

# **How do I research my own practice?**

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## **Tension within teaching**

There are times in my teaching when I become educationally troubled and I suspect I am not alone in the teaching profession when this happens to me.

The troubling originates from a tension of instinctively knowing that things are not right in some areas of English education, but not having the time or space to reflect and understand the issues. It seems that the value in providing the opportunity for classroom teachers and those at middle management level to spend time in quiet reflection on their own practice is significantly underestimated. Yet many teachers are driven by the question of 'How do I improve what I am doing in my own practice?' (McNiff & Whitehead, 2005). In my own experience the opportunity to reflect without being assessed is lacking. With the potential result that good practice becomes blind without theory and good theory is sterile without practice (Quinn, 1997 cited in Huxtable, 2009, p.2). Yet when there has been the chance to reflect in discussion without judgement it has proved itself to be creative, energising and motivational.

Much of what I have done and believed to be right has been based on my own experience of learning and teaching. The pleasures I derived from learning is that it opened up a world before me. The underlying tension referred to, is that of working within a system that assumes so much investment has to go into the measurement of learning, that lip service is paid to other forms of learning that are less easily measured. Such an environment is in danger of removing the intellectual curiosity of both the student and the teacher because of the obsession with straitjacketing the teacher into the measurable (See Appendix 1). Yet I am of the opinion that (Whitehead, 2008) educational influence is not causal – I can't determine what students learn - I can provide them with the opportunities for learning but they need to exercise their own creativity and imagination in relation to what I do. This explanation of learning goes right to the heart of what I educationally value about the Extended Project Qualification (Level 3 EPQ 2007). It allows the teacher to provide the opportunity for learning but is very dependent on the students' applying their creativity and imagination in order to progress. In achieving this they also create knowledge of themselves that I believe enables them to progress further (Huxtable, 2009).

I believe that what I have carried out during my previous MA essays is action research in terms of criteria given in the definition as outlined by Altrichter, Kemmis, Mc Taggart & Zuber-Skerrett (1990) as cited in Whitehead (2009b),

*“..if yours is a situation in which people reflect and improve (or develop) their own work and their own situations; by tightly interlinking their reflection and actions; and also making their experience public not only to other participants but also to other persons interested in and concerned about the work and the situation. i.e. their (public) theories and practices of the work and the situation, then yours is a situation in which action research is occurring.” (p.19)*

This essay will show how my ideas about independent learning first explored in 2006 have been developed and put into practice between 2007- 2010, through the process of action research. Reflection and action have been intertwined and has been demonstrated not only publicly through the website <http://www.actionresearch.net> but also through speaking at four conferences on the subject in the local authority of Bath & North East Somerset in 2009 as illustrated in one example on YouTube (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tMpaltNH7kg>). The reflections seen in this clip are examples of how my students and I have developed our own practice through reflection that has informed further teaching of this course to later groups of students.

The value of sharing what the practitioner does and placing it in the public domain (Whitehead, 2009b) was given fresh impetus when I saw the play ‘The Pitmen Painters’ by Lee Hall, inspired by a book by William Feaver (2008). Lee Hall in the programme notes comments that Culture is something we share and we are all the poorer for any one excluded from it. While Lee Hall was referring to the political failure to democratise the riches of culture there is something in this comment that can give us insight into the value of an opening that is being made for the teacher researcher to have a voice.

However a key part of this essay is to understand my own methods of research better and also to explore how I can improve the validation of my work. This process has initiated my exploration of claims of validation using a multi media format (Huxtable, 2009) to show a direct connection between educational theory and educational practice (Whitehead, 2008). (Appendix 8)

### **Review of my earlier writings**

In order to understand my existing process of validation I begin by reviewing my previous writings in terms of research methods and placed them in a recognised context. Cresswell (2007) summarises five methodological approaches used in qualitative research: narrative research; phenomenology; grounded theory; ethnography; and case studies. I wanted to know if how I had worked in the past related to Cresswell’s approaches. It was rather like holding up a mirror and examining my previous essays through new eyes. I was also interested to see if there were differences between my essays in the way in which I sought validation.

## **Narrative Criticism**

The first of Cresswell's approaches is narrative criticism that he defines as a specific type of qualitative design in which

*"narrative is understood as a spoken or written text giving an account of an event/action or series of events/actions, chronologically connected."* Pinnegar and Daynes (2006 cited Whitehead 2008, p.2)

suggest a narrative can be both a method and the phenomenon of study.

*"It can either be spoken or written, describes events and is chronologically connected"* (Czarniawska, 2004, p.17 cited Whitehead 2008, p.2).

A narrative can also include biographical information in which the experiences of another person's life are recorded. Biographical narrative material can be found in the single multiple episodes private situations or communal folklore (Denzin, 1989a p.55 cited Whitehead 2008, p.2)."

Subsequent reading of my essay: Gifted and Talented: 'How can I enable the gifts and talents of my students to be in the driving seat of their learning?' (Cartwright, 2008) led me to recognize within this the characteristics of Cresswell's narrative approach. It is this delayed reflection that has enabled me to realize that this coheres with my view that research conveyed to the classroom practitioner needs to be anchored in the practical day - to - day experiences of teachers and students and thus explored as a narrative. To be either a teacher or student can at times be both uncomfortable and pleasurable, which is also part of what is to be a human. The narrative is an opportunity to provide in microcosm, what other practitioners may also experience and hence make some connection between the writer practitioner and reader practitioner. Part of that connection is to recognize the difficulties as well as the pleasure in teaching. An acknowledgement of that through reflection on daily practice can release a key source of energy that drives us through the labyrinth of teaching and learning.

