

INTRODUCTION - AN OUTLINE OF THIS THESIS

This introduction begins with a brief description of this action research enquiry, and the claims to original knowledge that I am making. It describes Roseacre School and its management, the School Development Plan, our partnership with Kingston University, the people I have worked with and the stories I have written; the chronology of events, and how I have constructed the thesis. The introduction finishes with an outline of the content of each chapter. The intention of the introduction is to give a simple, but clear, overview of the thesis.

I have been undertaking an action research enquiry into the process of reflecting in action as part of the everyday role of a deputy headteacher in a comprehensive school. I began this research in September 1991, having been in post since April 1989, and my original aims were to evaluate my practice as the deputy head responsible for staff development and through action research to facilitate the development of colleagues' practice; to contribute to the development of teachers' learning in order to raise levels of pupils' achievements; and to contribute an original understanding to the process of staff development that leads to changes in the ways teachers teach with the ultimate aim of benefiting children's learning.

As I undertook this research, I broadened its scope to include an understanding of the gender dimension to my leadership role. I have also made an original contribution to the action research methodology by using story in different ways. Through my varied uses of story I have enabled researchers to look at issues from different perspectives, thereby transforming their understanding of the situations. I have established communities of teachers in school who are reflecting on, and intervening in their practice in order to improve the learning experiences of their pupils.

This thesis is a description and explanation of that part of my life as a deputy head which is responsible for developing teachers' learning. It tells of my actions in self-reflective cycles, my observations of the results of those actions, and my theorising, supported by the literature, about the meanings of what I have found out. I have worked with teachers of different subjects, for instance, English, mathematics, modern languages, humanities, science, physical education and design technology; with many teachers

representing a wide age range, from 25 to 55 years old, and with a consequent range of teaching experience. These teachers also represent the span of seniority within the school, from the Head and two other Deputies, five Heads of Year and some of the nine Heads of Department through to Deputy Heads of Year and Department and teachers who are just starting out.

This is a unique study of my leadership role as a woman deputy head in a comprehensive school, and contributes to epistemology through presenting an authentic description and explanation of my educational practice. In this thesis I make two claims to original knowledge. The first of these claims is that, within a hierarchically organised institution, I have worked with teachers collaboratively, enabling all of us to participate in a dialogical learning community, in which teachers took control of their learning so that they owned their development, and their work was accredited by the Academy in the form of Post Graduate Diplomas.

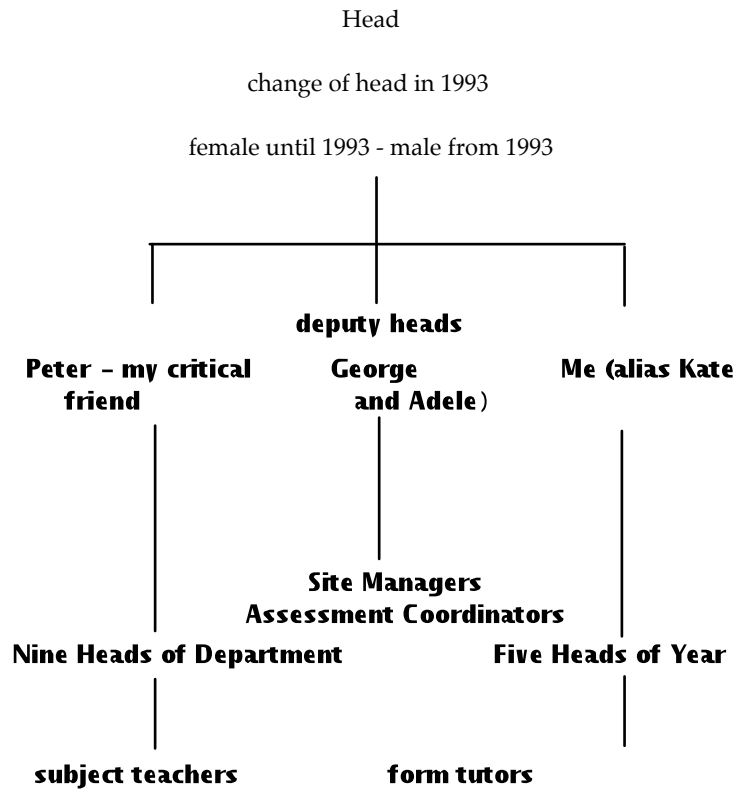
I make a further claim to originality in my contribution to the methodology of action research, through using story in self reflective cycles. In writing and discussing stories of their concerns, the teacher action researchers were able to transform their understanding of a situation and to engage others in exploring new perspectives of it. This was a highly stimulating part of our collaborative endeavour, and helped us to recognise, value and express our feelings about our actions and our learning. The teachers enjoyed their learning, and were pleased with the changes they were able to bring about in both their practice and their understanding.

