

CHAPTER FOUR

ACTION RESEARCH CYCLE: WORKING WITH DEPARTMENT A

The Canterbury Tales

It was the summer of 1992, and I was going on a walking holiday in the Austrian mountains. My inservice experiences were locked in my memory and I wrote the stories in my mind as each day we challenged ourselves to achieve ever more strenuous hikes. The result, written in the form of The Canterbury Tales, looks at the journey that members of the department and I had taken over the course of the year, but the story is seen from my perspective.

The prologue is an analogy. It parallels the challenges which I undertook on my walking holiday with how I viewed the challenges faced by the department over the preceding year.

The Prologue

We had prepared ourselves well for this holiday - 'working out' in the gymnasium twice a week for the eight weeks before we went. We would have preferred to put ourselves through this punishment only once a week but were left in no doubt from our coach that this would not be sufficient, and to be really fit when the time came, twice a week was imperative!

So we were confident. However, contrary to plan, on the first day, despite factor 8 sunblock we became so sunburnt that we had to cover most of ourselves up for much of the week, and our leg muscles ached so badly that we wondered if our twice a week exercise had done any good at all.

Our aim was to climb up to the Nedersee on Wednesday. We made our way along the Ramolweg, out of Obergurgl, and struggled up past the second waterfall. We turned off the path to the Ramolhaus (which was 3005m above sea level) and pulled up steeply to reach the Lehmerkar (2574m) by lunch time, and pressed onwards towards the Nedersee, but when we came to a fork in the path, with one returning to base and the other moving on to our goal, we abandoned our attempt and made for home.

Our story sounds simple and our lack of determination pathetic. But you may not realise, unless you have also embarked on mountain walking yourself, how we felt at the time. The paths on the map are deceptive, gently leading you onwards. In reality, the beginning was fine. We were well equipped, with food, mineral water, anoraks, jumpers, and so on - we were well versed in the unpredictability of mountain weather. We were eager to get on with the walk.

The sun was hot and at the hint of uphill struggle, sweat began to creep out of the small of our backs where the rucksack snuggled, little realising that it would be sopping wet before long. Sweat gradually oozed out of all parts of our bodies - from the tops of our heads to the soles of our feet. Talking of feet, I have to mention that the higher we went, the more sore my toes became, and every time I took an energetic step, the joints of my big toes sent slivers of pain shooting up to my brain which registered that the synovial fluid was apparently not doing its work properly. My heart, which had been trained twice a week 'to tone itself up', started pumping blood round my body so furiously I was surprised that it didn't give up the struggle.

Conversation was at an absolute minimum, as every last bit of energy was needed to keep going. 'Don't stop now - see beyond that bend it gets easier!' But when you get beyond the bend, it is no easier, the only thing that's better is that you are a few steps further on. The top of mountain is elusive - do you ever get there? We knew we got to Lehmerkar, because there was a little box and a stamp inside with which to mark our map, but there is always another mountain beckoning from the top - what do we do next? On this occasion, we decided to walk across the ridge before coming down; we needed to keep together, and of course, even at the lowest moments of the uphill climb, I couldn't think of giving up - I couldn't let the others down, nor could I simply 'chicken out'.

So onwards and downwards eventually we went. What bliss I thought! I could breathe without difficulty, the terrible feeling of being about to pass out had left me long since, and now it would be plain sailing. But not so! The steep descent reminded me about my toes, and about my legs, and I realised how exhausted I was as my feet began to bump against little rocks on the path. How can my feet not notice the rocks are there, I thought? Every time my foot crashed into one, a sharp pain reminded me of the importance of being aware of things getting in the way, and of watching what I was doing.

I don't remember ever feeling so exhausted as when I returned to the hotel after that walk - but after a swim, a hot whirlpool, a change of clothes and some supper, I was happy to join in the sharing of the day's activities with everyone else - the highest, the most difficult, the most daring, the greatest!

What I kept to myself, for the time being, were the tales that I spun in my mind whilst labouring along the rocky mountain paths. As The Host pronounces in Chaucer's Canterbury Tales:

*And, well I know, as ye go by the way
Ye shapen you to tellen and to play;
For truély, comfort nor mirth is none
To ridé by the way, dumb as a stone;
And therefore will I maken you disport,
As I said first; and do you some comfort.....
This is the point, to speaken short and plain,
That each of you, to shorten with your way,
On this viage, shall tellé talés twey,-
To Canterbury-ward I mean it so,
And homeward he shall tell another two,-
Of adventüres that sometime hath befall.*

The pilgrims who will tell their modern day stories are fewer than those who were travelling to Canterbury - five in all, and four out of the five tell their tale only once. But each of their stories interweaves with the others.....Here are the pilgrims:

<i>Harriet</i>	<i>the head of department</i>
<i>Martin</i>	<i>the second in the department</i>
<i>Alistair</i>	<i>member of the department</i>
<i>Eloise</i>	<i>member of the department on a year's contract</i>
<i>Kate</i>	<i>this is me - as the deputy head</i>

I had worked with one of our departments for a period of one year - from September 1991 till July 1992, during which time we met together on a weekly, timetabled basis for inservice sessions. The main purpose of our inservice sessions was to improve the GCSE examination results, but I think this has to be seen as a long term issue, in that I do not think it is possible to simply 'improve' the end product of a process which started, from our point of view, at least four years previously, when the pupils entered the school. Certainly, when we began to look in detail at departmental perceptions, it became clear that a fundamental review of what was happening in the classrooms was needed. So I talked through with Harriet, who was the head of the department, the sort of issues which we could look at as a department, and one period each week was set aside for all members of the department to meet together, led by Harriet, and supported by me.

At first I found it hard just to get on the inside of their thinking and experiences. I ascertained that some of the department were happy for me to go into their classrooms, so I was able to pick up quite a lot of what was happening from what I observed. I also became more conversant with the methodology through which they delivered their programmes of study, and could empathise with them over some of the evident problems. I struggled to find solutions; I listened to them a lot, and to my other senior colleagues, and I worried that they would expect me to provide them with answers. I realised that I did not have the panacea for their troubles, but that I could help them to talk about and analyse their situations, to reflect on their experiences, to apply theory and empirical evidence when appropriate, to verbalise insights into their practice, and to share, try out and report upon new ideas. Throughout this time, I worked with Harriet to help her understand what was required of her as the leader of the group, and how she could draw her colleagues along with her.

The department with whom I was working was finding that one of its major values - that of enabling pupils to achieve the highest qualifications of which they were capable was being denied in its practice, as it was clear in a study of the School GCSE results that, where Year 11 students were gaining a majority of A-C grades in other subjects, they were only achieving Gs and Fs in this particular subject. Members of the department wanted to improve the performance of pupils; they also wanted to improve behaviour and motivation in the classroom.

My concern was that I wanted to enable Harriet, the Head of Department, to lead her department in such a way as to enable them to be successful. I was anxious that the department should take control of their own learning, through researching their practice, seeing where improvements were necessary, and planning their own improvements, with support - but not necessarily direction - from me. Once the first year of our intervention was complete in July 1992, I wanted to help Harriet to focus on some of the feelings and actions of the year within the department, with the purpose of reflecting on it and planning how we could move ahead during the next twelve months.

There was an organised programme of staff development throughout the school, of which Harriet and the department's weekly timetabled inservice session was a part, and at which they were expected to address their one year action plan. In order to support the department, I also attended these sessions. For 1991-92, the general title of the action plan was 'implementing the National Curriculum'.

In addition, the department was funded for six twilight - extended meeting - sessions, occurring once each half term, and Harriet and Martin, the second in the department, were also funded to attend a conference during the Easter holiday. The cost of all of this inservice commitment was approximately £4,500 out of a school budget of £56 000 - made up of GEST £7000, TVEI £25 000 and enhancement from the teaching staff budget of £24 000.

