

The General Prologue

1995/1996. This Ph.D. resubmission is the tale of my own educational development. I am a teacher-researcher working in a local comprehensive school for girls and my curricular subject is English. Unlike a traditional thesis I am going to begin with an account of my classroom practice because my life as a teacher-researcher is grounded in my educative relationships with pupils. By writing a General Prologue I am aiming to introduce you to some of my core educational values in action which the rest of this text is an attempt to explain. I am not at this stage attempting to explain them. You may, if you wish, skip this Prologue of about 40 pages, and go directly into the Introduction. This more traditionally contextualises this thesis' claims to knowledge, explains some of the use of language within the text, and gives the outline of the thesis as a whole. I hope, however, you will read the following account as it represents for me the heart of my life as a teacher-researcher.

The class I am about to present to you is a mixed-attainment group of 27 Year Seven girls working on the poem 'The Ancient Mariner', by Samuel Taylor Coleridge. In the first half term, before we started reading the poem, I had accustomed them to an action planning approach to their learning in which they isolated concerns in English and worked towards solutions. I also encouraged them to look at ways of evaluating their own strategies and changing their learning methods in the light of their new insights. One of the ways I did this was through learning partners. Each girl chose a friend who would help her with her (mostly) written work, and act as a reader and editor. She would also be expected to make constructive comments on her friend's work before it was handed in to me.

How can I account for own my educational development by teaching 'The Ancient Mariner' to Rebecca, Zoë and other members of their Year Seven class?

**'He holds him with his glittering eye,
The wedding guest stood still,
And listens like a three year child
The mariner hath his will.'**

Rebecca: *'I don't want to read my work out, Miss. I don't think it's very good.'* (12.10.95.)

Rebecca: *'I'm really glad I did this project and presented my work today because I think this is the best work I've ever done!'* (2.2.96.)

Zoë: *'Sometimes I think you don't like me as much as Poppy and Kelly.'* (21.9.95.)

Zoë: *'You tell us we should try to be nice to each other and it's really hard isn't it? But when it works, it's great. I love working in this class in English. Why can't the world be like this class?'* (14.6.96.)

Rebecca's and Zoë's journeys have not been smooth ones by any means. I have chosen to concentrate mainly on these two pupils for several reasons. Let me take Rebecca first. She has written copiously and talked to me on many occasions about how she might improve her work. Secondly she is a highly gifted writer and has challenged me more than any individual pupil in my career in terms of helping her to improve the quality of her curricular learning in English. Thirdly, because of her abilities and my lack of perception at times, she has suffered some disaffection within the group which has challenged my sensitivities and sense of educational responsibility for her, and caused her some distress. Working out ways around these problems has been a crucial stage in my own understanding of my responsibilities as an educator, not only with her, but in general.

Zoë's educational development is, I believe, closely linked with Rebecca's and my own. She brought starkly to my attention, and continued to discuss with me, issues to do with fairness in the classroom. She challenged me profoundly in my own view of myself as an educator. In taking her seriously I believe I have learnt a great deal.

I will not claim simplistic causal links between my growing understanding in action in the classroom, and Rebecca's, Zoë's and other's responses to this poem which I view as educative. Each of the girls is her own centre of consciousness and brings her own view of reality into the classroom. However, I am claiming that the processes we have engaged in have helped Rebecca, Zoë and others to express something of value not only to themselves but to me and, I am further claiming, to our educational development. Through my helping them to explore some deeply moral issues in ways which have satisfied their own educational standards of judgement, I believe we have both benefited educationally. I too have been encouraged through their responses to explore some moral issues of my own and thus am in a better position to turn my educational values more fully into action. It is of course, not a simple $A + B = C$. The connectedness of our responses has not been in a simple linear progression. I do believe, however, that the connectedness has constituted part of the educational value of the work we have been doing. As I write this paper, I might, like Rebecca, be able to say now, 'I think this is the 'best' work I have ever done!'

Beginnings:

**'The ship was cheered, the harbour cleared,
Merrily did we drop
Below the kirk, below the hill,
Below the lighthouse top.'**

On 5.11.95. I read the first four parts of the poem to the group. The following is taken from my journal written that evening, notes made with the help of a transcript of the discussions during the lesson:

'I had an experience with 'The Ancient Mariner' this morning that goes beyond my previous experience in terms of its apparent impact on the children and on me. This always seems to happen with this poem. Each time I explore its depths I come up with something more profound and meaningful. I love it so much and put everything I have

into reading it aloud. I feel there is something so important about what it is saying, its moral framework, that I want to get it right. To a certain extent I have to control my own emotional reactions because they would get in the way of communicating its power to the children. Time after time I choose to read this poem with young people because it seems to encapsulate everything I believe in in terms of a moral universe at whose centre there is meaning, not chaos, in which people have to take responsibility for their own actions, and in which goodness and evil exist as embodied realities, not abstractions. Such qualities in the poem enable us to deliberate about what matters in human existence. Its universe is an archetypal one. The choices the Mariner makes may appear at first to be arbitrary ones but the consequences are not. I believe that one of my roles as an educator is to enable young people to make informed and empowered choices about their own destinies. Although at times things may happen to them in their lives over which they have little control, I believe we have to be in a position to deal with fate and the moral issues which surround ways we have of making meanings out of our lives.

How to start? I did the usual thing, asked them to sit quietly, led them through a few minutes of silent imaginings through a leafy wood, as they closed their eyes and began gradually to sit more and more still. Then I read the first part, my voice gentle and wondering. As Coleridge described the ice and the cold, Rebecca shivered, Laura-Lee opened her eyes and stared at me, Zoë stared ahead, her eyes fixed somewhere, I suspect, within. Katie blinked - nervously? Hannah shifted on her chair, Emily screwed her eyes tight shut and folded her arms tightly in front of her. Carly bit her lip. When the ice did split with a thunder fit, and the albatross crossed their paths, perhaps 'we hailed it in God's name'. Whatever presence sometimes comes into my classroom and says, 'yes, go on, go on!' it seemed to be materialising then.

I felt surrounded by a chill air despite the warmth of the room and knew that I had to maintain this spirit or it would leave. If it left now, I would be missing an opportunity

that experience has taught me is a vital one. And carefully, so carefully, as if I were nurturing the spirit myself, I kept the tears from my voice as the Mariner took aim with his crossbow and fired. I felt the dislocation as if it were happening for the first time, in real time and real space, not as an archetype in a poem, as a description of someone else's devising. I felt as if something were being created as I spoke the words. It is not often in my life that words appear to have ceased being symbols and become the reality themselves: as if it were happening to me, to the girls, and as if we were all responsible at the same time. I felt as if the art of the poem were becoming a living truth. Something was happening here that had never happened before. Such was the power of the moment that the poem seemed to be coming alive through the words I was speaking, through the occasion, through the apparent intense listening by the girls. Together we seemed to be creating the poem and somewhere in the scheme of things, we were all responsible for the horror which was to follow, as all of us are capable of evil as well as good.