Below is an example of an extract from my essay arguing that the approach to Gifted and Talented should be inclusive not exclusive (Cartwright S. 2008). I described an event from my own school, where students identified as Gifted and Talented were following the EPQ course and those following a Psychology course who were not identified as gifted and talented were taken to the same action research training in the unitary authority. I described the profound comment made by one of the 'non' - Gifted and Talented students in the plenary session. This is a brief narrative I used to show that what can be the most valuable is immeasurable and therefore it contributed to the argument that an inclusive Gifted and Talented approach should be used.

*"One of the Psychology students said the following in the plenary discussion at the end of the afternoon:*

*' I am not a student who will get all grade As or even all Bs but I would like someone to know I have been on a learning journey.'*

*This student's comments silently reverberated around his audience.*

*I was left with the question: would someone please tell me why that student with his own profound insight into how he and others view his progress should not be given the same opportunities as those who are labelled Gifted and Talented? "(Cartwright, 2008.).*

### **A Critique of the Narrative Criticism and Living Educational Theory**

While I believe this account reflects in brief, narrative criticism, I would also argue it takes me beyond narrative criticism and into the educational approach to research called Living Educational Theory (Whitehead, 2008). The reason for this is that I have included my own personal reflection and therefore brought the first person into what would otherwise have been an account in the third person. I have moved from the position of being an observer and presenting a rational argument to that of a writer who identifies their own values that underpin what they do and what they argue. The Living Educational Theory approach adopted in this essay is illustrated below:

*"For me this is part of recognising others for who they are and not what they are and coheres with my views on what Gifted and Talented education should be about. It is about us being valued for who we are, and about enabling others to have the confidence to discover their hidden gifts and talents Cartwright, S. (2008)."*

This opportunity for reflection allowed me the space to understand why I argued that the Extended Project Qualification should not be exclusively for those on the Gifted and Talented list but should be available to a wider spectrum of students with the result that this course is now open to a wider range of students.

'Living educational values' has encouraged me to explain my values and identify what influences me in practice as a teacher (Whitehead, 2008). It is what Dadds and Hart (2001, p.166,) call methodological inventiveness. It is where I have drawn on a recognised approach but because I have been driven by my own values and liberated to follow my own sense of direction I have stumbled into my own self-chosen research focus. I have been able to respond to the situation as I saw it in my own school with my own classes. It has enabled me to understand and move the students with whom I work and myself forward. There has been room for the intuition of the teacher to be developed, from which more formal ideas can be explored and evidenced. As with some of the best opportunities for learning for both the student and the teacher, I, out of my experience and reflections on my practice, gradually have been able to articulate my own question for investigation. My motivation has been that I will be able to resolve my own questions and improve my own practice and thus improve the experience of those students with whom I come into contact.

My initial mechanism of choice of research (Dadds & Hart, 2001) was not formulaic, was not about selecting one particular methodology but rather drawing on what seemed appropriate at the time. I was perhaps driven more

by my underlying educational values that intuitively lead to a particular course of action or method. With hindsight I can formally begin to understand the diversity of approaches that were taken and consider their appropriateness. While this approach may not fit in to recognisable boxes of traditional social science research what it has done is maintained an integrity to the question that is asked by the practitioner who is bound to the daily buffeting of school life and constant demands of implementing change brought not by themselves but by either the school or the government.

The flexibility allowed by the concept of methodological inventiveness allows the practitioner to adapt their research to the unpredictable nature of the school year and the opportunities that are granted or removed and yet still not lose sight of the question that motivates them. So within my own institution staff restructuring has meant that I have moved from a post that was centrally located within the Sixth Form to develop the EPQ to a pastoral post outside the main body of the Sixth Form with less access to the students following the course.

If research within a school environment is to be sustained then flexibility has to be a key component within the nature of research. The opportunities that arise during a school year can be unpredictable and therefore perhaps unlike conventional research where the methodology and method can be planned with care in advance the practitioner in the classroom does not always have that luxury and needs to be flexible in order to take advantage of the opportunities that arise and therefore needs to be flexible in what research methods they choose. Nevertheless, what can remain unchanged throughout this research process are the values of the practitioner that underpin the question and the motivation to see it unpacked and explored.

### **Phenomenological Approach**

The Phenomenological Approach describes the meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept of a phenomenon (Cresswell, 2007, pp.53-58).

*“Phenomenologists focus on describing what all participants have in common as they experience a phenomenon. The basic purpose of phenomenology is to reduce individual experiences within a phenomenon to a description of the universal essence.”*

In my report for the Farmington Trust (Cartwright, 2006) I began my enquiry into the lack of independent learning amongst those in the 16 - 19 age - group by gathering evidence from a wide range of sources. Cresswell describes how:

*“the inquirers collect data from persons who have experienced the phenomenon and develops a composite description of the essence of the experience for all individuals.”* (Cresswell, 2007, pp.53-58).

I wanted to show that this issue was significant not just from my own experience but was recognised by others. The range of sources can be found

in Appendix 2. As with the Phenomenological approach I describe what several observers share in common about their concerns for many students. In this respect I reduced a range of observed experiences (van Manen, 1990, p177 cited in Whitehead, J. 2008) to one concern many teachers and educators have in the lack of independent learning that takes place amongst many students in the English Educational System.

### **A Critique of my Phenomenological Approach**

On reflection my own composite description was based too much on secondary comment rather than first hand analysis of the original data. The data from the B&NES Area Wide Inspection and the Nuffield Foundation should have been analysed in order for there to be a more confident and sound basis for the report in order to raise its validity. Also my reason for the original report was based on my own experiences and anecdotes of colleagues within my own institution rather than based on a formal collection of data from staff. A questionnaire to staff to validate my own concerns about lack of independent learning could have set the initial question on a more valid footing.

