted around people's concerns, centred on the nature of journals. One woman said that she had wanted to write some autobiography and had found it difficult, that she had somehow convinced herself that the commission was to be about autobiography. I knew I felt vague and fairly nervous because I had not expected to be with the group in this way and the structure of the commission was not mine. Nevertheless a point came when people were ready to write.

One set the discussion into an order that would help her to remember points that were important to her but then moved on to write of a play that she had seen which raised disturbing thoughts for her and which she abandoned because she did not want to face them. She has begun to face them and can return to them.
One wrote down thoughts raised by other issues at the conference which related to her work.
Another wrote a poem. Every time she allowed her mind to be open it was filled with the grief of a bereavement.
The woman who had spoken of autobiography began to write about a part of her own life.
Another wrote a research proposal as a result of something said by another in the group
..... and so on .....

It seemed to me that we should have begun by writing in this way, that our journals would have been at the heart of the work we did together, working both for ourselves and with each other. As it was I feel we hardly benefited from the rich mixture of people who belonged to the group; that our own experience was devalued, again, that there was no release, that growth was in spite of.

The basis for action may rely on the myriad faces of our experience, not upon a single articulated rule or set of rules but upon our sense of ourselves as teachers and as people.
We act as it seems right at the time. We make mistakes. We have regrets. Our actions are a part of human relationship.
We act for the moment. Afterwards we tell ourselves and others stories of our actions. They are stories, our stories. Another may tell them differently.

When teachers come to a group, particularly at something like a national conference, they bring with them their own concerns in the same way each child brings his or her concerns to school. I believe that if teachers are given space, in the same way that students at Countesthorpe had space, first to clear out the débris and then to begin to hear their own pressing concerns and acknowledge them as important, and be in an atmosphere in which others acknowledge them as important, then teachers also can have a chance to grow and to feel

the power of an inner quietude and awareness.
I believe that both sureness and awareness, peace and activity are at the centre of teaching in action.
We are rarely given a chance to acknowledge our selves as teachers
interacting
feeling

An art teacher talked, once, of his early teaching experience, his need to be in control. Groups of tables were arranged in the room around which children sat, in the centre of each a plant in a pot. Don't move from the table; don't stray from the task in hand. We feel the need to be in control; there is the fear always of the spilling over, the bursting out, breaking through the cracks.

What we know often contradicts what we think we must do.
We hear the inner voice but find that it doesn't line up with what external pressures seem to demand.
Expectations a society has of its schools and the pressures that the institution, the school, places upon the teachers within it are often at odds with the organic and unpredictable nature of human growth and human relationships; at odds with the nature of teaching and learning as it happens, rather than as it is described in finite terms.

in order to release ourselves to act
in order to allow others the freedom to act
we need to acknowledge ourselves; who we are

I was able to allow students freedom to act; to have faith in themselves.
I was not able to allow that freedom and faith for myself; in working at this thesis I have begun to experience what I sought for my students.
It was as if there was one law for the children with whom I worked and another for teachers;
Now it seems that the same law should apply to us all.

Write whatever comes to mind
for ourselves for myself
recognise its importance in the order of things
my own experiences of learning, of teaching, of being
are a part of myself, the teacher.

Teaching is a part of who I am.
I have insights, now, into my own way of acting, of being a teacher, which help me to be aware of others as they teach, as they talk of the experience of teaching.
I am more ready to hear the other teacher because I am listening not to outer signs but to inner awareness.

Ought to; must; should;
Where do these words come from?
Duty; proper; what is expected.
The accepted way of doing things
outward signs of order which become an end in themselves.

I acknowledge uncertainty; embrace it as a positive and creative part of the nature of teaching.
I acknowledge a sureness at the centre of myself,
a quietness in the certainty of myself at the centre,
in the midst of shifting times
chaos

2. Teaching

Personal involvement seems to me to be an essential part of intellectual growth. It seems to be crucial in the process of reaching more abstract conclusions or in reaching new understandings.

The things that students chose to do seemed to spring from themselves, an inner longing, a requirement from the self, even if it was not conscious or immediately obvious. The subjects they chose often challenged them personally or related to a theme which ran through all their enquiries. Students did not choose easy options. In choosing to pursue an idea that was important to them they confronted further ideas and learnt new skills that were challenging and embraced as part of their own pursuit of knowledge.