This commitment of the institution towards staff development enabled us to pursue our learning and to support each other. All of us were learners, but the outcomes of learning were different for each of us.

Harriet and I eventually structured our inservice on the following topics:-

- _ what pleases me in my classroom?
- _ what displeases me in the classroom?
- _ how do we achieve and sustain motivation of pupils - and of staff?
- _ how do we keep our pupils on-task in the classroom?
- _ what are our expectations of pace and variety in our lessons? How can we plan adequately for these?
- _ are we clear about the demands we should be making and the progression we expect of our pupils at all levels of ability?
- _ are we aware of National Curriculum demands?
- _ reviewing homework policies
- _ reviewing marking policies
- _ reviewing programmes of study
- _ what are higher level skills, and how do we offer access to them for children?
- _ what constitutes effective learning?

- _ planning changes in our practice
- _ discussing our action towards making improvements
- _ listening to other people's tape recordings of lessons and commenting on them
- _ talking about our experiences

This amounted to a comprehensive programme of inservice action and reflection, and it provided me with a lot of data, (currently held in my archives), which I was unsure how to use. Not only did I want to make the programme useful for the department, so that they would feel better about their teaching and the children would be able to learn more effectively, but also, I was hoping to enable my colleagues to become a 'self-critical community', so that they would have more control of their own learning, and become involved in it because they wanted to do it.

I was influenced by a number of accounts of fictional-critical-writing as a method for educational research: Winter 1986, 1989, 1991; Rowland (Bolton) et al 1990; Bolton, 1994. The idea was to use the data collected to form the basis of a story, weaving into it points which the action researcher thought were relevant in the context of her particular research interest; in other words, 'to write something that would respond to and organise the data previously collected'. (Winter, 1991:261).

What one writes is similar to a case study, but there is scope for creativity - the story does not have to be true, but arises from the imagination of the researcher-as-writer and includes the discontinuities, the tensions, the questions to which the writer does not have answers. Once written, the fictional text, conveying 'ambiguity, complexity, and ironic relationships between multiple viewpoints' (Winter 1991:252) can be sent for criticism to readers who analyse what they read, making their own insights into what is written by recourse to their own knowledge and experience. These readers need have had no connection with the particular context of the research, and would not be asked to comment on whether they thought the story was true - because it is not intended that it should be. The action researcher then draws all the points of view together, including her own, discusses her reflections on them and makes practical suggestions as a result. The purpose of opening the story to the comments of others is because 'researchers do not wish simply to impose on the data their prior interests, but to learn from the data, to be responsive and sensitive to what is new and surprising in it' (Winter 1991:252).

Walker (1981:163) pointed out that the attraction of the fictional form is that it offers 'a licence to go beyond what, as an evaluator/researcher, you can be fairly sure of knowing.' But it is more than this. It enables the writer to distance herself emotionally from the scene of the research and to protect the colleagues with whom she has been working, both from recognition and also from the publication of the intricacies of their problems. For me, as an action researcher who has lived for twelve months both with the problems and with the colleagues who struggled daily with them, this is a very significant advantage.

Drawing up my narrative not only helped me to organise my data in what I hope is an interesting way, thereby making it more inviting for people to read, but also it helped me to gain insights - from my perspective - into the attitudes, values and ways of thinking of each character, and the relationships within the group, which resulted from what they were like as people and how they reacted to circumstances. It also helped significantly in enabling me to understand better how they reacted to the changes which they were being asked to pursue.

Winter (1991:261), in his use of the method of fictional-critical writing, was keen to emphasise the

'crucial role of 'theorising'. The term is used to emphasise that 'theory' cannot simply be derived from data, but is always the outcome of a process in which researchers must explore, organise and integrate their own and other's theoretical resources as an interpretive response to data.'

It is through this means that I came to understand the community with whom I had been working, the part I had played in the development of this community, and in the process of the management of change as it related to the participants.

I collected data through my diary, my INSET log book, the audio-tapes of my reflections, reports written by the department on lessons, reports written by the head of department on the general

progress at points during the year, and the evaluation forms which I asked my colleagues to fill in at the end of the summer term. I have retained all of this data in my archives, and offer a brief summary of this now.

A Data Summary of Diary Events which were Relevant for the Story 'The Canterbury Tales'

<u>DATE</u>	<u>REFERENCE</u>	<u>DIARY EVENT</u>
1991		
NOV 19	E 3,17	INSET session - What pleases us in our classrooms?
	D 4,7,9,10	What can I change?
NOV 20		INSET - focus on HOW can I change?
NOV 26		INSET - individual action plans drawn up
		Higher level skills - what are they?
	E 13	Weekly meeting established between Harriet, the HOD, and Kate, the Deputy Head responsible for staff development
DEC 10/11	E 4	INSET - work on motivation - what motivates children, and their teachers?
	E5,9	Looking at National Curriculum levels - expectations of children's work
1992		
JAN 7	E 1	INSET - talked about the evidence of learning (Shipman, 1990). Discussed the concept of 'matching'.
JAN 14	D2,3	INSET - discussed the 'clean slate' approach to each lesson.
	E 2, 10	Eloise insisted on miracles.
FEB. 12	D3, 11	INSET - what evidence do we have of any improved learning?

		Example given of - children knowing the aims of the lesson at its start.
		Further example given of 'pace' in a lesson.
FEB. 26	E 6	INSET - Higher level skills - explored NC - interpreting it.
	D 11	Solution to the evidence problem - Martin volunteered to record a lesson.
MARCH 10	E 7,8	INSET - department listened to and discussed tape of
MARCH 11	D 6, 11	Martin's lesson. Talked about instructions in the target language.
		Talked about classroom management and activity approach to learning - praise - teacher led lesson.
		Discussed how recording had been made.
MARCH 18	E 8	INSET - second recording played back - methodology discussed - use of letters in the target language.
		Discussed differentiation - could letters have been at different levels of difficulty?
		PARENTS EVENING - Complaints about Eloise - not following syllabus, classes unruly.
MARCH 23	D 12	Kate went into lesson with Eloise - able to compare her way of teaching with Martin's.
		Harriet worried about inspectors' visit.
MARCH 26	D 8,9,12	Kate discussed Harriet with the Head Teacher.
	E 18	
MARCH 29	am	Kate planned with HT how to help Harriet. They have a term's grace to 'get the act together'. Need to improve classroom practice particularly.
MARCH 29	D 7,8,9,12	Kate talked to Harriet - listened to how she felt. Talked
pm	E 14,19	about how she needed to take a more 'upfront' role in managing the department.

APRIL 29	D 12	Kate observed Harriet's lesson - discussed it with her	
	E 15	later.	
APRIL 30	E 15	INSET - on lesson planning - session taken by Martin.	
		Everyone told to plan lessons accordingly, taking	
		careful account of timings. Harriet and Martin to visit	lessons to support the
		other teachers.	
MAY 14		Kate observed another lesson by Harriet.	
	D 5	Kate talked to Alistair about his value position - being	
		non-assertive.	
	D 12 E 11	Offered opportunity for him to observe one of Kate's	
		lessons.	
JUNE 1	E 12	Alistair came to one of Kate's lessons and talked about	
		discipline afterwards.	
JUNE 3	E 20	INSET - showing video of communicative methodology.	
		Harriet showed Kate her draft report of progress to the	
		HT.	
JUNE 17	D 8,13	HT pleased with Harriet's report - talked Harriet	E
16,22		through further developments.	
		INSET - on feedback from undertaking new approaches	
		with classes.	
		Harriet reported that Alistair is still not assertive	
		enough.	
		End of term departmental function planned. Kate	
		invited as well.	
JULY 9	E 21,23	Eloise said she'd made some improvements during the	
		year - found it useful to hear what other people were	doing.

