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LOOKING FOR A FAIRER ASSESSMENT OF CHILDREN'S LEARNING DEVELOPMENT AND ATTAINMENT IN THE INFANT YEARS: AN EDUCATIONAL ACTION RESEARCH CASE STUDY

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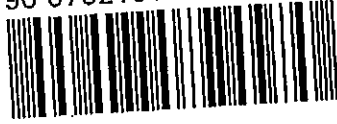
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M. FOLLOWS

PhD

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LOOKING FOR A FAIRER ASSESSMENT OF CHILDREN'S LEARNING DEVELOPMENT AND ATTAINMENT IN THE INFANT YEARS: AN EDUCATIONAL ACTION RESEARCH CASE STUDY

by

MARGARET FOLLOWS

A thesis submitted to the University of Plymouth
in partial fulfilment for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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Margaret Follows

**Looking For A Fairer Assessment Of Children's Learning,
Development And Attainment In The Infant Years: An Educational
Action Research Case Study**

Abstract

This thesis tells the story of an infant head teacher researcher's journey into the heart of a living educational assessment landscape. She embarks on this journey to search for a fairer assessment of young children's learning, development and attainment. It is a journey that forces her to question everything about the professional world in which she works and lives.

The story is intended to use and evoke the human senses within the context of a real infant school (for children aged 3-7 years) - seeing, touching, hearing, and listening. It provides the vehicle to experience and gain an insight into an evolutionary and exploratory journey of people working and learning together as they reflect on the creative, emotional, social, moral and sensual feelings of practice. In particular, it offers insights into the professional identity of the writer as she critically examines the impact of educational assessment on a school community and the people working in it.

The research methodology is adapted from critical action research in which the researcher's educational values are the yardstick against which the tacit knowledge of action (practice) is evaluated. Professional stories of past practice are used to represent implicit theories that are collaboratively reflected upon as they are deconstructed and explored.

The creative research process is uniquely represented by the visual metaphor of a multi-layered jigsaw puzzle that enables the researcher to uncover successive, significant layers of professional knowledge in the infant school that relate to the concept of a fairer assessment of children's learning, development and attainment.

The educational assessment landscape or 'sensescape' is traversed in order to make sense of the conceptual model of a fairer assessment of children's learning, development and attainment as a living educational theory.

The research offers an original contribution to educational knowledge in that it clarifies meanings of the researcher's ontological value of a fairer assessment of children's learning, development and attainment and transforms that value into a living epistemological standard of critical judgement.

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Members of The Kingston Hill Action Research Network

Members of the PhD Action Research Group Kingston University

Co-researchers and Critical Friends

To deal with the ethical issues of anonymity and confidentiality and to protect their identity the names of the schools, Local Education Authority and research participants have been changed in this thesis.

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Author's Declaration

At no time during the registration for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy has the author been registered for any other University award without prior agreement of the Graduate Committee.

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Publications:

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Follows, M. (2001) Learning From The Tale of an Ofsted Inspection, in *Management in Education*, BEMAS 15(3): 32-34.

Follows, M. (2001) Reflections on Ofsted's Seven-Year Reign, in *Management in Education*, BEMAS 15(4): 26-28.

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Introduction

Journey Beginning

Introduction - Journey Beginning

Purpose of research

The debate about raising standards of primary children's achievements and attainment by politicians, educationalists and educational researchers provides the general background for the research. In my research I aim to explore the meaning(s) of a fairer assessment of children's learning, development and attainment in the infant school, in relation to the Foundation Stage and National Curriculum Key Stage1. The purpose of my research is to contribute to the debates about rationality and justice of educational assessment practices (Carr & Kemmis, 1986). The research will be useful to primary school practitioners as they critique their own practice and education policy.

During my time as an infant head teacher (1989-1998) I observed that certain groups of young children appeared to be disadvantaged by the National Curriculum assessment practices that were imposed on schools at the time, particularly in the compilation of standardised test results. I witnessed the disadvantaging and potentially damaging effect of the tests on children in my school. The administration of the tests required an abnormal classroom organisation that resulted in anxiety and behavioural changes. The tests gave a narrow representation of the children's skills, knowledge and understanding and labelled them in a way that excluded them from opportunities and failed to measure their true potential (Goodwin, 1997). Such children were considered by many local and national policy-makers to be underachieving because their performance in national tests was lower than the national norm (DfEE, 1997; Ofsted, 2005, 2003, 2000 & 1995). I decided to use my own school (Oak Tree Infant School) as a case study to explore the issues associated with this apparent disadvantaging and potentially damaging effect of tests on young children.

Theoretical framework

The last decade of the 20th century has witnessed dramatic changes across the whole range of education including the beginning of formal schooling. The issue that has created the greatest tension for primary schools has been assessment (Conner, 2001:45). In emphasising educational assessment rather than a simplistic testing and examination culture I have taken a holistic view of the issue, reflecting the way in which assessment is viewed in the infant school (Clarke, 2005, 2003, 2001, 1998; Hutchin, 1996). To examine the complex debate on educational assessment I intend to study the types of formative assessment that enhance the teaching and learning process. That is, the day-to-day process by which children's work is assessed in the classroom as an integral part of the whole curriculum. I shall also consider summative assessment that involves the monitoring and measurement of performance for accountability purposes that is required by the Department for Education and Skills (DfES), Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) and Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted). Summative assessment includes national assessments (Baseline and Key Stage 1 tests) that are published as statistical performance tables. Finally I scrutinise the role of Ofsted relating it to a national evaluation of schools.

In creating my own meaning of a fairer assessment I examine the concept of tacit or intuitive knowledge (Atkinson & Claxton, 2000; Eraut, 2000; Winter, Buck & Sobiechowska, 1999; Wolf, 1998; Tripp, 1993; Schon, 1991, 1987 & 1983; Boud 1985). I intend to use my case study to explore the existence and significance of tacit knowledge as a basis for effective assessment practices that will not disadvantage young children and my research is an original contribution in this area.

Research method

I am using a research method adapted from critical action research in which the researcher's educational values are the yardstick against which action (practice) is evaluated (Winter, 1989; McNiff, Lomax & Whitehead, 2003 & 1996). Following the ideas of Whitehead I intend to show how to create *living educational theory* as I grapple with the issues of a fairer assessment that are raised by my own past experiences as an infant head teacher/teacher. I use self-study methods to explore my infant practice and approach to headship (Hamilton, Pinnegar, Russell, Loughran & LaBoskey, 1998). I adapt a narrative approach (Clandinin & Connelly, 1999 & 1995) to construct a language that I can use to open up for reflection and examination of the education assessment landscape I journey through. The critical dimension of the research is facilitated by collaboration with colleagues who include teachers from the case study school and a group of practitioner researchers (head teachers, teachers and teacher educators) as critical friends.

Research data

I have collected a variety of data about formative and summative assessment and the role of Ofsted, as follows:

1. Data about formative assessment:

- a. Looking at how teachers assess children's learning by examining their work from reception to year 2 (entry into school to end of key stage 1) and related continuous teacher assessment records that were taken from children's portfolios at the case study infant school. I had data for 21 children who attended the school 1994-1997 and were in the less and more able groups for reading and number and I selected the work of two children from the sample (School self-evaluation study 1995-1997).

b. Examining the infant curriculum and assessment procedures by presenting examples of my own classroom practice to a group of practitioner researchers who act as critical friends. I also analyse completed questionnaires that I received from 50 local infant and primary head teachers when I was examining the curriculum provision and the impact of season of birth on children's attainment in 1997 as the co-ordinator of an LEA early years project.

2. Data about summative assessment:

Evaluating formal statistics from Baseline Assessment and end of Key Stage 1 assessment (SATs) and pupil background data for four cohorts of children at the case study infant school to analyse the notion of value-added, which provides a way of evaluating school performance by taking account of intake factors that impact on children's attainment and progress (School self-evaluation study 1995-1997).

3. Data about Ofsted:

Analysing data from the three stages of an Ofsted inspection at the case study infant school (1996-1997) to explain how Ofsted inspectors assess the educational standards achieved by children and make judgements about their attainment and progress. I use a variety of techniques for its analysis, including writing a fictionalised professional story of my experiences, as a head teacher, throughout the Ofsted process (Winter et al, 1999; Winter, 1991, 1989 & 1988; Carter, 1992; Evans 1998 & 1996). The process of presenting, sharing and analysing the data enables me to test out my judgements in a disciplined and rigorous way as I involve a diverse group of professionals in the interpretation, validation and triangulation of the data. Also the critical friends collectively interrogate the related research literature and Ofsted documentation and I attempt to integrate it into the ongoing cyclical evaluation of the data.

Throughout the research I work within the agreed ethical framework with all participants (See Ethical Protocol: Explanatory Notes, Appendix 1). Also I record my experiences as a head teacher/teacher in professional diaries that show a factual account of events and reflective diaries that are a personal account of events and experiences. I make audio-tapes and keep detailed written records of meetings with a group of practitioner researchers and critical friends.

Summary of chapters of thesis

The thesis is divided into seven chapters:

1. The debate on educational assessment: reviewing the literature
2. Accessing tacit knowledge of infant school practice: a methodology
3. Learning from children's work: exploring the evidence
4. Learning from the infant curriculum: exploring the evidence
5. Learning from assessment and pupil data: exploring the evidence
6. Learning from Ofsted: exploring the evidence
7. Creating a living educational theory about assessment in the infant years

Chapter 1: The debate on educational assessment: reviewing the literature

In this chapter I review the literature about educational assessment and the debate about raising standards. I examine the local and national perspectives by exploring the historical, cultural and political contexts within which they are worked out. I engage with alternative viewpoints (Black et al, 2003; DfEE, 2000 & 1995; Davis, 1999; Black, 1998, Murphy & Broadfoot, 1995; Gipps, 1994; Gipps & Murphy, 1994; Conner, 1991).

I analyse a number of assessment schemes and I explore whether they measure up to what they are supposed to accomplish. I question whether it makes sense to claim that assessment schemes can do this.

The six complaints about current educational assessment policy:

1. Raising standards is being equated with improving test performance
2. Current policies encourage teaching to the test and this distorts the curriculum
3. Using standardised language in the National Curriculum and in standards for newly qualified teachers for accountability distorts learning
4. Using assessment to hold schools and teachers to account is unjust
5. Teachers are being told how to teach and yet are still being held to account for their pupils' learning, and
6. Ofsted inspectors cannot accurately detect teaching quality

listed by Davis (1999) are pertinent to debates about the rationality and justice of assessment practices and policy.

I examine research evidence about the purpose of educational assessment to improve standards not just to measure them. Mortimer (1998:299) writes about school effectiveness and school improvement and concludes that raw test results give a very superficial picture and emphasise children's attainment without considering factors that might affect children's learning, development and attainment. This ties in with infant head teachers' dilemmas and difficulties in looking at Baseline Assessment and National Curriculum Key Stage 1 Standard Assessment Tasks (SATs) statistics in isolation and the way they are used to make comparative judgements about schools, teachers, the children and the families they served (Robson & Smedley, 1996). In their research the Assessment Reform Group (2002, 1999 & 1998) write about a testing and assessment culture and they show that assessment is one of the most powerful tools for effective learning. This is recognised by many teachers who prefer to work with young children in an assessment rather than a testing culture in order to raise standards

of achievement. Teachers believe that classroom assessment provides essential information about children's learning so that activities can be modified to meet each child's needs. As I was required to implement Key Stage 1 assessment I have reflected on the impact of it on children and their teachers (Follows, 1993) and consulted on the work of researchers (Clarke, 2005, 2003, 2001 & 1998; Sainsbury, 1998 & 1996; Hutchison & Schagen, 1994).

I trace the origins of a holistic view of assessment and teaching and learning back to the Latin origins of educational assessment that is based on the Latin verb *assidere*, which means to sit beside and *educare*, which means to bring out, (Satterly, 1989:1). This matches very closely to the common integrated approach in the infant school context. It is the key issue for class teachers. They try to find out and understand what young children really know and it is necessary to be close to them, perhaps moving sensitively alongside them and engage in conversation as they pursue their learning. The children I taught were not always able to tell me what they knew, and accessing their learning was a combination of observation, communication, involvement and interpretation and demanded a broad view of child development, including social, emotional, creative, physical and attitude dimensions of children's learning and therefore a holistic view of assessment, (Moriarty & Siraq-Blatchford, 1998; Edgington, 1998; Hurst, 1997; Drummond, 2003 & 1993).

Chapter 2: Accessing tacit knowledge of infant school practice: a methodology

This chapter explains a research methodology that I develop as a practitioner - researcher who works in infant/primary school settings. The methodology is based on an educational action research case study and it includes empirical research, reflective research and creative research (Bassey, 1995:5). The inquiry integrates and adapts different techniques as I have to draw on the dimensions of each

method that seem to complement each other and combine to enrich my overall methodology.

I choose to explore the idea of tacit knowledge of practice, as it seems to parallel the intuitive and tacit approach to teaching that is followed by early years teachers such as myself (Atkinson & Claxton, 2003; Elliott, 1983: 227 & Gipps et al, 2000). I realise that my research needs to draw on a variety of understandings and that it is:

Situated, holistic, eclectic and principled (Golby & Parrott, 1999:22).

The theoretical base for my enquiry seems to be intuitively within the interpretivist and phenomenologist paradigms and make it explicit to others. The methods on which I have drawn come from action research, case study, self-study and reflective practice research paradigms.

I empathise with the important notion of professional life-long learning and the belief that professional development is closely bound up with personal development, which is accelerated by critical reflection, all key features of action research and case study (McNiff, Whitehead & Laidlaw , 1992:xi). There have been recent changes in the idea of action research itself, as well as my own understanding of it. Lomax and Whitehead have particularly influenced my own ideas of action research and I have chosen to follow an education action research approach developed by them that advocates:

Creating community of action research and self-study as aspects of evidence-based professionalism (Lomax, 1999:1).

This approach helps me to create theory about my own practice. I use professional story as a means of representing my implicit theories and, subsequently, I deconstruct them in a group so that my theories become more explicit (Winter et al, 1999; Clandinin & Connelly, 1999 & 1995; Carter, 1993). I call this *living educational* theory as it embodies my commitment to live my educational values more fully in my practice. I explain my educational practice by an evaluation of

past practice with the intention to create improvement (Whitehead, 1993; Lomax, Whitehead & Evans, 1996). By making my research public I feel that I am offering new knowledge and giving other people the opportunity to learn from me so impacting on wider practice.

I move away from a technical approach that emphasises the class teacher/head teacher as the researcher to implement initiatives for educational change to a creative approach whereby practitioners explore their professional practice through sharing imaginative forms of writing to encourage a sense of community for critical collaborative reflective enquiry. Critical collaborative reflection is reported to be particularly relevant to teacher action research by Kemmis (1987); Clandinin & Connelly (1999 & 1995); Noffke & Stevenson (1995); Tomlinson, Gunter & Smith (1999) and others. Winter (1989) lists reflexive and dialogue critique, collaborative resource, risk and plural structures amongst his six action research principles. These are central to the reflective stance that I adopt in my research.

In relation to accessing understandings of the educational assessment process, the two teacher co-researchers and myself have had to explore new ways of defining the process of observation and reflection to increase our knowledge and understanding of past practice. The research process involves risk as it is a joint exploratory process and it is problem solving and open-ended, that seeks differences, contradictions, possibilities and questions and that includes varying viewpoints. This leads to the research group's own identification of a number of new understandings about a fairer assessment of children's learning, development and attainment in relation to the data we collected in the past.

I support the idea that a dialogue of equals can foster both processes of professional and personal development. By collectively pursuing my research with a group of experienced and creative practitioners I am involved in active, open-

ended and vigorous reflection upon our work and its consequences and I am able to draw upon our individual and mutual experiential resources. I find it an attractive and very challenging process because it has to do not only with the production of educational knowledge for its own sake (though it has a contribution to make in that respect), nor with identifying the technical improvements to our job (though it can help us understand the preconditions of good practice); it also has to do with emancipation (McNiff et al, 1992:ix).

To pursue the idea of critical collaborative reflection I adapt the method of memory work developed by Lomax & Evans from the original works of Haug (1987) and Crawford (1992). Lomax and Evans write that:

Memory work is particularly appropriate for self-study as it is only possible if the 'object' and 'subject' of the research are the same, where the object of the research becomes the researcher. Memory work is a method for a collective investigation of experience, where each member of the group can draw upon their own experience in order to help another understand hers better (Lomax & Evans, 1996:139).

I use the research techniques of memory work and fictionalised story together to explore the data because they provide strong ethical safeguards for dealing with sensitive data so that respect for persons and respect for the integrity of their acts is emphasised. Because I have focused on real events, I have adopted the practice of using fictionalised story as an appropriate way of dealing with ethical issues of anonymity and confidentiality. Also it provides opportunities to validate aspects of my work through triangulation by sharing it with different audiences and enables a collective group investigation of my experiences and my actions during the investigation (an inter-subjective and intra subjective dialectic) (Lomax, 1999:5 & Schratz, 1994).

This shared discourse fits in with ideas of Schon (1991) who writes:

In all forms of intervention research, and especially in collaborative self-study, reflection-in-action is centrally important to the process of bringing to the surface and testing alternative accounts of reality (Schratz, 1991:353).

Also Schratz (1994) justifies the use of memory work as collective self-reflection within action research and says that:

Reflection processes rely a lot on how practitioners remember certain actions and how they evaluate them with a view towards changing future patterns of behaviour. Underlying this 'theory-in-action' is that anything a person remembers constitutes a relevant trace in his or her construction of personal and/or professional self. Remembering actions, episodes from the past make certain aspects of those processes accessible. Using memory work as a collective research method helps in uncovering the hidden aspects in the way a person evaluates his or her own actions (Schratz, 1994:2).

I explore the way that I uncover the hidden aspects and meanings of my research in a paper (Follows, 1999) that introduces my idea of representing my research through a visual metaphor of a *multi-layered jigsaw puzzle*, in analysing *layers of professional knowledge* in an infant school context. I use memory-work to reveal the processes by which I construct my sense of self by uncovering successive layers of significance in the concept of a fairer assessment in personal accounts through creating this particular and very personal representation for my research (Lomax, 2000&1999 & Eisner, 1997 &1993).

As my research is an education action research case study I am not expecting to generalise in a scientific way, instead I am creating educational knowledge that is specific to a given context and practice, and which may be transferable if taken up by practitioners and policy makers. By examining Bassey's views on the problematic of generalisation in educational research and his concept of *fuzzy logic* I realise the in-built uncertainty or the *fuzzy generalisation* of the findings of my work but I feel that I can transform my research findings into *fuzzy predictions* that may help teachers and policy makers to improve the assessment techniques that enhance the learning opportunities for young children and therefore improve educational standards (Bassey, 2001: 3). Golby & Parrott (1999:27) express practitioner knowledge in a slightly different way by stating the necessary eclecticism of practitioner research and importance of recognising the holistic aim

of understanding the individual case and recognising the values inherent in practice. This eclecticism is important to me, as the research techniques that I use in each chapter are different. Also the creation of transferable practitioner educational knowledge closely follows the fundamental principle of action research (Guba, 1999:xi).

Chapter 3: Learning from children's work: exploring the evidence

In this chapter I describe and explain how teachers assess children's work and make judgements about their learning, development and attainment. This chapter shows how teacher assessment happens in practice. To do this I draw on data from three infant classes, which are real life settings. I examine young children's learning, development and attainment, by using actual work of children, which was produced during the three-year period 1994-1997. Like Hutchin (1996:74) I use children's drawings and emergent writing, as concrete examples, to show children developing over time, as I want to show a picture of each child's learning, development and attainment.

I frame the chapter by adopting the action reflection process in which cycles explicate meanings about a fair assessment of young children's learning, development and attainment through looking at their work. This chapter attempts to show the development of my own learning and understanding in the process of deconstructing my own infant practice and making it explicit to others. My research is in contrast to other researchers (Gipps, McCullum & Brown, 1996) who have sought to access the minds of primary school teachers to find out their preferred teaching approaches and styles and their strategies for the assessment of children's learning.

I represent the data of the children's work by making a storybook. I adapt the book making approach as a way of representing and sharing the data for further

collective analysis. I choose this form of representation because making storybooks is an integral part of infant school practice (HMSO, 1975:par5.22; Hutchin, 1996:82-88). The children at Oak Tree Infant School (fictional name) made storybooks about topics like cooking bread or made up imaginary stories themselves as main characters. The ten class teachers made the books with the children using their pictures and their version of events for the text.

I use the idea of two children making a storybook about themselves so as to provide a visual and chronological representation of their work. The storybook that I make is an example of a fictionalised story, because Polly and Robert (fictional names) did not make the book with me. Although I construct the book from their real work, so their actual work is included in the story. I write an introduction to the book to provide some general information about Polly and Robert and I construct the text to accompany each pair of examples of their work, to clearly explain the assessment process as it takes place in the classroom, around the definition of assessment by Drummond (2003 & 1993:24):

What is there to see?

How best can we understand what we see?

How can we put our understanding to good use?

Chapter 4: Learning from the infant curriculum: exploring the evidence

This chapter shows one experienced infant teacher/ head teacher's practice by using different examples of her work when following a prescribed National Curriculum for Key Stages 1&2 (2000, 1997 & 1988) and Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage (2000, 1999 & 1997) with standardised assessment procedures. It offers an insight into a range of activities present in an infant classroom/school and shows the realities of classroom life. I examine the impact of

both the curriculum and types of assessment on children's learning. I draw on the works of James & Gipps (1998) who conclude that:

Instead of raising standards by deepening learning, National Curriculum Assessment could actually lower standards by narrowing students' learning to a limited range of skills learned in a superficial way. There is already evidence that this could be happening in some schools (Broadfoot et al, 1998) which does not bode well for the kind of learners we need for the millennium (James & Gipps, 1998:291)

Like Gipps, Mc Callum & Hargreaves (2000) I show that teaching is a diverse and complex activity with no clear rules except that teachers should teach and each child should learn. The purpose of this chapter is to unpack it and explain some of the strategies used by an experienced teacher in her work to explore the blend of theory and practice (Hayes, 2000:v).

In this chapter I explore the two broad connected issues of teaching and learning and attempt to address Woods key fundamental questions:

*What should we teach?
How should we teach it and in what context? How and what do children learn?
Or what is the nature of learning?
How is children's learning assessed?
Or how should we assess children's educational experiences?*
(Woods, 1996:xi).

I look at the key questions about infant school teaching:

*How do (good) teachers teach?
What are the teaching strategies they use?
How do they build assessment and feedback into the teaching/ learning cycle?* (Gipps, McCallum & Hargreaves, 2000)

My research is in contrast to Gipps, McCallum & Hargreaves who sought to describe a range of teaching, assessment and feedback practice used in primary classrooms in order to find out what makes a good primary school teacher and as the research was carried out in 1997 maybe their work was subsumed under or written in relation to determining the standards or competences for the advanced skills teacher status that was introduced by the DfEE. I explore the possibilities to

find out the important issues of teaching and learning that may contribute to a fairer assessment of children's learning, development and attainment.

I adapt Mohammed's (1998) use of the educational metaphor of cameos for representing qualitative data to recount and discuss significant moments of my teaching, and to engage with others in a discussion of the issues that will lead me to develop my emerging theories further. I write and rewrite a series of interconnected cameos and I frame the chapter by adopting the action reflection process in which cycles explicate meanings about a fairer assessment of young children's learning, development and attainment through looking at the infant curriculum. The chapter also attempts to show the development in my own learning and understanding in the process of deconstructing my own infant school practice and making it explicit to others.

Chapter 5: Learning from assessment and pupil data: exploring the evidence

In this chapter I describe how value-added analysis happens in practice. To do this I draw on data from a school self-evaluation project at the case study infant school (1995-1997) that I co-ordinated as head teacher. I adapt the techniques used in the National Value-added System (Fitz-Gibbon, 1997) to examine the value-added possibilities between entry into school (reception) and end of KS1 (year 2). I consider 4 cohorts of children who were admitted into school 1991-1994 and I use four main factors that are baseline assessment and KS1 SATs results, aspects of school context and pupil background, as I want to explore effects on children's achievement. I draw on the works of researchers who examine the effects of school intake on educational attainment (Nuttall, 1990 & Mortimore et al 1988) and Hillman (1996) who writes that:

The gap between schools in advantaged and disadvantaged areas is wide and increasing (Hillman, 1996:1)

The issue of poverty and schools is revisited by Maden (2001), Davies (2000) & Department for Catholic Education (1999).

I frame the chapter by adopting an action reflection process in which cycles explicate meanings about a fairer assessment of children's learning, development and attainment through looking at assessment and pupil data. I attempt to show the development in my own learning in the process of deconstructing my own past practice and making it explicit to others. My research differs from other researchers (Strand, 1997; Institute of Education, 1997; Goldstein et al, 2000) who all made external statistical analyses and evaluation of schools and young children as they considered a value-added approach to be a fairer way of comparing schools. My research innovatively considers a value-added approach as a means to a fairer assessment within and of one infant school (Follows et al, 1997).

Chapter 6: Learning from Ofsted: exploring the evidence

In this chapter I describe and explain how Ofsted inspectors assess the educational standards achieved by children at infant school and make judgements about their attainment and progress, when working within the Ofsted Framework 1995. I show how Ofsted happens in practice (a real life setting) and I illustrate how one head teacher tells her own story. I draw on data from the three stages of the Ofsted inspection process at one infant school that took place 1996-1997, rather than the three-day event (January 1997).

I frame the chapter by adopting the action reflection process in which cycles explicate meanings about a fairer assessment of young children's learning, development and attainment through looking at the Ofsted inspection process. Also this chapter attempts to show the development in my own learning and understanding in the process of deconstructing my own infant practice and making it explicit to others. My research contrasts with other researchers (Ferguson, 2000;

Macbeath, 1999; Cullingford, 1999 and Earley, 1998;) who have written about and evaluated the role of Ofsted, particularly as it relates to school improvement and raising standards.

Tomlinson (1999) presents:

The stories and struggles of head teachers today as a legitimate methodology and an alternative, richer understanding than the essentially conservative and debilitating notion of the all-powerful visionary leader. (Tomlinson, 1999:xi)

Also Macbeath (1999) recognises the importance for schools to give their own account of their achievements and experiences in order to come to know themselves. Macbeath writes that;

The 'story' is powerful because it is crucial to recognise that schools have a history, a unique cast of characters and a narrative that unfolds over time in unanticipated directions (Macbeath, 1999:2).

I represent the data by using fictionalised story and I did it in two stages. First I write a chronological and factual account that was cross-referenced with related documentation and supported by diary extracts and records of conversations with personal and professional colleagues. I write about the events involving the people directly involved with Oak Tree Infant School (the school staff, the parents and children, the governors and Park LEA personnel) and the Ofsted team, HMI's and the School Improvement Team.

Second I write a fictionalised account by adapting a children's story that the children and I had enjoyed in a variety of situations at Oak Tree Infant School. I choose the children's story *After the Storm* (Butterworth,1993) as the fictional context in which to set the Ofsted experience. The title, the story line and the central character have no significance, but there are numerous animal and bird characters with neutral characters that I can borrow. It is very important for the research group to focus on the events in the Ofsted process rather than the personalities as we need to critically examine the situation and the issues it throws up, not the individuals involved.

Chapter 7: Creating a living educational theory about educational assessment in the infant years

At this stage in the research journey through the hidden world of an infant school head teacher, it isn't so much that I nearly reach the destination but that along the way of this complex and wide ranging journey, I touch the emotional heart of my teaching. It is a statement of a passionate belief in a more optimistic educational future for young children.

This chapter is the overall conclusion to the thesis and follows chapters in which I begin to explicate and understand the inter-linking and emerging dimensions of a fairer assessment in my own evolving conceptual model as I create my own *living education theory*. In the Summary of Research (p2) I wrote about my concern for the rationality and justice of the assessment practices throughout my headship and at the beginning of the enquiry I found myself spending a lot of time wondering about fairness in educational assessment. This was not speculation, but a definite and naïve sense that there must be somewhere out there something that conforms to a better or even an ideal approach to educational assessment so that it is a fair assessment.

What do I mean by a fair assessment? I very quickly ask myself three further questions:

- *Can there ever be such a thing as a fair assessment?* As the research process develops I realise that the topic appears to be increasingly complex and maybe the notion too simplistic, but by exploring the tensions, dilemmas, contradictions and possibly the ambiguities within and between the dimensions of educational assessment I can realistically look for a fairer assessment

- *Am I exploring assessment or testing?* I explore both, as the statutory National Curriculum Assessment (NCA) procedures include both teacher assessment and standardised testing or performance assessment
- *Am I exploring attainment or learning and development?* I explore all three, as NCA requires teachers to look at children's attainment at the end of a Key Stage as well as their progress from entry into school to the end of a Key Stage. I look at how much children learn (progress or achieve) and how it is measured over a period of three years, but more importantly I look at the quality of children's learning and their accomplishments in a positive way by using a *holistic* approach to assessment.

What will I learn about a fairer assessment of children's learning, development and attainment?

My evolving conceptual model of a fairer assessment seems to be determined by five broad characteristics, that include:

1. An understanding of and a commitment to the issues of social justice, fairness, ethics and equity in education
2. A respect for the rights (entitlements) and interests of all children that recognises the uniqueness of the individual child
3. A realisation of the forms and purposes of classroom assessment for learning that are integral to and support and enhance the teaching and learning process, rather than assessment of learning, which is measured against expected standards of performance in NC tests
4. A holistic view of assessment and a broad view of child development, that celebrates achievement of the whole child, and

5. The positive use of school assessment is central to the commitment to equity and justice for all children in the wider context that is both inside/outside the school.

I base the five characteristics for a *fairer* assessment on three questions:

Where does assessment come from? (1,2)

What, how, when and where assessment happens? (3,4), and

How is assessment used? (5)

Original claims to knowledge

I am able to offer the thesis as my original contribution to educational knowledge, the process of *coming to know*, as I describe my conceptual model of a fairer assessment of children's learning, development and attainment as a living educational theory (Whitehead, 1993).

My research offers:

- a. An unconventional perspective from a practitioner-researcher using genuine infant head teacher/ teacher experiences
- b. Additional case study information about the effects of educational assessment on teaching and learning in the infant school context
- c. An original action research methodology that facilitates a critical collaborative reflective look at professional practice through using self-study and memory work
- d. A thoughtful critique of educational policy and practice that is potentially disadvantaging and harmful to young children
- e. A presentation of educational assessment both as an integral part of the infant school curriculum and as a result of the politics of education.

Chapter 1

The Debate on Educational Assessment: Reviewing the Literature

Chapter 1

The Debate on Educational Assessment: reviewing the literature

Purpose of chapter

In this chapter I critically review the forever changing, diverse and complex landscape of educational assessment and its impact on young children's learning and teachers' teaching. Educational assessment has been central to the debate about raising standards since the introduction of the National Curriculum and its testing apparatus in 1988 and the introduction of the national assessment programme 1991 at the end of Key Stage 1 for children 6-7 years (Hutchison & Schagen, 1994). The assessment of educational performance has become one of the most significant areas of interest in educational policy development worldwide. Official assessment procedures and techniques are commissioned and sanctioned to provide hard evidence on which governments, parents and the media evaluate educational policies and hold schools to account (Filer & Pollard, 2000).

I examine local and national perspectives of educational assessment by exploring the historical, cultural and political contexts within which they are worked out. I engage with alternative viewpoints (Black et al, 2003; Dann, 2002; DfEE, 1999, 1995 & 1988; Filer & Pollard, 2000; Davis 1999; Black, 1998; Murphy & Broadfoot, 1995; Gipps, 1994 & 1991; Gipps & Murphy, 1994; Drummond, 2003 & 1993; Conner 1991). I analyse a number of assessment schemes and explore whether they measure up to what they are supposed to accomplish, as this is pertinent to debates about the rationality and justice of assessment practices and policy that are central to my research.

This chapter starts with a story to show how National Curriculum Key Stage 1 assessment happens in school. It is a genuine story and shows how one class teacher attempts to translate national policy into meaningful classroom practice. I

use storytelling as my main research investigative tool as it helps to give meaning to my professional life and experiences (Atkinson, 1998). As a member of a research group I shared stories that then triggered a story from another member. Often, on hearing a story, we remembered a forgotten experience. Stories provided inspiration, and fresh ideas or confirmed old ones. We also gained an understanding of another person's experience through their story, as it involved us in events from the frame of reference of the teller. Atkinson suggests that, in telling a story, we increase our understanding and knowledge of ourselves, deepening the meaning in our lives through reflection and putting our experiences in a form that can be understood by others. Also Wilkins (2000b) suggests that stories are part of our natural dialogue and interaction. He frames the process of storytelling in research as having a number of stages, which are a means to access tacit knowledge or as being a largely intra-psychic process that can be mediated and modified by others.¹

The Stars

Assessing Georgie's Reading using KS1 SATs instruction

It was the middle of May; a time marked in infant and primary schools up and down the country by National Curriculum Key Stage 1 Standard Assessment Tasks [NCKS1 SATs]...

(See Appendix 2:p385-391 for the complete story).

The Origins of Educational Assessment

The terms *assessment*, *testing* and *exam* conjure all sorts of images in most people's minds. Often these memories are tinged with apprehension and the feeling of failure. Assessment for many of us has been an emotional experience,

¹ Cross reference Chapter 2 Accessing Tacit Knowledge of Infant School Practice: A methodology.

and therefore many infant teachers in school reject having to face children with such experiences too early in their lives (Follows, 1996; Conner, 1991). In addition to the emotional nature of assessment, Satterly (1989) suggests that there are two contrasting interpretations of assessment:

First there is a hard-nosed objectivity of an obsession with the measurement of performances (many of which are assumed to be relatively trivial) and an increasingly technical vocabulary, which defies most teachers save for the determined few with time on their hands. Secondly, and to many others, assessment presents a very different face as the means by which schools and teachers- sort out children for occupations of different status and remuneration in a hierarchical ordered society (Satterly, 1989:1).

Each of these views of assessment - as an objective measurement, as a means of social classification and as an emotive experience is surprising when you discover the roots of the word assessment. Satterly traces assessment to the Latin *assidere* meaning to sit beside. Sitting beside children suggests a close relationship and a sharing of experience. If you combine assessment with education, which can be traced back to the Latin *educare* meaning to bring out, then educational assessment should be seen:

As the sitting beside the child and bringing out the potential that exists within them, creating an opportunity for them to demonstrate what they are able to do (Conner 1991: xi).

Given such a scenario, assessment in education becomes a positive experience, a fundamental feature of teaching and successful learning. As an infant head teacher I strongly followed Conner's definition of assessment and used it as the underlying principle for the assessment of children's learning in my school. I used the definition of educational assessment as the introductory statement for both the school's teaching and learning and assessment policies.²

Teachers frequently pose three questions on in-service courses on assessment:

- *What is assessment?*
- *Why do we do it?*
- *Who is it for?*

(Conner, 1991:1).

² Cross-reference Chapter 3 Learning From Children's Work: exploring the evidence.

The variety of answers produced is an indication of the age we presently live and work in. That is, the age of accountability, where testing and assessment are central procedures for establishing and monitoring that accountability process. Furthermore, some educationalists believe that primary schools in the past, prior to the introduction of the National Curriculum, have not been particularly effective in this area. This is demonstrated by the comment from the Chief HMI Eric Bolton:

In secondary education there is a long history of debate of practice in respect of both curriculum and examinations. Neither is true of primary education. It is still difficult to identify sufficient common ground or at least a common language to begin to discuss the primary curriculum nationally, let alone carry out the kind of scrutiny and development required to establish a primary curricular framework and agree objectives. (Bolton, 1985:36).

This viewpoint can be shown by the ongoing debate about the rigidity and appropriateness of the National Curriculum, Literacy and Numeracy Strategies for all children up and down the country and the greater freedom allowed in the government strategy 'Excellence and Enjoyment' (DfES, 2003) that reaffirms the government's commitment to achieving high standards through testing and teacher assessment whilst at the same time recognising that learning can and should be fun (Primary School Teacher, 2003).

Nevertheless, Satterly and many others (Black et al, 2003; Black & William, 1998; Clarke, 1998; Hutchin, 1996; Drummond, 2003 & 1993) reiterate that assessment and testing should not be seen as an immediate response to such critical comments, but as a central feature of the teaching and learning process. By careful consideration of assessment procedures teachers are able to improve and enhance children's learning as well as satisfy the demands of accountability.

What is assessment?

There is often confusion about the terms assessment, evaluation, appraisal, testing and accountability. All these terms are part of the education assessment

landscape and are included in the definition of assessment by the Task Group on Assessment and Testing (DES, 1988), where they describe assessment as:

A general term enhancing all methods customarily used to appraise performance of individual pupils or a group. It may refer to a broad appraisal including many sources of evidence and many aspects of pupil's knowledge, understanding, skills and attitudes; or to a particular occasion or instrument. An assessment instrument may be any method or procedure, formal or informal, for producing information about pupils, e.g. a written test paper, interview schedule, a measurement task using equipment, or class quiz. (DES, 1988: Preface and Glossary).

Ainscow (1988) argues that confusion amongst teachers about the nature and purpose of assessment is primarily as a result of the varied intentions associated with any assessment activity. Ainscow suggests that assessment can be to do with:

Providing information for colleagues, recording work carried out by pupils, giving grades or marks, helping pupils review their learning, evaluating the effectiveness of teaching, helping teachers to plan the identification of pupils experiencing difficulties, information for others outside the school (e.g. parents, LEA and employers (Ainscow, 1988:151).

With a variety of potential purposes it is inevitable that the appropriateness of assessment procedure will be influenced by the original purpose of assessment and the intended audience(s) of the results, together with the relationship and effect on each other. Ainscow emphasises the necessity of considering two fundamental questions: What information is needed? Who needs to know?

TGAT(1988) state that assessment of children's work has four main purposes:

- To provide pupils with an indication of their individual achievements and progress.
- To help the teacher identify areas of strength and weakness in learning and adjust subsequent teaching in the light of this
- To enable pupils to evaluate ways in which they can improve
- To show others what standards of work have been achieved.

(TGAT, 1988:7).

Thomas (1990) suggests that assessment in primary schools in the past, prior to the National Curriculum, has taken three forms - informal assessment, formal processes or tests and summary assessment. Informal assessment is that which is continually collected in the course of daily teaching. As Bentley and Malvern comment:

Teachers make assessment all the time sometimes they are full and formal, resulting in a mark, a grade or a certificate. But they are often a matter of the moment, a check as to who is keeping up the work, and the reward is no more than a smile or a frown, a nod of the head or an encouraging word.... in our view, assessing is part and parcel of the teachers' service to pupils, not merely as notification and reward, but as a direct contribution to the children's growing awareness and appreciation of themselves.
(Bentley and Malvern, 1983)

The second kind of assessment identified by Thomas describes the more formal assessment as tests undertaken by children, which are devised and set by the teacher, or by people who may have never seen or worked with the children. He suggests that:

When they are set, the teacher and the children know that the occasion is special in that the process of teaching is abandoned for the time being. The children must rely on their own resources and expect no help.
(Thomas, 1990:26).

Some of these procedures are likely to be standardised either by the format undertaken in a personalised manner, or the result being compared with a group chosen to be representative of a wider population of children of similar age or aptitude.

The final category identified by Thomas describes those attempts to draw together perceptions of children's progress over time, i.e. over a week, a term, or a year- and then these are entered into some kind of record. Thomas also offers an additional category that arises from the development of the National Curriculum assessment. The standard assessment of the National Curriculum, he suggests:

Ought not to look like tests to the children and should, like teachers' informal assessments, be concerned with identifying what children can do...In some ways they may look like mini-schemes of work. They will be

standardised in the sense that they should be presented and marked in prescribed ways. (Thomas, 1990:27)

Further detail as to exactly what is included in assessment comes from Macintosh and Hale (1976) who suggest that teaching and assessment are inseparable and include all or some of the following- diagnosis, guidance, grading, selection, prediction and evaluation.

Since the National Curriculum began assessment in the classroom has gradually evolved from the cumbersome, relatively meaningless tick systems and evidence collections to a situation where researchers and teacher have learnt a great deal about the power of formative assessment practices in affecting and improving children's learning. (Clarke, 2005 & 2003; Gipps, McCallum & Hargreaves, 2000:6), Assessment definitions and purposes have been clarified further to consist of two main areas summative and formative. The two updated diagrams below outline the basic ingredients of both types of assessment (Clarke, 1998:4&10).

Figure 1.1. Summative assessment (snapshot testing which establishes what a child can do at that time)

Strategy	Purpose
National statutory tasks and test: externally produced, national tests taken at the end of each key stage	To enable pupils' and schools' performance to be compared, so that standards can be identified and targets set for improvement
National non-statutory tests: externally produced tests (QCA), to be voluntarily administered at the end of years 3, 4&5	To provide an opportunity for schools to keep track of children's progress and teacher expectation
Baseline tests: National Baseline Scheme, LEA or commercially produced tests applied to children on entry to school, ranging from observation of children's behaviour to specific oral or activity items. <i>Now Foundation Stage Profile completed at end year R (2003).</i>	To establish the child's abilities at the beginning of their education, so that subsequent achievement can be compared and measured against actual improvement. They can also be used formatively, to identify weaknesses and strengths and provide appropriate learning experiences for individual children
Commercially produced tests: Purchased independently by schools, these tests are controlled by publishers	To enable school to monitor progress through summative means at different points in the key stage
School tests: In-house tests written by teachers, usually 'end of module' tests, used at the end of a taught unit to establish general attainment or arrive at interim level judgements (against the statutory level descriptors)	Schools use these to make end of key stage levelling easier and to monitor progress between key stages.
Class tests: created by individual teachers and used in day-to-day lessons (mental number tests)	To improve children's mental recall and establish what they have remembered or learnt so far
End of Key Stage Teacher Assessment: Year 2 and year 6 teachers decide a level for each child's attainment in the core subjects, using the criteria of the level descriptors and using professional judgement	To provide parallel information to parents to accompany test results

Figure 1.2. Formative Assessment (day-to-day ongoing assessment based on how well children fulfil learning intentions, providing feedback and involving children in improving their learning)

Strategy	Purpose
Planning	Ensures clear learning intentions, differentiation and appropriate delivery of the national curriculum; short term plans show how assessment affects next steps by the development of activities and contain assessment notes on children who need more help or more challenge
Shared learning intentions: with children (for every task)	Ensures pupil is focused on the purpose of the task, encourages pupil involvement and comment on own learning; keeps teacher clear about learning intentions
Pupil self-evaluation: children are trained to evaluate their own achievements against the learning intention (and possibly beyond), in oral or written form.	Empowers the child to realise his own learning needs and to have control over future targets; provides the teacher with more assessment information- the child's perspective
Marking: must reflect learning intention of task to be useful and provide ongoing record; can be oral or written	Tracks progress diagnostically, informs child of successes and weaknesses and provides clear targets for improvement
Target setting: for individuals over time for ongoing aspects- e.g. reading and writing	Ensures pupil motivation and involvement in progress; raises achievement; keeps teacher informed of individual needs; provides a full record
Record of achievement: vehicle for celebrating achievements of which child is proud or teacher believes are significant (refers to products and events for physical, social, attitude and conceptual achievement; does not compare children but focuses on individual progress, often unrelated to learning intentions)	Celebrates all aspects of achievement, provides motivation and self-esteem thus enabling pupil to achieve academic success more readily; provides overall progress 'picture', although does not aim to track National Curriculum.

Why Do Assessment?

During the mid 1980's, just before Education Reform Act (ERA) 1988, many LEAs and teachers up and down the country were grappling with this question and were required to document their conclusions and I cite two examples from the London Borough of Croydon (1986):

First assessment helps teachers to decide what our next steps concerning your child's learning ought to be. Second assessment makes helpful comparisons with other children of similar age and abilities and with the individual pupils own capacity to succeed. Third assessment identifies difficulties.

and the London Borough of Hillingdon (1988)

Assessment can further improve the effectiveness of the learning situation by presenting a positive feedback to pupils and providing information necessary to ensure continuity at all stages.

Thomas (1990:29) identifies four main purposes of assessment:

- To inform the current teacher and to enable her to decide what a child should do next,
- To inform children about their own progress and
- To inform others about the progress of individual children (parents, next teachers, educational psychologist).
- To provide information for the public.

With relation to the first purpose Thomas emphasises that assessment is a highly skilled and complex activity and careful assessment helps teachers make appropriate decisions more effectively. The second recognises the important role of the learner in his/her own assessment as children do take responsibility for their own learning, understand what is required of them, can set their own realistic goals, evaluate their own performance in the light of them, be self-motivated and that all important ownership is improved (Hewett & Bennett, 1989). The third purpose of informing others, parents in particular, is highlighted in the ILEA Report, *Improving Primary Schools* (1985) which clearly states that parents require assessment information of two main kinds:

When parents ask teachers how their children are getting on they often have two different questions in mind. They want to know whether their child is working well and making progress of which he/she seems capable. They also want to know how their child is getting in compared with others of about the same age. Teachers' inclinations are to answer the first question but to be less interested in or even fearful of the consequences of answering the second. They may think that the parents want to push their child on unsuitably, or that they will be wrongly depressed if the child is, in some sense, slower than his or her contemporaries (LEA, 1985:par.2.55).

The fourth purpose of assessment identified by Thomas requires you to move on to the final question - Who is the information for?

Who Is Assessment For?

Thomas highlights the argument for the use of assessment for external accountability purposes in that assessment should provide elected members and possibly the public with information about the quality of education in the LEA. Assessment should provide information that will help in the transfer of pupils from primary to secondary school. Assessment should identify school with unsatisfactory achievements. Assessment should influence teaching and identify children who are failing and who need help (Ofsted, 2000:74).

It is possible to take this set of three questions further by relating *why* we assess to *what* and *how* we assess.³ Black (1989), Duncan and Dunn (1985) were just two of many to document the important aspects of assessment practice.

What do we assess?

- Acquisition of knowledge, concepts and skills
- Ability to apply the above in new situations
- Communication skills
- Attitudes

How do we assess?

- Through observation.
- Through oral work.
- Through written work.
- Through testing.

Duncan and Dunn go on to explain that the usual forms of assessment include some or all of the following:

- Children's activities: written, pictorial, oral, aural activities, performance activities, self-assessment and profiles.

³ Cross Reference Chapter 3 Learning From Children's Work: exploring the evidence.

- Teachers' activities: informal assessment, formal assessment, tests etc observation.

Thomas (1990) confirms that assessment should not be seen as an isolated activity. It is essential element of teaching and learning and contributes to the effectiveness of the school. Assessment is an ongoing process and an integrated part of an educational experience of each child. It is through careful selection of learning experiences and decisions about the most appropriate means of monitoring those experiences that progress is maintained. This is reiterated by Ainscow (1988) who sees assessment as a continuous process of gathering and reviewing information in order to help pupils succeed in the classroom. During the 1990s many researchers explored the relationship between assessment and learning in the social world of the classroom. They continued to promote assessment for learning and saw it as improving the learning process (Black et al, 2003; Drummond, 2003 & 1993; Dann, 2002; Filer & Pollard, 2000; Gipps, 1999; Assessment Reform Group, 2002, 1999 & 1998; Black & William, 1998; Murphy & Broadfoot, 1995).

Whilst studying for an M.Ed Kingston University 1989-1991 I carried out a twelve-month investigation of the assessment procedures at Oak Tree Infant School and reported that they were under review. The Year 2 teachers were able to use their expertise, gained during the NC KS1 teacher assessment period, to successfully support the development of continuous assessment procedures throughout the school. I showed that when teachers established a routine for considering how assessment became a regular feature of their planning it contributed significantly to children's progress and improved the quality of learning provided by the school as a whole (Follows, 1991).

My findings confirmed those recognised in the Gulbenkian Report (1982), which suggested that:

The form and method of assessment should vary with the activity and type of information sought. Assessment of pupils is not, nor can be, statements of absolute ability. They are statements of achievements within the framework of educational opportunities that have actually been provided. To some degree every assessment of a pupil is also an assessment of the teachers and the school (par.130).

The Gulbenkian Report argues that schools need to constantly review the quality of their education provision and their method of work, that is, to engage in a process of educational evaluation that is seen as:

A more general process than assessment in that it looks beyond the pupil to the style, the materials and the circumstances of teaching and learning. If teachers need to assess pupils they also need to evaluate their own practice. Although they have different purposes, assessment and evaluation are obviously linked. Teachers and pupils alike need information on each other's activities and perceptions of their work together is to advance. Assessment and evaluation should provide this as a basis for informed description and intelligent judgement... (ibid., par. 131).

I wonder if the researchers at that time could have predicted the plethora of work that was continuous throughout the 1990's, and the detrimental effect on schools, the teaching profession and children's education from Ofsted, Effective School project, government policy and media pressure. It is only as I write this chapter that the national emphasis is changing from effective school model (Rutter et al, 1979; Mortimore et al 1988a)) as judged by external means to the process of improving schools from within by self-evaluation (Ofsted 2005, 2003, 2000; Headington, 2003; Pascal et al, Effective Early Learning Programme (EEL), 1995). Also I remember early in my research grappling with the notion of attainment in isolation from whole child development and progress over time and preferring the positive notion of young children achieving particularly at the beginning of formal education (Follows, 1997). Nevertheless, I appreciate the interrelationship between teaching and learning, evaluation and assessment, as follows:

- Assessment is a central feature of the teaching and learning process.
- Assessment is part of the continual evaluation of the effectiveness of the school.

- Assessment is part of the accountability process.

By implication it means that planning for assessment requires consideration of national and local expectations as well as immediate school needs and the concerns of individual children, if an appropriate assessment structure is to be established. The importance of these issues has become more prominent with the introduction of the National Curriculum and its associated procedures for assessment and testing.

Assessment, Testing and the National Curriculum Key Stage 1

The political focus and a large professional pre-occupation since the ERA 1988 has been the introduction of the National Curriculum and specifically the Government's proposals that children should be formally assessed or tested at ages 7,11,14 and 16. The main purpose is to provide a framework for the assessment of children's achievements and the means for the assessment of teachers and the making of statements about the effectiveness of individual schools. The Task Group Report on Assessment and Testing for the National Curriculum (TGAT, 1988:3) identified four purposes for the national assessment. The purposes are:

- Formative, so that positive achievements may be recognised and discussed and the appropriate next steps may be planned.
- Diagnostic, through which learning difficulties may be scrutinised and classified so that appropriate remedial help and guidance can be given.
- Summative, for the recording of overall achievement of a pupil in a systematic way.
- Evaluative, by means of which some aspects of the work of the school or LEA or other discrete part of the service can be assessed and/or reported upon.

The report endorses many of the issues raised earlier in the chapter, and a central feature of the report is that assessment should be seen as formative, that it should provide information to the teacher which influences the organisation and structure for future learning both for the individual child and the class as a whole. This is in contrast to summative assessment, which is of less importance, since formative assessment is more likely to contribute to extending the learning process. This important point is confirmed by Lincoln, Guba and Qualter (1988) and many others (Assessment Reform Group, 2003, 1999 & 1998; Black & William, 1998) throughout 1990s as research findings became public.

Also the report emphasised the importance of building on existing good practice:

Promoting children's learning is the principal aim of the school. Assessment lies at the heart of this process. It can provide a framework in which educational objectives may be set and the pupils' progress charted and expressed. It can yield a basis for planning the next educational steps in response to children's needs. By facilitating dialogue between teachers, it can enhance professional skills and help the school as a whole to strengthen learning across the curriculum and throughout its age range (DES, 1988: par.3).

The last sentence of the quotation focuses upon moderation and reinforces the benefits of teachers participating in such a process. This is confirmed by Dean (1983) who suggests one way of improving our understanding of children's learning and thereby our assessment of that process is to engage in reflection with other teachers, who:

...Because they are different people, will see differently from you and may enlarge your seeing (Dean, 1983:31).

I examined this very process at Oak Tree when I collaborated with the LEA external moderator, three year 2 teachers and the deputy head teacher (Follows, 1991).

TGAT (1988) stated that the moderation process has two main functions:

- To communicate general standards
- To control deviation from the general standard by appropriate adjustments.

The procedure advocated by the Task Group is that of group moderation, which allows teachers to have the opportunity to discuss possible interpretations of children's learning experiences. It allows teachers to clarify their judgements by having to explain them to others and in doing so reveal the basis of their assessments. This it is argued:

...would enable professional judgements of teachers to inform the developments of the National Curriculum (ibid.: par.75).

Group moderation became standard school practice during the 1990s when schools were required to produce school portfolios of children's work to show the agreed NC levels.

TGAT recommended emphasis on criterion reference rather than norm-referenced assessment so that assessments were much more like the assessments teachers make about children everyday in their classrooms. Also TGAT intended that each child's progress should be viewed primarily in relation to him/herself and that he/she be provided with the information on what the assessment is about.

The Schools Examination and Assessment Council (SEAC) was set up under the ERA to advise on the new developments on assessment under the Act. Recommendations and guidance since that time have influenced both NC Assessment 1990 (pilot) and NC Assessment 1991 (trial) and the proposals for the NC KS1 Assessment 1992 ((Follows, 1993; Croydon LEA 1991).

From NC Assessment 1991 to 2004 the three elements of it have remained unchanged, i.e. Teacher Assessment period (February-March), SATs Period (April-May) and Annual Reports to Parents (June-July), although within each element there have been annual changes.

Teacher Assessment Period

The context of the case study school (Oak Tree Infant School)⁴, and the staff directly involved with the earlier project (1991), are included in much of this current project. Teacher assessment includes continuous assessment against the Statements of Attainment applicable to NC KS1 for English, Mathematics and Science (1988 & 1995) and now NC KS1 (2000) to level descriptors. Since the National Curriculum was introduced in September 1989 an assumption has been made nationally, that each school has similar expertise and is able to establish a continuous assessment process. So that appropriate assessment information, in the required format, was available to support the NCKS1 1991 and subsequent years.

The Education Reform Act requires a summary of the continuous formative assessment to be made at the end of a key stage of the National Curriculum. Therefore, the continuous assessment has been summarised in February–March of each school year since 1991 and judgements have been made by year 2 class teachers about each individual child's level of attainment in each attainment target and level descriptor in the 3 core subjects (English, mathematics and science). Teachers are required to decide which level (1,2 or 3) on each attainment target to allocate to each child, to provide a reasonably precise indication about the knowledge, skills and understanding he /she has attained at the end of Key Stage 1. The national expectation is that the majority of children should attain level 2. This information is summarised and the relevant document completed in preparation for the statutory assessments (SATs) that are administered in April–May when teachers are required to follow the government's (SEAC & QCA) annual

⁴ Oak Tree Infant School is the fictional name of the case study school and its context is explained in later chapters. Cross-reference Chapters 5 Learning from Assessment and Pupil Data: Exploring the Evidence & Chapter 6 Learning from Ofsted: Exploring the Evidence.

booklets about assessment and reporting arrangements for Mathematics and English.

SATs Period

The Standard Assessment Tasks (SATs) were compiled to investigate the competence of each child in the profile component and associated attainment targets. SEAC (1991) states that:

SATs are intended to support high quality teaching and learning by providing good classroom activities for assessment of pupil's attainment (SEAC, 1991: 9).

It was recommended that the SATs (Key Stage 1) were designed so that they looked like pieces of work that each child undertook and could be incorporated in the ongoing classroom learning activities. Each SAT was written so that levels 1-3 of the attainment target could be assessed. The class teacher was required to consult the teacher assessment level to decide which activity each child would need to engage in. One of the purposes of the SAT was to give the teacher the opportunity to confirm or revise the previous assessment.

In the process of doing the SAT it was envisaged that each child would be able to demonstrate a range of competences, which the teacher could monitor by observing the children's activity, the process they engage in as well as what they produce, whether written or oral. Standardised procedures were employed for teacher assessment and teachers from a group of schools moderated their results. The teachers made comparisons of their analysis of the children's responses to the SATs, as well as the general assessment of the children's attainments. During the earlier years of administering SATs support was given by an LEA moderator in the case study school.

In subsequent years it was recognised, both nationally and locally following continuously strong reactions and lobbying from head teachers and teachers and

their professional associations that Year 2 teachers needed and should have additional classroom support from existing school resources to administer both classroom assessment and SATs (Sainsbury, 1996:74). QCA made annual modifications to SATs to meet these demands that increasingly resulted in the use of formal work sheets and test papers for English and Mathematics levels 1-3, which in reality are administered to the whole class rather than individual or small groups of children. Concern remains about the administration and marking of KS1 SATs and, ten years after their introduction, in a National Union of Teachers (NUT) Survey (2001) teachers say they narrow young children's education, waste time and provide little information of value. Also there is evidence that they have a damaging effect on behaviour (Teacher, 2002:16). Furthermore SATs forms part of the current grievances of teacher workload that is led by the National Union of Teachers (NUT) anti-SATs campaign (December 2003 & NUT Annual Conference, Harrogate, 2004).

Assessment in the tasks is made by consideration of the child's performance in relation to performance descriptions. Overall judgements are made about the child's performance in the reading task and about the child's written work and competency in mathematics. Since 1991 it has been anticipated that the majority of 7 years olds would be at level 2 (the national average), which has changed because of the modification to the content of the National Curriculum 1995 and 2000. Each level of achievement represents an advance in knowledge and skills, and each child should proceed up one level every two years. In reality, although all children will progress, some will move faster than others (Hutchin, 1996).

Therefore a Year 2 teacher with a class of 6-7 year olds will need to be thinking of a curriculum across a wider age range.⁵ The main practical difficulty has been the narrowing down of the curriculum by teaching to the test and an over emphasis of

⁵ Cross-reference Chapter 4 Learning from the Infant Curriculum; exploring the evidence.

the core subjects at the expense of the foundation subjects (Hurst, 1997; Robson & Medley, 1996; TES, 2004). The SATs results are recorded for reporting to parents, for school, governing body and LEA use for target setting and for school evaluation by Ofsted (1995 & 2000). An annual statistical return of the test results continues to be required by the LEA and the DfEE.

Throughout the 1990's all levels of the teaching profession and researchers (Black & William, 1999 & 1998; Sainsbury, 1998 & 1996; Hutchison & Schagen, 1994; BERA, 1990 & 1992) questioned the effect of tests on both young children and teachers and the quality of teaching and learning (TES, 2004; National Union of Teachers, 1991 & 2004.). As head teacher of Oak Tree I was required to implement Key Stage 1 assessment and I reflected on the impact of it on children and their teachers (Follows, 1993). In 2000, David Blunkett, then Secretary of state for Education and Skills, commissioned a review of National Curriculum assessment by QCA. The review was intended to build on the strengths of the current system, to address weakness and to bring assessment in line with what was being taught in the classroom. As a result the government announced changes to Key Stages 1 & 2 assessment (Primary School Teachers, 2003).

As I write this chapter a new approach to assessment at Key Stage 1 is to be trialled. Tests and tasks will underpin class teacher assessment rather than them having them alongside each other and test results being reported separately, (NAHT, 2004). As part of the trial teachers may also be given more flexibility about how and when the tests are used. But they will still be required to use them. At the recent launch of the new primary strategy Excellence and Enjoyment (DfEE, 2003) Charles Clarke, Education and Skills Secretary, stressed the important role that targeting and testing must continue to play in raising standards and ensuring that every child is getting the education they deserve and achieving his or her full potential (Evans, 2003:8).

Reporting to Parents

It was statutory to report the first National Curriculum results to parents in Summer 1992. However, it was decided by most head teachers, myself included to inform parents in April/May 1991 directly after the first administering of SATs. Parents were informed both of the changes to the classroom organisation and learning opportunities available to their children during the SATs period and the SATs results were included on each Year 2 child's written annual report, which were presented in July 1991. Since that time it has become standard practice for schools to report to parents in this way.

In my earlier research (Follows, 1991) I wrote with concern about the new reporting procedures and the extent to which they would lead to derisive comparisons between schools. This was because information about individual children's achievement was not only available to parents, but also collected by the LEA and Ofsted for their monitoring of schools' delivery of the curriculum and the publishing of results alongside additional LEA test results that was available for public scrutiny. On reflection, TGAT (1988) somewhat naively proposed that such information should be carefully interpreted only as part of a more general statement about the school produced by the school and authenticated by the LEA. The LEA should provide material for inclusion in the statement describing the influence of factors, such as socio-economic nature of the catchment area on a school's results. At the time teachers were sceptical and apprehensive about the possible outcome of the national system of assessment. During the 1990s many head teachers and teachers, myself included, have experienced at first hand the personal and professional pressures and damage by this misleading comparative policy.⁶

⁶ Cross reference Chapter 6 Learning from Ofsted: exploring the evidence.

Value-added

As head teacher, I attempted to apply the notion of value-added to Oak Tree to adjust raw test data to show a fairer way of representing my school and children's real achievements. (Follows, Waites & Johnson, 1996-7).⁷ I took account of children's achievement at the time they entered the school by using the LEA Entry Profile (Croydon Education, 1992-1996), which was just one of ninety baseline schemes accredited by QCA (Early Childhood Research Group, 1998). I analysed the baseline data and matched it to the children's Key Stage 1 results. Subsequently the National Baseline Scheme was introduced (Taylor Fitz-Gibbon, 1997) and schools were required to provide annual value added returns. Since that time much work has developed to extend the notion of value-added to infant and primary schools (Goldstein, Huiqi, Rath & Hill, 2000; Tymms, 1999 & 1996; Sainsbury, 1998).

There continues to be debate about the accuracy of these latest adjusted league tables. Finding ways of making the concept of relative progress or value-added workable has not been without difficulties. These reside mainly around the nature of the data gathered on entry to school and at the end of KS1 & 2. In fact in 2004 Baseline Assessment was moved to the end of reception year, i.e. the end of the year in which children are 5 years old, in an attempt to monitor performance in literacy and numeracy and so contribute to value-added measures rather than being used for early intervention and preventative work (Fisher, 1998). Ofsted's (2005) main thrust is to monitor schools by scrutinising their contextual value added (CVA) data to evaluate school performance.

⁷ Cross reference Chapter 5 Learning from Assessment and Pupil Data: exploring the data.

What have I learnt about educational assessment?

In order to explore this question I adapt and expand Davis (1999) six complaints to probe the complexities of educational assessment, specifically the National Curriculum assessment system to find out if it measures up to what it was set out to accomplish. I explore whether it makes sense to claim that, NC assessment scheme can do this and set out to discover any serious contradictions. I probe this key research question.

Does the NC assessment raise standards or potentially damage the interests of pupils and teachers particularly young children at the start of formal education?

Raising standards is being equated with improving test performance

The government is very anxious about the relative performance of British children in international tests of numeracy and literacy. School communities are continually told that all examination and test results must improve. David Blunkett, when Secretary of State for Education stated that he would resign if the Literacy and Numeracy targets were not met by 2002. More than 75% of year 6 children must reach level 4 or better in Mathematics and more than 80% must achieve this in English. Children's levels would be measured by the statutory Standardised Assessment Tasks (SATs).

To achieve this schools were given extra funding to hold *booster* classes for mathematics and additional literacy groups (ALS), which involve all primary aged children even the youngest. These groups specifically focus on improving separate literacy and numeracy skills rather than taking account of an integrated curriculum and developmental learning. Recent research findings question the success of these groups in relation to both raising standards, children's motivation to learning and self-esteem. Davis argues that the description raising standards when simply

related to improving examination results is a mistake. A competitive industrial economy needs employees who can communicate and listen, make flexible and intelligent use of their knowledge and skills, work effectively with others and who are suitably motivated. These qualities cannot be tested by examination. Indeed the pressure to improve test performance may reduce the likelihood of children developing these traits (Davis, 1999:2).

Current policies encourage teaching to the test and this distorts the curriculum

Teaching to the test or narrowing down the curriculum is not a new problem, but it has been exacerbated by government policy that relies heavily on assessment to make schools accountable for the cost of education. In this chapter I have explored in some detail the difficulties this raises for any attempts to improve the real learning of children. Teaching to the test distorts and restricts learning (Black, 1998:ix; Gipps, 1994:31). As head teacher, I experienced and perhaps resisted narrowing the learning of young children in order to meet the demands of KS1 tests. I am currently teaching KS2 children and am very concerned that QCA optional maths tests and KS2 maths SATs deliberately alter the way problems are presented from one year to the next. It requires teachers like myself to prepare children by practising in varying formats and contexts of a test paper, with the emphasis on developing technical abstract thinking and acquiring complex specialist language. This approach to learning is very alien to young children especially those with poor speech and language skills. Also very unlike the approach that I encouraged whilst working with young children on the PRIME project, (Primary Initiatives in Mathematics Education, 1983), which was an investigative, positive and creative application to real life situations.

Using standardised language distorts learning

Teachers are being held to account for the learning outcomes of their children, and these are described in the official sanctioned language of the National Curriculum (2000, 1995 & 1988). Equally, teacher trainers are being held to account for the Standards laid down for Newly Qualified Teachers (DfEE circular 4/98). The National Curriculum provides official descriptions for children's achievement (attainment). The Teacher Training Agency has drawn up Standards which students must acquire before they are awarded Qualified Teacher Status and standards which teachers must acquire before they are awarded Advanced Skills Teacher (AST), Leading Curriculum Teacher (LCT) and Threshold status. Both use official languages that are purported to provide a key element in the current strategy to hold schools, teachers and higher education to account for the learning outcomes of their pupils and to compare the effectiveness of such institutions on this basis. There has been ongoing debate about inconsistency of meanings and interpretations of both National Curriculum language and Standards for NQTs, ASTs, LCTs and threshold resulting in significant unfairness when schools are compared according to their children's performance as characterised in this language.

Using assessment to hold schools to account is unjust

Local and national politicians are using educational assessment, mainly in the form of national examinations and tests, to hold schools and teachers to account. Judgements are made about whether value for money is being offered (Ofsted, 1999). Judgements of the quality of schools and even of individual head teachers and teachers are being derived from the results of assessment (Baseline Assessment, NC KS1 & 2 SATs). Test and examination performance is known to be correlated with the socio-economic status of the children (Maden, 2001;

Mortimore, 1998; National Commission on Education, 1996). Other factors may influence children's performance, factors over which schools have no control, such as budgetary constraints, or experience and expertise of staff.

An increasingly popular, but highly contentious view during the 1990s was that effects of disadvantage must be discounted if we are to use assessment results to inform fair judgements about the effectiveness of schools and teachers. Since that time attempts have been made to make comparisons fairer by using value added measures, but without much success (TES, 28.11. 03) as we simply do not know all the factors that may affect learning progress, and therefore cannot control for them when we try to make comparisons with similar schools. Such factors may be discrete, complex and unstable. I feel it is not possible to justify the use of a particular entry, interim or exit test as part of the value-added measure of a school. Yet these measures are at the heart of the ongoing national accountability programme that is presented by Ofsted and published league tables.

In Canada there is a good deal of similar evidence documenting numerous problems associated with standardised testing (Meaghan & Casas, 1995d). Problems stem from not just from the nature (form and content) of the tests but perhaps more importantly, from the way the tests and their results are used. The report considers some of these problems, particularly the impact of test bias and misuse of test results on educational equity (Froese-Germain, 1999). Tests of individuals have been used to analyse policy, program, school and teacher success, and they are being inappropriately used as educational gatekeepers to make important decisions about students, teachers, schools and the school system as a whole (Medina & Neill, 1990:24).

Whilst writing this chapter I have been looking at ways in which education can be monitored, and I seem to have distinguished two types of system. There are official accountability systems (OAS) explained above and professional monitoring

systems (PMS). The latter system is more encouraging and includes A Level Information System (ALIS) and Performance Indicators in Primary Schools (PIPs) projects, which advocated a policy of giving data to schools themselves about their performance on specific tests and how this compares with apparently similar schools. This approach was the pre-cursor to the notion of school self-evaluation and the use of information technology in the form of Assessment Manager IT package and Pupil Achievement Tracker to analyse and interpret local and national data, to make sensitive use of it in their own particular context to prioritise areas for school improvement.

The idea that using assessment or standardised tests to hold schools to account is unjust has really been the hidden or intuitive seed (my core personal value) from which my research began. The seed has grown, surfaced, weathered storms and eventually flourished as the research has evolved. Throughout my research journey I seem to be carrying these seeds from the original flower head and replanting them across the educational assessment landscape that I am discovering and interrogating at crucial points on my research journey. My research explores the contradiction that although standardised tests may be useful for sorting and ranking children, even the youngest, they are inadequate in assessing children's learning and development.

Teachers are being told how to teach and yet are still being held to account for their children's learning

During the 1990s the DfEE or other government agencies (QCA & TTA) increasingly prescribed teaching methods, as they required teachers to use certain approaches in the classroom. This was especially apparent in the primary sector. The National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies (1998 & 1999) provided ideal lesson structures, recommended proportions of whole class teaching, and even

suggested revised seating arrangements. Teachers were told that these methods were not compulsory. However, if Ofsted thought that the results of schools departing from approved methods were unsatisfactory then those without adequate explanation were likely to be severely criticised in their inspection reports. Equally before the strategies were introduced schools were criticised by Ofsted for using alternative intervention programmes that were encouraged by LEAs and fitted their own particular context. Since 2000 primary schools have been inundated with short intervention programmes for individual and small groups of children. I question whether they were really intended to support children's learning or to meet national targets for NC levels in literacy and numeracy. Also I question the effect of these intervention programmes on a broad and balanced curriculum, as they extend the time allocated to literacy and numeracy at the expense of the foundation subjects or topic work.

Ofsted inspections cannot accurately detect teaching quality

Since its introduction Ofsted claims to be able to assess the quality of teaching in schools. More recently head teachers and LEAs are required to judge the quality of teaching in order that fast track school staff may be awarded pay rises. My research is posited on the belief that inspectors are not in a position to judge effective teaching that is defined by the learning and development in the lessons they observe. From first hand experience as head teacher, what actually happens during an Ofsted school inspection is something rather different. Ofsted assumes that it is generally known which teaching methods maximise children's learning and that the employment of these methods may be detected on the basis of limited and often fragmented observation. The assumptions are mistaken, particularly in the case of young children in the infant school when 'connected' knowledge grows slowly and erratically. It is rarely appropriate for infant teachers to think in terms of

specific elements of knowledge that children will obtain as a result of a lesson or so. Nevertheless, Ofsted only observe explicit learning outcomes in order to judge and grade teachers who are using the approved methods. They interpret this as effective teaching rather than approaches that are used by teachers to enhance children's learning and development.

Conclusion

This chapter critically reviews the current national policy for educational assessment by explicating the deeper issues affecting the education of young children. I explore the philosophical dimensions to education policy and practice in the infant school. Also I try to understand the place of assessment in education and this makes strong moral demands on my thinking.⁸

In this chapter I show that the rigorous national systems in place for assessing children at school and their teachers are supposed to be in the service of raising educational standards partly so that Britain can compete more effectively in the global market place. Although this goal is desirable, like Davis (1999), I question whether these systems constitute an intelligent way to achieve it. I have examined the abilities that assessment schemes purport to assess and I have tried to discover whether they can in principle assess them. I needed to do more than just look at a number of assessment schemes to see whether they did measure up to what they were supposed to accomplish. I needed to actually find out whether it is rational to claim that the assessment schemes can do this.

In this chapter I explore this complex question and detect what I take to be serious tensions between a way of raising educational standards without damaging the interests of vulnerable young children and teachers (Froese-Germain, 1999:13). Darling – Hammond (1994) goes further and states:

⁸ Cross Reference Chapter 2 Accessing Knowledge of Infant School Practice: a methodology.

The role of testing in reinforcing and extending social inequalities in educational opportunities has by now been extensively researched... and widely acknowledged (p.10).