The discomfort of not knowing, of finding that our present picture of the world is disturbed, drives us on until we find resolution, for the time being.

Discomfort, anger, frustration, dissatisfaction, melancholy signal for me disturbance. I feel a great restlessness, which I have seen manifest physically in students as they pace up and down, rearrange papers, change location.

As we move towards resolution of disturbance, there is delight. Delight, joy, exhilaration, consummation.

Polanyi speaks of our capacity fr *enjoying* intellectual success:

> The personal participation of the knower in the knowledge he believes himself to possess takes place within a flow of passion. We recognise intellectual beauty as a guide to discovery and as a mark of truth.
>
> Polanyi, op.cit.

In between the extremes of disturbance and delight there is quietness, steadiness, enjoyment, consolidation, absorption, openness. Sometimes we need a change of activity, which might even appear as a blankness, a mindless activity, whilst our mind does work, unconsciously, like yeast, on the ideas that we have laid there.

We move inwards and outwards, forwards and backwards. I call upon my inner resources and reach out to the community of which I am a part, through people and through recorded word and image.

In the course of a year, a student's learning, her quest for knowledge, her personal growth, her desire for self-expression reflected individual rhythms.

Time and space were important in allowing students to respond to those personal rhythms of working and growing.

There seem to be themes, central concerns, which recur throughout an person's life. They have a bearing on what is chosen from alternatives, what is especially heard, responded to and what kind of interpretations might be made.
Our purposes arise from our 'life world'. We organise our experience in accordance with what we already know, and so extend our knowledge and our power of doing.

> I started as a person intellectually fashioned by a particular idiom, acquired through my affiliation to a civilisation that prevailed in the places where I had grown up, at this particular period of history. This has been the matrix of all my intellectual efforts. Within it I was to find my problem and seek the terms for its solution. All my amendments to these original terms will remain embedded in the system of my previous beliefs. Worse still, I cannot precisely say what these beliefs are. I can say nothing precisely. The words I have spoken and am yet to speak mean nothing : it is only *I* who mean something by *them*. And, as a rule, I do not focally know what I mean, and though I could explore my meaning up to a point, I believe that my words (descriptive words) must mean more than I shall ever know, if they are to mean anything at all.
>
> Polanyi, op.cit.

By helping a student to talk, write work with her own voice, with what is really herself, at her centre, a teacher can help her to discover what is most important for her to do, to think about, to understand, and to find ways of working towards that understanding.

I believe that a student's curriculum, in team time, arose from personal concerns.
Personal concerns work on a very long-term basis - a life-time; and respond also to immediate and day to day experiences. They operate at different levels of awareness and importance.

There is an essential energy which informs each individual's power and desire to learn and grow. It is something we are not precisely aware of but which is part of the energy and insistence of learning.

When students wrote about something ostensibly outside themselves they would repeatedly talk of what they had learnt about themselves.
Very often when they wrote about themselves or about close relationships, the understandings which arose extended far beyond their personal situation to embrace and confront much larger questions.

On the basis of conscious self, students may then develop skills.

Learning a skill very often arises from the need to do so; as part of a drive to achieve something else.

> Designs for teaching which take the fullest possible advantage of the jagged profile of each person's talents and abilities will be richer and more diversified than standard academic tracks, providing both for wide qualitative differences in individuals and also for significant and self revealing choice by individuals.
>
> David Hawkins, *The Science and Ethics of Equality*, Basic Books Inc., 1977

17.3.83

Learning is mysterious.

Teaching, for me, seemed, still seems, largely intuitive.

The mystery of learning lies partly in the fact that it is personal.

We may witness or be made aware in some measure of changing perceptions, growth of understanding, new realisations in another person, but we cannot, nor do we need to be able to describe precisely how those changes occurred or to have access to them.

We can be aware of many of the parts which contribute to a whole (though perhaps incomplete) process of growth/change.

We can draw upon our own experience of knowing.

Other people, through conversation and in writing, share, specifically, their experience of knowing.

Other people engaged in learning share their experiences of knowing and change in conversation, in writing and in action.

Growth of understanding is a personal activity but it is not an entirely solitary one.

We may call upon one or more other people to become involved in some measure in our questioning and exploration.

I feel that as a teacher I am called upon to take seriously and become involved with the individual concerns of those I am asked to teach.

I am not called upon, nor is it desirable, to become involved with the individual herself, nor to take on her concerns as if they were my own.