I have analysed the data into 'events' and 'dilemmas', and you will notice that each event is cross referenced with either an 'E' or a 'D' followed by a number. 'E' represents an 'Event', whilst 'D'

represents a 'Dilemma'. The story I wrote is based on the data presented here - so for instance, footnote E 21 in the story corresponds to an event, E 21, in the data summary. The entry for E 21 is recorded on July 9th, 1992 and states that Eloise had said she had made some improvements during the year.

As well as basing my story on the events of the year, I have tried to capture the dilemmas which we faced in our attempts to improve classroom practice. A summary of these 'Dilemmas' is presented here, and, as with the 'Events', they are cross referenced to the text of the story. The 'Dilemmas' are based on diary entries of events which happened during the year:

Analysis of Diary Entries to reveal dilemmas faced by members of the departmental team and Kate

For Eloise

ongoing D1 thinking she's an experienced teacher who should be respected by children and adults, but feeling aggrieved because neither adults nor children treat her as she feels she should be treated.

Jan 14 D 2 thinking she knows how teaching should be done, but finding children don't respond to her approach.

Jan 14 D 3 thinking there is a problem with the children that somebody else should cure, but not wanting to rethink her philosophy / values / pedagogy in order to help herself to find a cure.

June 17 D 13 having an idea about a new teaching approach, but not understanding enough about it to develop it further

For Harriet

March 11 D 6 finding members of her department very difficult to deal with, and to get on with, yet knowing that she was expected to lead them as a team

March 26,29 D 8 thinking that she should be more assertive with the

June 17 department, but not feeling confident that they would accept this from her

Nov 19 D 7 feeling bad about the difficulties of some of the department,
 March 29 but feeling that she did not have answers for them - feeling she
 didn't know what to do about the situation.

For Martin

NOV 19 D4 feeling competent himself, but finding it difficult ,
 sometimes, to act supportively towards the others

For Alistair

May 14 D 5 finding it hard to overcome his feelings about 'strictness'
 - or authority in the classroom - whilst apparently
 accepting that teachers must have order so that children
 can learn.

May 14 being exhausted by the poor behaviour of the children, but not
 developing sufficient determination or energy to counteract it.

For Kate

NOV 19, D 9 knowing that changes have to happen, and must result in
 March 26 improvements to the situation, but wanting these changes to
 March 29 come from the department, rather than having to be told what to
 do.

Nov 26 D 10 being aware of the need for positive action, urgently, from
 the department, yet also being aware that changes take time
 and commitment from the participants if they are to be
 successful.

Nov 26 D 11 being aware that the department has talked about possible
 Feb. 12 changes in their practice, but wanting them to take charge of
 Feb. 26 looking for evidence of any improvements they might have
 March 11 made

March 23 D 12 feeling a great responsibility towards helping Harriet, but
March 26 worried that she might not be able to support Harriet
March 29 sufficiently to 'recharge' the department.
April 29
May 14

Themes which arose from my review of the data

The following themes are ones which exercised my mind either as the year progressed, or as a result of thinking about the data I collected, or once I had drawn up the story in my mind. Aspects of these themes appear in the substance of the story - and although as you will see, some are resolved in my reflections at the end of the Chapter, many remain with me over a considerable period of time, and throughout my work both with this group of teachers, and others.

- 1) Tensions exist for individual members of the group, and between each other.
- 2) Are significant things happening of which I am not aware or which I have thought to be of little importance?
- 3) The levels at which people respond are different.
- 4) Authentic knowledge, - forging the links which give personal meaning.
- 5) The support of the group - does this amount to a support set? How can a support set be developed?
- 6) My role - what was expected of me, by the group, the Headteacher, myself?
- 7) The leadership skills needed by the head of department - the effects of management on a group.
- 8) Harriet - knowing her practice.
- 9) Changing classroom practice - how can we do it? How do teachers learn? Are they reflecting on their practice?
- 10) How do I work with teachers to improve classroom practice?
- 11) Have I helped to build a self critical community? What are the features of such a community?
- 12) What have I learned?

Using Analogies Within the Story

The prologue is an analogy, in which I have drawn together my reflections of our inservice journey. It speaks, metaphorically, of the preparations I had made before setting out, of the feelings I encountered, of the strong desire to 'get there', but then always finding there was a further distance to go, of bumping into unanticipated difficulties, and of the support of each of us for one another. It says a lot about the pain of the exertion, but also that once overcome, the difficulties are soon forgotten. It talks a little about our dishonesty - and about how we don't want to reveal our inadequacies to other people! Above all, the prologue is a concrete reminder for me of how I felt at the time about all that we had done; I can still picture clearly in my mind's eye the mountains, the sun, the walks; and I return immediately to the stories and the reflection which accompanied them.

Harriet's tale is also an analogy - it is trying to put into words how I thought she might have been feeling. By removing her story from reality, I felt I could illustrate what I thought was happening rather than what I would otherwise have tried to guess. I felt the seriousness of the situation was too close for me to be comfortable with describing the reality of it.

Why did I decide to use fictional critical writing as a research methodology?

I wanted to use this as a method within my research because:

- 1) It was an exciting way of presenting data and of eliciting people's responses.
- 2) I could engage in fanciful imaginings to illustrate a point (like Harriet's pain).
- 3) I had a wide range of data from which to draw a story.
- 4) I could distance myself from the subjects of the story and I could 'anonymise' each of them.
- 5) I could write in a story things which otherwise I might not dare to say.
- 6) I was able to engage several people in responding to it- they might have been less interested in just reading through transcripts and studying other data.
- 7) Writing the story enabled me to reflect upon what the characters might have said and felt, and what their values and attitudes might have been. It gave me the opportunity for 'intra-subjective' dialectics, leading to personal renewal; the chance for me to get inside the situation.
- 8) By giving the story to other people, I was able to test my theories of how I saw the situation; did they agree with me? Could they see other explanations?

My plan

My plan was to use fictional critical writing to enable me, Harriet and others to explore the situation in the department, with a view to planning what was needed in the inservice programme for the year 1992-93. My plan fell into several sections:

- 1) Write a story based on the data collected during the year September 1991-July 1992 - from departmental INSET meetings, action plans, discussions with Harriet, and evaluation returns.
- 2) Once the story has been told, I would offer it for critical scrutiny, so that different people could apply their varied perceptions to it, and through reflecting on the discussion which followed, I would be able to look at it from differing viewpoints. I wanted to test out whether these viewpoints, together with my exploration of the story, open opportunities for reflection which might have not occurred to me previously. So I would present the story to
 - (a) a seminar of researchers at Stirling University, August 28th 1992
 - (b) my critical friend, George
 - (c) Harriet
- 3) Tape the discussions and analyse the transcripts
- 4) Interpret the analysis in terms of planning what to do next.

This second part of 'The Canterbury Tales' has become known as 'A Year in the Life of a Department'. Here is a reminder of who the pilgrims were, (and it should be remembered that all these names are pseudonyms):

Harriet	the head of department
Martin	the second in the department
Alistair	member of the department
Eloise	member of the department on a year's contract
Kate	this is me - as the deputy head

A Year in the Life of a Department

Eloise's tale

I knew that they wanted me even though I had trained as long ago as 1962. Maybe they were desperate!! I do not know - but why should they not want me anyway, just because I am not in the first blush of youth any more? I am a specialist. I was successful with my classes. My lessons were quiet; the pupils could get on with the exercises - there were no problems.

So I went in well prepared with ideas I had used in the 1960s, at the private school I taught at in Harrow. It seemed a long time ago that I was in the classroom - before I had the children and when Marcel had been earning such a lot of money. I should have been pleased that the good times lasted while the children were growing up, but times change, and I needed to contribute to the household accounts now!

¹ The children at school seemed different somehow. They were more lively than I remembered from before and asked questions such as

"Why do we have to do this, Miss?"