Learning from Janet

When Janet first told me her story of the KS1 SATs reading test, the emotional impact on me was very strong. As a result, it took me some time to see beneath this piece of compulsory infant school practice to the larger, more abstract issues it exemplified. That is, how teachers might best, most fairly and appropriately, and most representatively assess how young children read, understand, interpret and use written text. Also how teachers understand and diagnose children's reading strengths and difficulties to effectively support their learning.

Georgie's reading test performance showed weaknesses in the KS1 SATs reading test, in particular the way in which such tests cannot tell us about the many processes of children's thinking (Alderson & Bachman, 2000). What it did show was that Georgie could read the words in that text correctly and it indicated her response to and an involvement with a book that she had chosen on a particular day in May.

What was clear was that the reading test had provided a source of information that had engaged Georgie. She was commenting on pages in the book to her teacher, she was thinking deeply, reviewing facts and ideas. She was most certainly learning from a national test. Also she did better on the test than expected. She had translated the test into a learning opportunity. On this occasion though, the distinction between assessment and learning seems somewhat blurred in the reality of the classroom and for the individual child. But of course when the results were listed and the levels promoted, the whole process of learning that Georgie embarked upon was not evident. In any case the purpose of the test was not to

assess children's learning but to show literacy standards in one year 2 class in one outer London borough primary school for accountability purposes.

Through my research I seek to promote an understanding of learning that underpins teaching, learning and assessment within education, particularly but not exclusively in the infant school. I am beginning to appreciate that there is no such thing as a typical teacher assessment. In fact there shouldn't be, any form of educational assessment is a mix of personalities, experiences and views that should together make the system work and ensure that the fairest decision is made. The emphasis throughout the research is on constructivism and the fundamental view that children construct their own means from experiences around them (Dann, 2002).⁹

In writing this chapter I have come to see that the key issues in assessment, the most challenging and difficult ones, are moral and philosophical, rather than organisational and pedagogical ones. The searching question is not *what*, *when*, *where* and *how to assess* but - *Why assess?* Effective assessment can only be based on a thorough understanding of my purpose in teaching and of my aspiration for young children. As I explore the practice of effective assessment I am beginning to realise that this requires a thorough understanding and acceptance of the concepts of rights, responsibility and power, lying at the heart of my work as a teacher. In searching for ways to make assessment practices more effective I am committing myself to recognising children's rights, shouldering my responsibility towards them and striving to use my power wisely and well (Drummond, 2003 & 1993).

⁹ Cross-reference Chapter 2 Accessing the Tacit Knowledge of Infant School Practice: a methodology.

Chapter 2

Accessing Tacit Knowledge of Infant School Practice: Methodology and Epistemology

Chapter 2

Accessing Tacit Knowledge of Infant School Practice: Methodology and Epistemology

Purpose of chapter

This chapter explains my teacher researcher's methodological and epistemological journey as I create a living educational theory from an exploration of my own tacit craft knowledge (Du Quesnay, 2002:16) of the assessment of children's learning, development and attainment.

The chapter is divided into three main parts, the first dealing with an autobiographical account of my teacher-researcher's starting point, the second with the developing critical action research methodology and the third with the clarification of the epistemological basis of the contribution to knowledge being made.

Taken together, the three parts of the chapter explore what motivated me to take an unconventional, innovative direction in my research, to employ my powers of creativity in surprising ways, and to think and do differently from the mainstream research I had met (Dadds & Hart, 2001:1). They highlight the opportunities and dilemmas that I faced as I grappled with the focus of the enquiry and clarified my own tacit knowledge. They identify the personal and professional values that guided and underpinned my ongoing active probing, thinking and questioning throughout a long, sometimes bumpy and unmapped exploratory research journey of self-discovery. (Hart, 2001; Giroux, 1997; McLaren, 1995; Popkewitz, 1981). They lead to the clarification of the contribution that a teacher researcher's *living educational theory* can make to ontological knowledge about the assessment of young children's learning, development and attainment.

I present the chapter as a reflective story, a personal account that is written at a particular moment in time of writing the thesis to show how I became a teacher researcher and then an action researcher and how this led to my claim that I have created my own *living educational theory*. It is written as a way of looking back over the educational research journey to highlight methodological and epistemological aspects of the thesis.

The Journey

*Journey's beginning... 1970-1987 research with children
I successfully gained a Certificate in Education from the
University of Southampton in 1970. During the three-year
course I specialised in Geography, Mathematics and
Physical Education.*

*In a personal study in education I reported on factors
influencing the structure of the junior school curriculum,
focusing on the teaching of environmental studies...*

(See Appendix 3:p392-418 for the complete story).

Methodology Action research

A daunting number of definitions for action research appear in the literature (McNiff, Lomax & Whitehead, 2003 & 1996; Whitehead, 1993; Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993; Elliott, 1991; Winter, 1989; McNiff, 1988; Carr & Kemmis, 1986; Kemmis & McTaggart, 1982;). Interest in action research has greatly increased over the last twenty years and each year more and more educators are becoming involved in action research through a variety of activities, such as award-bearing courses, educational change, school improvement, professional development and generating educational knowledge.

Because of the different roles and perspectives of participants of these activities (teachers, teacher educators, school administrators, children and parents) multiple models of action research have evolved (Rearick & Feldman, 1999:333-349). But action research has overwhelmingly been directed towards the late years of primary education and particularly towards secondary schools. Few if any of the practitioners who undertake action research are working within early years (Kelly, 1996). Although more recently action research methodology has been encouraged in the Evaluating Early Learning (EEL) Project 2001, which sets out to improve practice in the Foundation Stage, by collaborative self-evaluation.

It is well documented that examples of action research are varied and adaptable to unique situations and contexts (McTaggart, 1993; Noffke, 1990 & 1997; Whitehead, 1990; McKernan, 1988; Grundy, 1987 and Carr & Kemmis, 1986) and this is particularly pertinent to teacher researchers like myself who work in unique school contexts each with its own culture and history. I have created an eclectic form of action research and it seems very appropriate as action research builds upon my existing skills and experiences as a reflective practitioner (Middlewood et al., 1999). Action research appears to be a natural extension from my previous research work with children. Also I utilise a variety of methods, approaches and strategies and techniques to ensure that my work is rigorous, legitimate and totally justifiable as research and some of these methods are more traditional and have all been used in action research (Lomax, 2002:122). I seek to address the various complexities of schools and schooling as I explore and take account of different objective experiences and subjective perspectives. Also I acknowledge and emphasise that qualitative information is essential, both in its own right and also in order to make full and proper use of quantitative indicators. This seems to explain the underlying reason for me to create my own methodology as both action

research and qualitative research mean different things at different times and in different contexts (Griffiths, 1998: ix).

The teacher research that I am currently involved with is a piece of critical education action research firmly in the Whitehead & Lomax tradition as it is personally orientated action research (Whitehead, 1985). By using a multi-case study approach I intend to show how to create multi-layered educational practitioner knowledge, in the form of *living education theory*, as I grapple/explore the issues of a fairer assessment that are raised by my own past experiences as an infant head teacher/teacher. I intend to critically explore my own tacit knowledge of infant school practice (assessment) that I represent in a fictionalised form of professional stories. I involve professional colleagues in a PhD research group to help me deconstruct and reconstruct the past events so that we can all learn from them together.

This means that I see action research as an educational practice for all those involved in it (the researcher and co-researchers including adults and children). This appears to be very different from social science research. Research within the social sciences is subject to the conceptual frameworks of specific disciplines like psychology and sociology. Sociologists often apply their techniques to education and carry out research *on* education. For example Sammons (1999) writes about the statistical methods used in the school effectiveness research in the UK (1980-2000) and the problems it encountered. In 'Fifteen Thousand Hours' & 'School Matters', Rutter et al (1979) & Mortimore et al (1988a), respectively, appear to have been working within a scientific or positivist tradition which relies on a belief that concrete facts underpin social events and the work of research is to establish these facts.

Gipps, McCallum & Hargreaves (2000 & 1999) used a different approach when they researched into teachers' beliefs about teaching and learning. They worked with individual teachers and children in two LEAs to examine a range of teaching, assessment and feedback strategies used by expert teachers. They wanted to find out - *What makes a good teacher?* Gipps, Mc Callum & Hargreaves worked within an interpretive approach that relies on the belief that people create social meanings and therefore research must establish these meanings and how they emerge.

I work within an interpretive approach, but my work is educational research (Bassey, 1996). Although I accept many interpretative assumptions, I believe that I can improve education. I am not just interpreting it, I am making a positive effort to change things. I am engaged in a critical enquiry aimed at informing educational judgements and decisions in order to improve education action. My intention is to change practice as well as inform judgements about it. Bassey describes educational research as:

The kind of value-laden research that should have immediate relevance to teachers and policy-makers, and it is itself educational because of its stated intention to 'inform'. It is the kind of research in education that is carried out by educationalists (Bassey, 1996: 39).

Action research is a form of educational research that incorporates a commitment to act to bring about improved practices, as part of the research process. It should lead to the development of mental powers and character for all involved in the research, particularly the researcher, herself (Lomax, 1995:50). Kemmis recognises this in his definition of action research by making a commitment to rationality and justice as imperative of action research.

My research is clearly motivated by considerations of justice, fairness and equity in education. By following Lomax and Whitehead's approach to action research and

choosing the focus of fairer assessment my research provides a double set of principles for doing educational research for social justice. These are rooted in considerations of methodology, epistemology and power relations, and provide a framework for dealing with the practical issues of collaboration, ethics, bias, empowerment, voice, uncertain knowledge and reflexivity, at all stages of the research from getting started to dissemination and taking responsibility as a member of the wider community of educational researchers (Griffiths, 1998).

Carr & Kemmis (1986) define action research as simply a form of self-reflective enquiry undertaken by participants in social situations to improve the rationality and justice of their own practices, and the situations in which the practice is carried out. Lomax (2002:122) adapts their definition and writes action research is a self reflective, self-critical enquiry undertaken by professionals to improve the rationality and justice of their own practices, their understanding of these practices and the wider context of practice. Carr & Kemmis and Lomax's definitions of action research seem to be my methodological starting point as I particularly like their emphasis on the social justice of practice. I would like to adapt the definition still further and suggest that action research is a self-reflective, self-critical and critical enquiry undertaken by practitioners working together to improve the rationality and justice of their own practices and the wider context of policy and practice. I am starting the educational research process with a set of values that guide decisions about what is researched, and how and why.

During my time as an infant head teacher (1989-1998) I observed that certain groups of young children appeared to be disadvantaged by the National Curriculum assessment practices (NC KS1) that were imposed on schools at the time, particularly in the compilation of standardised test results. I believed that I witnessed the disadvantaging and damaging effect of the tests on children in my

school as the administration of the tests required an abnormal classroom organisation that resulted in anxiety and behavioural changes. The tests gave a narrow representation of the children's skills, knowledge and understanding and labelled them in a way that excluded them from opportunities and failed to measure their true potential (Goodwin, 1997). Such children were considered by many local and national policy-makers to be underachieving because their performance in national tests was lower than the national norm (DfEE, 1997; Ofsted, 1995). I decided to use my own school to explore the issues associated with this apparent discrimination.

I decided to use a multi-case study approach as my research was about real people in real life settings, therefore it was situated, holistic, eclectic and principled and it was focused in and on the practice situation (Golby & Parrott 1999:24). In line with these principles I have presented: examples of children's work as evidence to explore teacher assessment (Chapter 3); cameos of my own teaching as evidence to explore the infant curriculum and assessment (Chapter 4); assessment and pupil background data as statistical evidence children's attainment and progress from entry into school to end of Key Stage 1 (Chapter 5); and lastly a fictionalised account of the school Ofsted inspection as evidence to scrutinise the evaluation role of Ofsted (Chapter 6).

I agree with Carr & Kemmis (1986) and Lomax (1995) that action research is an ethical rather than technical enquiry. Whitehead (1993) reinforces this focus in arguing that action enquiry is educational because it enables practitioners to see their practice as part of a *living educational* theory that is generated from their own critical enquiries. This educational theory represents the professional judgements that practitioners, like myself, make as they seek answers like - *How can I improve*

this practice here? My initial research question was - How can I establish fairer assessment procedures at Oak Tree for all groups of children?

I know that I had strong ethical reasons for pursuing my enquiry, although perhaps this was implicit at the beginning and only became explicit quite late in the process when my research question changed to - *How can I affect a fairer assessment practice?* I hope this realisation reflects my personal and professional integrity as a teacher who works in a practical ethic profession (Adelman, 1989). For me, being an action researcher, the objective-subjective dimension of social science is re-interpreted, so that the researcher (me) becomes both the subject and the object of the research, driving the action that provides the data of the enquiry. This distinctive feature derives from an intention to work within a framework of shared personal and professional values that determine acceptable outcomes. These shared values have been clarified and sharpened and have been the subject of continuing reaffirmation and critique as part of the research process. This is very different from social science, with its expectation that researchers' values are kept separate from data and do not influence its collection or interpretation. Like Lomax (1994a) I feel that social science disciplines may provide useful concepts and research techniques for an action researcher, but the questions they pose, the research approach favoured and the criteria that they apply for judging their research is not useful for action research.

This potential of action research to generate *living education theory* separates it from social science research and from incorporation in an interpretative paradigm. The scientific intention of social science research differs from the professional intention of action research and my approach to doing research with children. The former in line with the conceptions of science generally is to add a body of knowledge about the social world. The latter is to act to bring about change in line

with educational values that are rational and just. For me attempting to be an action researcher, the objective-subjective dimension of social science is re-interpreted, so that the research (I) becomes both the subject and the object of the researcher driving the action that provides the data of the enquiry. This distinctive feature derives from an intention to work within a framework of professional values that determines acceptable outcomes. These values will need clarifying and sharpening, they will need to be the subject of continuing reaffirmation and critique as part of the research process. This is very different from social science with its expectation that the researchers' values are kept separate from the data and do not influence its collection or interpretation. The social science disciplines may provide useful concepts and research techniques for the action researcher, but the questions they pose, the research approach favoured and the criteria they apply for judging their research are not useful for action research (Lomax (1994a), or perhaps a teacher, like myself, researching with and on behalf of young children.

Much of my own novice/small-scale action research has been concerned with my work as a teacher/head teacher and has involved making changes in the light of collective critique of practice so that the teaching and learning and leadership and management of an infant school was more effective, but also so that it became a better, more educational experience for those involved (children and adults) (Follows, 1988; 1989; 1991; 1996; 1997; 2001). Whilst participating in action research I have followed six main principles (Lomax, 1995:49-57) although in each enquiry I may have placed a differing emphasis on each one (Forward, 1989: 29-39).

The principles are:

1. Action research is about seeking improvement by intervention.
2. Action research involves the researcher as the main focus.

3. Action research is participatory and involves others as co-researchers rather than informants.
4. Action research is a rigorous form of enquiry that leads to the generation of theory from practice.
5. Action research needs continuous validation by educated witnesses from the context it serves.
6. Action research is a public form of enquiry.

Applying six principles of action research

Action research is about seeking improvement by intervention

In *Excellence in Schools* (DfEE, 1997) the government clearly sets out a commitment to raising standards in education or seeking improvement by intervention. It proposes a way of school improvement that is through partnership and is enquiry based. However the government fails to appreciate improvement to help teachers understand and respond to the continuing new contexts that government has legislated. This is not what is meant by improvement within an action research perspective. Action research shares the emphasis on partnership and enquiry found in many government initiatives, but action research also incorporates a practical ethic that Adelman (1989:173) argues takes precedence over methodology. This practical ethic refers to professional decisions that teachers, like myself, make as part of their everyday jobs. These professional decisions involve more than choosing the most efficient means to a specified end. An example of this could be the introduction of the prescribed method of the National Literacy Strategy that was imposed on schools by DfEE (1998).

When I teach the skills of reading it is part of a methodology of the job and needs technical skill but this skill is the means to more important ends. Deciding how to improve professional practices such as teaching reading is more difficult than implementing technical improvement because what counts, as improvement, will be influenced by the informed professional judgements that I make within particular school contexts and each class, group or individual child. Changing the details of what is done should be influenced by why it is done and is therefore related to my professional values. The improvement that a teacher like myself seeks to make through action research involves recognising professional goals and committing themselves to achieving them. By pursuing my research I seek to transform my routine everyday practice (assessment) into praxis that is morally committed action (Carr, 1993).

Action research involves the researcher as the main focus of the investigation

Action researchers need to be insiders, researching practices integral to their work. The experiences of head teachers/teachers researching their practice whilst in post have been widely documented (Tomlinson, Gunter & Smith, 1999 & Lomax & Jones, 1993). All contributors show the imperative to intervene, which distinguishes action research. Also they show that their personal professional values are central to the investigation. This applies to enquiries into leadership and management practice or teaching. For head teachers or experienced teachers to use action research they must commit themselves to examining the motives and the method of their practice. Then there is no danger of them using action research techniques to manipulate rather than empower others (Griffiths, 1990: 47). Their potential to empower others is one of the strengths of head teacher/teacher action research.

Empowerment has strongly featured in each of my action research enquiries especially the current one when I work with a critical community of head teachers, teachers and teacher educators who come from a variety of educational backgrounds seeking both individual and collective empowerment through examining in order to make sense of the notion of a fairer assessment. Also I critically examine the term insider to justify to my own research position as I work outside the context of practice (an infant school). I follow Schon's notion of reflective research that he describes as:

Kinds of research, which can be carried outside the immediate context of practice in order to enhance the practitioner's capacity for reflection-in-action (Schon, 1991:309).

He suggests the use of frame analysis for the study of the ways in which practitioners frame problems and roles. I realise that my research emphasis is similar to Schon's reflection-on-action.

The form the intervention takes, using action research cycles of plan, act, and evaluate, means that the work of exploring values is a continuing process of informing the evaluation of action throughout the research. In this sense the research is truly formative, facilitating change as part of the process itself, not as the outcome. This appears to be directly related to the research focus that examines the contrasting modes of assessment, as formative assessment enhances the learning process for children and adults whereas summative assessment only shows the result of a test. Whitehead (1989:41) describes the process of coming to know as a set of action-reflection cycles and each completed cycle having a number of phases:

I experience a problem when some of my educational values are denied in my practice.

The problem that I experienced was the internal and external assessment and reporting of children's attainment at NC KS1 and the apparent disadvantaging and damaging effect it had on the young children in my school.

I imagine a solution to my problem.

The imagined solution to my problem was an improvement to the assessment procedures that I call a fairer assessment of children's learning, development and attainment.

I act in the direction of the solution.

As an infant head teacher I initiated a collaborative action research project with staff and the local education authority that examined children's attainment and progress from entry into school to end of key stage 1, by evaluating formal statistics from baseline assessment and end of key stage 1 assessment and pupil background factors (School self-evaluation study 1995-1997).

As a teacher researcher working as part of a critical community/ action research group, I collaboratively examined formative and summative assessment. Also I examined the role of Ofsted in assessing the educational standards achieved by children and how Ofsted inspectors make judgements about their attainment and progress (1997-2001). I critically explored some of my tacit knowledge of infant school practice by focusing on my past practice that I represented in a visual and narrative/fictionalised form.

I evaluate the outcomes of my actions.

I evaluated the outcomes from my actions of deconstructing the professional stories with critical community/action research group in line with our shared educational values.

I modify my problems, ideas and actions in the light of my evaluations.

Hopefully I can develop effective assessment practices that will help rather than disadvantage and potentially damage young children at the beginning of their formal education.

The thrust of Whitehead's argument is that action research must of itself be educational. It must help teachers:

make sense of their normal, everyday practice and the action-reflection spiral is a basis for teacher self-improvement (McNiff, 1988:38).

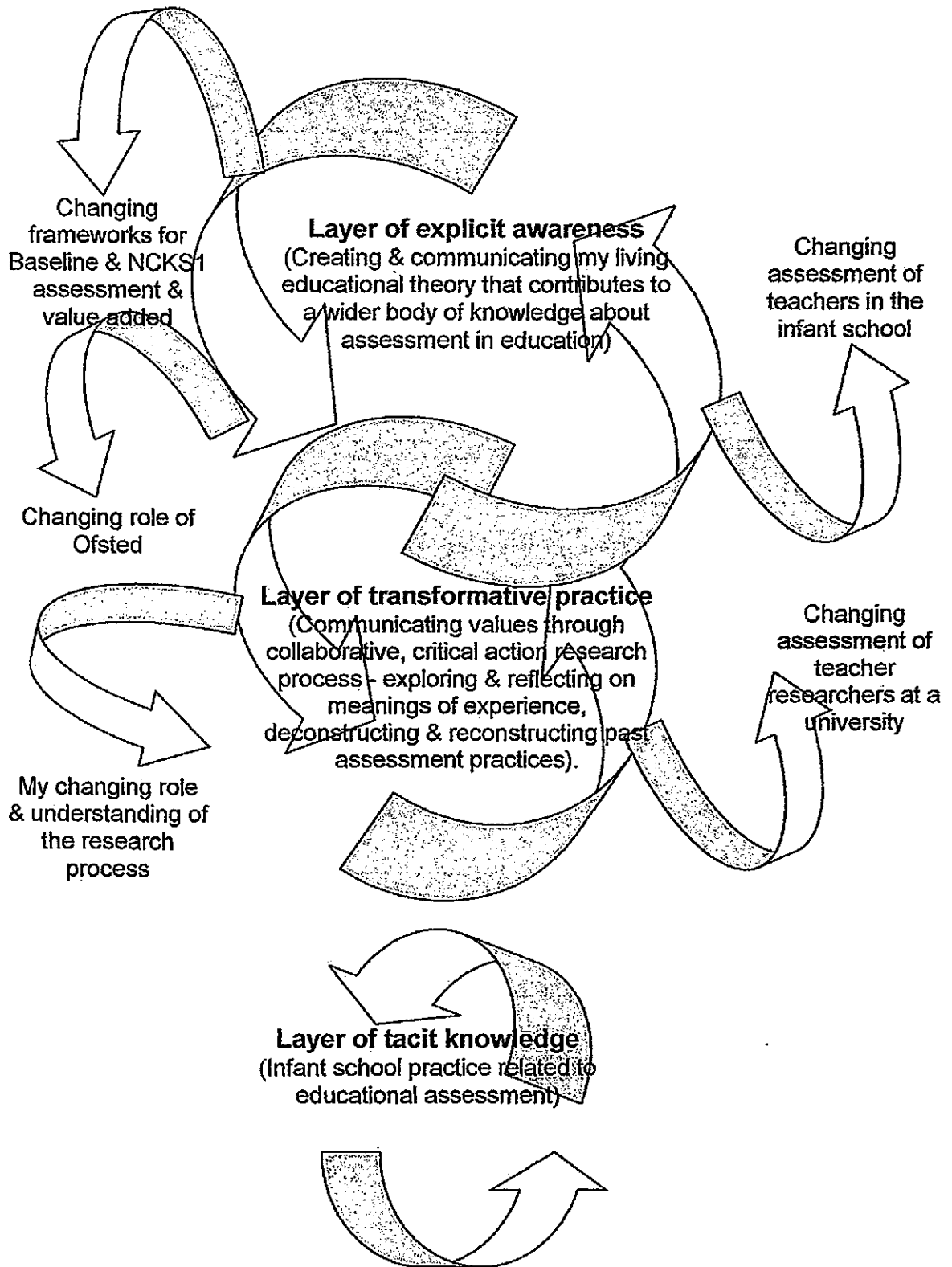
Certainly my current research directly relates to a group of teachers seeking to understand and improve the changing assessment procedures that they followed since the introduction of the National Curriculum in 1988 and the great tensions they encountered (Conner, 2001:45). I find Whitehead's five phrases useful to clarify the beginning of the research process but perhaps too tidy and linear as the process gets underway as they don't seem to account for the unpredictable and the unexpected. I very quickly find myself submerged in a much messier, complex and chaotic process (Green, 1999: 105-123; Cook, 1998: 93).

Like McNiff (1988:45) I find that in practice, I often attend to changes in aspects of a problem that are initially peripheral to the problems main focus (the changing frameworks for Baseline Assessment and NC KS1 assessment, the role of Ofsted, the assessment of teachers' work in an infant school leading to conflicting perceptions of educational standards, the notion of value-added and the assessment of teacher researchers by a university) at the same time as I attend to

changes in the main focus (national assessment practices carried out in one infant school and my changing role during the research process). I encounter emerging covert and overt links (learning links) between all these aspects. Hence I have moved away from the traditional action reflection cycles that show the chronology of the research process. Instead I am using a multi-case study approach each of which is treated like a multi-layered action research cycle to show the development of my own *living educational theory*.

Also I need to find a way that identifies the pattern of my own research behaviour, incorporate it within a methodology (action research) yet keep its uniqueness to me. Perhaps this is why I initially adapted the visual representation of the action research process (Kemmis, Elliott, Whitehead & McNiff) from the more formal action research spirals similar to that of Griffiths (1990:43) who includes Schon's notion of reflection to that of Whitehead (2002 & 2000). I see the action reflection cycle as an evolving three-dimensional visual representation that accommodates and informs my creative thinking in a fluid, open-ended and free research enquiry into the complex real-life of an infant school. The action research cycle is shown below in Figure 2.1.

Figure 2.1 The Action Research Cycles



Action research is participatory and others are treated as co-researchers rather than informants.

As an action researcher I have had to respond to the tensions and constraints of the schools where I worked and actively seek to relate my own value stance to that of other professionals and interested parties (staff, LEA personnel, school inspectors and school governors) and wider local and national institutional policies and practices. For this reason, action research is a collaborative activity rather than in which people work in isolation and the action researcher should be proactively aiming for collective action.

In previous action research enquiries I established colleagues as co-researchers as they shared in the planning, implementation and analysis of the research and I recognised each contributor's different expertise and unique perspective (Nodie Oja & Smulyan, 1989:1). This is very different from involving others as informants or respondents that may be useful to the research, but dehumanising for the respondent. I quickly found that asking others for information was problematic in action research. Also I was the project coordinator/deputy head teacher/ head teacher and I had to approach with care, to minimise any thoughts of coercion. As the feedback was about our practice, or information about outcomes associated with our practice I had to negotiate the fine line between getting feedback to inform our practice and making judgements about the practice others. I found working openly in groups easier than some colleagues working in junior or secondary schools. Perhaps early years teachers are more familiar with a democratic, collaborative way of working or intuitively work this way and are used to debating issues and formulating and applying ethical guidelines for themselves. Or perhaps I just don't like working in isolation!

It seemed a natural progression to create a critical community, with research colleagues, that works together to help individuals bring about enhanced understanding and agreed improvements to educational issues, which is what I have done for my present enquiry. Fortunately I belonged to a research community, the Kingston Hill Action Research Group (KHARG) that was established by Lomax and is:

A network of individuals rather than a closed community, a loosely coupled system where individuals act as links between subsystems and associated groups. There is an inner circle of individuals strongly committed to action research as a way of empowering teachers and bringing about a better education for children; and an outer circle of people who share these values but not necessarily the methodological commitment of the inner circle. Member's interests are diverse. Some of us are working to influence local and national policy in order to retain the form of education we believe is best for our students. Some of us are trying to work collaboratively with each other across different institutions. Some of us are trying to improve school management practice so that it models our educational values. Some of us are trying to improve our practice as teachers so that our pupils learn better (Lomax, 1996:1).

I was particularly fortunate in my earlier years with KHARG to experience the action research work of Whitehead, Winter, Ghaye and Dadds.

More recently I became a member of an action research support set, for PhD research students, that was created by Lomax and viewed as:

An educative community based on constrained disagreement that is contained by its shared desire for ethical, creative and emancipatory solutions to educational problems... that are set out in their diverse research to making what McNiff et al (1992) calls a good social order (Lomax, 1998: 1).

Now I do not have to persuade others to become co-action researchers as I am working with a critical community of researchers. I feel privileged to work with colleagues who possess vast and diverse experience and expertise within the field of education, high-level interpersonal skill and a strong personal commitment to share practice on the part of each action researcher. Also I have retained critical

friendships with previous co-researchers and created new ones from the action research support group to maximise the co-researching opportunities (Lomax 1994a).

Because I am using action research to look at historical events and I work within a critical research community I need to adapt the methodology to suit its purpose.

Grimmett & Erickson (1988) write that:

many scholars of diverse traditions and backgrounds are beginning to craft ideas around 'the concept of reflection'. Zeichner (1986) describes several of the most common approaches to the preparation of reflective teachers during pre-service teacher education, action research, ethnography, journal writing, supervision, curriculum analysis (1988:5).

I use what Van Manen (1995) calls retrospective reflection (done after the act) that is different from contemporaneous reflection and anticipatory reflection (done before the act). Van Manen argues that contemporary reflection or Schon's reflection-in-action is not possible because the active practice of teaching is too busy to be truly reflective (1995:35).

I use a form of retrospective reflection called memory work that has been developed as a critical group activity to deconstruct and reconstruct past events from present feelings and interpretations in order to promote a better understanding of them (Edwards, Potter & Middleton, 1992; Lomax & Evans, 1996; Schratz & Schratz-Hadwich 1995; Schratz, 1994 and Haug, 1987). Memory work enables me to put in place the crucial debate necessary to promote reflexivity, where the affirming or questioning responses of others to our communicated meaning challenges us to see something else in relation to the imagined meaning of a fairer assessment (Lomax, 2002:132).

Memory work helped me to experience the empowerment of my own actions as my own voice was heard within the group. I realise that my actions can make a

difference and that I am ultimately responsible for those actions. We built a critical community in response to challenges, to support each other to take risks and to recognise the creative possibilities that emerge when we collectively challenge and contest meanings and beliefs, we are involved in decision processing, we optimistically talk about the future, we actively think about the journey ahead, we nurture democracy and encourage pluralism, we learn to live with complexity: we are a learning community. This appears very similar to the notion of a learning school and people-centred leadership and the ability to manage tensions and dilemmas (Clarke, 2000& Day et al, 2000). Through working with the critical community I am (re)achieving greater control of my destiny within a climate of ever increasing central direction in primary education. However as I am involved in critical research I am never certain of the exact path of action that I will take as a result of my enquiry (Kincheloe, 2003; 24).

Action research is a rigorous form of enquiry that leads to the generation of theory from practice.

A positive aspect of action research is that practitioner researchers have a subjective understanding of issues and a problem of this is that it is difficult to see things objectively. Because I follow Schon and Van Manen's notion of reflective research I feel that I have learnt how to stand back from the action and through accessing my tacit knowledge of infant school practice I am beginning to describe events more clearly. Also by working with a critical research community I am looking for connections and learning links in the complex and disjointed bigger picture of educational assessment. I have to consider the perspectives of others rather than allowing my personal values and interpretations to interfere or inhibit the process. Nevertheless, I realise that my research depends on my insider

understanding of a situation and therefore it demands more rigorous methods of enquiry than objective research, where the researcher stands back from the data.

I find the action research cycle a useful conceptual tool for organising data to explicate meanings about a fairer assessment. It enables me to document different stages of the research in terms of planning, acting and evaluating in a way that is different from a chronological time line. I create my own representation of past practice around the theme of fictionalised story rather than using the more usual reflective journal writing or capturing action on video. I create my own forms of narrative writing or descriptive qualitative data that include a storybook of young children's drawings and emergent writing (chapter 3), an adaptation of a children's storybook (chapter 6) and a series of educational cameos (chapter 4) (Mohammed, 1999; Tripp, 1993 & Denicolo & Pope, 1990) to show the relationships of different parts of the enquiry rather than the chronology of it. Also to clarify the messiness, contradiction and complexity where different events and issues impinge of the central enquiry and I try to show an authentic description of my practice as an infant school teacher/head teacher, whilst keeping the children central to my work.

Because my research is focused on real events I follow the practice of using fictionalised story that has been adopted by researchers as an appropriate way of dealing with the ethical issues of anonymity and confidentiality (Winter et al, 1999; Winter, 1986, 1989, 1991& 1999; Carter, 1993; Evans, 1996&1998). Also I use my own imaginative style of fictionalised writing to aid the process of:

Professional reflection, exploring and reflecting on the meanings of experience (Winter, 1999:1).

as the writing is a means of representing my implicit theories about educational assessment (tacit knowledge of infant school practice) and to sketch a rich and

compelling view of the epistemological world in which I live and work (Clandinin & Connelly, 1999 & 1995).

Each piece of story writing becomes a focus for a number of group sessions in which research colleagues help me to deconstruct and reconstruct my past assessment practice. Following these sessions I re-edit the story so that its final form emerges from the critical research process to show my explicit theory. In this way I come to know about practice and locate knowledge within an autobiography of my own learning (Lomax & Parker, 1995; Russell, 1998).

Epistemology

I used critical action research intentionally to improve the rationality and justice of my own practice and understanding of educational assessment and the situations in which educational assessment is carried out. As the research process evolved I became aware that I needed to visualise my own unique way through my research and that this was as important as my self-chosen research focus (educational assessment) and my method (action research). This led me to devising a way of representing my action research through a *multi-layered jigsaw puzzle*, which enabled me to turn personal descriptions and explanations of educational assessment into explanations (my living educational theories) that contribute to the wider body of knowledge or epistemology of assessment in education.

By using a multi-layered jigsaw puzzle as a form of representation and a form of communication of my professional knowledge and learning I appeared to be working in a similar way to Lomax and Parker (1995) who talk about:

Visualisations as allowing their authors and their viewers to uncover implicit meanings about professional practice and enable these to be clarified and made explicit (p.303).

Eisner (1997 & 1993) wrote about the relationship between forms of representation and forms of understanding and new representational forms being used to convey to readers what has been learned. Eisner maintains that new forms of representation encourage new ways of seeing things and he lists five reasons why alternative forms of representation offers promise to educational researchers. The first is that new forms of representation encourage empathy. They recognise that human feeling aids rather than pollutes understanding. Second, they provide a sense of particularity that suggests authenticity (Eisner puts this against the peril of the idiosyncratic). Third, they are evocative in that they encourage multiple interpretations. (Eisner puts this against the peril of losing precision). Fourth, they encourage new ways of seeing things. Finally, they encourage the exploitation of individual aptitudes that have tended to be ignored as research skills. This is my justification for using the multi-layered jigsaw as a form of representation for my action research as it has enabled me to increase my understanding of educational assessment.

Representing layers of knowledge

The modern art movement of Cubists pictured the world as a jigsaw of geometric shapes (Bolton, 2000). They noticed how things take on different shapes when we see them from different viewpoints. By painting many views of the same object together in one picture, the Cubists found a new way of capturing 3 dimensions on a flat artist's canvas. My idea of a *multi-layered three dimensional jigsaw puzzle* parallels the Cubist's work in that everything is simplified, layered and fragmented and put together in unusual and moveable ways, yet it provides a visual mind map or mindscape to solve problems, improve memory and make things clearer by

unlocking my imagination (Buzan, 2003;4). This idea of a visual mind map, which shows the orientation and relationship between thoughts in my mind, can be likened to a topographical map showing the orientation and relationship of places on a landscape. The visual mind map is the process through which I generate and organise thoughts to make meaning or *living educational theory*.

Bassey (1995:4) used a similar idea when he described topography of social research. I can relate, easily to a knowledge landscape because of my educational background of geography and mathematics. These ideas and their associated images reinforce my belief in the crucial contribution play and art have in early years education, when young children naturally learn through the senses of sight and touch as well as language. But landscape and topography have limitations as metaphors for representing my action research. They suggest horizontal two-dimensional constructions that give a description of the surface; a view of a static landscape and a passive observer. My values as a teacher impel me to seek active involvement to engineer landscape intervention, and uncover what is hidden underneath the surface. In seeking and answer to the question - *What is a fairer assessment?* I need to uncover hidden meanings and tacit understandings. Bassey's (1992:6) topographical account of research is useful because it describes three levels on which research can be significant: the personal level, the informal interactive level and the formal dissemination level. The personal level is where the researcher is working more or less alone in designing and pursuing the enquiry and reflecting on the process and outcomes and this may often provide the most virulent critique of the work. The informal interactive level is where the enquiry is shared with selected others for critical appraisal of its meaningfulness. The formal dissemination level is where an account of the enquiry and its findings are published in literature so opening the findings to critical challenge. Bassey

maintains that this is only a topographical or account of the surface, the view of a landscape observer and I need to go underneath the surface to explicate my values that underlie my actions.

Links can be made between Bassey's ideas and the work of Clandinin & Connelly (1995:vii) who use the metaphor of a landscape to depict:

A rich and compelling view of the epistemological world in which teachers live and work.

I was seeking a form of representing my research, which depicted:

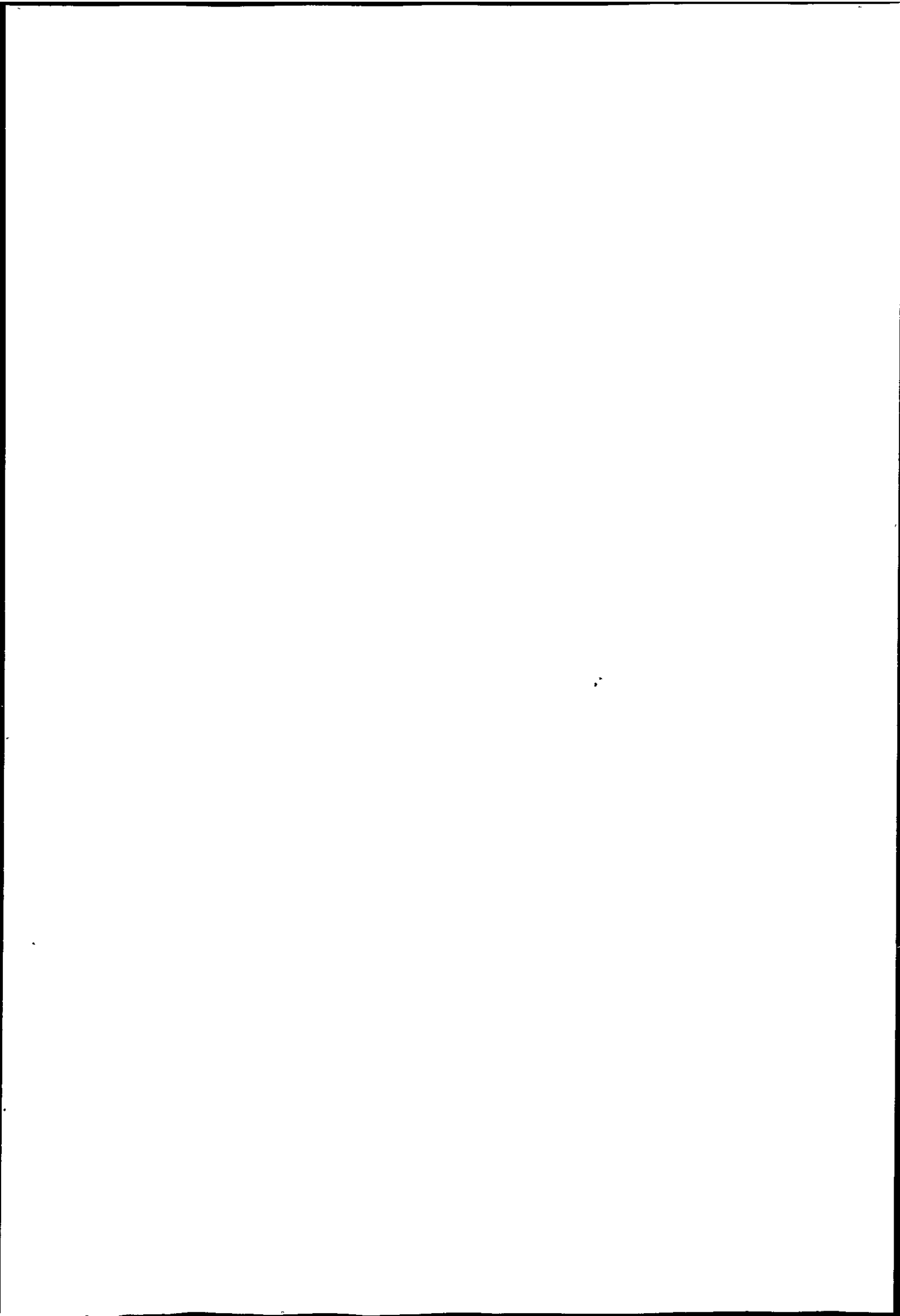
Relationships amongst people, places and things, as both an intellectual and moral landscape.

On the intellectual level I needed a form of representation that would allow me to explicate my *living educational theory*. On the moral level, I was thinking about the personal and professional dilemmas created by my school practice.

Reasons for choosing the *multi layered jigsaw puzzle*

I chose to use a multi-layered jigsaw puzzle as the form in which I would represent my research. What inspired this apparently quirky research innovation that was unlike traditional research styles? A question by the editor of Management In Education (MIE) when introducing my research article(Herrington, 2001:5). Very early in my research I realised that I needed to find a way to use images from my professional life as a head teacher/teacher and layers of knowledge from the infant school context in the research. The multi-layered jigsaw puzzle was a form of representation that provided an opportunity to do this.

A multi-layered jigsaw puzzle is a reminder that children must have a central role in my work. I remember the two contrasting views about the use of jigsaw puzzles



in schools - a solitary time filler or an enjoyable or purposeful activity. I hold the latter view. I have observed young children using a jigsaw puzzle for simple progressive problem solving activity. A large interlocking floor jigsaw puzzle is used at the earlier stages of children's education and is a popular, practical activity that encourages co-operative learning, as young children naturally work together or are helped by adults. Young children select each piece in an attempt to build on previous pieces to complete the jigsaw puzzle and the picture. They use simple recognition, sorting and matching skills, all vital for success in the development of language, reading, writing and mathematics. This is in contrast to an adult approach that sees the puzzle as a framed picture cut up into pieces to be fitted together again. Making a multi-layered jigsaw puzzle with young children goes one step further than making a simple interlocking jigsaw puzzle as it is built up of several layers. Each layer relates to previous and following layers. In addition, each layer may be different in size and made up of pieces of different shapes and sizes. Young children can learn about proportion or about the process of growth and life cycles. For example, where the life cycle of a chicken is depicted, each layer of the jigsaw puzzle shows a stage in that process. Each layer of the puzzle provides a layer of knowledge for a child.

Doing a multi-layered jigsaw puzzle is like engaging in action research. As with making a jigsaw puzzle, the action research process is practical and problem solving and progressively builds on previous stages (cycles) in order to move forward. A jigsaw puzzle is baffling when seen in pieces, but usually there is a stimulus, a curiosity or wish to find out more by fitting the pieces together in different ways or ultimately to find out what the completed jigsaw puzzle will show. A child or group of children can either start with a random piece or select and begin to make a favourite colour or shape, or find a familiar character, or start with

a corner piece to make a frame for the jigsaw puzzle. Most young children naturally seek the help of others and chat together whilst they play, which is similar to action research because both rely on the cooperation and collaboration of the participants.

Understanding young children is like fitting together the pieces of a multi-layered jigsaw puzzle as I put in more pieces and discover links. I can make sense of what a particular child is doing, a particular group of children is creating, and the meaning they are making in their interactions (Smith & Goodwin, 1997: 103). But, although I observe children from day one and continue to observe them over time I could never say I know all about that child, as I could rarely go under the surface. The jigsaw is never complete.

Creating a form to represent the research

I thought that the multi-layered jigsaw puzzle would be useful as a form of representation through which I could explore my tacit practitioner knowledge because it provided opportunities for exploring horizontal and perpendicular relationships between ideas and events within a structured framework. - How did the jigsaw represent the complexity of the issues involved in educational assessment? I began with a horizontal level of the metaphorical jigsaw and used a different piece to represent each different aspect of assessment. Initially I came up with twenty issues to examine. I started by drawing round the twenty pieces of a large floor jigsaw puzzle and labelled them with as many issues that I could think of. I carefully selected the four corner pieces and the edge pieces and arranged them on the paper with the other pieces inside. I pretended to myself that I was showing the real process of the first part of my research, which was marked by the same exploratory actions I had observed in young children. These issues were

drawn from my personal experience of assessment and contained my tacit understandings of the assessment process. Later I reduced the number of pieces to 7, extended my idea and used the notion of the multi-layered jigsaw puzzle. Figure 2.2 shows the multi-layered jigsaw puzzle. It shows red pieces to show the top layer of meaning. It includes blank pieces indicating that there may be more questions to be raised, more explanations sought and more imagined solutions. There are blue, green and the yellow jigsaw pieces stacked behind the red pieces, indicating further layers of meaning.

Later I realised that I was seeking the certainty of a solution to a traditional jigsaw puzzle. I seemed to be applying Kuhn's theory of truth in which he sees scientific knowledge and truth as puzzle solving and he suggests that a new piece of theory is true when it fits. He shows his view diagrammatically as an almost completed jigsaw puzzle (Kuhn, 1970). But this was not what I wanted. I was looking for something more original than my taken for granted knowledge of educational events. I began to think about space, place and time, just as Clandinin & Connelly did using the metaphor of the professional knowledge landscape. I saw this in terms of expansiveness and the possibility of the space being filled with diverse people, things and events in different relationships. I started with one or two inside jigsaw puzzle pieces and began to explore the relationships between different aspects of my research. I found that different pieces related to others in different ways depending on my orientation. At this point I decided that the inside pieces of the metaphorical jigsaw could not be cut exactly to fit each other and I began to visualise them with an irregular or even elastic frame, fixed only for a moment in time when I needed to take stock.

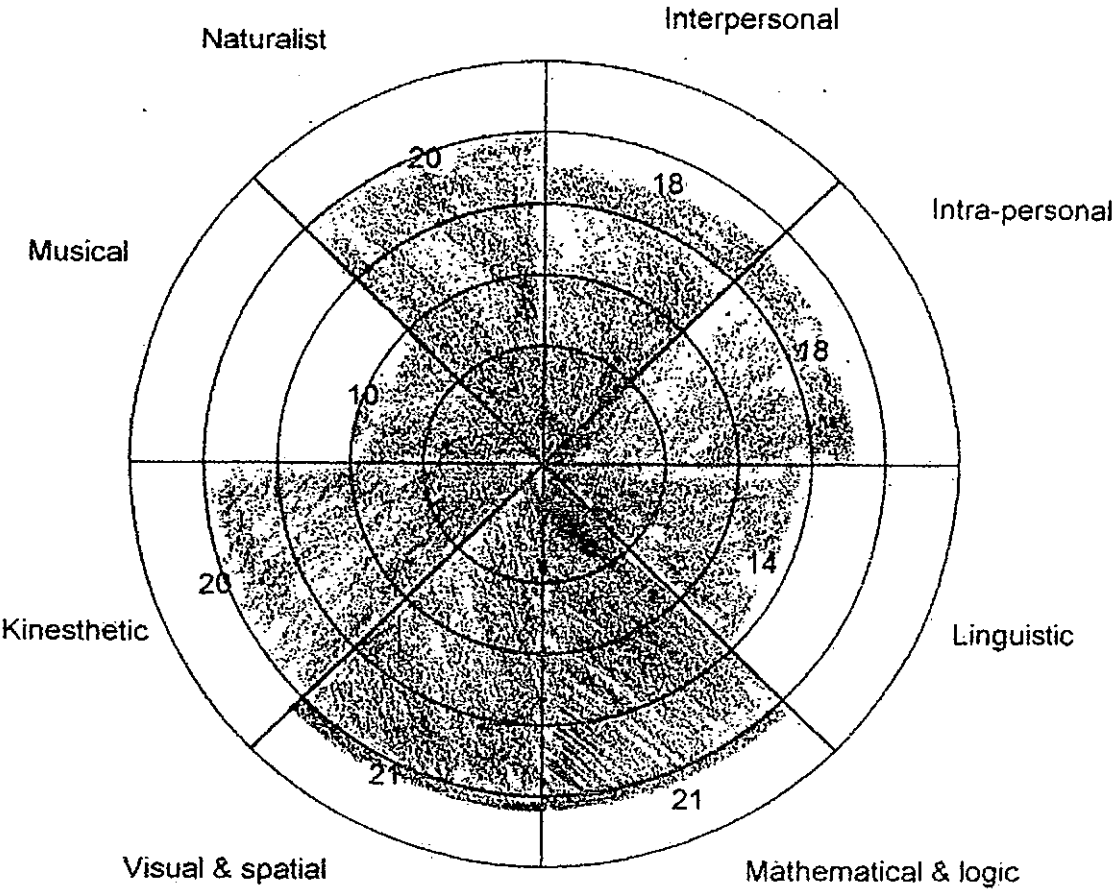
What about the other layers of the puzzle? As the research proceeded, as new relationships in the data were discovered and explored, and as other people began to share in the process of my research rather than just the end result, a number of different meanings were unmasked. This should not have been so surprising given that real multi-layered jigsaw puzzles (showing the life cycle of a butterfly or chicken) allow children to uncover new (and more complex) meanings as each layer of the puzzle is built. The way in which I shared and tested out my ideas with *critical* others was explained in the section on action research and is illustrated throughout the thesis. This is part of the action research methodology. I also presented the puzzle to other researchers at a number of educational

research conferences. For example I made my own giant multi-layered jigsaw puzzle using colour coded polystyrene jigsaw pieces and an explanatory poster to present at the BERA regional conference. I wanted to show an interactive rich picture of my research. Useful feedback from Michael Bassey suggested that further clarification of the purpose of the multi-layered jigsaw was necessary:

13 teachers had produced posters', he wrote, 'but I thought too many of them were uninspired and too wordy. Margaret Follows jigsaw puzzle was an exception, but even she could have been more direct in telling us what to try to do - I sat with those bits for ten minutes trying to make sense of it (Bassey, 1999:11).

At the time of the BERA conference I was at the stage of drawing my research methodology and focus to the surface of my own mind. I had recently recognised my own preferred way of learning but I was not ready to articulate it coherently to others. People learn and understand in different ways as their balance of intelligence differs (Gardner, 1983). I know that my balance of intelligence aligns with kinaesthetic, visual, spatial, mathematical and logical rather than the linguistic forms of understanding (Professional Development Programme, 2003; Smith & Call, (2002). My balance of intelligence is shown below in Figure 2.3 that I completed on the Professional Development Day.

Figure 2.3 Multi Intelligence Wheel



My experiences at the BERA conference would appear to follow Jerome Bruner's suggestion that:

we frequently know how to do things long before we can explain conceptually what we are doing or normatively why we should be doing them (Atkinson & Claxton, 2000:109; Bruner: 1996).

Action research has meant that I engaged with the literature and this helped me to develop my linguistic skills and my ability to explain conceptually and has given me a framework of theory against which I can test my understanding of my own practice. Whilst action research has given me insight into my tacit practice of assessment, engagement with the literature has given me a vocabulary and framework for theorising practice. This represents the third level of my puzzle. The final level of meaning is the development of my own *living educational theory*.

Layers of meaning

The layers of meaning are best understood through a specific example, which is taken from Chapter 6, which is about learning from an Ofsted school inspection, in which, I participated in 1997:

First layer of meaning (practical experience)

To articulate practical experience I wrote a chronological, factual account of the events and my personal experiences, as a head teacher, throughout the Ofsted inspection process. I consulted documentation, diary extracts and records of conversations with personal and professional colleagues to support the account. I used the School's Ofsted Inspection report (1997), the head teacher's professional diary that was a factual record of events and her reflective diary that was a personal account of the events and her

experiences during the year. I then included my own questions that arose as I wrote and edited my account.

Second layer of meaning (objective analysis)

For the purpose of gaining critical feedback I presented a fictionalised account of the Ofsted inspection to the group of research colleagues in a *memory work* session. Members of the group drew on their varied experiences to highlight *gaps* and *spaces* in the account and the things written between the lines were thoroughly explored. My fundamental values, expressed in the story, remained unchanged but after the session I was able to clarify, re-formulate and communicate some aspects of my tacit practice that were masked in the original account. Subsequently I rewrote the story to incorporate my new understanding of the experience. (Follows, 2001).

Third layer of meaning (locating it in the theory)

In order to locate my work in the broader social and political debate on educational assessment, I explored the contrasting and complex arguments presented in the literature. I critically examined the Ofsted process by using three Ofsted Handbooks (1993, 1995 & 2000). I examined national education policy documents, reports and press coverage.

Fourth layer of meaning (evidence-based professionalism in teaching)

The first three layers of the multi-layered jigsaw puzzle represented a dialectical research process in which I examined my own practice, tested its meaning with critical others and located it within the wider literature. Being part of a research group has been paramount in my identifying patterns and

emerging themes related to a fairer assessment; we have been creating theory together from the meticulous, ongoing and in-depth scrutiny of my past practice (Winter, 1989). During my research journey I have been seeking to increase practitioner educational knowledge as well as engage in successful action. For the final layer of meaning I explore a fairer assessment in the form of my *living educational theory* by focusing on the conceptual and ethical qualities of my professional practice as a teacher and teacher researcher. I see this as a means of contributing to improvement in educational assessment in the infant school by showing a fairer assessment of children's learning, development and attainment. The body of knowledge to which I contribute is constituted by the creation of living educational theories from teacher researchers like me. By explaining and communicating the grounds upon which my knowledge is constituted I am able to contribute to the wider educational epistemology (Lomax, Whitehead & Evans, 1996:11).

In order to appreciate my past action I use data generated through the research process as evidence that authenticates my research claims. Action research is about uncovering truths that belong to a history, to a time and a place and can be described as happenings not as permanent correspondence between sentences and things. By using my multi-layered jigsaw puzzle I seemed to be moving in a hermeneutic (interpretative) circle, in which truth (my professional knowledge) was uncovered together with the occurrence of the research (Heikkinen, Kattori & Huttunen, 2001:). Also I was seeking to use it to create communication spaces in which people could discuss and debate problems as issues as freely as possible (Kemmis, 2000). I was using a multi-layered jigsaw puzzle to explore, develop and support never to get a perfect fit, just as young children explore and develop ideas

unlike most adult's perceptions. I had to remind myself that I had chosen this jigsaw puzzle as a representation of my research and not to structure it.

I have developed a model for learning that uses personal knowledge (Polanyi, 1958) and like Abbott (1994) I see learning as a reflective activity which enables the learner(s) (the research group and myself) to draw upon previous experience to understand and evaluate the present, so as to shape future action and formulate new knowledge.

Furthermore, I have found a way of accessing knowledge that I use tacitly as I am an experienced (expert) teacher. The knowledge is secure and well integrated and appears to be embedded at a deep level (Strengelhofen, 1993). I suggest that it enables a shared process, a double dialectic of learning (Lomax & Parker, 1995; Lomax, 1999). With the intra-subjective, I am creating a representation that challenges my understanding of the practice it represents. With the inter-subjective dialectic, I am sharing the meaning of this representation and allowing others to challenge that meaning. I am using the double dialectic as a way of making my understanding transparent and transforming it in the process.

In conclusion the multi layered jigsaw puzzle as a form of representing my action research has enabled me to fulfil a number of important research purposes:

- It provides a form for exploring my tacit practitioner knowledge so as to make it explicit
- It provides a multi-layered visual and tactile representation of the research process and data that can be shared with others.
- It provides a way of conceptualising and developing my living educational theory.

Conclusion

This chapter shows the methodological and epistemological journey that I embarked on to create *living educational theory* from the exploration of my own tacit knowledge of educational assessment. The autobiographical accounts describe the starting points of my journey as a teacher researcher working with young children and the research paradigms and approaches that I intuitively delved into. Then I show the motivation I had to positively intervene with the teaching and learning process. This led me to see the need to develop a critical action research methodology and particular research representation so that I could clarify the epistemological basis of the contribution of knowledge that I made.

With the present project I have shown that it has been crucial to develop my reflective skills in a systematic way by subjecting my work to continuous critical review. I have learnt how to question my own assumptions and to analyse an argument in a way that exposes and questions its assumptions. The more I travel along my practitioner research journey I realise that theory and practice are closely linked, but I have had to restrain my curiosity and regularly stop and take stock along the way to lessen the chance of being side-tracked by irrelevant theory. By engaging with my past practice (evidence-based practice) through self-study or by delving into the hidden world of an infant school teacher/head teacher I have enabled myself to develop theory from practice. I have given myself a platform, though a somewhat unsteady one, from which to choose the most appropriate established or traditional theories and I chose - *living education theory* or a process of *coming to know* (Stronach, 1986).

I chose to create my own knowledge by extending the consciousness of myself as a social being. Because mine is a practical concern I have had to examine social relations and social processes historically and I have been reminded that human

beings construct traditions, ceremonies, institutions and belief systems. I have been motivated to uncover the genesis of assumptions that shaped our life and the lives of the young children in my schools and to ask how they may be altered to provide a fairer assessment (O'Sullivan 1999; Lather, 1991 & 1986; Popkewitz, 1981a). I used critical action research to promote self-reflection that resulted in attitudinal changes, the basis of which rested on the insights into causalities in the past. I came to know myself by unlocking intuitive knowledge and brought to the surface or consciousness the processes by which my perspectives were formed (Habermas, 1971).

As my research is an education action research case study I am not expecting to generalise in a scientific way (Elliott, 1989a), instead I am creating a model of multi-layered practitioner educational knowledge that is specific to a given context and practice, and which may be transferable if taken up by practitioners and policy makers. By examining Bassey's views on the problematic of generalisation in educational research and his concept of *fuzzy logic* I realise the in-built uncertainty or the *fuzzy generalisation* of the findings of my work but I feel that I can transform my research findings into *fuzzy predictions* that may help teachers and policy makers to improve the assessment techniques that enhance the learning opportunities for young children and therefore improve educational standards (Bassey, 2001:5). Golby & Parrott (1999) express practitioner knowledge in a slightly different way by stating the necessary eclecticism of practitioner research and importance of recognising the holistic aim of understanding the individual case and recognising the values inherent in practice. McNiff (1988) sees action research as:

a way of characterising a loose set of activities that are designed to improve the quality of education; it is essentially an eclectic way in to a self-reflective programme aimed at such educational improvement (p.2).

This eclecticism is important to me, as the research techniques that I have used in each chapter are different. Also the creation of transferable practitioner educational knowledge closely follows the fundamental principle of action research (Guba, 1999:xi).

By pursuing a piece of critical collaborative action research firmly in the Whitehead & Lomax tradition and by creating an alternative research methodology I appear to have worked in the way that is now advocated by the National College for School Leadership (NCSL) and the Networked Learning Communities Programme (NLCP) (Du Quesnay, 2002). Like the NLCP my research has children's learning at the heart of the activity and improving children's achievement is the fundamental motivation for me participating in it. Also my research is about teachers learning alongside children and it emphasises the value and effectiveness of practitioner enquiry and collaborative approaches to teacher learning. Like the NLCP my research is much more than the lateral transfer of knowledge (a comparatively passive concept), it is about powerful learning norms (an active concept).

I believe that I have created a potent model of learning built around two frames of thinking. The first of these frames involves three domains or fields of knowledge. The first is practitioner knowledge that is housed within the teaching profession-making explicit the often-tacit knowledge of teachers. The second is what I think of as public knowledge - the research, theory and international practice available but not always utilised within the school learning processes. The third is the knowledge that practitioners, like me engaged in innovatory activity, can generate together - through learning sets, enquiry processes and the conscious study of practice (a school community, the work of KHARG and the PhD research group).

The second frame involves the depth of the learning, which I have classified as shallow, deep and profound learning (multi-layered learning, by using the multi-layered jigsaw puzzle).

Believing, as I do, that every child can be a powerful learner, and that the knowledge either exists within the teaching profession or in the external knowledge base, then it is putting it together, studying and drawing theory from practice and sharing it within one school (Oak Tree) and then two research communities (KHARG & PhD research group) and hopefully more widely within the system by sharing my research with others (local head teachers, 1997; BERA/KHARG, 1999 & CARN, 1998 and publication), then I will gradually move closer to my aspiration for a fairer assessment for all children.

Finally, learning on behalf of each other has been a critical component of KHARG and the PhD research group. We all have a moral purpose and we are all educational professionals who care about all children (Drummond, 2003: 156 & 1993). It is about the shared belief that it is our responsibility as professionals to move away from the historical privacy of practice and to learn not only to improve our own teaching but also to help each other improve theirs. Learning on behalf of each other, understanding one another's situations, caring about the success of the teachers and children in each other's schools has been at the heart of our work (Schratz, 2000:91).

At the beginning of my research journey I made a commitment to work collaboratively within and between schools, KHARG and the PhD research group in the pursuit of educational assessment innovation, transformational change, more positive and powerful learning experiences for children and higher achievement. I was, and I still am committed to working together (as a network),

working smarter (learning powerfully) and to work interdependently (as a community) rather than working alone. There was a tremendous feeling of celebration and affirmation within the group and remarkable energy, excitement and commitment. There was also a feeling of trepidation about the research journey of self-discovery that we each embarked upon and the amount we had to learn together to achieve our aspirations (McNiff, 2000:14).

Chapter 3
Learning from Children's Work:
Exploring the Evidence

Chapter 3

Learning from Children's Work: Exploring the Evidence

Purpose of chapter

A great deal has been written about the differences between teacher's continuous assessment of young children's achievements and the external tests like SATs.¹ In this chapter I describe and explain how teachers assess children's work and make judgements about their learning, development and attainment. Teacher assessment includes both formative and summative assessment to support and enhance the teaching and learning process, so it emphasises *assessment for learning* (Black et al, 2003).

This is in contrast to accountability assessment, which considers the results of snapshot tests, which only establish what children, can do in one particular area of learning at any one time. Normally, snapshot testing is carried out in exceptional circumstances rather than as part of the everyday classroom routine. It emphasises *assessment of learning* and includes externally devised summative assessment (SATs) that is set out against expected standards of children's performance for the purpose of grading and reporting.²

This chapter shows how teacher assessment happens in practice. To do this I draw on data from three infant classes, which are real life settings. I examine young children's learning, development and attainment, by using the actual work of children, which was produced during the three-year period 1994-1997. Like Hutchin (1996:74) I use children's drawings and emergent writing, as concrete examples, to show children

¹ See Chapter 1 The Debate on Educational Assessment: reviewing the literature.

² The Assessment Reform Group (1999) made the distinction of assessment for learning and assessment of learning.

developing over time. Like Hutchin I want to show - a picture of each child's learning, development and attainment.

This chapter follows the model of educational research put forward by McNiff, Lomax & Whitehead (2003 & 1996:14) and highlights the centrality of my values when dealing with the issue of children's work. I frame the chapter by adopting the action reflection process in which cycles explicate meanings about a fairer assessment of young children's learning, development and attainment through looking at their work. This chapter attempts to show the development of my learning and understanding in the process of deconstructing my own infant practice and making it explicit to others. Whitehead conceptualises this as the creation of a *living educational theory*.³ My research is in contrast to other researchers (Gipps, McCallum and Brown, 1999; 1996) who have sought to access the minds of primary school teachers to find out their preferred teaching approaches and styles and their strategies for the assessment of children's learning.⁴

Teacher assessment at Oak Tree Infant School

The emphasis of teacher assessment at Oak Tree Infant School was on the teachers working together and seeking to understand the children's learning and then putting their understanding to good use. In other words, having a positive impact on children's learning and the teachers' teaching. The teaching strategies included co-operative teaching situations for individual, small group and class teaching. The class teachers followed an integrated approach to assessment, curriculum planning and curriculum provision. The assessment included the two main areas of teacher assessment, which are summative and formative assessment. Summative assessment involved the summary of children's attainment and progress over a period of time. It included

³ See Chapter 2 Accessing Tacit Knowledge of Infant School Practice: a methodology.

⁴ I examine the various approaches to teaching, learning and assessment in Chapter 4 Learning from the Infant Curriculum: exploring the evidence.

documents, which were updated regularly by the class teachers, using information from formative assessments. Summative assessment included Park LEA Baseline Assessment, developmental reading and writing frameworks, individual records of achievement, and half termly topic assessment and end of National Curriculum Key Stage 1 Assessment (SATs). Formative assessment involved the day-to-day ongoing assessment, which took place in the classroom. It was a means of gathering, evaluating and reviewing information to help children succeed in the classroom. It was also used to inform the planning of future work programmes. Formative assessment included materials to record significant achievements of individual children during specific planned activities. This included the Baseline Assessment grid, daily reading record and index cards.⁵

What did I do?

I wanted to explore how teacher assessment happened in practice. I decided to look at the records of children's work to see if I could find examples to show their development over time. I had three reasons for using children's work. Firstly, I wanted to show the ongoing developmental and conceptual stages that children pass through over time. Secondly, I wanted to highlight aspects of children's learning and their significant achievements, rather than provide evidence of their attainment for measurement against national expectations. Thirdly, I wanted to focus on the teacher's assessment and their judgements about the children's learning, which were recorded on the children's work.

From the children's personal portfolios I selected a set of children's drawings with their emergent writing that related to selected areas of learning from a series of topics that were taught at Oak Tree. One of the drawings included the teacher's annotations and two drawings included the Baseline Assessment Draw a Person

⁵ Oak Tree infant school assessment policy 1996-1997.

test score and one drawing included the Key Stage 1 Assessment writing SATs score.

Children's personal portfolios

All schools in Park LEA were required to set up and maintain a personal portfolio⁶ for every child, to show their achievements from entry into school to the end of Key Stage 1. A child's personal portfolio or record of achievement was required, by the LEA, not simply as a proof of attainment in the National Curriculum, but to celebrate the achievements of whole child development. This was in line with general views in infant education (Moriarty & Siraj-Blatchford, 1998:37; Hutchin, 1996:108). Every child at Oak Tree had a personal portfolio which contained a variety of information that provided a picture of whole child development from entry into school to end of Key Stage 1. The personal portfolio contained a record of children's learning that was updated regularly by the class teachers using their day-to-day judgements and records of the children's progress.

The documents included personal information about children including name, date of birth, and relevant family background and pre-school or previous school information. They also included examples of children's work with class teachers' annotations. The children's work was often a drawing and some accompanying writing, which related to the selected areas of learning of the half-termly topic. The drawing would be part of the normal planned group activities in the classroom. The children's drawings were important as they helped them express their feelings and visually record their experiences, when maybe it was too difficult for them to put them into words, so drawings gave the teachers clues as to what was important or interesting at any one time.

⁶ Portfolios are discussed in chapter 7 Creating a Living Educational Theory about Assessment in the Infant Years.

Also, the pictures rehearsed what the child wanted to write and the events were re-told using the children's words and either their emergent writing or adult script was used as the text for the story. The teacher assessed the work whilst she observed the child and talked with her about her work and intervened to move her learning forward. The teacher would record her judgements about selected pieces of work on index cards at the end of each day. At the weekly planning meetings, teachers would present one piece of work selected from the work the child had done during the week, which she would discuss with her year group colleagues. As a result of the discussion the teacher would annotate the back of the drawing. One piece of work would be selected to represent the child's progress each half term and put in the portfolio. The selection of the work occurred at a half termly meeting of year group staff.

Selecting the work

I had the data for 21 children, but I selected the work of one child, because I wanted to see if her drawings represented the conceptual stages of her learning. I selected six examples of her work from the beginning and the end of each school year (1994-1997). The work consisted of drawings and emergent writing. The teacher's annotations were written on the back of each drawing. The Baseline Assessment Draw a Person test score was recorded on the first drawing and the National Curriculum Key Stage 1 SATS score for writing was recorded on the last drawing. I selected the work of a little girl called Polly. I knew her very well and I had often taught her during the three school years she attended Oak Tree. Polly was a very interesting child with some unexpected learning patterns and she was in the less able group for both literacy and numeracy.⁷

⁷ Polly was part of the school evaluation study that I examine in Chapter 5 Learning from Assessment and Pupil Data: exploring the evidence.

Making a storybook

How was I going to represent Polly's work?

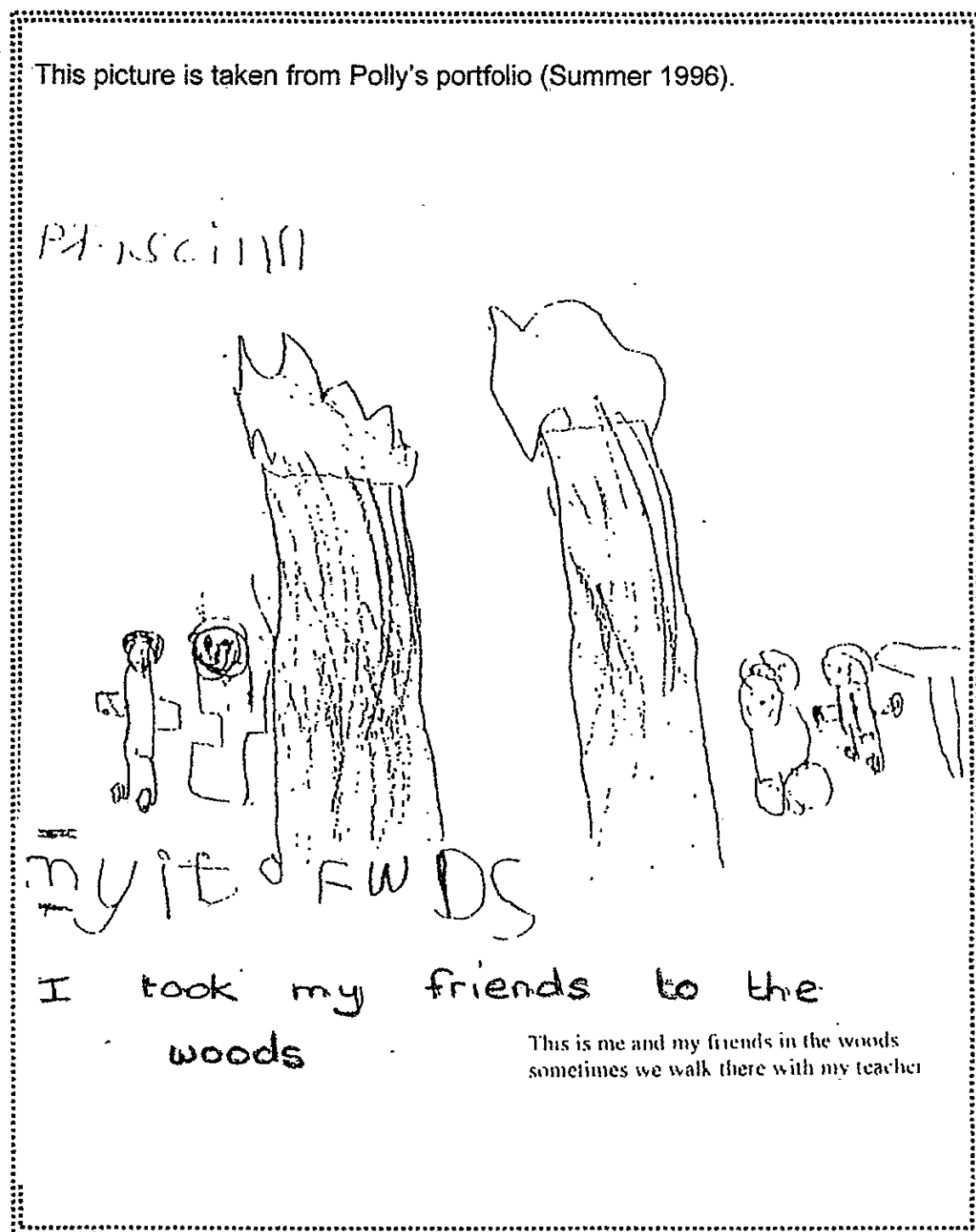
I called the method making a storybook. I adapted a book making approach as a way of representing and sharing the data for further collective analysis, in line with the arguments about representation that I presented in Chapter 2. I chose this form of representation because making storybooks is an integral part of infant school practice (HMSO, 1975:par22; Hutchin, 1996:82-98). The children at Oak Tree often made storybooks about topics like cooking bread or made up imaginary stories with themselves as the main characters. We (the teachers) made the books with the children using their pictures and their version of events for the text. There were always a number of books with blank pages in the writing area in each classroom. These books were for children to make their own storybooks maybe as an independent activity, just one child or together with a friend, or with an adult as a prompt and scribe. The completed books were put in the class book corner or school library and then taken home.