I was aware of the enormous potential for self-indulgence that this moment represented, as well as the potential for the girls to explore something deeply moral in a supportive and loving environment. It could have been merely self-indulgent if I had simply displayed my own extreme emotion. This would have been an egotistical response and the antithesis of anything educational because my power as the adult there would have been to focus attention on me and not on their own responses to the poem and on the poem itself. I wanted us to explore the deepest meanings of the poem which do not reside, it seems to me, in anything to do with personal ego. This killing of the albatross can be interpreted as the poet's metaphor for the crucifixion of Christ but it is not a prescriptive metaphor. I see the murder representing the destruction of good by evil. Thus it needed very careful, sensitive handling. If that process were coming alive in our classroom then I had to become an anchor of goodness in these potentially stormy waters. Our very humanity seemed to be being called into question. As the adult in this situation, I must steer these young, possibly vulnerable people

through this experience, and achieve educationally what the poet achieves poetically. He explores evil and good from the safety of hindsight and goodness. I must enable the children to explore such profound meanings from a safe haven of kindness, interest in their personal responses, attention to the beauty of the poem, a savouring of the language, and a sense of anticipation of the surreal descriptions to follow.

Although it was hard to stop because the poem seemed to be gathering a momentum of its own, I mustn't read on. I stopped and looked around. Gradually, the children opened their eyes, shifted in their seats.

'Oh, Miss,' said Rosemary. 'Why did he do it?'

'I don't know,' I replied. 'It's a great mystery. The poet never tells us.'

'I bet he was jealous', said Rebecca.

'Jealous of what?'

'Everyone was taking notice of the bird and not him,' replied Rebecca.

'I felt cold,' said Michelle. And she shivered.

'I think this is a horrid poem. I mean it makes me feel funny,' remarked Zoë.

'What happens next?' asked Jo.

'It's awful!' exclaimed Poppy. 'How could he do it? The bird wasn't doing any harm.'

I read on. I didn't need to ask anyone to listen. As I began, 'The Sun now rose upon the right/ Out of the sea came he,' every child closed her eyes. The power of this poem had never gripped me so entirely and I felt captured in a way I have not experienced before. I was conscious of something almost menacing happening, and recognised the necessity of reminding myself of the classroom we sat in, the beauty of their intent faces, and the calm of my own voice. When I described:

'The very deep did rot: O Christ!

*That ever this should be!
Yea, slimy things did crawl with legs
Upon the slimy sea.'*

'Ugh,' said Esther softly.

'Yuk!' exclaimed Kelly,

their interjections were in no way intrusive. No one giggled. No one moved in a way which suggested they were not taking the poem seriously. In a sense, they listened, as the wedding guest did, like a 'three years child'.

I didn't stop at the end of Part Two, although the albatross being hung round the Mariner's neck caused some screwing up of faces, some eyes to open in apparent shock and some (nervous?) laughter. I pressed on. The momentum of the poem must now reach its height with the description of the sailors, all but the Mariner, 'with heavy thump, a lifeless lump, they dropped down one by one.'

At the end of Part Three I hesitated. I didn't know what their responses would be and didn't want to continue if it were going to be too much for them to cope with.

'Oh, Miss, it's awful,' said Rebecca. 'I can just see it.' Her voice sounded genuinely distressed. I would stop. It was decided.

'Yes', I reply. 'So can I.'

'Why did they all die and not the Ancient Mariner?' asked Kelly. 'He's the one who should've died.'

'Yeah, why didn't he die? It's stupid. It's not fair', said Helen.

'Does that mean that he's alive and all the others are dead?' said Zoë.

'Yes it does.'

'That must be awful. He's alive and all these men are staring at him. It says that, doesn't it? They're all staring at him,' Zoë continued.

'Yes, they are. What do you think is going to happen next?'

'He's going to kill himself,' said Laura.

'He ought to,' said Kim.

'What do you think, Julia?'

'I think God will send another bird,' replied Julia. 'And it'll do something awful to him.'

'Are you going to read the rest of it, Miss?' asked Hannah.

'O.K., Part Four, then.

I read the next part, for me the most potentially horrifying descriptions in the poem. Certainly I read it with a dangerous undercurrent in my tones. When I got to the part:

'The many men so beautiful!

And they all dead did lie:

And a thousand thousand slimy things

Lived on and so did I,'

*I emphasised the sliminess, accentuated the dreadful isolation in the words, 'and so did I'. Rebecca opened her eyes and stared at me. So when it came to the part when the Mariner was able to bless the water snakes (snakes now, not 'slimy **things**') I had fiercely to control my own personal response of huge relief, which could have easily expressed itself as tears. After all this is the first aspect of hope in what has appeared up to now to be an evocation of a malign universe. This is the first time that the Mariner has committed a good act. He has moved beyond his own ego and recognised the reality of other creatures. He has grown morally into someone who is for the first time taking responsibility for his actions and ceasing to see his own needs as the only ones which matter. At last he is seeing his responsibility for making*

connections between himself and others, and I felt as if I were understanding for the first time the enormity of his new insight. The question was, how could I help to make it live for them too in ways which would matter to them? And why does it matter that it should, and I believe that it does matter? I am beginning to learn how I access myself in order to know what is of value to me. But how do I help others to access themselves in ways which will enable them to value their own insights and knowledge?

As I read the words:

*'O happy living things! no tongue
Their beauty might declare:
A spring of love gushed from my heart
And I blessed them unaware...'*

I looked around at the girls and felt their beauty and I was filled with love for them. Yet again the poem had reminded me of what I feel to be of importance in my own existence, and enabled me to access those aspects of myself which speak directly to children and to myself. It was a difficult moment in one sense, because I was intensely aware of my own reactions and their right to their own reality and the beginning of a shared responsibility for their responses to the situation, which seemed to be evoking quite a palpable spirit amongst us. When the albatross fell off and sank like lead into the sea, Rebecca closed her eyes for a long moment and when she opened them again, I saw traces of tears. I felt a closeness to her that was almost painful, and tears pricked my own eyes. She seemed to see my recognition and smiled as she blinked. I smiled back. Not a word spoken.

I know that what has happened this morning will always live with me. The poem came alive and during the reading I was reminded, as is the Mariner, about the reality of

others. The girls seemed to become more real to me. The poem enabled me to recognise them afresh as individuals. Because of the power of this poem, I could recognise, as if for the first time, the beauty and loveliness of the girls as they responded. I am also struck, as a classroom teacher, with how few questions I asked during our conversations. I was responding largely to their responses. That is probably unusual. I know that I tend to ask most of the questions, to which I already have a fair idea of the answers. They seemed to be asking questions to which they wished to know the answers for themselves. They were not my questions, but their own. I need to build on this. This is not a simple process, not merely a simple way to get them to ask questions but an exploration of what values underlie such processes.