"Miss! Miss! You do not call me Miss! I have a husband and children. I could not be a Miss could I?"

"Eh? What's she on about?"

"I am surprised that you call into question my morals - that's what I am on about!" I said, but they did not seem to understand my point.

Harriet went through what I should do with my groups and I thought I could adapt my previous materials for them. But she showed me the sort of resources she used with her classes. I could not see how I could use these but I didn't like to tell her so. I asked her for some books, but all the other teachers said that the books were out of date, and that I shouldn't use them. I said, what should I do then? Martin went through some ideas with me. I tried them out, but they did not work.

I said to him, "Your ideas do not work! What am I supposed to do?"

He asked how I had used his ideas. When I told him, he said that I couldn't have listened to his advice, because he had told me something different from what I had done. I was most offended. I always listen to people, especially when I have asked them for advice. I know other people might not listen, but I always do.

I was annoyed so I went to Kate and told her. I said 'No-one will help me! What can be done about the children who will not work?' I said Harriet should take them out of my lessons.

Kate asked me what I thought Harriet should do with the children then? I said it was not my problem; it was her problem. Maybe you should set up a special unit or something, I do not know - there are many things one could do - maybe I should send the children to the headteacher.....

¹ Taken from her general demeanor

Kate asked me why I thought the children were naughty in my lessons. I said that they didn't want to learn. But that's not true, she said, the children are eager to learn - maybe you need some help in structuring your lessons. She said she would talk to Harriet about it and had the inservice sessions been of any help?

² "Oh yes," I said, "They have helped a little. But you must remember that I am an old hand. I know how to teach. If the children would let me get on with the teaching, I would be happy and I would not need any inservice sessions or to come to you complaining."

There was more talking. They were trying to help me I know, but all to no avail. The children did not get better - yes, one or two were removed for a while from my classes, but that is no lasting solution, is it?

We had an inservice session³. I think I would be better off getting on with my marking! Kate had given us something to read this time. It was called 'the evidence of learning' - I found it hard reading! I was surprised Alistair got so interested. It seemed to me to be just the same old things.

Then Alistair started talking about seeing each lesson as a fresh start - not going in crossly because the children had been badly behaved in the last lesson⁴. Of course, I always treat each lesson as a new start. I thought everyone would, after all, one cannot remain cross for days! But Kate queried this when I agreed with Alistair.

"Of course," I replied⁵, "there is always hope, there is always faith, one can always pray for a miracle that these children will behave themselves."

Kate said, "Is it just a matter of praying then? Don't some skills come into it somewhere?"

⁶ They all started talking about these skills! I thought, I know all of this. I said,

"Yes, I know all that - I have done all this already." Martin said I hadn't, because I hadn't listened to any of their advice. I told him, there and then, - I said,

"You! What can you tell me about teaching - I was teaching when you were still a baby!"

*

Martin's Tale

I dreamed of being back in the Canary Islands. It was hot and lovely. The sea lapped at my feet, the breeze caressed my brown

² January 14th

³ January 7th

⁴ January 14th

⁵ January 14th

⁶ January 14th and February 12th

body. I was happy - by day the sun shone, by night the discos excited everyone.

A far cry from where I am now - the first meeting of the term. Not a good sign that my mind has wandered so soon! Still it's always better when we get into the swing of things, and there are some new staff to help over the first hurdles. Thank goodness I'm not one of them. Starting off is so hard!

I spent quite a lot of time with Eloise. I gave her some suggestions which had worked for me. But her training was so long ago, could she adapt it? Perhaps she could - after all, there are other 'oldies' on the staff who manage.

But I'm not sure. Eloise doesn't listen, and she's very opinionated. Been there, read the book, seen the film etc. I can't be bothered with that approach. I'll leave Harriet to help her. It's her responsibility after all.

Back to planning for next year - the sun, the sea, the romance!

But wait! I'm hearing rumours about our exam results! Perhaps they weren't the greatest, but it's a hard subject, and if the kids don't learn it, surely it's their own fault? But it seems it's our responsibility now. How to improve, that's the question!

These inservice sessions⁷ seem to be going over things that I am good at⁸ - after all the students like me, and behave in my lessons. Then where did I go wrong? Because even my results weren't too good. Perhaps it is something to do with expectations⁹ - we hear a lot about these!

We looked at the National Curriculum today¹⁰ - it's rather worrying really, I would never have thought of doing some of it so early - and some, I don't reckon our students could ever try it. Perhaps I'd better think about it a bit more!

Harriet's giving me more responsibility, which is good. For instance¹¹, she's asked me to lead some of the inservice sessions on classroom practice - and Kate suggested that I could tape a lesson¹² and play back the tape to the assembled company!! I don't know about that. It might be awful. But then, I suppose I could always say the tape broke or something.

Actually I was really pleased with the tape. I came across really well - I'm quite proud of myself. Mind you, I planned the lesson very, very carefully. I wonder what they will say about it? I think I'll need to explain some of the things - like why I keep calling to Kevin! But I think it shows good

⁷ November 19/20th

⁸ March 18th and March 29th

⁹ December 10/11th

¹⁰ December 11th

¹¹ February 26th

¹² March 10/11th

control, some interesting strategies for learning, good responses from the children, and an atmosphere of learning from beginning to end. It's brilliant! Hope they like it!

Well they did, and asked me so many questions - how did I do this, what about that, did I think such a thing? Alistair's going off to try an idea out which he got from listening to the tape.

Harriet was really pleased with the whole thing and I'm going to record the sequel¹³, so that we can see some progression. Also, we've talked about differentiation, and I'd like to look at that as well.

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Alistair's Tale

I don't know who is the best person to go to for advice. I don't really want to talk about my lessons, but I am beginning to think perhaps, just perhaps, there are things which I could do which might make the lessons better. We've talked a lot in our team about motivation¹⁴ - ours and the children's. Mine was at rock bottom. It's all such a struggle - a struggle to prepare the lessons, a struggle to give the lesson and a struggle to mark the work that the children do.

We've talked about our relationships with the classes. Eloise is scathing about our discussions.

"Relationships! Ha ha!" she says, "They are always talking about relationships. Have they got sex on the brain or something?"

"It's not that sort of relationship they're talking about, Eloise," I said¹⁵. "It's about liking the children - and finding some good in them. And I do like them, they are nice really, but I think I am too soft with them. But I cannot help it, I do not want to be horrid to them. I don't think life should be like that."¹⁶

"Well of course we all like the children, - I do not think we need sit around and talk about it all the time."

"I don't know about that," I said, "Do you really like them? You don't talk as if you actually do like them. I find the discussions we have quite useful, because everyone listens to my problems, and I have been able to try out some solutions that other people have suggested. Also, Kate or Harriet come into my room sometimes, and I can get on with the lesson then."

"Well, they don't come into mine. And I wouldn't want them anyhow. Doesn't it make it more difficult to deal with the children when they go, or if they are not there?"

¹³ March 18th

¹⁴ December 10/11th

¹⁵ January 14th

¹⁶ May 14th and other informal discussions

I thought about this for a moment and then replied, "No, I don't find it so. And if I did, I still would think it worth it for the times when I can do as I want in the way of teaching. You should ask Harriet to come in. I'm sure she would." Eloise mumbled something in reply, then bustled off. I do not think Eloise will take my advice and ask Harriet into the classroom.

I found I could talk to Kate about my teaching. She had told me¹⁷ that I had many good ideas, but needed to be more assertive and make more demands on the children. I have a pathological horror of being too demanding, and I don't really believe there is a difference between being assertive and being aggressive¹⁸. She asked me if I would like to come into any of her lessons, so I said "Yes please, I never have the chance to see other people in the classroom."

But I was disappointed in watching her lesson and I told her so¹⁹. She asked why, so I told her, "Well, I was going to look for how you discipline your classes, but I didn't see you doing any disciplining! So I didn't know what to look for next." She looked a little surprised and said, "But what do you mean, that there was no discipline in the lesson?"