The School

Roseacre is a mixed comprehensive school of approximately 1200 pupils and over 60 teaching staff, in a new town setting. It accepts pupils from the full range of ability, has a 20 place specific learning difficulties unit which is integrated into the mainstream school, and caters for approximately 3.8% pupils with special educational needs. The policy throughout the years in which I have been undertaking this study has been to maintain mixed ability tutor groups which are also the teaching groups as far as possible. Teaching in years 8 and 9 is mostly in mixed ability tutor groups, whilst some setting has been introduced in years 10 and 11 to cope with changes in GCSE syllabuses which differentiate in terms of entry levels, and therefore in curriculum content which leads up to the

examination. We offer a broad, balanced curriculum for all students which means that there is only a very limited option system in years 10 and 11.

The school has a hierarchically organised management structure as follows:



Although the line management system is as shown in the diagram, the lines cross inevitably from time to time as each of the deputy heads has some responsibility for subject teachers, form tutors, and pupils. For instance, George, having responsibility for assessment and Records of Achievement will discuss these, in formal meetings of staff representatives; and also with Heads of Year, in terms of managing the process, and Heads of Department, in terms of criteria for assessment. Similarly, I, having responsibility for staff development, communicate with all staff for different purposes, planning, monitoring, and evaluating our programmes. This will of course include talking to Peter, who has responsibility for the curriculum, to George, who has responsibility for assessing it, and to the Head who has overall responsibility for all of it.

The School Development Plan

We work from the School Development Plan, which is drawn up each year through the established consultative processes within the school, and then presented to the Governors for approval. Staff development has been integrated into the School Development Plan, and has been the subject of planning, monitoring and evaluation throughout the years of my enquiry. As part of reviewing the School Development Plan, our inservice work has been discussed and approved by the Governors, at committee meetings and full Governors' Meetings.

Since 1991, the school and Kingston University have increasingly entered into a partnership to develop and support in-service work in school, in the form of a Post Graduate Action Research Diploma, which I introduced as the school based tutor. This has been written into the School Development Plan as we have developed it and the work the teachers undertake on the Action Research Diploma falls within the remit of the School Development Plan.

Other programmes of staff development are also active, both within departments, and across departmental borders in the form of personal, social and health education teaching strategies. Our five training days are divided between departments, year teams, assessment and moderation, with responsibility being shared between heads of year and heads of department for drawing up group programmes, following consultation with head and deputies and within the leadership teams. We have just started a 'management development' group which meets after school once a fortnight, and we have a regular, planned programme of induction for new staff.

The people and the stories

During the last four years, I have worked closely with at least half the staff at Roseacre School on teacher development issues, and I have recorded this in my thesis. Where I have referred by name to these teachers, the name given is a pseudonym. As I shall mention many different people and groups in the thesis, I shall outline them here, so that the reader can refer back for clarification.

I first worked with what I called department 'B' from 1990 -1991, before I started this enquiry. I have not identified individual teachers, and have referred to this group only in chapter 8, and then briefly.

Department 'A' was a major group in my early work, 1991-1993. I worked with the teachers in department A to help them to develop their classroom practice, with the ultimate aim that this would improve pupils' examination success. The story 'The Canterbury Tales' (Chapter 4) came from my first year's work with them, 1991-92. Although there were six teachers in the department, I identified only four, and called them, Harriet, the head of department, Martin, the second in department, Alistair, and Eloise.