What happens to power and knowledge in the educative relationship when the learners are asking their own questions? When they are motivated to find out because it seems genuinely worthwhile to them to do so? If the worthwhileness to them is also an aspect of what seems worthwhile to me as the educator and the responsible adult, then it seems a wholly educative undertaking. Perhaps this is the value of the poem for me as a teacher-researcher: it leads to an exploration of such moral questions in an educative way for all concerned. Perhaps that is why time and time again I come back to it.

There is something else here too. Each time I engage with the poem in this living way - in other words when it becomes part of the way I externalise my relationships with others as I did in the classroom this morning (and never so powerfully in my opinion) - then I find more and more in the poem and more and more in the children. I was really overcome by my love for them this morning and there doesn't seem such a distinction between my love for them and my love for the poem. They both derive from the same root. It is something to do with my own ontology and has something too of my own ethics. That is how they are linked - in my practice with the girls as I try to help them improve the quality of learning. And this writing shows the connections in

a developmental way and points the way toward the creation of my own living educational theory.

We are underway:

**‘And through the drifts the snowy clifts
Did send a dismal sheen:
Nor shapes of men nor beasts we ken -
The ice was all between.’**

On 13.10.96. Rebecca had written to me in her journal about her creative writing (and here as elsewhere I have not corrected syntax or spelling in order to reproduce as closely as possible their own insights):

‘With the storys I write I want to expand my limits and learn new words because I find I’ll end up using the same words over and over again. I want to have a variety, but it seems I end up gobsmacked in the middle of a story, could you help me on this?’

I had replied the next day:

‘Do come and talk to me about your concern, Rebecca. ‘Gobsmacked’?! Now, what sort of a word is that to use with your English teacher? Seriously, though, when I read your homework - which I found absolutely thrilling by the way - I wasn’t aware of the repetition. Let’s find out where you think the weakness in your style is, and then we can work on it. Ask Hannah to come along too if she’s your learning partner now...And Rebecca, I’m so very proud of you. Your stories (note spelling) are truly amazing.’

I had not come across someone of Rebecca’s ability with metaphor before. That she should be concerned about the level of her vocabulary surprised me, but I realised

that a way to help her develop her creative talents would lie in my taking her own sense of her abilities completely seriously and starting from her perceived starting point. I wrote in my journal on 16.10.95.:

'I am concerned about how I am going to teach Rebecca. When I read her original responses to 'Beowulf' I knew that I was teaching someone exceptional in terms of her ability to evoke powerful metaphors. Her tacit understanding of the power and meaning of metre and onomatopoeia, which resonate in such lines she was already writing then as 'the grasses of the moors whispered dark secrets', reveal a spiritual and creative maturity that I am going to find difficult to approach in my usual way. In most circumstances, I don't believe I approach the understanding of a child's work from behind: usually I am able to stand in the front of it and coax it forward. This isn't going to be the same. How can I help someone with her insight and creativity? I could not have written that quoted sentence myself. I feel that I have much to learn from 'teaching' her. I am going to have to use her own insights to move her forward. She clearly has a sense of her own abilities. Perhaps I should stop judging her as an eleven year old child and judge her by her own criteria. Judge her as Rebecca. There's something here to do with trust. I have to trust her to be a competent judge of her own abilities. Is this just because she is so clever in a way I value? I really don't know but my instincts here tell me to let her creativity loose, to let her explore what it is she clearly wants to explore. Perhaps here the ipsative criterion is the most significant one in terms of our own educational development. Balanced with this, however, must be the sense as well that Rebecca is only one of many, not more significant because of her particular gifts. I need to stress carefully here her own role as a learning partner with Hannah and to encourage her to work with others. We can all gain from each other in this class. I am perceiving that truth anew. It is a matter of balance.'

**'One after one, by the star-dogged Moon
Too quick for groan or sigh,**

**Each turned his face with a ghastly pang
And cursed me with his eye....'**

**...They groaned, they stirred, they all uprose
Nor spake nor moved their eyes;
It had been strange even in a dream,
To have seen those dead men rise.'**

On 16.11.95. we re-read the parts of the poem framed by the above verses. I then asked them to rehearse a mime to illustrate the horror of those descriptions. Jo was the Ancient Mariner, Rebecca played Life-in-Death, Kelly played Death, Laura was the helmsman, Emma the spirit from the deep, Zoë played cards on deck with her friends. Emily sat in the 'crow's nest'. Each girl chose a role for herself, either explicitly from the poem, or from their own ideas about what jobs might be performed on a ship.

On 29.11.95. I videoed the final presentation. Rosemary wrote about it in her journal:

'I thought Jo was brilliant as the mariner. She looked really frightend. I think she was really scared. It was wierd when we fell down when Rebecca pointed at us. I got really cold and did you see Laura's face she just stared when she was dead. When it was finished I found it hard to get up because I felt really heavy. Are we going to do more drama? I hope so. It was really good fun.'

Chloë wrote:

'I want to do that drama again can we wach the viedo. that was the best lesson we had so far. I like it when we act it out because then we feel like were ther.'

Julia recorded in her journal:

'We all took it seriously, didn't we? It made the descriptions come alive for me. I was next to Kim and her face was so grim I could believe she was dying. I see what you mean now that Drama is serious and important. When can we do that again?'

Zoë wrote:

'29.11.95. i like doing this. I think we should all have turns at doing the big parts. When are we all getting a chance at the ancient mariner part.'

I wrote to Zoë on 30.11.95.:

'I hope you don't feel you're not getting a fair chance. Let's talk about it, Zoë.'

I find it significant now that I have no record of any meeting with her, which might suggest that I was not then aware of the importance of Zoë's early challenges. (See page 20, 'Stormy Waters' for greater clarification of this point.)

For homework on that day I asked the class to write a paragraph about their part in the drama. I told them that I wanted a description of their actions, written in the third person. As they would only have one evening in which to complete it, I didn't want to burden them with too much detail. Such a description would act as a marker of their understanding. Rebecca wrote three sides, in the first person, including this:

(I play Life and death who wins the ancient mariner.) 'I played with an inner urge to win that wretched man's soul. I rolled those dice with my pale hands of death. Each roll seemed like the world, my insanity rushed through my blood, the intensity and pressure surrounded me and that of my partner, death, his face a mere shadow of the souls he had claimed through this childish game, his boney hands snatched the dice and rolled, yes, at last...I slowly took one by one, each one's soul, and down they fell,

their eyes still mesmerized - on the ancient mariner, one by one they fell, slowly, and mysteriously, I giggled madly to myself, death's eyes, of nothingness, stared at me, almost as green as the sea, with envy.'

I wrote at the end of her work:

'2 credits! What a wonderfully vivid imagination you have, Rebecca and such a powerful use of vocabulary. I love reading your work. It's exciting to watch your images grow. I wonder sometimes whether you use too many adjectives (describing words) and whether you could gain a more powerful atmosphere through greater conciseness. Remember when you wrote that wonderful line about 'Beowulf': 'The grasses of the moors whispered dark secrets'? (I know it off by heart!) I think it works so well because it is unusual - and the menace comes from the idea that grass is conscious - and in this case evil. The word 'dark' placed with 'secrets' is masterly. I feel you're experimenting at the moment and I really want to encourage you to continue doing that. You're a very gifted writer and I am delighted to be teaching you.'