Unlike the Phenomenological approach I did seek to apply these collected observations to my own practice as characterised by the Living Educational Theory that recognises the uniqueness of the individual in their enquiry. My Farmington Report (Cartwright, 2006) was written prior to my engagement with the concept of Living Educational Theory as was my essay concerning boys' underachievement (Cartwright, 2000) and the personal values that underpin and motivated me to write these were not explicitly present. In each case there is a justification but not a personal explanation for the report. Below are two extracts, one taken from an essay prior to application of the Living Educational Theory and one after.

#### Farmington Report

*"The aim of applying for a fellowship that linked school and university was so that in the department we would be able to draw on current thinking and apply some ideas to our classroom teaching. The topic of independent learning was selected because there have been many occasions in the department when staff have been concerned about the lack of independence in learning shown by students particularly those in the Sixth Form."* (Cartwright, 2006)

This style contrasts with my opening paragraph of the essay 'How can I enable the gifts and talents of my students to be in the driving seat of their learning?' (Cartwright, 2009) which applies Living Educational Theory:

*"My most vivid childhood memories of learning at school were not what the teachers taught me but what I found out for myself. I remember at junior school completing a project on childhood games and feeling important when I discovered there was a museum devoted to the topic. In Year 9 in Geography a project on industry led me to interview a manager from a local company. In all these projects I remember the emotional engagement with the work because it was unique to me but what I did not appreciate was the research and thinking processes that underpinned my endeavours."*

Both paragraphs are concerned with understanding an aspect of independent learning, but between these two paragraphs one can see a transition from the Social Sciences approach to writing of the Farmington Report to a Living Educational Theory Approach which begins with what is individual and personal to me the writer, paving the way for an exploration and understanding of my own explanation of what has influenced me in my learning and subsequent teaching.

### **Grounded Theory Research**

Grounded Theory Research, is concerned with formulating a theory that might help explain practice or provide a framework for further research based on the experience of participants in the process (Strauss & Corbin, 1998. cited in Whitehead, 2008). At this stage I cannot see evidence of developing such a theory within my own writing. Although this is not to deny that my students and I have not been creating educational knowledge (Huxtable, 2009). On the other hand I would argue that this does summarise the approach developed by Wallace (2008) who has developed an eight stage process to problem solving, called Thinking Actively in a Social Context (See Appendix 3) that I and the Social Studies Faculty have adopted in order to help us develop students' skills in independent learning. Thus my Educational Enquiry (Cartwright, 2007) used Narrative Research and Living Educational Theory to show how we applied the Grounded Theory Research of Wallace's TASC to teaching Year 7 students.

Within this essay itself I can also see the TASC process at work. I began with the 'Gather/Organise' process and reflected on what I already knew which was embodied in my previous essays. From this I was able to 'Identify' a question I wanted to explore within the research methods' criteria. Through the MA seminars I was able to 'Generate' a range of ideas that could be explored in this essay. By the nature of this essay and the possibility of refining the title, the 'Decision' made prior to implementation as to the precise nature of the essay was not finalized and therefore the decision making process has been ongoing throughout the essay. The 'Lets Do It' part of the process has been one of evolution as the theory and the practical exploration in the classroom and reviewing students' work have dynamically fed in to each other. The 'Evaluation' stage or how well did I do stage, has had input from my students, members from the MA group and myself. 'Communication' will occur when this essay is handed in and the 'Review' will be in the feedback I receive and also my own reflection of the process. I would argue that this essay is the product of the application of one form of Grounded Theory Research.

### **Autoethnographical**

An ethnographer

*"focuses on an entire cultural group. ....typically it is large, involving many people who interact over time (teachers in an entire school)...it is a way of studying a culture – sharing group .... Most often through participant observation, in which the researcher is immersed in the day – to day lives of the people" (Creswell, 2007).*

I do recognise that my writing explores only one small aspect of the wider tensions experienced by teachers (See Appendix 4). As a result those tensions sit in the background of the essay but are not necessarily explicitly referred to. Those background tensions in the English education system include the pressures of a constantly changing curriculum and specifications, the demand to produce results for League Tables, performance during an Ofsted inspection, delivery of Assessment For Learning, Personalised Learning, Every Child Matters, Learning to Learn, Student Voice, Behaviour for Learning and the delivery of some courses without any formal training. Lord Filkin, (House of Lords, 2009) chairman of the House of the Lords Merits of Statutory Instruments Committee which reported in the The Cumulative Impact of Statutory Instruments on Schools said the following: :

*"The committee has concluded that able, brilliant and skilled professionals do not thrive when their energies are absorbed by the need to comply with a raft of detailed requirements."*

In many respects what I write is autoethnographical, because it emerges from the tensions and frustrations of an educational climate in which there appears little space for the reflections of the classroom teacher amidst constant changes. On the other hand unlike the ethnographer I do not focus or take full cognisance of teachers as a body of people in relation to these social norms of teaching but rather I reflect on how they affect me and how they affect my learning and teaching.

### **Case Study Research**

The subjects of my essays do meet the criteria given for Case Study Research, which is the exploration of an issue through one or more cases within a bounded system over time through detailed in depth data collection drawing on multiple sources of information (Cresswell, 2007). Much of what I have done has been qualitative research. The bounded system or case studied in my Educational Enquiry was planning and implementation of a pilot project using TASC process across five departments. This project from its inception to final implementation and review took about a year. And thus as in a case study took place over time. The multiple sources of information included Wallace's TASC process, conversation between the departments, photographic evidence of the delivery of the project, an evaluative questionnaire completed by participating staff and a summary of interviews conducted by a local authority consultant, Peter Spain with participating students. (Cartwright, 2007).