The managers of the school met regularly as the 'Curriculum Group' and I wrote the story 'Just Tell Me What To Do!' for them. The group consisted of the head teacher and deputies, nine heads of department, five heads of year and the assessment co-ordinator. There were 19 members of the group altogether, and my work with them, in this context, was in the Spring Term 1993. The story 'Just Tell Me What To Do!' addressed inservice training issues; in particular whether we should present our INSET opportunities in an active form, and how we might cope with the reluctant teacher-learner. The story arose as a development of the previous one, 'The Canterbury Tales'. I described the action and outcomes in chapter 6.

I have also included in chapter 6 the story of 'The Square Table', which was an account of my developing work with the heads of year. The heads of year were Caroline, Lindsey, Sebastian, Barry and Nigel. The account was of our preparation for an INSET day in which we were encouraging all colleagues to take part in a team building exercise. We thought tutors would then be able to use this activity, with modifications, with their own tutor groups. I have included 'The Square Table' because I think it shows the development of my leadership practice in enabling the heads of year to move towards a more collaborative culture.

In chapter 7 I talked about my work with individuals, who came together to work as action researchers. I have written about them in a fictional story, 'From Under A Wide Brim', and referred to them as

'Hats'. The story addressed some of the power relationships in a hierarchical management system, in which I was trying to relinquish my hold on 'the reins' to develop a more empowering learning situation. The discussion on this story took place on December 2nd, 1992. The individual 'Hats' were: Sarah, Rose, Henry, Nicole, Fiona, Jemma and William.

Since that time, those individual action researchers (apart from Henry who left the school) have undertaken and passed an Action Research Post Graduate Diploma (March 1994). There have been additions to the group of 'Hats', and in my text I refer to these as 'Hats 2', when six more teachers joined, and 'Hats 3' when three more joined. This brings the total of action researchers to sixteen. I have not referred to all these teachers by name, but one of the later additions to the group who was mentioned in the epilogue at the end of chapter 8, was called Becky.

I shall now sum up the chronology of events, the characters, the stories and the chapter references, as follows:-

Department B: 1990-91: 7 individuals, but not named: no story.

Department A: 1991-93: 6 individuals, 4 of whom were called, Harriet, Martin,

Alistair and Eloise: story - 'The Canterbury Tales', Chapter 4.

Curriculum Group: 1993, March: 19 senior members of staff, not individually named: story - 'Just Tell Me What To Do!' Chapter 6.

Heads of Year 1991-1995: 5 members of the team, called, Caroline, Lindsey, Sebastian, Barry and Nigel: story - 'The Square Table', written in October, 1992: recorded in Chapter 6.

Action Researchers 1992-95: the first seven were known as Sarah, Rose, Henry, Nicole, Fiona, Jemma and William: my story, 'From Under a Wide Brim' in Chapter 7 referred to these as a 'team of Hats'

The action researchers' story 'My Eyes Have Become Different', of which only chapter one, 'The Seed Is Planted' is recorded in this thesis - in Chapter 7.

Six more teachers joined, 1993-95: then three more in 1995-96:
the only named teacher from the 1993-95 cohort was Becky, who was
referred to in Chapter 8.

How I have constructed the thesis

My thesis consists of three different kinds of texts and I have alerted the reader to these by changing the presentation accordingly. The first of these texts is the narrative of the thesis; the second is my autobiography; and the third is the stories I have constructed.

The main text is written in this font, New York, in 'plain' style, and with double spacing;

<i>my autobiography is indented, written in New York font, in italics, with single line spacing, and enclosed in a box</i>
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and the stories are written in a different font (Chicago), in plain style, with single line spacing, and also indented.

My autobiography is included without comment; the intention is that the reader will make the connections between my history and my present, recounted experience. In some cases, it has been hard to separate story from autobiography; 'Reflections' in chapter 7 is a particularly good example of this, as it records reality, but the four selves do not exist at the same time.