I used the idea of a child making a storybook about herself so as to provide a visual representation of her work. The storybook that I made is an example of a fictionalised story, because Polly did not actually make the storybook. Although I constructed the book from her real work, so that her actual work is included in the story, I have written the text. The storybook gave me an appropriate vehicle to unpack or deconstruct my own practice and tacit knowledge about events in the infant school, while keeping the child (children) at the centre in line with my own educational values and those of infant practice generally (Hutchin, 1996:25; Clarke, 1998:45-98).

I prepared the storybook using Polly's work and called it - *All about me, by Polly*. I included a title page, and I wrote some introductory text to give personal background information about Polly. I wrote captions under each picture to signal

the context of the drawing, as was common practice when children did drawings in the classroom. I used footnotes to indicate the source of the data. Below is an example of one drawing from the book.

Figure 3.1 Example of one drawing from the storybook



Polly did this work in the summer 1996. She drew the picture after a class walk to the local woods and a follow-up discussion about ways to record real events. The

teacher planned the activity as part of teaching Key Stage 1 English Attainment Target 3 that involved - *writing about a real event*. I chose the picture because I felt it represented Polly's achievement at that time. This is the third example of Polly's work in the storybook. The drawing shows 4 recognisable human figures and 2 large trees. Polly has written her first and second names. I have erased her second name to maintain her anonymity. Underneath the drawing shows her emergent writing that includes her most frequently used letters and words. There is the teacher's script underneath Polly's writing and this was written as the teacher talked to Polly about her work and interpreted her attempts at writing. I wrote the second adult caption to indicate the context for the teaching and learning activity. I omitted much of this vital information when I presented the storybook to research colleagues and so I kept my knowledge secret (Bruner, 1996).

How did I use the storybook?

I decided to share the storybook with colleagues to see how far they recognised what I had identified as Polly's learning and development. I wanted to use the storybook to unpack and deconstruct my own practice and tacit knowledge of assessment. The storybook was presented at two sessions, which were at the action research support meetings, in February 1999 and April 2000. The first meeting was attended by four research colleagues, (including head teachers and teachers), and a director of studies. The second meeting was attended by five research colleagues, (including head teachers and teachers), and two directors of studies. The group that I presented the story to was a research group that met regularly to discuss each other's research. This aspect of my research was central because:

There has been little time to reflect upon teaching, though reflection itself is a necessary but not condition of learning. Confrontation by self or others must occur. And for this to be effective, these others must be skilled trusted colleagues who are knowledgeable about reflection in, on and about action (Day, 1997:195).

The two meetings were taped and then transcribed. The discussion raised three important issues. Firstly colleagues wanted to know what I was trying to show by using the storybook. Was it Polly's attainment and progress? Was it the developmental stages in her learning? Secondly did the storybook sufficiently represent Polly's learning and development? Or did I need to include more? Thirdly did the storybook act as a vehicle through which I could engage colleagues to identify aspects of my knowledge and experience that were implicit and through which I made judgements about Polly's work?

Analysing the taped discussion

What was I trying to show by using the storybook?

When I presented Polly's storybook to research colleagues I had given them a question. At the first meeting the question was: *Does the storybook show Polly's attainment and progress at Key Stage 1?* At the second meeting the question was: *Does the storybook show Polly's learning, development and attainment?* The change in the question was because my own thinking had developed during the time I had been studying the children's work. My colleagues were quick to explore my uncertainties:

B. *What do you mean by attainment?*

M. *That's something I've grappled with for a long time, particularly whilst I've been doing this chapter, whether I'm really looking at a fair assessment of Polly's, learning. Then it would give me the opportunity to break that (attainment) up and actually discuss the debate (about assessment) and what I actually mean by assessing children's learning.*

B. *So is that what you are really looking at?*

M. *I think so more and more. Its which way round I write in down...I'm wondering whether it would be better to have a wider question, put the children's learning and attainment. Then I could actually break up what I mean by learning. Learning as seen through developmental stages, the whole child development thing.*

V. *Yes, that feels much more comfortable.*

L. *Going down that line- learning and attainment- learning that the teacher knows the child can achieve and what the government expects a child to attain. That's a very different slant.*

(8.4.2000).

The discussion clarified my thoughts and the real tensions that exist in my work. Although, I preferred to think of assessment in terms of children's individual development and conceptual stages of learning, I also had to consider the national expectation of an age related measurement that is shown by attainment in National Curriculum levels. To continue my journey of exploring a holistic picture of assessment I needed to have a more balanced interpretation that related to the assessment for teaching and learning of each individual child and group of children and which must include learning, development and attainment.

Did the storybook sufficiently represent Polly's learning and development?

I presented Polly's learning, development and attainment through her six drawings and her emergent writing that showed her developmental language skills. I wanted to focus on Polly's individual development and conceptual stages of learning rather than an age related measurement, as is shown by attainment in National Curriculum levels. I consciously omitted comparisons of her Baseline Assessment scores with her levels of attainment of the National Curriculum. I wanted the drawings to pose questions about Polly's learning and show her achievements over three years. Even though I had consulted teachers' assessment records and considered their judgements about Polly's drawings and been able to visualise the classroom context for each learning activity. For this reason I had removed the teachers' comments from the drawings.

Ma. I wondered if... the point is to look at different levels or to just to look at how the drawings progressed. This first one is at the beginning of school and this one is at the end, at SATs time. They are getting more and more complex...I just assumed, they, the order of the pictures in the book, went from the beginning of school and ended at the end of year 2.

P. You can see that 'cos you are used to working with young children.

Ma. I thought your project was trying to show all these other areas of learning and progress...some of this could be looking at pictures - whether the level could be measured and compared to SATs and National Curriculum levels?

Md. I love the idea of using a book as your data. So catching, so immediate to see a child's work like this and have the development described...but hang on that's what's missing, the description of development, you can see it if you understand young children, but you haven't unpacked it. You didn't have criteria on how you can judge each piece of work...each page could be analysed as data... Can you use the external measure of SATs to show how a child moves on from that to this at the end and in what space of time?

M. Does the children's work show ... their attainment and progress? It's a collection of their schoolwork, over a period of time -3 years.

Md. This is a sort of holistic picture of assessment...this data shows that this pupil did progress, whilst not attaining age appropriate SATs scores (level 2).

F. I can see the children's, (Polly's), pictures but I still need some form of measurement and comments to show the teachers' assessments.

(3.2.1999)

F. I can see this is the beginning of your idea, but I need some form of measurement and comments to show the teachers' assessment.

Md. You didn't have criteria on how you can judge each piece of work.

F. I wondered why you chose a SEN child, I think it would be useful to have the work of a more able child, as well, so you can make comparisons and you can relate the pictures to the National Curriculum levels.

(3.2.1999)

V. Looking at these drawings themselves before you embellish them with other material... What do they tell you actually about that particular person, that particular event, point in time? Nothing very much, without an awful lot of other material.

L. Except that it's over a period of time and the drawings show progression.

(8.4.2000)

F. I would have liked to have known what Polly got for the rest of the baseline, (assessment), as well as the draw a person, because to me this

book does show that this child has progressed. Assuming the rest of the baseline data is comparable with that, this child would have been in the bottom band, therefore value added would have expected her to achieve level 1 which is what she got. I think this shows that Polly has progressed as expected.

L. Are you going to take into account any verbal comments?

B. That's what I was thinking, on their own it, (a picture), shows a limited aspect.

L. Teachers will have recorded their observations and what the child, (Polly), said.

P. The teacher discussion is key.

L. Presumably the teachers kept lots of records and talked together.

P. Where are the judgements about these drawings?

(8.4.2000)

By reflecting on the discussion, shown above, I realised that the storybook had provided insufficient information about how assessment and learning happened in practice and about the child teacher relationship that had supported it. Research colleagues had recognised that the storybook was the beginning of my idea for presenting, sharing and analysing data, but that there was insufficient information for a detailed collective analysis of Polly's or other children's learning, development and attainment. It was obvious to me that I need to enhance the storybook. It did not provide the information about Polly that was available to the teachers and me, who had made informed judgements about her learning, development and attainment. This was confirmed by the written comments that I received from a research colleague who was a specialist literacy teacher. She highlighted the development of Polly's emergent writing. Because of her expertise she was able to identify Polly's most frequently used letters and words and their progression throughout the book. I realised that the material I had included in the storybook was insufficient information for everyone to make informed judgements about Polly's learning and development or her attainment and progress. Teachers had been able to make informed judgements because they had a fuller picture of the child. The drawings were in isolation from the context of the

classroom. I knew Polly very well, but she was unknown to research colleagues. The members of the research group did not have my knowledge of the teaching and learning situations. I could read between the lines to fill in the missing data, but others could not. A subsequent comment from one of my research colleagues suggested that I was trying to use Polly's work as an audible piece of evidence of achievement and value-added but that I needed additional examples of children's work to support my argument. This made me realise that specific pieces of work, which are seen in isolation, do not provide the holistic picture of children, which is necessary when making judgements about their learning and development.

What did I learn about my own infant practice?

The preparation and presentation of the storybook to research colleagues, listening to their comments and reading the transcription of the tape really helped me to clarify my educational values and my own preferred infant practice.

P. We need to actually know what you actually do with your children and how you make judgements...This is very relevant to M's work because a lot of her work is implicit. What she actually means...I can't quite see, she has a particular view on what young children know... but you've got to be able to tell the story or you can't summarise it and analyse it. How will we know about your teaching, M, your preferred approach... How will we spot it in this book?

(3.2.1999)

V. What is it that you are looking for? What do you want to know?

M. I'm arguing from a teacher's point of view, that by looking at a child and her picture, it gives a clear indication, to me, of the child's stage of development... and its my experience that its not just analysed by one teacher- she'd make an initial analysis, then she'd gain information from others, e.g. a classroom colleague, or classroom assistant or which staff she's working with who also knows the child- then it would be moderated within the year group.

Ma. But I thought your project was trying to show all these other areas of learning and progress, (not just attainment in SATs).

B. But you only assess intelligence in SATs - logical and analytical (intelligence) in SATs.

P. *How could you score them? How do young children do a test?*

M. *Depends on what approach you take - how the test is introduced to the child, maybe by a sensitive teacher. If its part of the baseline assessment its used as an indicator to mark the stage of development of a child...its whether you are teaching to the test or whether its part of the natural classroom activities of the time - if you manoeuvred the topic of say families that maybe a sensitive way to introduce the child to the test drawing (draw a person)...one thing I concerned with - the time constraints with young children. You are unable to hear about the ideas that the child might be able to articulate in speech - you can't assume he can do it in writing, so its not always his real story with all his ideas valued.*

F. *Going back to your book, you can see it's the beginning of your idea. I can see you are coming at it from the child, rather than the raw data.*

V. *In my school the baseline is done with 30 children in the space of 2 weeks... it often relates to the provision... volunteers brought in to look after the rest of the children whilst some do the test.*

M. *My teachers did the baseline assessment very differently - we always used qualified staff, (their class teacher and nursery nurse), who knew the children.*

(8.3.1999)

P. *One of the aims of this chapter is to get at teachers' tacit knowledge, when they look at children's work. We are beginning to see a description of what it, (assessment and judgement), means to you... We are looking at Polly's work- this is a good example of the tacit knowledge that a teacher, (M), brings to make sense of it and help this little girl.*

... There's still a lot in your head, M, that you need to get out!

(8.4.2000)

The discussion clarified, to me, how I work with young children and how difficult it is for me to articulate clearly the thought processes and actions that I follow, and how unintentionally I leave out half the story. I strive to keep the needs of the child central to the learning process, in my practice so that learning is relevant to the child and so that I can promote her self-confidence and self worth. Fs comments *going back to your book* reminded me of the original reasons for choosing the storybook approach. One of the original reasons was to emphasise that storybooks were a common vehicle for teaching and learning at Oak Tree and that the child was either the central character or author of a book.

Bas question: *How do young children do tests?* Made me reflect on how I used the assessment process as an integral part of the teaching and learning process. Baseline Assessment was part of the normal small group activities in the classroom and was related to the topic on which the children were working, at the time. We used a number of staff to collaboratively assess the children's stage of development on entry into school. The staff all knew the children because they had either worked with them in the nursery or met them on home visits. The discussion brought into the open that my preferred teaching approach was based on building on what the children already knew and understood. I believe it is vital to emphasise success rather than failure. Infant children do not do well when they are faced with unfamiliar requirements that may be placed on them in test situations when they are required to write about an event without the opportunity to have a discussion with their teacher. This is in contrast to the normal way of working for young children.

The discussion with my research colleagues highlighted how fundamentally those values are in my infant practice and how interwoven they are. The infant classroom at Oak Tree was a *closed book* to people who had not experienced it. How could I open this closed book?

What did I do next?

The storybook proved to be a satisfactory method for presenting, sharing and analysing data about one child's learning, development and attainment. The construction and deconstruction of the storybook gave me some very valuable feedback. Research colleagues confirmed that looking at Polly's drawings was an enjoyable activity, young children's drawings were appealing, and that the presentation

of them in the form of a book gave an interesting, cohesive and progressive format to Polly's learning, development and attainment. Colleagues said:

The drawings are appealing; I love the idea of using a book as your data, so catching, so immediate to see a child's work like this and have the development described; I enjoyed the paper, I thought it was great; I enjoyed it, I loved the book (3.2.1999; 8.4.2000).

By sharing the storybook with research colleagues and inviting their critical responses, I learned that I had only shown a partial picture of Polly's learning, development and attainment. But the exercise had raised some key issues that I could explore further and I had to unpack and deconstruct my own practice and tacit knowledge about events in an infant school. However there was still much more to reveal and make public. This was not surprising and clearly fitted in with my *multi-layered jigsaw puzzle* metaphor about the need to uncover further layers of knowledge.

I decided to extend the idea from one child (Polly) making a storybook to two children (Polly and Robert) making a storybook together. Polly and Robert were in the same class group for three years at Oak Tree but very had different expectations, achievements, abilities, learning styles, personalities, interests and life experiences. Polly was in the less able group and Robert was in the more able group for both literacy and numeracy. The new storybook would attempt to show, both, the assessment and teaching and learning process and how young children's learning, development and attainment actually happens in practice. It would show the unique learning sequence for each individual child. It would also show much of the information that I left out about Polly.

Collaborating with teacher colleagues, working with Sue and Kate.

I realised that I needed to involve my two critical friends Sue and Kate. We regularly met 1999-2000 and they continued to give me valuable critical feedback both about

my research and the changing requirements of the assessment procedures, at Key Stage 1. We had worked closely together at Oak Tree. Sue and Kate both had key roles and responsibilities at Oak Tree. Sue had been deputy head teacher with responsibility for assessment and Kate had been the senior teacher and English co-ordinator. They jointly led the curriculum development working party that regularly evaluated and revised the curriculum in line with national requirements. Assessment and English were the focus areas of the school development plan (1996-1997). I could learn from their expertise about teaching and learning in the classroom. Also they could give me honest and valuable feedback about my selection of Polly's drawings and the presentation of them in the form of a storybook and my intention to revise the storybook by including Robert's drawings. Most importantly Sue and Kate taught Polly and Robert in year 1 & 2 (1996-1997) and knew them very well. They had valuable background information about the children and their work and the assessment procedures and curriculum planning that they had followed.

Research colleagues had stated that I had provided insufficient information about how assessment and learning happened in practice, the normal infant school classroom context, the pupil teacher relationship, and Polly's learning, development and attainment for thorough collective analysis. Sue and Kate were the missing links. They would be able to help me to show more of the missing pieces of the emerging picture of children's learning, development and attainment in an infant school. They could help me open the closed book and release my secret knowledge as they would specifically be able to describe their classroom organisation, their relationship with Polly and Robert and they would be able to elaborate the judgements that they had made when assessing their work.

Sue and Kate agreed to work with me in this experiment. We arranged to meet in April 1999. Prior to the meeting I made three copies of the new storybook using six

examples of Polly's work and six examples of Robert's work and three copies of their assessment records. We organised the meeting as a memory work session⁸ so that we could focus back together and triangulate our own memories. We could pose ourselves the questions: *What? When? How? Why did we do this?* We could work together to explore the judgements that we had made about Polly and Robert's work in relation to our insider knowledge and to the criteria and standards of assessment that we used. At the meeting we had concrete examples in front of us so I was able to explain my own initial idea, and the need to revise and enhance the storybook. I emphasised the crucial role that they could play (in the research process) as they had taught the children and had had vital roles at Oak Tree. Also I used a prompt sheet to explain what I was setting out to do in this part of my research and what additional information I might need. I wrote the prompt sheet for them to use if they wanted to when we discussed Polly and Robert and their work and when they made their own notes later. The prompt sheet had five sections each with its own question and my brief explanation and a space for our own comments. Below is an example of the prompt sheet and I have incorporated some text to show some of our notes about the first meeting.

Figure 3. 2. Prompt sheet of meeting with Sue and Kate

<p>Title: Does the children's work show a fair indicator of the children's attainment?⁹</p> <p>1. What am I trying to do? I've got to take 'children's attainment' to mean their attainment at the end of year 2 as shown by their SATs scores (I've got those). I need to look at 'prior attainment', on entry in to school, as shown by baseline assessment scores (I've got those). Then I want to look at 'children's progress'. I might need to sort out some way to 'measure progress'. I might need to answer 'has the child made enough progress?' (I've got predicted SATs scores, LEA data). I want to show 'children's actual achievements'. (I've got the summative and formative assessment records, developmental reading and writing records, and examples of their work from their portfolios).</p> <p>S. <i>What kind of progress are you trying to show, 'cos the drawings are about different areas of the curriculum and the topics we used.</i></p>

⁸ See Chapter 2 Accessing the Tacit Knowledge of Infant School Practice: a methodology, for an explanation of memory work.

⁹ This was the title of the chapter, in April 1999. The current title of the chapter is *Learning from Children's Work: exploring the evidence*.

K. You can see the changes in their writing too.

M. What about the changes in their drawings?

S. You could say something about the stages children go through, it would tell you more about the children.

2. Why did I select Polly and Robert? They were both in your classes. I thought you might remember a little bit about them. They were in the school for the full three years. I have more examples of their work than some of the other children in the group. The examples of their work are taken from the topic and were assessed at the same time in each term. One child was less able the other more able.

S. Yes, I can remember lots of things, they're certainly very different children!

K. I can remember which groups they were in too, Janet would remember things about them (in reception) and the topic, too. I'll ring her.

S. They progressed in very different ways too, and Polly had lots of upsets and moved (to a new house near the school), too.

3. Can you help me? I've got to somehow put the information about the children, into a story of their time at school.

a). Can you write a brief profile of each child: things you remember about personality, nice or funny ways, span of concentration, favourite activities or dislikes, favourite story books, friends, care of child, attendance, open evenings...whatever comes to mind....

S. Polly particularly enjoyed any adult led activity...always 'telling' about other children. She enjoyed role play and dressing up...I remember her especially enjoying 'the birthday party house'... she was preoccupied by friendship groups, (Sarah, Danielle and Jenny) she was always saying: 'Who's coming to my birthday party?'... She found it difficult to concentrate for any period of time. I remember one open evening - her parents arguing about whose fault her lack of progress was. Also her mum helping in the school office as part of her college course. Robert was one of twin in the same class. They had an extended family and the children were involved with out of school trips... with cousins and grandparents. Robert had excellent concentration... thoroughly enjoyed all aspects of learning.

K. Polly was always wanted to sit on my lap at story sessions... Yes, she loved doing things with adults or playing in the role-play areas. Robert was a very popular- friendly, easy going and helpful. He was very willing to participate in every aspect of school life...and always tried to think of an original approach to his work.

b). Did either child need extra help?

M. I remember Polly had speech therapy and help from Mrs H. Was she on the SEN register?

S. Yes she was SEN stage 2 and Robert was on SEN stage 1, having been identified as being 'more able' and we're currently seeking a statement for Polly in year 4.

c). Can you briefly describe how you set up an activity for the children to do an activity, directed or informal e.g. draw a person or a SATs task.

K. We ask the children to draw a picture of themselves at school. Only pencils are provided and it's done without any teacher input...the teacher sits with one child at a time in a small group and encourages the child to talk about their picture while they are working. For the SATs writing task- the children have previously written a story plan using a given structure. Most children wrote a story based on a story heard, the more able children had a free choice.

d). Can you write a brief description of each picture to contextualise the work and relate it to a topic or NC subject?

S. *We could include the topic walk or outing too.*

K. *Most of the pictures are end of topic assessments that we did in small groups, and I shared later at planning meetings with Elaine & Pat (year group colleagues).*

M. *Can you remember how you worked with the other staff or who they were?*

S. *Yes, the nursery nurses and classroom assistants.*

K. *And students and parents, too.*

4. Why am I presenting their work as a story?

I thought it would make the work more interesting by making a book- All about us, by Polly and Robert. Not produced by the children at any one time, but instead over time i.e. 3 years to show their progress. Also I need to find a way to explain how it's done in infant schools.

S. *It shows how the children often made their own books at the writing tables.*

K. *Are you making 2 books, one for each child or one book about both children so you can compare and see the difference in their achievements?*

M. *One book would be better, then I thought I could incorporate the text from your descriptions... Thought it would show our child-centred approach to literacy, positive purposes of it, the sense of celebration of a child's own achievements, boost their self-esteem, sense of pleasure, communication between children and adult?*

S. *Yes, it's very practical too, and the children liked making books.*

K. *How about including something about literacy underpinning all other areas... Communication is an important aspect... Literacy as a life skill that was our emphasis.*

5. Have you got any other suggestions, please?

S. *It's interesting how looking at the pictures and talking makes it easy to remember things.*

K. *You could write an introduction to the book, by describing the set up, how the classes were organised, how the parents were involved etc... you taught the children quite a lot too whilst we did other things around the school...you need to put in things about an infant school... we know what the pictures mean 'cos we know the children and we did the teaching and the assessment.*

At the end of our meeting, Sue and Kate said that they would like to take Polly and Robert's work and assessment records and the prompt sheet, to make more notes before our next meeting, July 1999. Sue and Kate met together to talk about the two children and Kate also contacted Janet, who had taught Polly and Robert in year R, (reception year which was the children's first year in school). This was unexpected but

really helpful, as it meant that I would now have information about the children's learning for each of the three school years.

Sue and I met for the second meeting (July 1999). Kate was unable to come, but had sent her written notes. Sue showed me their additional notes, which were very detailed. They had each written 2x A4 pages about Polly and Robert, their classroom organisation and curriculum planning and they had annotated each piece of work very thoroughly. Sue and I discussed the written comments that clearly showed two main issues. Firstly the vital first hand experience and knowledge that they had about Polly and Robert that I did not have. Secondly the vital first hand experience and knowledge about classroom organisation, the curriculum, the teaching and learning and assessment process that I did not have. They were experienced class teachers and I was head teacher who occasionally taught the children. I use an extract from Sue and Kate's written comments to illustrate this very important point:

S. Polly was very immature in reception, and cried a lot, I recall her screaming during the theatre production (Cinderella). She started to mature during year 1 and her work really improved then she regressed and showed attention seeking behaviour...she really liked Mrs Harris helping her with reading, 'cos it was 1-1 with an adult, she liked that. Robert was one of a twin. His sister was in the same class... it became more apparent that Robert was becoming more able than Verity, during nursery and reception it was thought that Verity was more able and she was certainly more confident and he was the quiet one. Polly was very affectionate...she had two child minders each day. She had breakfast with Mrs Fry and stayed until 6pm then another child minder collected her until mum came to take her home to bed.

K. This is the picture for the town and country topic and the story was 'The Town and Country Mouse'. It was the end of topic assessment following the local walks and the trip to Chapel Farm, Surrey. 'Able to state similarities and differences between contrasting parts of the environment' (National Curriculum Geography).

S. We used the walk to the woods and Millers pond to discuss the animals seen and to compare and contrast the features, then the children drew the picture and I assessed it and moderated with Linda, Ann & Bev, year group colleagues. (National Curriculum Science AT2, Life Processes and Living Things).

By reflecting on the collaboration with my teacher colleagues Sue and Kate I realised the great importance of their contributions to my research. I was surprised how easily

we had remembered significant events and aspects about Polly and Robert's learning, development and attainment. I was surprised how the exercise had confirmed our shared educational values of keeping the child central to the teaching and learning process. The importance of the development of language and literacy skills in young children and the emphasis that I had placed on the children's learning and enjoyment from storybooks at Oak Tree. Together we re-iterated the importance of the child-teacher relationship, the sensitivity and awareness of the teacher to meet each child's individual learning needs and the integral part played by their assessments in the teaching and learning process. Also by looking at Polly and Robert's work we emphasised how different the two children were and how their approaches to learning and the implication for teaching were quite different.

Research colleagues had highlighted what information was missing from the initial version of the storybook. Sue and Kate had enabled me to present a more holistic picture of Polly and Robert's learning, development and attainment. The new storybook was the outcome of inviting a critical response from research colleagues and triangulated memory work with two teacher colleagues (*critical friends*) Sue and Kate.

The revised storybook

I prepared the revised storybook by adding six examples of Robert's work and called it - *All About Us*, by Polly and Robert. I included a new title page, a contents page, three page dividers to separate the children's work into the three year groups (years Reception/1/2). I wrote a new introduction to provide some general information about Polly and Robert's experiences during the three out of four years that they attended Oak Tree. I constructed the text to accompany each pair of examples of Polly and

Robert's work around the definition of assessment by Drummond (2003 & 1993), which clearly describes the assessment process as it takes place in the classroom. She sets out three crucial questions that I explain below:

What is there to see? This first question refers to the fact that teachers need to be able to access children's understanding in the best possible way. They need to be constantly, but sensitively talking to children about their work. The teachers need to maximise the opportunities for children to achieve in the first place and demonstrate their achievement in the second. In order to see a teacher must allow herself time to observe children in both the more structured classroom activities and situations and in the play situations provided. It is often here that young children may be operating at their highest levels clearly demonstrating their achievement. (This relates to what the reader might see in front of her when she looks for the first time at the story book and sees Polly and Robert's drawings and writing);

How best can we understand what we see? This second question is the next stage. Teachers need to be able to create a climate in the classroom where they are not simply hypothesising about the reasons for children's understanding but have as much information as possible about this coming from the children themselves. Teachers also need to be clear about their own learning intentions for children and the learning possibilities within activities and areas of provision so that they know what is potentially achievable and what they would like the children to learn. Flexibility is essential because what a child does and achieves might not be directly in line with what they expect, but might be just as important and significant for that child (This relates to what the reader of the storybook might understand about the context of each child's piece of work, and the teacher's assessment of it); and

How can we put our understanding to good use? This third question is the key factor in moving the children forwards. If a teacher has answered the first two questions, then

the information gathered should give clear indications as to what should be the next move in helping a child to continue to progress. The purpose of the assessment process is to make explicit the children's achievements, celebrate their achievements with them, then help them to move forward to the next goal (as shown in the book showing examples of the two children's work and the fictional adult text). Observing the children is an important tool for teachers, but it is always important to share with the child, in order to ensure that your interpretation does not become judgemental. When shared with the child assessment information is more likely to result in a raising of standards because the child is more focused, motivated and aware of his/her own capabilities and potential. Good assessment practice enables children to be able to fulfil their learning potential and raises self-esteem and self-confidence. (This relates to what the reader may appreciate from the storybook about the possible next steps that are planned by the teachers in each child's learning).

Sue and I met in October 1999 to share the revised storybook. There were four reasons why I needed her vital feedback:

- 1). To check the accuracy and clarity of my descriptive text that provided the background information about the organisation of Oak Tree and the approach to assessment and curriculum.¹⁰
- 2). To check the context for the learning activity for each piece of work.¹¹
- 3). To check the references that I had made to Polly and Robert's assessment records. The records included the class teacher's formative records, individual

¹⁰ Oak Tree infant school brochure, Teaching and Learning and Assessment policies 1996-1997.

¹¹ Oak Tree infant school 4-year curriculum framework and 4 year cycle of ½ termly topic plans 1996-1997.

records of achievements, Park LEA Baseline Assessment and developmental reading and writing frameworks and Key Stage 1 Assessment.¹²

4). To check the details about the relationship between the three teachers and two children.

For ethical reasons I used fictional names to maintain the anonymity of the children, adults, the school and the LEA and retained the child's first name only on their work. By including the additional information I had expanded the data that I had used in the initial version of the storybook and I again used footnotes to distinguish the source of the data. I include the revised storybook in Appendix 4:p420-473.

Learning from looking at children's work

This chapter shows a significant development in my understanding of a fairer rather a fair assessment through the process of constructing the storybook and deconstructing my own infant practice and making it explicit to others.

A broad perspective on assessment

In Chapter 1 of this thesis I critically examined the various and contrasting dimensions of educational assessment. I examined the high profile of assessment and the wide range of purposes it is required to achieve. Two distinct models of assessment clearly emerged. The first model is about teacher assessment that enhances the teaching and learning process (Clarke, 2005, 2003 & 2001); the second model involves the monitoring and measurement of performance for accountability purposes that is required by the DfEE (1999, 1995).

¹² The assessment records from Polly and Robert's personal portfolios.

As an infant head teacher between 1989-1997, I was required to implement assessment as an objective and mechanical process of measurement, checklists, precision and incontrovertible facts and figures (Drummond, 2003 & 1993:13). I had difficulty in looking at National Curriculum (NC) Key Stage 1 Standard Assessment Task (SATs) statistics in isolation and the comparative judgements that were made about schools, the teachers, the children and the families they served. SATs statistics gave a very superficial picture and emphasised children's attainment without considering other contributory factors that might affect children's learning, development and attainment (Mortimore, 1998:299). Because I preferred to give children an opportunity to succeed rather than to be failed, I have chosen to work with young children in an assessment rather than a testing culture (Clarke, 2005; Assessment Reform Group, 2002, 1999 & 1998; Gipps, 1994).

My approach to assessment, teaching and learning in the early years is closely related to the Latin origins of assessment, from the Latin verb *assidere*, which means to sit beside and *educare*, which means to bring out.¹³ In my experience, to find out what young children really know, it is necessary to be close to them, perhaps moving sensitively alongside them and engaging in conversation as they pursue their learning. I very much like the idea of being close enough to children in order to understand them. The children that I have taught have not always been able to tell me what they know; accessing their learning has been a combination of observation, communication, involvement and interpretation. Not surprisingly, I began the research for this chapter with a specific focus on the first model of assessment described above, which I call *assessment for learning*.

Writing this chapter enabled me to clarify a great deal about how I sustained my practice as an infant head teacher and about the values that underpinned my thinking and actions. The research led me to see the classroom assessment of

¹³ Cross reference Chapter 1 The debate on Educational Assessment; reviewing the literature.

children's work as a richer and broader practice of educational assessment than is implied in just one of the two models. Part of my learning from this stage of the research has been to recognise that I have always taken a broad perspective on assessment and have valued aspects of the second model of assessment, which I call *assessment of learning alongside assessment for learning*.

Three action research cycles

Formative assessment has now a very high profile in UK primary schools, featuring in - at least - the DfES Primary Strategy & Every Child Matters (2003); Ofsted (2005) & QCA Assessment for Learning website. Like, Clarke (2005) and Black et al (2003) I believe that the continuing and developing interest in the subject is a consequence of its unique characteristic in the UK. Rather than being just another government initiative, teachers are continually defining formative assessment, as they trial various strategies, come up with their own ideas and delve deeper into certain aspects as they gain more insight. The development of formative assessment, therefore, is really a result of action research undertaken by thousands of teachers in their own classrooms. This model of professional development is now respected as probably the most powerful way of affecting change, and Learning Network Communities have been set up all over the country to encourage this way of working (Clarke 2005:1). I have been privileged to be part of the model of action research put forward by McNiff, Lomax & Whitehead (2003 & 1996). In many ways I see the work of the Kingston Action Research Group (KHARG), the Kingston University PhD Group and the teachers at Oak Tree as a forerunner to this national model of professional development.¹⁴

¹⁴ Cross reference Chapter 2 Accessing Tacit Knowledge of Infant School Practice: methodology and epistemology.

The research in this chapter is presented as three action reflection cycles. In the first cycle I set about examining data drawn from children's portfolios. I wanted to focus on their actual work rather than judgements about it, because I believe that children's work must be central to any judgement about their learning, development and attainment. At this stage of my research I was influenced by the notion of assessment as a *way of seeing* (Brainard, in Goodwin:164) and the idea of assessment as:

The ability to see children, to perceive what they can do in the hope of understanding how they learn (Drummond, 2003 & 1993:187).

For this reason I wanted to present children's work free of others' judgements so that the reader could experience *a way of seeing* for herself. I decided to present children's work in a way that was conducive to my own understanding of infant practice. I presented the work as a storybook to highlight the importance that I placed on children's enjoyment and their learning from storybooks at Oak Tree.

In the second cycle I shared the storybook with research colleagues to gain their critical responses. This led me to see the limitations of the storybook and highlighted some of the general confusions surrounding assessment. The storybook provided insufficient information and how assessment and learning happen in practice. Because I worked intuitively with young children and I had not clarified the contextual knowledge, a great deal of what I intended to communicate was too implicit for anybody outside the situation to understand. I had not clearly represented children's learning, development and attainment. Having collectively explored and analysed the storybook with research colleagues I reflected at length on their feedback. I decided to improve the storybook so that it would represent children's learning, development and attainment quite explicitly.

In the third cycle I sought the help of two teachers who worked with me at Oak Tree (my two critical friends) to help me modify the storybook. I wanted to draw upon their general expertise and knowledge about young children, and also their specific knowledge of the school's assessment procedures and curriculum planning. This part of the research process clearly constituted action research as it is generally construed, although other parts of this research rely on a reflective practice model. The teachers and I worked together in co-researcher mode to explore the judgements that we made about the children's work and which had been recorded in the children's portfolios. We did this with a clear commitment to using our insider knowledge about the criteria and standards of assessment that we used.

The revised storybook *All About Us by Polly and Robert*, showed the outcome of the third cycle of the action research when I reflected carefully on the data produced in cycles one and two. The revised storybook made explicit much of the information that I had in my head, but did not share in the first storybook. In order to frame the text of the revised storybook I used the three questions advocated by Drummond (2003 & 1993:187) – *What is there to see? How best can we understand what we see? How can we put our understanding to good use?* These three questions reinforced my intuitive knowledge that observation is the foundation of early years education and that once we have trained ourselves to become keen observers, we can turn our attention to becoming shrewd interpreters of what we observe (Irwin & Bushnell, 1980:3). This has been my own experience as an infant teacher. So assessment for me comes back to observing children from where they were on day one when they start school and I can never say that I knew all about that child. The next day I saw a different facet of that child. I felt that children could never be pinned down and defined. I think I saw them as an ever-evolving jigsaw puzzle and the picture became clearer and

clearer, but ultimately the puzzle would never be finished. All I hoped for was to look, describe and put in some more pieces. I worked with young children; I played, experimented and talked with them; I observed children and knew that I was privileged to witness a fascinating, inspiring and often puzzling and surprising process; I saw them learn as I learned. I embarked on the process that Drummond calls assessment.

Claims to knowledge

What have I learnt from engaging in the action research process? I feel that I can claim to have achieved the purpose of this chapter, which was to show how teacher assessment happened in practice and through that to find out how learning from children's work can contribute to a fairer assessment of their learning, development and attainment.

Claim 1

I have shown the development in my own learning and understanding in the process of deconstructing my own infant practice and making it explicit to others. I have attempted to look under the surface of classroom assessment to discover the hidden layers of meaning. I have looked at the unique meanings that each piece of children's work offers to diverse readers – the child herself, the class teachers, the research colleagues and myself. I have looked at the meanings for myself as I engage with the various perspectives from colleagues and theorists on the central issues:

What constitutes a meaningful response to children's work?

How does this contribute to the development of my understanding of a fairer assessment of children's learning and attainment?

I have investigated the nature of my own responses to young children's drawings and emergent writing, while looking at ways of responding meaningfully in the process of assessment for learning. I was familiar with this approach through my own preferred to teaching young children and furthermore, it is supported by the works of many early years specialists (Clarke, 2005, 2003 & 2001; Hall & Burke, 2003; Edgington, 1998; Hurst, 1997). However, with the exception of Graham & Johnson (2003) and D'Arcy (see below) I know of no other research studies that relate specifically to the personally meaningful responses teachers make to young children's drawings and emergent writing that is focused on whole child development rather than principally on evaluation, as is the case for National Curriculum assessment purposes.

My representation of the children's work through my storybook has parallels with the work of D'Arcy (1998). She investigated the attention teachers gave to children's story writing as they looked at writing techniques, rather than writing content, that would engage the reader with the story. She was critical of the practice in which children's stories were *looked at* rather than *looked into*. Her research showed the enormous benefits for children's learning of teachers making aesthetically engaged and appreciative responses to children's stories. I am equally sure that the teachers in D'Arcy's research gave a fairer assessment of children's learning.

Claim 2

I have illustrated how young children's learning, development and attainment actually happened in practice (through the storybook) and how that practice was

determined by my educational values, when I was head teacher at Oak Tree. I found that I was constantly challenging the particular educational values that I brought to that leadership role. Although the school policies and practices were developed through consultation and involvement with all staff I feel that they reflect my educational values and what is at the heart of a *fairer* assessment. I have argued, like Drummond (2003 & 1993) that:

The inside of a teachers' head can be read as a conceptual map of the outcomes striven for in everyday practice (Drummond 1993:167).

Through deconstructing the storybook and writing about this chapter I have illuminated five important educational values:

- Recognising and valuing the uniqueness of each individual's needs. I see this as the only certain safeguard against children's failure, the only certain guarantee of children's learning and development. Like Drummond I feel that this is essential at the beginning of formal education; to provide the secure foundation of life-long learning rather than early disaffection from learning.
- Believing that the needs of the whole child should be central to the learning process. This should be based on what the child can do, not what she cannot do, so that each child has a real chance of success rather than failure. The importance of understanding this principle of early childhood is widely documented by the Early Years Curriculum Group (1989:3) and Edgington (1998:158).
- Recognising that the developmental, as well as, the summative aspect of assessment, which includes the diagnostic and formative elements of assessment contributes to the development of appropriate planning for children's development as individuals. I empathise with Hurst (1997:84)

who champions the persistence of practitioners to suit education and assessment to the child, rather than satisfy the politician's emphasis on accountability assessment.

- Believing passionately that children's learning demands a broad view of child development, including the social, emotional, creative, physical and attitude dimensions of children's learning and therefore a holistic view of assessment. Other research has shown that non- academic achievement, if celebrated and used to raise pupil self-esteem, has an impact on children's academic achievement (QCA, 2005; Gilbert, 2002; Hook & Vass, 2000; Clark, 1998). I feel this is particularly pertinent to the school contexts in which I have worked, which have been ethically and socially mixed settings and often in areas of economic deprivation.
- Believing that assessment should be a shared and reciprocal activity between child and teacher, rather than a judgemental activity that results in a one-way view of children's achievement. This follows the recommendations of QCA (2003) and the writings of Clarke (2005), Hall & Burke (2003), Dann (2002) and Moriarty & Siraj-Blatchford (1998) who suggest that when assessment is a shared activity, positive relationships are established to enable children to understand the main purpose of their learning and achievements and to enable teachers to appreciate what the children really know and understand.

Claim 3

My third claim is that I am beginning to recognise and clarify my own uncertainties about what might constitute a fair assessment. Previously I was unable to articulate this, although the idea of a fair assessment was at the heart of my

practice as a head teacher, and central to my research. The research has raised a number of questions about this, for which this chapter is a partial answer only:

Which way do I look at a fair assessment?

To whom should it be fair?

Is there a fair way of looking at attainment and progress?

What areas of learning and attainment can be fairly assessed?

Is teacher assessment fairer than tests?

I think that a fairer assessment for young children must be one that promotes learning by showing what children can do and not one that restricts learning by showing what children cannot do. I definitely feel a fairer assessment should emphasise children's knowledge, understanding and life experience. This encompasses my view of a holistic model that has multi-perspectives and looks at promoting the development of the whole child and not just a narrow competency and fragmented model that measures children's attainment. It would seem that the child's personal portfolio, with its record of work in a range of areas over time, presents a fairer picture of a child's learning and development. This is in contrast to their performance in a test that only shows their attainment in one area of learning at one moment in time. It would seem that a SATs writing test, which tests the technical skills of writing in three short paragraphs that must have a beginning, middle and end, does not test the creative side of story, telling for a slow writer whose accompanying verbal explanations are not sought. SATs results give a partial picture of the child's achievement and viewed in isolation present an uninformed judgement of a child or school and so constitute an unfair assessment.

If children's work can form the basis for the assessment of their attainment in Science, why are SATs required for English and Mathematics?

Surely using children's work gives a fairer assessment?

But teacher assessment is only fair if teachers can make consistent and informed judgements about children's learning, development and attainment that best fits their performance. Teachers can be biased in the way they deliver assessment or tests to young children. I know that as an infant teacher I tried to get the best performance from young children by reassuring them, helping them and even offering them a second chance. I was concerned about them failing or being labelled and I often hid the fact that they were being tested. Also I preferred to assess young children's learning either individually or in small groups and so it was inevitable that I might have varied the way in which I introduced the task.

What sort of visual or verbal clues did I give?

How may this have influenced how a child drew a picture?

How did the child's response influence my view of the picture?

These were imponderables.

Does this mean that it was an unfair assessment?

I thought that individual children whom I knew well needed to have things explained to them in different ways or presented in different ways because of their own backgrounds, abilities and immediate past history.

Was it fair?

Certainly there is a real tension in practice about fairness.

An important structural support of teacher assessment is provided by the curriculum and planning procedures of a school. This chapter has indicated some of the structures that supported the production of a child's assessment portfolio at Oak Tree. I have suggested that good classroom organisation and cooperative teaching are necessary for a fairer assessment of young children's learning,

development and attainment. I think assessment should be planned as an integral part of the teaching and learning process, as a normal activity, without pressure and time constraints, and not in an unfamiliar test situation. I realise how much I valued assessment because of the large amount of time that I spent on it when I was head teacher. I was not content to use less time consuming whole class test approach because I thought this was less fair on the children. I supported a model of assessment that required teachers to make time to discuss individual children's work in the hurly-burly of the classroom, to sit down and talk with other teachers to moderate the outcomes and to link it to planning. A fairer assessment is about teachers making consistent and informed judgements about children's learning development and attainment together. This is part of whole school planning for the whole child and cannot be done in isolation by external agencies.

On reflection, a fair assessment is too complex for an either/or comparison of fair/unfair or good/bad. Certainly in the infant school context, it is unhelpful to see one form of assessment being better or fairer than another. What is needed there, is a more broad-based, analytical and problematised approach that takes account of the wider effect of assessment on learning and teaching, one that does not stand apart from learning and teaching but stands in an active interaction with the whole curriculum. What I am beginning to think is that we need to foster a system that supports multiple methods of assessment, while at the same time making sure that each one is used appropriately.

Social justice and fairness

In this chapter my educational values related to social justice in education have been challenged as I have questioned justice, fairness, ethics and equity in education. I feel that I have contributed to the debates about assessment and I am

engaging with alternative viewpoints. I feel this contribution has the potential to contribute to the improvements of education for all (practice and policy) particularly making a difference for disadvantaged groups. I am confronting debates between traditional standardised tests and other assessment methods and the possible effects on young children. Goodwin (1997) shows how assessment, equity and inclusion are inextricably intertwined. She writes:

Assessment by standardised tests often labels poor and minority children in ways that exclude them from opportunities while failing to measure their full potential. (Goodwin, 1997:xi)

I worry that standardised tests only provide a snapshot judgement on a child and I favour strategies of assessment that include rather than exclude children to create and value a diverse community of learners.

At this stage I am only beginning to articulate my own commitment, vision and understanding of social justice in relation to educational assessment. I found the three principles of social justice by Griffiths (1998) useful in the clarification process:

- *There is no right answer. Establishing social justice is less about the outcomes than about process and includes processes that might overturn themselves.* I have found this to be problematic as I research the topic of educational assessment where outcomes of results related to accountability assessment seem to be preferred and are a powerful aspect rather than the process model of teacher assessment where incompleteness is recognised.
- *Each individual is valuable and recognised as an important part of a community as a whole. On the other hand there is recognition that no individual exists apart from her community.* I have struggled with this principle since I recognise the uniqueness of the individual but I have

experienced that the interests of the child could be sacrificed to those of the community. This has been shown by published test results, schools placed in league tables or schools having selective admission policies.

- *We create ourselves in and against community as persons with gender, social class, race, sexuality and (dis)abilities.* I have struggled with individual empowerment and structural injustice that have the questions of power and resources available to individuals or sectors of the community. I am committed to and feel that I have a responsibility for working with disadvantaged communities to help them find their voice. I have grappled with the structural injustices of statutory national assessment procedures and their uses.

I realise that by trying to understand the place of assessment in education it has placed moral, philosophical, organisational and pedagogical demands on my thinking. This chapter has highlighted the more difficult aspects as being the moral and philosophical thinking. Drummond (2003 & 1993) emphasises the moral issues in the assessment of young children and she describes the practice of an effective assessment as requiring:

A thorough understanding of the concepts of rights, responsibility and power. (Drummond, 2003 & 1993:167).

She refers to two main areas of concerns, which are the interest of the children and the choices made by teachers. I can see parallels with my work in looking for a fairer assessment and I can empathise with her feelings of responsibility. I have always had a sense of responsibility for the children that I have taught and I have tried to work for their best interests. I have considered the entitlement of all children to a worthwhile education and tried to provide it. I appreciate their entitlement to honesty, trust and respect as human beings rather than just young children without a voice. In searching for ways to make the assessment process

fairer I now know that I am committed to recognising the children's rights for fairness in education. The moral issues of teaching highlight a real tension that I have with finding ways of assessing children's learning development and attainment that honours their rights and interests and enhances the worthiness of their educational experiences. Drummond endorses this tension:

The choices teachers make in assessing their children's interests are paramount. Assessment is the process that must enrich their lives, their learning and development. Assessment must work for children. (Drummond, 2003 & 1993:13)

Fennimore (in Goodwin, 1997:241) writes about assessment and advocacy for children. She states that:

Children depend on adults to help them discover all the capability and potential they possess. The unjust use of testing and assessment denies children full knowledge of their own power to learn and grow. Children especially those who are thus cheated are not in a position to advocate for themselves; only adults committed to justice can press their needs forward in school and society. These advocates are willing to become protective voices of children soundlessly lost in a maze of institutional practices... Advocacy for a fair assessment is central to the concept of democratic schooling. All children are well served by democratic schools that protect their rights to excellence in education; all children are harmed in some way by discriminatory practices. (Goodwin, 1997:241).

The concept of advocacy again emphasises my feeling of responsibility for promoting and protecting the developmental learning needs of each individual child and all children in general. It confirms my aim as a teacher, which is to know every child well, know what each child needs and to make sure those needs are met. A fairer assessment of children's learning, development and attainment must include the issues of social justice in education.

I have found very little writing in the concept of a fairer assessment and no reported literature that directly relates to a holistic assessment of young children. Gipps & Murphy (1994) write about how far assessment is fair in relation to gender and ethnic groups and they examine the reasons for differences in performance in

various forms of assessment. They approach the issues of equity and fairness through a focus on the outcomes of various assessments and tests in order to examine the extent of observed group differences in performance and to understand what these might reflect. They appear to be looking at the validity of assessment practice and so are looking at technical issues of assessment. Swatton (1995) also writes about the technical aspects of design of a fair test and he describes the notions of validity and reliability related to National Curriculum Key Stage 3 Science assessment. Strand (1997) examines the use and interpretation of schools' tests and examination results. He writes about the value-added analysis of the school effects when considering pupil progress at Key Stage 1 and introduces the notion of fair indicators of school performance. Conner (1991) and Gipps (1994) include assessment of young children when writing about standardised performance assessment and its appropriateness and fairness. They recognised some very specific issues related to the age of the child being assessed and which indicate that very young children require a different format for an assessment programme. Wragg (2001) writes about the concept of fairness related to fair opportunities for children to learn. He suggests that the concept of fairness does not require exactly equal amounts of time from the teacher for every single child, but rather a considered appraisal of who would benefit from informal assessment on different occasions and in various contexts. A child who is struggling with a task or concept today might, after a teacher's intervention, be confidently surging ahead with it tomorrow and need less immediate help.

I feel that I can offer this chapter as a part of my original contribution to educational knowledge, the process of coming to know. I have shown the development in my own learning and understanding in the process of deconstructing my own infant practice and making it explicit to others and through this I have been able to explain my emerging perceptions of a fairer assessment

as a *living education theory*. Clarke (1998:1) writes about the complex picture of the different aspects of planning, teaching, assessment and record keeping strategies. She suggest these strategies form a complete jigsaw when they are used together to form a quality teaching and learning environment. I feel this notion frames the situation too neatly and emphasises the forms, purposes and requirements of assessment rather than the forms, purposes and processes of assessment.

Can there ever be completeness to assessment?

Will all the questions be answered?

This chapter (Learning from children's work: exploring the evidence) has been one jigsaw piece of the multi-layered jigsaw puzzle through which I am representing my research as a whole. I have realised the moral, personal professional and political maze that is present within and between each layer of professional knowledge related to the dimensions of the concept of a fairer assessment. Looking at children's work and learning from it has only represented a small piece of the world of the infant classroom and the assessment of children's learning, development and attainment. The collective analysis of the children's work, presented in this chapter, gave me the opportunity to look critically and appreciatively at the bigger picture that is evolving in the multi-perspectives of the concept of a fairer assessment of children's learning, development and attainment that constitutes the whole thesis.

Chapter 4

Learning from the Infant Curriculum: Exploring the Evidence

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Learning from The Infant Curriculum: Exploring The Evidence

Purpose of chapter

In this chapter I explore the two broad connected issues associated with teaching and learning (Woods, 1996), so that I can learn more about a fairer assessment of children's learning, development and attainment through providing an infant curriculum. As I seek to improve educational achievement I need to have a better understanding of the educational development of our youngest children. The extent of this improvement depends to a large extent on my understanding and skill in providing a curriculum that is appropriate for all children at Oak Tree Infant School. This responsive curriculum, which is based on interactive teaching and learning processes and the observation and assessment of individual children, can inform my thinking about the National Curriculum (Moyle et al, 2003; Hurst, 1997:13).

The Early Years Curriculum has been described and defined by groups of practitioners in almost every local education authority in England and Wales, by large groups such as the Early Childhood forum (1997) and by small groups such as the Early Years Curriculum Group (1992, 1989). It has been analysed by individual writers and writing teams (Blenkin and Kelly (1996, 1981; Bruce, 1991, 1987; Whitehead, 1996). It differs from the National Curriculum and the Desirable Outcomes in basing its criteria of quality on underlying principles based on how young children learn, rather than on definitions of outcomes in terms of knowledge and skills acquired by children. Many practitioners like myself, and the Early Years Curriculum Group showed how principles could be used to interpret the National curriculum requirements (EYCG, 1998).

The Early Years Curriculum is a concept of the curriculum that has influenced generation after generation of practitioners and been developed by them in their turn (Isaacs, 1929, Hadow Committee's definition, Board of Education, 1931). The early years curriculum is based on statements of principle, which arise from a shared value-base giving high priority to what is called developmentally appropriate practice (Bredekamp, 1987) in supporting children's own learning strategies. In spite of the National Curriculum's definition of subject areas to be taught and the different levels of achievement, the practitioner working with children under the age of eight still has, therefore, very important decisions to take. Recent years have seen dramatic changes across the whole range of education provision including the beginning of formal schooling. Versions of a prescribed National Curriculum for Key Stages 1 & 2 (1999, 1997 & 1988) and Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage (2000, 1999 & 1997) with standardised assessment procedures have been set in place. The National Curriculum Handbook states that:

The school curriculum comprises all learning and other experiences that each school plans for its pupils and that the National Curriculum is an important element of the school curriculum (QCA, 1999:10).

In addition the Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage 2000 uses the term curriculum to describe:

Everything children do, see, hear or feel in their setting, both planned and unplanned (QCA, 2000:definition of terms).

This chapter explores, reveals and analyses my practice as an experienced infant head teacher by using different examples of my work. It offers an examination of the range of activities that characterise an infant classroom/school. In common with the work of Gipps, McCallum & Hargreaves (2000,1999) I demonstrate that teaching is a diverse and complex activity with no explicit rules except that teachers should teach and children should learn. The purpose of this chapter is to make sense of such a diverse activity by finding out how to analyse and explain

some of the strategies used by me, an experienced class teacher. I look at some of the key questions about infant school teaching and learning.

How do good teachers teach?

What are the teaching strategies they use to ensure effective learning?

How do they build assessment and feedback into the teaching/learning cycle?

What are the differences between teaching seven year olds and teaching eleven year olds?

What is the difference between, what are the dilemmas and tensions of teaching pre and post national curriculum? (Hayes, 2000).

My research is different from Gipps, McCallum and Hargreaves who sought to describe a range of teaching, assessment and feedback practice used in primary classrooms in order to find out what makes a good primary school teacher. Gipps, McCallum and Hargreaves based their book on research that was carried out in 1997 and I wonder if their work was subsumed under or written in relation to determining standards or competences for the advanced skills teacher status (ATS) that was introduced by the DfEE in 1997. In my research, I explore the moral and philosophical possibilities to find out the important issues of learning and teaching that may contribute to a fairer assessment of children's learning, development and attainment. I intend to explore the essential link between 1) a teacher's understanding and hidden values regarding the infant curriculum, and 2) a fairer way of assessing children learning, development and attainment in relation to it (Drummond, 2003 & 1993; Woods, 1996; Alexander, (1992).

The chapter is divided into two parts, the first dealing with self-study methodology using critical incident to explore my own values and practices in providing the infant curriculum and the second presenting a review of literature in relation to the infant curriculum.

Part 1

Self-study and critical incident

In this chapter I use a reflective, self-study method to explore my own personal and professional values and beliefs and aspects of my own practice as an infant teacher/head teacher. This method is located within the critical action research perspective of Lomax & Whitehead (1998). I use autobiographical incidents of past classroom practice as an alternative technique to fictionalised story to critically explore my own tacit knowledge of the infant school curriculum by exposing my professional values.¹ Tripp suggests that the development and improvement of professional judgement through the diagnosis and interpretation of critical incidents is another alternative that will lead to what he calls diagnostic teaching (Tripp, 1993:7).

I feel the critical incident technique is particularly relevant to my research methodology as it helps me to collaboratively analyse my practice in a scholarly and academic fashion to produce expert interpretations upon which to base and justify my professional judgements. It enables me to make observations of present teaching practices and relate them to the past autobiographical incidents that lie behind them. By examining incidents in my practice I reveal things that I could not otherwise be able to recall. In my research I seek the presence of the past as a way of illuminating, articulating, understanding and gaining control over my professional development, judgement and practice (Tripp, 1993:112).

Tripp puts forward the idea of a critical incident analysis that is social in what it critiques and how one critiques it. The idea of the analysis is to raise questions about how people should behave towards each other in a socially just society. Such an idea will often challenge the judgements and values revealed by general reflection. In the literature the approach is often called critical because it comes

¹ See Chapter 7 Conclusion Creating a Living Educational Theory about Assessment in the Infant School.

from what is called critical theory, but he distinguishes the approach from many other ways in which one can be critical, he uses the term socially critical. This would seem to empathise with the underlying principles of critical action research that I chose for my research and the critical community that I worked with at Kingston University.²

The term critical theory is used to refer to the work of a group of socio-political analysts commonly referred to as The Frankfurt School, whose prominent members included Theodore Adorno, Herbert Marcuse and, more recently, Jurgen Habermas. They were all interested in the idea of a more just society in terms, not just of all people having equal access to the good things of life, but also and perhaps more importantly, of people being in a cultural, economic and political control of their lives. They argued that these goals could only be achieved through emancipation, a process by which oppressed and exploited people became sufficiently empowered to transform their circumstances for themselves by themselves. The work of Haug and others (1987)³ seems to parallel this earlier work of The Frankfurt School. It is called critical theory because they saw the route to emancipation as being a kind of self-conscious and rational critique which calls into question all social relations, in particular those of and within the discursive practices of power, especially, for Habermas, technical rationalism.

Aspects of this work have been taken into education in a number of different ways but most notably by Paulo Freire (1972) in his work with oppressed minorities which gave rise to the term critical pedagogy meaning teacher-learning from within the principles of critical theory. Michael Apple (1982), Henry Giroux (1983) and Shirley Grundy (1982) amongst others have provided comprehensive, accessible and succinct accounts of the nature and working of critical theory in their work on

² See Chapter 2 Accessing Tacit Knowledge of Infant School Practice: a Methodology.

³ As above.

the political, institutional and bureaucratic control of knowledge, learners and teachers.

Another group to use critical theory in education comprises those working in action research, a movement, which has been particularly strong in Australia largely initiated by Stephen Kemmis and developed by others, particularly Shirley Grundy and Robin McTaggart. It is with this last approach that Tripp's own principal interests lie and which has led him to the following definition:

Socially critical analysis in education is informed by principles of social justice, both in terms of its own ways of working and in terms of its outcomes in and orientation to the community. It involves strategic pedagogic action on the part of classroom teachers aimed at emancipation from overt and covert forms of domination. In practical terms, it is not simply a matter of challenging the existing practices of the system, but of seeking to understand what makes the system be the way it is and challenging that, whilst remaining conscious that one's own sense of justice and equality is itself open to question. (Tripp, 1993:114;modified from Tripp 1990b: 161).

In the socially critical theory literature (and its two most obvious educational offspring, critical pedagogy and critical action research), one finds three different forms of practice, each informed by a different human interest. These are termed the technical, the practical and the emancipatory interests (Grundy, 1982). Although these terms make sense within Habermas' (1972) special sense, many people find them confusing because it seems that the technical and emancipatory are unpractical. Tripp prefers to deal in different kinds of judgement rather than in kinds of practice, using the terms: practical, reflective and socially critical instead and adding diagnostic. Like Tripp, I feel this helps in two ways: one can clearly distinguish the different kinds of analysis necessary to inform each kind of judgement, and it recognises that the kind of analysis employed determines the nature of subsequent practice.

I intend to explore this notion further by following Mohammed's (1998) adaptation of Tripp's critical incident work. I use her educational metaphor of *cameos* for representing qualitative data to recount and discuss significant moments in my

teaching, and to engage with others in a discussion of the issues that will lead me to develop my emerging theories further. I speculate that the cameo is another way of representing one jigsaw piece of the *multi-layered jigsaw puzzle (mljp)*⁴ through which I represent my research as a whole, since Mohammed suggests that each cameo represents a moment of realisation/meaning that is presented in relief against a background of past/present understanding that lends itself to analysis in order to enhance future understanding.

Mohammed claims that cameo moments have a transforming effect, perhaps leading to the breakthrough that facilitates the breakthrough to the next level of understanding (Parker 1998) echoing Vygotsky's zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978). Similarly I seek to unearth layers of meaning or layers of professional knowledge related to the interconnected and emerging dimensions of a fairer assessment. I anticipate that as I write a series of interconnected cameos with my values and beliefs becoming clearer in the process of writing, then there will be similarities with my *mljp*.

Nevertheless, I envisage the background as being different, as I am reversing the process. Since the first layer *mljp* is the background of past/present understanding and the final layer is intended to be a clear explication of my beliefs and values, in the form of being able to express (to myself and others) what is a fairer assessment. At the moment each jigsaw piece appears to be a random fragment with only tenuous links and I try to piece together my own vision of what a fairer assessment may be and how it is an improvement on what exists now. At this stage in my research I visualise the final layer as being one piece of the multi-layered jigsaw puzzle representing a young child experiencing positive educational assessment and being fully respected for his/her own unique identity and talents.

⁴ See Chapter 2 Assessing Tacit Infant School Practice: A Methodology.

Cameos

The research data in this chapter is presented in the form of three cameos or fictionalised stories of change that will contribute to the practical knowledge of the teacher professionalism that relates to the externally imposed curriculum and assessment changes in the infant school and the impact of the changes on children and teachers as people. In my first cameo I highlight the government-initiated changes of the National Curriculum, the effects on personal and institutional cultures for teaching and learning and my responses to them. Like Day (2000:110) I found that few stories of teachers from different phases of education, and with different lengths of service, have yet been documented. I, too, feel that their voices need to be heard to widen the current educational debate by teachers presenting their practitioner knowledge about teaching and learning.

My work parallels Day's approach, as his work with teachers' professional development shows a particular interest in bridging the theory-practice tensions through the development and dissemination of grounded data often referred to as teacher's voice. Day suggests that teachers' voices are an important and under-represented part of the macro debate which focuses on whether educational reforms in England and elsewhere are resulting in the deprofessionalization or technicization of teachers' work or whether they result in reprofessionalization. Day emphasises the importance of quoting extensively from the teachers' stories partly in an attempt to balance the voices read and heard in his paper, and partly because the richness of the teachers own texts illustrates their individual and collective stories far more effectively than abstract academic comment.

My research explores some of the changing personal, professional and political characteristics between a head teacher/class teacher and the school curriculum and its assessment procedures over the past ten years. Like Day's work with researchers and teachers, my work provides contemporary insights and

represents a range of original empirical and conceptual research focusing upon the ideological, social and educational policy contexts, national and local trends and their impact upon school leadership, and the quality of teachers' work in schools.

Cameo no. 1

The cameo *Handa's Surprise* is taken from my direct experience as a support teacher working alongside a class teacher of Year 2 children in an art lesson, in 2001. I chose this particular art lesson because I want to explore how the children were given opportunities to express themselves through their drawings (Cole, 2004). All names, apart from my own, are fictitious as I work within an agreed ethical framework of confidentiality with the class teacher.

The school follows the Qualifications & Curriculum Authority (QCA, 2000) Art & Design Scheme of Work for Key Stages 1&2 that consists of twelve units of work. In key stage 1 units 1A, 1B, 1C, 2A, 2B & 2C are to be taught with allocated teaching times for each unit. The art lesson is part of Unit 2A *Picture This! Year One/Two* and has an expected teaching time of 10-12 hours. The guidelines for Unit 2A explain that children explore an issue or event in their lives. They learn how to use a viewfinder and record their observations and ideas using a variety of methods, including photography and collage. They look and comment on the work of the photographers and illustrators. Unit 2A is divided into three sections Exploring Ideas, Investigating and Making and Evaluating and Developing Work. There are six learning objectives, a range of possible teaching activities, learning outcomes and teaching points to note. The expectations at the end of the unit are that most children will be able to explore ways of framing images; investigate and use drawings, print making, collage and photography to communicate ideas and meanings in their own images; comment on differences in others' work; suggest

ways of improving their own work. The unit formed part of the half-term curriculum plans that had been developed by the three teachers in the year group prior to my appointment to the school. The art lesson described in the cameo was judged to be satisfactory in terms of the evidence gathered and the assessment criteria related to teaching and learning, attainment, attitudes and behaviour that were used by the Ofsted inspector who observed it (Ofsted Inspection, March 2001). Cameo 1 is created from the class teacher's lesson plan.

Handa's Surprise.

QCA Learning objective:

To record from imagination and experience and explore ideas.

Possible teaching activity:

Give the children part of an image from a magazine photograph and ask them to fix this to a larger sheet of paper. Ask them to draw what might be outside the given image.

Learning outcome:

Visualise the whole of an image from a given part

Make drawings and paintings using the visual clues from given images.

Before the art lesson Fiona (the class teacher) reads the story *Handa's Surprise* to the children. The story is about a little girl Handa who puts seven different fruits in a basket to take to her friend Akeyo. But Handa's walk takes her past a variety of animals and the fruits do look very inviting....

Margaret (the support teacher) photocopies and enlarges to (A3) three part-pictures from the storybook for Fiona to use as a visual prompt (image) for the art lesson and pictures for the children to complete. She prepares the children's tables by putting out the pencils pots containing fine drawing pencils, fine colouring pencils and felt pens and a selection of the photocopied pictures. Fiona puts the big storybook on the display stand and fixes the three part-pictures on the easel. The children come into the classroom after the lunch-break ready for the art lesson that is timetabled for one hour. The children sit on the carpet.

Fiona. "Children do you notice anything about these pictures?"

Tom. "There are bits missing."

Fiona. "That's right you can only see ½ of the picture."

Jenny. "I can see a bit of Handa's face."

Tom. "That's the same as the picture on the cover...I can see a bit of the big pineapple in the basket."

Yasmin. "I can't see the mango."

Ben. "That elephant looks funny he's only got one ear."

Fiona. "OK this is what I want you to do...You can each choose a picture and try to draw the missing parts of the picture from your imagination. You can use pencils, coloured pencils or felts. I'll leave the book on the easel in case you would like to look at the pictures...Tom, Yasmin and Ben you three can go and work with Margaret."

The children go to their tables, choose their picture and try to draw the missing parts of their picture. Tom. "I wish we had the paints out today, I like painting my own pictures...I can't draw."

Yasmin. "I want to see the book so I can copy the picture and get it right."

Margaret. "Let's look at the picture you've chosen and see if you can spot the shapes then you can try and draw the whole shapes of each fruit and colour it in."

Ben. "I've got the elephant's head...there's a great big ear. I'm going to draw the other one small...that bit's like a big tooth."

Margaret. "Does anybody know what it's called...it's got a special name."

Tom. "Yes it's a tusk and elephants can kill things with them."

Yasmin. "I'm going to draw the grass...I'm using the felts and mixing the yellow and green like we did with the paints."

The children carry on colouring their pictures until Fiona asks them to pack away at the end of the art lesson.

Below are the examples of the photocopied three part-pictures and the completed work of Tom, Yasmin and Ben (Figure 4.1, 4.2, 4.3 & 4.4).