A further essay which explored issues to do with the meaning of Gifted and Talented drew upon an ongoing record of student observation and student comments about their progress as we worked together on the pilot project of AQA's Extended Project Qualification. The comment below illustrates the type of qualitative data collected from students:

*"However, the skill which I consider to be the most important for me is the improvement in my public speaking ability. With no experience and little confidence in this field before my participation in the Extended Project, yet*

*now I am quite happy to give presentations and indeed I have done relating to other subjects.” (Mead, 2008)*

### **A Critique of the Case Study Approach**

Although my enquiries contain key characteristics of the Case Study they have also been underpinned by The Living Educational Theory described as ‘a relationally dynamic awareness of space and boundaries.’ (Whitehead, 2008). The difference between the two understandings of action research is that the Case Study approach has clearly defined boundaries. However the latter approach allows the researcher and writer to recognise the values that underpin not only this piece of work but other work as well. Living Educational Theory allows the researcher to recognise their own values within the work they are carrying out. As Whitehead (2008 p.5) says it allows one to articulate the principles that explain why we do what we do and to recognise that by our participation we are transformatory. Thus the case study I am researching is not apart from me but includes me and the challenge I face is to acknowledge that role and recognise my own influence on students. Influence implies having an effect on another and with that there is implied responsibility, which only I can own and which is without boundaries. It’s openness, creates a depth of responsibility that reaches in to my own values. For my thinking to progress I have to unpack the assumptions upon which my embodied knowledge sits. My role as a teacher requires me to daily deliver a practical response to situations but provides infrequent opportunities to understand and unpack the individual values which underpin my embodied knowledge. Yet it is those values that are the driving force behind what I do and the way I do it. They are the foundations upon which educational relationships are formed with students and colleagues. In Appendix 8 I start to show how I am beginning to explore these issues through a multi - media approach.

Much of what has been described and evidenced in understanding my own processes of work has been based on the use and application of qualitative data. However my first piece of action research (Cartwright, 2001) was heavily influenced by quantitative data, that by its nature shows measurement (Appendix 7). From this I was able to make a case for direction and change in how we delivered our schemes of work to address the issue of boys’ underachievement. Even here I did not exclusively draw on the quantitative technique, but used a Case Study approach in relation to a lesson observation and the Phenomenological approach to gather colleague’s views.

In conclusion I have recognised that no one method or methodology has been exclusively used throughout any one piece of my action research. Where appropriate different approaches have been woven into the same piece of action research. What I now have is a language with which to articulate their different methods and methodologies and an appreciation of the strengths and weaknesses. What I have also seen is the progression and development of my influence from the beginning of a concern in independent learning in the Farmington Report (Cartwright, 2006) to an attempt at a solution in the Educational Enquiry (Cartwright, 2007) and appreciation of the opportunities afforded by AQA’s Extended Project Qualification (Cartwright, 2008). Finally

for myself as a practitioner this essay has set me on the path to explore in more depth, the multi - media approach to validate my own research.

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## Appendix 1

The value of sharing what the practitioner does and placing it in the public domain (Whitehead) was given fresh impetus when I saw the play 'The Pitmen Painters' by Lee Hall, inspired by a book by William Feaver. The book and play tells the true story of how miners from the Ashington Pit from scratch in 1934 began to learn about Art by doing it. Lee Hall in the programme notes comments that Culture is something we share and we are all the poorer for any one excluded from it. While Lee Hall was referring to the political failure to democratise the riches of culture there is something in this comment which can give us insight into the value of an opening that is being made for the teacher researcher to have a voice . He goes on to describe how the Ashington Group

*"chose to make art both central to their lives but removed from the 'economy' of the art world."*

Again this comment gave a fresh view on the work of the EPQ students, which is that the delivery of the Extended Project Qualification has not been dominated by the target driven culture of other courses. To some extent the students have been removed from the economy of school grades. However the standards have been set through in depth discussion and peer analysis striving to work towards the standards of such journals as the New Scientist and History for Today. William Feaver describes how the class came to an understanding that each member would do a painting accordingly to be discussed in class the following week. In the same way the EPQ group has been modelled on the Tuesday MA seminars that in many respects are dependent on what each member of the group brings to the class that week. As William Feaver says:

*"Seeing by doing. Doing by seeing"*

I found this play inspirational as a teacher because the artists were not conventional in the way they worked in relation current artists of the day but at the same time they brought something honest new and fresh to the world of art without compromising the riches of culture (Hall, L. Newcastle, March 2008).

## Appendix 2

### Phenomenological Approach

A range of sources from the Farmington Trust Report (Cartwright, S. 2006) used to support my enquiry into the lack of independent learning amongst those in the 16- 19 age – group.

- *“The general concerns raised by the department’s teaching experience were found to be suitably summed up by the series editor, Janet Moyles of J. Williams’ book: ‘Promoting Independent Learning in the Primary Classroom’ :*

*In the UK we work hard with young children to encourage independence yet then successively take it away from them as they progress through primary and finally into secondary schools, then try to give it back to them again at University level.” (Williams. Moyle. 2003 pxii.)*

- *“In the Autumn 2000 a 16-19 Area Wide Inspection took place in Bath and North East Somerset and Ofsted, the FE Funding Council and Training Standards Council in their review under the section ‘Issues for Attention’, made the following point:*