I can recognise their seriousness for her.

I draw upon my own experience and knowing in order to help the student as best I can to come to know what she seems to want to know; and to offer opportunities which challenge and beckon her in particular.

I can share with her my own enthusiasms and something of how her concerns impinge upon mine, but I do not seek to impose my concerns upon her. I can introduce them as they seem appropriate. This sharing is a part of the seriousness with which I approach a student's own concerns.

Sometimes if a student introduces a subject about which I feel I know a lot, or which is of great relevance to my own immediate concerns, I can find it more difficult to listen properly to what the student's concerns are and to find an appropriate way to help her to pursue them. My own personal involvement can create an obstacle.

On the other hand it is an essential part of me. It is a crucial part of me, the teacher. As long as I don't feel that a student will be overpowered, intimidated by my enthusiasms I may express them.
Part of the experience and knowing which I draw upon when working with a student is my experience of other students, of other people and their concerns and what they have to say about learning and acting doing

I also draw upon my experience of and whatever I may know of the student. The things which I am somehow aware of when talking with a student about her work are diverse and complex.

Teaching seems largely intuitive because, particularly in a large class, one must work quickly and fairly immediately. There is not time to ponder or reflect a great deal in response to a given situation.
Nevertheless actions, responses, contributions are based upon one's experience and understanding of the world with personal emphasis and concerns, upon one's experience and understanding of others and what they can share about knowing and how we come to know as individuals bound up in a process which continues throughout life, upon our changing perceptions of learning as a result of our being teachers and involved in a particular way in learning; and upon our awareness of each individual and their concerns.

Learning is mysterious in so far as it remains private, for others, and unconscious for ourselves.
It is mysterious because it is elusive; complex, incomplete, changing.

There are many times when I do or say something as a teacher which seems no more than a hunch, a shot in the dark. I think those actions are based on the wide range of experience and understanding which I have already mentioned and on something which may be part of that as well:- a feeling, a look, a way of sitting, a book that happens to be lying nearby.
In one way almost everything one says or does in relation to individual students and their concerns is a shot in the dark - they

may take it or leave it; something they speak of as having great importance years later is something you have no recollection of.
At the same time, the more I am aware of and the more I can know of knowing and of an individual's concerns, I hope that the nearer my actions and words might be to furthering that individual's purposes.

Enjoyment
I've been thinking about that word quite a bit.
I was going to say I enjoy being with people - but I don't, particularly.

and I don't particularly like being with children, but I do like being with them.
I like to be with people, joining with them in purposeful activity.
I enjoy working with adults and young children when I can remain myself and make contributions to what is going on without having to live up to false expectations, easy within my skin.
I derive great pleasure from other people discovering ideas, becoming immersed in what they are doing or becoming so excited about what they are doing that they want to share it.
I derive pleasure from seeing students accepting the power to make choices which is offered back to them and their acknowledgement of the excitement; the energy
I like people feeling good about themselves.
I enjoy other people's pleasure in themselves, their discoveries, their sense of satisfaction and achievement.
There is a sense of release when I see a student suddenly seeming to see a way forward; or becoming involved in something, almost in spite of himself; when I see a student going it alone.
It is the other side of the constant nagging worry of seeing a student restless; uninvolved, listless, or working from a sense of duty, trying to please me, parents, some unknown external expectation. I try all the time to help them out of that situation into a situation where they can feel in control, where they have a sense of doing something for their own sake, in their own way.
It's disturbing, unsettling, to have students who can't seem to be satisfied, can't become involved, who have not yet found what it is that is important to do.
So my pleasure is in part, witnessing a kind of release of a prisoner

of duty, or apathy, or confusion into an area which is more satisfying, which offers rewards of his own making.
Once students are on the way to ordering their own learning I feel I can offer more to them; feel I am in a much better position to work with them and for them. The more sure they are the more confident I feel about contributing to their work and challenging their ideas.
There is something uncomfortable about orchestrating the work of others.
Students are remarkably compliant. They mostly want to do well, please the teacher. And I set the cat among the pigeons!
At the beginning of a new year there is a lot of anxiety; students don't want to be on their own, or they do but they're not sure how or whether they can. There's a lot of offering to do what they think they ought to do, or what they think I want them to do and relief when they find they don't have to; and more anxiety, perhaps, when they realise that they are going to have to make decisions about what they will do.
But there is also a sense of excitement; feelings of power; potential.