Figure 4.1 Photocopy of Three Part Pictures

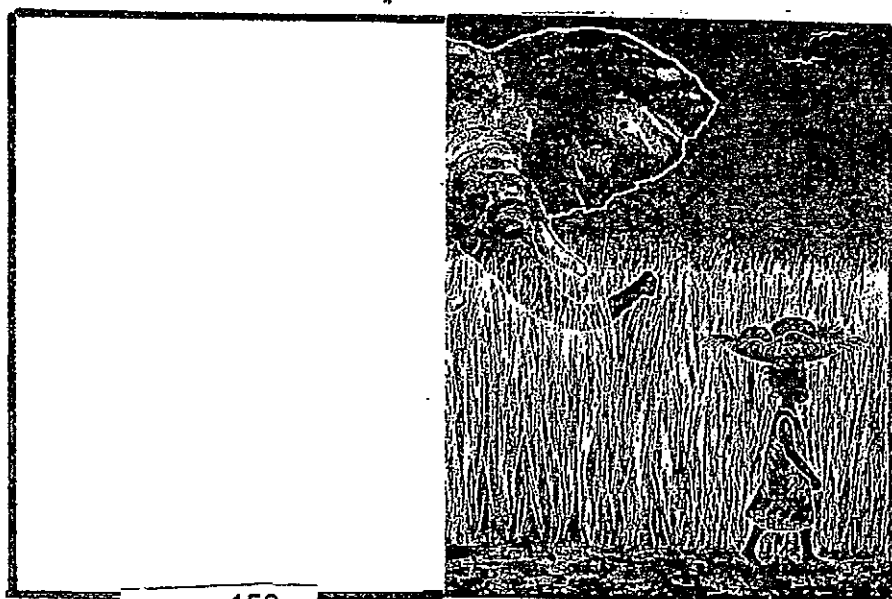
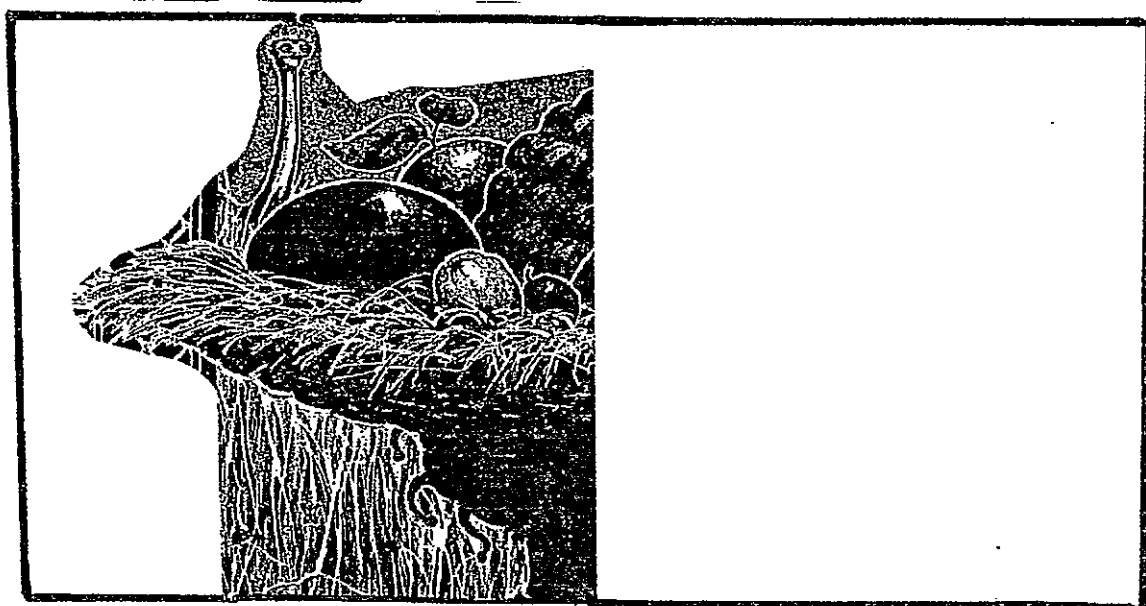
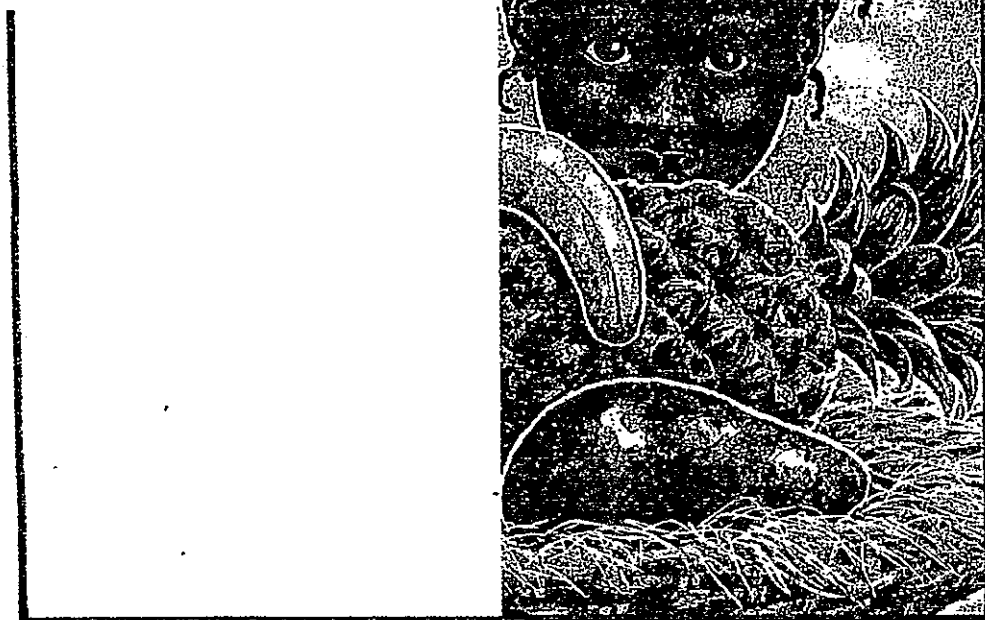


Figure 4.2 Tom's Completed Work

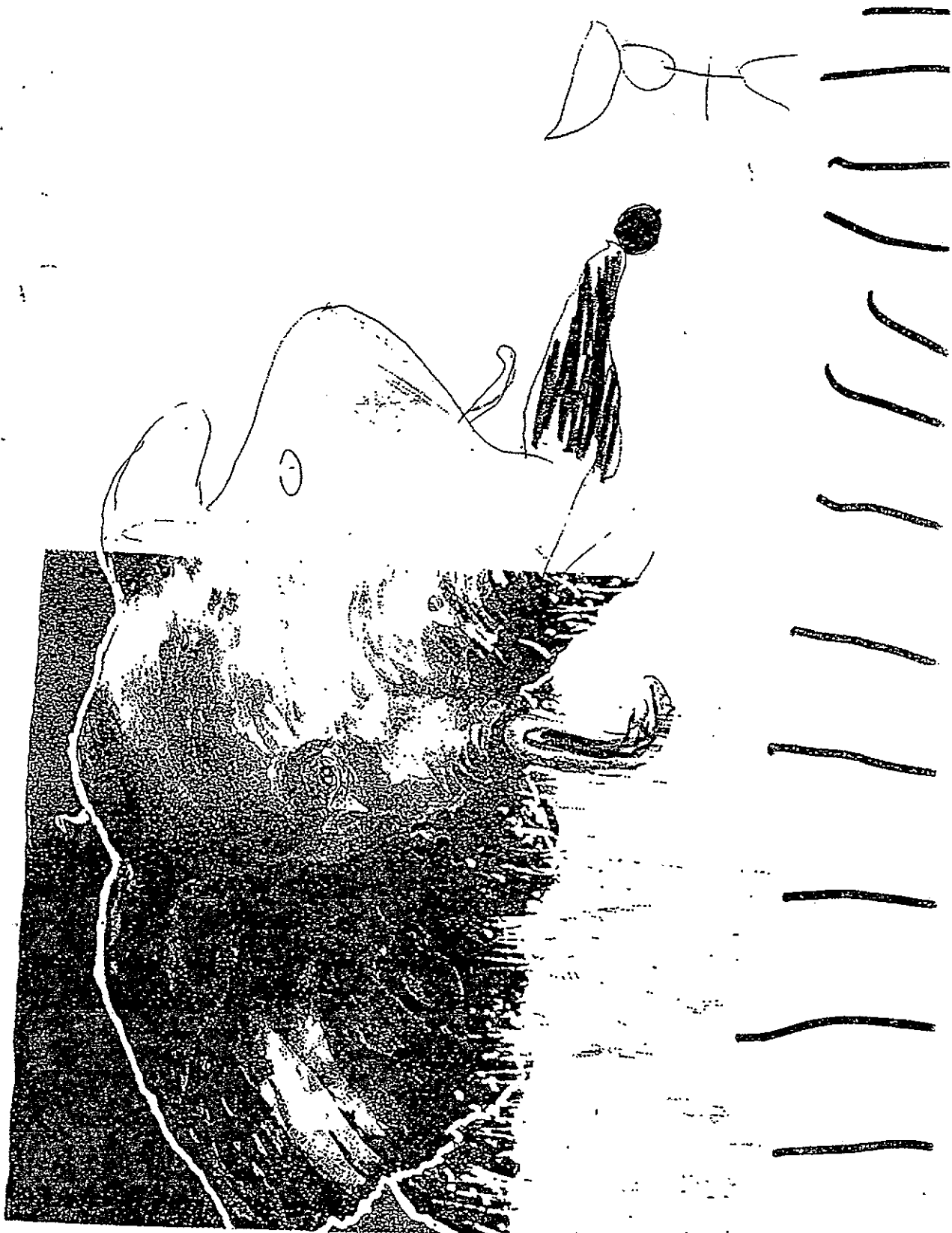


Figure 4.3 Yasmin's Completed Work

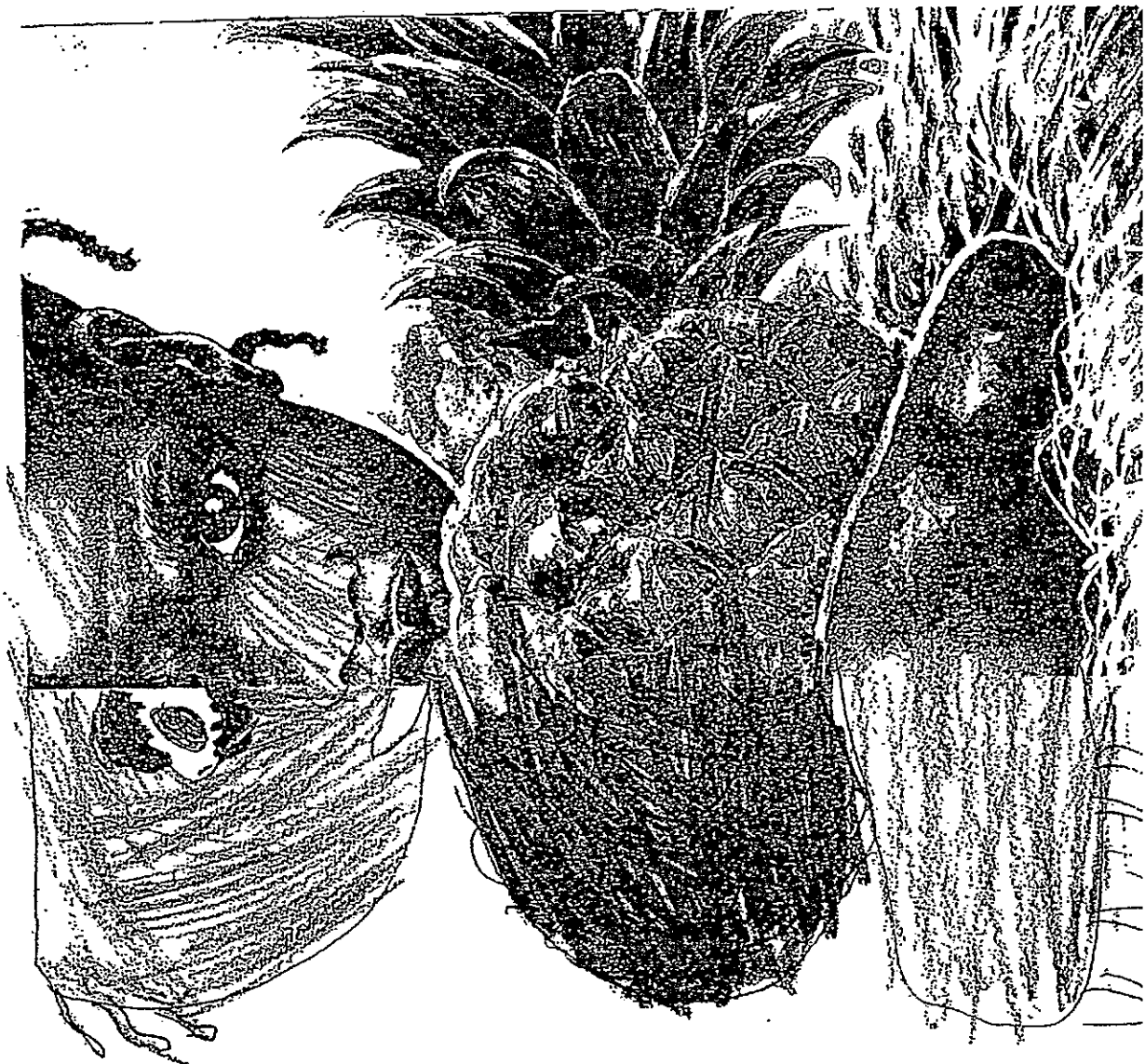


Figure 4.4 Ben's Completed Work



How did I use the cameo?

I decided to share the cameo with a group of teacher researchers for their collective examination of it to move my understanding forward, to clarify my professional values and tacit knowledge of the curriculum and its assessment procedures and to focus on the issues of social justice and rationality. I presented the cameo *Handa's Surprise* to a group of teacher researchers, who were members of an action research support group at Bath University (7 July 2001). Twelve teacher researchers (including only three known research colleagues from Kingston University) and four directors of studies attended the meeting. I circulated a short paper that included the cameo and examples of the part-pictures used with the children, my initial after thoughts from writing the cameo that included references to literature and questions that I posed, a brief overview of my research and a list of possible options for using the cameo. I introduced the group to my work by giving a brief explanation and then listened to their comments. The meeting was taped and later transcribed for the purpose of critical self-reflection, in order for me to further develop my emerging theories on curriculum and assessment, by explicating my hidden values and their affect on my intuitive practice.

Analysing the taped discussion

How did I feel about the use of cameos?

The experience of writing and presenting the first cameo was quite daunting and threatening because this was my initial attempt at representing, generating and analysing data for this aspect of my research and to reassure myself I had included references to research methodology and curriculum literature. Also this was a new knowledge community with many unfamiliar faces, and it felt very different from the safe haven of the community of research colleagues that I had been used to working with at Kingston University. I already knew, from their

previous feedback on my research that I need to show greater clarity in my writing. I needed to find a way of expressing my apparent intuitive approach to teaching and learning and to explore my teaching strategies and find out how I use learning theories intuitively or indirectly. As with the teachers in Gipps' research study (2000) my underlying view is that children learn differently from each other and therefore in any classroom there needs to be a range of teaching and assessment styles. I was reminded by one of the director of studies comments:

P. One of the things I find so interesting in M's work is that she is an expert educator in the infant field who believes absolutely passionately about certain things about how children should be educated and this is to do with something hidden away there and I want to get at that thing, which is not an easy or comfortable thing to do. It's to do with how she views the curriculum, how she views the whole of it, probably how she views humanity. She certainly hasn't got there and she is very reluctant to go down that way as a person...she needs pushing all the time because it's in herself. How do you help a person get it out of himself or herself?

My responses to the comments were - surely I need to help myself, or be able find the way myself. What was the emotional tension within me? It must be really annoying to others in the group; it's certainly very annoying to me! Would this new approach help me to solve that mystery? This was my first opportunity to be involved with or perhaps join a new collaborative enquiry network. I soon learnt that my reservations and contradictions were still being revealed through my writing. The transcript of the tape shows this:

Mo. What I read on the first page, the cameo was captivating, its lovely, it was original... there was something about the way you have chosen very carefully exactly what you wanted to relay to us. You put it up front, I was in there...this was original and special. Then I got to page 3; there seem to be contradictions...I wondered if there was unnecessary reference to others when we are involved in our own thesis, our own knowledge, our own educational epistemology to rely on others' theories is actually to negate the process of your action research enquiry.

I was pleased that the cameo clearly showed how the children were given few opportunities in the lesson to express themselves through their drawings. But I was dismayed that the research group had recognised my ongoing hesitation or

lack of realisation that I was creating my own educational knowledge by describing this significant moment in my teaching.

What did I learn about articulating my own living educational theory?

Je. Tapping into the epistemology is an emerging process and you need to get very familiar with the literature of the people you criticise. Bring them in as reinforcing your point. Find other writers that are being more adventurous...It's a tremendous leap to make when you are secure enough in yourself to think 'I'm here to question etc and to bring these insights into your work- feel passionate and say 'Yeah now I'm jumping off the cliff and I'm not sure if I know what's happening, that's very risky.

Je's comment above reminded me of the quote used by Eisner (1997):

'Come to the edge,' he said. They said, 'We are afraid.' 'Come to the edge,' he said. They came. He pushed them...and they flew (Apollinaire).

And Md's comments in her research (Mohammed, 1998):

I think it is important for action researchers to hold on to their being 'expert' in some area of their practice whilst having the confidence and educational energy to continue to add to their learning in other areas (Mohammed, 1995:1).

I certainly feel I'm on the edge of something unknown, I'm excited by it yet self-conscious and unsure about how to present my research and I too have difficulty keeping the balance or feeling happy about recognising the expert within myself and I am reassured by Salmon's (1992) definition of PhD research:

As authorship that needs personal confidence so that the student can claim ownership and cease to 'hide behind the skirts' of others fearful of making any statement, any judgement that cannot be supported by reference to published work (Salmon, 1992:3).

I was also reminded of the four core values or beliefs that are at the centre of my identity as a teacher and a researcher – relevance to real life, ongoing learning, participation and collaboration.

What can I learn from each child as well what can I do to help each child to learn?

What can I learn from colleagues in the researcher group?

How can we learn together by active participation and mutual support?

How can we help each other to learn as a collaborative group in the classroom or as co-researchers?

Sachs (2000) describes these values when taken together as being:

A socially responsible and active professional that constitutes the fundamentals of a proactive and responsible approach to teacher professionalism (Sachs, 2000:83).

I am finding unearthing this information very uncomfortable. Just as Sachs (Australian National Schools Network/Innovative Links Project between schools and universities for teacher professional development, in the context of rethinking teacher professionalism)⁵ explains that being active means:

Responding publicly with issues that relate directly or indirectly to education and schooling (p85).

It means standing up for what Fullan (1993) describes as the moral purpose of teaching. I remember writing that I felt a very strong moral purpose for being involved with education in Chapter 6:24. Also Sachs says that:

This type of activism is not for the faint-hearted. It requires risk taking and fighting for ideals that enhances education (p85).

This is the main reason for pursuing my research despite serious criticism- I'm feeling blocked and unable to speak with my own voice. I'm struggling to maintain professionalism against all odds. I am currently seeking a new permanent post in a school community and seeking a new opportunity to continue my research. Is this part of the process and development of doing research?

It requires passion and energy (p85).

I have the passion but I need to show it in my writing and it certainly saps the energy levels.

Not surprisingly, activism is probably safer as a collective activity rather than an individual one (p85).

⁵ The NSN research framework involves building a research culture amongst teachers in school. It promotes and supports collaborative research and collegial reflective practices using critical action research methodologies.

I am feeling very vulnerable at times but have the positive educative relations and ongoing support of working within a research community who are all following the critical action research approach and the ongoing encouragement of this new research group. Several members of the group re-iterated the need for me to feel more confident and release or expose the passion that I feel for teaching young children and having the confidence to promote my own beliefs.

The following extract clearly explains my current vulnerability at going public with my particular mode of writing and my inability to predict which events in my life will prove significant. All I am beginning to realise, with any conviction, is that some events are taking on the role of touchstones – points that I repeatedly return to as a source of meaning and inspiration. Looking back to my past, returning to these experiences, good or bad, I remember their significance and the crucial role that experience and reflection plays in learning. As a teacher and researcher, I try to learn from this, and look to provide young children with both rich experiences and the means to interpret them (Cole, 2004).

P. Say thank you, (to the academics and theorists) you've helped me a lot now I'm going on my own. That's the key point that I think M and B are at the moment... people have got to be confident about our own theorising.

Mo. Yes, we don't have the confidence or the cheek to say I'm creating my own theory...we assume we theoretically get subsumed under a more prominent voice. It goes back to what Je. was saying earlier about the emergence of your voice. Your thesis is about the emergence of your voice which is unique which is not to be subsumed under the voice of anyone else if you are to gain a doctorate for it is the uniqueness and specialness of your voice where you tell your story about what you've done...the precious work that you are doing about education, how you are involving your own living educational theory about the way you are going to help to improve the quality of learning for those children and the reason for that is because you feel passionate about it.

G. I'm curious about where you can go next (with using the cameos). You have to go into yourself to find the answer to that, in other words you need to think which one is appropriate to you or do you have a real sense of where your excitement and energy lies. My response to you would be to use it where the energy is. What is it that gives you a buzz? What will make you excited and make you tinkle?

J. *I'm just curious about the responses. How can we help each other to get to what really matters to ourselves? It's not about how can I use the cameo? That question doesn't put me in touch with what G. is talking about- it's the passionate values that will motivate you I think it is about what questions you are asking yourself about the cameo. What really engages you in relation to something that has happened in the art lesson? I think you will find the questions that interpret those values that are emerging. You are reliving the experience of being in there wondering what it is that you can do to make the assessment fairer.*

G. *You need to go back to p.2 they are the real juicy questions (How do I feel about art? etc)... its these questions you are really interested in answering rather than the questions about how to use the cameo and references to literature.*

Mo. *Its about uncovering those particular values...what it is that really engages you... that will enable you to grow in confidence whereby you will know what it is that is your unique and valuable contribution to educational theory.*

Reflections on sharing the cameo

I realise that the first cameo was my account of the art lesson as a support teacher to the class teacher, not a specialist art teacher. I actually look at teaching, learning, assessment and I focus on my practice as a teacher/head teacher, but I took my present practice and the way I saw it. To uncover my implicit teacher thinking and theories I need to uncover my tacit and complex knowledge of infant teaching and discover the relationship with my actual classroom practice. Like Bennett (1995); Day & Hadfield (1995) & Beach (1994) I discover that this seems to be a very complex picture rather than my practice being characterized as following current or popular educational theories in a more or less unthinking way (Alexander, 1989 & 1992). I need to pursue how I planned for art in the infant classroom and then how I enabled teachers to develop their learning and teaching practices at Oak Tree. I need to explore how my particular values and beliefs about teaching and learning art and other areas of the curriculum might have influenced the process.

How did I try to give an opportunity to the teachers and children to give them scope for interesting and creative learning and teaching?

I did not achieve my approach to planning for art or how I enabled teachers to develop the teaching and practices with the first cameo. By writing the cameo I was reliving the emotional experience of supporting the teaching of art and the tensions I felt of technically delivering art - disjointed and unrelated to other areas of the curriculum, no apparent link to a topic, no opportunity for a child's self-expression or relevance to their maturity level, to a class of 6-7 year olds, as prescribed by the National Curriculum and the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) scheme of work. Also I relived the experience of my involvement with a previous negative Ofsted inspection (Oak Tree, 1997) and I remembered my keenness to help a class teacher and a school survive and gain a satisfactory judgement from their second Ofsted inspection (the first also being crushing and damaging) rather than to help give the children a purposeful experience of engaging with art and enjoying drawing. I know I felt very uncomfortable during the preparation and throughout the lesson, as I felt professionally and in my heart that much of the activity was inappropriate developmentally for many of the children and there was little opportunity for each child to represent their hidden feelings, qualities and ideas through their drawings (Cole, 2004). This is confirmed by the comments from the artist Quintin Blake:

Most children seem to like drawing. They take to it like ducks to water, in fact, and it is only later, with the advent of self-consciousness and the growing urgency of science, sport and words that the activity frequently fades out (TES 23 February 2001).

With the advent of the National Curriculum requirements the importance of drawing fades out too and children's desire and opportunity to draw is reduced and suppressed and this is potentially damaging. The National Curriculum prescribes the current presentation and expectation and it emphasises skills to be taught rather than attitudes to be nurtured, encouraged and valued. It does not

acknowledge the importance of drawing in its own right as well in the service of all other aspects of learning (Cole, 2004). By sharing the cameo *Handa's Surprise* and listening to the tape from the action research support group meeting (Bath University, 2001), I realise I still need to show the passion that I have for the education of young children and which comes out when chatting with teacher colleagues, but not in my writing. Also, I wonder how I would have succeeded in Gipp's study of teachers' beliefs about teaching and learning and in particular about the preferred ways of teaching (Gipps, 2000). I can relate to the teacher's beliefs about learning that Gipps describes as:

Children learn in a range of ways, and so learning requires a combination of different teaching strategies (p.110).

I empathise with the teachers that described informal assessment:

It's the stuff I'm doing all the time - I can't separate it...It's the much more personal assessment, knowing them as individuals, able to recognise from their faces whether they understand...some of its going round in my head (p.67).

I know that I am much happier with informal assessment when I observe, listen or interact with young children during a learning activity. Something I did not feel that I was able to do in the art lesson. I need to explicate further the educational values that underpin my preferred infant practice and my role as a head teacher. I need to interrogate and explore the questions that I posed myself when I first wrote the cameo and the supporting paper.

What is this art lesson really about?

Is it about teaching the skills of: reproducing?

Is there any scope for the children to show their own creative style?

How could it have been used imaginatively?

Were the children required to rely on memory rather than imagination?

Wasn't it about practising skills of drawing reflective patterns and reflective symmetry linked to maths?

Did it stimulate the children's imagination and creativity?

Does it represent the children's feelings and ideas?

I wonder what the children felt about their finished pictures?

I wonder how I can find out the answers and I think that I need to explore more questions.

What do I think art really is?

What do I think is acceptable when I look at children's art?

What do I understand about the nature of seeing and personal perception?

What do I feel when I look at children's art?

What do I know about the general pattern of sequential development of children's imaginary?

Writing the next cameos

In order to explicate further the educational values that underpin my preferred infant practice I decide to write two further cameos to show more real examples of my practice and the importance I place on drawing and painting for worthy teaching and learning. One cameo shows my approach to teaching in an infant classroom, the atmosphere that I tried to achieve for active and collaborative learning and how I used the display of children's drawing, painting and written work to stimulate the children's interest and thinking, to encourage a sharing of ideas, to motivate their further learning, to value their contributions. Like Morgan (1988:130) I feel that display offered opportunities for the young children that I taught to build up the skills of learning and to enrich their experiences through visual images and it formed the basis for the means of their creative and aesthetic awareness. I used display as a non-verbal form of communication, which was very important as I was working with young children many of who had delayed comprehension of and expressive language or English as a second language.

Also I chose this particular cameo to show my belief in the importance of creativity in the lives of young children and the vital part painting plays in the development of creative skills, insights and understandings (Cole, 2004).

The other cameo describes my approach to the preparation of the learning and teaching policy at Oak Tree whilst I was head teacher. It shows my preferred way of leadership and management, of working collaboratively with staff to continue our shared approach to teaching and learning, to support their learning and to recognise and value their individual expertise. Day (2000:166) calls this way of working as *post-transformational leadership a values-led contingency model* of leadership that is quite different from the form of leadership to those espoused by government rhetoric. I was certainly working as an infant head teacher within the results-driven, achievement-orientated demands of politically motivated governors, local education authority and government but I was really more concerned with making my school caring, focused and an inquiring community rather than like a cost-effective business.

Cameo no 2

The Cameo *Hocus Pocus I'm A Diplodocus* is taken from my own practice as an infant teacher of a mixed age class in a semi-open plan infant school (my last post as a class teacher/deputy head teacher before taking up a headship). I followed an integrated approach to learning and teaching. I co-operatively presented the curriculum as a series of half termly cross-curricular topics that emphasised active learning, valued individual children, was relevant to their life experiences and interests and was based on the principles of whole child development. I organised the classroom (learning environment) by arranging the furniture into areas and making the equipment accessible for the children to use for their different activities

during the school day. The cameo describes the evolvment of a wall display of children's work that depicts aspects of a dinosaur topic.

Hocus Pocus I'm A Diplodocus!

Sanjay and a group of children are keenly studying a book about dinosaurs in the book corner.

Sanjay. 'Miss Follows, do you know which is the biggest dinosaur?'

Miss Follows. 'No, I don't think I do, can you tell me?'

Sanjay. 'Look, this book says that a diplodocus is 27 metres long. That's the same as our classroom wall. We measured it yesterday, I remember. David and I want to paint a picture of a dinosaur, a diplodocus. Can we?'

Miss Follows. 'Yes you can help yourself to the painting paper and do it at the easel. Look there's 2 spaces.'

Sanjay. 'But, I want to paint a big picture so it looks like a real diplodocus'

Miss Follows. 'Ok. How do you think you can do it then?'

Sanjay. 'We can put the sheets of paper on the floor along the edge of the wall then glue them together. Then put another line of paper in front so we can paint his feet and the ground.'

Sanjay and David busy themselves with the paper carefully collecting each sheet of paper (A1) from the shelf and laying it in turn on the floor. Sam (the class room assistant) helped them glue the paper together. Then Sanjay asks her to make them some paint in a table-tray and he chooses two large paintbrushes from the assortment of brushes to paint the outline. Sanjay hands David one of the brushes and David comments that his dad uses a brush like this one when he decorates at home. The two boys help Sam mix the powder paint in the trays to make different shades of green and then go back to the expanse of paper on the classroom floor.

Sanjay glances at the picture of the diplodocus in the book, takes a generous brush-load of paint and begins to paint his own outline of the body. He walks to one end of the paper and starts with the head and walks onto to the paper to continue painting the contour of the back and continues until he reaches the other end of the paper and the tip of dinosaur's tail. He stands back to survey his work. He appears very pleased with his efforts.

Sanjay. 'Miss Follows do you want to see how much we've done?'

Miss Follows. 'That's brilliant you can really begin to see how huge a diplodocus was and he only ate grass- that's lucky!'

Sanjay. 'I'm going to paint the line for his legs, his neck and his long tail. Come and help David.'

The two boys carry on with the painting until they complete the contour of the diplodocus and then stand back to admire their handy work- a very recognisable painting almost to scale as they had used the extremities of the space on the paper to paint the monster diplodocus. The boys clean themselves up and go off together to write a factual account of the dinosaur whilst the paint dries. After lunch Sanjay and a group of friends paint the expanse of space inside the outline with Sam supplying several trays of paint so they can complete the job. Another group of children search through the bag of fabrics and book of wallpaper samples for scraps of mixed materials to glue onto the diplodocus' body and for its features.

When the paint and glue dries out Miss Follows, Sam and several other adults fix the enormous picture on the wall using as staple gun- fortunately the whole classroom wall is made of pin-board. Over the coming days and weeks all the children enthusiastically continue to add to the display by contributing their completed pieces of work, that include creative dinosaur stories and poems, factual accounts, dinosaur related mathematics problems, paintings and collage pictures- some done in the classroom some brought in from home. The children's interest and fascination is continuous throughout the duration of the six week dinosaur topic - all thanks to Sanjay aged 7 years!

Cameo no. 3

The Cameo *Making Connections* is taken from my own practice as head teacher of Oak Tree at the beginning of the school year 1996-1997. It shows how the senior management team, that included the deputy head teacher, literacy co-ordinator and me, review the school learning and teaching policy and the organisation of the curriculum. I use related mandatory and school documentation. All names, apart from mine are fictitious, as I am working within an agreed ethical framework of confidentiality with the two teachers who are also critical friends. The cameo shows how each member contributes to integrate the changing National Curriculum Key Stage 1 requirements (1997), Park LEA Early Years Curriculum (1994) and DfEE Desirable Outcomes (1996) into the teaching programmes and assessment procedures whilst allowing for the appropriate ways of teaching young children. Cameo 3 is called *Making Connections* for three reasons. First, it integrates national policy to local practice that accesses all children to learning and the curriculum. Second it focuses on the core learning experiences which, integrated with cross curricula issues provide a broad and balanced curriculum. Third it examines a whole set of collective beliefs and values that determine curriculum planning at Oak Tree.

Making Connections.

Margaret (head teacher), Sue (deputy head teacher) and Kate (literacy co-ordinator) meet as planned to discuss the new curriculum requirements whilst the other teachers begin to set up their classrooms for the beginning of the new school year and new term.

Margaret. "Now I think it is really important that we all have scope for creative and interesting teaching. That's the only way we can enrich the children's learning...they need to be active learners, they are naturally curious but they need their confidence boosted, we need to help the children feel good about learning and enjoy themselves and then hopefully they will be self motivated."

Sue. "Ok, lets take a look at the current school's 4 year curriculum framework. I've got the revised national curriculum document. Kate, have you got a copy of the Desirable Outcomes so we can be sure to maintain continuity from nursery to reception and also take account of the 5 year olds in the reception classes so there is a smooth transition and we show that those children particularly are getting access to the national curriculum in the summer term, then we need to look at the curriculum for year's 1&2."

Kate. "Yes, I've got my copy. I think we can still keep our integrated approach to the curriculum. We may need to change the order of the topics to match the changes in the programmes of studies of each subject and to meet the time allocations for each subject."

Margaret. "I would really like us to continue with the story and a role-play focus for each topic."

Kate. "Yes its essential to keep language and literacy central particularly for our children. The delayed language development of so many children really showed up when I screened the children for their inclusion in the reading recovery programme, Jacky (speech therapist) and Jenny (ELS teacher) gave me their figures too. The children need every opportunity for language and literacy then they can access other areas of the curriculum. We need to put the emphasis on speaking and listening and role play gives them opportunities to be effective communicators in a variety of situations and for many purposes... and dressing up is fun, the children enjoy it".

Sue. " We may need to look at the storybooks that we've suggested to introduce each topic. It would be really good to have multiple copies and more big storybooks too then we can link it with shared reading activities in the literacy strategy and the children can borrow them to take home, too."

Kate. " Oh, and we need to add to the list of places for class and year group visits for each topic, we need to have as many as possible."

Sue. " Yes, that's really important 'cos we must provide the children with experiences that they can relate to and understand and then we build on what they already know. It'll vary from child to child... their growth of understanding within the homes and the neighbourhood environment. We can use and build upon the children's experiences. We need to encourage everyone to arrange more outings to the local park and the woods, the shops, the supermarket, the clinic and the library etc. Also its worthwhile getting peoples ideas soon for visits to more distant places of interest and a contrasting environment as we need to book those."

Margaret. " We can invite people into school to talk to the children...how about checking to see if any parents are firemen or bus drivers, we can use the builders before they've finished the toilet and classroom conversion...I'll speak to the governors and the school liaison police officer and school nurse too, they're sure to have contacts."

Sue. " I know we are a long way from the swimming baths and it takes ages but I think the children get as much out of the coach journey as the actual swimming lesson itself...probably for some of the children its their only opportunity to travel off the estate its very isolated here."

After the initial meeting with Margaret, Sue and Kate arrange to meet the year group leaders to review the cycle of topics and adjust the 4-year curriculum framework. Then they meet with all the staff (teachers and support staff) to make the annual and ½ termly curriculum plans for each year group of children. Also they discuss how to use the children's work and to collect artefacts and books for the topic related interactive displays that were collaboratively developed at focal points around the school.

What did I learn about my own infant practice?

I wrote and reflected on the two cameos and pursued further narrative analyses with a trusted Kingston research colleague (L) from the action research support group. I recorded and reflected on our professional conversation in my research diary. I appreciated the cameos as a representation of my professional life as an infant teacher, head teacher. But would L. appreciate that? L's comments confirmed that she too appreciated the cameos in a similar way to me. As she read cameo 2 she said:

L. I remember seeing the dinosaur display when I visited your classroom as part of the school management course (Kingston University 1988). All the children's pictures and writing were displaced around that amazing dinosaur. All the children were full of it and you could see the full range and variety of possibilities that you achieved from that project.... it was the visual focus of the classroom; you could tell the children were continually involved with it.

I was surprised by these comments but then felt them inevitable as I remembered that we had been very supportive of each other over the years of our involvement with Kingston University. We had grown to know each other and each other's schools... how we each thought and what direction our schools moved in. We were always totally open and critical but in a supportive way as we worked together on a number of assignments and our common understandings grew from there.

Also L. commented on remembering the collaborative style of leadership and management I showed during the school Management Course at Kingston University (1991) throughout the action research project (Validation meeting 1991) and how it is reflected in Cameo 3. She commented:

L. I remember you saying how important the major role played by the deputy head teacher was to curriculum development in the school... it gave credibility to the situation and it supported you as head teacher. The cameo reflects your shared values and your approach to the curriculum through story.

I then returned to the dissertation for the project and focussed on the director of studies comments:

P. If you put your values where they belong at the beginning, we then know your personal value context in which to do the piece of development. It becomes much clearer- that these are the ways of working that you want to bring about within the particular thing that you are doing. You need to move things round to get the story going from the beginning.

I now fully appreciated how writing and narrative analysis with colleagues is a natural progression from the concept of reflective practice in shaping the nature of teaching and learning in schools. Also that it is a valuable tool to explore, understand and improve my teaching whilst fostering social justice in teaching, learning and assessment.

I now realise that by writing about those specific moments in my teaching I directly related them to school situations, during the tumultuous period, that I experienced as a teacher from the mid 1980s to the present day. This was a time when the dominant educational ideas and practices of the previous two decades were being questioned and primary teachers and children were being rapidly transferred from the progressive Plowden era (1970-1980s) into the very different ethos of the National Curriculum (Alexander, 1995). I examined these changes and determined the effects on teachers' teaching and children's learning. I found out how teachers created ways of implementing the National Curriculum whilst meeting the legislative requirements, the educational needs of children and those of their own beliefs and values. (See Woods, 1996:introduction px).

I feel that my work as a head teacher (Cameo 3) was like closing a circle as I attempted to provide a balance between the political, personal and educational dilemmas that I faced. I know that the National Curriculum was meant to raise standards by setting standards of knowledge for all schools to work towards and by providing clear learning objectives for teachers and children. Through writing the cameos I critically examined the effects of introducing the National Curriculum

in my school through reflecting on my own favoured continuing practice. The cameos were a means of clarifying my ongoing concerns with the National Curriculum. Rather than raising standards it had led to a steady decline in progress and an impoverished infant curriculum that had little room for the creative process involving exploration, discovery, reflection, self-expression and understanding.

Part 2

The National Curriculum

I looked at the National Curriculum from the point of view of a head teacher researcher, who spent much of her time in schools during the past two decades. This included the period spanning the introduction of the National Curriculum, the Dearing reports of 1993, the General Election 1997 and then both the initial and ongoing attempts to implement the National Curriculum in school. Throughout much of this period my research has consisted of reflecting and evaluating my own classroom practice and carrying out observations, whilst a head teacher/class teacher, in a variety of classrooms (Goldsmith College & Kingston University).⁶ From my research perspective, therefore the relative success or failure of the National Curriculum centres on three key questions:

How has the National Curriculum influenced teachers' teaching and children's learning?

What has happened to standards?

What has happened to teacher morale and the impact on professionalism?

(Galton, 2002).

⁶ Cross-reference Chapter 2 Accessing Tacit Knowledge of Infant School Practice: A Methodology.

How has the National Curriculum influenced my teaching and learning?

The 1988 Education Act that resulted in the implementation of the National Curriculum and its assessment framework had few supporters among the educational establishment (Crombie & White, 1997:14). The consultative paper that preceded the legislation drew nearly 12,000 responses, most of which were sharply critical of the proposals. A selection of these were published by Julian Haviland (1988), who confirmed that the principle (of a national curriculum) was overwhelmingly approved, but he could not recall one response, however that endorsed without reservation the structure of the curriculum which the government was proposing. Denis Lawton (1993; 1992; 1989; 1984) was one of those who drew attention to the dangers of what he saw as a 'bureaucratic approach' to the notion of a common curriculum. He encouraged the professionals to salvage the situation by insisting on a national curriculum which concentrates on broad objectives, not detailed lists of content, and teachers being involved at school level to work out the detailed curriculum (in accordance with national guidelines) (TES 1 May 1987). Peter Cornwall, Senior Inspector for Cornwall, was more forthright and stated that we have the gravely flawed product of amateurs, a hasty, shallow simplistic sketch of a curriculum, reductionist in one direction, marginalising in another, paying only a dismissive lip service to the professional enterprise and initiative on which all progress depends (O'Connor, 1987).

Members of the government also expressed warnings, including Keith Joseph - *far too rigid* and Stuart Sexton - *will put the schools' curriculum into a straitjacket*. However, despite such warnings and the historical evidence that demonstrates how successful curriculum change needs to start from the professional concern of teachers, only tokenistic attempts were made by the Secretary of State, Kenneth Baker to involve them in the process.

These warnings were echoed in practice, because, in 1986, teacher colleagues and I still believed that the curriculum was ours to shape despite broad public expectation about the importance of the basics. We had participated, during the two previous years, with intense in-service to prepare and implement a LEA curriculum (Park Education Authority, 1986). Teacher colleagues and I experienced our first shock when the LEA curriculum was suddenly imposed without including many of our recommendations. About the same time we learnt of the government's intentions. In 1987, Secretary of State Kenneth Baker had announced to the Commons Education Committee the imminence of the National Curriculum and the related changes, and Margaret Thatcher had romped home in the general election for a third successive term, thus making it inevitable that consultation was not on the agenda. We experienced our second shock. Yet still the enormity of what was to come had not struck home in the infant school world. The stock assurance at in-service organised to prepare teachers for the changes was *don't worry: you're doing this already*, even though the first subject proposals (mathematics, science, English and design technology and the specification for testing at age 7) had all indicated otherwise. From first hand experience, as an infant school head teacher, it quickly became evident that the ideas and practices of the previous ten or twenty years would decreasingly shape the work of teachers and children in the future.⁷

From 1989 head teachers like myself were obliged to lead, manage and teach a curriculum that was accompanied by a two-line mission statement (balanced and broadly based curriculum which promoted the spiritual, moral, cultural, mental and physical development of pupils at the school and of society, (Richards, 2000) that appeared bland and meaningless to practitioners. If there was a vision for the curriculum it remained unseen by practitioners like myself who were expected to

⁷ See Chapter 7 Conclusion Creating a Living Educational Theory about Assessment in the Infant Years.

deliver it, which made it impossible to work out whether it was meeting the needs for which it had been established (TES, 2003). Were the children getting a better education than they had before? Or even the appropriate education? Certainly teachers in schools did not have the time to consider these two vital questions as they were not only struggling to teach the new, very secondary subject based curriculum to young children, it was a forever changing curriculum.

The first revisions to the curriculum were brought in following the Dearing Report (1993) and it wasn't until 2000 with the third version of the National Curriculum that David Blunkett, Education Minister, laid down specific aims. From attendance at LEA In-Service meetings (2000-2001) it was obvious to me that teachers generally welcomed these values and objectives, which covered everything from acquiring basic skills to problem solving, developing a sense of identity and a healthy lifestyle, forming relationships and becoming caring citizens in a just society. Nevertheless the general feeling was that successive governments had done little more than tinker around the edges of these subjects, often trying to cram more and more in, without ever questioning whether the original premise on which the curriculum had been built was coherent. It is only now in 2004 following the publication of the government document *Excellence and Enjoyment: A Strategy for Primary Schools* (2003) and a major conference *Rethinking the School Curriculum: Values, Aims and Purposes* at the University of London, Institute of Education 2003 that there appears to be a rethinking of the school curriculum (DfES, 2005 & 2004; QCA, 2005).

My overriding memory of the period (1988-2003) is one of horror, alienation and confusion. Just before 1988 I had successfully completed a series of in-depth studies in teaching and learning and curriculum development in early years education. But both the structure and the way teachers were required to teach the National Curriculum was very different from the innovative approaches to teaching

and learning that I had been encouraged to follow and had gained accreditation for. The introduction of the first National Curriculum was based on seven foundation subjects -- geography, history, technology, art, music and physical education a foreign language (secondary only) and three core subjects - English, mathematics and science and resembled the traditional grammar school education that I had experienced, not one that was child-centred, relevant to life experiences and would meet the educational needs of young children.

On reflection, I now realise that as head teacher I was grappling with two contrasting views of entitlement: the legalistic and the moral (Robson & Smedley, 1996). The legalistic, represented by the National Curriculum, was based on the acquisition of knowledge and the moral on people and meaning making. These two positions represent fundamentally different value systems. Given such differences, common ground was hard for me to find. As an early childhood educator, with a strong moral view of education, I struggled to create it, at the risk of seeming to endorse the knowledge-based curriculum. The irony of the legal structuring of the knowledge centred view is that it is designed to ensure access. By legislating for the delivery of the same content for everyone of the same age, at the same time, regardless, I felt that many children at Oak Tree would inevitably be disenfranchised. Their individual and cultural diversity was inevitably ignored, and therefore I considered that many experiences were inappropriate for young children.

I now realise the legal view compromised my practice as a head teacher and the learning of the children in my school by inhibiting, if not prohibiting localising of the curriculum, to take account of diversity. On the other hand the strong moral view that I held then and continue to hold recognised individual and cultural diversity in organising for many points of entry and pathways to common goals.⁸ I have

⁸ See Chapter 3 Learning from Children's Work; Exploring the Evidence.

always supported arguments in favour of a curriculum for children from birth to eight that have been offered in terms that seek to protect young children from inappropriate experiences. The impression or the reality that the influence of the National Curriculum detrimentally affected children, before the age of five was inescapable (LEA inspection 1996; Sylva et al, 1992).

During the 1990's diagnostic baseline testing was on the increase and the National Baseline Scheme was introduced in 1998 (Sainsbury, 1998). Initially the frames of reference for this were the National Curriculum core. At the time, my main concern was how long it would be before nurseries as well as infant schools were required to teach to the test, necessitating a formal curricula for babies and toddlers. Rather than suggesting that early childhood educators adopting the moral position had all the answers they did much work to critically review the curriculum and its assessment (BERA, 2004 & 2003; Siraj-Blatchford, 1998) whereby all participants had a voice. The intense work during this period influenced government thinking and resulted in the introduction of *Desirable Outcomes for Children's Learning on Entering Compulsory Education* (SCAA, 1996) and *Curriculum Guidance For The Foundation Stage* (QCA, 2000).

I, too, began research into the curriculum and its assessment with teacher colleagues, (Follows, 1996 & 1991) and used a similar collaborative approach. As an early years teacher I strongly felt that taking a neutral stance was not an option. I continually had to take a stand in relation to my principles, which at the time were implicit and which have only become explicit through pursuing this challenging, professional and theoretically informed research. Like Siraj-Blatchford I continually discover that teaching is a moral as well as a practical and intellectual endeavour and that early years teachers, too, are professional and political, and need to find their own voice (Siraj-Blatchford, 1993b: 404).

The rapid introduction of statutory external curriculum controls that emphasised success in national tests conflicted sharply with my beliefs about appropriate teaching and learning with young children and resulted in me experiencing significant dilemmas in my teaching (Hayes, 2000; Nias, 1989; Berlak & Berlak, 1981). The tension between my legal obligations as a head teacher and the convictions about pedagogical and moral principles created three specific dilemmas.

First, at the beginning of my headship (1989) I was engaged in constructive discussions, planning and delivery of a continuous and appropriate curriculum for early childhood that spanned from three to seven years (Croydon Education Authority, 1994; Metropolitan Borough of Wirral, 1993). Yet as a teacher and head teacher I was being required to incorporate the separate subjects of the National Curriculum by local and Ofsted specialist subject inspectors, mostly with secondary school backgrounds. This requirement was contrary to legislation as the National Curriculum recognised that for young children it is usually inappropriate to view the curriculum, (from the point of the learner) as separate subjects. It recognised that young children often learn through collaborative, exploratory, manipulative and imaginary play and that teachers should be aware of what underlies the various activities in which the children were engaged (DES, 1989b). Despite continuing to use topic frameworks for curriculum planning, teachers had to reference NC programmes of study, therefore teaching and so children's learning was compromised. The emphasis was now on *what* children must learn (the curriculum content), at the cost of teachers considering the ways *in which* children learn (Maxwell, 1996:1).

Even in 1993 when Dearing reviewed the curriculum, after complaints from teacher unions about workload and a boycott of the first KS1 SATs, the seven foundation subjects remained. A more streamlined curriculum was intended

allowing teachers more flexibility, but in reality early years teachers experienced ongoing changes with the introduction of Desirable Outcomes for Children's Learning (SCAA, 1996) that described areas of learning which enabled children to move into the National Curriculum requirements at five. The Desirable Outcomes are divided into six areas of learning: Personal and Social Development; Language and Literacy; Mathematics; Knowledge and Understanding of the World. The Desirable Outcomes then echoed the subjects of the National curriculum and the requirements of the curriculum at Key Stage 1. The text of the Desirable Outcomes made reference to the developing abilities of children and the importance of practical activity and the physical environment to stimulate learning in children. These learning theories have had legitimacy in the education field, particularly with early year's practitioners like myself as they have been developed from the work of such theorists as Piaget, Vygotsky and Bruner. As head teacher, the infant school was a training establishment for student teachers and it was apparent to me that there was less emphasis placed on these theories in initial teacher training, although research suggested that infant and nursery teachers continued to refer to them (Gipps, McCallum & Brown, 1999; Moriarty & Siraj-Blatchford, 1998).

Second, how was I going to dovetail curriculum planning for the Desirable Outcomes and the National Curriculum to provide an early years curriculum that benefited all children in the school? Despite guidelines in the Next Steps Document (SCAA, 1996) I remained confused as its aims were solely for preparation for school, rather than viewing early education in a wider context (Warnock, 1978 & Rumbold, 1990). On reflection I know that I was committed to planning for children's learning and development that included planned experiences and activities and that they needed to be recognised as being important in themselves in order to equip the children with necessary skills,

understandings and attitudes for later learning and for life (cameo 4). But I know there were always pressures to limit the children's experiences and activities and directly relate them to the programmes of study of the National Curriculum (Ofsted Oak Tree, 1997). This pressure remained until the revised National Curriculum (2000), the introduction of the Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage (2000) and a more cohesive way of thinking of early years practitioners (Early Childhood Education Forum, 1998).

Third, and the biggest challenge, has been trying to find space in the timetable to teach literacy, numeracy and the National Curriculum, whilst providing a curriculum which, while paying due regard to English and mathematics, is broad, exciting and challenges children across the full range of national expectations (Ofsted, 2002). Whilst I realise literacy and numeracy underpin success in the rest of the curriculum, I had to block most of the mornings to concentrate on skills for literacy and numeracy in order to implement the requirements of the National Literacy (1998) and Numeracy (2000) Strategies. Also as I worked in a school serving a disadvantaged area I had to include the various intervention programmes (2000-2002) to support the less able children. Therefore time alone prevented me from teaching an enriched curriculum that is crucial to all children's effective learning but more so with children from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Furthermore, I was very anxious and concerned of the potentially negative impact of the literacy and numeracy hour on my established and valued teaching approaches and therefore learning. I was particularly worried about the imbalanced emphasis on whole class teaching and literacy and numeracy skills at the expense of individual children's needs, understanding, interest and creativity. I found that these additional government documents were limiting my practice further, as I had to interpret them in a narrow sense. Initially I was unable to adapt and interpret them in the light of my own tried and tested theories and ideologies.

One of the key challenges of colleagues and me has been to expand and enrich our own thinking through exploring a variety of perspectives to provide what we believe to be quality literacy and numeracy provision (Dadds, 1999).

What has happened to standards?

The National Curriculum and its assessment system was meant to raise standards by setting standards of knowledge for all schools to work towards and by providing clear learning objectives for teachers and children. The government was very anxious about relative performance of British children in international tests of numeracy and literacy. Raising standards continued to be equated with improving test performance and it was increasingly being argued that the school curriculum had become so dominated by test related practice that *teaching to the test* had distorted the curriculum, the way it was taught and the way children learnt. The testing regime began with Baseline Assessment (1998), which came seven weeks after starting primary school and then it was moved to end of the first year (2003), to test speaking and listening, reading and writing, arithmetic and social skills. At seven came KS1 Sats, at eight to ten came QCAs annual tests and at 11 came KS2Sats the results of which are still crucial to a teacher's future and school funding.

Nearly a decade of national testing has generated a vast amount of data, which have been used for multiple purposes, one of which has been monitoring standards over time. The officially reported impressive rises in standards in English and mathematics in primary schools since 1995 has been challenged and it has been shown that in this national testing has failed (Tymms, 2004:477-494). Research evidence about standards is inconclusive. The Leverhulme Numeracy Research Programme showed that the National Numeracy Strategy (NNS) had a positive but small effect on numeracy standards, but there were many schools,

children and areas of mathematics for whom the effect had been negligible or negative. Also they questioned whether the government was being completely open about evidence of effectiveness of the NNS. (Brown, Askew, Millett & Rhodes, 2003). Similar findings were presented about the effectiveness of the National Literacy strategy (Hanke, 2001; Wyse, 2003; Mansell & Ward, 2003).

In addition many early years specialists argued that educational excellence in countries such as Italy, Sweden, Holland, Germany and Switzerland has been achieved by holding off intensive formal education, especially the teaching of reading and writing, until the ages of six or seven. They believed that our education bureaucracy was turning our teachers, in the words of the education critic Ted Wragg, into *curriculum delivery operatives*, destroying child centred creativity and causing irreparable harm to our children's development. The mood and aims of the European equivalents of our nursery and early stage primary schools presented a striking contrast. So adamant are continental educationalists about the virtues of delay in formal teaching and testing of reading, writing and arithmetic that they believe too early prescriptive teaching in Britain is irreparably harming children (Cornwell, 2003).

For his article Cornwell sought the views of three eminent British educationalists, which all supported the European viewpoint. Professor David, Canterbury Christ Church University College says that research evidence shows that forcing children into academic skills too soon and testing them too early creates conditions for low self-esteem and future failure, (David, 1999). Whilst government agencies remain confident with claimed evidence of the success of official policy of continually raising standards, Professor Alexander, Warwick University, objects that while the NLS and NNS imposed on primary schools will almost certainly yield improvements, the apparent successes are at the expense of the wider curriculum. Against this background, many practitioners and educationalists including

Professor Robinson, Warwick University issue a warning to the government and the educational bureaucrats that as long as the debate in education is seen as a contest between traditional and progressive methods, an education system for the 21st century will be thwarted. These are not simply questions of standards and accountability, but of educational purpose and vision (Cornwell, 2001).

More recently national policy makers became more attentive to the philosophical dimensions of education and Citizenship Education became a new compulsory foundation subject of the National Curriculum in (2000) and included activities involving working with others, using imagination, and coming to understand the way a democratic society functions now and in the future, all previously sidelined in curriculum policy (Davis, 1999).

What has happened to teacher morale and the impact on professionalism?

Those responsible for creating the National Curriculum originally argued that pressure on teachers would gradually decrease once they became familiar with the programmes of study and the associated schemes of assessment. This did not happen and led to the review by Dearing (1993) and the introduction of discretionary time. Surveys by the teachers' unions (NUT, 1995) were carried out to discover how teachers adapted to the Dearing recommendations.

The main findings were fairly predictable. Most teachers questioned the concept of discretionary time often referring to it as evaporated time instead. Those who did acknowledge the term said they used it to top up English and mathematics, by using the intervention programmes, so that scores on the National Curriculum Assessment Tests could be improved. Even more striking were the teachers' survey responses that were relevant to the particular issue of teacher professionalism. All the answers fitted into a general theme of stress, loss of control and a feeling that teaching was no longer fun. Certainly, as head teacher at

that time, I encouraged teachers to develop the love of learning and a sense of fun again, but appreciated their frustrations. I strongly felt and still feel that the National Curriculum had actually stifled opportunity for sound early educational experiences that were spontaneous and exciting.

The survey comments, and my first hand experience of leading a school under these conditions suggest that a considerable number of teachers, while coping with the demands of the National Curriculum did so without great enthusiasm. The latest surveys, by the NUT and NAHT, on teachers' working conditions suggest things have not improved under new Labour. Breadth and balance have been further restricted with less than an hour per week on average being allocated to history, geography, art and music. Almost all the teachers' responses refer to the stresses of coping with inspection, marking, testing and record keeping. Most alarmingly many younger teachers said they were leaving teaching to *get a life*. So serious were these findings taken by government, that they set up a national agreement between themselves, employers and school workforce unions to help schools, teachers and support staff meet the challenges that lie ahead. It promises joint action, designed to help every school across the country to raise standards and tackle workload issues (DfES, 2003). Although early days I feel the tide changing for the better as I experience, at first hand, a more, ethical, collaborative, trusting learning environment being (re)created in LEAs and schools for the benefit of all participants (Merton Education Authority, 2003). Again teachers have the opportunity to become empowered to achieve a moral purpose for the curriculum and education that enables young children to understand themselves and the world that they are growing up in (Hawkes & Farrer, 2004).

The creative curriculum: a teacher researcher's perspective

After issuing a flood of directives on education the government is now actively encouraging the exploitation of creativity and offering schools the opportunity to be more flexible in their interpretation and teaching of the curriculum. The government's change of heart is reflected in a number of official publications, the first of which was a major report from the National Advisory committee on Creative, Cultural Education (NACCCE) that resulted in *All Our Futures: Creativity, Culture and Education* (DfEE/DCMS, 1999). The report defines creativity as imaginative activity so as to produce outcomes that are both original and of value. Similar sentiments are expressed in the National Curriculum for Teachers in England and Wales:

The curriculum should enable pupils to think creatively and critically, to solve problems and to make a difference for the better. It should give them the opportunity to become creative, innovative, enterprising and capable of leadership, to equip them for their future lives as workers and citizens (DfES/QCA, 1999:11).

The government's strategic document (National Primary Five Year Strategy) for primary schools *Excellence and Enjoyment* (DfES, 2003) advocates the use of creativity in primary education and insists that teachers have a considerable degree of freedom in lesson planning to do so, though the specific nature of freedom is not defined. In fact, this vagueness is reflected in much of the Primary Strategy, which is, as Alexander forcefully argues:

ambiguous to the point of dishonesty about the Government's true intentions towards primary education (Alexander, 2004:28).

Finally the Creativity web site established through the DfES asserts that:

The increased emphasis placed on thinking skills in schools will enable pupils to focus more on their creative talents. High quality learning and thinking demand more than transmission of facts and the routine application of familiar procedures- pupils need to be taught to think flexibly and make reasoned judgements. (www.naction.org.uk/creativity; accessed May 2004).

At the first whole school staff meeting of the new school year (September, 2004) I discussed with colleagues the recommendations of the National Primary Strategy and we outwardly felt excited *it's just what we need!* Inwardly we were more cautious *not more legislation to undertake?* After that we gradually realised that the document could be our passport to a more creative curriculum. We have existed on a basic diet of literacy and numeracy since the strategies were launched in 1998 & 2000, our KS1 SATs results had not shown a consistently marked improvement and our first KS2 SATs results (2003) were as expected, in national terms poor. It is time to reflect on and adapt our practice. We teach at a recently reorganised school, which has grown from a first school to a primary school and it is located in an area of social deprivation in a south London Borough. In general the children do not have the wealth of life experiences more fortunate children have. This is especially apparent in their ability to express their reasoning and ideas. As a school staff we need to give the children experiences of the wider world and provide opportunities for speaking and listening. At the staff meeting (September, 2004) we concluded that the best way to achieve this is to give them access to a more cross-curricular, creative curriculum.

Teachers in Chestnut Primary School began to look for ways to develop or rekindle their understanding of creativity (Hayes, 2004; TES, 2004; Haigh, 2004; DCMS, 2001; DfES, 1999; De Bono, 1999; Siraj-Blatchford, 1998; Tong & Palmer, 2004; Craft, 1997; Rowland, 1984; Cropley, 1967) and how to move forward with it. Creative development is recognised as being of immense importance in all areas of learning and development. It was identified as a distinct area of learning in the Desirable Learning Outcomes (SCAA, 1996) and while there is no subject called creativity in the National Curriculum, the creative process involving exploration, discovery, reflection and expression is part of all subjects. Therefore creativity is positively seen and has a long tradition in early childhood

settings, e.g. Froebel (1826) associated creativity with the inner life of the child (Froebel, 1826) and we are still urged to promote creativity (HMI, 1989; NVQ, 1991; *DfE*, 1995; SCAA1996). Yet Bruner (1986) argued that society has placed a greater value on logical and systematic thought. He emphasised that this can lead to over-emphasising the ability to retain and repeat facts, to be impartial, dispassionate and detached, all of which, are included in the main criticisms of the National Curriculum.

Furthermore, when only the rational aspects of learning and development are stressed we deprive ourselves of the full range of the human ability to think, and creativity does not receive the attention it deserves. By encouraging creativity teachers are promoting children's ability to explore and comprehend their world, to respond and represent their perceptions. We are increasing their opportunities to make new connections, reach new understandings and create new meanings. The creative process helps children to experience beauty and lasting value, express their cultural heritage and increase their understanding of other cultures. It helps them to solve problems and gain command and it promotes self-esteem (Duffy, 1998:141).

Senior management established a programme of whole school INSET on how to promote creativity (Cole, 2005; QCA, 2004; NAHT CPD, 2004; NUT CPD, 2004) and included monthly creativity days into the planned curriculum. In the midst of all this creativity Chestnut Primary School awaits the Ofsted brown envelope that explains the arrangements for the forthcoming school inspection. This will be the first Ofsted inspection as a primary school, but the second for the staff who were employed three years ago when the first school was rigorously inspected and came out of serious weaknesses. Excellence in education remains central to government thinking (QCA, 2003) and raising standards remains the central issue for the LEA and the school. Despite the Government's assertion that creativity is

the route to higher standards (Ofsted, 2003) and the legitimisation of creative approaches to teaching and learning, teachers are understandably tentative about employing innovative practices for fear of jeopardizing national test results (Day, 2004).

Teachers cautiously await the professional freedom to develop ways of planning and delivering a curriculum that is more relevant and motivating to the children. I realise this is just the beginning for many younger primary teachers (TES, 2004), but for experienced teachers, like myself (34 years as a primary school teacher), we are keen to develop a fully creative curriculum which embraces the wider community (Tong & Palmer, 2004). The change to a more creative approach to teaching and learning has unsettled, excited and enthused staff. It has allowed us to make important teaching and learning connections, but I realise that creativity can only flourish in a school environment in which active support by leaders for teachers that want to enlarge their vision of teaching and learning is overt and consistent. It is essential to perceive creativity as the prime influence on the process of school improvement that benefits both children and teachers (Hayes, 2004:284).

A creative future

I feel this is a crucial moment on my learning journey across the curriculum and assessment landscape. At last teachers seem to have found a way to reverse the trend to rethink the school curriculum (White, 2004). Again, I have the opportunity to show my passion for teaching, enthuse about learning, encourage children to explore, imagine and fantasise, and present the benefits of cooperation. I am rediscovering professionalism and my own professional identity (Hayes, 2000:148). Again, I can put creativity at the heart of learning and teaching.

Also, I can now justify the reason for doing practitioner research differently and finding my own creative and unique path through my 'emergent' model of research that shares some of the characteristics of what have been previously termed interpretive, reflective and creative approaches to research by my director of studies and research colleagues. Pollard and Tann (1987) suggest that at the core of interpretive research lies a concern with opinions and perceptions, seeking to describe these things. According to Bassey (1992), reflective research involves critical and systematic thinking about previous and present research findings, while creative research is concerned with the devising of new systems, novel solutions, using critical enquiry. I use emergent here in the sense that new understandings and new questions might come into view as a result of description, enquiry and questioning (Crotty, 2001). I now realise my research encompasses all traits described above but with a greater emphasis on the creative approach as I use original approaches to critical enquiry.

Despite conflicting claims about effective policy, standards, parental rights, societal obligations and political aspirations, it is still the relationship between the teacher and taught, the joy of discovering new things and the thrill of achievement which lies at the heart of education (whether as a teacher in the classroom or teacher researcher). And regardless of the changes to the curriculum that have taken place over the years, the ability to plan, teach and manage children to give them the best possible chance of learning remains the essential element of the teacher's role, and the very sense of my being (Hayes, 1999:vii). It seems that Bruner's observation that:

Learning should not only take us somewhere, it should allow us later to go further more easily (Bruner, 1960:19).

Is just as relevant today as when it was written in 1960.

Chapter 5

Learning from Assessment and Pupil Data: Exploring the Evidence

Chapter 5

Learning from Assessment and Pupil Data: Exploring the Evidence

Purpose of chapter

The last decade of the 20th century has witnessed the introduction of national assessment of pupils on an unprecedented scale. The Educational Reform Act (1988) made provision for all 7, 11 and 14 year olds in England and Wales to take standardised assessments in English, Mathematics and Science with a phased introduction from 1991. The National Assembly for Wales, Ministry for Education and Lifelong Learning (2000) reviewed and adjusted the arrangements for National Curriculum Assessment for schools in Wales. However, English schools are required to publish their results, alongside comparative national averages, in both their annual report to governors and their school prospectuses. Also, comparative tables of secondary schools' results in GCSE and A/AS level examinations have been published by the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) since 1992 and comparative tables for primary schools based on the results of the end of Key Stage 2 assessments (KS2 SATs) were introduced in 1996.

The intention of these initiatives, as outlined in the Parent's Charter (Department of Education and Science (DES, 1991) is to promote greater accountability of the education service and specifically to aid parents in their choice of school for their children. However, the use and interpretation of schools' test and examination results, in both primary and secondary schools, has generated considerable and ongoing debate. The debate was summarised in the Dearing interim report:

Without a value-added dimension, the obvious basis for judgement is that 'higher' scores represent better practice and 'lower' scores worse. This could lead to unwarranted complacency on the part of some schools whose pupil population comprise more able pupils and, conversely, to despair on the part of others, who, however hard they try can never expect to raise the absolute level of their pupils' scores to those obtained in schools with more able pupils. (School Examinations and Assessment Council, 1993 [Dearing interim report], Annex.5: para. 3).

There became a broad consensus that fair indicators of school performance would need to measure progress made by pupils at school, rather than their raw results in national tests or examinations (McPherson, 1992). Variations in the test or examination results of schools may not reflect their effectiveness, since they partly reflect the educational attainment of pupils when they enter the school and other factors related to intake. Nuttall (1990) argued that:

Natural justice demands that schools are accountable only for those things that they can influence (for good or ill) and not for the pre-existing differences between their intakes (Nuttall, 1990:25).

Measures of the educational progress made by pupils in a school, relative to that made by similar pupils in other schools, became called value-added. The government accepted the need for value-added analysis of school effectiveness (DfEE, 1995) and developed a national value added system reporting for both primary (KS2) and secondary schools that was based on prior attainment, which will be statistically valid and readily understood (Fitz-Gibbon, 1997:13).

Considerable research on value-added has been undertaken with secondary schools (Rutter et al, 1979; Smith and Tomlinson, 1989; Thomas & Mortimore, 1996), but relatively little research has been completed with primary schools. Those studies focusing on primary schools (Mortimore et al, 1988; Bondi, 1991; Hutchinson 1993 have principally concerned pupils' progress during KS2 (age 7-11) rather than KS1 (age 5-7) and have looked at performance on standardised tests rather than National Curriculum (NC) assessment results (SATs).

Also attempts to contextualise end of KS1 results focused on measures of pupil background. McCallum (1993) compared aggregated KS1 results for local

education authorities (LEAs) against measures derived from the 1991 census, also aggregated at the level of the LEA. Social class, as indicated by the percentage of the population in social classes I & II, showed a consistent and positive relationship with LEAs' KS1 results. Schagen (1994) and Thomas (1995) analysed pupils' KS1 results against concurrent measures of pupils' background. Age, sex, free school meal entitlement and whether the pupil had a statement of special educational needs (SEN) were strongly correlated with KS1 results.

Additionally Thomas (1995) investigated school effects and reported that pupil background measures accounted for about 29% of the variance in pupils' KS1 performance and about 47% of the variance at the school level. However, neither study had access to information on individual pupils' attainment at the start of school. A value-added analysis of schools' achievement in the NCKS1 SATs, as distinct from the contextualised results, requires an assessment of the knowledge and skills of pupils when they first enter school, as shown by Baseline Assessment (Tymms, 1999; Sammons & Smees, 1998).¹

Such assessment of children at the start of primary school is not new. During the late 1970s and early 1980s considerable research was undertaken on screening instruments designed to identify children at risk of later educational failure (Wolfendale, 1976; Lindsay & Pearson, 1981) and used annually by Park LEA during that period. While significant positive correlations between attainment at the start of school and subsequent attainment were frequently reported, the research reduced in prominence largely because of difficulties inherent in making accurate predictions for individual pupils (Potton, 1983).

With a new focus on school effects on pupils' progress, interest in baseline assessment was renewed (Hill, 1994) but there has been little research on the effect of the school on pupils' progress in the infant school. Tizard et al (1988)

¹Statutory Baseline Assessment requires teachers to make judgements about the attainments and skills of children starting at primary school and to record these formally, assigning numerical scores. See chapter 1 The Debate on Educational Assessment: Reviewing the Literature.

although they did not set out to study school effects in a systematic way, did report significant differences between schools in the amount of progress made by their pupils between age 4 and 7. I found only one study (Strand, 1997) that analysed National Curriculum Key Stage 1 results in terms of the progress made between age 4 and 7. Strand considered one cohort of pupils in London Borough of Wandsworth schools and examined pupils' results in the 1995 KS1 SATs in relation to their baseline assessment completed on entry to reception class in 1992/1993.

In this chapter I describe how value-added analysis happens in practice. To do this I draw on data from a school self-evaluation project at Oak Tree Infant School (1995-1997) that I coordinated as head teacher. I examine the value-added possibilities between entry into school (reception) and the end of KS1 (Year 2). I consider four cohorts of children who were admitted into school 1991-1994 and I use four main factors that are the baseline assessment and KS1 SATs results, aspects of school context and pupil background, as I want to explore effects on children's achievement. Then I examine the factors further by working with local head teachers to explore the achievements of summer-born children on entry into school.

This chapter follows the model of education action research put forward by McNiff, Lomax & Whitehead (2003 & 1996:14) and highlights the centrality of my values when dealing with the issues of leadership and management and school evaluation. Like McBeath (1999), Ofsted (2005, 2003, 2000 & 1995) and National Association of Head Teachers (NAHT 2000) I recognise the importance of school self-evaluation in the context of the school improvement and the process of change. I frame the chapter by adopting the action reflection process in which cycles explicate meanings about a fairer assessment of children's learning, development and attainment through looking at assessment and pupil data. I

attempt to show the development in my own learning and understanding in the process of deconstructing my own past practice and making it explicit to others. Whitehead conceptualises this as the creation of a *living educational theory*.

My research is in contrast to other researchers outlined above whom all made external statistical analyses and evaluations of schools and young children as they considered a value-added approach to be a fairer way of comparing schools (Schagen & Hutchison, 2003; Goldstein et al, 2000; Tymms, 1999; Institute of Education, 1997; Thomas et al, 1997). My research considers a value-added approach as a possible means to fairer assessment of children's learning development and attainment within one school.

School self-evaluation project, Oak Tree Infant School Data Baseline Assessment

Park LEA developed Baseline Assessment (Entry Profile) in the 1980s and the scheme was accredited into the National Framework for Baseline Assessment (SCAA, 1997).² The aims of the scheme 1996-1997 were to:

- assist in establishing a child's stage of development on entry into school,
- assist teachers in their early observations,
- assist in identifying strengths and weaknesses,
- help teachers to plan appropriate learning experiences,
- give baseline from which to evaluate future progress,
- contribute to continuity in the child's education,
- form part of the child's in-going records for colleagues and other support agencies and
- form the basis of discussion with parents during the child's first term in school.

² Park LEA Entry Profile, National Framework for Baseline Assessment superseded by Foundation Stage Profile (DfES, 2003).

Also it was anticipated that:

The pupil data would form the basis of LEA pupil assessment database making it easier to link Entry Profile data with subsequent assessments for value added calculations (LB Croydon, 1997:31).

The Park LEA baseline assessment consisted of six broad areas of development:

- personal and social development,
- response to learning,
- communication in English,
- early reading and writing,
- mathematics and
- science.

Also it included a Draw a Person assessment when a child was required to draw a human image. The child was given a score (1-24) for each item included in the drawing that indicated the developmental stage. Schools were expected to complete the Baseline Assessment within 6-7 weeks of each pupil starting school, whether attending full-time or part-time. As all classroom activities addressed all the areas of experience required to meet the Desirable Outcomes (SCAA, 1996) for pupils starting school, teachers were expected to complete the profile when normal classroom activities were observed, rather than limiting children to specifically devised tasks.

Profile Statements were given for each area of development to guide the teachers' judgement and were recorded on a 5-point sliding scale that gave opportunity to record a wider development within and beyond each of the three statements. The evaluation was recorded on one of the five columns, from working towards (1) to working beyond (5) the profile statements. The profile statements should therefore fall between stages 2, 3 & 4.

A copy of the Development Profile is included in Appendix 5:p475-476.

Since completing the school self-evaluation research project at Oak Tree the procedures for Baseline Assessment have changed. Park LEA gained accreditation for the Entry Profile to be incorporated into the National Framework for Baseline Assessment (1997) that was designed to cover aspects of the 'Desirable Outcomes for Children's Learning on Entering Compulsory Education' (SCAA, 1996). Then, with the introduction of Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage (QCA, 2000) the Foundation Stage Profile was introduced (QCA, 2003) initially for assessment of children's progress throughout the Foundation Stage, which is from three to the end of reception year. The Foundation Stage Curriculum is divided into six areas of learning and early learning goals establish expectations for most children to reach by the end of foundation stage, and progress is identified as *Stepping Stones* of knowledge, skills, understanding and attitudes that children need if they are to achieve these early learning goals by the end of foundation stage. The communication, language and literacy and mathematical development directly link to the National Literacy and National Numeracy Strategy. Initially Baseline Assessment continued to be carried out on entry into school but the assessments were moved to the end of the school year (2003).

Key Stage 1 results

Pupils in schools in England and Wales complete end of KS1 assessment in the summer term of year 2, when the pupils are aged six and seven years. In 1994-1997 pupils completed tasks and tests in reading, spelling, writing, handwriting and mathematics. In each area pupils are awarded a level on the NC scale, which ranges from W (working towards level 1) for the lowest attainers to level 3 for the highest attainers. The expected level for a pupil aged 6/7 years is level 2. For reading, spelling and mathematics tests it is also possible to grade pupils at level 2

into one of three grades: 2A, 2B or 2C (SCAA, 1995-1997). Taking the average of the pupils' levels on the five tests derived an overall indicator of pupils' attainment in the end of KS1 tests. Separate analyses for reading and mathematics tests were also completed. In order to give appropriate weight to grades within level 2 on the reading and mathematics tests, scores were computed (Park LEA software) according to the following scale: level W= 0.5; level 1= 1.5; level 2C= 2.25; level 2B= 2.50; level 2A=2.75; level 3= 3.5. Only the test results from the KS1 reading and mathematics assessments were used in the study.

School context

Oak Tree was located on the eastern boundary of the Park LEA, an outer London Borough. It was a mixed county school for children three-seven years and it was a designated three-form entry school with approximately 280 children on roll. It was opened in 1950 with two part-time nursery classes added in 1990. There was an unsuccessful plan for school amalgamation in 1988 that was successfully reviewed in 1998. The school had extensive grounds that included a school field; wooded areas, a pond and conservation area and it shared the site with Oak Tree Junior School.

Oak Tree was situated in Oak Tree ward and it appeared to be located in a satisfactory socio-economic area.³ But the children came from a small part of the ward. This area included a local authority housing estate that was built in the late 1940s. Also a small housing association development was added in 1994.

Park LEA directed families to the school from other areas of the borough and also a neighbouring borough. The direction of families was due to the extensive building of housing developments in those areas during 1994-1997 and no places for the children in their local primary schools. A significant proportion of children

³ *Satisfactory socio-economic area* - Census data of population (1991) & Pre- Inspection Context and School Indicator (Ofsted PISCI, 1996).

came from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds that included a high proportion of young single parent families, families seeking refugee status and families with temporary housing in the area. The school data for 1996-1997 shows 70+% entitlement to free school meals, 50+% pupil mobility, 30-40% children with English language support (ELS) and 30% children with special educational needs (SEN). Oak Tree was amalgamated with the neighbouring junior school to form a large primary school in September 1998, eighteen months after the Ofsted inspection.