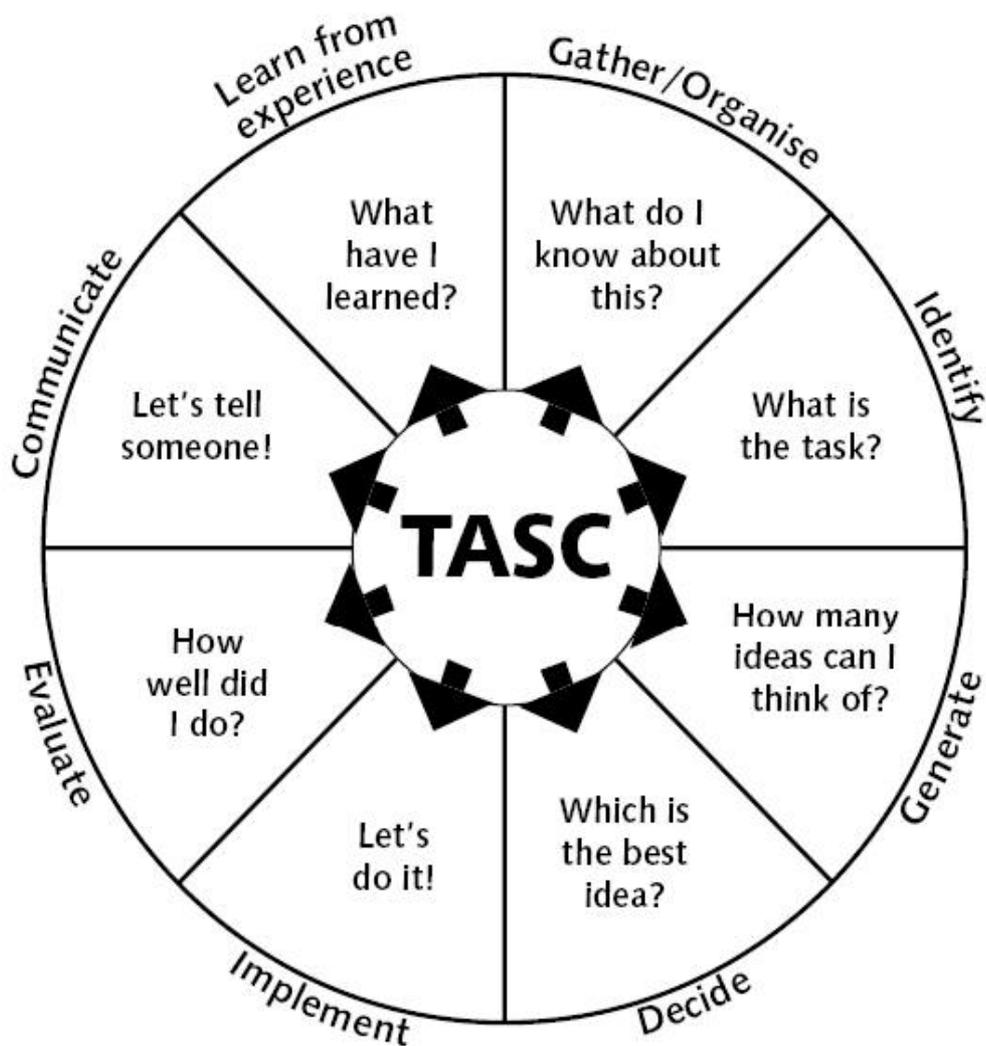
*‘Schools and Colleges should take the opportunity offered by Curriculum 2000 to review their teaching and learning strategies, ensuring that there is challenge for the most able students and that all students are encouraged to develop the skills of independent learning.’ ”*

- *“In February of this year the Nuffield Foundation published a part of the Nuffield Review of 14-19 Education and Training However the attributes that were lacking in students were commitment to studying a subject, engaging critically with ideas, being prepared to take intellectual risks and using a range of skills to develop argument.”*
- *“The front page headline of the Daily Telegraph on February 9<sup>th</sup> 2006 read ‘ Spoon fed pupils can’t cope at college’. Liz Lightfoot the Education Correspondent for the Daily Telegraph Said: ‘Schools pupils are being spoon fed to pass exams instead of being encouraged to develop knowledge and understanding’ .”*

### Appendix 3

This thinking skill framework developed by Belle Wallace breaks down the thinking required to solve a problem into eight stages and each stage is represented as a segment in a wheel. While all eight stages did not need to be completed consecutively there is coherence to the process

Wallace, B (ed) (2003). Using History to Develop thinking Skills at Key Stage 2. Great Britain. David Fulton Publishers



## Appendix 4

### Autoethnographical Approach

My writing is characterised by my experience and response to the cultural norms as illustrated below:

#### **1. Project Report: Boys' underachievement in my own school. Cartwright, (2002).**

"I compared the school's own results with those of national DfEE figures quoted in the DfEE publication: 'Teachers' July 2000 stated that overall figures for GCSE results showed that 53% of girls were achieving 5 or more passes at A\*-C compared to 43% of boys. At my particular school in that year 78% of girls achieved A\*-C and boys achieved 65% A-C."

#### **2. Essay on Understanding Learners and Learning: How can I help my students understand and develop the skills of independent learning? Cartwright, (2007).**

"the Autumn 2000 a 16-19 Area Wide Inspection took place in Bath and North East Somerset and Ofsted the FE Funding Council and Training Standards Council [www.ofsted.gov.uk/reports/servicesreports/301.htm](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/reports/servicesreports/301.htm) accessed 01/06/06) in their review under the section 'Issues for Attention, made the following point:

"Schools and Colleges should take the opportunity offered by Curriculum 2000 to review their teaching and learning strategies, ensuring that there is challenge for the most able students and that all students are encouraged to develop the skills of independent learning."

"The inspection team also said this: In general few students read around the subject as well as they might and few show willingness to question or challenge what is being said. This often restricts the development of their analytical skills."

"In some lessons teachers do not place sufficient emphasis on independent learning and the need for students to think for themselves."

#### **3. Essay on Gifted and Talented: How can I enable the gifts and talents of my students to be in the driving seat of their learning? Cartwright, (2008).**

"The DCSF is: 'expecting all schools to have a gifted and talented education policy and whole school improvement programme in place which is part of the wider improvement plan including personalisation of Learning, AfL, Inclusion, Every Child Matters and all major strategy initiatives.'" ([www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/giftedandtalented](http://www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/giftedandtalented)).