Rebecca's learning partner is also a gifted writer in the sense that she uses vocabulary skilfully and is able to evoke a powerful atmosphere through her descriptions. Her writing is more syntactically accurate than Rebecca's, and I felt that both girls could help each other improve the quality of their written work. I was also concerned to encourage them to help each other as I felt that the values of care for the other, engagement in the reality of others, were educationally sound as well as representing the morality in the poem. The Mariner's greatest sin lies in his disconnecting from others and trying to absolve himself from culpability because he forgets the connectedness of all creation, and his responsibility in the whole scheme of things. This too, at a less obvious level, is the sin of the other mariners who conspire in this disconnection and moral weakness. I felt it was important with the girls explicitly to

encourage values to do with connectedness in our classroom. If they are brought only to see themselves as individuals without responsibility for others as well as themselves, then I do not believe this is educational. What I perceive as included within the educational, is what opens individuals to a sense of their own unique place in the scheme of things. A scheme in which they are aware of the potential for their own unique and good contribution to the world, but which will include some significant collaboration with others. I want to open up these processes of connectedness in my classroom and the poem seems to me to have the capacity to become a living philosophy within the educative relationships I develop with the girls. See the end of this piece of writing for some corroboration of this belief.

In her homework about her part in the drama, Hannah wrote about staring over the side at the icy waves. At one point she included this:

'I felt as if I were growing into the groaning ice, which twinkled and heaved beside me.'

This sentence moved me deeply, because I believe that it showed an identification with the poem that went beyond mere description. It moved me because I believe it embodies the values just described. The poem seemed to have evoked a living reality for Hannah. It was as if in one sense she had really been on board, and had stared over the side. She had felt the cold and the menace. She had heard the weird screams of the ice as it began to melt. Even more significant in my opinion is Hannah's sense of the way in which the surroundings and the sailor she represented becoming one and the same. I believe she is revealing a sense of the connectedness of all things. This is Coleridge's point. As he says in the conclusion to the poem:

*'He prayeth best, who loveth best
All things both great and small;*

*For the dear God who loveth us,
He made and loveth all.'*

Love is not an abstract concept to Coleridge as exemplified in the poem, but is personified through the spirit which joins all living things together in harmony and enables the Mariner at last to bless the water snakes:

*'A spring of love gushed from my heart
And I blessed them unaware.'*

This is what I wish for my classroom: that we might all become acutely aware of our individuality and recognise the responsibilities we share in trying to work together in harmony as we do something worthwhile.

In pencil, Rebecca had underlined Hannah's phrase above and written beside it: *'Wow! I wish I'd written that!'* I know exactly what she meant. On 3.12.95. I sat with Hannah and Rebecca and had the following conversation with them:

Moira: *I liked that phrase too. I think it's beautiful.*

Hannah: *Yeah, I read Rebecca's story and it was better than mine.*

Moira: *What do you mean?*

Hannah: *You asked us to do this description and it wasn't very interesting.*

Moira: *I didn't want to give you too much for one evening.*

Rebecca: *I just decided to write mine the way I did. Once I started I couldn't stop.*

Moira: *I like it when you do more interesting things with what I set you.*

Hannah: *I read Rebecca's and then I just got these ideas. I really enjoyed writing it. I would've written more but I didn't have time. Dad said I had to go to bed.*

Rebecca: *Yeah, I get that as well.*

(laughter)

I think there are several significant aspects to this. Rebecca had inspired Hannah by her initiative. Rebecca had tacitly refused to do what I had asked because it would have limited her creativity. I had opened up to her previously the opportunities to her to take risks with her creativity, and whether or not she was responding directly to my explicit encouragement, something in the situation was enabling her to be adventurous. Perhaps she was simply enjoying the exploration. (N.B. In the New Year, 1996, I asked her specifically why she had chosen to work in that way. *'I like working in my own way and you encourage us to work in ways that suit us. If I like something I just want to write and write.'*)

Hannah had been inspired to rewrite something without any referral to me: she wanted to express something of importance to her, and I believe that Rebecca played an explicit role in this flowering.

**'The ice did split with a thunder fit
The helmsman steered us through.'**

Rebecca elected to write an illustrated story of the Ancient Mariner's adventures. The first draft of her story included the following:

'The boy still sat there staring into the darkness, his pupils as if they had been replaced now by the spirits like a pair of black pearls which shimmered in the dim light as the icy wind sailed through his hair.'

In commenting on her work I wrote to her:

'I wish I had your grace in my words. At its best your style is worthy of real poetry. Sometimes the images don't quite work for me, though. The picture of the black pearls is potentially wonderful but it becomes awkward, I think, if you imagine the

pupils being 'replaced' by spirits. That's gruesome, and I think you wanted another effect, didn't you? Remember that the way you use language is all you have to control your readers' reactions. If these comments don't make sense, then see me.'

She amended this to:

'The young boy still sat there staring into the darkness, his eyes a pair of black pearls which shimmered in the dim light...'

Stormy Waters:

**'Each turned his face with a ghastly pang
And cursed me with his eye.'**

All was not plain sailing, however. Rebecca's gifts were again becoming the subject of discussion with girls who lacked confidence, it seemed to me, in their own abilities. Indeed Zoë had written to me back in September:

'21.9.95. Sometimes I don't feel you take much notice of me you ask Lisa and Chloë to read their work and Esther is always answering questions. Don't you think my work is very good? Sometimes I think you don't like me as much as Poppy and Kelly. will you write to me. I don't like it when you don't take any notice of me. I know I'm not as good at english as Rosemary or Rebecca but I do try hard.'

Although I had felt this was sad and I was surprised by it, I was pleased that she was able to express her feelings so honestly. It is not often in my experience that a child is able to tell an authority figure so openly about her experience of that authority. I believe this took great courage. Certainly I had been touched by her candour. Whether she had grounds for her feelings was not the only point here, it seemed to me. In other words I needed to be more sensitively aware of the effect of my teaching

on the girls in my care - that is my responsibility, part of the moral crafting I believe good teaching to be. I am struck by the significance of Zoë's making contact with me in this way however, because it enabled me to develop with her a closer educative relationship that aimed to help her to grow more independent and secure. My reflections on her comments, though, had revealed to me the possibility that I was able to respond so enthusiastically to Rebecca because of the similarity, as I perceive it, of our gifts. She too is an accomplished writer and seems to value similar aspects of English to me. She delights in metaphor and poetic expression. She reads poetry for pleasure and given the choice will sit up late at night and write stories. It had therefore always been easy for me to engage Rebecca in conversation because we appeared to have a great deal in common. Maybe Zoë had, then, genuinely been picking up an inequality in my treatment of the girls. Perhaps I did not simply discriminate through the work. It is possible that I too confused the worth of the child with the worth of the work. Teaching Rebecca in the way I had, and trying to be open to Zoë's criticism (which was, I believe, at least partially a result of the way I had taught them both) should have encouraged this aspect of my own educational development.