I think that there is usually a lot of laughter in my classroom.
There is also intensity
and passion
and enjoyment.
I enjoy teaching; I enjoy being with students, especially when they can feel their own potential, see the possibilities, are taking control. I love it. and even though I write of balance, of holding back and all that, I have another image of myself, in there, with my sleeves rolled up, up to my elbows in it!

There need to be fallow periods in an individual's growth. There are times when a student seems to be doing nothing. He cannot seem to settle; writes titles and a few words and abandons them; talks to friends, teachers, anyone rather than return to the operation in hand. They are disturbing times for the teacher because they seem essentially unproductive. They can be disturbing for the student if he feels he should be producing something, but cannot.
Fallow periods are needed for thinking; for resting after intense activity; for reassessing the situation, particularly a new one, so that I can proceed in a way that is useful rather than dutiful; for allowing the yeast of the mind to work.

A student may take up an idea for a story or a piece of research but then appear to put it aside, continuing to work on other things. Much later he tackles the idea, begins to write.

Students need time.
Students need time to be with their material and their thoughts.
They need time to sift through material and be aware of what is available before embarking on a particular course of action.
They need time for the mind to work on the ideas that are there.

It can take time for some kinds of writing or ideas to emerge either in the forefront of a student's activities or as a completed piece of writing. There may be several false starts before a course of action is taken.

There is often an appropriate time for action.
It may be to start something new, to consolidate, to act upon an idea in the midst of another piece of work or to take action on something the student has been thinking of, wondering about over a period of time.
How can I know when the time is right?
The student can know. I want to encourage the student to trust himself, to let him know that all these courses of action are legitimate.
I seek to be aware of the right time,; offer it to the student reservedly; accept rejection; seek greater sensitivity.

The appropriate time may be when conditions seem at an optimum for the rightness and success of an action for that person.

Let things be.
A student may be particularly excited and involved by something; I want to make something of that interest, capitalise on the involvement.
Is not that my job as a teacher?
It can be enough in itself.
To thrust my own plans or ideas on the student may quench anything the student may have felt for the experience; or distort her appreciation, her understanding of it.
I won't forget it. It becomes part of what I know about that student and later the occasion may arise when I can directly remind her of it; or make available something that is similar, or linked and may be at that moment appropriate.

A student may have an idea or question but be able to make nothing of it immediately. She may keep returning to that idea without sucess. She may eventually find a solution to her problem. She may forget the idea completely but discover it again months/years later, in another guise, perhaps. It may never come to fruition in the span of one teacher's relationship with her student. It does not mean that the idea is lost.
I experience; come to know; raise a question. These things have happened. They remain somewhere, in the sediment or nearer the surface, of my knowing.

A student may have an idea, question, feeling to which she returns repeatedly; reworking, changing, developing. The same idea may come to have different meanings at different points in her life.

Sometimes students do not complete - or even start - a piece of work, even though they seem to want to, and often keep returning to it. Rachael was very taken with Blake's *Songs of Innocence and Experience*. She kept coming back to them. She said she wanted to do something more than read them and talk about them. She never did, despite her interest in my suggestions and some ideas of her own. Perhaps we never found quite what she was looking for; it is not true to say she did nothing, she read them many times, talked to me and others about them. The thought, experience, feeling, which lies at the root of the desire "to do something" remains.

Sometimes an experience can be very gripping for a student, she becomes really taken up with it, but then doesn't want to paint it, write about it, present it in graph form.
Experiences reappear in students' thinking very much later. Perhaps I will never see how.

There are times for doing things; I cannot always see them. Sometimes an idea, a story or poem read, a film shown to a large group catches a response in one student that it may not have elicited at another time. Gary's writing about the death of his uncle, *One for One*, arose in that way.
Sometimes I would prepare a particular idea or read some poems with only one student in mind. I may have had an idea that such a thing would offer him an opportunity. By offering it to the whole group I give him the chance to refuse the opportunity without refusing me. He need not know that I have thought about him and his work in a particular way, there is no pressure, but a space is offered. Others in the group will also be able to use what is offered, or not,

There are times to start something new; to consolidate; to act on impulse in the midst of something else.

Students sometimes rework things that they have already encountered once in their school career. I return repeatedly to similar questions; to similar areas of thought. Each time they are both the same and different. I bring new experiences, new awareness to the ideas.