## Appendix 5

Below are comments from five of the students with whom a colleague and I worked to deliver the Extended Project Qualification.

### Comment A

*"I massively enjoyed the extended project. Firstly because of the sheer fascination I had for my own experience for my own project and the many, many new ideas and interpretations of evidence I experienced, also the development of my own beliefs and the challenging and broadening of my own view of abortion.*

*The group with which I undertook my project was brilliant when it came to constructively criticising. Drafting and redrafting therefore became a new skill I learned as a result of the project as well as criticising and suggesting ways of improving my peers' and friends' work. The research community we formed also meant I could hear about, at all stages, the other projects being done in my school."*

(Norris, 2009) When does life begin, how do beliefs about death have relevance to the question and how can this relate to the morality of abortion?

### Comment B

*"To summarise, opting to do the Extended Project was a fantastic decision for me. Not only have I been on an educational journey with a subject that I am highly interested in, I have also gained so many skills that will help me so much in the near future. The independent nature of the qualification has been a leap into the unknown somewhat and initially a challenge, but it's a form of learning that I've found to be by far, more preferable to my normal A – level. I am now only left wishing that the rest of my exams were of a similar nature."*

(Palmer, 2009) Is NATO doing more harm than good?

### Comment C

*"My learning during this project has been highly transformed. I found it incredibly difficult but I enjoyed the freedom it gives you."*

(Peake, 2009) A comparison of the effects that WW2 had on the cities of Bristol and Bordeaux

### Comment D

*'Writing and performing the play was probably one of the most rewarding things I have ever done. I have learnt a great deal along the way, not just about the Ancient Egyptians and Tutankhamun, but also about myself.'*

(Stainer, 2009) How can I use theatre to communicate the story of Tutankhamun to an audience of none to ten year olds?

### Comment E

*"At the end of this project I was not only able to have written an essay about it's (Shariah law) adoption in our country but I was able to educate others in the presentation (which I presented in the form of a lecture)."*

(Tearney, 2009) Would adopting some aspect of Shariah law in Britain be detrimental to Society?

## Appendix 6

Below is a transcript of 5 mins 40 secs of an Extended Project Qualification lesson. It is chaired by one of the students Jonty who has submitted the first page of his draft exploring his interest in jazz for discussion amongst his peers.

The students begin with a discussion centered around the detail of Jonty's phrasing and then I suggest the students move the discussion on and this is picked up by Josh at 03.02 when he raises the question about how Jazz should be defined.

01:47 Jacob: I don't understand. I don't know if this makes much sense, that at an early age, then comma, I was taken to a concert. I think it is phrased a bit strangely. I think it should be something when I was younger 'Cos you usually say at an early stage when you are exposed to something, like at an early age I listened to a lot of music like Mozart, where as this one, specific, that happened once.

02.24 Jonty: Ok so do you want me to be more specific and say when it was?

02.26 Jacob: No say when I was younger.

02.29 George: When I was five or something.

02.35 Angharad: I don't know if it is the comma that is throwing off something.

02.47 Jonty: So?

02.47 Myself: What about the way you actually start, the way Jonty starts, the general flavour of it, just look at it generally, rather than go in for the kill straight away.

03.02 Josh: The first paragraph specially. I don't know, why did you put in the definition of jazz?

03.09 Jonty: I just thought it was quite a nice place to start.

03.11 Angharad: I like it.

03.23 Alexej: It makes sense 'cos it sort of makes a base for the whole then.

03.15 Angharad: It's defining so that's what we want.

03.19 Jacob: Personally with mine I will wait to define it when I start the actual essay rather than put it in straight away. I would put it in, but say something about, you have asked the question and immediately answered it without saying anything.

03.34 Angharad: But I think with Jacob's it is different because there is no generic definition for plastics I wouldn't say, but I think there is for jazz and you 're comparing the definition.

03.43 Jonty: I am saying this is what the dictionary thinks.

Angharad: That's why I think it is good that you have started it.

Jonty: And I have said that there, behind it. I am not saying, oh there is my question and that's what I am going to say.

03.58 Angharad: Because that's your starting point.

04:00 Harry Could you give your own definition of jazz – this is what the dictionary says and then this is what I think.

04.03 Jacob: Would it make more sense, then instead of straight at the end you have given a definition, and then at the end of two paragraphs, what makes jazz, jazz? But you have defined it at the beginning so it kind of makes that question irrelevant so you could say something what really makes jazz, jazz, rather than what you just mention, the definition above or are you satisfied that there is a definition or not?

04.26 Jonty: So.

04.27 Joshua: You just mention the definition above or are you satisfied that this is a definition or not?

04:33 George: I think you need to explain your thoughts without that definition, rather than just listing, you need to have a short sentence or paragraph underneath, exactly explaining what you think about.

04.48 Myself: I think both Jonty and George make a really good point, that I like the way you ask the question - actually are you happy with that definition? And are you saying so you need to locate that definition because if you are then taking an accepted dictionary and you are going to explore it I think you are both right. If you then set the boundaries of your essay so you are clear about how you are using one definition but how may you explore another. That's what you guys are saying is n't it? Jacob what do you want to say? Sorry I am taking over now!

05.18 Jacob: I was going to say by defining it straight away and then not. You define it straight away but then you don't reference, you only reference to it being a dictionary definition is right next to it. You don't reference in the paragraph, so then the paragraph is talking about how you define jazz, but it does not take any note that you want to define jazz by the dictionary which kind of nullifies the first part of your essay question.

05.55 Jonty: I put the definition just so that if I am reading this essay when I have done it, you might not necessarily have any knowledge of what jazz really is so.