Pupil background

In addition to the baseline and KS1 attainment, information was collected on six further pupil background factors:

- Age: the pupil's age when they completed baseline and KS1 assessment was recorded. Also the season of birth was considered in relation to the number of full-time terms in school.
- Sex: the pupil's gender was recorded
- Entitlement to free school meal (FSM): some 70+% of the children at Oak Tree were entitled to FSM.
- Home language: the main language spoken in the pupil's home was recorded. Annual school data showed that approximately 30-40% of children had ELS
- Special Educational Needs (SEN).
- Pupil mobility: annual school data showed 50+% pupil mobility.

Sample

The children, included in the study, form two distinct groups within each of four cohorts of children who were admitted into Oak Tree 1991-1994. The first group

includes children who completed the three years from entry into school to end of Year 2 and the second group of children were admitted to school at a later date and therefore did not complete three years at Oak Tree. For practical purposes it was decided to examine only the attainment of the children who either scored below or above average in the Baseline Assessment for reading or number. Also a focus of literacy and numeracy was chosen because of the local and national interest in standards in these areas, the opportunity for schools to be involved in support projects and the expected introduction of the National Literacy and Numeracy Projects (DfEE 1998 & 2000).

Project members

The school self-evaluation project (Autumn 1995-Summer 1997) was a joint enquiry involving Oak Tree and Park LEA and so included school staff and LEA personnel. The three key project members were - Sue (deputy head teacher/assessment co-ordinator), James (Park LEA inspector assigned to the school) and me, Margaret (head teacher)⁴. The names, apart from my own, are fictitious as I am working within an agreed ethical framework of confidentiality. Sue, James and Margaret had termly meetings and communicated regularly throughout the project. At the beginning they clarified and agreed their roles. Margaret co-ordinated the activities by providing ½ a day per week non-contact time for Sue so that she could collect and make initial manual analyses of the assessment and pupil background data (using school documents and database without the aid of computer software) and allocated time together for them to have joint discussions of the findings.

Also, Sue collated the findings and wrote both the interim and final reports. James accessed and collected the assessment data from the Park LEA database,

⁴ I wrote this chapter (Chapter 5) in the third person to provide a creative distanced approach that overcame a writing block (Winter, Buck & Sobiechowska, 1999)

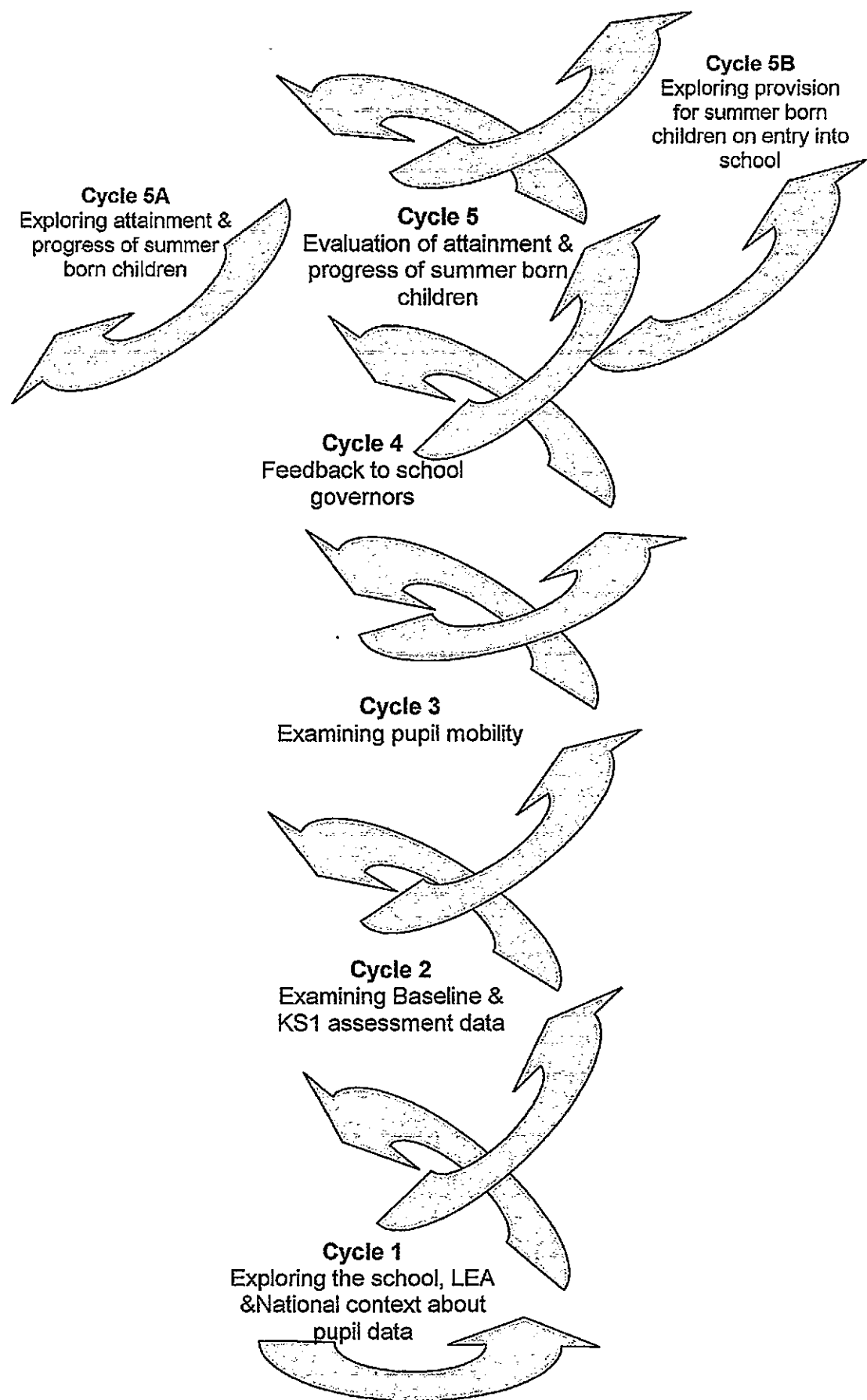
allocated ½ a day from each of the termly inspector's school monitoring visits to extend the analysis of the data and examine implications for school improvement and change with Sue and Margaret and recorded progress in the LEA inspection reports (Note of Visits [NOVs]). Members of school staff were consulted as necessary and Margaret gave written feedback to school governors in the termly governors report, a copy of each of James's NOVs and Sue's interim and final reports and verbal feedback at four governing body meetings (Autumn 1995-Autumn 1996) and a governor's curriculum sub-committee meeting (25th November 1996).

Project findings

The project findings are presented in five action reflection cycles to show the chronology of events. In the first cycle Sue, James and Margaret work in co-researcher mode to establish aspects of the school, LEA and national context in which they work and set about examining the data for one cohort of children that was already available for their joint analysis. In the second cycle they examine data for three cohorts of children. In the third cycle they discuss pupil background, aspects of school organisation, and implications for teaching and learning. In the fourth cycle they discuss feedback to the governor curriculum subcommittee and preparation of the report as part of the school documentation required by Ofsted. In the fifth cycle Margaret works with four local head teachers to evaluate the attainment and progress of summer born children.

The past tense is used to describe the chronology of recorded events throughout the project; the third person is used to provide a creative distanced approach that overcame a writing block (Winter, Buck & Sobiechowska, 1999) and to foster a reflective, critical and theoretical analysis of past events that draws out principles for future practice (Tripp, 1993).

Figure 5.1 Five Action Reflection Cycles



Cycle 1. Exploring the School, LEA and national context at the beginning of the project

Margaret attended a Special Educational Needs (SEN) forum (September 1995) when it was highlighted how valuable Park LEA Baseline Assessment data (held in the LEA database but not shared with schools) would be in the assessment of children's SEN and the writing of Individual Education Plans (IEPs). Also Baseline Assessment formed part of Oak Tree's assessment policy and teachers were already collaboratively using the findings to evaluate the children's attainment and progress during their first year in school. Sue and the three reception teachers developed a means of tracking individual children, making comparisons within each class and across the three classes in the year group (cohort). Also she attended LEA moderating meetings for baseline assessment to evaluate her work with teachers from different schools.

Margaret posed herself the following seminal question –

How can we use this work to show a fairer assessment of children's achievement throughout the infant school not just reception year?

As head teacher of Oak Tree, Margaret was increasingly concerned that the type of judgement and reporting of both children's attainment and schools' performance was only made in relation to national standards, took no account of the progress made by children since entry into school, the school context or the characteristics of the pupil intake. She strongly felt this method of evaluation was unfair as it was incomplete and misrepresented the children's real achievement and the teachers' teaching. Like many researchers of school effectiveness she realised the dangers of measuring school performance just by test results and league tables (Mortimore et al, 1988 & Sammons et al, 1995).

The following headlines in the Times Educational Supplement show the biased mode of reporting educational standards and league tables:

More fall short of expectations (13.1.95)

Standards in his sights (27.1.95)

Parents continue to resist tests (10.3.95)

Misrepresented by crude statistics (19.5.97)

Happy, fulfilled- but failing (9.5.97).

Like many head teachers Margaret worked in a volatile national and local political climate that reinforced the governments perception:

Raising standards is the government's highest priority. Performance tables play a vital part in raising standards (Shephard, Secretary of State for Education and Employment, 1996).

The two years 1995-1997 saw a change in the local administration of Park LEA and in national government that intensified the climate. By 1996 many London Boroughs (including Park LEA) compiled education statistics to provide statistical data on the performance of schools and used them to make decisions about aspects of their work (Du Quesnay, 2000). Also a growing body of international research on school effectiveness confirmed the importance of the routine use of data on pupil performance (QCA, 1998:2). Within this climate school governing bodies were required to evaluate the educational statistics annually (Education Reform Act, 1988) (Park LEA Governor Training Programme 1996-1997) and the continuing questions posed to Margaret by the governing body of Oak Tree were not

What do the figures tell us about the teaching and learning?

But

How can you improve the test results next year? We need to improve standards! We need more children attaining the national average or above!

Oak Tree needs to perform better than Beech Tree Primary School!

As part of the Park LEA school inspection programme, James met Sue and Margaret (October 1995) to discuss school NC KS1 assessment results for 1995.

They started by examining the summary figures for the cohort of children (three class groups).

Below is a table showing the results:

Table 5.2 Summary of NC KS1 results Oak Tree 1995.				Total = 57 children
Subject	working towards level 1	level 1	level 2	level 3
English (teacher assessment)	0%	49%	40%	5%
Reading (teacher assessment)	2%	44%	37%	12%
Reading (task/test)	4%	42%	26%	23%
Writing (teacher assessment)	0%	49%	46%	0%
Writing (task/test)	0%	42%	47%	5%
Spelling (teacher assessment)	0%	49%	46%	0%
Spelling (task/test)	2%	44%	39%	11%
Handwriting (teacher assessment)	0%	58%	37%	0%
Handwriting (task/test)	0%	56%	39%	0%
Mathematics (teacher assessment)	7%	44%	44%	0%
Mathematics (task/test)	7%	40%	35%	12%
Science (teacher assessment)	0%	56%	39%	0%

Table 5.2 shows that 45% of children attained level 2 and above whilst 49% attained below level 2 in English as shown by teacher assessment. For reading 49% of children attained level 2 or above and 46% attained below level 2 as shown by teacher assessment and 49% above and 46% below as shown by the task/test. There is a similar pattern for attainments in writing, spelling and handwriting. For mathematics 44% of the children attained level 2 and above and 51% attained below level 2 as shown by teacher assessment and for the task/test 47% of the children attained both level 2 and above and below level 2. For science 39% of the children attained level 2 and above and 56% of the children attained below level 2.

Sue, James and Margaret then examined the schools results in relation to the national results for pupil attainment. Below is a table showing the percentage of children at Oak Tree attaining level 2 or above compared to the national average in 1995.

Table 5.3 The percentage of children at Oak Tree attaining level 2 or above in NC KS1 assessment compared to the national average in 1995.			
KS1	School	National	Difference
Reading (teacher assessment)	49%	79%	-30%
Reading (tests/tasks)	49%	78%	-31%
Writing (teacher assessment)	46%	78%	-32%
Writing (tests/tasks)	53%	80%	-27%
English (teacher assessment)	46%	80%	-34%
Mathematics (teacher assessment)	44%	79%	-35%
Mathematics (tests/tasks)	47%	79%	-32%
Science (teacher assessment)	39%	84%	-45%

Table 5.3 shows that 49% of the children at Oak Tree attained level 2 or above in reading, as shown by both teacher assessment and the test/task compared to 79% and 78% respectively nationally, showing a difference of -30% and -31%. For writing 46% of children attained level 2 or above in teacher assessment compared to 78% nationally showing a difference of -32%. For the writing test/task 53% of the children compared to 80% nationally showing a difference of -27%. For attainment in mathematics there is a similar pattern, for teacher assessment 44% of the children attained level 2 or above compared to 79% nationally showing a difference of -35%, and for the tests/tasks 47% of the children compared to 79% nationally showing a difference of -32%. To summarise there is a difference of between -27% and -35% for the children's attainment in English and mathematics at Oak Tree compared to the national percentages of attainment, showing that a significant number of children attain below the national norm in both English and mathematics. In addition it is interesting to note the percentages for children's attainment as shown by the teacher assessment compared to the attainment in the tests/tasks, which suggests the thoroughness and reliability in the teacher assessment procedures. This relates to the strictness of the methodology for teacher assessment, followed at Oak Tree and involved

additional non-contact time allocated for the assessment to be moderated by the year group team as well as by the external Park LEA moderator.

The examination of the SATs results confirmed that a significant proportion of the children at Oak Tree attained below the national expected level for 7 year olds in English and mathematics, a factor already recognised by the school and Park LEA particularly in relation to the school being located in a disadvantaged area. Sue, James and Margaret sought to find out how Oak Tree could be more effective to overcome the influence of disadvantage. They were keen to explore the situation more; they wanted to find out if the children at Oak Tree really were underachieving as reported by the National Commission on Education who stated:

The clear message is that pupils in disadvantaged areas are less likely to do well at school...the odds still (seem to be) stacked against schools in poorer areas (1996:2).

The National Commission identified underachievement in deprived areas, particularly in inner cities (Department of Catholic Education, 1999) but also rural locations, as an acute problem. Also the National Commission (1993) argued that when multiple disadvantages combine, educational success is more difficult to achieve.

Sue, James and Margaret began their research at a time when the New Labour Government was elected (1997), was committed to raising standards in socially disadvantaged areas and brought with it the promise of change. They were naively encouraged to think that policy-makers had somehow succeeded during the last three years in beginning to weaken the link between disadvantage and educational performance. Like the history of educational reform efforts in this area they underlined the extent of the challenges and counselled a degree of caution. Politicians, meanwhile, were determined to drive up standards. There had been a perceptible shift - change not merely expected but demanded. In theory, schools that had been *succeeding against the odds* should be safe from criticism. In

practice, memories were rather short and former laurels counted for little when a fresh inspection loomed. *Improving against the odds* was now the name of the game (Maden, 2000:1).⁵

The characteristics of *good* or so-called *effective* schools had been extensively researched over the previous decade and there was consequently much greater understanding and agreement about their most salient characteristics (Sammons, 1999) but research on school improvement was just beginning (Mortimore, 1998; Harris et al, 1997). Margaret was aware that being able to describe an effective school did not necessarily indicate what was needed to help an unsuccessful school be more successful. Furthermore, the steps required to help a school turn itself around were less researched (Ofsted, 2005, 2003 & 1999; Barber & Dann, 1996), but she felt it important to initiate her own school self-evaluation study and saw it as a natural progression from her previous studies (DPSE & MEd action research projects).⁶

As a head teacher Margaret realised the challenges of disadvantage and deprivation, but did not make excuses for them. She always worked to achieve successful progress with academic work within a caring school community. She strongly felt it was crucial to examine the dimensions of disadvantage with James and Sue as it had been previously commented and documented by Park LEA personnel that Oak Tree had special hidden complex characteristics and Oak Tree estate had hidden needs as there were not many figures about it as many of those collected were about the Oak Tree ward not the estate in particular and the rest of the ward was affluent (Croydon SE Health Authority, 1994). She wanted to look at the bigger picture to be able to tell more of the story of Oak Tree. Like McCallum (1993) she was interested in the children's performance in tests and the effects of context on performance. She knew large discrepancies existed between LEAs in

⁵ See Chapter 6 Learning from Ofsted: Exploring the Evidence

⁶ See Chapter 2 Accessing Tacit Knowledge of Infant School Practice: A Methodology.

the performance of children in Sats and that approximately a quarter and a half of the differences are associated with the proportion of households in social class 1 & 2.

Margaret wanted to highlight the possible odds faced by schools in different areas to help her unearth the real challenges of disadvantage that she faced at Oak Tree. She wanted to clarify the elements of socio-economic and educational disadvantage and explore the combined impact. Utter and Madge (1976) define the term disadvantage as *unfavourable circumstances, detrimental or prejudice* and refer to social factors such as income, unemployment, housing, health and environmental conditions. In many senses the term simply means poverty. The Joseph Rowntree Foundation (1995) inquired into income and wealth and showed that profound social and economic changes have resulted in increasing disadvantage measured in different ways. The study showed that the scale of disadvantage was larger in 1997 than it was in 1977, particularly for children. Margaret saw parallels with the findings of a local health authority report (Croydon Health Authority, 1994) that outlined proposals to tackle poverty on Oak Tree estate.

Sue, James and Margaret explored the term educational disadvantage and how it might apply to the children at Oak Tree. Mortimore & Blackstone (1982) researched into educational disadvantage and defined it as:

The denial of equal access to educational opportunities, the tendency to leave education at the first opportunity and the hindrance of achievement by social and environmental factors.

Margaret knew that despite the fact that there is an increasingly standardised school system, through pupils' entitlement to the National Curriculum and the national system of quality assurance of schools through Ofsted inspections, educational disadvantage remained just as much of an issue as ever. Like Hillman (1996) she knew that by the age of five, children were already very differently

placed in terms of the extent to which they were able to benefit from primary education.

The negative relationship between material and social disadvantage and educational attainment is well established in empirical national and international research findings (Douglas, 1964; Prosser, 1972; Davie, Butler & Goldstein, 1972; Essen & Wedge, 1982; Pilling, 1990). Socio-economic and family background factors have been shown to be important influences upon pupils' educational achievements at all stages of their school careers. These factors strongly relate to measures of prior attainment at entry into school. Sue, James and Margaret needed to find out: 1). How material and social disadvantage translate into lower attainment. 2). If disadvantage both limits access to educational opportunities and reduces the ability of children to benefit from the schooling that they get. The school self- evaluation project could then help them find out what they should put in place at Oak Tree to minimise this effect. They looked at the contributory factors that directly related to Oak Tree.

Below is a summary showing the contributory factors of material and social disadvantage on educational disadvantage that are listed by the National Commission on Education (1996:3) in relation to the evaluation of Oak Tree data that is shown in *italics*:

- Poverty, resulting from unemployment or low incomes, results in stress; and precludes money being spent by families on learning resources such as books, or learning opportunities such as outings and holidays.

During the period 1994-1997 there was consistently 70+% entitlement to free school meals, and therefore free school milk. Poverty from low income or unemployment was apparent from visiting the homes of families, as part of the Home School Liaison Policy. Also it was confirmed by the enthusiastic take up (100%) of the Home/School Book Lending Scheme and adult help available for regular outings both in the local environment and further away.

- Poverty also increases the need for teenagers to be in paid employment in the evenings or weekends, reducing time for homework, causing absenteeism and at the first opportunity of leaving the education system.

Truancy by older siblings was very apparent by their presence in and around school, by liaison with local secondary schools and the education welfare service. Also many of the parents were teenagers themselves and had opted out of the school system early rather than go into further education.

- Health problems are more likely with their associated affects on physical and intellectual development.

A large percentage of the health problems are childhood ailments related to poor hygiene, education and living standards. The school records show a high incidence of acute infection, gastro-enteritis and asthma/eczema as well as delayed development of expressive and comprehension of language and therefore delayed literacy skills. The community was highlighted in 'The Think Tank Project' that was reported and acted on the issues of deprivation.

- Housing problems are more likely e.g. overcrowding, bed-sharing, lack of quiet space for homework and a greater chance of household accidents.

The housing estate was built in the late 1940s and was originally built to house displace families from other parts of the borough. The number of tenanted properties on the estate was 784 and these properties approximately comprised 70% flats (1-2 bedroom units), 22.5% maisonettes and 7.5% houses. In recent years the structure of the buildings had deteriorated and much of the properties were substandard. There was a large turnover of residents who comprise in the main single parents, immigrants, refugees and families whose homes have been repossessed. The school experienced 50+% pupil mobility annually. Being on the eastern border of the borough many of the residents were isolated from their families who lived in other parts of the borough. The very young single parents had a number of particular problems being separated from much needed family support and help raising young children.

- Children's environment is less likely to be conducive to their development e.g. greater pollution, limited access to gardens and places to play.

Oak Tree housing estate had very little safe play space. It was very fortunate that Oak Tree had large outdoor play space, both hard playgrounds and grassed areas that were in constant use both during and outside school hours.

- There is a greater incidence of crime and drugs.

Close liaison was established between the police and social services to support the problem that was apparent with some older siblings and their families. Support was provided in school when a crisis occurred.

- Racism 'stifles learning because children are distracted by it and spend time trying to cope with it'

Racial tension was not a problem within the school environment but was occasionally evident outside and the head teacher was occasionally used to mediate and resolve conflict.

- Family disruption is more likely, with the increased incidence of depression and neurotic disorder.

The work of social services professionals included child protection investigations, family support workers who dealt with financial budgeting and parenting skills, domestic violence, alcohol/drug abuse and mental health that had obvious effects on the children when they were either drawn into a situation or observed the consequences of it.

- Parents are more likely to have low levels of education, parenting and educational skills and are less likely to have knowledge about and confidence in the education service.

A significant percentage of parents had low levels of education and parenting skills and certainly had a lack of confidence in the education service. Oak Tree had an 'open-door' policy for adults to overcome apprehension, provided classes for basic skills and encouraged attendance at the local adult education centre which had an outpost on the housing estate. The majority of parents wanted a different experience for their children and the positive school attendance figures and parent/teacher meetings reflected this.

- Children are less likely to have a secure mastery and understanding of language to have enough opportunities to read at home, to have a high self-esteem or to be subject to peer-group pressure to succeed at school.

The school culture and ethos was based on boosting self-esteem, valuing and praising small steps in each child's achievements. It was based on the premise that young children enjoy learning together. The priority was to support the development of language and literacy skills by collaboration with specialists in education and health (speech and language therapists worked on site) and whole school involvement with national and local literacy projects. Support was given to ELS children and an adult refugee support group met regularly during the school day.

Margaret recognised the frequent inter-relationship of the various disadvantages, she recognised multiple deprivation at Oak Tree that not only accumulated over time but also reinforced one another, so that their collective impact was even greater than the sum of the individual effects. Also she realised from school records that disadvantage tended to exhibit obstinate survival over time and between generations. Lord Joseph (1972) the then Secretary of State for Social Services called this the cycle of deprivation. Margaret wanted to discover what the school needed to do to break the chain? Hillman (1996) reports that:

The odds are stacked against schools in poorer areas and that the link between disadvantage and educational performance has so far proved too difficult for policy-makers at national level to break (Hillman, 1995:5).

However, many individual schools in disadvantaged areas have been able to succeed against the odds.

Margaret believed that Oak Tree was one such school. She successfully applied and became head teacher for eight years and during that time experienced much happiness and satisfaction. In 1989 she took on a school that was very depressed and its future undecided. The building was uninviting through lack of care and maintenance and the staff dispirited. But with a new permanent senior management team the future appeared secure and many aspects of school improvement were undertaken.

Margaret took on the challenge because she believed in the school, the teachers, the children and the community that it served. She believed the school was worth regenerating because the community was entitled to have better. She believed in kindness, care and mutual support and she enjoyed helping the people so that they regained self-confidence and realised the choices that they could make for themselves and their families and possibly transform the life-chances for their children. Margaret's decisions were value-driven rather, than, say, managerial, budgetary or solely ambition. Also she was very fortunate in working with equally committed people who helped her to transform the physical structure of the school. Margaret put in place a four-phase internal building programme (£175,000) to improve the school's learning environment, including the integration of a nursery into the school and increased the school roll from 7-10 classes (40%).

The school ethos positively changed to welcome people into school and Margaret established an open-door policy so that parents came and helped during the school day, and met socially in the newly formed parents' room. Parents

enthusiastically supported the school and promoted the community use of it out of hours and at weekends. Most importantly Margaret created a happy school. A fact confirmed by Ofsted (1997) but Oak Tree was judged to be a failing school, because Ofsted emphasised the measurement of success by the performance of 7 year olds in Sats against the expected national standards, they did not look at the bigger picture or the whole story.⁷

The Park LEA followed a school inspection programme that was based on the Ofsted framework for school inspection and on the assigned visit morning (October 1995) James inspected the teaching and learning in the three year 1 classes (year 1 were the agreed focus of the visit). Afterwards he gave verbal feedback to Sue and Margaret on the children's standards of achievement, related to the national standards and relative to the ability of the children. He said:

In five sessions the substantial majority of pupils achieve national expectation, and in two sessions some pupils achieve the national expectation but many achieve below it...in four sessions all or almost all pupils are achieving appropriate levels for their abilities and in three sessions a significant minority are underachieving (NOV, 19.10.1995).

James, Sue and Margaret discussed his findings from the classroom observations and compared them with the 1995 KS1 results that they had interpreted earlier and then they made a tentative estimation of the 1996 KS1 scores when these children would be year 2.

During the feedback session with James, Sue and Margaret shared their concern that the current judgement and reporting of both children's attainment and school performance was only made in relation to national standards and took no account of the progress made by the children since entry into school. They explained the reason for their concern that their personal and professional values were being compromised. Sue and Margaret were both committed to celebrating not criticising young children's achievements and saw this as the key to improvement and

⁷ See chapter 6 Learning from Ofsted: Exploring the Evidence.

positive future learning. They felt it was crucial as they were working in an infant school that was in a disadvantaged setting, these children particularly needed their self-esteem boosted not crushed and similarly the teachers efforts needed praising not slating (DfES, 2003; Sammons, 1999; Mortimore, 1998).

Sue and Margaret told James that they wanted to examine the assessment data more thoroughly both to explore the issues and provide a fairer indicator and to help them articulate their findings to governors. They wondered if they could compare baseline assessment and Sats results to examine the cohort of children's attainment and progress from entry into school to end of KS1. James replied that this activity would be very useful as the LEA were beginning to consider value-added and he thought the complex context of Oak Tree would be a useful and interesting example to explore together.

Margaret was very pleased, as they appeared to have shared intentions, i.e. the LEA and the school and James was keen to work collaboratively with them. She now had the beginning of a mechanism to widen the assessment debate, to involve all staff and governors with the project and possibly discover a fairer indicator of children's attainment and progress. James recorded their discussion in the NOV where he wrote:

The summary information from the 1995 end of key stage 1 assessment was presented to governors at a recent governor's meeting. The next step is to analyse the information against the children's abilities on intake to obtain a measure of progress, rather than only comparing national norms (16.10.1995).

Also this pre-empted Ofsted in recognising pupils' attainment on entry to school as an important indicator of the school's context and requiring inspectors to consider evidence about attainment on entry to make judgements about pupils' progress at the schools in relation to prior attainment (Ofsted, 1997).

Reflections on cycle 1

James's inspection visit to Oak Tree, the discussions that ensued with Sue and Margaret must be considered to be *significant events* (Tripp, 1993) that promote the development of Margaret's research project because she has re-formulated the action reflection cycle into a pattern of statements that appear to match the five statements put forward by Whitehead (McNiff, 1988:38) and act as a general formula for *tackling practical educational problems in a systematic way*. Margaret and Sue had identified a problem (looking for a fairer assessment indicator) at Oak Tree and they were beginning to tackle it in a systematic way by planning to pursue the self-evaluation activity in the termly LEA inspection visits, the weekly senior management meetings all of which were documented and Sue included the work as the ongoing focus of her role as assessment co-ordinator (Annual Tasks 1995-1996).

They appeared to be following the thrust of Whitehead's argument that action research must of itself be educational. It must help teachers to make sense of their normal, everyday practice. They were trying to understand an important aspect of their everyday practice and make it explicit to others. The action reflection spiral is a basis for teacher improvement (McNiff, Lomax & Whitehead, 2003 & 1996). Sue, James and Margaret supported each other's professional development as well as that of the other teachers. Margaret realised she used Whitehead's set of questions to act as a starting point for reforms in the assessment practices at Oak Tree.

Cycle 2. Examining Baseline and KS1 assessment data

Sue and Margaret felt both excitement and apprehension at this early stage of the enquiry. They were excited because they were collectively breaking new ground by exploring the value-added possibilities at Oak Tree (the first infant school in

Park LEA to do so) and they were apprehensive because of the apparent conflict between the methodological and philosophical approach that would underpin their work in an infant school. On one hand they were grappling with the pressure to focus on the children's educational outcomes that would give the ultimate measure of the effectiveness of themselves as teachers. On the other hand they tried to follow the action research tradition that the educational process is paramount. It appeared that they were grappling with the contrasting views of the school effectiveness researchers such as Reynolds (1997:97) who wrote:

For us our 'touchstone criteria' to be applied to all educational matters concern whether children learn more or less because of the policy or practice.

And action researchers such as Elliott (1996:50) who claimed that:

Teachers should focus on the quality of the teaching-learning process rather than on educational outcomes since, if the former is right, the students themselves will take care of the latter.

How would the value-added analysis help them?

What was the meaning of value-added?

Sue and Margaret realised that value-added appeared to have two interpretations both of which were explained later by SCAA (1996) who reported on Baseline Assessment and value-added. The most straightforward interpretation of value-added is pupil progress i.e. if a child learns to read then this corresponds to value-added. This direct interpretation had an intuitive appeal, because that was what they were aiming to examine not the meaning attached to value-added by educationalists. For them the term means relative pupil progress. In other words it refers to how well, or rapidly, a pupil has learnt to read compared with other similar pupils.

Nevertheless Sue and Margaret knew that they were working at a time in which the original economic meaning of the phrase had become distorted and that value-added with its uncertainty of interpretation had taken on such a widespread

educational use for secondary schools. They also knew of similar future national plans for value added meaning relative pupil progress to be introduced into primary schools at KS2 and then KS1 (SCAA 1997). They were trying to be proactive in the debate.

For the purpose on the school self-evaluation enquiry they knew the focus would have to be explicitly on pupil progress and then maybe it would lead to relative pupil progress within each year group at Oak Tree.

Why should this be?

What is so important about relative progress?

Surely they should be interested in individuals and the way that they progress, never mind what others are doing?

They were experienced teachers and shared the common view of early years professionals that children learn at different rates (Hutchin, 1996). But they both knew that relative progress measures had been the basis of school effectiveness studies for more than three decades and many teachers and schools (mostly secondary) have found these relative measures to be an important addition to information that they hold on pupils and also as a fresh way in which they can look at their schools.

Would it enable them to look in a fresh way at Oak Tree?

This technical input-outcome measure of pupil progress was very alien to them. Also their background in early years' education emphasised the importance of meeting individual children's differing needs and assessing whole-child development. They knew that all young children progress, but children progress at different rates. Their teaching was designed to nurture this progress, to provide appropriate experiences to guide children's learning and to foster their interest and self-esteem so that they could do their best on an individual basis.

But what is very hard to know, within a class or a whole school, is whether the children are making the kind of progress that is reasonable to expect. What is even harder was finding a means to clearly articulate that factor to interested parties. Sue and Margaret knew from the school's assessment policy and their own practice that that they had always made a point of assessing children on a formal and an informal basis and had identified children as falling behind or excelling through their own interpretation of what constituted appropriate progress.

What about the class as a whole?

They were already being asked the question –

Would these children have made the same progress if they had been to another school?

Sue and Margaret knew that such a question was about relative progress and could only be answered with high quality data and they were unsure of its present existence for infant schools although they had heard of future plans for the use of Park LEA Baseline Assessment scheme (1997) and the introduction of a national baseline assessment scheme (QCA, 1997) that was intended to be used in a value-added scheme for KS1 (SCAA, 1996).

Sue and Margaret clarified the central issue of the enquiry that was:

To track the progress made by individual children using Park LEA Baseline Assessment data as the starting point and KS1 SATs results as the end point.

Also they established the aim:

To monitor the actual progress of both more-able and less-able children undertaking SATs who started at Oak Tree, by tracking individual children within both categories using Baseline Assessment data to establish their starting point in specific areas of the curriculum.

They were concerned with the reliability of the information they had available to them as the aim was to compare like with like. The information collected at the start point had to relate (as near as possible) to later achievement levels so they

decided to examine progress in only two specific areas of the curriculum, English and Mathematics and then isolated reading and number for closer examination. Also they had to consider annual changes to the baseline assessment profile statements and national curriculum attainment target level descriptors during the project.

Sue and Margaret were doing a simple but time-consuming manual collection and analysis of data as there was no complex computerised facility available. They decided to track the progress of individual children who were admitted into Oak Tree (reception) and stayed until the end of Year 2 because they did not have consistent baseline assessment data for all the children who were admitted at a later date. To reduce the size of the sample of children and to make it manageable they selected children who were included in only two ability groups, the more able and less able groups. The two ability groups were defined by children's attainment in Baseline Assessment, stage 1 for the less able and stage 3 for the more able group.

Below are six tables showing the assessment data for three cohorts of children (1991-1994, 1992-1995 & 1993-1996).

Table 5.4 Cohort 1991-1994.		
Attainment in reading of less able group (L=less able, 1-13=number of children).		
Child	Baseline assessment	SATs
L1	1	1
L2	1	1
L3	1	1
L4	1	1
L5	1	1
L6	1	1
L7	1	2
L8	1	1
L9	1	1
L10	1	1
L11	1	2
L12	1	1
L13	1	1
Baseline Assessment print awareness stage 1 indicates unable to recognise name.		
NC AT2 reading level 1 indicates begins to recognise individual words in familiar context.		
Attainment in reading of more able group (M=more able, 1=number of children).		
M1	3	2
Baseline Assessment print awareness stage 3 indicates development of some sight vocabulary.		
NC AT2 reading level 2 indicates able to read a range of material with fluency, accuracy and understanding.		

Table 5.4 shows 13 children (L1-13) in the less able group and one child (M1) in the more able group for reading. The results indicate that of the less able group 11 children made the expected progress and two children made more than the expected progress for reading. As there was only one child in the more able group for reading there was insufficient data to draw a conclusion.

Table 5.5 Cohort 1991-1994.		
Attainment in mathematics of less able group.		
Child	Baseline assessment	SATs
L1	1	1
L2	1	1
L3	1	2
L4	1	1
L5	1	2
L6	1	1
L7	1	1
L8	1	1
L9	1	1
L10	1	1
L11	1	1
Baseline Assessment number stage 1 indicates unable to understand one to one correspondence.		
NC AT2 number & algebra level 1 indicates able to use number in the classroom situation. Understands simple addition and subtraction.		
Attainment in (number) of more able group.		
M1	3	2
M2	3	2
M3	3	2
M4	3	2
M5	3	2

M6	3	1
M7	3	2
M8	3	2
M9	3	2
M10	3	1
M11	3	1
M12	3	2
M13	3	2
M14	3	2
M15	3	2
M16	3	1
Baseline Assessment number stage 3 indicates can count a given number of objects up to at least 5.		
NC AT2 number and algebra indicates able to understand number facts including addition and subtraction and solve number problems.		

Table 5.5 shows 11 children (L1-11) and 16 children (M1-16) in the more able group for number. The results indicate that of the less able group nine children made expected progress and two children made more than expected progress in number. Also of the more able group 12 children made expected progress and four children made less than expected progress in number.

Table 5.6. Cohort 1992-1995.		
Attainment in reading of less able group.		
Child	Baseline assessment	SATs
L1	1	2B
L2	1	1
L3	1	1
L4	1	1
L5	1	1
L6	1	1
L7	1	1
L8	1	1
L9	1	1
L10	1	2B
L11	1	1
L12	1	1
Baseline assessment print awareness stage 1 indicates unable to recognise name.		
NC AT2 reading level 1 indicates begin to recognise individual words in familiar context.		
Attainment in reading of more able group.		
M1	3	2
M2	3	2
M3	3	3
M4	3	2
Baseline Assessment print awareness stage 3 indicates development of some sight vocabulary.		
NC AT2 reading level 2 indicates able to read a range of material with fluency, accuracy and understanding.		
NC AT2 reading level 3 indicates able to read silently with sustained concentration.		

Table 5.6 shows 12 children (L1-12) in the less able group and four children (M1-4) in the more able group for reading. The results indicate that of the less able group 10 children have made expected progress and two children have made more than expected progress in reading. Also of the more able group three children have made expected progress and one child has made more than expected progress in reading.

Table 5.7 Cohort 1992-1995.		
Attainment in number of less able group.		
Child	Baseline assessment	SATs
L1	1	2C
L2	1	1
L3	1	1
L4	1	1
L5	1	1
L6	1	W
Baseline Assessment number stage 1 indicates unable to understand one to one correspondence. NC AT2 number & algebra level 1 indicates able to use number in classroom situation. Understands simple addition and subtraction.		
Attainment in number of more able group.		
M1	3	2
M2	3	2
M3	3	3
M4	3	2
Baseline Assessment number stage 3 indicates ability to add 2 sets in a practical situation. NC AT2 number & algebra level 2 indicates knows and able to use number facts including addition and subtraction. NC AT2 number & algebra level 3 indicates		

Table 5.7 shows six children (L1-6) in the less able group and four children (M1-4) in the more able group for number. The results indicate that of the less able group four children made the expected progress, one child made slightly less progress and one child made more than expected progress in number. Also of the more able group three children made the expected progress and one child made more than the expected progress in number.

Table 5.8 Cohort 1993-1996.		
Attainment in reading of less able group.		
Child	Baseline assessment	SATs
L1	1	W
L2	1	W
L3	1	W
L4	1	W
L5	1	1
Baseline assessment print awareness stage 1 indicates unable to recognise name. NC AT2 reading level W indicates able to handle book correctly and retell story.		
Attainment in reading of more able group.		
M1	3	3
M2	3	3
Baseline assessment stage 3 indicates development of some sight vocabulary. NC AT2 number & algebra level 3 indicates able to read silently and with concentration.		

Table 5.8 shows five children (L1-5) in the less able group and two children (M1-2) in the more able group for reading. The results indicate that of the less able group all children made expected progress and of the more able group both children made more than expected progress.

Table 5.9. Cohort 1993-1996.		
Attainment in number of less able group.		
Child	Baseline assessment	SATs
L1	1	1
L2	1	W
L3	1	1
L4	1	1
L5	1	2C
Baseline Assessment stage 1 number stage 1 indicates unable to understand one to one correspondence NC AT2 number & algebra level 1 indicates able to use numbers to count, order, add and subtract using up to 10 objects.		
Attainment in number of more able group		
M1	3	2A
M2	3	3
Baseline Assessment number stage 3 indicates ability to add 2 sets in a practical situation. NC AT2 number & algebra level 3 indicates able to use mental recall of addition and subtraction facts to 20.		

Table 5.19 shows five children (L1-5) in the less able group and two children (M2) in the more able group for number. The results indicate that of the less able group four children made expected progress child and 1 child made more than expected progress in number. Also of the more able group both children made more than expected progress in number.

Reflections on Cycle 2

Sue and Margaret's initial value-added analysis using the baseline and KS1 assessment data and then further discussions with James showed no clear emerging pattern except that it appeared to confirm that all children in all groups progressed in reading and number from their recorded starting points. Also the majority of children made expected or more than expected progress. Sue, Margaret and James looked more closely at the 4 children who made less than expected attainment in number at Sats (1994) and concluded that there were contributory pupil background factors for 3 children namely continued disruption at home and 1 child showed a negative reaction to the test situation that was reflected in his score (Tymms, 1999).

Cycle 3. Examining pupil mobility

Sue, Kate and James decided to explore this key characteristic of Oak Tree because of the ongoing debate on league tables and the evaluation of school performance without knowing about the mobility of its pupils (Fitz-Gibbon, 1996). More importantly they felt it was fundamental to their strategies to raise achievement. They felt it was a critical issue that had previously been ignored by government and educational researchers since the work of Plowdon (1967) and Mortimer (1985).

Park LEA described pupil mobility as *one of the hidden characteristics* of Oak Tree and later gave additional funding to support the extra administrative work it created but not to support the implications for teaching and learning. In fact the Government's White Paper (1997) *Excellence in Schools* made no mention of pupil mobility in its 84 pages, except where it appeared to refer to movement between stages of education. Yet many of the policies that were soon to be enshrined in legislation posed particular problems for high mobility schools (Taylor

Fitz-Gibbon, 1996). A research project on pupil mobility funded by the Nuffield Foundation and the DfEE began in 1998 when Robson researched into transience and mobility and the effect that interrupted and changing schooling had on teachers, pupils and families. She compared the performance of mobile and non-mobile children at different key stages. In virtually all cases, the average performance of mobile children was below that of non-mobile, often substantially so (Robson, 2000). Also Ofsted (1999:7) concluded that Gypsy Traveller pupils are the group most at risk in the education system, because of under-achievement partly caused by pupil mobility.

Given the degree of educational and social disruption experienced by 50+% of the children at Oak Tree Sue, James and Margaret wanted to find out:

The impact of pupil mobility on children's progress from entry into school to end of Key Stage 1.

Sue and Margaret manually collected the mobility statistics that showed the number of children admitted into reception, the number of children undertaking SATs who started in reception, the number of children undertaking SATs who did not start in reception and the total number of children undertaking SATs. Below is a table showing the analysis of pupil mobility in the four cohorts of children who attended Oak Tree 1991-1994, 1992-1995, 1993-1996 and 1994-1997.

Table 5.10. Pupil Mobility At Oak Tree.

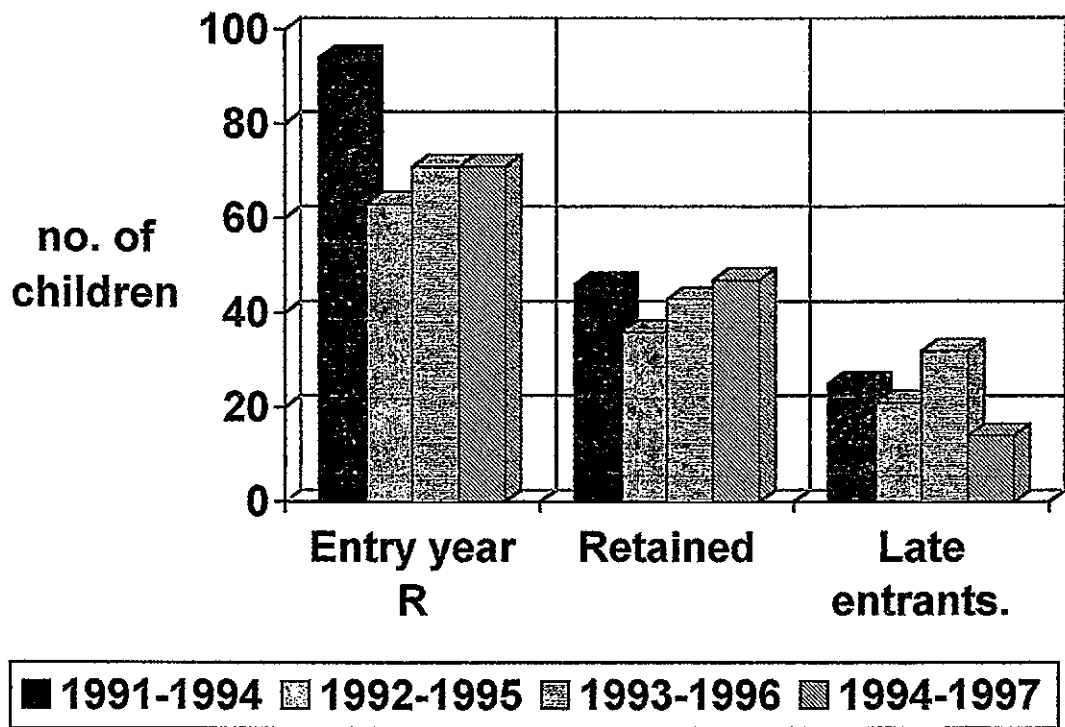


Table 5.10 shows that for the cohort 1991-1994 94 children were admitted into reception in 1991, 46 of the children stayed for 3 years and took SATs in 1994, 25 children who did not start in reception took SATs and the total number of children who took SATs in 1994 was 71. In percentage terms 49% of the children were retained through to SATs, 51% left between entry and SATs and 35% of final total started school elsewhere some of which may have had interrupted or no previous schooling.

For the cohort 1992-1995 63 children were admitted into reception in 1992, 36 of the children stayed for three years and took SATs in 1995, 21 children who did not start in reception took SATs and the total number of children who took SATs in 1995 was 57. In percentage terms 57% of the children were retained through to SATs, 43% left between entry and SATs and 37% of the final total started elsewhere and some of which may have had interrupted or no previous schooling.

For the cohort 1993-1996 71 children were admitted into reception in 1993, 43 of the children stayed for three years and took SATs in 1996, 32 children who did not

start reception took SATs and the total number of children who took SATs in 1995 was 75. In percentage terms 60% of the children were retained through to SATs, 40% left between entry and SATs and 42% of the final total started school elsewhere and some of which may have had interrupted or no previous schooling.

For the cohort 1994-1997 71 children were admitted into reception in 1994, 47 of the children stayed for 3 years and took SATs in 1997, 14 children who did not start in reception and took SATs and the total number of children who took SATs in 1997 was 61. In percentage terms 66% of the children were retained through to SATs, 34% left between reception and SATs and 23% of the final total started school elsewhere and some of which had interrupted or no previous schooling.

Reflections on cycle 3

Sue, James and Margaret's wondered if the annual mobility figure (50+%) used by the Park LEA was misleading as it related the number of children joining the school to the number of children leaving the school. Their analysis showed more hidden information as it highlighted the actual disruption within each cohort with the 3rd cohort (1993-1996) showing the highest percentage of children who started school elsewhere and the 4th cohort (1994-1997) showing the least percentage of children who started elsewhere. Because of the volatility of the test results they felt their analysis of pupil mobility suggested a direct correlation between pupil mobility and attainment in KS1 SATs as the results for 1996 and 1997 showed the lowest and the highest scores respectively (Fitz-Gibbon, 1996). The exercise showed that any KS1 assessment data for Oak Tree did not show a true picture of all the children's achievement.

Sue made a detailed comparison of the SATs results in reading, writing, mathematics and teacher assessment of science, for the two cohorts (1993-1996 & 1994-1997). Below is a table showing her analysis.

Table 5.11. Comparison of SATs results for two cohorts (1993-1996 & 1994-1997). All figures are expressed as percentages.

Cohort.	Reading (SATs). National Curriculum level.			
	W	1	2	3
1996	22%	36%	38%	4%
1997	12%	28%	39%	21%
	Writing (SATs). National curriculum level.			
	W	1	2	3
1996	28%	40%	32%	0%
1997	14%	20%	64%	2%
	Mathematics (SATs). National Curriculum level.			
	W	1	2	3
1996	1%	29%	65%	5%
1997	0%	30%	47%	23%
	Science (Teacher assessment) level.			
	W	1	2	3
1996	3%	48%	47%	3%
1997	0%	29%	43%	28%

Table 5.11 showed a marked variation in SATs results for years 1996 and 1997:

- Firstly in reading 10% more children attained level W in 1996, 8% more children attained level 1 in 1996, 1% more children attained level 2 in 1997 and 17% more children attained level 3.
- Secondly in writing 14% more children attained level W in 1996, 20% more children attained level 1 in 1996, 32% more children attained level 2 in 1997 and 2% children attained level 3.
- Thirdly in mathematics 1% more children attained level W in 1996, 1% more children attained level 1 in 1997, 18% more children attained level 2 in 1996 and 18% attained level 3 in 1997.
- Fourthly in Science (TA) 3% more children attained level W in 1996, 19% more children attained level 1 in 1996, 4% more children attained level 2 in 1996 and 25% more children attained level 3 in 1997.

Sue and Margaret knew from studying the school records that they regularly lost higher achievers through the outward movement of families to improved permanent housing and they were replaced with children who had already experienced cultural, social and educational disruption and had language or learning difficulties or emotional and behavioural problems and so were behind

their peers in achievement. Margaret knew that pupil mobility made it more difficult for her to implement a long-term forward financial plan, as school funding was directly related to pupil numbers and to predict long term needs in the school development plan, to target interventions appropriately and to measure accurate progress.

What new approaches could they put in place to meet the particular needs of transient children and their families?

She knew that great emphasis was placed on creating and maintaining happy relationships for new entrants to nursery and reception to enable them to adapt to new surroundings and quickly become part of the school. Sue had done this successfully through the home visiting scheme and induction programme for children and their parents into school.

Could this be extended to encompass new entrants whatever their age to provide stability and to enhance the quality of education they offer?

Sue continued to explore the SATs results to gain more information about this complex situation. She made a detailed analysis of the attainment in reading and mathematics of the two distinct groups, the non-mobile and mobile groups in the cohort of children (1994-1997). Below are two tables of the findings and all results are shown in percentages.

Table 5.12. Comparison of reading SATs results (1997) for non-mobile and mobile groups of children.

National Curriculum level. Reading SATs	Non-mobile group. (reception entrants)	Mobile group (late entrants).
W	8%	21%
1	34%	14%
2	32%	29%
3	26%	36%

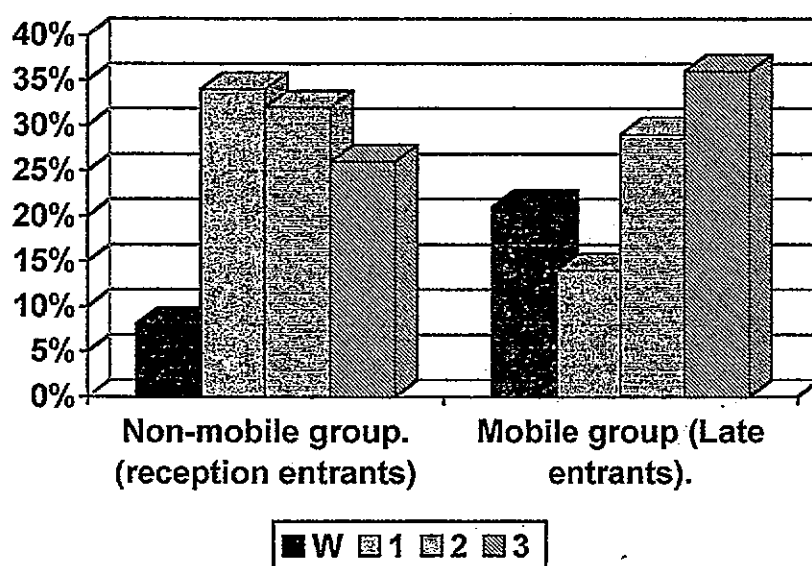


Table 5.12 showed a marked variation in the children's attainment in reading between the non-mobile and mobile groups. 13% more children in the mobile group attained level W, 20% more children in the non-mobile group attained level 1, 3% more children in the non-mobile group attained level 2 and 10% more children in the mobile group attained level 3.

Table 5.13 Comparison of Mathematics SATs results (1997) for non-mobile and mobile groups of children.

National Curriculum level Mathematics SATs	Non-mobile group (reception entrants)	Mobile group (late entrant).
W	2%	14%
1	34%	21%
2	43%	57%
3	21%	7%

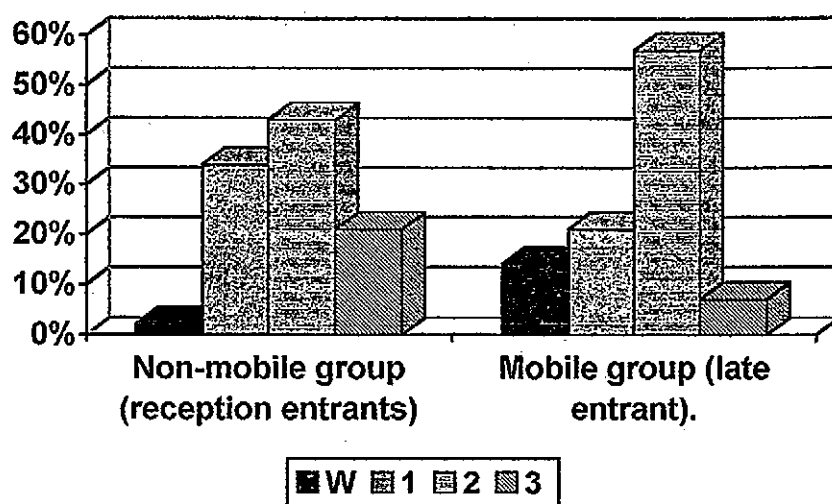


Table 5.13 showed similar marked variations in the children's attainment in mathematics between the non-mobile and the mobile groups. 12% more children in the mobile group attained level W, 13% more children in the non-mobile group attained level 1, 13% more children in the mobile groups attained level 2 and 14% more children in the non-mobile group attained level 3.

Also the continued school focus (1995-1997) was the development of a school-based language and literacy programme, that included the local Health Authority speech therapist working in school both to provide weekly speech therapy sessions to a substantial group of children (who previously had not attended the clinic) and joint staff and parent training sessions and the extension of the Reading Recovery programme for a selected group of children in years 1&2 to a class-based writing support project that gave staff training and targeted groups of children. Perhaps this programme was more effective as the 1994-1997 mobility figures were lower and so more children stayed in the school to benefit from the support.

Could the 1997 SATs results reflect the additional language and literacy input?

Sue decided to explore the question more, so she found the starting dates for the mobile group to ascertain if the actual length of time spent at Oak Tree might

affect the children's attainment. From the school records she deduced that 14 out of the 61 children who took SATs in 1997 started their full-time education elsewhere and of those children 14 % joined during reception (Yr R), 43% joined year 1 (Y1), 29% joined at the start of year 2 (Y2) and 14% joined during year 2 (Y2). This showed that 86% of the mobile group (late entrants) spent a maximum of one year at Oak Tree, so they had only a short time to experience the literacy and language input in contrast to the children in the non-mobile group who had sustained input.

To conclude the investigation Sue considered additional pupil background information about the whole cohort of 61 year 2 children who took SATs 1997 and she selected five factors that were season of birth, pupils' sex, entitlement to free school meal, home language and special educational needs (SEN). The table below shows her analysis and all results are shown as percentages.

Table 5.14. Analysis of pupil background factors for year 2 children who took SATs 1997.

Pupil background factor.	Percentage of children.
Age: Season of birth	Autumn 43% Spring 26% Summer 31%
Sex	Boys 51% Girls 49%
Entitlement to free school meals	53%
Home language: English additional language	18%
Special Educational Needs (SEN)	36%

Table 5.14 shows 43% of children were born between September-December (Autumn), 26% were born between January-April (Spring) and 31% were born between May-August (Summer). Previous research into the relationship between achievement and age has detected differences in achievement between children born in different stages in the school year, resulting from variations in maturity levels of children and length of schooling and/or readiness for school, which appeared to persist beyond primary school (Massy et al, 1996). Sue and Margaret

wondered how season of birth might impact on children's attainment in SATs, but felt their analysis was inclusive as Park LEA's admission policy minimised the disadvantage to the summer-born children as all children were admitted during the autumn term. Consequently all children received approximately 9 terms in school up to time they took SATs.

On the other hand Sue and Margaret felt that perhaps the benefit of spending longer in school was counter-balanced by a mismatch between the prescribed curriculum provision offered in reception classes and then year 1&2 classes and the developmental needs of a 4-5-6 year old child. They felt that equalising the length of children's schooling would not necessarily boost the performance of younger children. The cohort showed approximate even gender-balance of 51% boys and 49% girls and 53% entitlement to free school meals and so the analysis for both was inconclusive.

Also 18% of the children had English as an additional language but as the level of fluency in English was not considered Sue and Margaret felt the analysis was incomplete. Similarly 36% of the children had special educational needs (SEN) but no account had been taken of the type or level of need that could impact on their attainment in SATs. Despite limitations of their analysis Sue and Margaret felt that there were strong links between specific pupil characteristics and performance in KS1 SATs. The major influence appeared to be the reduced pupil mobility for the cohort 1994-1997.

Or –

Could the 1997 SATs results simply reflect the higher natural ability of the children?

Cycle 4. Feedback to school governors

Margaret and Sue reported the NC KS 1 SATs results and the findings of the school self-evaluation project to the governor's curriculum sub-committee (25th November 1996). Four governors attended and James was unable to come so Margaret previously discussed her approach with him. They both thought it would be a good idea to widen the discussion about the children's attainment in 1996 SATs by including their progress from entry into school.

This would be the first opportunity to share the findings of their extensive enquiry about the children's attainment and progress. Also it would directly relate to the Park LEA's governor training programme (1995-1996) on interpreting pupil performance data, the explanatory meeting with elected members (19 November 1996) when the school self-evaluation study of Oak Tree was presented as an example of good practice and the inclusion of the report with the school information that is required by Ofsted (1995:22) in preparation for the future school inspection in January 1997.

Sue wanted to present the findings of the enquiry and Margaret agreed to this as Sue had done most of the actual analysis, she was assessment co-ordinator and far more expert than Margaret and familiar with the finer details. Also this was her last week in school before admission to hospital for a major operation that required extended sick leave for her recovery. Peter (chair of the curriculum committee) opened the meeting and began to ask specific questions about the SATs results. He had obviously earlier made his own evaluation of the statistics. He followed a very detailed pre-written script (unknown to Sue and Margaret) and was quite aggressive and negative in his approach whilst the other three governors remained quiet:

*These test results are poor! How can you improve the results next year?
We need to improve standards. We must have more children attaining the*

national average or above. Oak Tree needs to perform better than Beech Tree Primary School down the road.

Margaret suggested that their own value-added analysis examined all the issues that he was making and actually gave informed answers to them as Sue provided very worthwhile evidence from her work. Also the information in the report gave everyone a very detailed, clear picture of the characteristics of Oak Tree, the educational needs of the children and so it was vital that everyone considered its contents rather than just the raw test results. Peter was unconvinced. Margaret felt that he was following the current political agenda, he was overstepping his monitoring role or perhaps he just had an alternative viewpoint from his own experience in an independent secondary school whose reputation was gained from good examination results. He was unable to visit Oak Tree during the school day to appreciate the progress made by young children from entry into school to end of KS1.

Reflections on cycle 4

Margaret related Peter's reaction to the 1996 SATs results to the work of House (McBeath, 1999:4) who wrote:

Any attempt to evaluate a school or any other organisation is founded on values and purposes, covert or explicit... contrary to common belief, evaluation is not the ultimate arbiter, delivered from our objectivity and accepted as the final judgement. Evaluation is always derived from biased origins. When someone wants to defend something or attack something, he always evaluated it. Evaluation is a motivated behaviour. Likewise, the way in which the results of an evaluation are accepted depends on whether they help or hinder the person receiving them. Evaluation is an integral part of the political processes of our society (House, 1973).

Like many head teachers Margaret was working in a very volatile local and national political arena. Her experience at the governor curriculum subcommittee meeting confirmed that this group of governors was following the story that was told publicly about school performance through raw test results and they did not realise the incompleteness. She had to find another way to re-tell the story so that

they could understand it better rather than be confused by it and gain a wider perception of the hidden but crucial issues of Oak Tree. McBeath (1999:5) highlights the need to have a clear purpose for school evaluation and Margaret was seeking to have a shared and clear purpose for the evaluation of Oak Tree to foster honesty and respect rather than confusion and mistrust. She wondered what the governors saw as the key purpose.

Was it political, accountability, professional development, organisation development or the improvement of teaching and learning?

How could she re-tell the story so the purpose of the value-added analysis was clear?

How could she re-tell the story to show the effects of school context and pupil background on children's achievement?

Cycle 5. Evaluation of the attainment and progress of summer born children

The evaluation project (Autumn 1997) developed in two parts. The first part was a reconnaissance, joint enquiry involving Margaret and four local head teachers (Cycle 5A). The second part involved Margaret (a seconded head teacher to Park LEA inspectorate to co-ordinate the project) and 50 local head teachers of both infant and primary schools (Cycle 5B).

Cycle 5A. Exploring the attainment and progress of summer born children

The aim at the beginning of the project was to explore the factors that influence the attainment and progress of summer born children (Massey, Elliott & Ross, 1996; Sharp, 1995; Sharp, Hutchison and Whetton, 1994). Also to examine data from a new LEA computer programme that was devised to show value-added analysis or school effectiveness at Key Stage 1. The computer programme used

children's Baseline scores to forecast performance at the end of Key Stage 1 English and Mathematics tests.

In order to do this Margaret visited each of the four schools to examine the Entry Profile (Baseline) results and NC KS1 SATs results with each of the head teachers and discuss the contextual factors related to this particular group of children with the class teachers. A written record was made summarising the main findings after each visit. The four schools were quite different from each other in location within Park LEA, size, physical layout and catchment area. There were three infant schools and one primary school. The names of the projects members and their schools are anonymous as Margaret worked within an agreed ethical framework of confidentiality.

Table 5.15 Summary of pupil information from four schools in Park LEA.

School	Number of summer born children		Entry Profile English results					Entry Profile Maths results					Projected KS1 English results				Projected KS1 Maths results			
	boys	Girls	wt	1	2	3	4	wt	1	2	3	4	bl1	1	2	3	bl1	1	2	3
School A	5	5	Data unavailable																	
School B	11	9	0	0	10	9	0	0	1	13	6	0	1	18	1	0	0	12	8	0
School C	5	16	Data unavailable																	
School D	15	14	0	3	18	7	1	1	1	15	11	1	1	8	19	1	2	7	18	2

NB: Baseline evaluations are recorded on a scale wt (working towards (1)) to working beyond (5) of each profile statement.
Key stage 1 results are recorded on a scale bl1 (below level 1) to level 3. (refer Chapter 5, page 3)

Analysing the data

Table 5.15 shows that School A had a total of 10 children, School B had 20, School C had 21, and School D had 29 summer born children in each of their reception year groups. Margaret was only able to complete the data analysis for School B and School D due to difficulties with the computer programme. However, it confirmed the assumption that children of average ability on entry to school will show an average attainment at SATs. For example, School D, Entry Profile English results show 18 and 7 attaining levels 2-3 and Key Stage 1 English results show 18 children projected to score level 2, which was an expected level of achievement (progress) (Strand 1998).

The discussions with the head teacher and class teachers in each school included the effect of contributory factors that may effect the attainment and progress of children from entry into school to end of key stage 1. Also recognising and meeting the particular educational and social and emotional needs of summer born children in reception classes. All 4 schools considered the organisation of the reception classes and provided specific support to the summer born children in the form of allocating additional staff to them. School D reported that they had sought advice from the LEA early years inspector who recommended a specific class for these children. But after careful consideration of the implications for both the autumn and spring born children and the imbalance of class sizes it was decided to plan a specific support programme within each class that was similar to practice followed by other three schools. The support programme included flexible admission procedures involving extended part time school, with close liaison with parents, as appropriate. Also team teaching between classes to create flexible group sizes and individual assessment of children's progress that highlighted next steps in children's learning and tracked children's progress (Hutchin, 1996) and flexible play times for more integrated outdoor learning opportunities. Following recent

early years comparative research (Mills & Mills, 1998) these factors have been re-introduced following a period of prescriptive teaching methods throughout reception and key stage 1 with the intention of improved KS1 SATs results through target setting (Clarke, 1998; Ofsted, 2000).

Reflections on Cycle 5A

The reconnaissance enquiry gave Margaret the opportunity to collaboratively examine in depth one particular aspect of her own school self-evaluation study that was of greatest concern, that of the attainment and progress of summer born children. Like Strand (1997); Tymms (1996) and Massey, Elliott & Ross (1996) Margaret was concerned about effect of the date of birth and length of schooling on children's attainment and progress from entry into school to end of key stage 1. Previous studies looked at attainment at the end of Key Stage 1, but her intention was to start with attainment at baseline to highlight progress of this group of children throughout key stage 1. These children were the youngest children to be admitted into reception classes and so the youngest children to be formally assessed both on entry into school and at the end of year 2 and in fact throughout their education. Five head teachers were willingly discussing probably the most sensitive aspects of their school - the assessment of children's performance on entry into school and their projected performance in NC KS1 Sats prior to the availability of local and national benchmark information (QCA, 1998). Also they now had the opportunity to discuss further the hidden but crucial issues of each school and compare their findings.

Cycle 5B. Exploring the provision for summer born children on entry into school

At the time of the project Park LEA considered these initial findings both interesting and relevant to other research projects about the attainment and progress summer born children and the Senior Primary inspector requested that Margaret extend the project borough-wide.

The aim of the second stage of the project was to highlight the provision made by schools to accommodate summer born children into reception classes. Research (Hurst, 1997) has shown that the first year in formal schooling is crucial to future success for all children. In order to do this Margaret devised a questionnaire, with the LEA senior primary inspector. They followed the guidelines for constructing and administering questionnaires by McNiff & Stanley (1994). The questionnaire was constructed using different types of questions to collect three categories of information, as follows:

- Closed factual questions related to school type and size, organisation and size of reception classes, numbers of children by season of birth, in each reception class, admission procedures, deployment and qualifications of staff.
- Open factual questions related to the administration of the Entry Profile, curriculum provision and classroom organisation.
- Open description to allow the respondent the space to develop their answer without obvious restrictions.

The questionnaire was sent to 50 out of 68 infant and primary schools in Park LEA, selected at random from the computer. The questionnaires were numbered enabling the school to maintain anonymity. 41 completed questionnaires were returned for analysis, a return of 82%.

Analysing the data

Closed factual information about project schools

Table 5.16 Closed Factual Information About Project Schools.

School Type.								
Infant with nursery class	Infant without nursery class	Primary with nursery class	Primary without nursery class					
16	6	5	14					
School size.								
Below 1 form entry	1 form entry	2 form entry	3 form entry	4 form entry	5 form entry			
1	9	16	12	4	1			
Organisation of classes.								
Parallel class	Season of birth class		Mixed aged class					
27	2		12					
Class size.								
Under 20 children	20-25 children		25-30 children		Over 30 children			
2	5		21		13			
Order of size of each season of birth children in reception year group (largest group A –smallest group C).								
Autumn born			Spring born			Summer born		
A	B	C	A	B	C	A	B	C
17	12	9	9	16	14	19	9	11
Admission procedures for summer born children.								
Non phased admission					Phased admission			
7					34			
Deployment of staff.								
Class teacher	Part time teacher	NNEB		LSA	Student	Parent helper		Other
41	6	21		35	20	16		10

Table 5.16 shows that there were 16 infant schools with a nursery, six infant schools without a nursery, five primary schools with a nursery and 14 primary school schools without a nursery, in the sample of project schools. This illustrates the diverse nature of school type in Park LEA. Similarly, there is a diversity of school size as shown by one school below one form entry, nine one form entry schools, 16 one form entry schools, 12 three form entry schools, four four-form entry schools and one five form entry schools.

With respect to how the schools organised the reception classes, 27 schools had parallel classes, two schools had season of birth classes and 12 schools had

mixed age classes. It is interesting to note that in 19 schools the summer born children was the largest group, in nine schools it was the middle sized group and in eleven schools it was the smallest group of children.

When considering the deployment and qualifications of staff working in the reception classes it was apparent that the principal member of the reception staff in all schools had qualified teacher status or had obtained higher qualifications such as B.Ed or advanced diplomas as three teachers had specialist early qualifications. Also six schools used part time teachers to support children in the classroom or to provide curriculum release for the class teacher. Nursery Nurses (NNEBs) were part of the reception team in 21 schools and they were either deployed to work alongside the class teacher or to work with the class teacher and learning support assistants (LSAs), as 35 schools employed LSAs to work specifically with the reception children. Most LSAs were unqualified, but several participated on the Park LEA Training Programme. The hours worked by both NNEBs and LSAs varied from working full time with one class to part time allocation to more than one class.

Park LEA was located near various high schools, colleges and universities and 20 schools included a range of students, as the schools were recognised as training establishments for a variety of childcare and early years students. Regular parental help (qualified/unqualified) was present in 20 schools. Finally, six schools were allocated English Language (EAL) or bilingual support for minority ethnic children, three schools provided support for targeted children with differing special educational needs, one school was regularly supported by a retired teacher, another by the LEA maths advisor and another by a school governor with a special early years interest.

Open Factual Information About The Schools Administration of the Entry Profile

From the written responses of the questionnaires it was apparent that all the project schools followed Park LEA guidelines for the administration of the Entry Profile and assessed all the children within six weeks after admission into school and all children became full-time in January, most by the October half-term. This reflected the LEA policy that all schools should have similar admission procedures and admit all children into school during the first half of the autumn term. However, in reality the actual admission dates varied particularly for the summer born children, the assessments and parent/teacher consultations were completed within a period the beginning of October (first half-term of the Autumn term) and towards the end of November (second half-term of the Autumn Term).

One school completed the assessments by the end of January, as the head teacher creatively interpreted the assessment guidelines and assessed the summer born children six weeks after their January full-time admission, so staggering the assessments to more closely match the season of birth of the children and enabling more time and flexibility for the crucial observational assessments. Some schools assessed the children whilst they attended school part-time whilst other schools waited until the children attended full-time.