"No, I don't mean that, I mean that there was no need for you to discipline them. You did not need to tell them off. You did not need to be ferocious with them!"

"But how do you think I achieved that state in the first place? What was I doing to ensure that I had no need to be ferocious, as you put it? What was my body language like, what was my tone of voice like? What were my expectations of the children?"

"Oh, well, yes - I could see that everyone knew what they should be doing, and you were moving around and amongst them and sounded as if you meant what you said. Is that what you mean by discipline then? Is that being assertive?"

"That's what I mean by being assertive" she replied.

I was beginning to understand. I was beginning to make sense of it all; I was beginning to have a better idea of what I needed to change.

*

Harriet's tale²⁰ I'd been going to see the doctor quite a lot²¹ - little things - some to do with me, some to do with my family - so I knew the doctor quite well.

But I never told her of this terrible pain²² I had. I felt so bad about it; I'd had it all last year, but this term, it was awful. I wished it was a wound so that I could put sticking plaster over it to make it better. I thought, I shall have to

¹⁷ May 14th

¹⁸ as above

¹⁹ June 1st

²⁰ January 14th and March 11th

²¹ November 26th onwards

²² November 19th 1991, onwards - particularly March 29th, and in informal discussions through the year

go to the doctor and tell her about it. Maybe she can cure it - although I doubted if anyone could. While I waited for my turn, I saw other, more lucky patients, come and go. Then I went in.

"What's the trouble?" she asked, "You're looking a little peaky."

"Er, yes. Well, I've got this, um, I'm not really sure what the problem is. But perhaps I need some sleeping tablets. I don't seem to sleep well at all."

"Do you have a lot of work to do at home in the evenings?" she asked.

"Yes and no. That is, I have some work I should do, but I'm so tired that I often don't do it. That worries me then, and so I don't sleep!"

"Why don't you get up and do the work if you can't sleep?"

"Oh, I couldn't possibly do that. No, I need to sleep. Some sleeping tablets would do the trick, I think."

So the doctor gave me what I asked for. But it didn't help my pain, which just grew worse and worse²³. It was like a lead weight deep in the centre of my body. People bumped into it from time to time - I'm not sure whether they could see that it hurt.

I told the doctor about these people bumping into me. She asked lots of questions. Eventually I thought I would have to tell her about my pain, because I couldn't see any way of curing it otherwise.

As I told her about it, I could see that the doctor understood how I was feeling²⁴.

"Can you cure it?" I asked, anxiously.

"I think I can help you to cure it," Kate replied, "but I shall have to think about the best strategy to adopt. Tell me more about it."

So I talked to her a lot. Then one day the consultant sent for me. She said I must take control of my life. She said she would talk to Kate about me, and Kate would help me to get myself better.

I was so relieved now that I had shared my pain, and I felt much more confident that I would get better. I talked a lot to Kate²⁵ and together we worked out a plan to change my way of going on²⁶. Because I felt so much better, I didn't need the sleeping tablets any more, and I was able to put far more energy into my work. I began to see things which I had previously not seen, so everything came into focus more sharply. I decided to begin with Eloise. I was determined that I would put a stop to her undermining activities, so I forced myself to be more assertive with her.

²³ as above

²⁴ March 29th

²⁵ April 29th/30th onwards

²⁶ Friday 26th March, March 29th pm and June 17th - Harriet's discussion with the Head Teacher

Things began to change. I passed the three month milestone, and went back for a check up with the consultant²⁷. She was pleased with my progress. I knew she would be, because, whereas before, I didn't realise what was happening, now, I knew things were getting better.

I gave the consultant a spiral-bound booklet of my plans for the next twelve months. I am looking forward to making sure the plans work!

*

Kate's tale

I was drawn to the room by the noise²⁸; there seemed to be children everywhere, calling out, moving about, swinging on the backs of their chairs, talking animatedly amongst themselves - and at the front of the room, a flustered, annoyed teacher, trying to make himself heard. I went in. A gradual hush descended. I talked quietly to Alistair about what the class was supposed to be doing. They settled down and began to do as they had been asked.

I stayed for a while, then tried to leave unobtrusively. I felt for Alistair - I can remember experiencing something similar - I think most teachers have, but prefer to forget it and even to deny that it happened. Does every teacher have a recurring nightmare of the class out of control - or is it just my dream? It's like when I gave up smoking, I'd dream that I started again - and wake up dreadfully depressed at my failure to resist temptation.

I wasn't sure how to cope with Alistair - should I discuss the lesson with him, or would he prefer to forget about it? Could I let him forget about it? Could I ignore what I had seen? Where would I start? How did he feel about me coming in? What about the continuing disadvantage to the children's learning if I did nothing about it?

I decided to talk to him and was relieved and somewhat surprised to find that he welcomed both my presence in the room and my discussion of the lesson. I agreed to go in more often and we talked about strategies that he could adopt to improve his control of the class.

Through spending more time in the department, I found that some of the other teachers were in similar difficulties, and that Harriet was isolated and needed someone to talk to. Harriet and I began to meet once a week to talk through the department's activities, and also to structure the meetings which were timetabled weekly.²⁹ We looked at all sorts of aspects of classroom practice³⁰ - motivation, control, how to achieve a learning environment, what we are doing which might account for

²⁷ June 17th

²⁸ November 19th, onwards; March 26th and March 29th

²⁹ November 19/20th 1991 onwards

³⁰ November 19/20th 1991 onwards

the current state of affairs, how to give children access to higher levels of attainment. We recorded lessons and discussed them, we made action plans, put them into operation and reviewed them and so on. We made some progress, in that at least most people in the team were sharing their practice - some good and some problematic³¹ .

But it was hard going. Sometimes relationships within the department were very tense, with the teachers in difficulties feeling that those who weren't having problems were unsympathetic and impatient with them.

The consultant³² talked to me about Harriet, whose wound got much worse in March, and for a while I wondered whether she would get better³³ . She talked to me a lot and I was relieved when eventually she faced up to the wound³⁴ . Once she had done that, we were able to plan what we could do about it, and she began to get better. By the summer, she was a different person - Harriet was determined to build a successful team.

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Eloise again

Harriet is looking better³⁵ . She is around more, and the children see her through the door and behave better when she is there. I still have not cracked it here. I cannot fathom why the children are so bad.

Martin says they are not bad for him - I don't know why this is, and I still don't like him but - I think he's right, they are not bad for him. In fact that lesson he recorded³⁶ was brilliant - but how did he do it?

I have made little improvements³⁷ - I have been using some of the ideas³⁸ in our meetings and I was surprised when one really worked. I said I would use it again. It was a game and I let the children make up their own rules.

I said to them "You see, you can work well when you choose to. You have been very original. You have come up with lots of different ideas and I am very pleased with you".

"Well you let us work it out for ourselves," they said.

"Yes, but even so, you have done well." I was not sure what they meant - were they saying I should have taught them properly?

³¹ February 12th; February 26th; March 11th

³² March 26th

³³ March 23rd; March 26th; March 29th; 29th April; May 14th

³⁴ March 29th pm onwards

³⁵ Summer Term

³⁶ March 10/11th

³⁷ July 9th

³⁸ June 17th

Anyway, I was so pleased that the game worked that I gave it to them again, but they weren't so good this time.

I told the team about my success. They were very interested. Someone asked why I thought it had been successful. I said, "Well they were probably in the mood, you know, sometimes they are and sometimes they are not." I do not know why it worked³⁹ - I am only happy that it did.