After her comments I thought what I therefore needed to do was to find what Zoë and I had in common, a value-base that we both laid store by. Or perhaps I simply needed to respect Zoë for who she was, regardless of how that related to me. After all, *'He prayeth well who loveth well/ Both man and bird and beast'*! In other words, the most useful form of life is the one which values all constructive contributions, all manifestations of life and affirmation and development. Just as the Mariner has to open to that living truth and allow its meanings to become part of his abilities to act in the world (look what happens when he doesn't), I had to let go of ideas about my own worldview and see what it might mean to be Zoë in that situation. The implications of that I now find salutary: it is not for me to confuse particular abilities with human value. This was becoming a new, living, insight for me as opposed to being the

rhetoric of my educational theory. I was certain in my own mind of my equality of regard for both of the girls and yet it seemed that my actions were allowing one girl to feel slighted. It is in the explanation of this living contradiction (Whitehead, 1989b) that I capture what it means to be creating my own living educational theory. In which the realisation of my acting against my own espoused values spurs me to try harder, to sacrifice ego for the common good:

*'O happy living things! no tongue
Their beauty might declare
A spring of love gushed from my heart
And I blessed them unaware.'*

I had replied to Zoë:

'22.9.95. I am sorry you feel like this, Zoë. It must be really awful. I have thought very hard about what you have said. I am not aware of ignoring you at all and I know I value you and the work you are doing very much indeed. I enjoyed your Beowulf story very much. I know that you try hard and I am proud of you. I would like you to become proud of yourself. Come and talk to me and we'll see what we can do to help you to feel more settled here. How are you getting on at school do you think? Are you enjoying it? What do you like doing best? I must say I am enjoying teaching you and the class enormously.'

I see now that I may not have been as aware as I should, given what happened later.

Another girl, Vikki, had also written back in October 1995:

'I don't mean to be rude Miss ladlaw but esther alwas seems to answer questions and get the first turn in drama. Can me and Laura go first next time?'

I had replied:

'27.10.95. I cannot discuss what other girls do in your journal, Vikki, but thank you for your comments and I will think about them carefully. I don't see why you shouldn't have a chance to go first next time we do Drama. Remind me, will you? You know what my memory's like!'

I do not feel that such resentments are at all helpful to the learning environment I wanted to create in my classrooms. Through journals I had hoped to keep track of as much that was going on in the background as possible so that I might help to avert bitterness and inappropriate comparisons, to help to foster a spirit of a love of learning for its own sake. I thought after the 'Beowulf' project, that I had found ways of valuing individuals in such a way as to obviate further jealous friction. I am also perceiving in these words how important it is for my own educational development to recognise the emphasis I should place on living out my values more fully in my actions with pupils in the classroom rather than simply engaging in elegant descriptions of those values. This becomes particularly telling in the events which occurred towards the end of the Autumn term.

Marooned:

**'Day after day, day after day,
We stuck, nor breath nor motion,
As idle as a painted ship
Upon a painted ocean.'**

One morning Rebecca came to me in tears at the beginning of our lesson on Friday 12.1.96. In my journal that evening I wrote the following:

'I wonder how much of Rebecca's situation is my responsibility. That question again. How much is down to me, and how much is someone else's responsibility? I am the adult in the situation, I must bear a great deal of the responsibility for what is happening. However, I must not bear it all because that deprives the girls of becoming responsible for their own behaviour. Rebecca said that three of the girls, Zoë, Chloë and Lisa had been taking things from her bag and hiding them. They had given them back later, but Rebecca felt intimidated. Apparently all three of them had said that Rebecca always got more attention and everyone was praising her work. They were calling her a 'keener' (someone who is keen to work hard and please the teacher). There is something wrong if any of the girls are feeling undervalued. How do I continue to support Rebecca's exceptional talent as a writer, whilst nurturing Zoë's creativity and sensitivity, Chloë's usual kindness to others and her empathy for those less creative than her, and Lisa's formidable originality? How can I help the girls to internalise the ipsative criterion when it comes to them judging their own work? This is not just about setting arbitrary standards linguistically, it's about helping the girls to find more appropriate ways of relating to themselves and each other.'

I felt there was a lack of moral impetus on my part at this stage. I didn't know what to do. I felt I had already done something wrong to have allowed this situation to have occurred at all. I decided, after talking to the girls quietly outside the classroom in a cosy corner, to tackle it head on. I knew that if I did that I was liable to unearth some uncomfortable issues but felt that it was a matter of fairness. I stopped the lesson fifteen minutes before the end and said that I was concerned that some girls didn't always seem to feel they were being treated fairly in my lessons. Did they trust me enough to talk about it? I felt it was really an important issue and I would value their opinions. Here are the notes I made that evening:

21.1.96. It was slow at first and no one spoke. I said: 'I am really sorry that some of you feel that you are not being treated fairly. Do you remember what I said in that letter I wrote to you which I gave to you in our first lesson? I said I wanted you to be able to tell me if there was anything happening that you thought was unfair. Well, I really meant it. I know it's difficult to say anything in public, and if you want you can write to me about it, but if you want to say anything now, please do, and I promise I will listen really carefully.' Then Zoë spoke. She said she thought I tried to be fair but sometimes I wasn't. Several girls nodded agreement. Jo said she felt that some of the girls were jealous of other girls and what they could do and not just in English and that was the problem. There was some nodding of heads at this point too. Discussion ranged from valuing people to valuing writing. I kept stressing that although I could see differences in writing, I was not aware of valuing girls differently. Would they be able to tell me if they felt I was breaking that rule? Could they write to me about it? They talked about giving constructive criticism to each other, both as learning partners and friends. We talked about making sure that each girl felt that she had an equal chance to express herself, say in Drama and reading her homework aloud for example. We talked about giving each other a chance to speak and listening carefully to each other. With respect. At the end of the lesson Zoë, Lisa and Chloë came up to me and thanked me and then asked Rebecca if she wanted to eat lunch with them. Rebecca accepted with alacrity. I shall have to keep watching out for this. I don't want a classroom in which children feel resentment and bitterness and a sense of personal failure. I am also aware that not every child spoke to me at this point, which might suggest they did not feel able to do so. The reasons for this need exploration.

I have to learn always to be concerned about individuals and not believe that it is a job done once and for all time or shelved when it is inconvenient. If it is inconvenient then my priorities need careful examination again. To feel individuals are inconvenient is to go some way, it seems to me, towards objectifying people. I believe that to be anti-educational.