Some of the stories contain my educational theorising, and I have used them in varied ways. For instance, I have sometimes retold what I know from my perspective in the form of a story which is accessible to everyone, and it may be interpreted individually by the readers, according to the experiences and knowledge that they bring to bear on their reading. I also used story to present what I thought I knew, and asked for other people's perceptions on it; and I used story to clothe my concerns, worries and what I didn't know. I have used story in different ways, but usually as opportunities to explore my thoughts, feelings and experiences and have offered them to colleagues to read and contribute their thoughts to help make sense of situations, worries and problems. I have also encouraged teachers at school to make sense of their thoughts and worries through writing stories and

discussing them, and some of the teachers have used their own stories in the classroom to help students to understand a concept more clearly (Morgan, 1994, Salmon 1994).

My values

When I started my action research enquiry in September 1991, I recognised the following values:

- I valued equality of opportunity, in which teachers should be able to talk, share thoughts, feelings and experiences, in order to help them to be effective in their teaching
- I valued offering the opportunity for teachers, and children, to develop the self so that they could become autonomous learners
- I wanted to be part of a thinking and creative school culture
- I believed that pupils should be part of a culture which inspires them to love learning, so my responsibility was to help teachers develop this culture

I wanted to be living these values in my practice, but I was concerned that I was not always doing this, and I explore this contradiction further in chapter 3. I now recognise additional values which have emerged through my practice over the last four years.

- I value collaborative support within schools, which can and should make rigorous demands on people, both as 'recipients' and 'originators'
- I have respect for and belief in those people who want to learn and to change and I am excited at seeing professional and personal change taking place, which ultimately benefits children in classrooms
- I value the use of dialogue as a means of exploring our understanding of teaching and learning

The content of the chapters

I shall now outline for my reader the main points of each chapter, and I have included in the thesis at the start of each chapter a signpost to show the reader a way through the forthcoming text.

In chapter 1, I have reviewed the literature on leadership and management, secondary deputy heads, headteachers and feminist perspectives on leadership. In particular, I was interested in collegial management, as this was close to the way I wanted to work with teachers in school, and throughout the thesis, I have explored some of the tensions in establishing collaborative ways of working whilst the underlying management structure is of hierarchical relationships. I explored the feminist theories on difference, the essentialist position that asserts that men and women are innately different; and the relativist view that differences in men and women are related to how they have been brought up and to their social experiences. I preferred to think of a leadership style that could be androgynous, valuing collegiality and collaboration, empowering people, and 'revaluing femaleness' (Griffiths 1989:290) - dependence, emotions and nurturance. So I rejected the possible view that men and women manage and lead differently according to their gender, and instead thought that as a woman deputy head, I was in a position to support and empower my colleagues, and to enable my voice to be heard in significant leadership discussions.

In chapter 2 I traced the development of action research, investigating the androcentrism of the early writing about it. I showed the influence of Lomax, Whitehead, Winter and Carter on my work, and I discussed the significance of values to the action researcher. I argued the case for teachers to be researchers of their own practice, and for their voices to be heard in the construction of teachers' knowledge.

I also introduced my original contribution to the methodology of action research in the use of story in action research cycles, describing how dialectic critique supported the analysis of the stories so that researchers could look at the situation with different eyes. I explored the centrality of self to the action research cycle and the involvement of others in the pursuit of change and I finished the chapter by arguing that the teacher's feelings, beliefs, attitudes and values contributed to the holistic nature of action research.

Chapter 3 described my first action research cycle on managing my time, and interspersed throughout the chapter are short stories drawn from my early reminiscences at Roseacre.

I began my enquiry by seeking to improve two main aspects of my practice: to carve out for myself the space to reflect upon my actions through standing aside from them, and to improve the quality of support I was able to give to teachers. I was concerned that I did not take time to reflect on my actions, that the children, in general, did not achieve their potential, that the teachers were distressed because the children did not take learning seriously, and that there was a lack of structure in our inservice training programme which needed addressing.

The outcomes of the action research cycle were that, at a technical level, I was able to make some time for keeping my research diary by using my travel time to and from school every day, and on a more fundamentally significant level, I began to rethink my leadership of the groups of colleagues with whom I worked. I realised that I was a 'living contradiction' (Whitehead, 1993:80), in that I thought I was enabling groups of colleagues to improve their practice, but in reality, I was in control of all their 'improvements'. Was my idea of what they needed to do, of central importance to them? How could I work with them to enable them to take control of their own learning? The chapter closed with an example of my first strides in giving more responsibility to teachers in the induction group (1991-92).