Alistair tried it too⁴⁰. He said it was successful because the children are competitive and wanted to win. Harriet asked whether the interest in the game could also have to do with the children being in control of what they were doing, instead of being told by me. I do not know whether this is the case. I have not thought about it, except that they should be told by me what to do. After all I am the teacher - but then, it's a topsy-turvy world since I started teaching. I think this is what the Government calls 'left wing ideologies'. Alistair, Martin, the others - they must all have been taught this way at College - give up your responsibility, the children will know what they want to do!

But I have missed out on the discussion. I think they are talking now about if they can start at the point of the children's previous knowledge. I don't understand this - if I did that with my groups, we would never get anywhere - no, perhaps, I haven't heard properly. I am tired of trying to work it all out. I shall go back to my garden - I do not have to think about how my plants will grow, they just do, if I put the fertiliser on them and water them. Conditions for growth! Yes! That would make a good title for an inservice discussion. But with plants, it could be over in five minutes, and then we could get on with the gardening. With children - it could go on for hours, and I can't say that I am very keen to rush off into the classroom. It is a pity. Maybe I have learned a little⁴¹, maybe I have changed a little this year, but I am sorry that I have had to change. At least the left wing ideologies will not have penetrated into my garden. My lupins will look lovely, and I shall not have the need to tell them off. I am looking forward to going.

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³⁹ June 17th

⁴⁰ June 17th

⁴¹ July 9t

What happened once I had written the story

i) about the story

My story fell into three parts - one part was about me, one part was about the department, the other was about Harriet. The first time I presented the story to the researchers at Stirling I shortened it, using Eloise's story only, because I felt it was too long as a discussion paper. As a result of some of the comments made, I revised parts of Eloise's story and presented the whole story to my critical friend and fellow deputy head, George. Once I had discussed it with George, I decided to give the story to Harriet, but I left out the part that specifically recorded Harriet's story. I was not sure how she would react to the section which was about her, so felt it safer to exclude it. Throughout all of this process, I did not submit the prologue for discussion, as I felt it was rather an indulgence as it was about me, and the story was long already!

To sum this up:

- 1 short version - "Eloise's story" presented to the researchers.
- 2 revised version "A year in the Life of a Department" presented to George.
- 3 "A Year in the Life of a Department", excluding Harriet's story, presented to Harriet
- 4 discussion with researchers - 28.8.92
- 5 discussion with George - 9.9.92
- 6 discussion with Harriet - 11.9.92

Full details of the discussions are in my archived materials; relevant extracts will be used now in the accompanying discourse.

ii) about the discussions

I taped each of the discussions and transcribed the tapes. Different things emerged from each discussion - the researchers at Stirling were outside the action and knew only the circumstances which were revealed in the story and the brief introduction that I gave them to our inservice training programme. On the other hand, George had an overview of the department, being in a senior position in the school; and Harriet was, of course, a participant in the action. Each brought their own

perceptions to the discussion, and the following are points raised which I shall reflect upon in the next section.

1.0 Harriet's perceptions

- 1.1 Harriet had a view that we - she and I - were doing something in the form of INSET to her department.
- 1.2 'The work we have done together has led to a stronger team' through talking together, building confidence, expressing expectations.
- 1.3 There were difficulties in the relationship with Martin.
- 1.4 Some of Harriet's comments indicated to me that she lacked confidence.

2.0 George's comments

- 2.1 On Eloise - she operated in the 'transmission mode, with an overdose of Victorian values'.
- 2.2 On support for new members of staff - help was given in the department, but there was tremendous pressure of their own work which might prevent this from being effective.
- 2.3 There was often a feeling of 'Oh well, I've done what I could'.
- 2.4 Understanding how people learn - experience can be 'floating about without a structure to pin it to'
- 2.5 Teachers go into the classroom with their own baggage - like Harriet with her pain.
- 2.6 Harriet was crying for help with her pain - she wasn't coping but was pretending she was alright. She seemed to be covering a lack of confidence.
- 2.7 Perhaps some of the support given to Harriet as a Head of Department had been also in the transmission mode - so how could she learn effectively?

3.0 Elizabeth, Isabel, Pam (the researchers)

- 3.1 On Eloise - who refused to listen, - so the children get a poor deal - and in turn, the children won't listen. Where was the nurturing that was in evidence in the garden?
- 3.2 But she was not given sufficient help - has been floundering around all the term - eventually projected her lack of ability onto the children - it became their fault.

3.3 The deficit model - turning it around to say, 'what am I doing that isn't helping, because you have to see them in a different way?'

Reflections on the discussions

I think the outcomes of the discussions can be grouped together as follows:

- 1.0) Harriet's perceptions of INSET.
- 1.2) Harriet's relationship with Martin.
- 1.3) Harriet's lack of confidence.

- 2.0) Eloise and the transmission model of learning.
- 2.1) Learning, nurturing and the deficit model.

- 3.0) Support for teachers, - structured, early enough, and finding time for it.

1.0 Harriet's perceptions of INSET

Harriet read Eloise's story at the end of the first full week of the Autumn Term 1992. She found it difficult to recognise the characters, which surprised me greatly as I felt that they were very transparent. I have recorded the transcript of the discussion in italics (H is Harriet; M is me).

H: I suppose I was trying to recognise people in it really

M: and did you?

H: well I suppose so. Martin comes into it and you and I are on the periphery.....

The main part is someone coming in with new ideas - could it be you or me? Or even could it be Eloise herself? I don't know. I'm finding it difficult to take it all in

At this point I suggested that Harriet should take the story away and read it peacefully at the weekend, but she then started to get into it and wanted to talk about it.

H: I suppose it's the idea of how others are reacting to what we've been trying to do to them.

M: to them - interesting?

H: well, for them - I mean subjecting them to sitting there every week and perhaps there wasn't a lot of form in what we had to talk about - just talking, getting them to shift - to shift long taken stances I suppose.

I was interested in her perception of what we had been doing. It was not my view that we had been doing something to them, - or even that there had not been a lot of form in what we talked about - but rather that we had been working with the department, and had been giving them the opportunity to contribute to the debate. The title of the debate was straightforward - how are we going to improve pupil performance?

However, Harriet and I had met each week on the day prior to the inservice session to talk through the structure for the next day, and it was possible that she might have thought of this as planning what we were to do to them. I had been thinking of these sessions as working out how to encourage the department to be involved in their own development. For instance we had looked at pupil behaviour by 'brainstorming' 'the things which I like about my classroom', and we followed this up by looking in the next session at what they didn't like about their classrooms. In the discussion, some surprise was expressed at how pleasing some of their classroom practice was, and this heightened their awareness of actions and practices which they wanted to discourage. We looked at motivation - and noted that people taking an interest in what was going on increased motivation - both the pupils' motivation and that of the teachers. Harriet was surprised that her department was able to think of a long list of motivators; left to herself, she would have come up with a few obvious ones, like - being successful, being praised, undertaking relevant activities and so on, and would have thought these were all there were.

Contrary to the impression Harriet gave when saying that the department have been 'subjected to sitting there every week', she did refer to the value of the talking the department has done together, for example:

H:.....although on the surface we agree to a certain style of teaching, we would find quite a few of us come from different backgrounds and the fact that we are talking about it now - it's making us think about what we're doing, and that's no bad thing!

And:

H:before, when I came, that sort of dialogue wasn't going on,.....but I think I'm fairly optimistic now that we're pulling together - that we want to do the same things, talk the same language - it's not a shock when somebody's got certain ideas, and they're not laughed out of court - it's been like that before.....

And again:

H: I'm sure the more we talk about what we do - we're in the habit of doing it; let's carry on, it'll give us more confidence in one another.....building expectations.

And finally:

H: the amount of work, the amount of discussion we've had, the amount of consensus we've actually achieved, the work we've done together has made us a stronger team.....

Towards the end of the discussion, Harriet turned to the forthcoming inservice session, and I began to feel that she may have understood some of the principles of 'ownership' when she asked:

H: so with this INSET, do we go in with things which we've got to cover? Or is it more a personal awakening, rather than us saying you've got to do this?