I write something that I feel is new to me. I find it in my writing of ten years ago.
I look at writing of ten years past and wonder who I was when I wrote things that no longer seem to relate to my present sense of myself.

Formal plans made are often changed out of recognition. I cannot always expect to find endings in beginnings.

Making links and associations is a part of growing understandings. The growth may not be where I expect it.

Why do some students persist in the face of drawbacks and difficulties? and insist on doing certain things which don't seem essential and are certainly difficult? Often the fact of their importance is not clear to the other.
I acknowledge their importance. I may not understand it.
There have been many reasons for not finishing this thesis. I have not been able to let it go.

It took time for students to decide a piece of work was finished, before they could be satisfied sufficiently to leave it. Exams demanded that they must complete, must move on to the next piece. Often I would say that what they had done was fine, fine for the exam. They would continue until they were satisfied that they had done enough *for themselves*. Much is hidden, I cannot know what a student seeks. Very often, in a curriculum structured by the teacher, time is filled by the teacher. There is less time for students' ideas to develop, for them to pursue a pale scent which draws them on to something they will know when they reach it.

It took time for some kinds of writing, some ideas to emerge, either in the forefront of a student's work, or as something complete.

There may be false starts before a student embarks on a course of action. She needs time to be with her material in a way that does not appear productive but is.
She needs time to be with the material. See what is there. Let her mind work on it. Allow herself to feel the possibilities.

In the course of a year a student comes across many ideas in school, more outside it.
Some things become important; are used; wrestled with; cause irritation; are returned to again and again.
Some are hardly noticed.
Sometimes an idea seems to mean nothing to me but it takes a hold; it relates to some part of me but I am not yet ready.

There are times of intense, concentrated involvement that takes precedence over everything.
There are times when 'messing about' is important. Exploratory, playful times.
There are fallow periods, when new ideas, new experiences, new associations have time to settle into place. When the student doesn't feel he can or must produce anything concrete.

Thought, development, coming to know is part of continuing action and inaction.
It is something which is happening, to different degrees, in different ways, all the time. Single strands of thought seem to stretch over long periods of time and may be linked to such a complex mass of other thoughts, experiences, feelings that as soon as I try to isolate or define I find meaning escaping.

past present future the cold in my foot the presence of my child the bright clouds in blueness my yearning to be my striving to

I need humility
to recognise my limitations, my foibles, my prejudices.
to know I often make mistakes
I can never properly know other people
I do not know best; I may have an inkling
I should not make assumptions which blind me to some aspects of a person
I can only help others to know themselves and to know for themselves
there are a myriad possibilities for every individual and many that I cannot imagine
to try and make the way as open as possible for each individual to see the possibilities and to have the chance to choose the ones that seem right at the time.
not to close down avenues in a way that denies potentiality.
I cannot always be sure how I helped or hindered students
not to categorise
and on the basis of that categorisation decide what will and will not be made available
possible for that student
to remember that what is best for one is not best for another but that I should not deny the one the opportunities of the other

> Judgement of intelligence must be first of all qualitative. It is only through such qualititative judgement that a teacher can begin to come to terms with children's individuality and thus reach toward and plan for that which will invite and steady them to make some significant investment in learning.
>
> The question is not one of whether the child is "ready", for example, to read, but of how, or along what tracks of growth, and at what pace, can the art and the addiction to it best be learend ..... The question should be <u>what</u> is the child ready for?
>
> David Hawkins, *The Science and Ethics of Equality*,
> Basic Books Inc, 1977

It is important to me to recognise and respond to the individuality of the other.

to remember the integriy of each person I encounter, their wholeness and their incompleteness; their uniqueness and their existence as a part of the community of humankind; our commonality and our differences.

I believe that each individual has a potential within them which is at the root of their life and living. It is something that I cannot touch or know but which I might glimpse.
It is something which each individual needs to work to get to know; to be in touch with herself.

In knowing ourselves we can be released to act.

As individuals we do not exist in isolation but derive from cultures, exist in communities which are an essential part of our existing.

What I seek to know and to wonder about; how I set about searching, whatever drives me on, depends on the complexity of who I am, my past experiences and how I have understood and known them, how they appear in my knowing - as part of a pattern, as an unanswered question, as a feeling

A teacher creates disturbances.

In the life of the classroom disturbances are created which challenge students' current pattern of meanings and which provoke accommodation and change.