It is interesting to note that some schools showed concern and raised the question of fairness with respect to the admission system and the assessment of the summer born children during the autumn term. This is shown by the following extracts from the numbered questionnaires 1-50(q 1-50):

- *The timing of the assessments is unfair as the summer born children are six months younger than the other children (q5)*
- *There is less time because of the parents evening being arranged so soon (q4)*

- *There are too many children in the class to allow good assessment opportunities- it's easier for the first two cohorts (q9)*
- *They start later and spend longer part-time and they are assessed at a younger age (q12)*
- *I much preferred taking the children in over a longer period as in previous years with the summer born children coming into school after half-term. More time could be given to them because the previous two groups had had time to settle (q20)*
- *Baseline assessment generally shows that summer born children are less mature and less receptive to the assessment tasks (q32)*
- *Teachers have less time to observe the younger children (q44)*
- *It's harder to assess them because they are only part-time and they have not participated in everything (q47/49).*

Other schools recognised that season of birth could be a contributing factor to achievement at KS1:

- *Birth date is one of many factors to achievement (q3)*
- *The lower scoring children are usually the summer born children (q23)*
- *The summer born children are really nursery children and should be treated appropriately (q28/43)*
- *A few summer born children lack maturity and need nurturing into the school environment (q42)*
- *It was particularly noticeable with KS1 Sats results (1996) that it was the summer born children who achieved lower levels, despite having been identified early as needing more help and this help was given (q20)*
- *We have noted that in years 1,2 & 3 children with literacy difficulties, that is those identified with benefiting from extra help within school, are invariably summer born children (q28).*

Curriculum provision and classroom organisation

From the written responses it was apparent that the curriculum provision of all project school reflected the introduction of the government document Desirable Outcomes for Children's Learning (SCAA, 1996) and the National Curriculum. Emphasis was placed on the areas of learning of the Desirable Outcomes in the autumn and spring terms and then the subjects of the National Curriculum Key Stage 1 in the summer term, when most of the children were five years old. The majority of the schools felt that the individual learning needs of all children, irrespective of season of birth, could be met through careful planning of a differentiated curriculum; organisation and layout of the classroom into learning areas, availability of appropriate resources and deployment of staff:

- *The classroom (one large open plan area for both classes) is organised into learning areas, e.g. language, maths, construction, art etc (q2)*
- *The classroom environment allows for the creation of learning areas for suit the needs of the summer born children, as well as the others (q17)*
- *Children are encouraged to choose from a range of activities in designated curriculum areas of the classroom but are also expected to take part in more adult directed activities, as well (q29).*

However, seven schools made special provision for the less mature children by flexible working arrangement within the reception classroom and the nursery class and they recognised that these were primarily the summer born children:

- *Extra time is spent with NNEB and LSA on curriculum extension tasks, (q5)*
- *The organisation for these children is more like the nursery class (q6)*
- *These children need more free play, less directed activities and practice of motor control skills (q8)*

- *These children need larger spaces to play and appropriate equipment and outdoor learning facilities (q11)*
- *Throughout the year we run a very close liaison with our nursery (q21); these children shouldn't.*

Also 7 schools recognised the children's less developed social skills and lower self-esteem:

- *In social situations the younger children tend to observe for longer periods before joining in with others or would prefer solitary play (q8)*
- *Summer-born continue (throughout the school year) to be socially less confident (q28)*
- *It is very difficult to provide 'play learning' activities for the younger children when the older children are in focused work groups. The younger children are often aware that they are less able- poor self image is created (q35)*
- *The children shouldn't be rushed into formal learning they need time to make their own discoveries (q41)*
- *The summer born children have assembly in the classroom, but the other children attend the school assembly (q44)*
- *Some summer born children find play-times a daunting experience (q46)*
- *The teacher focuses her work with the summer birthday children in the morning...these children are more egocentric and have trouble being part of a large group (q48).*

On the contrary one school had a contrasting view about the social development of the children and discounted season of birth as a contributing factor:

- *Socially the children settle and form relationships in a very individual way- not found to be related to age but rather to family situation and pre-school experience (q20).*

Open description

Finally, in the comments section at the end of the questionnaire, three schools described in contrasting detail the need for recognising summer-born children as a distinct group within the reception cohort

- *I (the head teacher) make a point of saying to parents at the new parents meeting that the summer born children are potentially a very vulnerable group as they are very young to be in a primary school and need a gradual introduction to the building, the routines etc of a school. Staff are very aware of them as a group who may find the days long, even after a very gradual introduction. Parents are occasionally encouraged to take a child home after lunch if their stamina is flagging. Many of our summer born children, however, quickly settle and by the end of the school year are progressing on par with their peer group, though they may continue to be socially less confident. We have noticed that in years 1,2&3, children with literacy skills, i.e. those identified as benefiting from extra help within school are invariably summer born children. Parents continue to need support in understanding that summer born children may find school life potentially stressful and that everybody involved must be sensitive to their needs (q28).*
- *As no allowance is made for summer born children at any other stage of their academic lives e.g. transfer to junior departments etc. it is iniquitous to suggest that schooling at reception and KS1 should further discriminate. All children must come into appropriate (play orientated) provision at the same time. To have younger children try and fit into a class already developing its social character is extremely unfair and does not help any child. The system must allow summer born the same rights of entry as any other child (q14).*

- *I have been very concerned in the past that we were not nurturing the summer born children adequately when we admitted them in the mornings on a part-time basis. This meant they immediately had to integrate into an established, busy classroom environment where the staff had little time to give extra support and attention to these very young children. Consequently, this year I changed the admission system to cater more effectively for the needs of the summer born. We offered these children more afternoon visits when they initially had the classroom to themselves (before full-time attendance of the autumn born children) and we started their part-time attendance in the afternoon so that they gradually adjusted to working alongside the older children. They transferred to morning part-time attendance in the week before half-term. We found this procedure to be very successful in that these youngest children quickly gained confidence in the extremely calm afternoon sessions and subsequently they took morning attendance in their stride. The staff also feels that they had opportunity to discover the needs of the summer born children more effectively with this new admission procedure (q41).*

Reflections on Cycle 5B

Reflections: closed factual information

The factual information about the project schools highlights both the overt and covert factors that head teachers have to consider when making provision for all reception children in their schools. The overt factors are the type and possibly the size of school if pupil numbers remain consistent. The covert or unexpected are the annual changing size of pupil numbers of both the total reception intake and size of the three seasons of birth groups, which has may present consequences for organisation of classes, class sizes and admission procedures for particularly the summer born children. Also there are external factors that head teachers have

to consider, for example the location of the school in relation to day care or full time nursery provision as legally children can be admitted the term after their fifth birthday resulting in a significant number of summer-born children being admitted to school at the beginning of year 1, so missing the whole of their first year of formal education.

Reflections: open factual information

The open factual sections of the questionnaire begin to show the more covert factors relating to individual school contextual factors including, deployment and qualifications of staff, class room organisation and adequate indoor and outdoor learning environments, which appeared to be dependent both on budget constraints and the educational philosophy and professional values of the head teacher, early years team and/or school governors. Also it indicated the prescriptive early years policy of Park LEA and its interpretation of equal opportunities with respect to their perceived entitlement of standardised or similar good quality nursery and reception provision for all young children.

Reflections: open description

This final section of the questionnaire really indicated that staff in each school, offering early years provision, had a broad range of ideas and experience, different values and priorities for the care and education which they offered. Whilst in society many values are implicit, Margaret discovered that the adults in the 50 schools decided which of their values combined into their own early years provision. Also it became obvious from the written comments that these were decided in consultation with parents and carers and other members of the school community and were explicitly stated as part of the ethos and philosophy of the

school. This ethos appeared to be the basis for the planning of the curriculum programme and their practice (Moriarty & Siraj-Blatchford, 1998:85).

Learning from assessment and pupil data

In this chapter I examined and outlined the history of the development of fair indicators of school performance in infant and primary education and shown how statistical innovation has gone alongside other changes in educational policy.⁸ By reflecting on the data analysis and reference to literature I showed the progress in statistical techniques and their application to real educational issues in both policy and practice concerned with raising standards.

I highlighted four main elements.

- First, externally required statistically analysis is particularly relevant to the ongoing debate about using target setting and benchmarking as a means to foster school improvement and school self-evaluation (Ofsted, 2005 & 2003; SCAA, 1997; ISP, 2005; SEAL, 2005; Clarke, 1998).
- Second, the use of statistical evidence presumes that other value-driven elements of education have only marginal relevance.
- Third, these external requirements assume a culture of compliance amongst teachers (Hayes, 2001).
- Fourth, fair indicators of school performance conflict with the holistic notion of a fairer assessment of children's learning development and attainment or progress at key stage 1 (Filer & Pollard, 2000).

Value-Added

The Curriculum, Evaluation and Management Centre (CEM centre), at the University of Durham, designed and piloted the Value-Added National Project in

⁸ See Chapter 1 The Debate on Educational Assessment: Reviewing the Literature.

1995. The project was concerned with value-added indicators relating to externally measured attainment. Dearing recognised that there are many ways in which schools add value to their pupils... the others are no less essential and must feature as part of the context of the whole school within which any value added measures must be interpreted. (Dearing, 1995), But the introduction of the National Curriculum and a system of testing at the end of each key stage meant that the UK had in place a framework of external assessment that provided the potential for value added measures produced at the end of each Key stage.

The aim of the Value-Added Project initially was to look specifically at the end of Key Stage 2 and end of Key Stage 4 (GCSE examinations). However, the concept of value-added was soon applied to key stage 1 (Tymms, 1999), when he linked Performance Indicators in Primary Schools (PIPs) Baseline Assessment to levels in the end of Key Stage 1 statutory assessments.

Also several LEAs, including Bexley, Wandsworth and Avon (Tymms, 1996), examined value-added possibilities between reception and end of Key Stage 1 and Surrey Education Service commissioned a value-added project to explore the use of their baseline assessment to measure pupil progress across key stage 1 (Sammons, 1999; Sammons & Smees 1998).

Fitz-Gibbon's (1996) critique of the Value-Added National Project highlights the theoretical background of the policy maker's thinking. Also it provides a helpful summary of my reflective learning in this chapter that is shown in italics. Fitz-Gibbon's critique is divided into 7 key points:

1. Value-added is here to stay

Fitz-Gibbon suggested the project's feasibility as it met the four criteria that were set. The criteria were readily understandable, statistically valid, not an undue burden on schools and cost effective. She anticipated the permanency of the

notion of value-added, because schools became interested in the notion of the process of school improvement rather than that of school effectiveness.

This was how my interest was evoked and why I initiated the school self-evaluation project at Oak Tree.

Schools would be able to look systematically at test and examination results not only in terms of the absolute level of achievement but also in terms of progress each child made.

Also schools would be able to appreciate this additional insight into the work of teaching. Value-added measures provided an index of the progress made by their pupils relative to that made by similar pupils in other schools, and when examining school improvement value-added was the index they needed to use to measure that improvement.

These factors certainly influenced my decision to work with other trusted local head teachers in Park LEA to explore the attainment and progress of children in our schools.

Furthermore, value-added could be used when you investigated which pupils in your school are particularly effective or whether 'low' results for some pupils are in line with prior performance or represent a current failure to make progress.

This influenced me to pursue the borough wide project that examined the attainment and progress of summer born children.

Finally, value-added provided the hard evidence of teaching (Performance Management, a new teacher appraisal scheme, ATL, 2000; DfEE, 2000) rather than impressions of teaching effectiveness.

2. Value-added will be used for both internal school management purposes and public accountability purposes

Dr Nick Tate, SCAA's chief executive at the time, gave a decisive lead by stating that the Value Added National Project was concerned with facilitating school improvement efforts as well as providing information for public accountability. Since then value-added analyses, together with KS1 and KS2 test data form a crucial part of school improvement plans, LEA and school's joint annual review of school performance and Ofsted's judgement of the effectiveness of the educational performance of schools, taking into account of its context: the prior attainment and background of the pupils at the school (Ofsted, 2003).

3. Schools need someone with data analysis skills

Soon after key stage and GCSE results became available school were required to conduct rapid and simple analysis of value-added, pupil-by-pupil for English and Mathematics. This was accomplished by SCAA and then QCA who provided essential information from national results on computer disks or simply in publications or newspapers. Then someone (head teacher or deputy head teacher) and/or the LEA processed the school's own data, on a spreadsheet or in a statistical package (assessment manager). The development of the computer has radically improved the way researchers and schools work and recently the DfES (2003) provided the Assessment Manager IT package and Pupil Achievement Tracker for schools to analyse and interpret evidence from local and national data to prioritise areas for school development and make predictions for target setting throughout the primary school.

At the outset of my own school self-evaluation project I, as head teacher working with the deputy, were interested in data analysis and the Park LEA inspector provided the data analysis skills to conduct the joint data analysis

exercise. Now I realise that there are much more sophisticated mechanisms available to head teachers for analysis of factors affecting school performance.

4. Value-added can be volatile in several ways

Fitz-Gibbon acknowledged that the educational world was unlikely to settle down to a static system. She recognised the continuing developments of the National Curriculum and its assessment system. It would seem continuing developments to baseline assessment could compound this factor. Also, that there was no guarantee that an analysis for one year's data would be adequate for the following year. Furthermore, the value-added measures in the National Curriculum subjects would certainly vary around average (usually designated as zero indicating zero difference between schools' results and those expected from teachers on the basis of the national pattern). The up-and-down variation was to be expected because of the complexities of influences on the results and the ever-changing sample of children with whom schools were working. The Value Added National Framework considered three years average as a possible index. Sammons & Smees (1998:402) confirmed that year-on-year analysis proved valuable for the improvement and in relation to monitoring the achievement of specific school targets.

5. Value-added needs to be considered with great care: it is only one of many outcomes in a school

Fitz-Gibbon recognised that examination and assessments are not the only important outcomes of schooling. There are many other outcomes that are precious to individuals, to society, to parents and employers. A good and safe quality of life in school is one such outcome. Further really bad teaching could

conceivably lead to high value-added scores if children sought help outside the classroom, such as private tutors. She felt that head teachers needed to know more than one indicator to make tentative judgements about their school and how it was functioning.

This was the prime factor that encouraged me to start my own self-school evaluation project, but I experienced at first hand that there was a much narrower viewpoint held by school governors and the Ofsted inspection team.⁹

This key point seems to be the most pertinent to my research, as it particularly forces me to question my own educational philosophy and to explicate more meanings of a fairer and meaningful way of representing school examination results (Thomas, Sammons & Street, 1997) and therefore a fairer assessment of children's learning, development and attainment, by exploring the evidence from assessment and pupil data.

In reality I realise that I was grappling with the three dimensions of accountability that operated at all levels of the national and local education system at that time (1997); the moral, legal and financial dimensions of accountability. I now know that I was struggling with an apparent imbalance of the three, with a dominance of the legal and financial over the moral aspects of accountability. Within that arena I was striving to fulfil my moral obligation, as a teacher, of providing appropriate, enjoyable and interesting educational experiences for all young children that helped them make progress in their learning. I felt morally accountable to parents for the educational development of their children. I felt morally responsible, together with local professionals, in and beyond our schools, to provide accurate and appropriate information from which each child's progress could be fairly tracked, measured and compared (Headington, 2003).

⁹ See Chapter 7 Learning from Ofsted; Exploring the Evidence.

In 1997, when there was an upsurge in data collection, I was working with the early, simplistic approach to value-added that rested on using the numerical difference between the results at Key Stage 1 and at Key Stage 2. Furthermore, as I was head teacher of Oak Tree I was only working with Baseline and KS1 assessment results. Tymms (1999; 59) described the term value-added as very unfortunate and that it had two quite distinct meanings, which cause considerable difficulties that lead to confusion. Furthermore he stated that the simplistic approach was not deemed appropriate as the assessments made at Baseline, Key Stage 1 & 2 were not comparable in content or technical accuracy in areas such as validity and reliability, yet I was actively encouraged to pursue this approach (Shorrocks-Taylor, 1999; Lindsay & Desforges 1998).

Also, Tymms & Henderson highlighted that the simplistic approach was fraught with difficulties, such as the ever-changing population of the school, particularly applicable to Oak Tree (Tymms & Henderson, 1996). He felt that like could not be compared with like with such ease. Certainly local head teacher colleagues and I experienced considerable professional difficulties and confusion by having to work with the simplistic interpretation of value-added.

Nevertheless, we were beginning to work with the second and more technical approach to value added measures in the primary school that was investigated within the Value Added National Project (Tymms & Henderson 1996) and later adopted within the 2002 KS1-KS2 Value Added Pilot (www.dfes.gov.uk/performance/tables). This approach was based on how pupils progress in relation to other pupils. We began to examine how pupils progressed in relation to other pupils. We compared with the median performance of other pupils with the same or similar KS1 attainment. Sometimes the value-added was positive and sometimes it was negative. Like Tymms & Henderson we began to realise that the approach was more statistically valid than the simplistic approach.

described previously but it too had difficulties. It required accurate information of individual pupils' results based on comparable assessment and a large enough sample size to ensure that measurements were statistically valid (locally the accuracy of information was questionable). Tymms worked on the pilot in 2002 recognised the need to include statistics on coverage, the number of pupils included in the measure, and stability, the percentage of pupils included within the same school at both key stages. Tymms (1999) provided an accessible and informative explanation of value-added, the measure of residuals, something we were not able to do.

The use of information technology has made the development of value-added more feasible but the complexity of the measure cannot be denied. The difficulty of explaining information that accurately, and therefore, fairly reflect the progress in pupils' learning has appeared to outweigh the public need for information. The raw data of summative assessment has instead been left for public scrutiny and interpretation. Value added has been recommended for use in schools as a means of analysing and comparing pupils' progress from Key Stage 1 to Key Stage 2 (DfEE, 1999d). From that time the emphasis has gradually moved away from the dangers of using value-added as comparative, contextualised data for Target Setting & Benchmarking, (QCA, 1998), as outlined by Richards, 2001, to using it to structure school improvement and directly include it by adding value to or enhancing the process of children's learning (Clarke 2005, 2003, 2001 & 1998).

6. There will always be the danger of data corruption

Fitz-Gibbon realised that when there is any publication of value added measures it was essential to ensure that the value added system was fair, and it was seen to be fair, to all schools. She felt that this meant that data must be derived from externally marked examinations or assessment. She strongly felt the need to

remove names of schools and candidates from scripts, as a basic quality assurance procedure (this is pertinent to KS2 tests, but could be applied to any Key Stage tests).

Fitz-Gibbons, academics and school-based professionals continued to raise the issues of assessment quality, equity and fairness (Goldstein, Huiqi, Rath & Hill, 2000). The aim of the value-added approach, or regression analysis, was to compare like with like. In doing so it aimed to make fair comparisons and a lot rested on this. Schools continue to be compared using value-added scores and policy decisions are made on the basis of these findings.

The most honest answer to the question - *Is it really fair?* is that we can never be certain. But we can make informed comments and recognise that there are degrees of fairness. It is clearly unfair to compare schools on the basis of raw league tables and it is certainly fair to compare large groups that were created by random assignment. Value-added measures appear to be somewhere in between these two extremes. If done well, and if based on high quality data, regression procedures provide the fairest performance indicators available. But those *ifs* should not be ignored. If one tried to compare a school in a tough area where English is an additional language for all pupils with a school in a leafy suburb where English is a first language for all then no amount of clever statistics would make for a fair comparison. Like would simply not be being compared with like. There are limits to the approach. As a general rule problems (misinterpretations) are most likely to appear in unusual cases and that means school or pupils with exceptional intakes or scores (Tymms, 1999:63).

These were my feelings as head teacher of Oak infant school when I experienced at first hand an alternative viewpoint by governors, LEA councillors and Ofsted who were unable or perhaps unwilling to try to explore and understand the exceptional intake of the school and its affect

on pupil achievement, despite me undertaking the school self-evaluation project. This challenge continues to be an issue for head teachers of school with exceptional circumstances.

I believe that:

Natural justice demands that schools are held accountable only for those things that they can influence (for good or ill) and not for the pre-existing differences between their intakes (Nuttall, 1990; 25).

Fortunately the national vision and policy changed (DfES, 2004; DfES, Excellence and Enjoyment, 2003 & DfEE, 1998) and now the emphasis is more on school communities working together in partnership to raise standards in education (Merton LEA, 2004).

Also, it has been recognised that the assessment of young children is notoriously difficult since good tests are typically long - the longer the more reliable - and yet young children tend to be slow to respond, making the collection of data potentially tedious. Young children tend to have short attention spans, placing severe limitations on the amount of data that can be collected. Further young children must be assessed individually. These are some of the reasons why many people have favoured observational studies for assessing children starting school (Tymms & Coe, 2003). Also, criticisms have been levelled at assessment procedures at key stage 1 (NUT, 2005; Assessment Reform Group, 1999) and their future continues to be questioned.

Gipps & Stobert (1993) consider that such assessment have limitations in their basic design and in the way that an individual teacher may administer or deliver the test. Additionally there may be discrepancies in the way that the results for individual children are interpreted. Different teachers may also interpret children's understanding differently. There is the danger that some children could be labelled as a result of tests that are administered in this way, because teachers' knowledge

is not value-free, therefore their assessments need to be monitored (Siraj-Blatchford (1994:90):

When I analysed the written comments on the questionnaires, in the study of attainment and progress of summer born children many respondents raised the issue of fairness related to the difficulties of being able to provide quality individual children's assessments to the summer born children within a busy classroom. But many showed collaborative working practices that monitored and discussed the results of baseline assessments and children's progress. Also Park LEA personnel, who visited schools, moderated Key Stage 1 assessment procedures and results.

7. Absent or transient pupils will be an issue

Fitz-Gibbon stated that despite statistics being easy to come by there would be other issues. Teachers are unable to teach pupils who are not present and for value added measures you need for each pupil a set of results on intake to school or key stage and on completion of the key stage. Should pupils count in indicators of value-added if they have only recently joined a school (assuming they brought their earlier results with them)? What about persistent absentees?

In primary and secondary schools studies undertaken by the CEM centre and Strand (1997) it was clear that pupil turnover could pose considerable problems in substantial numbers of school and mobility affected pupil attainment. In primary schools this problem of turn-over, combined with small year group sizes and the large four year time span of key stage 2 called into the feasibility of a value-added system for the whole of this stage.

Similarly I grappled with the challenge of transient pupils being a major part of the school population at Oak Tree and many of them not having earlier results. This was the main factor that evolved during the school self-

evaluation project at Oak Tree, and the one that caused the greatest discussion and debate.

Perhaps this is one of the factors influencing QCA's decision (2004) to move baseline assessment to the end of reception year so that there was only a two-year gap in Key Stage 1 rather than the three-year gap previously experienced.

Summary

This chapter is just one practical example that seeks to show fairer indicators of effective school performance in infant/primary education, by examining value-added measures that show attainment and progress from entry into school to end of Key Stage 1. It describes and collaboratively examines practical situations that firmly belong in the story of development of increasingly sophisticated techniques for analysing individual data within a hierarchical context. Concern for school factors that affect pupil progress gave rise to the evaluative and reflective work of school effectiveness research (Rutter et al, 1979; Mortimore et al, 1988a), and more recently the pro-active 'school improvement' ideas and initiatives (Hopkins et al., 1994). My research falls within the parameters of these linked movements and also forms part of the current and future directions of a less harsh inspection system, based on school 'self-evaluation' (Ofsted, 2005 & 2003).

I offer this chapter as part of an original contribution to knowledge, the process of coming to know. I have shown the development in my own learning and understanding in the process of deconstructing my own infant practice and by working together with others to make it explicit. Through this I have been able to explain my emerging perceptions of a fairer assessment as a *living educational theory*. This chapter - Learning from Assessment and Pupil Data, has been one, but very crucial jigsaw piece of the *multi-layered jigsaw puzzle*, through which I am representing my research as a whole.

Chapter 6

Learning from Ofsted: Exploring the Evidence

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Learning from Ofsted: Exploring the Evidence

Purpose of chapter

The Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) replaced earlier agencies of inspection and it was created in 1993 as a result of the Education Act 1992. It was a significant and ambitious national policy initiative to serve two main functions that were to promote accountability and to raise educational standards. Ofsted published its first handbook in 1993 and made revisions in 1995, 2000, 2003 and 2005. The handbooks in 1993 and 1995 demonstrated Ofsted's strong commitment to promoting *improvement through inspection*. All schools are inspected according to the specified format and the explicit framework that is set out in the Ofsted handbook. There are different handbooks for inspection of secondary, primary, nursery and special schools, but all are inspected against four main areas:

*The quality of education provided;
The educational standards achieved;
The efficient management of financial resources and
The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils.*
(Ofsted, 1995: 8: par.2).

A registered inspector and a team of trained inspectors carry out a school inspection according to the requirements of the inspection schedule. Systematic collection and evaluation of evidence is at the heart of inspection and the resulting report:

Should be as fair and just a representation of the school as possible with all recommendations firmly supported by evidence (p.20: par.12).

A key part of the registered inspector's role is to manage the evidence base and ensure that:

Sound and fair judgements derive from it (p.20: par.12).

In this chapter I describe and explain how Ofsted inspectors assess educational standards achieved by children at infant school and make judgements about their attainment and progress.

This chapter shows how Ofsted happens in practice (a real life setting) and it illustrates how one head teacher tells her own story. Cullingford (1999:4) recognises that all who observe what goes on in schools before, during and after inspections have tales to tell. He suggests that these tales are easily dismissed as anecdotes and he poses the question –

How many separate cases are needed to accumulate valid evidence?

I draw in data from the three stages of the Ofsted inspection process at one infant school that took place 1996-1997, rather than data from a three-day event (January 1997). I examine the inspection the process by using the Ofsted Handbook, the school's Ofsted inspection report, the head teacher's professional diary that is a factual record of events and her reflective diary that is a personal account of events and her experiences throughout the year.

This chapter follows the model of education action research developed by McNiff, Lomax & Whitehead (2003 & 1996:14) and adapts the co-researcher(s) self-study action research approach developed by Evans & Lomax, Lomax (1996:138). I use the narrative (fictionalised story) as it is recognised as an appropriate vehicle for including relevant feelings, values and actions in the research, a strong tradition of action research.

Because this chapter concentrates on a real event I am following the practice of using fictionalised story that has been adopted by researchers as an appropriate way of dealing with the ethical issues of anonymity and confidentiality, (Winter 1991, 1989 & 1988; Carter 1992: Evans 1998 & 1996). I frame the chapter by adopting the action reflection process in which cycles explicate meanings about a fairer assessment of young children's learning, development and attainment

through examining an Ofsted inspection process. This chapter attempts to show the development of my own learning and understanding in the process of deconstructing my own infant practice and making it explicit to others. Whitehead conceptualises this as the creation of a *living educational theory* and Clandinin and Connelly (1999& 1995) use the term as:

Teachers' professional knowledge landscapes which are narratively constructed...to sketch a compelling view of the epistemological and moral world in which teachers live and work (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995:vii).

My research is in contrast to other researchers (Ferguson, 2000; Cullingford, 1999; Early, 1998) who have written about and evaluated the role and function of Ofsted, particularly as it relates to effective schools, school improvement and raising standards.

Three action research cycles

The research in this chapter is presented in three action reflection cycles. In the first cycle I set about examining data drawn from the Ofsted inspection at Oak Tree infant school. I focus on the personal not the numerical (statistics) aspects of the Ofsted inspection process because I believe that a holistic view of assessment and inspection will provide a more balanced/true picture of the learning, development and attainment of the children, school performance and school improvement. Like MacBeath (1999) I believe that performance tables and inspectors' reports only tell a partial story, sometimes get it wrong and that self-evaluations of schools are information rich.

At this stage of my research I was influenced by the notion of school self-evaluation put forward by Ferguson (2000); NAHT (2000); Ofsted (2000); MacBeath (1999). Like MacBeath (1999) I understand that school improvement occurs when people are not put on the defensive. It starts with the questions in your mind about what you are doing and it accelerates when you share them with

others engaged in the same enterprise. I wanted to find out if Ofsted inspectors consider the evidence of self-evaluation alongside their judgements and external evidence. I wanted to find out the role, impact and effect of Ofsted inspection on school standards.

For this reason I wanted to present the three stages of the Ofsted process rather than the three-day event of the inspection. I represented the work as a chronological and factual tale that was supported by the Ofsted Handbook and related documentation, diary extracts and records of events and conversations with people directly involved with the inspection of Oak Tree infant school

In the second cycle I share the tale with a professional colleague (critical friend) and a director of studies to gain their critical responses. This led me to see the limitations of the tale and some of the conflict, contradictions and confusions in the Ofsted system. The tale provided only a long list of boring facts about events and actions and not a rich picture of the research that showed relevant feelings and values. Having shared the account with the two colleagues I greatly reflected on their feedback. I realised that sometimes I express things unconsciously and convey implicit messages about my preferred infant practice, my educational priorities and values. Then I decided to improve the tale so that it became a fictionalised tale adapted from a children's story to highlight the importance of the children having a central role in my work and the emphasis that I placed on story for their learning, enjoyment and literacy development.

In the third cycle I seek the help of three infant teachers who helped me choose the children's story. I wanted to draw on their knowledge of me as an infant teacher and of my work with the young children at Oak Tree Infant School. Then I modified the Ofsted tale and shared it with research colleagues to gain their critical response and for their collective examination of it.

This part of the research process clearly constituted action research, as it is generally known, although other parts of the research rely on the reflective practice model. The research colleagues and I worked in co-researcher mode to explore how Ofsted inspectors assess the educational standards achieved by children at infant school and make judgements about their learning, development and attainment. We did this with a clear commitment to using our insider knowledge and experience about the evidence base and the criteria of assessment that Ofsted used.

Ofsted inspection at Oak Tree infant school

Oak Tree Infant School was notified in April 1995 that it would be included in the Ofsted programme of inspections for the school year 1996-1997. The school was informed in July 1996 of the contractors, the composition of the inspection team, the time allocation for the inspection and that the impending inspection would take place in January 1997. This enabled the head teacher (me), deputy head teacher, staff, governors and the LEA to discuss their strategy for managing the inspection process before the autumn term. As the inspection was conducted under the 1995 framework, the role of the school as an active participant and the notion of the actual inspection being developmental were not expressed in the Ofsted procedures. The main sources of evidence (re: educational standards achieved by the pupils at the school; attainment and progress) were collected both before and during a school inspection.

Before the inspection there were three main sources of evidence that included National Curriculum assessment, both test results and teacher assessment, the Pre-Inspection Context and School Indicator (PICSi) Report, which gave comparative data and other evidence of attainment was provided from the school

self-evaluation project.¹ The other evidence of attainment included Baseline Assessment, value-added analysis of the progress made by pupils in a year group based on prior attainment and the outcomes of diagnostic tests.²

During the inspection there were six main sources of evidence about the current and prior attainment of pupils throughout the school and particularly those 5 and 7 years old. The sources of evidence were collected from teacher assessment and records, observation of children at work, scrutiny of samples of pupils' current and earlier work, including National curriculum assessment, analysis of statements, individual education plans and annual reviews for a sample of children on the school's register of special educational needs, scrutiny of any evidence of the progress pupils for whom English is an additional language and discussion with a sample of high, average and low attaining pupils exploring their knowledge and understanding of the work in hand and the progress they have made (Ofsted, 1995:58).

Ofsted inspection report Oak Tree Infant School

Oak Tree infant was identified as failing when it was inspected in January 1997 and it was deemed to require Special Measures. The inspection report stated that there were some strengths that included:

The curriculum, teaching and attainment, progress and expectations in the nursery;

The stability provided by the school for the pupils. They feel secure in the classrooms and the behaviour is, on the whole, satisfactory;

The good parental involvement, including home reading scheme and parents are encouraged to come into school to read with children;

¹ See Chapter 5 Learning from Assessment and Pupil Data: Exploring the Evidence.

² The evidence of attainment provided by the school is explained in Chapters 4 & 5.

Parents feel that the school promotes good attitudes and values. Parents feel that the school is informative through newsletters;

There are good links with the community and various agencies who visit the school, and

Good bi-lingual support for the under 5's.

Also the inspection report stated that there were major weaknesses in the school that included:

Educational standards achieved by the pupils at the school: attainment and progress: Attainment in all subjects in national tests (1995 & 1996) is well below national averages... The baseline attainment for these year 2 children showed a low level of attainment for many of the pupils when they began school;

On entry the pupils showed a range of ability though there is a significant skew to the lower level of ability... The monitoring of pupil's attainment and progress is neither detailed enough nor used sufficiently to match work to pupils' needs. Insufficient strategies are in place to improve attainment... The unsatisfactory level of attendance also affects the attainment and progress of pupils;

In all areas of learning for the pupils under 5, the attainment in the nursery is at a higher level than is being achieved in the reception classes. Children in the nursery are attaining good standards and pupils in reception attain average standards in most areas of the Desirable Outcomes for Children's Learning;

In class and by the end of Key Stage 1 attainment is below or well below average in core subjects of English, mathematics and science and all other subjects apart from music, which is average;

Attainment and progress is lowered mostly by limited coverage of the National Curriculum programmes of study by the teachers in the classroom. When pupils are taught in small groups progress is satisfactory. However, the rest of the pupils in the class are on undemanding tasks... There is insufficient direct teaching of skills, knowledge, research and investigative and experimental work; and

Pupils with special educational needs (SEN) or English as a second language are attaining at a similar level to their peers.

(I have excluded the reporting of quality of education provided, pupils' moral, social and cultural development and the management and efficiency of the school).

A number of key issues for action by the school community were identified in the inspection report:

- Improve standards in all subjects and in particular in English, mathematics and science;

- Raise standards in literacy, IT and numeracy across the curriculum;

- Improve the quality of the curriculum provision;

- Improve the quality of teaching of the whole curriculum;

- Develop the spiritual, moral, social and cultural education; and

- Strengthen the roles of middle and senior management.

Oak Tree Infant School

Oak Tree Infant School was located on the eastern boundary of Park LEA, an outer London borough. It was a mixed county school for children 3-7 years and it was a designated three-form entry school that was opened on 1950 with two part-time nursery classes being added in 1990. The school had extensive grounds that included a school field, wooded areas, a pond and a conservation area and it shared the site with Oak Tree Junior School. Oak Tree was situated in Oak Tree

ward and it appeared to be located in a satisfactory socio-economic area.³ But the children came from a small part of the ward. This area included a local authority housing estate that was built in the 1950s. Also a small housing association development was added in 1994.

The LEA directed families to the school from other areas of the borough and also a neighbouring borough. This was due to the extensive building of housing developments in those areas during 1994-1997 and no places for the children in their local primary schools. A significant proportion of the children came from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds that included a high proportion of young single parent families, families seeking refugee status and families with temporary housing in the area. The school data for 1996-1997 showed 70+% entitlement to free school meals, 50% pupil mobility, 30-40% children with English language support (ELS) and 30% children with special educational needs (SEN). Oak Tree infant school was amalgamated with the neighbouring junior school to form a large primary school in September 1998, eighteen months after the Ofsted inspection.

Cycle 1

Constructing the first tale

What did I do? I wanted to explore how the Ofsted inspection process happened in practice. I wanted to find out how Ofsted inspectors assess the educational standards achieved by children at infant school and make judgements about their attainment and progress. By doing this I could critically examine Ofsted's main function that involves the monitoring and measurement of school and children's performance against national expectations for accountability purposes. Also I felt that I could fundamentally question the validity of the national assessment

³ *Satisfactory socio-economic area* - Census data of population (1991) & Pre-inspection Context and School Indicator (Ofsted PICS), 1996).

procedures as a measurement of educational standards and children's attainment and progress and make comparisons and seek relationships with my findings on other dimensions of educational assessment.

I experienced an Ofsted inspection whilst I was head teacher of Oak Tree infant school. I decided to look at the Ofsted inspection report and my professional diary that I had kept to factually record events, meetings and conversations with colleagues and professionals who were involved with the Ofsted process. Also I decided to look at extracts from my reflective diary that I had written as a personal account of my observations, feelings, reactions, interpretations, reflections, hunches, hypotheses and explanations and the mass of archived data that I had collected. Finally I studied the Ofsted Handbook (1995) and related documentations to examine the inspection framework and schedule and how it was applied in practice.

Telling the Ofsted tale

How was I going to represent the Ofsted inspection process? Tomlinson (1999:xi) presents:

The stories and struggles of head teachers today as being a legitimate methodology and an alternative, richer understanding than the essentially conservative and debilitating notion of the all-powerful visionary leader.

Also MacBeath (1999:2) recognises:

The importance for schools to give their own account of their achievements and experiences in order to come to know themselves.

This is rather than stories about schools told by others (LEA, test-makers and the assessment industry, politicians or the media) who claim the right to speak on behalf of schools to tell their stories for them, to amend and abridge and to add their own ending.

MacBeath writes that:

'The story' is powerful because it is crucial to recognise that schools have a history, a unique cast of characters and a narrative that unfolds over time in unanticipated directions (p.2)

The method I chose was writing a fictionalised story and I did it in two stages. First I wrote an account in February 1999 of my personal experience, as a head teacher, throughout the Ofsted inspection process. I called the paper:

Does the Ofsted inspection show a fair indicator of children's attainment and progress? Or maybe conflict, contradictions and confusions?

The account focused on a continuous period of One-year (April 1996-June 1997, before, during and after the inspection). It was a chronological, factual account that was supported with related documentation, diary extracts and reports of conversations with personal and professional colleagues. I wrote about events involving people directly involved with Oak Tree Infant School (the school staff, the parents and children, the governors, Park LEA personnel) and the Ofsted inspection team, HMI's and the School Improvement Team. Initially I needed to include real names or initials of the people in my account. This was to enable me to make accurate cross-references with the mass of archived data. Subsequently I substituted fictitious names for all the people, except me, in the account to maintain anonymity. I cross-referenced sections of the account with material from the three sections of the Ofsted Handbook (1995):

1. The Ofsted Framework: Inspection requirements.
2. Guidance on Inspection Requirements: The Conduct of Inspections: and
3. The Inspection Schedule and guidance on its use.

I expanded the account where further explanation was needed. These references were numbered and highlighted with the italic font. I then included my own comments and questions that arose as I wrote and edited my account and these were also highlighted in the italic font. Below is an extract from the first Ofsted tale (Follows, 1999:2-5).

Does the Ofsted Inspection show a fair indicator of children's attainment and progress? Or maybe conflict, contradictions and confusions⁴

Setting the scene:

April 1996

First notification that Oak Tree infant school would be included in the Ofsted programme of inspections, for the school year 1996-1997.

Part 1. Before the Ofsted Inspection

July 1996

The head teacher (Margaret) received a telephone call from Park LEA secondary specialist inspector for mathematics (Alice)

Alice. Hello Margaret can you guess why I'm calling?

A slight pause on Margaret's part, trying to think of half an intelligent answer rather than sound completely stupid and baffled. After it was getting near to the end of term! Surely Alice didn't want Margaret to get involved with her in another LEA maths project, Margaret had previously worked for Alice with a maths project (1987) or join the LEA working party with councillors for raising standards in maths or do the second cycle of head teacher appraisal.

Margaret. No not really and I haven't got time to do the second cycle of Gary's head teacher's appraisal with you this term!

Margaret had shared the appraisal of a head teacher colleague with Alice the previous year and was wondering when the next stage would come.

Alice. I'm ringing about your Ofsted inspection. It's to be a local team (from Park LEA) and I'm to be the Registered Inspector. How do you feel about it?

A sharp intake of air before Margaret replied, probably rather weakly.

Margaret. Ah, that's a surprise to have a local team, especially as you all know me and most of the teachers here. You know the school, surely! Oh! By the way can I ask who the other inspectors in the team will be.

Alice. Well, at the moment the inspection team will be 6 inspectors. There's Beryl the early years inspector. There's Rose the SEN inspector. There's Jeremy the Humanities inspector. There's Sally the visual arts inspector. Lastly the lay inspector is Kay who works part-time for the playgroup association.

Beryl the early years inspector was the attached inspector to the nursery class at Oak Tree infant school. Rose the SEN inspector was previously deputy head teacher of a local senior MLD special school that Margaret had worked with to provide work experience for its secondary students. Jeremy the humanities inspector had a secondary background, had previously been part of a local inspection team and visited the school and worked with local councillors and teachers on a committee for Religious Education. Sally the visual arts inspector was a secondary and further education specialist inspector. She had previously worked with the school's nursery teacher on a working party developing and art curriculum document.⁵

⁴ 'Looking for a fair indicator of children's attainment and progress' was the title in February 1999 when I wrote the Ofsted story. I have since amended the title and chapter headings.

⁵ The experience and expertise of the Ofsted inspection team (Ofsted CV's August 1996) and Park LEA inspectorate (1997-1997).

July 1996

About one day later Margaret received a telephone call from the Chair of governors, Anne.⁶

Anne. *Hello Margaret I've just heard about the inspection team and my husband is worried about it. Can I come and see you tomorrow?*

Margaret. *Yes that's fine.*

Next day

Anne. *My husband is worried about Beryl the early years inspector being in the team she knows the school. The others are alright because they don't.*

Margaret had to try and answer very tactfully as Anne's husband had an influence over Park LEA education department and he tried to advise/influence the activities of the school governors and the school. He was the councillor for the ward in which the school was located. Margaret needed to seek advice from Park LEA assigned inspector James before she committed herself more definitely. Margaret felt she was walking on eggshells!

Margaret telephoned James a secondary IT specialist inspector.⁷

Margaret. *Hello James. Has Anne rung you about our inspection team?*

James. *Yes we had a conversation about. How do you feel about it Margaret?*

Margaret. *Well I'm very surprised that we are having a local team and Alice is the registered inspector. I've worked with her and I've worked in the LEA for a long time, about 26 years. They must all know something about the school and me. They won't be able to make objective judgements, they can't be unbiased. Anne wants me to request that we have another inspector instead of Beryl, but who else is there with early years experience or even primary for that matter? The other primary inspector in Park LEA was my previous assigned inspector to this school. So what can I do about it?*⁸

James. *I suggest if you want to keep Beryl on the team then you keep the rest of the team!*

Now to break the news to the staff! Well Margaret went to tell her deputy, Sue, first with a cup of coffee and a chocolate biscuit- she could read Margaret like a book. She'd probably say- *that's the best piece of news this week. You won't need to tell me anything else until next term!*

Weekly staff meeting

Margaret's thoughts whilst getting ready. Should she slip in the Ofsted news with diary updates, visitors coming to school or AOB? At this stage in the term whatever she did the news was sure to go down like a lead balloon! Margaret had told the staff previously about the Ofsted letter⁹ and to expect the inspection at some point in the next school year. They had already worked that bit out. Anyway Margaret re-arranged the agenda so that everybody could talk about the Ofsted team at the beginning of the meeting. Margaret had to know everybody's feelings and she needed time to talk it through with everybody there. The staff quite understandably raised all the reservations Margaret had raised with Anne and James. When Margaret shared James' advice- everybody appeared to accept the situation and the visit of the registered inspector the following week. Also Margaret shared the details of Park LEA's pre-Ofsted inspection INSET package that would be put in place next term.¹⁰

⁶ Record of conversation, July 1996, head teacher professional diary.

⁷ Record of conversation, July 1996, head teacher professional diary.

⁸ LEA directory of education personnel, 1996, showed two vacancies for primary inspectors. The inspectorate was being restructured, reduced and linked with the advisory service, LEA staffing bulletin, Summer 1996.

⁹ Ofsted notification letter meeting April 1996

¹⁰ Minutes of whole school staff meeting, July 1996.

Reference 1: Ofsted Handbook, 1995.

Code of conduct for inspectors: Inspectors should evaluate the work of the school objectively (p9)

The inspection must be undertaken without bias or preconceptions about the school. No inspector should take part in an inspection if they have a close previous relationship with the school. Inspectors must be absolutely impartial, in their treatment of all those with whom they come into contact. Judgements must be based on sound evidence, which has been carefully weighted, collected from a range of sources and firmly based on the criteria in the inspection schedule. Inspectors must be careful to avoid making premature judgements (p18:par4).

Comments and questions:

The inspection team was a local team, from within the LEA, and all the inspectors had prior knowledge of Oak Tree, the head teacher and members of staff and the governors.

Q1. *How could the inspectors evaluate the work of the school objectively?*

Q2. *Equally how could the school evaluate the work of the inspection team objectively?*¹¹

Reference 2:

An inspection must be carried out by a registered inspector assisted by a team of trained inspectors which is sufficient and competent to conduct the inspection... In the inspection of primary and special schools and pupil referral units (PRUs), where teams are small, there must be a combination of phase and subject expertise but without undue fragmentation of the team. Primary school inspection teams must be competent to inspect the full age range present in the school, including nursery provision (p11:par 12&13).¹²

Reference 3:

Quality Assurance Requirements – To ensure that inspections are conducted to the highest standard, contractors for inspections are required to submit to Ofsted details of their quality assurance arrangements. These must cover: the induction, support, selection and deployment of inspectors (p11:par15)

Comments and questions:

The inspection team included only one inspector who was nursery/ infant/primary specialist inspector. Although the other five inspectors had received the Ofsted primary/secondary school inspection training, and two the SEN training. This was explained in the CV's sent by Ofsted. (Cross- reference footnote 8).

Was the team of trained inspectors sufficient and competent to conduct the inspection of Oak Tree infant school and nursery?

Were they competent to inspect the full range present in the school, including the nursery provision?

Did the contractors for inspections submit to Ofsted details of their own quality assurance arrangements?

*How did Ofsted check these?*¹³

¹¹ Records of conversations with professional colleagues, Autumn 1996/Spring 1997 and research colleagues, Autumn 1997/Spring 1998. Record of meetings with assigned inspector and Governors, Spring 1997. Record of communication with Ofsted and HMI, Spring/Summer 1997. Record of communication with NAHT, Spring/Summer/Autumn 1997.

¹² As footnote 4.

¹³ As footnote 4

Discussion

In my tale I have tried to describe my initial communications (as head teacher) with the people directly involved with Oak Tree that included the staff, chair of governors and Park LEA personnel and the registered inspector of the Ofsted inspection team. In writing the tale I have drawn on archived data and the Ofsted Handbook. The extracts from the Ofsted Handbook have focused on three issues: the requirement of objectivity; the competency of the Ofsted inspection team and the quality assurance of contractors. These extracts confirmed my view that the Ofsted inspection did not show a fair indicator of the children's attainment and progress. Firstly the inspection team had prior knowledge of the school and its staff and governors and therefore the inspection was undertaken with bias and preconceptions about the school. Secondly the inspection team was not competent to inspect the full age range of the school and thirdly the contractor had inappropriately deployed the inspection team. Therefore this suggested that the inspection process and the inspectors' judgements were unfair as the Code of Conduct or set of principles (Ofsted, 1995:18:1) did not govern the conduct of the inspection.

Cycle 2

Constructing the second tale Introduction/preparation

How did I use the first Ofsted tale? I decided to share the Ofsted tale with a professional colleague (from Park LEA but outside Oak Tree and outside the research group) and a director of studies. I met each person at two separate meetings in February 1999) I explained that my reasons for writing the tale were to clarify the conflict, contradictions and confusions that arose throughout the Ofsted process and to search for the truth(s) of the situation. I wanted them to help me

explore how far the Ofsted process and the inspection team's judgements were sound and fair. Also I wanted to know if my first attempt at writing a tale was a satisfactory method for presenting, sharing and analysing data about the Ofsted inspection process at one infant school.

The discussion highlighted the complexity of the concept of a fairer assessment. I added a new dimension to my understanding of fairness that is playing by the rules (following legally binding rules) by writing the Ofsted tale. I began to recognise the importance of self-study as an aspect of action research and the importance of professional stories in this. I also recognised that my tale had not been told in a way that brought my experience alive for others. The factual tale had only provided boring facts about action and events. I needed to provide a rich picture for this part of my research that also showed relevant feelings and values. I needed to be more creative and imaginative. I needed a different or an original presentation.

What did I do next? I decided to write a second Ofsted tale that was to be a fictionalised account by adapting a children's story. As an infant head teacher children had always had a central role in my work. Also an important and enjoyable part of my work with young children included sharing, telling and reading stories with them. It is widely appreciated that sharing, telling and reading stories to young children is an important to their subsequent literacy development (Teale, 1984; Wells, 1986; Smith, 1988; Meek, 1990). I sought the help of three professional colleagues (infant teachers) and we met during March 1999. Together we selected seven popular children's stories – *After the Storm*, *The Animals of Farthing Wood*, *Pirate School*, *Wind in the Willows*, *The Jungle Book*, *Noggin the Nog* and the *Oxford Reading Tree Reading Scheme*.

Then I made a conscious decision to choose a story that the children and I had enjoyed together in a variety of situation at Oak Tree. A story that we had used as

a focus for a centre of interest, art display work, assemblies, class, group and individual story-times when we had enjoyed the story pictures and poster or a cheer me up story for an unhappy child. I chose the story *After the Storm*, by Nick Butterworth (1992) as the fictional context in which to set the Ofsted experience. The story focused on a large oak tree and so I felt that it would fit in with the name, Oak Tree Infant School that I had adopted. The school had extensive grounds with many oak trees and lots of animals and birds.

The title, the story line and the central character (Percy the park-keeper) had no significance for me choosing the story. But there were many humorous animal and bird characters in the story and I felt that I could borrow them, as I needed many characters for my story. The characters also provided fictitious names for all the people included in the account. This was very important, as it was essential for me to maintain confidentiality and anonymity for the LEA, the Ofsted inspection team, the school community and myself. Also I needed story characters that had neutral personalities, so that I could focus on the events rather than the personalities. I wanted to critically examine the situation and the issues that it threw up, not the individuals involved.

I rewrote the tale in April 1999 and I re-named it:

After the Storm. Does the Ofsted inspection show a fair indicator of children's attainment and progress? Or maybe conflicts, contradictions and confusions.

I retained the cross-references of relevant sections of the story with material from the three sections of the Ofsted Handbook (1995) and expanded my own comments and questions. Then I included a chart showing a list of the animal and bird characters in the story. The main characters were squirrel/ head teacher, hedgehog/ chair of governors, fox/ Ofsted registered inspector, and mole/ LEA assigned school inspector. The other characters were grouped into birds/ school staff, hedgehog 1-2/ governors, mice 1-5 Ofsted inspectors, rabbits/HMI and school improvement team. Below is a copy of the chart and three extracts from the revised Ofsted story.

Three extracts from the second Ofsted tale

After the Storm: Does the Ofsted inspection show a fair indicator of children's attainment and progress? Or maybe conflicts, contradictions and confusions.

Extract 1

Part 1 Before the inspection (p9)

25 November Governor's curriculum sub-committee meeting

Squirrel reported the National Curriculum Key Stage 1 SATs¹ (1996) results to the hedgehogs (3 hedgehogs attended). This was the statutory, annual reporting of SATs results to hedgehogs plus part of the planned pre-Ofsted INSET. Squirrel had previously discussed her approach with mole. They both thought it would be a good idea to widen the discussion, not just the rabbit's attainment of SATs but also their progress from entry into to school. This was to be the first opportunity to share the findings from the school self-evaluation study that squirrel, owl and mole had been working on for the last two years. They had made a statistical analysis of the attainment and progress of four cohorts of rabbits.¹⁴ Pity mole couldn't come to the meeting. Squirrel explained to the hedgehogs about the part of the Ofsted Handbook that referred to the children's attainment and progress (p10: par10). Squirrel said how positive it would be for the school to include the school self-evaluation study, as Ofsted would consider it.

Owl decided she wanted to present the findings of the school self-evaluation enquiry and that was fine by squirrel. Owl had done most of the actual analysis and after all she was the school's assessment co-ordinator, far more expert than squirrel and familiar with the

¹⁴ Follows & Waites (1997)

finer details. This was also her last week in school before she began long-term sick leave for the next six months). But hedgehog 3 (chair of the curriculum committee) began to ask specific question about the SATs results. He followed a very detailed pre-written script and was quite aggressive in his approach. Squirrel suggested that their enquiry explained all the points he was making and actually provided informed answers for them all and for Ofsted, too. It also gave everybody a detailed, clear picture of the characteristics of the school and the educational needs of the children. It was recommended by mole to include the enquiry with the school documentation being prepared for Ofsted.

The next day mole rang to ask how the meeting went –he seemed resigned to squirrel's comments about the hedgehogs and related elected members being obsessed with raw test results. He seemed genuinely disappointed as he had worked collaboratively with squirrel and owl and had put a lot of work into the enquiry.

Squirrel had a mixture of feelings. Both owl and squirrel felt very angry at this reaction to the presentation of the enquiry. Squirrel felt sorry for owl. Squirrel knew she had really struggled this term because of poor health not only as a class teacher but also as a deputy head teacher. Squirrel knew how much work owl had put into their enquiry, how much time she had spent analysing the data and typing it up so that it was a very presentable piece of joint school and Park LEA research for hedgehogs and mice. Also it was owl's contribution to the Ofsted inspection as she wouldn't be in school then – although she had muted the idea of coming into school to present her work and her role as deputy head teacher. Squirrel told her to wait and see- although secretly she wanted her to do it!

Extract 2

Part 2 During the inspection, Day 2 (p14)

8.30 a.m. Squirrel meets fox. She wonders if it is the right moments to talk about the school self-evaluation study- the enquiry about the children's attainment and progress. Squirrel wanted Ofsted to highlight the enquiry as evidence in their report because she felt that it would provide additional information to the raw test results (SATs) that Ofsted considered as it also included the results of baseline assessment.¹⁵ Owl 1 had been unable to gain a meeting about it yesterday and she had taken the trouble to visit sick owl at home to familiarise herself with the information, so she was very disappointed. Squirrel tried to discuss it but was firmly told by fox that it was part of the school documentation and it would be considered with that, so there was no need to talk about it. Squirrel made two further requests to fox to discuss this enquiry, without success.

Reference 1:

The inspection process and school improvement.

In that an inspection, of necessity, takes place over a short space of time,¹⁶ the inspectors should consider the school's own priorities for development, evidence about past attainment of pupils and any evidence from the school's own analysis of its provision or standards (p10:par 10).

Reference 2:

Initial contact with school:

The registered inspector should subsequently contact the head teacher to:

iv. Discuss the information, which will be required from the school before the inspection, explaining why it is needed, and make arrangements for its collection.

The following should be requested as appropriate:

¹⁵ Head Teacher's Form HP (December 1996) & Pre-inspection School context Indicator (PISCI November 1996).

¹⁶ The Ofsted inspection was a three-day inspection.

...other information that school wishes to be considered, including any documentation about, and the outcomes of, any school self-evaluation activities (p21 & 22:par18).

Reference 13:

Discussion with staff, the appropriate authority and others involved with the work of the school.

Discussions with the head teacher... staff with particular management responsibilities and class teachers provide important sources of evidence relating to roles, responsibilities, procedures and policies. They are essential to the professional dialogue between staff and inspectors, which contribute positively to the inspection of schools and helps inspectors to establish the context of what is seen (p31: par 61).

Squirrel felt angry and aggrieved!

Were the mice considering the evidence provided by the school, of past attainment of pupils and any evidence from the school's own analysis of its provision or standards?

How can staff provide important sources of evidence when they were denied discussion time with the inspectors?

How can the work of teachers be acknowledged without dialogue?

How can we help the mice to establish the context of what they see without dialogue?

Extract 3

Part 2 During the inspection, Day 2 (p17)

At 3.30 p.m. Owl 3 retold the situation of mouse 2 hearing rabbits read. Rabbit 1 (age5) was a less able reader who was at the beginning stages of learning to read and quite a shy, apprehensive little rabbit. She had observed mouse 2 waiting for rabbit 1 to start to read her book- no response from rabbit 1 – "What are you waiting for. You are going to read to me aren't you?" said mouse 2. Owl 3 tried to help and she explained, "Well actually rabbit 1 is waiting for you to go through the book first and talk about it, then you read the adult text and rabbit 1 will read the rabbit's text afterwards". Mouse 2 looked surprised at these suggestions.

Reference 14:

Gathering the inspection evidence. Within their assignments individual inspectors should allocate time to collect the range of core evidence on which the judgements of the team must be based. This includes... iii. Hearing pupils read (p28:par 42)

Registered inspectors will also need to ensure during the week of the inspection a sufficient sample of literacy and numeracy skills is taken by: 1: Hearing at least three schemes, library books and samples of their own writing (p30:par 59).

Squirrel again felt feelings of disbelief and unfairness.

How reliable was the judgement on that and possibly the other children's attainment in reading?

How confident can a young rabbit feel about reading to a stranger, a mouse who she had not met before particularly a less able and shy rabbit?

How can a mouse be familiar with the approaches of different published reading materials? Or be sensitive to rabbit's special educational needs? Or know that rabbit had participated with the school's language enrichment programme and the reading recovery programme?¹⁷

Discussion

In the three extracts from the second tale I have tried to describe the types of evidence collected by Ofsted. In writing the second tale I have again drawn on archived data and the Ofsted Handbook. In Extract 1 I describe my discussion with the school governor's curriculum sub-committee that was part of the pre-Ofsted preparations. I explain the school and LEA's joint approach to evaluate the children's attainment and progress by including baseline assessment scores rather than report the key stage 1 test results (SATs). I felt our approach was inline with the LEA expectations and Ofsted requirements (1995:10: par.10) and that it would provide important additional evidence of the children's attainment and the school's performance. Extract 1 confirmed my view that school governors did not appreciate the importance of showing the analysis of children's attainment and progress to Ofsted. In Extract 2/3 I describe the range of evidence collected by inspectors during the inspection. The references from the Ofsted Handbook focussed on three issues: the consideration of evidence about past attainment of pupils and school self-evaluation activities, the competency of the Ofsted team and the inspectors' judgements of standards of literacy by hearing children read. These extracts confirmed my view that the Ofsted inspection *did not* show a *fair* indicator of the children's attainment and progress.

Firstly the inspectors should have considered the school self-evaluation study as a record of evidence that was outlined in Ofsted (1995:20:par12) and so the evidence base was incomplete. Secondly the inspection team was not competent

¹⁷ Pupil record and individual education plan (IEP) (Spring 1997)

and the individual inspector's judgements and assessments of the standards of reading of individual pupils were invalid and unreliable. Also the inspection team's collective judgement was invalid and unreliable. Also the inspection team's collective judgement was unsound and unfair as their individual judgements were not based on the consistent application of criteria and so did not accurately reflect what was achieved. Therefore this suggested that the inspection process and the inspectors' judgements were unfair and unjust as the Code of conduct or Set of Principles (ofsted, 1995:18:par1) *did not* govern the conduct of the inspection.

After writing the second Ofsted tale I examined Part A of the Ofsted inspection report for Oak Tree Infant School that described *The Aspects of the Educational Standards achieved by the pupils at the school – Attainment and Progress*. Below I include the opening paragraph:

Attainment in all subjects in National Tests is well below national averages. In the 1995 Standard Assessment (SATs) in English the school is well below the national average. Standards are below in speaking and listening, reading and spelling and well below in hand writing. In Mathematics SATs tests all AST are below the national averages. In Science SATs the proportion of pupils attaining level 2 or above is also well below the average nationally. In 1996 the results were similar to 1995. The baseline assessment for these year 2 (Y2) pupils showed a low level of attainment for many of the pupils when they began school (p16:par 50).

I feel the above paragraph from the Ofsted inspection report is unfair. The mode of reporting, by placing the negative first in the paragraph (attainment in all national tests is below the national average) and the qualifying statement second (low level of attainment on entry into school) is biased reporting. I feel it is unfair to describe the attainment of children (by the end of Key Stage 1, i.e. Sats results) without comparing and collating their attainment with the contextual information about the school and its pupil intake; which is laid down in the Ofsted Handbook (1995: 54-58).¹⁸

¹⁸ Record of governors meeting with Ofsted registered inspector (30.01.97).

I feel that it is essential (for the two cohorts of children, 1995/1996 in year 2) to consider pupil turnover and their progress related to prior attainment, i.e. baseline assessment, and the examination of the validity, relevance and nature of SATs tests themselves. I had collected and presented the information on attainment and progress of the children for the Ofsted inspection. I feel the Ofsted report gave an unfair and false representation of the efforts and real achievements of the children, staff and parents. I strongly feel a positive and realistic account of the children's progress and achievements is an essential aspect and responsibility of education, particularly in early year's education. This is where positive attitudes to learning and success are established. It is not only a moral issue but an efficiency and long-term cost effective issue, too. If success is recognised at the start of education there is a stronger possibility of it remaining with the children throughout the later stages of education.

There was no mention in the above paragraph or in other sections of the report of the school self-evaluation study that specifically examined children's attainment and progress of four cohorts of children (1994-1997). This enquiry included the two cohorts of children reported above. I felt very disappointed and cheated at this omission, as there was no reporting or evidence of the efforts and actions the school had taken to evaluate and improve the educational opportunities for the children and their standards of attainment. Extract 2 showed that I had requested an interview on several occasions with the registered inspector who had responsibility for the management and efficiency aspects of the school to discuss and explain the purpose and the findings of the school enquiry. She and another inspector had openly criticised the attainment of the children with individual staff and me during the inspection.

What effect did this approach have on the teachers' performance in the classroom during the inspection? I have shown that discussion of the school enquiry was

considered unnecessary as I was told that the inspectors had the head teacher's statement and the PICSi report, (Pre-inspection Context and School Indicator Report). The PICSi report included attainment; comparing school with national standards and the characteristics of the school was taken from the census data. I feel this presented an unrepresentative picture of the school, as it was located in a small section of an affluent ward. The Head Teacher statement that I presented used data from housing, health and social services and provided a representative picture of the school as it explicitly expressed characteristics of the immediate catchment area. I feel these two reports provided insufficient and inaccurate evidence on the characteristics of the school, and they were not discussed with me either. Therefore this omission emphasises that the inspection report was unfair. I feel strongly that the school enquiry would have clarified some of the ambiguities and misleading information about the school.

Pupil mobility was a particular characteristic of Oak Tree infant school (50+% annually)¹⁹ and had been studied in the school self-evaluation study. We examined the effect(s) that pupil mobility had on many aspects of the school organisation and the reported attainment of the children. I had had numerous discussions with the LEA personnel about pupil mobility all ending without solution. We were beginning to show patterns/trends and effects of pupil mobility and we had been adapting strategies to improve the management of it. I thought the enquiry would explain how actively various groups of staff e.g. curriculum co-ordinators, year group teams, senior management, were all working to examine and evaluate the issues. I was very disappointed by the inspector's attitude or was it not within the Ofsted brief- a very rigid framework? I felt justified in requesting an opportunity to explain the complexity of the school context.

¹⁹ Records of Oak Tree infant school pupil mobility (1995-1997).

How can anyone gain more than a snapshot or superficial picture of a school in just three days, or did these inspectors feel they were familiar with the school as they were a local team? Why wasn't I given the opportunity to confirm or even extend their prior knowledge or pre-conceived ideas of the school?

I felt defeated, confused and surprised by their defiance.

The Ofsted inspectors' attitude towards the school evaluation enquiry greatly conflicted with the feedback that I had received from Park LEA. They had encouraged and advised me to include the enquiry with the documents sent to Ofsted, pre-inspection.²⁰ The LEA had been very positive about it, in relation to us assisting aspects of the school context and praised aspects of the enquiry and the approaches that we were taking.

Was it genuine praise or were we being used as guinea pigs for others to gain an advantage?

As the Ofsted inspection team was a local team of inspectors they must have known about our work as other schools were following our lead.

Why was it not included in the Ofsted inspection evidence base and the report?

Our enquiry presented a fair account of the school.

Or was it all part of a more sinister political conspiracy against the school and me?

I will never know!!

²⁰ Record of LEA assigned inspector's visits, 1996.

Cycle 3

Working with research colleagues to redraft the Ofsted tale

I decided to share the Ofsted tale with research colleagues for their collective examination of it in a memory work session. Like Lomax & Evans (1996:138) I was using memory work as:

A method for collective examination of experience in order to help another understand hers better.

By deciding to share the Ofsted tale I had created an opportunity for colleagues to validate this aspect of my research. Also I had begun to use a different form of *triangulated memory work*²¹ that drew on our varying Ofsted experiences and the Ofsted Framework and its related documentation and literature. The story was presented at a meeting (28.04.1999) that was attended by six colleagues (including head teachers and teachers) and a director of studies. The group that I presented the account to was a research group that met regularly to discuss each other's research. I wanted to see how far they recognised what I had experienced with the Ofsted process and how far they recognised how Ofsted inspectors assessed educational standards achieved by children at infant school and make judgements about their attainment and progress. Also I wanted to use the tale to unpack and deconstruct my own practice and tacit knowledge of assessment through the eyes of Ofsted. This aspect of my research was essential because I was using the key idea of:

Knowledge communities, safe havens in which genuine community provides shelter for real dialogue and sharing of stories, human stories of relation and reflection (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995: vii).

Like Clandinin and Connelly I was using writing as a method of enquiry that moved through successive stages of self-reflection.²²

²¹ I explain another form of triangulated memory work in Chapter 4 Learning from the infant curriculum: exploring the evidence.

²² My research is a reflective account that involves self-study, using the method of memory work within an action research perspective (Schatz, 1994) and it shows a clear statement of educational beliefs. The account is about my own evidence-based practice and it will contribute to professional knowledge that is related to assessment in the infant school. I describe the research methodology in Chapter 2 Accessing tacit knowledge of infant school practice: a methodology.

I prepared for the meeting by circulating the second Ofsted tale, the chart showing a list of the animal characters and a copy of the book cover to show the story that I had adapted, to all the group members before the meeting. Also prior to the meeting I discussed with a director of studies the approach that would be taken by the supportive group of researchers. She reassured me that the group would approach my presentation of the Ofsted process from the range of memory work based on the use of a fictitious story not as a representation of self and that this would be instead of straight critical feedback.

The meeting was taped and then transcribed and it showed that the memory work session had promoted much discussion. I learnt how I felt about the use of story and members of the research group were able to draw on their varied experiences to highlight the things written between the lines and gaps and spaces in the account, which were thoroughly explored. I felt unable to participate fully in the deconstruction of the tale because it was too personal to me but the taped discussion provided many angles on which to reflect. The experience was very valuable for my critical self-reflections.

After the meeting I wrote:

What actually happened? Was it expected or unexpected? Mostly unexpected and parts of it were uncomfortable for everyone. I experienced feelings of fascination, surprise, embarrassment, vulnerability and horror... Why was I unwilling or unable to engage in dialogue that related to the characters of the tale even though everyone was trying to help me? The characters in my tale were very real people to me. I could not fictionalise them or myself. Was it because I hate role-play? Was it the topic of Ofsted? Or the ethical concerns I had? Listening to it I began to understand the learning process we'd all gone through and how hard I had made it for others and myself. The tape confirmed the value, strength, support and trust within the research group...this type of learning and understanding usually happens at our meetings... we get the most valuable feed-back which promote the thoughts -it's really taken me forward (1.5.1999).

Analysing the taped discussion.

How did I feel about the use of professional story?

The meeting began and I knew immediately that I was still unsure of and very uncomfortable with the method of professional story, and what it was going to unearth about me and/or the situation described in my tale. I immediately wanted further explanation. The transcript of the tape shows this:

P. We are going to explore some of the meanings in the story through the characters that M. has presented.

M. Why?

P. In writing fictional stories people incorporate a lot of their implicit meanings and assumptions within the story itself. If an audience challenges the story they can get at these implicit meanings and assumptions, which are otherwise very difficult to get at. They emerge, one doesn't know what they are particularly, because they are hidden in M. and if she knows what they are it can be helpful to her. According to M.E. it's less threatening talking about characters in the story, about what they are like or why they are presented in the way they are presented... we've been given a story it's not about M. we don't know what it's about we can explore the meanings. Can I start? Can I show you what I mean? Can you tell me something about the kind of person squirrel is? Whether squirrel is similar to other squirrels? Or is she a particular kind of squirrel?

M. Do you mean the character taken from the story?

P. I mean the character that comes through here... What is significant about squirrel? Is there something special about squirrel?

M. Squirrel as an animal/squirrel as a character?

P. As presented in this story how do you see squirrel? What sort of characteristics, what sort of values?

B. I would see squirrel as being kind and caring because she looks after birds.

Md. Gathering all things together as squirrel does... making sure things are OK, being so busy.

P. Why squirrel?

M. She just happened to be one of the characters in the story.

P. But the story wasn't about a school inspection... you created a squirrel. In this story it's you, it's not from the storybook. You've chosen squirrel to play that character, you made the choice, no one else did it.

I could feel myself emotionally resisting this approach, even though people were being so encouraging and patient. I couldn't enter into the deconstruction of the tale or role-playing or even talking about myself in role or even the real me.

B. *I can see why you've chosen fox (the registered inspector).
Md. Why were you squirrel and not mole?*

P. *Could you have been badger?*

B. *But it wouldn't have been the same.*

P. *Yes but why squirrel? We're trying to do this as M.E. uses the story with her teachers. Where a teacher writes a story and then they talk about the story itself. M. is resisting this enormously. She won't tell us anything about squirrel.*

M. *I honestly didn't choose squirrel as opposed to mole for any reason.*

B. *Didn't you?*

M. *No.*

P. *You don't know why? But subconsciously possibly and maybe if you explored it a little bit you might get something.*

F. *Squirrels are hard working and conscientious – planning people.*

P. *M. is unwilling to delve down a bit!*

I was still emotionally resisting and people were still gently encouraging. But by re-reading the transcript as I'm writing now, I'm conjuring up a few imaginative thoughts, but I'm very hesitant to write them. Were they real? I remember squirrel/me me/squirrel feeling out of the situation, (during the Ofsted inspection) for most of the time. I was the busy organiser before the inspection. I was clarifying ambiguities in the inspection procedures and communicating with various groups of people directly involved with the inspection. I was encouraging, helping and caring for people then I was calming their nerves. But I was very much the observer during the inspection. I was often observing from a distance.

Could this be like a squirrel in a tree? Very different from what I wanted to do – I was unable to help people and work with them as we normally worked. I was often

homeless relocated from my room as others were using it for closed meetings, without me or without permission. This was very different from the normal school day as we had an open-door policy at Oak Tree. I suppose that squirrels go and find another tree until it's safe to return. I couldn't do that. After the inspection I returned to being the busy organiser, encouraging and helping, and calming people's nerves, meeting and beating deadlines – I can't relate that to a squirrel because it usually forgets where he's buried his acorns! Though I suppose he has to collect all his nuts and build his nest (drey) before winter when he hibernates and withdraws from the bustling life around him. Don't think I've done that! Enough about my emotional resistance to the activity!

How did I feel about people reading between the lines?

I became very surprised and dismayed at how much people were reading between the lines of my tale, and wanted to explore down these new and unexpected avenues. I was amazed at the images that the story had evoked in their minds. Was it because the story was about Ofsted or my use of animal characters? The title, the story line, the characteristics, the sizes and the types of animals – hadn't I made my story line explicit? Was it just that we all perceive situations in different ways? Or was I being questioned on my choice of story? Perhaps I shouldn't have included the copy of the book cover with my writing?

How did I feel about symbolism?

I had not perceived that my paper was symbolic of me and the things that I did as a head teacher or of me now. I thought some of the questions were asked because my explanations in the introduction of this paper were unclear.

F. I wondered where you got the idea from? When I read the title I thought it was very apt.

M. *But that wasn't why I chose the story. I suppose that it could possibly have been- but I chose it 'cos it had an oak tree in it... I also chose the story -um the characters were fairly bland rather than those that had innuendoes about them... You've made your own innuendoes up or your own ideas in your own minds...*

B. *But what about the title- After the Storm- Was it that why you chose the story?*

M. *No it really was because I had great trouble finding a story that had many characters... I particularly wanted a children's story.*

P. *Here it is - we know you've resisted writing about this for two years because it was so painful, now it is after the storm you've been able to do it!*

M. *That's coincidence.*

P. *I don't think it's coincidence.*

Md. *That's synchronicity; things come along at the right time. Why that story with all these characters, it's so significant. This could be so symbolic to your whole story. There are thousands of children's stories. Why this book?*

M. *Basically what I did- I think I've got 5 garage boxes of children's books in my garage. I went through them until I found one that had lots of characters. It's the one I enjoyed reading to the children, I suppose, I used it at assemblies and things like that.*

Md. *That in itself is symbolic- it's the enjoyment of your life.*

P. *Did you have Old Mother Hubbard, and the Old Woman Who Lived in a Shoe in your box?*

M. *Possibly P. I also had worse stories.*

P. *You've also shown us that you like things from the world of infant children and infant education to use as a model of what you are doing which has great relevance - it's the way of framing the world in a way that's meaningful to you.*

This transcript shows how I resisted or couldn't seem to understand the notion of symbolism, but on reflection, I have reconsidered this point. In fact I confirmed many points raised by people in writing my reasons for choosing a story and the importance of story in the infant school. But I just wonder if the perceived significance of the title may have been omitted if I had just provided the readers with an illustration of the animal characters rather than the front cover of the book that clearly showed the title and the story poster, which illustrated the animal

characters. I really only intended to emphasise that I had started my story after looking at a children's storybook. Also the cover may suggest the story line and the main character (Percy the Park Keeper). I had not used either. This was because my story had a very different story line and it did not have a principal character that helped his animal friends to find new homes after the storm blew down their old oak tree. There was not a new oak tree that was strong and safe. There was no supportive community.

Symbolism has also been confirmed in written feedback from Z after the session:

Although people said in our session that maybe it was irrelevant that you chose this story, I feel instinctively that there may be many similarities between this story and yours that you have not explored yet. Perhaps some of this is reflected in the consideration of the characters to particular persons.

How did I feel about symbolism in relation to my choice of characters?

But I had been careful to choose bland characters with unknown personalities. Not careful enough, because there were so many questions.

Ma. Are the characters chosen for their qualities? So we can assume what we assume ourselves. When I first read it I thought you had not really chosen, then as I read on you kept thinking what are rabbits really like.

B. Mice scuttling around.

Ma. It got into you what you were thinking about.