M: Yes, I think this is one of the things you need to think about quite carefully, because you've got to get them to 'own' their improvement, rather than you imposing on them - so in a way, you've got to get an agenda of things coming from them.

The discussion continued, and we agreed how to approach the next session.

1.2 Harriet's relationship with Martin

Harriet opened a discussion on Martin, referring obliquely to the fact that there have been problems in this relationship in the past, but that now it is much improved.

H: He was, and still is a very solid element in the department, and relationship-wise, it's got better and better....the weekend conference was good, I think he realised I was on the same side and not an old fuddy duddy.....he's much, much better now.

M: How do you think he is with the others?

H: I think he comes across as a little arrogant, although, reading what you gave me (the evaluation returns for last year), even that is shifting - once you get inside the arrogance, he has got lots of good ideas, and so on and he can admit to failures, now that the closet is opened a little bit.....and the little mistakes that I might have made, have been received with guffaws, guffaws of laughter - but that's OK now, I think I can take that(her voice tails off to a rather large sigh).

I think Harriet was pleased that the situation has improved, but from my discussions with her, I was aware that this relationship was still a fairly problematic one - in that it appeared to me that Martin was easily irritated by Harriet, and did not conceal his irritation. This upset her, particularly when it happened in meetings. Harriet and I were working on this - what was it about Harriet that annoyed Martin - how could Harriet act differently - and how can she express her feelings towards Martin so that he stops undermining her? I hope Harriet will come up with an action plan to deal with these issues.

1.3 Harriet's lack of confidence

I think Harriet's lack of confidence showed through in many ways - her body language, her speech, her management of the department, and in the context of the discussion following Eloise's story, it showed in the question she asked me about the INSET which we had just planned together. Her question was quite simply "Are you coming to it?" She worries that she will not be able to lead the sessions towards the goals we have set; she is afraid that there will be nothing left to say by about half way through, and that she will not have been able to draw from the team their commitment to the next step.

George also saw Harriet as lacking confidence.

G:she's amenable to help because in spite of her pain.....there's nothing to suggest that Harriet hasn't got the mental gear to do it.....Harriet's problem is all to do with confidence and dealing with people.....it's a cry for help really - her pain is almost forgotten once she's having some conversation, in the sense of structuring and improving - the doctor and the consultant, they address

something different - Harriet goes with her pain but they don't talk about her pain,- the pain goes when they talk about her lifestyle - the pain is a manifestation of something else that is wrong.

2.0 Eloise and the transmission model of learning

Discussions with George, Elizabeth, Isabel and Pam focused mainly on how people learn. George was not happy with Eloise, and pointed to several character traits which he thought her formal training tended to reinforce, such as being 'more stiff and unchanging than most people are'; falling into staffroom clichés such as 'Oh well, if I started from where they are, with what they know, that wouldn't do them much good would it?'; being a 'certain class.....a certain person who has expectations of how the world should be, they may never have seen it in operation '; believing that children should be 'vessels into which knowledge is poured'; assuming that 'they are a million miles from me, and I am appointed in a superior capacity to them'; and holding 'an overdose of Victorian values'.

George also made some interesting points about how teachers might learn.

M: Do you think it sounds like it's an appalling situation?

G: No, I think it's a situation that many people find themselves in, in schools.

M: But what can the schools actually do to improve the situation?

G: By recognising that teaching is a very complex and difficult process, and not assuming that when newly qualified teachers come into schools that they know it all - by actually structuring a programme of support from when they come into school.

M: But I think these people might indicate that they had structured a programme of support.

G: But it's a bit ad hoc - it's just when somebody offers them a bit of advice - when Harriet's not in the background as much as normal.....It sounds as if Martin would have given her a few 10 to 15 minutes when it was spare, and that was it, and probably (Martin) assumed an awful lot - there was the bit about she (Eloise) couldn't understand why something had worked - so that little bit would have just been floating around without structure to pin it to - without any real level of understanding to link it with.....

M:.....not being able to pin that to anything meant that she therefore couldn't use it.

This discussion on being able to make learning meaningful reminded me of the concept of authentic knowledge (Polanyi 1958, Kemmis and Carr 1983). In pursuing this concept, Groundwater Smith

(1988:256) claimed that knowledge is a 'personal invention' - that for a person to come to know something, he or she has to do more than simply assimilate the information offered. She said

'A positive act of construction is required whereby the knower tests the information against the yardstick of personal experience. The quality of the emerging understanding is dependent upon the ability of the knower to evaluate the information in a prudent and exhaustive fashion. Each person's knowledge is the next person's information. In transmitting information, we should not be persuaded that we are fabricating identical forms of knowledge.'

It seemed to me that Eloise did not try to evaluate the information in an exhaustive fashion - instead she said, 'I do not know why it worked - I am only happy that it did.' So she dismissed an opportunity for learning - as George said, 'that little bit would have been floating about without structure to pin it to' - she did not seem to want to attach it to personal experience. Maybe, as she expected the children to learn through the transmission mode, she also expected this of herself, which might be why she did not evaluate the lesson that had worked well for her - she would not have recognised the need to review what had happened.

George, in drawing on his 'insider' knowledge, linked some of Harriet's problems with the fact that the support she has received as a head of department has also been in the transmission mode.

G: ...but if you have a transmission model in treating heads of department, how can you expect that to be any different from the head of department to the department?

M: so if Harriet's experiencing a transmission mode

G: Yes, do this, do that, hand this in by, get this in by.....

M: OK, but where does that put her then?

G: well that's not learning is it? It's bits flying about that you can't move into a pattern or a structure

M: This is like Eloise, trying to transmit knowledge to her children and not being successful and Harriet is having the transmission mode of learning applied to her and she's not being successful....

pause

M: It comes back to how people learn, doesn't it?

George made the point that a structured programme of induction is necessary, and this is something which we have developed over the last year. Eloise was part of the induction group, but if her favoured mode of learning was through the transmission model, she will have been disappointed that most of the programme was teacher-centred, consisting of activities such as role play, small group discussion and classroom research. However, the induction group was only a part of the programme of induction for new colleagues; departments and year teams were expected to take a significant share in the process, which had been worked out by representatives of Heads of Year and Heads of Department during the previous year. However, as George said

.....teachers have their own jobs to do, and there's a sense of - Oh, well, try this, and if you haven't listened properly, I've got other things to do.

M: but isn't that a bit harsh, don't you think?

G: Yes,it is harsh for people, but there is still the issue of someone who hasn't got much time giving it and then feeling exasperated, Oh well, I've done what I could - and there's a lot of that around in the department and the way things are in education, with lots of work, but....

I think the statement 'there's a lot of that around in the department' is indicative of a depressed department, with all members struggling quite hard - some more than others - to keep their heads above water.

Both Harriet and George picked up on the fact that teachers take 'their own baggage' into the classroom - Harriet took her pain, Eloise her rather extreme attitudes towards children, - 'her very strong views and ideas' (as Harriet saw them). If there had been less baggage for both Eloise and Harriet, Eloise's induction might have been more satisfactory; if the programme within the department had been more structured, maybe the problems would have been less. I think there are important lessons to be learned here and we need to be careful to support adequately any new teachers joining the department.

Elizabeth - one of the researchers at the seminar at Stirling University - in contrast to the idea of taking her 'baggage' into the classroom, brought to the discussion in Stirling her 'interest in negotiation.'

E: And so I think that I obviously side with the children against this woman who refuses to listen

Pam:I think she's a voice crying in the wilderness, - the only thing she has is she's an expert, she knows, that's what being an expert means and they (the children) don't listen.....She knows she could help them if they listened.