If I create disturbances, provoke unease and change, I must hold the responsibility for the possibility of change. provide a stability within which a student may work and may feel able to take risks.

A way of thinking influences how an individual may respond, what she chooses and the emphasis of the choice.
The way of thinking may well become unsatisfactory so the individual must make a dramatic change in patterns of thought. This can be a very disturbing time when it would appear that the student is incapable of acting, or is angry, unhappy, infuriated, or when what she is trying to do does not match her aspirations and imaginings.
We often do not want to let go of the old ways.
We live and work within them whilst moving away from them.
We can acknowledge what seems to be the truth of new thoughts but do not feel them. And then suddenly those new ideas seem to be a part of us and we can no longer imagine the old state.
I can often see what seems to be the sense of an idea before I make it a part of my self.
Until it is a part of my belief I cannot seem to make use of it.
When it becomes a part of me I cannot recognise it as separate.

"my students" "my tutor group"

'My' a possessive adjective

Identification
and indication of a special, personal relationship.
the students who worked with me.

I didn't possess them. My mother. My children. I do not possess them.
I was certainly responsible for those students in my tutor group and accountable to them.

I was the official reference point for them and for others concerned with their welfare and behaviour.

I did feel in terms of working for them, having responsibilities towards them, having some knowledge of their lives and learning, that our relationship was a personal one.
I was often preoccupied by their concerns outside school hours. I was in a position to share their excitements and disappointments but I was also aware of and determined to maintain our separateness.

Not only were teams different but a student's experience would be quite different according to who her tutor was even within one team. Differences were probably emphasised because of the individual way of working in teams.

Discrepancies bothered me.
I was also worried by difference - "Would a student have had a better deal in another tutor group? or if I had acted differently concerning some things?"
Now I feel better able to accept differences.
And to know that one can only do what is possible at the moment.
I learn from mistakes and omissions.

I cannot deny the influence I had on students.

For this reason a teacher needs to be self aware.

Aware
Wary
On guard.

3. Writing

But if you say, "How am I to know what he means when I see nothing but the signs he gives?"
Then I say, "How is he to know what he means when he has nothing but the signs either?"

Wittgenstein *Philosophical Reflections*

I was working recently with an adult student who was writing about Alan Bennett's monologue for television, *A Cream Cracker under the Settee*. The student had seen Thora Hird's performance twice and felt it meant a lot to her, but what the student wrote fell short of what she wanted to say. Both she and I were disappointed by what she had written. She felt that it was somehow inadequate to describe her responses to the monologue. The trouble is life is not lived in sentences. Sometimes the complexity of our lives is ill-served by a discourse which seems to distort or overpower the subtlety of what we experience.

Barthes talks of the limpness of the 'grands mots'. We have to work with the words at our disposal but deception lies in the attempt to express ideas and existence using a mode of discourse which of itself denies that existence. In adopting certain modes of discourse I believe I ceased to listen to my own understandings. My meanings were obscured by the words and patterns of words I chose. I sought to clarify my thoughts but the discourse within which I worked could not accommodate the openness of what I tried to describe. Much of the discourse of education denies the real existence of teachers and learners, but having rejected the notion of research as objective and statistical, I continued to work within the notion that there was a particular way of writing appropriate to my subject.

The writing of this thesis is in itself autobiography and within it is my own struggle to unfold my experience, to unpack the layers.

When I began writing diaries they were support, reminder, tool, justification. As I became more confident the diaries became more expansive but remained a part of my own teaching and learning. Once I began on the year's research my diaries changed. They became less urgent, less engaged; distant in the interests of an objectivity I hardly believed in.

Once you have moved to a new state it is hard to remember how it was in the old one. Writing now it is hard to remember how it was when I started thinking about this work. I remember my frustration with myself and with my first supervisor. I was disappointed by my writing, by what I now see as its smoothness, an incompleteness that made me and others who read it feel - so what? - a sense of insufficiency. But I could not find anything satisfactory to replace it. I could not find a way through that disappointment.