Moving On:

**‘First Voice: ‘But why drives on that ship so fast,
Without or wave or wind?’**

**Second Voice: ‘The air is cut away before
And closes from behind’.**

I wrote the following in a letter to my Ph.D. supervisor, Jack Whitehead, on 28.1.96.:

Where I find the poem moving is in its moral complexity, its wrestling with deeply moral issues, trying to find livable solutions to a seemingly fragmented world. I feel pity for the Ancient Mariner, although I know what he has done is wrong, but I sense that his crime is somehow mine when I am reading the poem. That is its strength for me, that I can identify with the dilemma, and yet I can learn from the trauma resulting from the Mariner’s action. It has a cleansing effect on me. Although it deals with evil, this poem, it is not evil itself. It sees evil and rejects it for the good. There is a wonderful moment when the Mariner looks over the side of the ship, his heart bitter and all natural good feeling suppressed. All his shipmates are dead because they too have to pay the price for their weakness in supporting his murder of the albatross. The bird is hanging around his neck and the leaden weight is symbolic of his guilt of course. He is unable to pray, and then as he looks over the side, he sees the water snakes:

‘moving in tracks of shining light’,

all colours of the rainbow and then, quite suddenly he is seized by a good impulse:

‘And a spring of love gushed from my heart

And I blessed them unawares.’

I must recognise the power of the destructiveness represented by Zoë, Chloë and Lisa's actions and find a way to turn their perspectives to a more educational route. I must enable them, if I can, to experience an environment which values a generosity of spirit towards others and a feeling of pride in their accomplishments. I believe the way forward here is to do with a loving integrity on my part in which I genuinely value each girl equally, not rhetorically, and expect only the very best from each one of them. An environment in which they are valued and not just for their curricular abilities.

Homecoming:

**'Twas not those souls which fled in pain,
Which to their corses came again,
But a troop of spirits blest.'**

In our lesson on 5.12.95. I talked about what they might do for the rest of the project on the poem. With 'Beowulf' they had worked on self-chosen assignments, the brief being simply that they had to find at least two forms of representation (one of them to be writing of some sort) to show their understanding of the legend which would be presented at a special Ceremony of Celebration. Many of them had expressed interest in doing something along similar lines for 'The Ancient Mariner'. Integral to this former project had been processes of evaluation in which they had articulated the educational standards of judgement by which they had wanted their presentations to be judged. I did not feel I had explained this process in such a way that enabled them to integrate their growing understanding about the legend with ways about how to internalise some worthwhile criteria by which to judge it. Some of them, like Lisa, had written in her journal:

'I don't understand why we're doing this. Can't you just tell us whether it's any good or not? Isn't that what you're supposed to do? I'm not being rude but I just don't understand.'

She was not alone in such insights. Questions of personal responsibility seem to me to be so crucial to the learning process, but I need constant reminding about how such questions can most educationally manifest themselves in living relationships with others. I think this is to do with the forms of my educative relationships, what I am calling elsewhere their morphology, for example the interactive journals, the learning partners, the educational standards of judgement, their presentations of their understanding. I seem to be searching for a form in which educational questions can be opened up to the learners in order to improve the quality of learning for us all. However, I do find it easier to be conscious of the significance of asking questions like: ‘How much of this is to do with me and how much belongs to someone else?’ when engaging in archetypal literature like ‘The Ancient Mariner’ which deals so powerfully with such values. The poem’s values themselves provide us with a role-model for the classroom. For example, when the Ancient Mariner says to the Hermit:

‘Oh shrieve me, shrieve me, holy man!

The hermit crossed his brow.

‘Say quick,’ quoth he, ‘I bid thee say -

What manner of man art thou?’

Forthwith this frame of mind was wrenched

With a woful agony,

Which forced me to tell my tale;

And then it left me free.’

the Hermit refuses to absolve the Mariner of his guilt because he must do it himself. His punishment is in fact the reliving of his failure to recognise the importance of taking personal responsibility for his actions in his eternal recounting of his own story, so that he will come to understand what his failure means. And in our

classroom, the girls and I must wrestle with issues of personal responsibility if we are to come to understand our place in the world and our potential within it, both as individuals and as members of a community.

On 17.11.95. I wrote the following in my diary:

‘I can perceive parallels in the situation in which the Mariner finds himself towards the end of the poem in what he has to learn, and the integrated nature of the values underpinning my practice and what I have to teach in the Year Seven classroom.

*I am on the same ground here in terms of values and significance in the notion of a living educational theory which I am developing with these words. I cannot usefully articulate my own educational theory unless it is a living one because of the nature of the values underpinning it. My own educational theory lives in the values as they become explicit in my practice over time. It is therefore never complete. It is much more than a snapshot and much less than the truth, but it is living. As I write these words I draw together my past, I describe and explain the present and out of that I try to craft the future. Like the Mariner at the end of the poem I try to understand what I experience and capture it in order to improve the quality of life for myself and others. That is my particular quest: **to know my own educational development that I might cohere experience with wisdom in the service of education and humanity.***

Similarly, I want the girls to come to know their own educational development, to evolve a perspective about the meanings they can make from what they do. Because of that I won't allow them to use the words 'good' and 'bad' as descriptors of quality about their own and others' work. I have tried to explain that 'good' and 'bad' mean nothing unless they are set against something else which is living for them and come alive for us in their representation. Thus a 'good' piece of work for one girl's writing might be more usefully described as 'accurate' if she is normally careless with

syntax, or it might mean 'highly descriptive' if she is challenging her own vocabulary and ways of evoking atmosphere for example. These descriptions embody as well as explain their own educational development just as the evolving of educational standards of judgement in my own thesis represents a useful articulation of my own educational development. I consider it useful because it enables me to communicate what is of value in my work and to improve what I am doing.

In the same spirit, what will it mean in my classroom for girls to understand that asking such questions about formulating their own criteria really matters? That they might be able to help themselves in such ways to live good lives? 'How much of this is down to me?' 'How can I improve what I am doing?' 'How can we help each other?'
When the Mariner is reminiscing about his experiences he says at one point:

*This soul hath been
Alone on a wide wide sea:
So lonely 'twas, that God himself
Scarce seeméd there to be.*

*O sweeter than the marriage feast
'Tis sweeter far to me
To walk together to the kirk
With a goodly company.'*

This passionate avowal of his human need (rendered archetypal through the aesthetic power of the poem) for collaboration towards the good always stirs in me a sense of the need to bring such an enabling process into the classroom: I believe that there must be a way that I can integrate the values of loving integrity in my educative relationships with the girls with my insights into the poem in ways which will enable us to begin to take greater responsibility for our own learning and ultimately for

ourselves as we work together on something we feel is of intrinsic value. I believe that encouraging the girls to integrate their learning about the curriculum aspects of my teaching responsibilities with ways in which we can evaluate our own learning will serve this purpose. It's a matter of finding a better way than I managed with 'Beowulf'. I want us to be able to judge our own work, not by criteria which are disconnected from others' sense of worth and purpose, but are sufficiently our own to render them personally true and meaningful, giving us as individuals and as a group, something we can build on and points from which we can judge how far we have come. I want us all to be able to stand and tell our own stories of our own lives, not as the Ancient Mariner does as a punishment, but as a process of self-empowerment. It seems to me that developing our own educational standards of judgement, both as individuals and as members of a group, will help in this process, and that the poem can give us all clues about the worthwhileness of such an undertaking. I want each one of us to become the helmsman steering through the ice.