Isabel: She seems to be isolated.....But I think that what's interesting about action research is that some teachers.....are trying to change their practice with reflection - now I can see that Martin and Alistair - they can see that they've got problems, and they're trying things out and coming back, and they're trying to help her by involving her in their problems, but she doesn't really want to know.

The discussion continued along the lines that Isabel thought Eloise, whilst wanting the children to change, wasn't prepared to change herself - but Pam pointed to the lack of support throughout and felt that Eloise was defensive towards those who offered help because the help came too late, and she didn't really understand it when it was offered. Isabel thought that one of her defensive mechanisms was 'to project the problem onto the pupils', claiming that it was 'something within the nature of the children almost..... so it ceases to be a problem'.

Elizabeth developed this discussion into the wider issue of learning, and likened it to her experiences with students who have special educational needs

E: ...particularly when they've got disturbing behaviour - look, they've said (the teachers), we've done this and we've done that, but this person is not responding - rather than turning it round and saying not that we tried but couldn't help her, but that what we tried didn't work. Maybe if you're working with any learner, you've got to turn it round and say 'what is it about what I'm doing that isn't helping?' - because then you have to see them in a different way - it changes from a deficit model to something more positive.

I think that one of the things which emerged from the discussion with Elizabeth, Isabel and Pam was that I felt guilty that we had not been able to help Eloise, and I had been seeing it in terms of Eloise not responding to the help she was given. Elizabeth pointed out that it doesn't help to feel guilty, but that 'failure is actually quite an interesting and exciting area, - it has a lot of potential for exploration....' I

found that what Elizabeth had to say about the 'deficit model' was very thought provoking - and I had not looked at it in those terms before.

3.0 Support for teachers - structured, early enough and finding time for it.

Each of the discussions explored the support the school was able to offer to Eloise - and this support applies to all new teachers. George pointed to the need for the programme of induction to be structured and that departments have little available time for individual support; Harriet said that she had given to Martin the responsibility of day to day help which she perhaps should have monitored more closely, and Kate indicated, through the story, that inservice time had been made available to the department. Yet it was clear to Pam that 'there's this poor woman, comes back to teaching after having her children or whatever, and she's obviously given no help at all, because she's doing things which you just wouldn't imagine anybody doing or thinking.'

Eloise was actually given quite a lot of support, in the form of structured, school wide induction - how the school operates, the role of the form tutor, writing reports and records of achievement, managing the classroom and so on. She was a part of the departmental inservice sessions which Harriet and I planned to help the department to improve their classroom practice. She probably did not get sufficient support with day to day problems - such as controlling behaviour, planning lessons, knowing how to interpret the scheme of work, understanding the goals of the department and the teaching methods they employed to achieve these goals. Whatever help she did get with this was probably given too late, once it was becoming evident that she was in difficulties.

What have I learnt through this exploration of the department's story?

I have been searching for reasons to explain why our support was not appropriate for Eloise. Duigan and Macpherson (1992:83), in talking about educational change said

'In the whole of this learning process there is a need for individuals to make personal sense of what is happening. Unless they can connect the proposed new ideas or practice with their basic assumptions, beliefs and experiences they are likely to reject the change outright. One of

the challenges for the educative leader is to make proposed changes understandable and meaningful for those who are expected to implement the changes.'

I think we probably failed at this first hurdle. Eloise had trained thirty years ago and had not taught for many years. The world of education and schools had changed in that time. Her training and experience would not have fitted her for the challenges of today's classroom, and we did not recognise this - or if we did know, we did not understand that she would have the difficulties she experienced in developing her skills to fit in with contemporary methodology. Her attitudes towards children were different from those of the rest of the department, and her attitude towards how to teach, and her beliefs about teaching, were different as well. It is not clear whether anyone had helped her to understand the aims of the department - she had a staff handbook which gave a good picture of the wider ethos and aims of the school - but she would have needed to discuss these and the departmental goals, with other people in order to give it meaning for herself.

In talking about teacher development, Northfield (1992:88-9) spoke about 'the need (A) to assess teachers' present strengths and find out what really happens in classrooms and (B) to utilise and build on existing teacher strengths, extending their present skills, rather than neglecting or undermining them'. I do not think we built on Eloise's pre-existing knowledge and skills - rather she was expected to cope with new teaching approaches which she really didn't understand and she was unable to make the 'positive act of construction', whereby 'in order to appreciate what is offered when we are told something, we have to find somewhere to put it.....Something approximating to 'finding out for ourselves' needs therefore to take place if we are to be successfully 'told'. ' Bullock (1975).

Perhaps this was what George meant when he said 'so that little bit would have just been floating about without any structure to pin it to' - Eloise was unable to make sense of the activities she tried out, because she had nowhere 'to put them'; she did not have a basic understanding of what she was trying to achieve and therefore could not develop her pedagogical knowledge. Martin easily tired of trying to help her because for Eloise, learning was disjointed and made little sense. Martin would have seen little progress being made. At best, using Northfield's analysis, Eloise might have accepted the new ideas

but was unable to apply them to other situations, or at worst 'the new ideas are misinterpreted to fit in with or even support, existing ideas.' For example in relation to the part of Eloise's story where she was successful in trying a new method, she showed that she didn't understand what she had done. The activity was a 'one-off' idea, which she didn't think was teaching anyway - 'were they saying I should have taught them properly?' - and because the children were good, not because they had learnt something - she gave it to them again. She did not appear to develop the game in any way, so she did not adapt the methodology for the next stage, to extend the children's learning. I think our programme of inservice support failed to help Eloise because, although it arose in response to the experiences of the department, it was a 'mixed ability' programme, which took account of the 'mass' in the middle, but not sufficiently of the extremities.

Polanyi (1958:100)) talked of the urge to understand experience:

We have seen how the urge to look out for clues and to make sense of them is ever alert in our eyes and ears, and in our fears and desires. The urge to understand experience, together with the language referring to experience, is clearly an extension of this primordial striving for intellectual control. The shaping of our conception is impelled to move from obscurity to clarity and from incoherence to comprehension, by an intellectual discomfort similar to that by which our eyes are impelled to make clear and coherent the things we see. In both cases we pick out clues which seem to suggest a context in which they make sense as its subsidiary particulars.

If Eloise was unable to make sense of her experiences, she must have felt very uncomfortable that she was not able to achieve 'intellectual control'. In the circumstances, it is perhaps unsurprising that she responded in a defensive way, and eventually appeared to give up the battle of trying to make sense of them.

Conclusion

Writing 'The Canterbury Tales' has enabled me to develop my epistemology of educational practice. Through reflecting in action I have come to know the following:

- 1) The nature of 'ownership' of learning - as a result of our experiences, Harriet led the department through the process of identifying and prioritising issues for 1992-93 and therefore the INSET sessions became departmental agendas within the broad parameters of the School Development Plan.
- 2) The need to differentiate learning for teachers - that teachers are at different stages in the development of their personal knowledge, and therefore at different stages of 'learning readiness'.
- 3) The nature of 'reframing' (Schön, 1983), and how this is affected by reflection (see Chapter 8).
- 4) The beginnings of an understanding of the significance of relationships within learning - the importance of confidence - and the nature of leadership.

The problem I set myself following 'The Canterbury Tales' was how could I establish action research as a way of working which enables my colleagues to become participants in the process as well? I see 'participation' in two ways - colleagues can become participants in someone else's action research project by working with the researcher, and maybe gradually taking over parts of the original project (Evans 1991:10). In this way, colleagues are taking over the problem and making it and the solutions their own. I think this can be an important part of action research, but, as my enquiry is about establishing a community of action researchers, participation means more than this to me. I want to enable colleagues to own the development of their practice - to take the initiative in looking critically at what they are doing and to identify value conflicts which give rise to dissonance; my role then is to provide the necessary support for them whilst they work out their solutions. In other words, my colleagues will become action researchers in their own right, and the learning culture of the school should be structured to provide the support.