06.15 Myself: Could you call it a working definition, a generally acceptable working definition, but the purpose of your essay is to explore it.

06.19 Jonty: So basically you are saying that I need to say something about this early on in the paragraph.

06.26 Alexej: You could move the definition down to beneath, to what makes jazz jazz – the Oxford dictionary says da da da da da however there are many different strands, then move on to the popular music thing.

06.37 Jacob: That would probably make it flow better.

06.40 Angharad: Or you could have a definition and then start your anecdote and then you can say since that concert and then say, like, why it is now that you don't necessarily agree with that definition. I like the definition near the opening because that is the base of your whole essay so it is a good starting point but then justify it later on.

07.14 Jonty: So I need to say that I don't see this definition as a perfect definition of what jazz really is.

07.22 Myself: In your log when you go over what you have done in the lesson today you can put down your knowledge of a variety of suggestions that were considered but the one you have finally chosen and why you have chosen it.

07.30 Jonty: Ok anything I mean, so with that change are we happy with that paragraph?

## Appendix 7

Below is an extract from an essay written to investigate how it was possible to raise boys' achievement in the Philosophy and Belief department of the comprehensive school at which I worked. Below is an extract from the introduction to the essay

'The purpose of this project is to show how within my own school I have begun an investigation into what can be learnt from how pupils perform, in both public exams and the school's own internal methods of assessment and how from the issues raised one department has begun to reflect on current practice and implement changes in classroom practice with the expectation that other departments will become interested in the project. The starting point or method employed was to examine the performance of boys and girls in each of the Key Stages of the school.'

The school's GCSE Results 1988 – 2000 are shown in **Appendix 1& 2** and show the following data:

- In every year since 1998 the girls' average point score per pupil is higher than that of the boys'.
- Within the last 5 years the smallest difference has been 3:00 points in 1996 and the greatest difference was 8:1points 1997.
- The percentage of boys achieving grade B or better was lower than girls each year since 1988.
- Within the last 5 years the smallest difference was 4% in 2000 and the biggest difference was 14.2% in 1998.
- The percentage of boys achieving A\*-C each year since 1988 was less than that of the girls.
- 
- During the last 5 years the biggest difference between boy/girl performance for those in the A\*-C was 20:9% in 1998 and 9:7% in 2000.

### **A comparison of national data with the school's own data on GCSE results**

I compared the school's own results with those of national DfEE figures quoted in the DfEE publication: 'Teachers' July 2000 stated that overall figures for GCSE results showed that 53% of girls were achieving 5 or more passes at A\*-C compared to 43% of boys. At my particular school in that year 78% of girls achieved A\*-C and boys achieved 65% A-C.

Both groups are performing well above the national average.

Nick Tate from QCA who spoke on Radio 4's 'The Commission' on 8<sup>th</sup> September 2000 produced the following figures:

70% of boys from professional classes achieve A\*-C,

41% of boys from unskilled workers achieved A\*-C

20% of boys from ethnic minorities 20% A\*-C.

The gap between boys and girls is widest amongst the least academically able.

According to John Clare writing in the Daily Telegraph on 18/10/2000 the gap between girls and boys GCSE A-C results was: 12.5% at Secondary Modern Schools

10.7% at Comprehensives

1.5% at Grammar Schools.

The average percentage difference over the last 5 years between girls and boys performing at my comprehensive school at GCSE level was A\*-C is 15.02%.

### Questions to come out of the data analysis

Although it is not always possible to ensure with precision that one's own school can be compared directly with national data, this data begs a range of questions some of which are to be found in the national debate on boy/girl performance:

1. Is the school in a situation where the girls are performing exceptionally well?
2. If this is the case how can teachers enable the boys to perform exceptionally well?
3. Are there bigger differences between the performance of those boys and girls who are less able?
4. Does there need to be a more in depth analysis and comparison of boys and girls who achieve within the D-G range at GCSE at my school?
5. Are these averages applicable to all subjects or are there variations between subjects?
6. Does this pattern of results continue to Key stage 5?

### *Boy's performance differs between subjects*

John O'Leary writing in The Times on August 27 1999 summarised a report into Welsh examination data by Stephen Gorard, Jane Salisbury and Professor Gareth Rees from Cardiff University covering the years of 1992-1997. The researchers concluded there were no significant differences in Mathematics and Science only English and that that the gender gap is more to do with particular subjects, than across all subject areas.

Further analysis of my own schools GCSE A\*-C results in 2000, subject by subject showed that there were differences between subjects on girl/boy performance. They were as follows:

	Boys	Girls
- English	69.2%	87.9%
- English Literature	66.7%	75.8%
- Mathematics	70.9%	66.7%
- Double Science	86.6%	81.5%
- Single Science	15.0%	44.0%

Finally, out of a further 17 subjects taken at GCSE by boys and girls there were 4 subjects where boys scored a higher average point score and these subjects were:

Graphic products, Music, Physical Education, Resistant materials all of which can be regarded as practical subjects. **See Appendix 3.**

Philosophy and Belief was one of the remaining 13 subjects where girls achieved higher GCSE results than boys and the differences over the last 3 years are as follows:

Year	A*-C Boys	A*-C Girls
1998	63.6%	81.5%
1999	55.6%	72.0%
2000	68.8%	78.6%

An analysis of the 2000 GCSE results for the Philosophy and Belief Department showed that for 53.57% of the girls and for 50% of the boys their Philosophy and Belief grade was their highest grade. **See Appendices 3 and 3a**

#### **KEY STAGE 5**

The difference between boy/girl performances is nationally more marked at 11 years of age, 14 Years and 16 years compared to that at key stage 5. The school's results bear this statement out as shown in **Appendix 4**. The results at Key Stage 5 show that during the last 9 years there have been two years when the boys average point score per student was higher than the girls and that in 1992 the results were identical and in 1997 there was 0 .1 difference. Having compared the school's data there are trends within the school that match national trends as well as some differences. Therefore I would argue that just as there is national debate on these trends there is a good case for such a debate within my own school. While my project does not answer all these questions; they are important questions, which could form the basis of school discussion."