B. You tend to put in the characteristics.

Md.. So you weren't choosing them to be symbolic.

M. No! I had great problems because of my viewpoint or perceptions of certain people that I'd worked with over the last couple of years and the experience I've had. I didn't want to choose a story that necessarily had explicit good and bad characters in it.

P. But we didn't know the story all we know is the characters as you've portrayed them.

B. Foxes are sly, cunning and predatory, you can't help thinking that.

F. *All the staff are birds*

P. *M. is very unwilling to delve down a bit.*

F. *All the staff are birds and the head teacher is not a bird.*

P. *Why are the inspectors mice?*

B. *'Cos mice scuttle a lot, running in and out of places.*

Ma. *Why did you choose a story? You were unhappy about writing it up.*

M. *I wanted to maintain confidentiality of the people involved.*

B. *But you could have done that by changing their names or even their gender. But this is much better!*

P. *So tell us about foxes if you don't want to tell us about squirrel. What kind of image comes to your mind?*

M. *But that wasn't why I chose the characters.*

B. *But would you have chosen the registered inspector as a mouse.*

P. *Or would you have called her squirrel?*

M. *The reason I chose the inspectors as mice because there was more than one mouse... I felt if I introduced too many different animals it would be confusing. I grouped the staff together to one type of animal and the inspectors to another.*

P. *I wonder if M.E. had this difficulty?*

F. *What about the sizes of the animals. A fox is the biggest animal, but the next biggest is the badger. In the LEA hierarchy is senior- you've picked the biggest for the most senior, certainly mice are smaller than all of them.*

Md. *You can't divorce the whole of your previous knowledge if you like from choosing this story and choosing those animals. It can't be chance. There must be some way even if you are not conscious of it at the time – there must have been some workings of influence about what you know about those animals and what you know about those people.*

M. *I really did try to guard against any of that.*

Md. *Why? Because isn't that part of the story. You can't make the story devoid of character. That is part of the story.*

P. *You've just allowed us to talk about them without getting personal. But you've still got the characteristics that led to the outcomes.*

F. *Where are the children?*

M. *They are not there apart from one - that was the difficulty, I had so many people... I felt that the adults were the key characters.*

P. *I think you should have put them in.*

F. *What would they have been?*

M. *That's interesting, I don't know but I wouldn't have wanted them as a group of animals 'cos they are all different whereas I put the adults into certain groups.*

Z. *You're different from the adults, squirrel is different from birds.*

F. *Perhaps the children ought to be underground minibeasts.*

M. *And I missed out the parents too... would I just put them in as a group.*

P. *You need them in, they must all be there all along perhaps a group then you can see where they would come in the story as it progresses... Depends on what the story is. Is it the story of what happened to you or what happened to the school? The children and parents did have a role to play - obviously they had a role to play in the school - but they did not have a role to play in the storm that squirrel experienced.*

I became very uncomfortable during this part of the meeting as I was still unable to separate the characters from the real people. I still felt we were talking about people without their presence, instead of talking about the situation. I knew most of them professionally, or I thought I did, and all have been affected by the experience most in a difficult way. However, on reflection I decided to modify the cast list. I decided to change fox and hedgehog around. I feel this will fit the characters to the people better as I perceived them. I realised (perhaps omitted to myself) that I had intuitively selected animals from my own feelings about the characteristics of each type of animal or bird and matched them as closely as possible to the characteristics of the real people in the story. I return to Md's comments:

You can't divorce the whole of your previous knowing, if you like, from choosing this story and choosing these animals... there must have been some workings of influence - about what you know about those animals and what you know about those people.

Is this unethical or unprofessional in research terms? The members of the research group persuaded me that I had acted both ethically and professionally in research terms.

P. If you have lots of brambles at the school would you have called it Bramble infant school... of you had lots of stinging nettles would you have called it Stinging Nettle infant school?

M. Possibly.

P. No, no way!

M. Well that's why I didn't take the suggestion and use flowers as names for all the people... because I did find myself calling them deadly night shade and things... I really did try to guard against any of that.

Md. Why? Because isn't that part of the story. You can't make a story devoid of character... that's part of the story.

P. You've just allowed us to talk about them without getting personal.

M. But they've still got the characteristics that led to the outcomes!

Also colleagues in the research group were keen to adopt their own perceptions of the characteristics and personalities of animal and place them in my story. On reflection, this is quite usual, because we all interpret things differently, and we all seek to delve into or imagine the characters of a story that we might be reading.

How did I feel about people filling in gaps and spaces?

I found this very helpful as I still had reservations in my mind about the clarity of my work and me being explicit about a situation that I was inside of and the members of the group were very much looking from the outside. Oak Tree infant school and Park LEA were unknown to all of them. The size of the cast list was questioned and the need to provide information about the context, the size of the school, the numbers, the roles and relationships between the different people.

F. What were the children?

P. They are not there.

M. Apart from one, no, two children... I didn't actually include them... that was a difficulty I had so many people I actually put into the story. I felt the adults were the key characters- apart from the little boy and girl.

P. I think you should have the children in the story

F. What would they have been?

M. That's interesting – I don't know that I would have wanted them to be a group of animals – 'cos the children are all different – whereas I've put the adults into certain groups and they are all different too.

Z. You're different from the adults. You're in the box with... squirrel is different from birds... and the parents are missing too, as animals – your final sentence is that you feel that the community was cheated, that is the teachers, children and parents yet only the teachers mostly appear in the story.

P. But you had parents in there 'cos quite a lot of them turn up for the meeting or thirteen make a comment about what a good relationship the school had developed with the community... so you've chosen in your 'hidden head' to miss them out – they're not there so you haven't put them there. Perhaps if you put the children, teachers and parents into the diagram they're all there. You don't have to mention them by name... build them into the story then you'd get a more rounded picture.

M. Would I just put them as a group as a mass?

P. Choose a type of animal if you want, and then you could see where they would come into the story as it progresses. They must be there all along, all of them.

Md. Also the children and the parents were sort of adversaries weren't they? Some of the birds weren't either, they were helpless. They had a part to play in the downfall – they couldn't help the way things happened to them.

P. You've got to be clear. Is it the story of what happened to you (squirrel) or what happened to the school. The children and the parents didn't have a role to play. Obviously they had a role to play in the school but they didn't have a role to play in the storm that squirrel experienced.

F. You didn't include them, the children and the parents, they were blameless, the innocents.

P. Interesting you included the teachers, it suggests they let you down.

M. What! The teachers let me down. No they didn't.

P. But the analysis we are doing suggests that, doesn't it?

Md. But by default, they were letting you down only by the fact of events.

What did I learn about my own infant practice?

The preparation of the second Ofsted tale, the presentation of it to research colleagues, listening to their comments and reading the transcription of the tape really helped me to clarify the educational values that underpin my own preferred infant practice and my role as an infant head teacher. P's comments:

You like things from the world of infant children and infant education to use as a model of what you are doing which has relevance. It's a way of framing the world that's meaningful to you... but there are a lot of implicit meanings that are hidden in M. and unknown to us.

appeared to be similar to MacBeath (1999:145) who described semiotics as the analysis of hidden messages in pictures and images that can include or exclude certain groups or suggest different models of behaviour. Also Atkinson & Claxton (2000) explore the relationship between reason and intuition in the context of professional practice. They highlight how many experienced teachers (like me) find it difficult to explain their practice and deconstruct the teaching and learning process. Like Atkinson & Claxton research colleagues began to unpack the role intuition plays in the development of professional judgement and expertise. Sharing the second Ofsted tale with colleagues confirmed how intuitively I worked with young children, how I tried to keep the needs of the child central to the teaching and learning process and how I promoted the enjoyment in learning at Oak Tree. Also I saw story as being crucial to the children's language and literacy development and key to raising achievement in learning, teaching and behaviour. The writing and deconstruction of the Ofsted tale and discussion about the characteristics and values of squirrel highlighted the person in the professional. It highlighted that my infant practice and approach to headship was organised around the principle of collaboration and holistic thinking. Also it was organised around my core personal values that were concerned with modelling and the promotion of respect for individuals, Fairness and equality, caring for the emotional well-being and whole development of children and staff, integrity and honesty. I

feel these core values were part of the strong humanitarian ethics that link my personal and professional self and explain the professional and personal difficulties I experienced with the Ofsted inspection process and Oak Tree.

Day (2000:39) sees the personal and professional linkages as:

Providing empirical support for those who write of the centrality of moral purposes to those involved in teaching.

I feel that by writing the fictionalised Ofsted story and sharing it with research colleagues I was able to distance myself from the real experience and begin to understand in my multi-layered way the conflicts, contradictions and confusions. Also to realise the strong moral purpose I have for seeking a fairer assessment of the educational standards achieved by children at infant school.

Reflections with research colleagues

The experience of writing the second Ofsted tale and collaborating with research colleagues was very valuable for my critical self-reflections. The fictionalised Ofsted tale proved to be a satisfactory method for presenting, sharing and analysing data about how Ofsted inspectors assess the educational standards of children at infant school and make judgements about their attainment and progress. Also Ms's comments confirmed that the fictionalised tale provided a clear and rich picture of this aspect of the research and clearly explored and challenged the question *Does the Ofsted inspection show a fair indicator of children attainment and progress?* Md. wrote:

This is a riveting account, really well told. I like the humour juxtaposed with the deadly serious, of the rigour of the bits in italics and your comments and questions – the devastating effect. The story unfolds dramatically like a tragic comedy. What a horrifying tale of events. Clearly this Ofsted was devastatingly unfair, yet this begs the question- Could an Ofsted inspector show a fair indicator etc. that is according to the extracts if they'd been followed would Ofsted be fair?

By sharing the tale with research colleagues and inviting critical response I learned about expressing my feelings in writing and gaining an emotional response from

writing. There were several questions about how I felt emotionally whilst writing the tale – Was it an emotional release? I felt that it was an emotional release for me as I was able to clarify (at last) the actual focus, the actual reason for why I was doing this research, and I was able to realise the next steps, new directions and dimensions of the research. It was not an emotional release for me to write about the Ofsted inspection, as I have done that by writing the factual account. I felt it was important to allow readers to express their feelings about this particular Ofsted experience and perhaps relate and compare it to their own experiences. Although there were comments of needing to know more about my feelings, my preferred infant practice and my approach to being a head teacher. These still appeared to be implicit in my work rather than explicit.

F. I didn't feel the emotion that is there – I wondered why? But it was still quite an enthralling story.

Md. I think that F. said about you not showing emotion, but it was the emotions it aroused in me, I was getting so angry. It's almost more effective that squirrel was not emotional. She was just stating facts- this happened and then this happened, you could almost get this awful sense of tragedy unfolding.

P. That's very in line with J's (emotional response) paper about M's experiences. She's appalled... her very emotive language.

F. Going back to lack of emotion. I felt that this was an edited unemotional version. I wanted to read the uncensored version.

P. But at the end M. refers to what she wrote earlier, isn't it emotion? I was totally stunned to hear the inspection... I am left with a deep feeling of being cheated by the Ofsted system and some people working in it ... I feel that the school community was cheated. That's totally feelings.

F. Yes, it's interesting the feelings that Ofsted generates.

P/Z. I feel this account calls on my emotional response.

The two professional had highlighted the limitations of the first Ofsted tale (the factual account) and the research colleagues had highlighted what information was missing from the second Ofsted tale (the fictionalised tale) that I had adapted using the children's story and how implicitly I work with young children. The

redrafted Ofsted tale was the outcome of inviting critical response from two colleagues (critical friends) and triangulated memory work with research colleagues. The experience and process of writing fictionalised story moved me through successive layers of self-reflection or layers of meaning or layers of professional knowledge but I think that my fundamental beliefs, expressed in the story remained unchanged.

The redrafted Ofsted tale.

I revised the Ofsted tale in May 1999 and re-named it -

Soon After The Storm: The Tale of an Ofsted Inspection.

I retained the cross references of the relevant sections of the tale with the material from the three sections of the Ofsted Handbook (1995) and my own comments and questions and made my varying emotions explicit. I have put a different emphasis on some aspects of the tale and I have improved the clarity of some events. Subsequently I rewrote pieces of my different story, recast some of the animal and bird characters and extended the cast list. I used three colours of print (red, blue and green) to define the groups of characters in the story. I used red print to denote the Park LEA and two groups of inspectors. I used blue print to denote everybody in the Oak Tree community (school staff, governors, children and parents/carers). I did this to show the important relationship between the LEA and the school community. The green print denoted the external inspection teams. I re-named all the inspectors as mice. This was maintain the link between all the inspectors who were directly involved with the Ofsted inspection. I revised the numbering system so that it was a consistent numbering system for all the characters. I numbered the LEA senior inspectors, the advisor and the governor e.g. badgers 1-3 and foxes 1-3. I showed all the members of governing body by including foxes 1-16. I realised that I needed to include all members of staff,

children and parents to explain the context and the size of Oak Tree. I felt the children had a crucial part to play in the story.

I remembered my opening question - *Does the Ofsted inspection show a fair indicator of the children's attainment and progress?*

I remembered that my reason for writing the Ofsted tale was because the children were central to my work. I felt this highlighted an important omission on my part. Also it showed that by fictionalising the children's names differently (by changing their names) from the adults (using animal or bird characters) I had confused their roles in the tale. I re-named all the children as rabbits and highlighted the two children featured in the tale as rabbit 1&2.

By previously omitting the parents from the story I misled their relationship with the Oak Tree, as they were positively and actively involved with many aspects of school life. I added them as hares with the parent featured in the story as hare1. Also I needed to include all the staff to show the staffing structure at Oak Tree. I named robins 1&2 for the school secretary and the site manager. I re-named the key characters to show dual role in school. Owl 1 now represents the deputy head teacher/year 1 teacher and pigeon 1 now represents the acting deputy head teacher/year 2 teacher and Owl 2 became the acting senior teacher/year 1 teacher. I represented the other teachers by pigeons 2&3 as the year 2 teachers, owls 1-3 as the year 1 teachers and thrushes 1-3 as the year R teachers and starling as the nursery teacher. The part time teachers became sparrows 1-5 with sparrow 1&2 as the music and art co-ordinator. The support staff became swallows 1-13. Below is a chart of the revised cast list and redrafted Ofsted tale. The redrafted Ofsted tale is included in Appendix 6:p478-518.

Epilogue

Learning from telling the Ofsted tale

This chapter shows a new dimension emerging in my understanding of a fair or rather a fairer assessment through the process of constructing the fictionalised story *After the storm: The Tale of an Ofsted Inspection*. I use the method of reflective writing to record my own professional experience and to share sensitive data in a manner that presents a clear picture but respects the anonymity of people involved. Also I deconstruct my own infant practice and make it explicit to others.

Reflections on Ofsted's seven-year reign

The inspection of schools by Ofsted has been in place for seven years, 1993-2000 and throughout that time Ofsted has generated much public interest, discussion and attracted more controversy with time. The popular and educational press regularly comments on some aspect of Ofsted's activities:

Naming and shaming works (TES, 17 April 1998)

Political spotlight turns on Ofsted (TES, 29.09.98)

Precious days ruined by Ofsted 'spectres' (TES, 16.10.98).

I have just read two very contrasting articles about Ofsted. The first one says that the outgoing Ofsted complaints adjudicator concedes the need to reform Ofsted so that schools are given the extra opportunity to question the judgements of Ofsted (TES, 27.04.01). The second, written by the ex Chief Inspector of Ofsted, says that some schools find it hard to accept an adverse judgement from inspectors, but once the initial shock is past, most schools make real progress (Daily Telegraph, 28.04.01).

One of the reasons for the controversy is the way in which the Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools alongside league tables of test results has been taken by the media as the main source of information that is used to measure educational standards (Maw, J. 1998:9:2:145-152). Also, Woodhead, the chief inspector from 1993-2000, adopted a highly political role, which threatened to bring the system into disrepute and alienated many head teachers and teachers (Mortimore, 1998:216).

Like Mortimer I consider that without teachers' support and good will, raising standards will be impossible. Woodhead's controversial and adversarial approach has counteracted some of the useful contributions that a more flexible inspection process could make to promoting good practice and improving children's achievement. Brookes, The President of the National Association of Head Teachers (1999-2000), a primary school head teacher, wrote about the culture of mistrust inculcated by Ofsted. He recognised that whilst there has been positive movement on some issues the '*Kingdom of Ofsted*' has remained virtually unmoveable since its creation in 1993 (NAHT, 2003:3:46).

Also Ofsted imposed (without consultation) a new short inspection version of inspection (Ofsted 2000) that threatened to put more schools into categories of failure. The new short inspection was an improvement only for a minority of schools as it excluded all schools not up to current trends in national norms (NAHT, 2000:3:46). Like Mortimer, Brookes saw the link between school self-evaluation and external inspection in the revised Framework as a possible catalyst for school improvement, but only if commitment for change came from the school and the school's own development plans were acknowledged. Since the year 2000 Ofsted has been revised twice more (2003 & 2005) and each addition has several new features particularly relating to teaching and learning, performance management, best value and overall judgements of school effectiveness, with

increasing emphasis on school self-evaluation, as shown by continually updated schools' on-line self-evaluation form (SEF) by head teachers (Ofsted, 2005).

What is the evidence to measure the success or failure of Ofsted?

There have been three detailed reviews on the limits and possibilities of Ofsted as a means of ensuring greater accountability across the education system and as a strategy for raising standards and fostering school improvement. The first review of Ofsted was undertaken by a group of eleven contributors to a special edition of the Cambridge Journal of Education (1995:25:1) who gave a full range of perspectives on the inspection practices. Hardly any of the contributors appeared to imply that Ofsted inspection should be curtailed and most perceived some strengths. Some saw the need for improvements in methodology and others wanted to strengthen the processes with a view to facilitating school improvement. All however were concerned with fitness for purpose of Ofsted.

The second review was an important independent review undertaken by the Office for Standards in Inspection (Ofstin) with a grant from the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust and it was published in 1999 (Cullingford, 1999). The review draws on the research of seventeen distinguished academics, who critically assessed the role, impact and effect of the Ofsted inspection system on school standards and it set out to answer three key questions:

Does inspection improve the academic attainment of pupils?

Are school standards actually improved by the Ofsted system?

Do inspectors create more problems than they solve?

And a fourth question that underlies all others:

Is Ofsted successful, within its own terms?

The Commons Select Committee and the National Audit Office have their doubts. Also, the evidence presented in the various chapters of the book taken together

suggest that Ofsted lowers standards and increases the possibility of long-term damage to the pupils' academic and social abilities. This leads me to ask the questions:

What is the purpose of education?

What is the effect of inspection on the learning development and attainment of children?

With the current Ofsted Framework children could experience five Ofsted inspections during their time in formal education (3-18 years).

In terms of my own experience, I was most interested in Chapter 2, which examined the Ofsted process and discussed how inspectors made their absolute judgements from the evidence base. (Winkley, D. An Examination of Ofsted pp32-45). Winkley questioned the consistency, reliability and validity of Ofsted and diagnosed the core of Ofsted's problem as the conflict between its theory and practice. He saw the theory as a:

Kind of depersonalised check... a blue print carried out to a rule-based agenda- a checklist based on centrally conceived set of values as to what constitutes a good school. That's the theory. In practice, as an all-textual interpretation, the theory is mediated through the minds of individual inspectors (p35)²³.

Therefore with Ofsted inspection in action, Winkley argued that we see examples of evidence constructed against the background of the values of the inspectors themselves and perhaps most formatively those of the registered inspector, which could guide the inspection. He felt that the paradox seems to be that any consortium of values between the team and the school could lead to either an under critical or an over critical approach. Under critical where the inspection team overvalues the very component that the school feels is overwhelmingly the most important. Over critical where the team feels on the same value grounds as the school but the school seems to be evidently failing against its own set of principles

²³ I discuss the problematic of forms of interpretation and phenomenological research in Chapter 2 Accessing the tacit knowledge of infant school practice: a methodology.

or objectives. On the other hand the school is even more at risk when team and school values clearly do not converge. I believe this was the contributing factor to the inspectors' harsh and premature judgements of Oak Tree reported in my Ofsted tale. Winkley emphasises this point:

Inspection is a practice of its own, demanding a high level of skills and self-understanding. Its outcomes are highly infallible, and teachers are vulnerable to the diversity of quality and insight of the teams as well as to the circumstances of the inspection itself...there is no going back, no repeating of evidence (p41).

Winkley described the results of the National Primary Centre (NPC) Study presented by Channel 4. This study related to the procedures that were followed in inspections between 1995-2000. 95% of the head teachers of 200 recently inspected schools wanted Ofsted changed. Like many of the head teachers I too have intense feelings about my Ofsted experience. I too felt peculiarly vulnerable during the Ofsted process and felt personally and professionally damaged by it. The problem was not so much with the principal of external analysis and review. Like many heads in the study I objected to the nature of the process that Ofsted adopted and the spirit in which the team worked. I sympathised with the 40% of heads who were critical of the Ofsted team, their judgements, the inspection report and the label of a special measures school.

Macbeath (2001) undertook the third review. He continued to work with the National Union of Teachers to examine the Ofsted inspection system. The NUT was part of an increasing body that pressed the Government to reform the inspection system so that it supported rather than demoralised teachers. The NUT involved a wide range of educationalists including Wragg, Richards, Taylor Fitz-Gibbon and Learmonth who all proposed new models for school inspection in which self-evaluation played an important part. Also Barber outlined the ways in which schools had significantly more evaluation data to inform their practice than

when Ofsted was established and he posed a set of questions on the next phase of Ofsted's development which reflected that:

The key to success will be trust in the informed professional judgement of teachers (p7).

The concept of informed professional judgement and the realisation of the relationship between self-evaluation and inspection, that is, that trust and accountability are co-evolutionary have been paramount in moving both Ofsted and schools forward since 2001. Although Ofsted inspection teams continue to interpret the framework differently with devastating and damaging effects to school communities (Wallace, 2005).

Ofsted and raising standards

Ofsted inspections are intended to bring about school improvement. There is growing evidence that inspection has both positive and negative effects on the process of school development, Gray & Wilcox (1995), Earley (1995), Earley et al (1996) and Ferguson et al (2000). In chapter 10 Cuckle P. & Broadhead, P., Effects of Ofsted on School Development pp176-187) Cuckle and Broadhead sought the views of head teachers. The extent to which heads valued inspection was related to a combination of factors that included the value of the pre-inspection preparation process in terms of time invested and what was achieved; the conduct and quality of inspectors; the expense of the inspection system in relation to its contribution to school development; the extent to which it provided a new focus for development; the extent to which it provided a tool either for school management or relationships with the wider community; the residual effect on staff morale and the extent to which the school found it possible to implement the Ofsted key issues for action. It remains to be seen whether schools improve after

inspection as re-inspection of primary schools has only just begun and little comparative data is available.

At the NAHT Annual Conference 2005 challenges to the value of Ofsted continued and concern remained about its credibility, expensive record of demoralizing the teaching force, lack of accountability and use of power without responsibility (NAHT, 2005). This emphasised the previously held views that Ofsted alone cannot bring about improvement because it does not take sufficient account of local circumstances (Faruqi, 1996, Broadhead et al, 1996).

There is a considerable body of opinion that different approaches to development (other than Ofsted inspection) may be more useful. Macbeath (1995 & 1998) put forward the notion of school evaluation in his studies that were commissioned by the National Union of Teachers (NUT) and then supported by Ofsted publication *School Self-evaluation Matters* (Ofsted, 2000). Also the NAHT (2000) highlighted the important link between self-evaluation and the revised Ofsted Framework (2000).

Ferguson et al (2000) went one step further when he looked at the relationship between school inspection and school improvement. He focused on how schools could develop a culture of self-inspection (using the Ofsted criteria, Ofsted (1998a)) and argued that the schools own systematic evaluation processes should play a greater part in the arrangements for inspection. This view was supported by the NAHT (2000) who reported on the advantageous link between school self-evaluation and external inspection. It seemed that this balance could be the catalyst for school improvement but whatever the approach taken, a commitment for change must come from within the school and ongoing development should be acknowledged.

Writing the chapter and engaging with the literature has enabled me to clarify a great deal about how I sustained my practice as a teacher and about the values

that underpinned my practice as a head teacher of an infant school. The chapter (so far), reading the Report of the National Advisory Committee on Creative and Cultural Education, NACCCE(2000) and Craft (1999:10:1:135-150) has led me to see that the government's urge to raise standards in education has been dominated by a national curriculum and methods and styles of assessment and inspection that pays too little attention to whole child development .

There is still too much emphasis on the areas of children's knowledge that can be easily measured and this marginalizes the teaching and learning and school management that encourage creative and culturally sensitive aspects of education and which is particularly important for young children. The issue is not the need for assessment but its nature. The problems are the dominance of particular approaches to summative assessment (literacy and numeracy) and the related emphasis on measurable outcomes, the difficulties of assessing the teaching and learning of the broader curriculum particularly creativity and the growing pressure of national assessment on children, teachers and schools. Judging pupils' attainment and progress through reliable and systematic assessment are essential for all areas of the curriculum areas.

How this is done must take account of what is being assessed. A proper balance must be restored between different types of attainment target and between different forms of assessment. All schools need to provide formative assessment, which contributes to pupils' development and progress and summative assessment that reports on overall attainment. Processes of assessment should address equally all areas of pupils' development and all agreed attainment targets of the National Curriculum. This is not happening now. In practice there is more emphasis on summative than formative and on some areas than others. The dominant forms of summative assessment focus on those areas of pupil's

knowledge and skills that can be most easily measured quantitatively and compared objectively.

Ofsted is effective in many ways but it currently limits opportunities for creative and cultural education in several ways. The inspection framework lacks necessary flexibility, it does not focus enough on the processes of teaching and learning that are central to developing creative and cultural education in schools, and inspectors often lack the specialist knowledge of the processes and disciplines. The inspection team who came to my school were both insensitive to the ethos and inexperienced in infant education. Yet evidence from Ofsted reveals that at Key Stages 1&2 literacy and numeracy are best promoted through a broad and balanced curriculum, including the arts and humanities and more provision for creative and cultural education should be available in the early years.

At the Ofsted Conference, Good Teaching in the Arts (1998) Ofsted statistics were presented that showed that there was a positive correlation between good performance in the arts in schools and higher standards of performance in literacy. Furthermore, Ofsted (2004) reports that the learning and teaching environment in school is shaped by an understanding of what children can achieve and by teaching that meets their individual needs as learners (DfES, 2004).

Claims to knowledge

What have I learnt from engaging with the action reflection process? I feel I can claim to have achieved the purpose of this chapter that was to show how Ofsted happens in practice. I have critically assessed the role, impact and effect Ofsted has on a school and through that to find out how learning from Ofsted can contribute to a fairer assessment of children's learning, development and attainment.

Claim 1

I have shown the development in my own learning and understanding in the process of deconstructing my own infant practice and making it explicit to others. I have attempted to look under the surface of Ofsted inspection and its external assessment to discover hidden layers of meaning. I have looked at the unique meanings that events throughout an Ofsted inspection process offer its diverse participants- young children, professional colleagues (infant teachers) and critical friends, research colleagues and myself. I have looked at the meanings myself as I engage with the various perspectives from colleagues, theorists and practitioners on the central issues:

What constitutes a positive inspection system? How does this contribute to the development of my understanding of a fair(er) assessment of children's learning, development and attainment?

I have investigated the nature of my own responses to the Ofsted system of inspection whilst looking at a framework for school evaluation that could be used by schools and authorities and school improvement. I was familiar with this approach through my own preferred approach to leadership and management as an infant head teacher (1989-1998). Southworth (1998) and other writers support this approach in their work on effective leadership for improving school (Southworth, 1998). I know of only two research studies that put forward proposals for improving Ofsted and creating a successful inspection system that needs to cover a full range of methods of assessment of performance of children, teachers and schools (Cullingford, 1999 & Macbeath, 1999).

My work has parallels with the ideas of Cullingford and McBeath because they investigated the system within which Ofsted operates and the varying roles, personalities and styles of inspectors and how they go about making judgements.

They were critical of Ofsted being inconsistent and gathering its information at any given moment giving a snapshot without considering valuable contextual aspects or viewing the process of improvement over time. I am equally sure that a fairer assessment of schools requires Ofsted to *look into* schools, teachers and children (teaching for learning and development) rather than *look at* schools, teachers and children (teaching for attainment). A core purpose of my research is to look into how a society goes about its business of education.

The big question for me is:

Can Ofsted ever be a positive inspection system or do we need a new model?

Claim 2

I have illustrated how Ofsted inspection happens in practice and how that process was affected by my educational values, when I was head teacher of Oak Tree Infant School. I found that I was continually challenging the particular values that I brought to the leadership role. The greatest conflict was the lack of care, respect and trust, the lack of positive communication, the lack of consultation and collaboration in reaching judgements about the achievements of Oak Tree and its staff, children and parents and the emphasis on failure rather than success. These are in contrast to my own educational values related to early years education and what is at the heart of a fairer assessment.

Claim 3

My third claim is that I am continuing to discover new dimensions about what might constitute a fair assessment and that inspection is an absolute key. As in chapter 3 research colleagues raised a number of fundamental questions about this and I only have a partial answer.

Which way do I look at fair assessment?

Who does the judgement of what is fair, to whom is it fair, who does it affect?

Is the Ofsted system fair?

Is the Ofsted Framework fair?

How do Ofsted inspectors make fair judgements?

Also this chapter highlighted the interplay between micro and macro assessment policy and practice and the implication for schools, teachers and children. I explain this by including in the diagram Policy and Practitioners: Feedback for Individual and Collective Learning (Linter, 2001).

In Chapter 3 I clarified that a fairer assessment for young children must be one that promotes learning by showing what children can do and not one that restricts learning by showing what children cannot do. Ofsted assesses the measurable outcomes of children's learning in relation to attainment of National curriculum levels and expected attainment at the end of each key stage. This is a performance and results orientation that has potential to create divisiveness and so it constitutes an unfair assessment. I definitely feel for Ofsted to make a fairer assessment it should assess the processes of teaching and learning to emphasise the development of the whole child in a way that avoids labelling children.

Also in Chapter 3 I look at children's work being the basis for assessment and I state that teacher assessment is only fair if teachers can make consistent and informed judgements about children's learning. I explained the problematic in teachers' interpretations. Ofsted inspectors also make judgements about children's work and I feel the problematic of their interpretation is far greater. Their interpretation is often hasty and fragmented, it is of an unknown child's completed (or uncompleted) piece of work and may include that child's explanation of it to an unknown inspector.

How can Ofsted inspectors make consistent and informed judgements in such an unnatural situation?

Especially if they don't understand the theory and practice of teaching young children, their work or their explanations. I remember my horror at some of the inspectors' remarks about the children's work, the children's attempts to describe it and the teaching, the little girl trying to read, criticism of the paintings, the music and art teachers being upset, the maths teacher needing all this specialist language work with young children. If you don't recognise the things about young children, how they learn, how they express themselves (particularly if English or language or self-confidence is limited) then you can't have a fair assessment.

Is Ofsted fair and just?

This chapter examines how inspectors go about making their judgements although I recognise that mine was a unique case that was not representative of other situations. Like Winkley (Winkley in Cullingford, 1999:ch2:32-58), I felt the formidable powers of Ofsted, of being exposed to an analysis of the school's performance based on the assembling of a vast array of numerical data that depersonalised the process.

I believe that the inspection team was biased, unfair, unreasonable and unprofessional in the way it carried out its brief. I witnessed the exceptional stress of an Ofsted inspection experience for teachers and young children (the real victims of Ofsted). The teachers felt they were observed on and not communicated with. They experienced a team that was insensitive to the feelings of the teachers and children (very alien to the ethos of an infant school). They felt that the inspectors were aloof and unapproachable and the depersonalised nature of the process led to them experiencing powerlessness and feeling abused. Also I felt that this was particularly threatening as I was teaching young children in the caring

and trusting environment of an infant school and I have to ask if this kind of practice is ethically acceptable in a mature democratic society.

Two research colleagues questioned whether the Ofsted system could be fair and just. B. commented:

One thing I can't understand was... you thought you were being cheated by the Ofsted system, but you were at great pains during the course of the story that they were flouting the system, their own rules. Is it just the team or is it the system?

Also Md added:

Clearly Ofsted was devastatingly unfair. This begs the question can Ofsted show a fair assessment according to experts, if they'd (the rules) been followed, would Ofsted have been fair?

On reflection I feel it was both the system and the team that were *unfair* and *unjust* because at that time of my inspection (1997) Ofsted did not consider the children's attainment and progress or contributory factors as evidence of them. There was no opportunity for redress or informed discussion with the inspectors. The inspectors made absolute judgements that enforced promised local and national initiatives by the newly elected local council and national government. These included naming and shaming of schools and head teachers not meeting national testing norms (mostly social priority schools), literacy and numeracy strategies before they were introduced, integration and the provision of SEN, monitoring provision and performance, the amalgamation of schools and the governance of schools. Also at the time local LEA inspectors were able to inspect local schools when wearing their Ofsted hats and there was considerable mis-match between their LEA phase (Primary/secondary) and subject specialism and their Ofsted roles and responsibilities.

I feel that I need to return to the Ofsted Handbook that states that the inspection report should be:

Fair and just...with all its recommendations supported by evidence (p19).

Also Ofsted state that the registered inspector should manage the evidence base and ensure that:

Sound fair judgements drive from it (p20).

The Ofsted Handbook clearly states six principles that govern the conduct of inspections. I list four principles that are relevant to my research and they are:

Carry out their work with professionalism, integrity and courtesy, evaluate the work of the school objectively, report honestly and fairly and act in the best interests of the pupils at the school (p9).

The most worrying aspect of the Ofsted system is its power to control and regulate local and national policy often conducted in a way that can inflict damage. Following a conversation about the Ofsted inspection process with a research colleague (an Ofsted inspector) she wrote:

I was totally stunned to hear the inspection of her school brought with such a negative and destructive outcome. On reflection, I was not so shocked that the system was capable of such effect but more that a colleague had experienced such judgements through an apparently appalling process. The inspection team sounded an embarrassing mis-match for the school...the school to my knowledge was high on the scale of social, economic and educational deprivation and the external test results were overall below by national comparison. However, the additional irony was that Ms own research was looking at tracking closely the progress being made by pupils entering school with particularly low baselines of ability and the value added impact of the school's intervention. Research that should have helped to prove the inadequacy and inaccuracy of the inspection team's judgement about pupils' attainment was not taken seriously enough. Research that also has the benefit of tracking over time. There appeared to be numerous anomalies during the inspection and the following written report. (Extract from paper, member of research group, 1999).

Throughout my tale about the Ofsted inspection process at Oak Tree infant school I made specific references to the Ofsted Handbook to highlight instance that caused concern and to clarify whether the inspectors made fair and just assessments. I concluded that the Ofsted inspection of Oak Tree infant school showed an unfair assessment of children's learning, development and attainment. I experienced an inspection team that was insensitive to the ethos of an infant school. It was a mismatch for my school. The inspectors took a managerial and

numerical approach to their task and presented an analysis of the school's performance based on depersonalised numerical data that created a very questionable comparative instrument (in research terms). This gave an unrepresentative picture of the school's strengths and weaknesses that resulted in profound damage to a vulnerable school community and vulnerable children.

The inspection team that came to my school were inexperienced in infant education and did not seem to understand the theory and practice of teaching young children. I suggest that if you do not recognise how young children learn or how they express themselves if English or language or self-confidence is limited, then you can not make an informed judgement and the school, the teachers and the children do not receive a fair and just inspection. The Ofsted methodology and the misty snapshots that emerged from fragmented classroom observations of unknown children and unknown children's explanations of their work to unknown inspectors compounded this problem. What an unnatural situation! I remember my horror at some of the inspectors' critical remarks about a 5 year old trying to read, about the immaturity of a young child's painting, about the inappropriateness of using music and art to support language development.

In my inspection experience of 1997, Ofsted did not consider the bigger picture. It did not consider children's prior attainment and progress or contributory factors or evidence of them. I agree with writers who have suggested that Ofsted does not take sufficient account of local circumstances. I was denied the opportunity to explain the complex circumstances of Oak Tree, young children's unpredictable traits on starting full-time school, the fragile emotions of many children, the hazards of social poverty and temporary housing, the disruptiveness of sudden staff changes or the meaning of the projected 1997 Sats results which were the best the school had ever achieved.

I also felt that the unique set of contextual circumstances (political, professional and personal) both inside and outside the school that accumulated and happened simultaneously during the year of the Ofsted process influenced the course of events. The inspectors made unchallengeable, absolute judgements that seemed to support the hidden agenda of local and national initiatives rather than reflect the situation in my school. Maybe this is not surprising, given that it was Park LEA inspectors inspecting a local school, although they were wearing their Ofsted hats. The negative outcome of the Ofsted inspection of the independent, progressive secondary school Summerhill (1999) and the result of the Independent Schools Tribunal that followed the head teacher's appeal against Ofsted was well documented in the popular and educational press (Guardian and TES, March 2000). A group of academic researchers was asked to produce an expert witness statement that supported Summerhill in making its case (Ian Stronach, Expert Witness in the Case of Summerhill v Ofsted, Research Intelligence 72:14). It was very critical of the inspection process and found that HMI 'had played scant regard to the school's aims, devised no methods to address these aims and merely assumed that those elements that diverged from Ofsted expectations should be ignored'. HMI's written record of evidence was made available and it was clear that the subsequent judgements were sometimes bizarre and often prejudiced. During the tribunal hearing it was apparent that Summerhill School was on a secret Ofsted 'to be watched' list, made up of 66 independent schools. The judge condemned this as surveillance and unacceptable.

Schools were once described as being *secret gardens*.

I have to ask the question –

Is Ofsted a world of secret judgements?

The Summerhill case seems to echo many of the research findings about Ofsted. It also raises the question of what schools can do if they are not well known or

don't have adequate funds (Summerhill reputedly faced a legal bill of £150,000!). Common Woods Secondary School became the first state school to successfully mount a legal challenge against Ofsted (TES, 1.12.2000). The first adjudicator to Ofsted was appointed in 1998 to review the handling of complaints, broker agreements where possible and to help the body improve its own handling of complaints. The adjudicator cannot alter the judgements made by registered or HM inspectors, order a re-inspection or alter an inspection report. The TES (22.10.99) reported that only 6 cases of complaint out of 291 complaints to Ofsted had been dealt with since the appointment and in all cases Ofsted complied with the recommendations. The latest figures covering 1999-2000 show that there were 300 complaints about inspection, 116 were formal written ones and of those 116 complaints 32 were partially upheld and 5 were upheld.

Does Ofsted really have a commitment to the improvement of inspection as well as improvement through inspection?

Ofsted has to change to become a positive and popular inspection system. The reformed service could offer high-quality care for ailing schools. It could perform the traditional function of school audit and review as well as assessing schools' capacity to manage themselves. It could become the integrated quality assurance, review and improvement system that is standard practice in well-managed sectors of industry and commerce. It could support the rights of parents and children to have quality schools and the teaching profession to have high quality support. It could be a very effective, fair, just and popular (Reynolds, D. Mark 11: Ofsted remixed, TES February 2001). My own Ofsted experience was probably the worst experience of my personal and professional life that resulted in profound public and private damage, but unlike many teachers and head teachers who are reported to be leaving teaching I am committed to remaining in the profession and in headship.

I feel I can offer this chapter as part of my original contribution to knowledge, the process of coming to know. I have shown the development in my own learning and understanding in the process of deconstructing my own infant practice and making it explicit to others and through this I have been able to explain my emerging perceptions of a fairer assessment as a *living educational theory*. This chapter *Learning from Ofsted* has been one, but very crucial jigsaw piece of the multi-layered jigsaw puzzle, through which I am representing my research as a whole.

I have realised the moral, personal and professional and highly political maze that is present within and between each layer of my professional knowledge related to the dimensions of a fairer assessment. Critically examining the Ofsted process and learning from it has only represented a small but powerful piece of the infant school, the infant classroom and the assessment of young children's learning, development and attainment. The collective analysis of the Ofsted process presented in this chapter has given me the opportunity to look critically and appreciatively at the bigger picture that is evolving and merging in the multi-perspectives of the concept of a fairer assessment of children's learning development and attainment that constitutes the whole thesis.

Chapter 7

Creating Living Educational Theory About Assessment in the Infant Years

Chapter 7

Creating a Living Educational Theory about Assessment in the Infant Years

Introduction

Journey end ... and another journey beginning

In this thesis I journeyed widely across the complex and ever-changing educational assessment landscape to search for a fairer assessment of children's learning, development and attainment. I journeyed through vast and varied literature about educational assessment and the debates about raising standards in order to examine local and national perspectives and alternative viewpoints (see Chapter 1 in this thesis).

Whereas many research paradigms related to educational assessment have been created because of philosophical and epistemological commitments to particular bodies of knowledge and working practices (Davis, 1999; Mortimer, 1998; Gipps, 1994), my approach has been a more problem centred and a creative one that evaluates the tacit knowledge of infant school practice related to the assessment of young children's learning, development and attainment (Moyle et al, 2003; Atkinson & Claxton, 2000).

Methodology and epistemology

As a branch of philosophy that studies knowledge, epistemology addresses knowledge questions that surround the process of knowing. In pursuing this research I attempted to understand the epistemological dimensions of how professionals in teaching, like myself, authorise and certify the knowledge they produce. I explored the social epistemological construction of my own consciousness. I traced the effects of

my cultural value systems upon my frames of reference and the perception of the world around me (Kincheloe, 2003).

The project is unique in using its own interactive research process (collaborative reflection and analysis of past practice to inform future practice and in using its own form of visual representation (multi-layered jigsaw puzzle). In Chapter 2 I explained how I adapt a research method from Lomax and Whitehead's approach to critical action research (McNiff, Lomax & Whitehead, 2003 & 1996) in which the researcher's educational values are the yardsticks by which action (practice) is evaluated. I chose to use Oak Tree Infant School, where I was head teacher, as a case study to explore the existence and significance of tacit knowledge as a basis for effective assessment practices that will not disadvantage young children. I adapted a method of professional story writing (a personally meaningful approach to me) to probe deep levels of my tacit knowledge and raise it to explicit levels of awareness to inform future practice – a fairer assessment of children's learning, development and attainment (see Chapters 3, 4 & 6).

Throughout my research journey I learnt to be creative as unexpected happenings occurred in my professional life both as head teacher of Oak Tree and as a teacher-researcher. I realised that we all have creative abilities and we all have them differently (Cape, 2005). In Chapter 3 I showed how I worked with members of a research group at Kingston University to pursue our research projects, each in our own creative way, by using individual professional story writing and visual metaphors. Storytelling was our main investigative tool. Often, on hearing a story, members of the research group remembered a forgotten experience. Stories provided inspiration, and offered fresh ideas or confirmed old ones. We also gained an understanding of

another person's experience through their story, as it involved us in events from the frame of reference of the teller. Atkinson suggests that:

In telling a story we increase our understanding and knowledge of ourselves, deepening the meaning in our lives through reflection and putting our experiences in a form that can be understood by others. Stories are part of our natural dialogue and interaction (Atkinson, 1998:12).

Our conversations also allowed the real world into our research and this was crucial for us all, as teacher-researchers. Storytelling helped us to give meaning to our lives and experiences, and for us, this worked in a variety of ways (Atkinson 1998). We attempted to find a powerful means of relaying imagery of school experience for in-depth analysis. I discovered that creativity is not a single aspect of intelligence that only emerges in particular activities, in the arts for example, but that it is a systematic function of intelligence (essential in the educational action research process) that can emerge wherever intelligence is engaged. Also I discovered that creativity is a dynamic process that draws on many different areas of school experience and intelligence. Members of the research group found a way to harness, for improvement of practice, not just release their creativity. We discovered that creativity was not just purely an individual performance but that it arose out of our interactions with the ideas and achievements of each other (Cape UK, 2001). We also found that creative expression facilitated communication. It became an agent of personal reflection and change to improve the overall educational experience.

Also in Chapter 2 I described how I used colour, shape and tone in the multi-layered jigsaw puzzle, which was my visual metaphor that represented the overall research process to manifest personal meaning (Mitchell-Williams et al, 2004). I now realise that my research process appears akin to the four stages of art therapy, outlined by Silverstone (1993). As well as the language of the professional stories I needed to

use images, the felt-sense of a phenomenon that the research group could identify and work with as a way of uncovering meaning (multi-layered practitioner knowledge). Throughout my journey I interrogated my own educational values as I uncovered successive, significant layers of professional knowledge in the infant school related to a conceptual model of a fairer assessment (see Chapters 3, 4, 5 & 6). I used self-study and adapted a narrative approach (see Chapters 3, 4 & 6) to construct a language that I could use to show underlying ideas, and to open them up for collaborative reflection and examination of the educational assessment landscape I journeyed through with research colleagues. I also drew on assessment and pupil data from a school self-evaluation study at the case study school (Oak Tree) and work with a group of local head teachers to collectively examine the effects of school context and intake on achievement (see Chapter 5). Throughout the thesis I endeavoured to make sense of what I considered to be less than adequate standards of holistic educational assessment and find ways to improve them so that assessment practices enable all children to have a fair opportunity to learn (Wragg, 2001:39).

Although the journey was very risky it was a huge collaborative practical learning experience for all those involved, particularly me. Like Black et al (2003:118) I soon realised that practical learning and risk often go together. One risk in our journey was that we (all teacher-researchers) found the tasks that the journey set us often to be unacceptable or impossible (see Chapter 3 & 6). Although we did not decide to refuse or to ignore the challenges, there was still the uneasy feeling that the changes we proposed might have been found feasible but unacceptable. We were keen to improve our practice (effective assessment) by making changes, but we were required as head teachers and teachers to implement national and local policies in our schools. Yet these potential disasters did not happen!

Why did we persevere and why are the outcomes of the thesis so positive and rewarding to me?

One answer to this question lies in the relevance and potential of educational assessment as a research topic. Throughout the project, assessment remained one of the most talked about national issues in education. In Chapter 1, when I reviewed the literature about the debate on educational assessment I showed that assessment has taken on such importance in schools since the introduction of the National Curriculum that the very word is saturated with associations of formality, anxiety, ritual and impending doom (Wragg, 2001).

Yet while the positive outcomes may have been due in part to this potential, the commitment of the research group formed a second essential component. Soon after the beginning of the journey, I became aware that the interaction of the two - that is the power of the ideas to bring out the professionalism and talents of teachers (research colleagues) - was clearly the catalyst to success that has enabled me to get to this point in my journey to be able to complete the writing of the thesis (see Chapter 4).

Theoretical framework

Educational assessment

The purpose of my research was to examine assessment policy and practice more deeply and collaboratively reflect on some of the issues raised by my experiences as an infant head teacher/teacher. I examined the relationship of subject matter – summative and formative assessment, assessment by Ofsted with the learning needs of young children. I also examined how the work, attitudes and beliefs of teachers impact on young children and I linked this with research into children's learning.

Discovering the best way to assess pupil and school performance remains one of the most hotly debated issues in education. I weighed up the arguments in Chapter 1 and the recent research by the General Teaching Council (GTC) (2005) has provided valuable information. I discuss the work of the GTC later in this chapter. In an attempt to examine the inter-related elements of educational assessment I collected a variety of data about formative assessment (see Chapter 3 *Learning from Children's Work: exploring the evidence*), standardised assessment (see Chapter 4 *Learning from the Infant Curriculum: exploring the evidence*), summative assessment (see Chapter 5 *Learning from assessment and pupil data: exploring the evidence*), and the assessment role of Ofsted (see Chapter 6 *Learning from Ofsted: exploring the evidence*).

Summative assessment

At the start of my research project I tried to encourage research colleagues to steer clear of summative assessment. I consciously tried to show them how teachers at the case study school (Oak Tree) developed their formative work (see Chapter 3), when I examined examples of annotated children's work. I now realise that I felt the negative influences of summative pressures (National Key Stage Sats) on formative practice (Follows, 1991) and a strong feeling of the harmful influence that narrow high-stakes summative tests had on teaching and learning at Oak Tree.

Research colleagues could not accept this emphasis because the reality in school was that formative assessment had to work alongside summative assessment. In fact we tried to work out effective strategies for using formative approaches to summative tests, as Black et al later wrote about (2003). We looked at the distinctions drawn

between formative and summative assessment, with the definitions of the two usually revolving around the difference in function and timing (see Chapter 1).

Summative assessment is generally undertaken at the end of a course or programme of study (half-term or term's topic) or at the end of year or Key Stage to measure and communicate pupil performance for accountability (Torrance & Pryor, 2002). The implementation of the National Curriculum and National Assessment was central to our debate about the role and purpose of formative assessment, and indeed the balance to be struck, or the tensions to be resolved, between formative and summative assessment. In Chapter 1 I discussed the claim by the National Curriculum Task group on Assessment and Testing (TGAT) that a properly designed system of national assessment could produce both formative and summative assessment data – at the level of the individual child and at the level of the school and national system for accountability purposes (TGAT 1988). Subsequently, Harlen et al (1992) have argued that formative procedures and data must be kept separate from summative, precisely because they address quite different purposes: to use the former to supplement that latter would inevitably involve distorting the process of formative assessment. Others like (Wragg, 2001) have argued the reverse – that two separate sets of procedures would produce an intolerable burden on teachers and that, in any case, in such circumstances the summative would always overshadow the formative because of the demands of accountability.

Certainly this tension and feeling of intolerable burden on our work in schools was the central factor in our discussions, (see Chapters 3 & 4). In writing the thesis, and continuing to work with a primary school community, I realise that for formative assessment to survive at all it must be developed in tandem with, and linked to, summative assessment (Black et al, 2003). Certainly teachers now have greater

control over the setting, timing and marking of Key Stage 1 Sats. Although teachers have no control over the construct of the tests they have greater opportunity to use them positively as part of the learning process, rather than solely as proof of the learning outcome.

At the beginning of my research, the most significant issue that I discussed with the co-researchers was the impact of National Curriculum assessment on the learner [child or teacher] (Weedon et al, 2002:14). Reineke (1998) points out that:

Instruction touches the mind; assessment touches the heart (p7).

Certainly one of the main reasons for me starting my research was the emotional impact of assessment on young children, teachers and the school community at Oak Tree (see Introduction).

I felt that the emotional impact of assessment was one of the most overlooked but profoundly important truths of education that learning includes both intellectual and emotional components. Reineke states:

Assessment, formal or informal, considered or casual, intentional or not, powerfully affect people, particularly students. The assessment climate that students experience is a critical component of instruction and learning. Students' assessment experiences remain with them for a lifetime and substantially affect their capacity for future learning... emotional charge is part of the character of assessment information (Reineke, 1998:7).

In each of the Data Based Chapters I considered the factor that assessment can lead to elation, dejection, fear or excitement, but is rarely neutral. In Chapter 1 I used Satterly's writings to discuss the origins of educational assessment and explained that if any adult reflects on their best and worst moments at school they will usually recount an assessment period. In many cases these experiences are painful many years later. I examined my very negative Ofsted experience in Chapter 6 and children's negative experiences in the classroom in Chapter 4. Psychologists have long

recognised the role of emotion in learning, in terms of self-esteem, motivation, attribution theory, but this recognition has only recently spilled over into the world of educational policy and practice (DfES, 2005).

Government Control and interference

External tests and targets have been the dominant culture for the best part of two decades (Moorhouse, 2006), as shown by the introductory paragraphs to earlier chapters. In the past years, prior to and during my research project the government and its educational advisers became progressively more involved in telling teachers not only *what* to teach within the curriculum but *how* to teach it, using a range of methods perceived to be appropriate (Alexander et al, 1992). Also the government introduced strict procedures of *what* to assess and *how* to assess teaching and learning in schools.

Depending on the age, experience and partialities of teachers, some have welcomed these incursions into their professional practice while others have been more sceptical. I know that I fell and still fall into the latter group. The National Literacy (NLS) and Numeracy Strategies [NNS] (DfEE, 1998b; 1999a) were arguably the most prescriptive of these incursions and they received mixed responses from teachers. I know that I became increasingly frustrated, as head teacher, on behalf of the teachers and young children at Oak Tree when lack of time precluded the exploration and spontaneous development of ideas in a class, or the struggle to perceive the relevance of some of the learning that was to be tested.

Fundamental review of purpose and process of assessment

Even as I complete my thesis assessment remains one of most talked-about issues in education. The General Teaching Council (GTC) initiated extensive research in 2005, to study evidence from all sides in order to better advise the Secretary of State for Education. Despite some welcome developments, they wanted to see a fundamental review of the whole purpose and process of assessment across National Curriculum Key Stages 1-3 (Moorhouse, 2006).

As a head teacher I recognised that everyone had a stake in the assessment debate - from children, teachers, parents and schools. But I strongly felt that the balance had swung too far in the direction of external tests and targets. I began my research by trying to find a right or fair way to assess children's learning, development and attainment and the performance of a school. Soon after the beginning of my journey I realised that there was no easy or single answer (see Chapter 5). Throughout my research I weighed up the arguments (see Chapter 1, 3, 4, 5 & 6).

I find it interesting if not reassuring that the General Teaching Council (GTC) Chief Executive, Carol Adams (2006), recommends that we need a fundamental review of the whole purpose of assessment. She states:

We need to go back to basic questions, such as: what do pupils need to help them best with their learning? What information is most helpful to parents who want to be involved in their child's education? Such a review needs to encompass Key Stage 1 - 3. (Prestage, 2006:6).

The GTC sees three major components for a future system of assessment:

- Teachers use a bank of nationally devised tests when pupils are ready
- Formative and summative assessment are used side-by-side to better support learning, enrich public information and increase accountability of schools
- National standards are monitored through sampling cohorts of pupils.

In his article Prestage emphasises the need for immediate change in the assessment system. Just as I have written in my thesis he explains that external tests and targets have been the dominant culture in education for approximately seventeen years.

Children and assessment

Prestage reiterates the competitive nature of summative assessment and writes that tests and targets may benefit the brightest children but increasing evidence shows that rather than raise standards overall, the gap has widened between high and low attaining pupils particularly those in socially-deprived areas (DfES, 2005; Weedon et al, 2002). Many young people appear to regard testing not as a help to their learning, but as a confirmation of their failure (Buck, 2006) [see Chapter 4]. Although this is feedback from secondary school students I continue to experience similar anxiety and concern both from the young children that I teach and their parents. This echoes the negative feelings since National Curriculum and the assessment procedures were introduced (Weedon, Winter & Broadfoot, 2002; Gipps, 1994).

Perhaps most fundamentally, Government is modifying its one size fits all approach to assessment with a commitment to personalised learning drawn from work started in the 1990s on assessment for learning (AfL). Black is widely recognised as a pioneering leader in AfL's development. He defines it as the way a teacher might assess a pupil in order to determine what the pupil or group needs to take learning further and considers the vital element involves motivating pupils to become independent learners, able to reflect on how they learn best. Although Black's work appears to be concerned with AfL in secondary education, much of his work can be applied to both primary and early years education, and therefore is very pertinent to my research.

The GTC strongly supports AfL as a vehicle for developing teacher assessment and recommends that the Government integrate it even more into its national strategies for education. Black & William's famous review of the literature (1998) about formative assessment (AfL) established that:

Engaging in formative assessment raises test results and equips children to be lifelong learners (Clarke, 2005: 5).

Since Black & William's conceptual framework was developed, formative assessment (AfL) has gained higher and higher profile with policy makers (QCA) and practitioners (teachers). It became widely linked to the current thinking of other educationalists (Clarke, 2005, 2003 & 2001; Hall & Burke, 2003) and has dramatically impacted on teaching and learning in infant and primary schools. I shall discuss formative assessment in more detail later in the chapter.

Parents and assessment

Assessment for learning provides new opportunities for parents too, as much of the current feedback on their children's progress comes from test results. Ongoing assessment and more regular feedback between teachers and parents (key-stake holders) could, the GTC believes, encourage more parents to be more actively involved in helping their children to learn. Cottee (2006) writes about the dazzling array of information, from performance tables to Ofsted reports, available to help parents make informed choices about their child's education. She discovers that despite many parents not knowing the difference between formative and summative assessment, or be able to define assessment for learning, they certainly know when they are receiving regular, clear feedback about their child's progress and performance from teachers who know their child well. Therefore the issues surrounding the information received by parents from teachers and schools, when

they receive it, and how they use it – to make informed judgements and choices about individual children's learning and about schools are central to the debate on the current assessment and accountability.

GTC liaised with a number of organisations including the National Confederation of Parent Teacher Associations (NCPTA), the National Governors' Council and the Parent Education Support Forum and the GTC also commissioned quantitative and qualitative research throughout 2005. Margaret Morrissey of the NCPTA commented on the results:

We have found scant support for league tables and SATs from parents... Our survey with the London Evening Standard found the majority of parents wanted to abolish Key Stage 1 SATs, and they are definite that SATs data should be used by individual schools, not for league tables...Performance table information is 'too narrow' and the over emphasis on testing in the system risks children being taught to the test, not taught to learn. Parents don't want assessment data used for performance tables to inform their choices, they need broader information about children and schools.

Finally she reflected on another research group's findings (GfK NOP, 2005):

Parents can use the information teachers give them, to help teachers raise standards and progress learning at home and at school, but the assessment is the teacher's role. Of course parents need to understand it, but ultimately parents respect teachers' professionalism and trust them to assess their child, using the information gained to progress learning.

And she concluded that:

Parents want ongoing discussion with teachers, with good, regular information, preferably termly, so that issues can be dealt with early. By the end of the year it's often too late (Cottee, 2006:9).

My work with a group of local head teachers confirmed the involvement of parents as an important contributory factor to young children's learning, development and attainment (see Chapter 5).

School governors and assessment

My research examined the interest, and power taken on by school governors at Oak Tree, the apparent difficulties in their understanding of the effect the context of the school on the children's attainment and perhaps their own value or political position (see Chapter 6).

In the autumn of 2005, a GTC stakeholder seminar on assessment brought together a variety of bodies including those representing parents and governors. Issues raised included the imperative of finding appropriate ways to disseminate data to different audiences – from teachers and pupils to LEAs, parents and governors. Neil Davies, chair of National Governors' Council explained that Governors approach assessment data differently from parents. Governors take a strategic position, attempting to establish from the assessment data whether a school is moving in the right direction, with regard to its school development plan and Key Stage targets. But Davies recognised that governors need training to make a valuable contribution when interpreting such data.

Government accountability assessment

It is a central feature of public accountability that a school's informal assessment procedures and the results of the formal assessment of children's learning are shown on its Performance and Assessment Data Report (Panda) on which statutory Baseline and end of Key Stage tests and optional annual Key Stage 2 tests are recorded and included on the School Self-Evaluation Form (SEF), together with Contextual Value Added (CVA) that was introduced in 2005. They are part of the evidence base on which Ofsted inspectors may draw when making judgements about the school and the teaching and learning that takes place within it (Ofsted, 2005).

Ofsted focuses on the school's policy and practice, and the extent to which formal and informal assessment is used effectively.

However, the greatest emphasis is still placed, by government, on the results of the national tests and whilst I feel that it is not unreasonable that such information should be scrutinised, I remain concerned that the data is still often used crudely and inappropriately. For example norm-referenced statements such as the results in mathematics are well below/well above the national average on their own say very little about the quality of teaching and learning in a school, as they do not take into account the many different starting points. Some schools with children of high ability may have too low expectations, but still show above-average performance in tests because of the efforts of parents or private tuition. Conversely, some schools with large numbers of children with significant learning difficulties may struggle to obtain a set of grades close to the national average (Wragg, 2001).

My research highlighted this unavoidable factor related to Oak Tree and the apparent difficulty of Ofsted and Park LEA to appreciate this point (see Chapter 6 & 7). My earlier work on exploring the value-added possibilities at Oak Tree included additional information about many important factors that impact on children's progress. These included earlier attainment in tests as well as information about their special educational needs and socio-economical backgrounds (see Chapter 5). I can only question whether the outcome of the Oak Tree Ofsted inspection (1997) might be different under the new Ofsted inspection system (2005).

Ofsted (2005) describes a new relationship with schools as the self-evaluation form (SEF) is now used as the focus of the inspection. Inspectors use SEF to inform their judgements about how well the head teacher and senior management know their

school and how well the school is meeting the needs of the children. Ofsted (2005) say feedback about the new inspection system has been overwhelmingly positive:

Head teachers and senior managers say that they find the process challenging but professionally rewarding (Ofsted 2005:1).

But, the Times Educational Supplement (Hastings, 2006) reports differently:

The new inspections might be shorter, but pressure is driving some heads to resign and hundreds to complain (Hastings, 2006:9).

Furthermore, Wallace (2005) reports on documents, obtained by the TES under the Freedom of Information Act, that between 2002-2004, five schools had their special measures judgements overturned by the Chief Inspector, David Bell. The figures give an interesting insight into the scale of apparent misjudgements of Ofsted inspection teams and raise the question of how many more schools might not be in special measures, had they had sufficient self-belief to challenge Ofsted's findings.

The National Association of Head Teachers (NAHT) remains deeply concerned about the variable quality and continuing aggressive nature of Ofsted inspections and their use of contextual value-added data and they have requested changes to Ofsted so that statistical analysis of pupil performance should be placed in the context of deeper and wider knowledge about prior attainment and individual pupil circumstances that affect progress. The NAHT recognise that what is useful as an internal quality assurance measure is not necessary helpful as external extrapolated data (NAHT, 2006). Also De Waal (2006) has written a critical expose of the Ofsted inspection process and concludes:

Teachers are not treated as professionals. They are told what to teach and how to teach it. Not only is Ofsted traumatic, it can have long-term damage. Every box must be ticked, and anything that doesn't confirm is ignored. Ofsted only guarantees conformity to a bureaucratic template not quality in education (Smethurst, 2006:13).

Nevertheless, the Government continues to advocate the need for national tests to provide the basic data on which to evaluate and judge evidence of teachers' effectiveness, pupils' learning, national or local improvements from one year to the next, comparative performance between one school or local authority and another, predictions of future potential and performance all part of the government's aim to raise standards in education (Headington, 2003).

The Government White Paper *High Standards, Better Schools for All* (2005) is seen as the most contentious for years by the GTC and teachers' unions despite its bold and welcome aim:

To raise standards for all especially amongst the least advantaged (DfES, 2005:3).

The white paper highlighted that the correlation between under-achievement and social class, gender, ethnicity and deprivation is more severe in England than in many other countries. On first glance I was optimistic that at last many of the issues that I had grappled with as Head teacher of Oak Tree were being recognised by government (see Chapter 5). But on reading the article that summarises the GTC response, I too am seriously concerned that the proposals do not currently contain the right balance of measures to make real progress on the most intractable of education issues - the attainment gap. It seems that unless variations of attainment within and between schools are tackled, educational underachievement may merely be moved around the system. Furthermore, pockets of deprivation in relatively affluent urban (the context of Oak Tree)[see Chapter 5] and rural areas need to be targeted.

There is clear evidence that it is not the school structures that have the foremost influence on outcomes for pupils. It is the quality of teaching and learning, institutional and professional leadership, the curriculum offered (see Chapter 4 & 5), parent/carers

involvement and the resourcing that make a difference. My research findings have been subsequently echoed by the GTC, who believe that the white paper proposals do not, in combination, place sufficient weight on these factors, and so will not deliver an entitlement for all pupils to excellence and equity in either provision or outcomes. The opportunity to make a difference for those children who are least well served by the system is only half grasped. The GTC fear that the proposals on school structures undermine the government's stated objective. The criterion for change of school status or school expansion should be whether change will improve the attainment and well being of all groups of children in an area. This should be placed alongside sustained additional provision to tackle the attainment gap (an important factor not considered by Ofsted when Oak Tree was inspected (see Chapter 6)

Finally the GTC proposes nine measures that would deliver flexibility and authority to the local community and schools:

- Greater incentives for schools to work together across a whole local area
- Admission policies demonstrating how they will enhance provision for all children and have a positive impact on disadvantaged children
- Further resources, including better staffing ratios, targeted at pupils at highest risk of under-achievement
- Universal access to continuing professional development for teachers and staff
- A commitment to extending expertise in special educational needs throughout the system and to all staff
- Support for families in poverty and with low literacy and numeracy to engage with their child's school

- A realignment of accountability of schools from the centre to release local influence
- Greater clarity in local and national accountability and monitoring combined with a central focus on pupil outcomes (GTC, 2006:11).

The GTC focuses on the goal of entitlement for all pupils to high quality provision tailored to their needs. This goal of entitlement was a fundamental principle highlighted in my research (see Chapter 5).

Formative assessment

Clark (2005, 2003 & 2001) continues to work in infant and primary schools, at the Institute of Education INSET courses and in research projects related to practical strategies for implementing the principles of Assessment for learning (AfL) or formative assessment that now has a high profile in UK schools. She emphasises the importance of the successful implementation of formative assessment in schools and says:

In order for formative assessment to be embedded in practice, it is vital that teachers have children's learning as their priority, not their teaching or the opinions of outside parties (Clarke, 2003:1).

Like Clarke, I believe that the continuing and developing interest in the subject is a consequence of its unique characteristic in the UK. Rather than being just another government initiative, teachers (like those at Oak Tree in Chapter 3) are continually (re)defining formative assessment, as they trial various strategies, come up with their own ideas and delve deeper into certain aspects as they gain more insights. Clarke suggests that the development of formative assessment, therefore, is:

The result of action research undertaken by thousands of teachers in their own classrooms (Clarke, 2005:1).

This model of professional development is now respected as probably the most powerful way of affecting change, and Learning Networks have been set up all over the country to encourage this way of thinking. This current way of working appears to be very similar to the network that I was part of at Kingston University in the 1990's, when it was considered to be at the cutting edge of practitioner research (see Chapter 2).

Clarke's involvement in action research includes various large-scale national or local projects, and now in the co-ordination of LEA-based *Learning Teams*. These are spread around the country and consist of 30 teachers drawn, in pairs, from 15 schools in each project. The LEA selects the keenest teachers and schools and the participants make a commitment to attending all three days with her (once a term for a year) and carrying out action research in between the days. I too was actively encouraged by Park LEA to pursue this action research as a continuation of previous projects (see Chapter 2 & 5). Like Clarke I describe the feedback days as being, rich exciting and inspirational, as teachers discuss then summarise their key findings under three headings:

What did you trial?

What was the impact on children's learning?

How did you know?

The last question ensures a level of rigour. It means that teachers cannot simply say that a particular strategy made the children for instance *more focused*. They have to say how they know they were more focused: what behaviours were manifested, what the children said to make the teacher believe they were more focused? How their work changed? The feedback is organised in phases and then published almost word-for-word on Clarke's website (www.shirleyclarke-education.org). This means that teachers can find out what other teachers from different parts of the country have

discovered about the same elements of formative assessment in the same year groups. All the teams' findings are archived, so the resources continue to grow. Like teachers in Clarke's Learning Teams I have certainly delved deeper to gain more insight into formative assessment, specifically the aspect of fairness as I consider it to be a vital part of the bigger picture of the education assessment landscape (see Chapters 3, 4, 5 & 6).

Also it is interesting that Clarke (2005) writes about weaving the elements of formative assessment together to become very knowledgeable about the component parts of a formative assessment, but still be unclear about how to weave these together through a typical lesson (very similar to my justification for creating the multi-layered jigsaw puzzle to weave the elements of a fairer assessment to become more knowledgeable about its components parts [see Chapter 2]). Trying to fit the elements into a traditional model of teacher input followed by children's recording just won't work. Clark's book attempts to show how the pieces interlink and overlap and often take the place of traditional input and recording. To bring this idea to life, she sought the help of excellent practitioners, like I sought the help of excellent practitioners at Oak Tree and the research group at Kingston University. Clarke asked them to write up a typical lesson or series of lessons in which formative assessment is central. Similarly, I created a series of professional stories of my practice in which the notion of a fairer assessment was central. The practitioner's pieces punctuate Clarke's book, and she referred to them within the main body of the text. She believes these accounts will help people to see the main question is not:

How can I fit it all in?

But rather:

How can I reformat the lesson to capitalise on maximum learning? (Clarke, 2005:3).

Again I see parallels with my work as the main question is not:

How can I fit different types of assessment to develop a fair assessment?

But rather:

How can I reformat the assessment system to capitalise on maximum fairness to all children?

Clarke concludes that all the elements of formative assessment (sharing learning goals, effective questioning, self and peer evaluation and effective feedback), are as usual, detailed and include direct references to the findings of the learning teams. Also she included for the first time, accounts by head teachers of how they organised the development of formative assessment in their schools, plus two accounts by LEA advisors who very successfully enabled formative assessment to take off in the Dorset and Gateshead areas. She finishes by saying:

Great things can be achieved by individual teachers; but we need risk-taking, enthusiastic leaders to really push formative assessment through so that it has a more global impact (Clarke, 2005:3).

Much of Clarke's observations of the research process echo those of Black (2003) and certainly as my own research project evolved I became increasingly knowledgeable about the component parts of a fairer assessment, but I was still unclear about how to weave these together to articulate my findings to others. I began the straightforward adult approach to completing a jigsaw puzzle (see Chapter 2). But trying to fit the elements together into a traditional model of jigsaw puzzle didn't work. I realised how the pieces interlinked and overlapped and discovered hidden layers of meanings too. Similarly I attempted to bring the idea of a *fairer* assessment to life, by writing professional stories of my infant school practice, then I sought out excellent

experienced practitioners (Kingston University Action Research Group (KHARG), co-researchers from Oak Tree and critical friends to provide feedback on my past practice which in turn will inform future practice - creating effective assessment that will help rather than disadvantage and potentially damage young children at the beginning of their formal education (see Chapter 3, 4, 5 & 6).

Another journey beginning...

Educational values and the creation of original practical knowledge

I begin this next journey with some trepidation. I am very aware that many further professional stories can grow from this continuing investigation. I am uneasy and tentative, rather than conclusive, about expressing/articulating my understanding of the concept of a fairer assessment of children's learning, development and attainment. Also I am very self-conscious, as I am at the point of submitting my work for public scrutiny and accreditation for a higher academic degree requiring educational theorising.

I still question the weight or authenticity of teacher transformative knowledge as opposed to the dominant propositional forms of theory. This is despite being involved with critical educational action research for twenty years, deciding that it was my best professional learning pathway and the current realisation that such work is a valuable contribution to and influential in policy debates rather than radical. Whitehead is a prominent theorist in this field and suggests that:

Personal practical theories should carry as much weight as conventional social science approaches....Practitioners should be encouraged to offer accounts of their work, in terms of descriptions and explanation of their practice, and these accounts should be seen as living educational theories of practitioners as they endeavour to live more fully in the direction of their educational values (Whitehead, 2000:74).

McNiff supports this view and realises the positive effect on teachers' teaching and children's learning:

The practical nature of teaching, how teachers could come together to share their work and their visions for the future, how partnerships could be developed between schools and higher education and what might be the different contributions that all parties might take to support children's learning in classrooms (McNiff, 2003:3).

From writing the thesis I now recognise my own biases from the enquiries of others who work with different perspective from my own and I am open to the possibilities that others may interpret the data in my research differently (Kincheloe, 2003).

Educational values

This research journey is as much about the life of an infant head teacher as it is about the life of an infant school teacher. I care deeply about education and hopefully the thesis brings alive a real infant school and classroom practice. Throughout my journey I examined what I enjoy and find difficult about infant school practice and policy specifically about the issues to do with educational assessment. My discoveries have been interspersed with an analysis of the vision offered by a variety of past and contemporary writers and researchers as to how things might change as the 21st century gathers momentum.