Once I began working with Bill Brookes, even though I had a sense of relief and excitement, it took time before I began to allow myself to centre on myself and to begin to find a mode of discourse which arose from a seeking inwards and outwards. My first difficulty was to accept that I could write about an area of my experience as a teacher which I had always felt to be inadmissible, even though it was what informed my whole practice as a teacher. There is a sense in which it will always remain ineffable. It is something it is hard for me to know, let alone anyone else, but I began to write for myself again and to write accepting that what I wrote might remain obscure to others but with an attention to how I wrote, in the hope that others might find resonance in the writing. So my second difficulty was to find a mode of discourse which opened up ideas, let possibilities arise rather than closed them down. I found that I had somehow to centre myself, forget myself, and yet expose every nerve-ending in order to hear an inner voice and to allow that voice a hearing. As I continued to write I ceased to consider Bill's suggestion of using different-coloured pages as a joke at my expense and tried to avoid the seduction of the fine phrase. I could see that there might be a place for different modes of discourse within the whole.

There is a tendency for studies of teaching to sentimentalise. The need to present action in terms of cause and effect can give rise to explanations after an event which imply an intentionality and a finity which does not actually exist in the unexpectedness and incompleteness

of action. We naturally tell stories as a way of making meanings for ourselves but it is important to remember them as such. The story which imputes greater significance to an event, with hindsight, than it had at the time, words which seem to embrace meanings but are divorced from action, can both engender guilt. Unless we deceive ourselves we rarely recognise our own classrooms, our own encounters with learners, in many accounts of classroom practice; and we feel inadequate because the picture portrayed is so very different from the unevenness of our own classrooms. So now the distance which a discourse can create makes me tentative. I find it useful to remember that articulation will always remain incomplete but that there is value in trying to reach the inarticulacies of teaching and learning and in seeking new ways to configure them.

Teachers are asked to justify themselves all the time. Too often accidents of learning are expressed as a part of a pre-ordained scheme of things: I set out with this in mind; this is the result. It can be too neatly packaged. Very often writing which gives a rationale for what happens is removed from how a teacher operates from moment to moment. There can be a density, a predictability, an inflexibility which does not echo my experience of classrooms. Teaching is often described as 'doing unto' so when I began writing I wanted to place the emphasis on children and what they did. I believe that such a shift (which can be seen in the early diaries) from what I might produce in my role as teacher to what students brought with them and how, therefore, I might respond to them was an essential part of my own growth and change. Once I began writing for others, however, what I produced fell short of my aspirations. It was altogether too bland. Those who heard what I had to say might ask, yes, but how did you get the student to do that? Others would express themselves in agreement with me but made me feel uneasy because I felt that they were agreeing with something that maybe was not quite like that. I did not try to write down very much about myself until I met Bill, but can remember now how I tried to express my differences occasionally but felt, always, the inadequacy of my attempts.

Despite my dislike of the stridence of many articles about teaching and the oppressive need to justify I found myself contained within a mode of discourse that was reductionist rather than expansive. The difficulty of a language which seeks to define is that it risks

distortion and limitation. Definition tends to exclusiveness. An idea can become bounded by definition which excludes rather than offers possibility. Language structures tend to deal in absolutes, finities, closure. The affirmation - this is so - excludes and limits whereas the experience of teaching and learning tends to openness, remains unfinished. That I was concerned with actions, a way of being, elusiveness and uncertainties came to me later. Perhaps accusations of irresponsibility made me keep what it is that informs my practice to myself. I do remember that there were times when I was able to tell stories that resonated with others and such moments encouraged me to write alongside my own need for justification. When I wrote, however, my writing felt top-heavy. When Bill first suggested that there might be different ways of writing about different aspects of experience I could not see what he was saying to me. I began writing again, and slowly, as what I felt I could say changed, so the discourse itself has changed and continues to do so. The multiple states from which we operate cannot easily be expressed within the linear flow of language as it is written in sentences and paragraphs. When I began to try and write about my experiencing of teaching I found my writing sprinkled with conditional clauses. To make a categorical statement seemed to impose limits where I saw none. What in one case seemed to be true may not have been so in another. How could I write about something that seemed increasingly contradictory?

Many traditional stories have an economy and resonance about them which elicit a response from the listener which he may not be able to articulate but which touches him in an important way. I heard recently a Grimms' story of suffering, endurance and constancy. The story-teller included a detail of seeming triviality. Towards the end of the story, as the story nears resolution, the king sleeps whilst his queen watches over him. A napkin the queen has placed over his face falls down and she picks it up and replaces it. It is an incident within the drama of the story which hardly seems worth recalling and yet when it was told I felt it was a moment of great power.