On 5.1.96. we got together as a group to discuss what would be the criteria we could use as a class in judging the quality of the work being produced in preparation for the final presentations.

Zoë: *'We've got to understand it, haven't we? I mean, whatever anyone does, we have to understand it..'*

Moira: *'Brilliant, yes. Can we think of a way of describing that - what Zoë said?'*

Rebecca: *'Understandability, Miss!'*

(general laughter)

Moira: *'Any advance on that? 'Understandability' sounds a bit clumsy, but you're right, Rebecca, you've got the idea.'*

Jo: *'Is it comprehensible or something?'*

Moira: *'Comprehensibility, yes. O.K., then, are we agreed? What you produce has to be comprehensible. We have to understand it. Well done Zoë, Rebecca and Jo on that one.'*

We went on to discuss several more ways of judging the work. Here's what we came up with:

- 1) Comprehensibility: *the work has to be understandable. It has to make sense.*
- 2) Carefulness: *it has to be the result of hard work and attention to detail.*
- 3) Collaboration: *it has to show evidence of working with (an) other(s) in some way, however small. (Learning partners can help here.)*

Then the girls got together with their learning partners to discuss the standards of judgement by which they wanted to evaluate their own work. Helen wrote about her puppet show:

*'Creativity: Like the way we made the box and painted the backgrounds.
Difference in voices: each character has a separate voice so you can recognise him.
How much effort did we put into the show?
Whether people found it entertaining.
The skill of how we used the puppets.'*

Hannah wrote:

Five things.

- 1) *I want to be judged on creativity, meaning has it got some good phrases and if my writing comes from the heart.*
- 2) *Have I seemed to understand the story, meaning did I seem to make it up?*
- 3) *Is the story a comprehensible one?*

4) *Was the story an interesting story, meaning gripping?*

5) *Is it an informative story? Do I seem to have filled you in on what the story is about?*

Rebecca wrote:

'I would like my work to be judged on how creative it is in the way of how well I have structured my vocabulary and if they find I have really tried with it and included effort into the project. I would also like to be judged on how artistic this is and if they think I've presented it well and put effort into the illustrations and story. Also I'd like to be judged on how accurate it is by my punctuation and grammar and if it is well put together. However, I would like to be judged on the overall creativity of my piece of work.'

Each girl set her own criteria and then set about finishing off her work in preparation for the presentation which they knew would be videoed.

Telling the story:

**'I pass like night from land to land;
I have strange powers of speech;
That moment that his face I see,
I know the man that must hear me:
To him my tale I teach.'**

On 28.1.96. the class came into the room after Assembly, in a rush. They were talking, shouting, asking for last minute advice from me and from each other, reminding themselves of the order of presentation (which we had done through volunteers the day before) and rifling through bags for scripts, diaries, pictures, etc.. Costumes flew out of bags, tables were moved, books fetched, O.H.P. set up, bags dumped in a heap, chairs arranged, smiling, anxious faces, pleas of 'Do I have to go first, Miss? Kelly says she doesn't mind.' And 'yes I bloody-well do!' (from Kelly!)

(N.B. I'm afraid that just made me laugh. I couldn't do the traditional English teacher-thing of getting worked up about register and tone! I was quite pleased actually that Kelly was not going to be put upon by anyone else. I simply frowned at her with a smile on my face and she grinned back.) Katie came to me. She had dressed her hair in a different way from usual and her face and clothes sparkled with careful attention. My heart ached for her as I recognised how much this meant to her. 'I'm so nervous, Miss, I'm sure I'm going to get it all wrong.' I reassured her with a brief hug and turned to Michelle who was to start.

Michelle's confidence seemed to surprise quite a few of us. She spoke out clearly and distinctly, her *Mariner's Diary*. She dramatised her reading and I looked round the faces and saw gripped attention. I had given girls copies of their own criteria and at least those of three other girls' they chose themselves. Rebecca's work was to be judged by Zoë, Lisa and Hannah. Rebecca had opted to judge Hannah, Jo, Lisa and Zoë's work. I was pleased with these choices as they suggested that the girls might have found constructive ways of working together. I was interested to see how the balance between concern for the work and their personal relationships was going to evolve in this setting.

I advised the class to read the criteria as the presentation was in progress to help them to make their final judgements which would take a written form after discussion with the presenter.

Zoë decided to read aloud parts of the *Mariner's Diary* she had written. She was dressed in breeches and a ragged shirt, held together with a faded leather belt. She had teastained and burnt the edges of the paper to give the diary the appearance of great age, her writing on it florid and tapering. She limped into the middle of the floor space.

'I am Josiah Barnaby', she began. 'My story is very old. I haven't finished telling it yet. I've tried very hard to tell the truth but my memory is not what it was. I have not had a happy life. I am not a happy man.'

And we were listening! I looked around at the faces of the girls. I saw what I believe to have been admiration, interest, warmth, and understanding. Katie looked at me and smiled her approval. Rebecca seemed to be attending very carefully.

'I did something very wrong,' Josiah Barnaby continued. 'It was a long time ago but it still haunts me. I am a guilty man. I will read you something from my diary. Then you will understand. I want you to understand.'

She then read us some extracts from the papers she was holding. Here is her final entry. I present it here in its written form because I think it gets closer to the originality of Zoë's text:

'Sometimes I fall asleep. not often becaus when I do I dream about the albetross. We haled it in God's name. it was a good bird But I didnt like it. i killed it. i've had an unhappy life but at least I had a life. I took the albatrosses life away from him. I wish I hadnt done it!'

She spoke the lines with such sadness. She bowed her head and looked bereft. There was silence and then we all clapped with gusto. I feel she had captured something of the pathos and the regret of the poem. She wanted her work to be judged on the following criteria:

- 1) *Originality: does the work remind you of something else? It shouldnt do.*
- 2) *Creative: is it using the ideas in the poem in an imagintive way?*
- 3) *Belivable: do you belive in the work?*

4) Atmospheric: *do I make you feel you are there with the ancient mariner.*

Here is a selection of the comments the girls made straightaway.

Laura-Lee: *'It was spooky, I thought!'*

Rosemary: *'Yeah, it made me feel funny. I thought you were going to cry at one point.'*

Zoë: *'So did I, actually.'*

(laughter)

Moira: *'I thought it was very touching indeed, Zoë. Thank you.'*

Rebecca: *'I felt I was there. You were so convincing.'*

Hannah: *'What made you do it like that?'*

Zoë: *'I don't know really. I thought of the name and it sounded old and it just came from there. I don't know.'*

Emily: *'I think it's really original the way you did it. I haven't heard anything like that before.'*

Kelly: *'Nor have I. It was great!'*

Zoë: *'Thanks.'*

Zoë looked pleased with the responses and when she sat down she looked over at me and smiled with obvious pleasure. I wrote in my diary that evening:

'When Zoë had finished her presentation, I really felt like celebrating with her. She seemed so happy to be herself. She looked around at others who smiled at her in affirmation. I watched her on and off for the rest of the presentations and she was smiling quite a lot. More than usual I would say. But the smiling wasn't at others, it also seemed to be for nothing in particular. She simply seemed happy. Can I suppose that she had achieved something she wanted to achieve? That she felt good about being Zoë? I hope so. That does seem to be very important because she had achieved

something really worthwhile. Her characterisation showed a genuine empathy for the plight of another. The attention to detail - in her dress, in her manner, in the form of writing, in her body-language, in her tone of voice, in the pathos of her words - exceeds anything in terms of insight that I have seen from her before. There seems to me to have been a greater synthesis between her sensitivity and her actions. She has such insight and I believe that today she grew a little in exercising this talent.'