Whilst all this was going on, I was also working with Department A. Chapter 4 outlined the inservice work we did together, and included the story I wrote called 'The Canterbury Tales' which described my understanding of what I had experienced. But I wanted to hear other people's views on the story as well, so I gave it to others to read and comment upon.

I learnt a lot about staff development as a result of this action research cycle. I understood the importance of 'ownership' of learning, and of the need to differentiate teachers' learning in in-service sessions so that they could start from 'where they are now'. I understood about Schön's 'reframing of the problem', and I began to recognise the significance of relationships within learning situations. And through using story in my action research methodology, I learnt how I could transform my understanding of the situation.

But as a result of my research in chapter 4, I was confronted with some ethical dilemmas which I found worryingly problematic. I eventually learnt to cope with the problem through the discipline of the action research cycle and described the cycle in chapter 5, in which I discussed the issues at length with my critical friend, Peter, and then planned what to do as a result. My plan was to include many of the issues I wanted to raise with managers in the school in another story, but this time to have in mind the audience as I wrote.

Chapter 6 recorded two stories. The first was 'Just Tell Me What To Do!', in which I constructed people, events and actions for the curriculum group to explore. I was careful to ask the relevant people's permission to include anecdotes if they were taken from a real experience, so that I had their 'informed consent'. I had included in the story the dilemmas I felt about how teachers could learn best from in-service work, and the chapter described and analysed the responses of the curriculum group. We discussed the usefulness of using story to open issues for discussion, and I began to see that writing stories could be a way of writing a theory of something; I was telling what I believed about a situation.

Since I had been alerted to my living contradiction, which I identified in chapter 3, I had worked at developing my leadership style, and in chapter 6, I told the story of how I was changing my leadership behaviour with heads of year towards a more collaborative style. In this chapter I also showed how I developed my story writing methodology, through constructing a very different story, 'The Square Table', by using tape recorded data of a meeting of heads of year and myself.

Chapter 7 was about working with the individuals who made up the action research group, and pointed to the tensions for me in working as a senior manager in a hierarchical structure, whilst endeavouring to develop opportunities for greater sharing, support and openness between colleagues. The story 'From Under a Wide Brim' was intended as a fictionalised expression of these tensions. The chapter continued with a description of the development of the action research group (the Hats), and I wrote and included the first chapter of an autobiographical account of our experiences as a group. The story is called 'My Eyes Have Become Different' because the action researchers claimed to see the world differently once they had started their research, and particularly after they had written their stories.

The main part of chapter 7 concerned Pam Lomax's principles of action research, which I investigated to see how closely I had followed them in our partnership, and I looked for criteria for judgement in my work as an action researcher. After consultation with the action researchers at Roseacre, I drew up my own set of principles from which we now work. They are a development of Lomax's in that they draw more particularly on the affective dimension of human relationships within the learning context. The chapter closed with a further exploration of hierarchical relationships within the fictional form of a story in which I used four representations of myself.

Chapter 8 was an exploration of my living educational theories and my contribution to an epistemology of practice. It offered evidence of changes in the way teachers thought about themselves and about their theories of learning, and it offered evidence that children have noticed the changes in the ways their teachers teach. The children's comments are complementary to the teachers, pointing to greater enjoyment and involvement with the lessons. The percentage improvement in students achieving 5 or more GCSE passes at A to C grades was 15.6 between 1991, when my enquiry began, and 1995, when the enquiry finished.

I made my two claims to original knowledge, which I have placed at the beginning of this introduction to my work. The claims were about a new form of school based staff development in which teachers differentiate their learning, starting from 'where they are now' through using action research methodology; about using story in action research cycles to transform the researcher's understanding and to share with others, obtaining their perspectives on the researched situation. The claims are set within the context of my leadership as a female deputy head intent on empowering my colleagues; and they are a contribution to epistemology as I present my living theories which describe and explain a part of my life as a deputy head.

As much of my thesis has been about the colleagues with whom I worked, the final chapter finishes with a story which highlighted the excitement of teachers' learning, the sharing of positive feelings

about teaching and learning, and the fact that we felt good about ourselves through the collaborative activities which we had been a part of together.