Stories also tell us about those who tell them. Folk tales have many versions and many are retold, particularly those which are still told to children. The stories we choose to tell and how we choose to tell them reveal something of ourselves. There are many stories to tell of teaching and learning. Can they be told with a lightness of touch? Let us remember that they are stories.

Stories offer meanings; invite the making of meanings. In the telling of stories I have discovered sometimes the possibilities offered by the space between. Consider the nature of writing about the understandings and relationship between teacher and learner and of the mysteriousness of the space between and within.

Barthes places words together in pairs - 'copy/analogy' 'model/plan' 'poetics/poetry'. "Then," he says, "between the words passes the knife of value." In juxtaposing words, phrases, contrasting modes of discourse, a space is created, an opposition which generates possibility rather than closure.

In trying to write about my experience of teaching and of learning and in trying to unfold my understandings of myself sometimes what I write is nearer to story and poesy than to the conventions of educational discourse. Ted Hughes writes of putting ourselves together again through writing. We dream an idea, have a sense of something and when we write it becomes myth. The myths we write belong to us at the time that we write them. Hughes suggests that such stories are healing. In some ways autobiography is a healing and a creating. It offers an opportunity for stillness and for unease and both are important. In disturbance I can see the shifting, incomplete nature of things and the impetus for change and in the stillness there is a centring; a fixed point from which we may act.

As I am writing I know of my intended meanings and meanings which are implicit but of which I am unaware. I know also that meanings will be brought to the text by the reader; that the text will be recreated each time it is read. I offer words on a page; words which by themselves mean nothing but which are connected to something within me without which they run idle. The words I use arise from and respond to my search for meanings and may, I hope, offer a resonance for others.

'Strictly speaking nothing that we know can be said precisely.' Polanyi suggests that when we acquire a skill, whether muscular or intellectual, we achieve an understanding which we cannot put into words. Probably if we tried to think about how we managed to swim or to ride a bicycle we would sink, or fall off. Certainly I was not the only teacher to find that reflecting as we worked in the classroom could paralyse action as a teacher. To be a teacher-researcher changes the nature of action.

It seems to me that it is in the nature of teaching and learning that they will remain always, in part, ineffable. Having acknowledged that much will remain inarticulate I am able to unfold understandings which I can reach towards; and as I do so I seek a discourse which moves towards openness rather than closure.

Teaching and learning are interlocking. They exist through and within each other. Once I begin to unravel them I am afraid that they cannot be put together again in working order. I once read a moral tale of a girl who took an alarm clock to bits and then couldn't put it back together again. I did the same once with my first adult bicycle and have a picture of the pieces lying useless around me on the kitchen floor. When I isolate an idea it is important to remember it as part of the whole.

Having put the parts together again a consciousness of the parts and a consciousness of the whole may inform each other but I cannot operate if I remain focussed upon isolated parts, nor can I articulate the interlocking consciousness of parts and whole. I think of the difference between looking at a plant through an electron microscope and looking at the plant from my own eyes. The way of looking changes the meaning. I can appreciate the structure and human associations of the plant and the very different perceptions offered through the lens of the microscope. I must look back to the plant without the intervention of the lens to remind myself of it. I must make an intuitive leap to grasp a connection; to form a meaning which links the two. When I see the plant again my perception of it is different because of the different way of looking.

I write to discover myself. Sometimes I pay attention to the discourse, look for the configurations of words which might embody my meanings. I put down the words and later I can look again and decide whether I must reject their hollowness or work on their possibilities. At other times it seems that what I write precedes understanding; tht writing itself is revelation. As I write I must have both faith and doubt, moving backwards and forwards between discourse and understandings, between what is known and what was hitherto unknown; unpacking, unfolding, unlocking, disturbing.

456 When one means something, it is oneself meaning, so one is oneself in motion. One is rushing ahead and so cannot also observe oneself rushing ahead. Indeed not.

457 Yes; meaning something is like going up to someone.

Wittgenstein *Philosophical Investigations*

I love to teach. Teaching allows me to think and imagine and do.

I like to teach
light blue touch paper and stand well back.
what will light the fuse?
what colours, lights, sparkles, explosions will burst forth?

and there the metaphor collapses. Teaching is not about pyrotechnics or about standing back, though stand back I must.

It is about the release of individual energies, about mutual engagement in concerns which matter to us, about commitment and restraint, passion and coolness.

As I come to the end of this thesis
reach these last pages,
now, I am ready to begin.

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