When it came to Rebecca's turn she stood up with the book she had made.

'I decided to make a book, an illustrated story of The Ancient Mariner's voyage. I will show you the drawings I have done and read you out my favourite parts. They are my favourite parts because they bring the poem alive for me again and I feel as if I have made it all up myself. I really enjoyed doing this. I drew an embroidery on the front cover in gold pen to make it look special.'

She then showed us the cover before returning to the centre of the semi-circle and opening it up to read:

'T'was early in the morning and the ice was sprinkled on each leaf as if the angels had flown down in the night and showered each branch with their jewels. And each spider-web more divine than any tapestry, sparkled in the hazy sunshine and the golden leaves layered a carpet of joy on the ground.'

I find the originality of this opening stunning. It is not in the poem in any way directly, but she has captured the mood of optimism and reverence very clearly indeed. She continued:

'The darkness under the tree was immense, for the branches bowed down like servants before a queen...However, on the old man spoke, his voice as fluent as the rivers themselves.'

Her imagery here is awe-inspiring. The idea of juxtaposing 'darkness' with 'immense' takes real insight, aesthetic sensitivity and poetic originality. The suggestion of reverence is continued through her simile: *'bowed down like servants before a queen'*. For each major event in the poem, she has illustrated the scene, each paragraph is decorated and its first letter designed like a stained-glass window. At the end of her presentation she spoke about what it had felt like to do the project:

'This is the hardest work I have ever done. It took me ages. There were times when I didn't know whether I would finish it in time. Sometimes I sat up until after eleven at night and I got told off because I should have been in bed. I wanted to finish it because it was important to me and I loved doing it, although I got nervous about not finishing it. I have only written up to the point where we read it all together in class because Miss Laidlaw said that was all we needed to do, but it's incomplete now and I am going to finish it all. I'm really glad I did this project and presented my work today because I think this is the best work I've ever done!'

I looked around the class, and especially at Zoë, Chloë, and Lisa and their faces were wreathed in smiles and the clapping started spontaneously. Just as the time when I had read the poem to them weeks before I felt like crying but suppressed the emotion for the same reasons as I had then. This was Rebecca's moment not mine. But again, she caught me wiping away a tear and smiled so sweetly and warmly at me, I felt a rush of love for her and for the whole class. Something magical was happening again that day. I felt the storm which had hit us in previous weeks was fading away even as the presentations developed. Katie's was the last to be videoed. Afterwards she came

up to me and said: *'Oh, Miss, I was really good, wasn't I?'* her face beaming with delight. The hug I gave her this time was not quite so brief!

On 2.2.96. Rebecca, Chloë, Zoë, Lisa and Hannah sat together to judge Rebecca's work after most of them had looked at Lisa's. I videoed their responses:

Zoë: *I thought it was brilliant, Becks. I thought your pictures were amazing. I wish I could draw like that.*

Rebecca: *Was it creative, do you think?*

Chloë: *Course it was. I liked the storm picture best. It looks like fingers from the sky.*

Hannah: *Yeah, I thought that.*

Zoë: *I thought you read out a bit too much, though, but it was good.*

Lisa: *Good? (laugh) We're not allowed to say that word, are we?*

Moira: *(from behind camera) No, you're not!*

Zoë: *I mean it was interesting. I thought you had tried really hard as well.*

Hannah: *I thought overall it was very creative, because your pictures really went with the story and you had not copied the poem. It was definitely in your own words.*

Chloë: *Yeah and you had made up bits which fitted. I liked it, but I think it went on a bit.*

Lisa: *I didn't. I liked all of it. You did something a bit like mine with the storyline, but I wrote it as a poem. They were really different really.*

Conclusion:

**'Farewell farewell! but this I tell
To thee, thou Wedding-Guest!
He prayeth well, who loveth well
Both man and bird and beast.'**

I find that 'The Ancient Mariner' focuses and stretches my moral insight and enables me to live some of the values out in the classroom which seem to be linked to improvement in children's learning. This is not to say it is the only piece of literature

which has an ennobling effect on my practice, but I do believe it is the most cogent one. I have written this because I wanted to explain the connections between my desire for beauty, truth and goodness in the classroom with my pupils and its articulation as my own living educational theory. I wanted to explain why this poem affects me so strongly, and how it enables me to connect more directly with children as I help them to improve the quality of their learning about English. The poem also enables me to learn more about myself and the processes of educational development which I am undergoing. It has played a significant part in the uncovering of my own ethics and ontology, and thus it helps me as a teacher-researcher to remember how much I have still to learn from my pupils, from the world around me and from my own reflections on the processes I engage in with others. This paper is an attempt to account for my own educational values as revealed through my practice over time. It is a rendition of my own living educational theory which finds great significance in devising situations in which individuals can articulate their own educational standards of judgement as I help them to improve their learning about English.

N.B. On 14.6.96. Zoë and I had the following conversation which I wrote about in my journal that evening. We had been discussing co-operation in relation to putting on scenes from 'A Midsummer Night's Dream'.

Zoë: *'You make me think, Miss.'*

Moira: *'What about?'*

Zoë: *'About the world. I was thinking about Bosnia last night, and there's Northern Ireland and people killing each other all over the world. All these adults telling us things and then not doing them. You tell us we should try to be nice to each other and it's really hard isn't it? But when it works, it's great. I love working in this class in English. Why can't the world be like this class?'*

Moira: *'Perhaps our job is to try to make the whole world like this class.'*

Zoë: *'How can we do that?'*

Moira: *'I don't know, Zoë, but I have to keep on working with the class to make it the best class it can possibly be. All of us together. Do you see why I bother so much? Somewhere I believe that the world can really be like this. And I know you look around and it seems to make no sense, but then bits of it like this class, they do make sense sometimes. And it's fun, isn't it?'*

Zoë: *'I love being in this class. I think we're learning how to be nice to each other as well as English. And I'm starting to see what it means.'*

Zoë bowls me over with her humanity and insight. That last bit about understanding what it means strikes me as one of the clearest reflections back to me of the values that I am now quite consciously bringing into the classroom. I know, again, that I have not 'cracked it' with Zoë but for those few moments I think we shared something educational. It is possible, of course, that she was simply seeking my approval in this conversation, but I believe that we were building from something powerful and I capture that here as part of my living educational theory. Thank Heavens for the 'Ancient Mariner', Action Research, and a context in which working with children really seems to have the potential to help us all to lead better lives.'