## Appendix 8

### How I began to evidence what I do

- The first source of evidence (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tMpaltNH7kg>) is a video clip made by Marie Huxtable posted on YouTube and shows students and myself talking about the EPQ at a local conference after they completed the course in 2008.
- The second source is written information and contains extracts taken from the EPQ logs of five students who completed the course in 2009 and is enclosed in Appendix 5.
- The third source is a 5 min 40 sec extract from a 57-minute video and a transcript of the EPQ lesson showing my interaction with students (Appendix 6).

The purpose of each piece of evidence is to support my claim I make at the beginning of the essay that I can provide them (students) with the opportunities for learning but they need to exercise their own creativity and imagination in relation to what I do. My evidence is validated in both the text and videoed form but covering a period of three years. Laidlaw (2008) argues that not only are our values not static but they live and develop as we do which has implications for what material counts as validating evidence. Below is an explanation of the videoed forms:

**YouTube Video (2008).** <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tMpaltNH7kg>.

This video extract shows two students Simon and Louise from the first AS level EPQ (B&NES 2009) describing what they have gained from studying for the qualification. Each student has identified quite different skills from the course. Simon describes how he established a strict writing regime for himself, how he learnt to communicate science to a lay audience and how to reference, which he described as a key life skill. He comments that he has become a bit of a learning addict. Louise on the other hand describes how she learnt to use primary sources in another language and also developed her confidence in public speaking. In both these cases these students have been given the opportunity to study but what each regards as their biggest gain from the same qualification has been quite different. As Buber (1961) says:

*“For in the manifold variety of the children the variety of creation is placed before him.” (p. 122)*

I have been influential in providing the students with the opportunities and they have exercised their own creativity and imagination in relation to what I do. I believe the use of the YouTube extract will validate this form of research that can convert knowledge not easily captured in written text. (Bruce Ferguson, 2008) but also demonstrates the smiles and humour which

contribute to the educational relationship between a student and teacher (Laidlaw, 2008).

### **Extended Project Qualification lesson extract (2009 – 2010).**

The transcript and video extract from an EPQ lesson shows students (who followed the EPQ course 2009-2010) taking charge of the discussion, after reading a first draft of a student's work. They use question and answer to evaluate and analyse his work. The student whose work is under scrutiny is responding to questions about his introduction in particular, how the word jazz should be defined. The interaction between the 16-17 year old students shows them working at a very focused level sharing their own responses and giving generously of their views. It is through Jonty's chairing and the group's choice of questions and answers that have enabled them to progress. My influence has not been causal but one of providing an opportunity. My intention in submitting the video extract is to do as Huxtable (2009) says:

*" I believe that I have communicated more of the relationally dynamic qualities of my educational research through inviting you to engage with me in this brief interactive, multimedia narrative, than would otherwise have been possible"*

The two video extracts and quotations from the student logs (Appendix 5) are taken from three different groups of EPQ students across three years I see in them my values of giving the student ownership of their work and that independence of thought. Buber's (1970) words concerning the word 'I' resonated with me:

*"How much of a person a man is depends on how strong the I of the basic word I-You is in the human duality of his I. The way he says I – what he means when he says I – decides where a man belongs and where he goes. The word "I" is the true shibboleth of humanity."*

The video extracts show the relationship between the students and myself embodied in dialogue and discussion. Adler Collins (2008) argues that textual representation on the printed page alone does not adequately communicate claims about lived energy – flowing values. Each extract contains something of what I value about learning. Each contains something of the shibboleth of learning. Each piece of evidence shows students engaging in their learning and the learning of others through their own intellectual curiosity. These students in this qualification are not demonstrating the spoonfed culture (Cartwright, 2006). In fact these extracts show how much it has been possible in three years to move away from such a culture as described in Appendix 1.

*"But how beautiful and legitimate the vivid and emphatic I of Socrates sounds! It is the I of infinite conversation, and the air of conversation is present on all its ways, even before his judges, even in the final hour in prison. This I lived in that relation to man which is embodied in conversation" (Buber, 1970).*

The combination of these words of Buber and the watching of the video have started to give me a new understanding as to how I enter into learning

conversations with my students. In a subsequent lesson I submitted pages 7 and 8 of the first draft of this essay to my students for scrutiny and I believe went beyond what Buber (1961 p.128) describes in the following:

“But however intense the mutuality of giving and taking with which he is bound to his pupil, inclusion cannot be mutual in this case. He experiences the pupil’s being educated, but the pupils cannot experience the educating of the educator.”

The reason for this is that I am sharing my learning with my students and asked them to comment not on me as teacher but rather as a student. I was unsure what to expect from this process and admittedly felt awkward but having briefly put myself into the fray I know I benefited from their insightful comments and was impressed that they applied the same energetic criticism to my work as they did to each other.

They gave me the following feedback:

- Greater clarity required
- More paragraphs
- Teaching is done not for life but for exams (!)
- Explain more the relevance of having studied Theology
- Put more emphasis on the wider context
- What did I mean by Living Educational Theory

Some of their comments cohered with the feedback I received from the master’s seminar groups I attend on a Tuesday and they have influenced part of this essay. Their engagement in this essay was directly influenced by the values that underpin the Living Educational Theory approach as well as the need to actively involve my students in the process of validation.

These examples combined with the students’ reflections in their logs (Appendix 5) illustrate the beginnings of my focus on how I provide evidence in a multi - media format to support the claims that I am making about my action research.