Throughout the thesis I offer my own ideas from unearthing tacit knowledge of assessment practice and my beliefs as to what is important for a *fairer* assessment of children's learning development and attainment. In considering changes and how differently things could be constructed in the future, the centre-piece of the thesis has been the exploration of my values - the rights and wrongs of different courses of action, the kinds of choices and how my own actions have been determined by a particular set of beliefs (see Chapter 3). In revealing the very human self behind the

role of infant head teacher and teacher I offer very personal insights into some of the issues that lie at the very heart of any debate about educational assessment.

Finally by drawing comparisons with others' practice and the views of educationalists and policy makers around the UK, this thesis offers its own vision for creating a fairer assessment of children's learning development and attainment in the years ahead. I hope it promises an exciting and thought provoking read (Crombie-White, 2000).

Social justice and equity

The core values of social justice and equality underpin my research and affect its outcomes. They include an understanding that all people are of equal worth and deserve to be valued and respected and treated accordingly. The values led me to begin my research and question fairness and equity in the educational assessment practices that I was required to implement at Oak Tree and challenge a system that appeared to me to privilege those born into a situation of relative advantage, while at the same time subject those not so fortunate to less preferential treatment [See Chapter 3].

Also the core values of social justice and equity of practice led me to use Carr & Kemmis and Lomax's definition of action research, then to take methodological risks, to break with convention and find my own creative and innovative pathway through the research (see Chapter 2). I became aware, too, that I needed to visualise my own unique way through the research (multi-layered jigsaw puzzle) and that this was as important as my self-chosen research focus (educational assessment) and my method (critical education action research) (see Chapter 2).

Centrality of children

Children's practitioners place the interests of children at the heart of their work. Children and young people value practitioners who enjoy working with them, who treat them with respect and who are good at communicating with them (GTC, 2006:7). In the data based chapters I showed that I, too, feel a strong responsibility for a range of outcomes for children. I am committed to ensuring all children have the chance to be healthy, stay safe, enjoy and achieve, make a positive contribution and experience economic well being. I recognise children's fundamental right to be safe, in order to reach other goals (DfES, 2004).

The core value of keeping children central to my work underpins the approach to my research and gave me the stimuli to spark off ideas for creative writing. I presented the research data in the form of professional stories (see Chapter 5). I adapted a children's story (see Chapter 6) and I included examples of young children's work (see Chapter 3) to examine tacit knowledge of infant school practice – assessment of children's learning, development and attainment. The presentation of the data showed that my work with children starts from their experiences and interests. I strive to embed creativity into school practice, review practice and make changes where required, create a curriculum that is broad and balanced and relevant to the children that I teach as it maximises their learning and so their achievement (Hofkins, 2006); www.creativelearningjourney.org.uk; QCA, 2004; National Advisory Committee on Creative and Cultural Education, 1999).

Whole-child approach to assessment

Practitioners, including teachers, concern themselves with the whole child, whatever their specialism. Although their own involvement with specific children may be short-

term, children's practitioners work to develop the potential and capacities of children for a longer term (GTC, 2006).

Despite pressures to formalise classroom assessment practices and the need to produce evidence, I use whole-child approaches for contextualising children's progress and informing the next stage of teaching and learning (Torrance & Prior, 1998; James, 1998; Pollard et al, 1994). This illustrates the confidence that most early years teachers like myself continue to hold in their all-round knowledge of children as they pass through their school. The following teacher's view emphasises this point:

Because I think, you see, if you've already got a good team you don't need all this formalising and paper work, because we've always talked to each other and every member of staff knows every child in the school, not just by name but we know their talents and we recognise them (Key Stage 1 teacher, Broadfoot, 1996:72).

Whole-child approaches to assessment not only involve direct knowledge of a child's attainments and efforts across a range of settings, but can also embody, explicitly or implicitly a number of social, emotional and physical characteristics of children. In this, a vast assortment of behavioural, attitudinal, socio-economical, cultural and family characteristics often constitutes a social diagnosis (Filer, 2000) in accounting for children's progress, fulfilment of potential or application to tasks. Torrance & Pryor (1998) describe just such a diagnosis in relation to the emotional state of a child:

I've got a child at the moment who's got a lot of problems at home and so I will plan an activity for that child and if that child can't see themselves at the end of the activity I record what they have achieved but I suppose I'm giving them the benefit of the doubt and thinking they could have achieved more if they hadn't been going through all these emotional turmoils at home. (Year 1 teacher, Torrance & Pryor, 2002:36).

As Torrance & Prior suggest, taking account of previous effort and achievement, reflecting and making allowances, seems a legitimate, even laudable use of a teacher's previous knowledge of a child. However Filer & Pollard's (2000) findings

through the *Identity and Learning Programme* led them to question what it means for an early years teacher to know the child they are assessing. What assumptions are embedded in the notions of a whole-child approach to learning and assessment, with its suggestion of a child as a knowable entity, accessible for teacher interpretation? Certainly this question arose in Chapter 3 when research colleagues and I examined examples of assessed children's work and we discussed the different ways in which teachers knew the same children. Nevertheless, I maintain that it is essential for the teacher to value and respect children's individual identities and their distinct approaches to learning. Also my belief in whole-child assessment led me to adapt and modify the original title of the research from - *Looking for a fair assessment of children's attainment* to - *Looking for a fairer assessment of children's learning, development and attainment*.

Furthermore, the Early Years Curriculum Guidance (QCA: 2000) outlines the curriculum for nursery and reception classes and details Stepping Stones and Early Learning Goals in the six areas of learning recommended for young children, which are – Personal, Social and Emotional Development, Communication, Language and Literacy, Mathematical Development, Knowledge and Understanding of the World and Physical Development. In the Principles of Early Years Education section, the Guidance outlines the national expectations for good in relation to assessment procedures for young children:

- Assessment should be based on skilful and well-planned observations of children, observing play or logging their responses to a variety of activities. These may be sometimes recorded in writing or photographs, and sometimes an insight can be gained through talking with a child or assessing samples such as drawing or writing.

- Parents are vital partners in the assessment and planning process.
- Assessment gives an insight into children's interests, achievements and possible difficulties in their learning from which next steps in learning and teaching can be planned
- Where staff are clear about what children know, the skills they have, they can plan how best to take learning and teaching forward. (QCA, 2000: 24).

Similarly the Ofsted Framework for Nursery Education (Ofsted, 2000) asks inspectors to:

Determine whether staff make regular assessment...identify achievements and any learning difficulties...Check if assessments are based on observations of children's behaviour and activity, listening to children in different contexts and evaluation of their work. Determine if the assessments are systematic, informative, objective and clearly linked to the early learning goals (Ofsted, 2000:75).

In September 2002 QCA introduced the Foundation Stage Profile as the statutory assessment for children at the end of reception year. This replaced Baseline Assessment. The London Borough of Merton Assessment and Record Keeping folder for the Foundation Stage (2003) was developed to incorporate the Foundation Stage Profile into a holistic assessment approach across the Foundation Stage from the beginning of the child's experience in nursery to the end of reception. This movement appears to support the professional judgement of early years teachers like myself to adopt whole-child assessment.

Collaborative learning and assessment

I see learning in the classroom as the teachers and children learning about learning together (Watkins et al, 2000). Furthermore, I see learning as a collaborative interactive process for both children and adults as a means to empowerment, trust and respect for other's judgments (Torrance & Pryor, 2002). I believe a dialogue of equals fosters both personal and professional development in either a school or

research setting (Introduction). Throughout the research and the writing of thesis I supported a collaborative approach to teaching and learning and assessment in the early years classroom (see Chapter 3 & 4). Also throughout my own research journey across the educational assessment landscape I showed that it was very much a collaborative interactive learning and assessment process both with staff at Oak Tree, local head teachers, co-researchers and the research group at Kingston University (see Chapter 5 & 6).

Like Kreisberg (1992) as a teacher-researcher I seek to construct and integrate assessment and learning that can be seen as empowering of others. On reflection, my contribution to practitioner knowledge could be seen as empowering of other practitioners if it could be said that I articulated the thoughts of others in the research group and in return they articulated my own thoughts – rendering explicit what others were struggling towards (metacognitive reflection). Therefore, this collaborative methodology could be crystalised for exploring the processes and outcomes of other innovative practitioner's work (Dadds & Hart, 2001) [see Chapter 2]. As Kreisberg notes while quoting the words of one of the teachers in his study:

... The power of more powerful individuals frequently gives other people in the group a feeling of being empowered as well, because somebody is speaking articulately things they were thinking. This is synergistic power. Its exercise expands the effectiveness of the individuals in the group and of the group as a whole (Kreisberg, 1992: 138).

In earlier chapters I showed with respect to the relationship of classroom assessment to the promotion of learning, rich examples of the possibilities of peer collaboration, facilitated by the teacher setting up a structured small-group formative assessment task and adopting an observer role. Therefore, I showed the advantages of metacognitive reflection in young children (Clarke, 2005; Drummond, 2003). I showed collaborative classroom environments in which children were encouraged to develop

the capacity to monitor the quality of their own work and to develop a set of tactics, which could be drawn upon to modify their work. There appears to be clear paralleled evidence that collaborative peer interaction (adults/children) is capable of enhancing the intellectual performance because it forces individuals to recognize and coordinate conflicting perspectives on a problem (early mathematics concept or educational assessment) and that learning consists of the internalization of social interactive processes (Forman & Cazden, 1985). In the contexts of the arguments in this thesis the role that teachers take in considering the relationships, which exist between teaching, learning and assessment is critical. Although the concepts and practical implications are very much related to classroom contexts, their foundations must also relate to professional practice.

By following a collaborative learning process I have been able to reconceptualise my professional practice, based on the priority for developing both my own and young children's learning. In so doing, I realize that there is the potential to recognize the ways in which assessment is not merely an adjunct to teaching and learning but offers a process through which children's involvement in assessment can feature as part of learning – that is, assessment as learning (Dann, 2002).

Relevant curriculum

This principle requires practitioners to understand how young children develop and learn during the early years and recognise that they develop rapidly – physically, intellectually, emotionally and socially (QCA, 2000; Isaacs, 1930). Like Blenkin, Hurst, Whitehead and Yue (1995) I consider knowledge of child development to be the single most influential factor in the professional development of practitioners who work with the under-8s. Furthermore, an early years curriculum should be based on

certain bodies of knowledge that is planned for that is relevant and complimentary to the experiences of the community in which the setting is based (Moriarty & Blatchford, 1998). It should be seen as the widening of every child's horizons of appreciation and understanding. Furthermore this principle implies an active involvement of learning by the participants. This view of children unequivocally excludes the possibility that because of their age and biological maturity they are in any sense weak, needy ignorant or lacking in ability. This construction of childhood in turn, shapes my approach to pedagogy, which is based on the child as the one who, in relationships with others, constructs knowledge and understanding. Children are spontaneous and autonomous meaning makers in their own right. Like the New Zealand approach to learning the early years curriculum should be founded on four principles:

- Empowerment

The early childhood curriculum empowers child to learn and grow

- Holistic development

The early childhood curriculum reflects the holistic way children learn and grow

- Family and community

The wider world of family and community is an integral part of early childhood curriculum

- Relationships

Children learn through responsive and reciprocal relationships with people, places and things (Ministry of Education, 1996)

I examined the curriculum at Oak Tree in Chapters 3 & 4 and showed that like the Reggio educators I honour learning over teaching and see the task of teaching as being to provide the conditions for learning, that is a planning a relevant curriculum (Drummond, 2003).

Creation of original knowledge

Below I use the five subheadings to explain each area of original knowledge that I created in my research.

a). An unconventional perspective from a practitioner researcher using genuine infant head teacher/teacher experiences

I stress that some typologies or approaches are only useful to some readers and only for some of the time and no single system is able to capture our unique individuality (Clandinin & Connelly 2000). This thesis reveals a journey of one infant head teacher/teacher who, for the past six years, has explored the way narrative inquiry deepens her understanding of educational experience and it is always multi-layered and many stranded.

That is why I chose to break with convention and find my own creative and unique path through my research (Dadds & Hart, 2001) and perhaps other readers might find my pathway quirky or baffling (Herrington, 2001; Bassey, 1999). This thesis could make an original contribution to our understanding of motivation and quality in practitioner research. It suggests that we may need to resist any form of methodological dogma if practitioner research is to be effective (see Chapter 2).

Just as helping children to develop as confident, enthusiastic and effective learners is a central purpose of Primary Education (DfES, 2004) we may need to empower individuals like me to make methodological choices that harmonise with their own purposes and predispositions - to free them to do practitioner research their way. The findings in this thesis provide opportunities for professional discussions about teacher's work which will support both individual and school development needs, which are essential for school improvement and effective assessment of children's learning.

Although I touched on it earlier in the conclusion it seems useful to analyse more thoroughly the question of the reasons of successful learning throughout the project, partly as a way of seeing the work described here from different perspectives, but mainly because such an analysis should help those who might draw lessons from their own action from my work. Just as I have anticipated and reflected on my work as an infant head teacher/teacher, other teachers could anticipate or reflect on their own experiences as practitioners (McNiff & Whitehead, 2000).

b). Additional case study information about the effects of educational assessment on teaching and learning in the infant school context

This thesis explores information about educational assessment in the infant school context through critical reflective examination in order to understand the events and processes of the assessment practices at one infant school (Oak Tree). As a teacher-researcher I need to pursue an inquiry that I care about and am perplexed about. The enquiry has to be concrete and practical in a real life context of an infant school with important practical results (a fairer assessment of young children's learning, development and attainment). In order to do this I needed to look at the contemporary issue of educational assessment, although I had to consider both historical and political influences. My research appears to coincide with the features of case study that are summarised by Yin (1989) who states that case study is an empirical enquiry that:

- Investigates a contemporary phenomenon within a real-life context (see chapter 1); when
- The boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident (see Chapter 2); and in which
- Multiple sources of evidence are used [see Chapter 3, 4, 5 & 6] (Yin, 1989:23).

Case study suggests an academic approach to practical problems and is crucial for practising a community for learning. Case study enables the practical problem (assessment of children's learning) to be investigated in ways that might allow teachers to reconceptualise the problem, understand more fully its wider significance and act more intelligently in resolving it (Golby & Parrott, 1999:71). I see case study as the pursuit of professional excellence through academic means and therefore invaluable for other teachers to consider when wishing to improve their practice.

c). An original action research methodology that facilitates a critical collaborative reflective look at professional practice through using self-study and memory work

Although the thesis examines the notion of a fairer assessment of children's learning, development and attainment in the early years, from studying the practices at Oak Tree, it also presents a distinctive multiple approach to self-assessment (a critical collaborative reflective look at professional practice) for teachers using a wide range of techniques related to narrative and data analysis. It offers a transformative insight into the life and learning in one infant school (Oak Tree) that can be approached in a number of ways and through different layers. Most of us tend to assume that everyone responds to the world in much the same way as we do, and we are often taken aback when they do not (my assumptions were highlighted in Chapter 6). The in-depth analysis of widely contrasting physical, emotional and intellectual types of infant school practice (various assessment procedures) found in this thesis reveal how dramatically dissimilar people prove to be in education. By reading and engaging with this thesis this colourful spectrum of types hopefully enables you to understand yourself more clearly, and to anticipate how you - or someone with different traits or values/beliefs - might act, and why (Godwin, 2001).

d). A thoughtful critique of educational policy that is potentially disadvantaging and harmful to young children

A coherent theory of a fairer assessment has not yet been formulated; indeed I am hopeful that the findings of my research project will provide new ideas about such a formulation. In the vast, varied and complex field of educational research, the task of practical implementation of ideas cannot simply be as the application of previous knowledge: putting ideas into practice usually leads to those ideas being transformed - new knowledge being created (Black et al, 2003) and the growth of educational knowledge, creating my own educational theories (McNiff & Whitehead, 2000; Whitehead, 1993).

I argue, that any theory of a fairer assessment that draws on the findings of such knowledge will be grounded in the realities of (infant) classroom practice and will, therefore be more useful to teachers than one that is not so grounded. Such arguments can be found in writings about the nature of new knowledge that I examined earlier in the thesis (see chapter 2) and created by technology - it is not merely *the appliance of science* (Layton 1991) – and for educational research, in a paper by Hargreaves (1999) entitled *The Knowledge Creating School*. Also McNiff & Whitehead (2000) confirm Schon's (1995) approach to educational knowledge and they say that:

It is time to develop a new scholarship which demonstrates a new epistemology, a new way of knowing, that meets the everyday needs of people working in real-life situations (McNiff & Whitehead, 2000:1).

So what I attempted in this thesis is an in-depth analysis of the lessons I learnt about the concept of a fairer assessment as it unfolded throughout the research. By doing this I hope that I have created some new knowledge of my own that could be offered and transferred to other practitioners, giving them the opportunity to learn from me and make a difference - so impacting on wider practice and influence policy. However

I realize that this new knowledge can only be acceptable to others if they can take ownership of it and that it is consistent with their own beliefs and values as teachers.

e). A presentation of educational assessment both as an integral part of the infant school curriculum and as a result of the politics of education

The notion of a fairer assessment

As the professional body for teaching, the General Teaching Council for England (GTC) is concerned with all the issues related to teachers and their role in the enterprise of teaching and learning. It is concerned with improving children's education by supporting the professionalism of teaching (GTC, 2006). The GTC recognises that pupil assessment is an integral component of the teaching process and is critical to effective learning.

As commented earlier the GTC is committed to the principle of teacher professional judgement being used to better effect in the assessment system than is the case in the current arrangements. At the GTC Conference *New Relationships: Teaching and Learning and Accountability* (2004) a comprehensive paper highlighted the continuing tension between the DfES view of teachers using performance data as the basis of dialogue and target-setting with children, and the more bottom-up approach developed in the research of responding to individual needs with qualitative feedback. This again seems to highlight the issue of how to reconcile the purpose of assessment for learning (AfL) with assessment related to wider public accountability.

Of the eight contributors to the conference Gipps & Stobart 's paper focuses on fairness in assessment and clearly characterises the strength of assessment for learning as the basis of future assessment arrangements in their framework of good assessment practice, combining a focus on learning with transparency in approach and the need to provide a sense of equity for all learners. Although Gipps & Stobart

use a different approach from my research, their work is very useful to articulate what I consider to be some aspects of a fairer assessment.

Gipps and Stobart's paper addresses some of the key issues in fair assessment: equal opportunities, bias and discrimination and validity. Although they focused particularly on tests they feel, as I do, that they could apply their argument to teacher assessment (see Chapter 3). They suggest that equal opportunities in assessment relate to two issues; what we commonly call bias in the test itself, and fairness in the comparison: have the groups of pupils being tested had the same opportunities to learn? Fairness and equity are used as interchangeable terms, with equal opportunities as one component of what constitutes equity. As I established earlier in the thesis Gipps & Stobart's (2004) key question is: Can we create an assessment system that is fair to all learners? The answer is: no - but we can make it fairer. We do this by being clear about what we are assessing, by identifying and dealing with possible forms of bias and unfairness (see Chapter 3).

As I discovered, whilst examining the literature search in Chapter 1, Gipps and Stobart confirm that most research on equity issues in assessment has focused on tests and examinations; there has been little work done on equity issues in teacher assessment in the early years. For example we know that teacher expectation can affect the curriculum and learning experiences offered to children. There is clear evidence that teachers offer a different curriculum for whom they low and high expectations (Harlen, 2004; Tizard et al, 1988; Troman, 1988) [see Chapter 4 in this thesis]. While high teacher expectation is good and can enhance children's performance, the opposite also holds true. So one question is - Can teacher expectation have an effect on teacher assessment?

Equity, bias and testing

External testing has historically been seen as an instrument of equity.

Examinations were the obvious method of attacking patronage, the hitherto dominant mode of recruitment to all forms of government (Sutherland, 1996:16).

The notion of the standardised test as a way of offering impartial assessment is a powerful one, though if equality of opportunity does not precede the test, then the fairness of this approach is called into question. So these fair 19th century selection examinations invariably excluded women from taking them and similarly fair 21st century selection examinations appear to exclude disadvantaged children from succeeding in them (see Chapter 5 & 6).

I have shown earlier in the thesis that bias is a term widely used in relation to assessment and is generally taken to mean that assessment is unfair to one particular group or another (James, 1998). This rather simple definition, however, belies the complexity of the underlying situation. Differential performance on a test, i.e. where different groups get different score levels, may not be the result of bias of the test; it may be due to real differences in performance among groups which may in turn be due to differing access to learning, or it may be due to real differences in the group's attainment in the topic under consideration. It is also possible to have unequal group outcomes that may be seen as fair. An example would be where the group differences in application to learning and preparation, where each had similar resources and preparation. The philosopher John Wilson argued:

Education is not (only) something that can be simply be given to people and distributed equally or unequally, like cake. To be educated is not just to have received something but also to have done something... there is always what we may call the question of uptake: whether the individual makes use of whatever opportunities or resources he may be given (Wilson, 1991:2).

I feel these complex issues of difference in children's performance were highlighted in Chapter 3 when I explained how some teachers assess children's work and Chapter 4 when I analysed children's learning from National Curriculum and the Foundation Stage Curriculum. The question of whether a test or assessment is biased or whether the group of children in question has a different level of attainment is clearly extremely difficult to answer. Wood (1987) describes these different factors as the opportunity to acquire talent (access issues) and the opportunity to show talent to good effect (fairness in assessment).

In the USA tests have been seen to be denying opportunities for advancement, particularly for black students. In the post-1965 Civil Rights legislation era, critics of *advancement through testing* were pointing out that opportunities to acquire talent or to be able to show it to sufficient effect in tests and examinations, were not equally distributed (Orfield and Kornhaber, 2001; Wood, 1987) In other words these tests were biased in favour of the dominant social group.

Wood (1991) recognises that the threat of bias is an important danger in formative or summative assessment by teachers. Research in this area (Black, 1998; Gipps & Murphy, 1994) shows conflicting results on whether teachers confuse or conflate industry and effort with achievement. Gipps & Murphy (1994) show that there is evidence of teachers behaving differently towards boys and girls, towards pupils from different social classes, and towards children with differing season of birth (see Chapter 4 & 5). It would appear possible that where teachers know their pupils well, they might be able to detect and act upon individual or group differences, by adapting the tasks, by making allowances in interpreting results or by seeking moderation from colleagues. Nevertheless, by focusing too much on bias in tests or assessment it

might distract attention from wider equity issues such as actual equality of access to learning, biased curriculum, and inhibiting classroom practices (see Chapter 5).

Fairness

Most tests and examinations including National Curriculum Key Stage SATs, are amenable to coaching. My thesis shows that schools are strongly encouraged to prepare their children for SATs. Children who have very different school experiences are not equally prepared to compete in the same test situation. Furthermore, children do not come to school with identical experiences and they do not have identical experiences at school. Gipps & Stobart (2004) therefore suggest that we cannot expect assessment to have the same meaning for all children. However the stakes and purpose of the assessment are relevant here as Linn et al (1991) argue:

On a non-threatening assessment ... it is reasonable to include calculator-active problems even though student access to calculators may be quite inequitable. On the other hand, equitable access would be an important consideration in a calculator-active assessment used to hold students or teachers accountable (Linn et al, 1991: 17)

Throughout the thesis I have shown that what is important is to have a fair approach where concerns, contexts and approaches of one group do not dominate. This, however, is by no means a simple task, e.g. national test developers may be told that they should avoid any context, which may be more familiar to males than females or to the dominant culture. There are problems inherent in trying to remove context effects by excluding passages that advantage males or females, because it reduces the amount of assessment material available. De-contextualised assessment is anyway not possible, and complex higher order skills require drawing on complex domain knowledge.

For design of tests in a multicultural society Shohamy (2000) has proposed three models of how the contributions of different groups are treated:

- *The assimilative model.* In this there is no appreciation of an immigrant's (sic) previous knowledge; the task is to master the new knowledge associated with the dominant group. There may be recognition that this takes time to acquire and allowances may be made to ease the process (pain killers);
- *The recognition model.* In this there is recognition and appreciation of the different knowledge and viewing of it as valuable – situation in which groups are credited for this knowledge and encouraged to maintain it;
- *The interactive model.* In this knowledge of the *different* groups affects and influences the dominant group and thus existing knowledge.

While we might aspire to the interactive model, Shohamy (representing the highly diverse Israeli culture) is not so optimistic:

Even in societies multiculturalism as part of society there is rarely recognition of the specific and unique knowledge of different groups in schools ... educational leaders continue to strive for homogenous knowledge to be owned by all. This is even more apparent in educational assessment. In a number of situations there is a gap between curricula and assessment as curricula may, at times, contain statements and intentions for the recognition of diverse knowledge, yet the tests are based on homogenous knowledge (Shohamy, 2000:3).

Gipps and Stobart consider that one litmus test of where an assessment system is in relation to these models is in the attitude to language; how much linguistic diversity does the assessment system reflect?

For example:

- Assess in only the main language of the culture (e.g. England)
- Offer the same tests/qualification in two or more languages (e.g. Wales).

Both options bring options and costs. In the monolingual approaches an issue is the accessibility of tests for those who are not using their first language, particularly if this

is combined with cultural assumptions in their content. Politt et al (2000) provide a case study example of how the monolingual assumptions of mathematics test writers interfered with understanding of an Urdu-speaking student taking a mathematics test in English. In Urdu the number of hours *in a day* (din) is 12 (with day-night, *dinraath*, being 24 hours) and there are two words for *height* (from the ground; of the object) – with both ambiguities capable of generating *wrong* answers to everyday *how long will it take...? And how high is...?*

I found little reference to research into linguistic issues in Baseline Assessment or NC KS1 tests except for Moriarty & Blandford (1998) who suggest that there may be discrepancies in the way results for individual children are interpreted. Different teachers may also interpret children's understanding differently. There may also be a danger that some children will be labelled as a result of tests being administered in this way. In all kinds of assessment, there must be vigilance to ensure that assumptions about children who have different cultural backgrounds, or who have English as a second language. They state:

Our knowledge is not value-free, therefore assessments need to be monitored. The best way to achieve this is to talk to other staff and consciously to evaluate the statements that we make regarding each child's progress (Moriarty & Blandford, 1998:38).

We are now much more aware that the form of assessment can differentially affect results for different groups. In England there has been far more analysis of this in relation to gender than ethnicity. In Chapter 5 I considered the results of both gender and season of birth and it is now normal practice in schools to consider all contributing factors as crucial evidence of pupil performance from entry into school to end of Key Stages 1 & 2.

So to return to Gipps & Stonard's definition of equity, how do we ensure that assessment practice and interpretation of results (by teachers, schools, parents and

all interested parties) is as fair as possible for all groups? As Willingham and Cole (1997) and Gipps and Murphy (1994) argue, consideration of the way in which a construct is tested is crucial. I feel this is essential for any age of children but particularly necessary for children who are being tested at the beginning of formal education when recognition of children's successful achievement is vital (see Chapter 3).

All four researchers emphasise the need to encourage clear articulation of the test developers' constructs on which the assessment is based, so that the construct validity may be examined by test-takers and test-users. The requirement is to select assessment content that accurately reflects the construct, even if it produces gender/ethnic group differences, and to avoid content that is not relevant to the construct and could affect such differences. The ethics of assessment demand that the constructs and assessment criteria are made available to children and teachers and, in any case, this is consonant with enhancing construct-validity. We also need to define the context of an assessment task as well as the underlying constructs to make sure they reflect that is taught. The involvement with a minority background is crucial. It raises the issue as to how much the ethics of assessment can be applied to Baseline Assessment and National Curriculum assessment?

An important approach to offering fairness is to use, within any assessment programme, a range of assessment tasks involving a variety of contexts; a range of modes within the assessment; and a range of format and style. This broadening of approach, though it may not be always possible, is most likely to offer young children alternative opportunities to demonstrate achievement (learning, development or progress as well as attainment) if they are disadvantaged by any one particular assessment in the system (Black, 2003); Linn, 1992)

This broadening of approach is included in the Criteria for Evaluation of Student Assessment Systems by the USA National Forum on Assessment (NFA), a coalition of education and civil rights organisation:

- To ensure fairness, students should have multiple opportunities to meet standards and should be able to meet them in different ways;
- Assessment information should be accompanied by information about access to the curriculum and about opportunities to meet the Standards;
- Assessment results should be one part of a system of multiple indicators of the quality of education (NFA, 1992:32).

If we wish children to do well in tests we need to think about assessment that elicits an individual's best performance (after Nuttall, 1987). This involves tasks that are concrete and within the experience of the child (an equal access issue) presented clearly (the child must understand what is required of her if she is to perform well) relevant to the current concerns of the child (to engender motivation and engagement) and in conditions that are not threatening (to reduce stress and enhance performance) (Gipps, 1994). This is where teacher assessment *can* be more equitable since it is under the teacher's control (Gipps, 1994).

As good assessment practice we should:

- *Using assessment that supports learning and reflection, including formative assessment with feedback;*
- *Designing assessment that is linked to clear criteria (rather than relying upon competition with others;*
- *Including a range of assessment strategies so that all learners have a chance to perform well (Gipps & Stobart, 2004:32).*

Using a range of assessment processes, together with clarity and openness about what is being assessed and how, is not only more equitable, but also supports learning. My research shows that this is true for teacher assessment as it is for tests.

Earlier in the thesis (see Chapter 1) I discussed the work of a Canadian working group, convened by the Joint Advisory Committee of the University of Alberta's Centre for research on Applied Measurement and Evaluation that produced a document called *Principles for Fair Student Assessment Practices for Education in Canada* (1993). The principles and their related guidelines address both classroom assessment and large-scale standardised assessment, developed outside the classroom (by commercial test publishers, ministries of education and school boards), and represents a broad consensus of the educational community. Intended for both developers and users of assessment, the former being those:

Who construct assessment methods and people who set policies for particular assessment programs; the latter are those who select and administer assessment methods, commission assessment development services, or make decisions on the basis of assessment results and findings (p3).

The principles include the following:

- Assessment methods should reflect the purpose and context of the assessment
- Students should be given sufficient opportunity to demonstrate the knowledge, skills, attitudes, or behaviours being assessed.
- Procedures for judging or scoring student performance should be appropriate for the assessment method used, and should be consistently applied and monitored.
- Procedures for summarising and interpreting assessment results should yield accurate and informative representation of a student performance in relation to goals and objectives of instruction for the reporting period.
- Assessment reports should be clear, accurate, and of practical value to the intended audience (Froese-Germain, 1999:56).

All three sets of principles for fair and good assessment practice stated by the NFA, the University of Alberta and Gipps & Stonard appear to be applicable to any form or stage of assessment of children's learning, development and attainment from entry into school to the end of formal education. Similarly, I feel these principles are at the heart of both my research and the General Teaching Council's current request for a fundamental review of the whole purpose of assessment in UK schools.

A pause for thought on the learning journey...

As a head teacher/teacher I am both a producer and consumer of knowledge. Through the professional development opportunities at Kingston University I was encouraged to engage in the debate both about educational research and undertake meaningful research myself (Kincheloe, 2003). I was encouraged to carry out research to improve the effectiveness of the leadership and management of an infant school and practice (assessment) in an infant classroom (see Chapter 2).

By writing the thesis I now realise that I have reflected on and challenged the reductionist and technicist methods that promote a top-down system of education that I experienced since the introduction of the National Curriculum (1988), National Assessment Programme (1991) and Ofsted (1993). I argue that only by engaging in complex, critical research will teachers, like myself, rediscover their professional status, empower their practice in the classroom and improve the education for their children.

Since beginning my research the choices for educational assessment have been enriched by the work of the Assessment Reform Group, whose important and influential publications have made a substantial contribution to our current understanding of understanding the power and purposes of assessment. The first of

these *Inside the Black Box* (Black & William, 1998), presented overwhelming evidence, firstly that improving the practice of formative assessment raises standards, secondly that there is room for improvement, and thirdly that we already know a great deal about the ways in which assessment can be made more effective. Black & William went on to argue that if teachers are to implement these ideas in their practice they will need considerable support in the form of *living examples of implementation* (Drummond, 2003:181). As I wrote earlier in the chapter they sketched out an ambitious programme for development, which would enable teachers to reconstruct their current approaches to assessment in the interests of learning: assessment *for* learning rather than assessment *of* learning has been the driving principle of this development work. In the later publication (Black et al, 2002) the authors describe the innovative practices in assessment that have developed in selected secondary and primary schools and the evidence that this work has raised standards. This classroom work is described under four headings: questioning, feedback through marking, peer and self-assessment and the formative use of summative tests. In all four areas Black and colleagues claim, teachers become more effective as they redefined their role in learning, relinquishing the delivery-recipient relationship of expert teacher/passive learner (a term that I always struggled with), and repositioning themselves with their children as partners in pursuit of a shared goal (my preferred role). Gradually assessment *for* learning has become a dominant responsibility, a key principle that extends to the whole of their teaching. Further development work continued, under the auspices of the ESRC Teaching and Learning Project, which extended the earlier work on formative assessment into a model of learning how to learn for both teachers and children. This in time may offer teachers a powerful framework for examining and understanding both their practice and their children's learning.

One striking aspect of the work of my research is that it is taking place on an educational assessment landscape where the trends still seem to be set in a very different direction. My own experience and observations, over the last ten years of children in the early years of school, suggest that the process described by Willes (1983), by which active, enquiring and explorative children quickly become submissive and obedient pupils, is still a lived reality for most children.

As funding arrangements for four-year olds changed, many more children now enter primary school at the beginning of the year in which they turn five. But these children of below statutory age are, on the whole conceptualised as pupils, and subject to stringent classroom control. This is despite the introduction of the Foundation Stage Curriculum Guidance (2000) and the standardised Foundation Stage Profile (2002) and the work of Clarke (2001, 2003 & 2005). I remain concerned that the principle of young children as:

Active learners who take responsibility for and manage their own learning

(Black et al, 2002:21)

has limited currency in the wider world, outside the *Assessment for Learning* project schools and Clarke's project schools. Like Drummond (2003) I feel that there is still too little opportunity for an active learner, and no framework for understanding young children's spontaneous acts of meaning making and enquiry (see Chapter 3 & 4). There is still the danger of young children being impoverished as learners, discouraged from exploring the world, from loving and quarrelling and peace-making, from engaging with enthusiasm, from telling astonishing stories, or imagining new and impossible worlds. The model of assessment that accompanies this mindset towards learners is I have come to realise, equally inappropriate (see Chapter 6).

Where to next? Another learning journey...

Throughout the thesis I have attempted to establish some enduring principles in fairly assessing young children's learning, development and attainment that are not subject to contingencies of short-lived national and local pressures and policies. I have explicably shown my extreme anxiety about inappropriate mechanical and numerical approaches to assessment, and shown my cautious continuing optimism that teachers like me can do better, in ways of our own invention. This thesis accounts for many fresh efforts by teachers to alter the assessment landscape from unsituated tests that have been dominant in the last two decades to moving towards assessment at its best.

It is important to note, however, that some of the emerging discourse about educational assessment is similar to that which surfaced alongside the progressive education reform period earlier in the last century. Teachers then, as now, were engaged in discussions about documenting children's learning, making real work the focus of attention in assessment, getting closer to children's understandings, their meanings, helping children make learning their own. And yet such directions did not come to dominate the educational landscape (Perrone, 1997). We need to pay attention to that history so that assessment remains not only *assessment for learning*, but also *assessment as learning* in order to improve the learning process (Dann, 2002:142).

While writing the thesis, the work of Drummond (2003 & 1993), related to assessment of young children's learning, has been an inspiration to me (see Chapter 3) and since that time I have considered her short, simple, clear, but nevertheless very profound message:

Children's interests are paramount. Assessment is a process that must enrich their lives, learning and development. Assessment must work for children (Drummond 2003:13).

My research journey so far has given me the opportunity for careful reflection on past practice to try to understand the place of assessment in education and it has made great moral and philosophical demands on my thinking. Because the thesis examines my work in school since the implementation of the Education Reform Act (1988) I examined both the objective, mechanical process of measurement that suggests checklists, precision, explicit criteria and incontrovertible facts and figures (see Chapter 1, 4, 5 & 6) and how I worked in the classroom with young children (see Chapter 3 & 4). I particularly looked critically at my acts of assessment of children's learning. I collaboratively explored (with research colleagues) what I saw. I tried to understand it and put my understanding to good use. I embarked on a process that in this thesis I referred to as - looking for a fairer assessment of children's learning, development and attainment.

I am ready to take up my next responsibility or challenge as I am optimistically committed to a future that will enable me to use my improved acts of a fairer assessment of children's learning, development and attainment, to open doors to their future as confident life-long learners. The opportunities for continuing practitioner research on the education assessment landscape appear varied and extremely interesting. My wish is to continue to work with a school community, to gain their involvement with an action research project that explores formative assessment (AfL) of creative learning and includes gaining young children's perception of assessment. I would like to design an early years curriculum of exploration, themes and creativity for the whole primary age range – perhaps this could be my next creative learning journey. Maybe the Primary Review, chaired by Robin Alexander (TES, 2006), over

the next couple of years will provide one such an opportunity for me to continue my learning journey across the educational assessment landscape.

This thesis, then, tells the story of an infant head teacher/teacher researcher's exploratory journey into the heart of a living educational assessment landscape at a time of extensive and forever changing national reforms. The account identifies her personal and professional values and seeks to:

1. Evaluate the tacit knowledge of infant school practice related to the concept of a fairer assessment of young children's learning development and attainment
2. Demonstrate how teachers, schools and Ofsted make judgements about young children's learning, development and attainment
3. Create a research methodology that is adapted from critical educational action research case study and reflective practice research paradigms
4. Use professional stories of past practice (self-study) to represent implicit theories
5. Use collaborative reflection of experience (memory work) as a means to deconstruct practice and extrapolate values to foster personal and professional development
6. Create the environment for an improvement of assessment practices and children's learning, development and attainment (living education theory)
7. Show a unique representation of the overall research process in the form of the visual metaphor of a multi-layered jigsaw puzzle that enables the researcher to uncover successive, significant layers of professional knowledge in the infant school that relate to the concept of a fairer assessment of children's learning development and attainment

8. Provide an original contribution to educational knowledge in the debates about the rationality and justice of educational assessment

The characteristics of this thesis are located in each of the themes noted above:

1. Fairer assessment relies on both tacit and explicit practitioner knowledge
2. Young children's learning, development and attainment are not adequately represented through formally derived test scores but by means of a collaborative assessment community within a school
3. Use of a narrative approach, critical incident, self-disclosure and professional dialogue provide a powerful, situated, holistic, principled and eclectic combination in educational action/case study research
4. Implicit theory can be constructed by drawing from personal and professional practice and plays a vital role in the development of professional judgement and expertise
5. Collaborative critical reflection on experience powerfully enables both the production of educational knowledge and emancipation from the restraints of educational assessment
6. Formal and informal assessment procedures involve a social process, bias, distortion and equity issues and also affect each young child's motivation, self-esteem and sense of self as a learner
7. Professional knowledge is multi-dimensional and relies on a combination of creative action and evolving dialogue by collaborating participants

The research offers an original contribution to educational knowledge in that it clarifies meanings of my ontological value of a fairer assessment of children's learning, development and attainment and forms that value into a living epistemological standard of critical judgement.

This is achieved through:

- Adopting an unconventional perspective from a practitioner researcher using genuine infant head teacher/teacher experiences
- Additional case study information about the effects of educational assessment on teaching and learning in the infant school context
- An original action research methodology that facilitates a critical collaborative reflective look at professional practice through self-study and memory work
- A thoughtful critique of an educational policy and practice that is potentially disadvantaging and harmful to young children
- A presentation of educational assessment, both as an integral part of the infant school curriculum and as a result of the politics of education.

In this thesis I demonstrated how a passion for a fairer assessment of young children's learning, development and attainment and the involvement of a collaborative community of teacher researchers (critical friends) from an education background has sustained my work and caused me to interrogate my own practice and values. My research not only reinforced a belief that educational assessment should support all young children to be enthusiastic and effective life-long learners but also, crucially, generated professional knowledge to share with other practitioners about the implications of a fairer assessment.

I invite the reader to live, experience and learn in a reciprocal relationship with the findings of my thesis and thus understand better the creative, emotional, social, moral and sensual feelings attached to their own assessment practices. In short, to travel their own educational journeys to professional enlightenment.

Appendices

Appendix 1

Ethics Protocol: Explanatory Notes

Appendix 1

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1. Background, purpose, objectives

The debate about raising standards of achievement and attainment by politicians, educationalists and educational researchers provides the background for the research. The aim of the research is to explore meaning(s) attached to a fairer assessment of children's learning, development and attainment in the infant school, with reference to the Foundation Stage and National Curriculum Key Stage 1 and to contribute to the debates about the rationality and justice of educational assessment practices (Carr & Kemmis, 1986)¹.

2. Research Methodology

The principle research method is adapted from a critical action research model in which the researcher's educational values are the yardstick against which action (practice) is evaluated (Winter, 1989; McNiff, Lomax & Whitehead, 2003 & 1996)². Following the ideas of Whitehead I show how to create *living educational theory* as I grapple with the issues associated with the concept of a fairer assessment of children's learning, development and attainment that are raised by my own past experiences as an infant head teacher/teacher. In doing so I use self-study methods to explore my infant practice and approach to headship (Hamilton, Pinnegar, Russell, Loughran & LaBoskey, 1998)³. I adapt a narrative approach (Clandinin & Connelly, 1999 & 1995)⁴ to construct a language that I can use for reflection and examination of the education assessment landscape through which I journey. The critical dimension of the research is facilitated by collaboration with colleagues, who include teachers from the case study school and a group of practitioner researchers (head teachers, teachers and teacher educators) acting as 'critical friends'.

During the research I collect a variety of data about formative and summative assessment and the role of Ofsted, as follows:

Data about formative assessment:

- a. Looking at how teachers assess children's learning by examining their work from reception to year 2 (entry into school to end of key stage 1) and related continuous teacher assessment records that are taken from children's portfolios at the case study infant school.
- b. Examining the infant curriculum and assessment procedures by presenting examples of my own classroom practice to a group of practitioner researchers who act as critical friends. I also analyse completed questionnaires from 50

¹ Carr W. & Kemmis S. (1986) *Becoming Critical: education, knowledge and action research*, Falmer

² Winter, R. (1989) *Learning from Experience: principles and practice in action research*, Falmer.

McNiff, J., Lomax, P. & Whitehead, J. (2003 & 1996) *You and Your Action Research Project*, Routledge & Hyde.

³ Hamilton, M. L., Pinnegar, S., Russell, T., Loughlan, J. & Labroskey, V. (1998) *Reconceptualising Teaching Practice: Self-study in Teacher Education*, Falmer.

⁴ Clandinin, D. & Connelly, M. (1995) *Teachers Professional Knowledge Landscapes*, Teachers College Press.

local infant and primary head teachers to examine the curriculum provision and the impact of season of birth on children's attainment in 1997 as the co-ordinator of a Local Education Authority Early Years project.

Data about summative assessment:

I evaluate formal statistics from Baseline Assessment and end of Key Stage 1 assessment (SATs) and pupil background data for four cohorts of children at the case study infant school to analyse the notion of value-added, which provides a way of evaluating school performance by taking account of intake factors that impact on children's attainment and progress (School self-evaluation study 1995-1997).

Data about Ofsted:

I analyse data from the three stages of an Ofsted inspection at the case study infant school (1996-1997) to explain how Ofsted inspectors assess the educational standards achieved by children and make judgements about their attainment and progress. I use a variety of techniques for its analysis, including writing a fictionalised professional story of my experiences, as a head teacher, throughout the Ofsted process (Winter et al, 1999; Winter, 1991, 1989 & 1988; Carter, 1992; Evans 1998 & 1996)⁵.

Throughout the research I record my experiences as a head teacher/teacher in professional diaries that show a factual account of events and reflective diaries as a personal account of events and experiences. I make audio-tapes and keep detailed written records of meetings with a group of practitioner researchers and critical friends.

3. Participants

The participants include teachers and children at the case study school, local education authority personnel, members of the Kingston Hill Action Research Network, members of the PhD Action Research Group Kingston University, co-researchers and critical friends. I work within the agreed ethical framework with all participants. I deal with the ethical issues of anonymity and confidentiality and to protect the identity the names of the schools, local education authority and research participants. I retain only children's first names on work samples to maintain their

⁵ Winter, R., Buck, A. & Sobiechowska, P. (1999) *Professional Experience & The Investigative Imagination: The art of reflective writing*, London: Routledge.

Winter, R. (1991) *Interviews, interviewees and the exercise of power (fictional-critical writing as a method of educational research)* British Educational Research journal, Vol17:251-262.

Winter, R. (1989) *Action Research: the Basic Process, Six Principles for the Conduct of Action Research*, London: Falmer.

Winter, R. (1988) *Fictional Critical Writing*, in Nias, J. & Groundwater-Smith, (ed) *The Enquiring Teacher*, London: Falmer.

Carter, K. (1992) Creating Cases for the Development of Teachers' Knowledge, in *Teachers and Teaching*, London: Falmer.

Evans, M. (1998) Using Fictional Story in Teacher Research, in *Education Action Research* 6(3):493-505.

Evans, M. (1996) Using story as a method of facilitating staff development in a secondary school, in (ed) Lomax, P. (1996) *Quality Management in Education*, Ch8:123-149, London:RoutledgeHyde.

anonymity. All participants have the right to withdraw from the research should they wish, at any time.

4. Recruitment

There is no recruitment process involved as I establish colleagues as co-researchers and I work within a collaborative critical community of teacher researchers. The teachers from the case study school who work with me consider the research to be a continuation of previous research projects that we had been involved with together and an integral part of our collaborative working practices at the case study school. The purpose of the PhD research group at Kingston University and Kingston Hill Action Research Group was to work as a collaborative critical community.

5. Conflicts of interest

The research does not involve any conflicts of interest.

6. Informed consent

All aspects of research are part of the responsibility of my job, and the senior LEA primary inspector wrote an introductory letter to participating local head teachers in support of my study

Appendix 2

The Stars: Assessing Georgie's Reading Using KS1 SATs Instruction

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The Stars

Assessing Georgie's Reading Using KS1 SATs Instruction

It was the middle of May; a time marked in infant and primary schools up and down the country by National Curriculum Key Stage 1 Standard Assessment Tasks (NCKS1 SATs). I visited a friend (Janet) for the afternoon to walk through the bluebell woods near her home. It coincided with the week when she administered the key stage 1 reading test levels 1 and 2 with her class of 29 children. The Department of Education and Skills (DfES) designed the reading task to be administered with individual children to provide evidence of children's abilities to read accurately, fluently and with understanding, and to understand and respond to the texts they read (QCA, 2002:2). At each level, the test had the same structure that involved each child choosing a book, having an introductory discussion with the assessor, reading aloud, and having a discussion of what has been read. Janet was an experienced class teacher whose particular interest and expertise was literacy in early years, and so she was very sensitive and astute at assessing children's reading ability. As we walked I could sense that she was perplexed. Janet mentioned that her head teacher was very concerned to show an improvement on the schools previous

year's Key Stage 1 reading results. Improving standards in literacy was high profile in the school and was both a continuing local and national issue.

Janet told me how she tried to follow the general principles for administering the English tasks as set out in the Teacher's Handbook:

The tasks should be incorporated into normal classroom procedures and routines as far as possible. The reading task should take place without interruption, and the classroom layout and the grouping of children should allow the child to concentrate and the teacher to retain the child's full attention (QCA, 2002:4).

Janet's head teacher recognised the dilemma of trying to administer the reading test in a busy infant classroom. Janet was given non-contact time to administer the reading test with each child in turn in a quiet corner of the school library.

With reference to Janet's teacher assessment in English, she judged that Georgie (d.o.b.13.05.95) was working within level 2 for speaking and listening, reading and writing. She prepared for the level 2 reading task by finding two comfortable chairs for Georgie and herself to sit on in the library. Then she spread the unfamiliar thirteen books, all within a fairly narrow range of difficulty from the QCA Booklist 2002, on a table ready for Georgie to choose a book to read to her.

As Georgie was just working within level 2 for reading¹, this meant that she was neither a confident nor consistently fluent reader. Also she was a little girl with unpredictable moods and low self-esteem. Janet hoped Georgie would choose one of the six story- books rather than one of the seven non-fiction books. Georgie liked sharing storybooks with an adult. The text in those books was simpler and related to Georgie's own experience; the text used language with recognisable repetitive patterns, rhyme and rhythm. It had a straightforward characterisation and plots and included visually stimulating illustrations. Therefore Georgie would read more confidently and so would perform the test better and the class average would increase. On the other hand the non-fiction books showed interesting subject matter but were set out in a less clear format, which could confuse and

¹ All infant and primary schools in England are required to assess all pupils who have reached the end of Key Stage 1 in the core subjects of English, mathematics and science. That is, all year 2 pupils. This includes some pupils who are older or younger than 7 years old when the assessments take place. In the National Curriculum the expected level of achievement for a typical 7 year old is level 2 (DfEE, 1995). Annual arrangements for statutory assessment at the end of Key Stage 1 are set out in detail in QCA's annual booklets about assessment and reporting arrangements (DfEE, 1999).

agitate Georgie so that she became reluctant to complete the reading task.

Janet collected Georgie from the classroom, took her to the library and showed her the books on the table and waited patiently and hopefully whilst Georgie slowly studied several books, finally choosing 'The Stars,' by Patrick Moore. Clearly Georgie had chosen a non-fiction book! Janet began an introductory discussion with Georgie to encourage a relaxed atmosphere and to find out about her choice of book. 'That's a nice book. Do you like the cover? Have you seen any other books by the same author? Have you read any other books like this one?' 'I like space its about stars and planets,' Georgie replied. Georgie silently turned the pages as she browsed through the book looking at the pictures and then she chatted about the things she knew about stars. She returned to the contents page and commented, 'the contents page is useful and you can look up things like Galaxy. It's like Galaxy chocolate, I like that'.

Janet explained to Georgie that they were going to read some parts of the book together and then Georgie would read part of the book alone. This gave Georgie the opportunity to become familiar with the layout of the book and any specialised language used before she read aloud the running record passage, making an attempt at any unfamiliar words. Janet

marked the running record overlay for each word in the passage that Georgie read to identify the accuracy and reading strategies that she had used. Janet then asked the set questions to judge Georgie's understanding and response to the book. Why do think each of the pages has a title on it? Where can you find out how stars are born? What did you learn about the size of stars? Why do you think the book has a black background with white words?

Janet completed the session by finishing the book with Georgie, annotated and completed the reading record, then assessed the level achieved in the reading test. To do this Janet considered the qualities shown in Georgie's reading and response in relation to the performance descriptions (QCA, 2002). She made a judgement about which description fitted Georgie's performance best. It appeared that Georgie had read the test passage almost accurately and she had tackled unfamiliar words with encouragement only. Georgie had noticed when her reading did not make sense, and had either self-corrected, looked backwards or forwards in the text or asked Janet for meaning. Georgie had read mostly independently, with confidence, and she had even tried to use expression and intonation to enhance the meaning. Also Georgie had demonstrated that she

knew how a non-fiction book worked and how to find the information she wanted.

Janet wrote the level/grade achieved by Georgie as level 2B on the official QCA Running Assessment Record for Level 1 and 2, 2002. Janet was very pleasantly surprised, if not highly relieved! She was pleased for Georgie, her class, the school and herself as class teacher. Both internal and external judgements were made on this evidence of attainment in the key stage 1 SATs reading test as it was considered to be a vital part of the debate on raising standards. The result would be included on the school's data sheet of raw test results that were published and also scrutinised to determine whether the school had met its English target for 2002.

Appendix 3

The Journey

Appendix 3

The Journey

Journey's beginning...

1970-1987 research with children

I successfully gained a Certificate in Education from the University of Southampton in 1970. During the three-year course I specialised in Geography, Mathematics and Physical Education.

In a personal study in education I reported on factors influencing the structure of the junior school curriculum, focusing on the teaching of environmental studies. I critiqued the two contrasting approaches to the teaching of geography and wrote:

The methods employed by the teacher depend upon the aim that he/she has adopted. If the aim were to impart facts for some external purpose, such as passing an examination or the acquisition of a store of knowledge, then the method would consist principally of formal, perceptive instruction. But if the aim is to stimulate an enthusiasm for the subject and to lay a firm foundation for personal discovery, then the fundamental principle of the method would be to demonstrate, that geography deals with realities of life as the children see it around them and there are opportunities for children to actually participate in the work which is done (Follows, 1970).

Also I wrote about the teaching revolution of the 1960s and Hadow's directive that:

The curriculum is to be thought of in terms of activity and experience rather than facts to be stored (Hadow, 1931).

I explored the works of Rousseau, Pestalozzi, Froebel, Whitehead, Dewey, Montessori and Macmillan and was encouraged to value change and innovation and to see the impact of activity, interest and environment on a child's development. Susan Isaacs was one of many educationalists that wrote about the principles of teaching and learning which led to the reformation of the junior school curriculum away from traditional methods towards the child-centred approach and the integrated infant curriculum. This approach was reinforced by the Plowden Report (1967), which stated:

Activity and experience both physical and mental, are often the best means of gaining knowledge and acquiring facts... and that the positive function of a teacher is to provide a learning experience to suit the individual child, or to provide a 'child-centred' education as opposed to a 'class-centred' education (Plowden, 1967:195).

I examined the formation of the child's socio-geographical or environmental concepts. The research was a two-month enquiry that involved me working with fourteen mixed-ability children aged 10-11 years in a local primary school. The research method involved using model making, story, structured conversation (open ended questions) and observation of individual children investigating a problem situation, which

was developing a neighbourhood on a newly discovered island. The children's responses were taped and the results analysed using a qualitative classification of the different types of reasoning revealed by the children (Follows, 1970).

The qualified teacher status I gained enabled me to teach throughout the primary phase. I began my teaching career in 1970 in a large infant school located in an outer London Borough (a position gained perhaps by default as there were no jobs in junior schools due to a surplus of teachers at the time). In 1974 I gained promotion to teach in a semi-open plan school within the same local education authority. I thrived on the unexpected events of an infant classroom and the naturally unpredictable behaviour of young children. I suppose this set the scene for me becoming a continual research learner and for getting involved in a variety of innovative projects about teaching and learning for both adults and young children. Also it nurtured my interest in the fun, creative, collaborative and active aspects of teaching and learning. It established my strong feeling for social justice and fairness by trying to respect all children as individuals, to recognise their differences, to praise their efforts and achievements and engage in a positive assessment process that considers whole child development.

Whilst studying for a Diploma in the teaching of Mathematics to pre-school and primary school children (1981-1983) I researched into the development of spatial awareness in young children and I focussed on the development of their appreciation of topological space. I find it interesting that I approached this second enquiry in reverse order from the first by analysing the findings of my work with the children (my practice) then relating it to theory. Was this the start of me striving to create *living education theory*? I began to realise that practical ideas come from action and conversation rather than books.

The seven-week enquiry involved working with two children who attended local nursery (children 2-4 years) and junior schools (children 7-11 years) respectively. I observed the nursery child during the normal nursery classroom situation. He was involved with a wide range of activities in/outdoors and a great emphasis was put on the children being involved with purposeful play situations. I observed the junior child as part of a withdrawal group of eight children engaged in practical mathematical activities. The method of the observations on the second child was very different from the nursery child as I was not impartial to the children's activities, but centrally involved

with them. Also the observations were not concerned with the child's many reactions to situations that arose naturally in the classroom, but with the child's reactions that directly resulted from his participation with planned mathematical activities led by me. The two children's conversations were taped and then transcribed. Also I was able to write ongoing field notes during the systematic observations (child-tracking) in the nursery and often talked to the child when invited to do so. I wrote reflective notes about the junior child after the teaching session but conversed with the group of children when I introduced each activity and used open ended questioning to encourage a problem solving approach.

The enquiry included an examination of the theories concerned with the development of spatial relationships in young children, particularly their appreciation of topological space. Choat implied that:

Geometry is the beginnings of Mathematics for the young child since it originates from the earliest physical, mental, emotional and social activities of children by their seeing and understanding of the world around them (Choat, 1978:14; Lovell, 1961:95).

This is confirmed by several psychologists particularly Piaget who maintains that children's perception of space initially

develops from topological relationships (Piaget 1956 & 1960). Piaget interpreted that a topological (relational) view of the world gives way to a Euclidian (measurement) view of the world. Also I examined the curriculum and the mathematics schemes available to schools at that time and highlighted the omission of topological notions from them and the detrimental effects this might have on teaching and learning mathematics. It is interesting to note that I highlighted the relationship of topology with environmental geometry (the focus for my first project) (Nuffield Maths Project (1967)) as it gave the children an alternative means of interpreting their environment, without the confines of the comparisons of intricate measurements (Follows, 1988).

Journey's discovery...

What have I learned about research with children?

My early research projects were influenced by the curriculum in British primary schools at that time and the colleagues I worked alongside and learnt from, but they also encapsulate the values I developed during my teacher training and my first years of teaching. The most important of my values underpins the obligation I feel to keep young children central to my work as a teacher researcher. I strongly feel it is the entitlement of all children to receive quality education and my responsibility to

gain an understanding of all children and how they develop, what factors adversely affect their progress and what factors will promote their optimum development. Gaining this understanding is the driving force behind my past and present research. Putting the child at the centre (for me) is congruent with placing value on providing children with opportunity to engage in creative, practical, exploratory, problem solving and problem posing activities with no pre-conceived outcomes; it is also congruent with developing the methodological and epistemological frameworks discussed later in this chapter.

In each of the earlier research enquiries I looked at unique situations and phenomena. I attempted to capture the ways in which the child participants made sense of the events under investigation. Contrary to taken for granted assumptions, I felt that the children, even the youngest children, were both able and entitled to have a point of view in a research process. On reflection, I see that my earlier research recognised the importance of the children's voices although I had not really understood the full significance of the issue in research terms or represented the voices in my research account. Schratz (1993) warns us that traditional educational research:

Usually transfers the original voices of its research subjects into statistical data, mathematical relations or other abstract parameters... Thus the original voices from the field become the disembodied voices in the discourse of quantitative research presented through reports, articles and books (Schratz, 1993:1).

With my earlier research I did not clearly differentiate between the assumptions of qualitative or quantitative research techniques. Although my work recognised the centrality of the child and tacitly recognised voice my conclusions were framed in quantitative terms. I devised quantitative methods of analysis and used graphical statistical representations of the children's responses, to draw the conclusions of my studies. This was because I wanted my research with children to be:

A systematic and scientific search for information that aimed to improve my knowledge on children (Greig & Taylor 1999:38).

I interpreted Greig and Taylor's definition of scientific as a disciplined and rigorous yet cautious, reliable, valid and insightful approach rather than purely technical, yet at the time I viewed science in a traditional positivist way that linked it with measurement. Looking back I can see that I needed a less positivistic definition of it.

A major focus of my current thesis is teachers' tacit knowledge. Reflecting on the research projects conducted at the beginning of my career has enabled me to appreciate the tacit theoretical framework that underpinned my early research. It is clear to me now that my early research was based on a tacit inductive approach:

The procedure of generating new theories and in which theory emerges from the data (Greig & Taylor, 1999:43).

Inductive theorising is congruent with the view that the child is subjective in nature and that his understanding, knowledge and meanings are subjective, and emerge from his interaction with others in a given context. This is different from viewing the child as an object governed by social laws. The qualitative focus of my earlier research favoured a methodology in which theory was grounded in data such as observations, interviews and conversations, written reports, texts and their interpretations. It was very much view of theory and data that came from practice and led to theory and its tacit form was inductive or interpretive.

The importance of child at the centre and voice were not fully understood by me at the time. In retrospect they can be linked with constructivist approaches. I see now that the research I did

with young children could have been presented through a constructivist perspective that:

Perceives the nature of the child as being subjective not objectively knowable or measurable. The child has her/his own perspective, but is also socially determined and theories are inextricable from context and culture (Greig & Taylor, 1999:38).

As a teacher researcher I was not interested in control, but like constructivists I wanted:

Naturally occurring social behaviour, in place of isolated variables, they seek a contextualised holistic examination of participants' perspectives, instead of measuring, correlating and predicting, constructivists describe and interpret (Hatch, 1995:122).

The constructivist approach reflected some of the underpinning values I held about children, their learning and my teaching.

A research paradigm clearly associated with the constructivist approach is the interpretive paradigm. The interpretive paradigm involves a way of looking at the world that is congruent with my views about the centrality of the child and the importance of voice. My early research might have been framed within an interpretive paradigm. Like the interpretivists I investigated children and sought to understand the social world from the point of view of the child living in it.

Interpretative sociology encourages:

Entering the child's world and meanings to get the child's perspective from the inside out. This is necessary because situations, meanings, problems are defined in interaction with others

(Greig & Taylor, 1999:44).

Like the interpretivists, I attempted to make sense of how children understood their experiences and how this affected the way they felt towards others when they actively made and told me how they developed a neighbourhood on a newly discovered island. My teaching and research were in line with humanistic psychology that begins with:

The view of the child as his own psychologist, creating meaning for himself out of his experiences and interactions. When a child encounters problems, the belief is that the child should be enabled to look within himself for both the problem and the solutions (Greig & Taylor, 1999:44).

My early research with children described, interpreted and explained events in order to make evaluative judgements about the children and aimed at objectivity in accordance with research tradition. Although I was unclear about its position within interpretive or positivist paradigms, I was clear that the researcher should not 'contaminate' the research data by introducing her subjective values. There was a tension between

this view of research and the responsibility I felt to try and change the things that happened in my classroom for the better. I overcame this tension by trying to understand the issue better and making a conscious effort, based on informed judgements to change practice after the research was done. In retrospect I can see that I was searching for a different research paradigm that enabled me to set the goals for change within the framework of the research itself. This I have found in action research.

Action research helped me to explicate and strengthen the underpinning values that I held about children and at the same time to work to improve education as I strived to live these values more fully in my practice through the research process.

The epistemological framework, described later in this chapter uses a form of representation drawn from genuine infant school practice. This is my reality, my construct, and my view about the nature of knowledge and the most appropriate way to represent the living educational theory I am developing. The seeds of this idea can be found in my first research project, where I encouraged children to construct a model neighbourhood on a newly discovered island, so that I could investigate their developing environmental concepts. Also the seeds began to

grow in the second project where I observed young children constructing various models with the building blocks and playing spatial concept games. The idea of living educational theory is that it emerges from our learning as we experience a problem, imagine a solution, act in the direction of the solution, evaluate the outcomes of our actions and modify our understanding in the light of this process. The construction of 'the model neighbourhood on a newly discovered island' by children shadowed this process, although on a more concrete level. Sometimes it is useful to use concrete images to represent our more abstract models. I have constructed a model to explore the boundaries of internalised (intuitive) and externalised (explicit) infant school practice.

This is the genesis of the form of representation I have chosen for my own living educational theory. I have created a multi-layered jigsaw puzzle to topographically visualise the problem, explore numerous viewpoints with colleagues, consider possibilities and then hopefully discover ways to transform the landscape of educational assessment. The multi-layered jigsaw is crucial to the next part of my research journey. Thus I am beginning to realise my own key learner and teacher

characteristics and their interdependence (Watkins et al, 2000:92).

Journey's continuation...

1986-2002 Action Research - research with teachers

I was introduced to action research at Kingston University where I successfully completed the Diploma in Professional Studies in Education, School Management (1986-1988) and the M.Ed (1989-1991). Both courses enabled me to explore my own professional learning, first as a deputy head teacher and later as a head teacher. My particular interest was to support the professional development of the teachers with whom I worked and to improve educational opportunities for the young children at the schools where I worked, Willow Tree and Oak Tree Infant Schools¹. Improving the collaborative and educative working relationships of teachers as a means to teachers' professional development and educational improvement became the common thread in a number of small school-based projects that I completed as part fulfilment for these award linked courses.

During these years I became a committed member of the Kingston Hill Action Research Group (KHARG) and shared and

¹ Willow Tree and Oak Tree are fictional names for the infant schools where I worked.

helped to develop the values, aims and practices of this group. One of the most important aspects of the group was its commitment to working collaboratively to support the action research of individual members. The members of the group came from diverse parts of education and they were all experienced professionals. We met together to critique members' action research and to discuss the theoretical standpoints upon which our work was based, an opportunity unknown to most teachers.

One of the theoretical standpoints discussed at the meetings of KHARG was Lomax and Whitehead's approach to action research and their belief that the starting point for a teacher researcher's work is an exploration of their personal and professional values (McNiff, Lomax & Whitehead, 2003 & 1996:16). After sixteen years in teaching this was the stimulus that moved me to begin to critically challenge myself beyond the intuitive way of reflective practice that I had previously adopted, from asking, *What am I doing in the classroom?* to, *How am I doing it?* and *Why am I doing it this way?* to *How can I improve what I am doing here?* As I write this autobiography I now realise that Pam Lomax (Kingston University) and Jack Whitehead (Bath University) and the KHARG network have been most influential and supportive in helping me to develop and understand both

my action research practices and to shape my work as an infant head teacher/ teacher. I have continued to work with a small group of KHARG colleagues to support each other's PhD action research studies.

As deputy head teacher of Willow Tree, which was semi-open plan, I set up a six-month action research project to develop co-operative teaching and learning situations for three class teachers (including myself) and our classes whilst developing my own management skills as project coordinator/deputy head teacher. We set out to examine our approach to teaching and learning, improve the use of the shared teaching space and children's access to shared resources in the three classes. I reviewed the literature relating to cooperative teaching and open plan schooling. After twelve years in the school I discovered why I experienced immense personal satisfaction from teaching there. I enjoyed an open classroom, immediate support, sharing ideas, the dialogue it generated and the benefits that resulted. Also I remember having to continually grapple with the apparent conflict between my leadership and management role as deputy head teacher introducing change and my co-operative role as team teacher. Nevertheless, we achieved our shared aims of making better use of the teaching space and

resources, developing some uniformity in teaching whilst maintaining our individuality and improving developing flexible learning and social situations for the children in the three classes (Follows, 1988 & 1989).

Moving to a headship at Oak Tree presented apparently very different problems. The future of the school was uncertain, its staff and parents demoralised and its building and grounds had fallen into disrepair. I realised that I would need to inspire, motivate, encourage, support and involve everybody in its community if the school's potential was to be understood. I decided to address this challenge through action research. I would utilise the help of the KHARG group and present the research as coursework for an M.Ed. I began by looking at the action research literature about school leadership and management. I set up a two-term project and I used traditional action research cycles. I was very fortunate to have appointed a new deputy head teacher who shared my values about participative leadership and management. My aim was to collaboratively develop an induction programme for the deputy and clarify her role in the school whilst developing my own approach to school leadership and management. During the project we were able to establish our differing but

complimentary expertise, share each others professional development needs and clarify our intended partnership working practices with the staff.

We made it clear that we intended to facilitate a caring, supportive and open approach to changes and improvements in the school following its very unsettled history. Despite the very different demands of the new situation, this project (like the earlier ones) again focused on the three key strands of collaboration, professional development and educational improvement (Follows, 1990).

One of the unforeseen outcomes of my first action research project at Oak Tree was that the teachers in the school learnt about action research and over the next seven years many of them became committed to it themselves. This happened as the result of a number of different projects. In one project I worked with the deputy head teacher and three year 2 teachers to improve the implementation of National Curriculum Key Stage 1 assessment in the school. We achieved a cohesive programme of teacher assessment alongside SATs and extended collaborative working at the school (Follows, 1991 & 1993). I again started by reviewing the literature about assessment and testing in the infant school. I again used the traditional action research

cycles. This project brought home to me my very strong personal value for social justice and fairness in relation to educational assessment and my concern for its impact on young children, parents, teachers and schools.

So much so that after completing my M.Ed, I continued to work with staff, using action research to improve assessment in school and I decided to register for a doctorate in order to locate this action research case study within the broader issues about rationality, justice and fairness in educational assessment (Golby & Parrett, 1999). As head teacher, I was very concerned that raw SATs results alone did not reflect the real achievements of the children, i.e. their progress from entry into school to end of key stage 1 and were potentially damaging, as a significant number of children's attainment was below the national average. During 1995-1997 I examined pupil progress by applying the notion of value-added to my infant school setting and considered SATs results, baseline assessment and pupil background factors, particularly pupil mobility (Follows, Waites & Johnson, 1997). At this time the school underwent a negative Ofsted inspection partly due to its interpretation of pupil attainment as shown by SATs results. The LEA asked me to explore the issues of pupil's season of birth, length of time in

school, curriculum provision and its affect on pupil's achievement. This work became the initial stage of my PhD research when I was continuing to use the traditional action research cycles.

The most recent phase of my action research has changed direction due to having left my post at Oak Tree. In this new phase I have remained committed to my values, which centre on collaboration, school improvement and social justice. For me these are the central values of action research itself. On leaving my post as head teacher I was presented with the personal challenge of tailoring my action research to describe and explain a new phase in my quest to create living education theory as I seek a fairer approach to children's assessment. I accepted the challenge, broke with convention and sought to develop a fresh perspective that is my own creative and unique path through my research (Dadds & Hart, 2001; Kinchloe, 2003).

In doing so I began to concentrate more on the concept of reflection, an important aspect of action research, and its role in enhancing the learning process (Schon, 1983 & Boud, Keogh & Walker, 1985) and most importantly collaborative reflection for professional learning by a critical examination of

practice (Schratz, 1994). I was introduced to self-study, which appeared to be an exciting if not unnerving new research method for creating and exploring professional knowledge whilst contributing to public practitioner knowledge (Loughran & Russell, 2002; Hamilton, Pinnegar, Russell, Loughran & LaBoskey, 1998). I learnt that the essential feature of self-study is that the self is both the subject conducting the study and the main object to be studied. I adapted a method of collective memory work (Schratz, 1994; Crawford et al, 1992; Haug et al, 1990) using professional story with the research group to facilitate self-study by the collective analysis and clarification of concerns to pursue a critical examination of educational assessment. Like Lomax & Whitehead I seem to be following the idea that self-study and action research theses are not full autobiographies but sharply focused autobiographies of personal and professional learning that is defined by the purpose and contexts being studied. At last I am beginning to appreciate the importance of teachers creating their own living educational theory as a way of presenting their professional intuitive thinking and practice or tacit knowledge (Atkinson & Claxton 2000; Eraut, 2000; Wolf, 1998; Clandinin & Connelly, 1999 & 1995; Tripp, 1993).

But how was I going to present and generate my research data? I became particularly interested in deepening reflection through writing (Winter, Buck & Sobiechowska, 1999), and although encouraged to write was very reluctant to write my own professional stories about past practice. Why was this? I was an experienced infant teacher who saw story, in its widest form, as central to the infant curriculum and young children's learning. But I felt it very difficult and I was extremely self-conscious writing about my practice, exposing myself and publicly putting myself at the centre of my research.

I came to realise that deconstructing my stories was not judgemental but a constructive way of accessing my tacit practitioner knowledge and it helped to uncover the hidden aspects of the way that I evaluate my actions. For example, my stories have led me to see that I was alienated by national and local educational policy. As an infant head teacher/teacher I was forced to work in situations that were alien to me and to adopt policies with which I did not agree with, like the fragmentation of the infant curriculum away from topic based experiential learning. I now see that at the time my educational values determined my (re)actions and my practice. Through story I am able to take a fresh look at these

events, to understand aspects of my implicit practice and to be constructively critical about my own and others ideas.

I have started to pursue my research in a similar way to how I work in the classroom with young children. At times I feel as mystified as the children appear to be when they are posing and solving problems. I feel more comfortable using a collaborative, practical, explorative and open-ended approach to learning in my research just as I do when teaching and learning with the children in the classroom. I now recognise my own learning patterns and the link with my preferred teaching approach that I described in previous research projects, (Smith & Call, 2003; Gardner, 1983). On reflection, I think as a head teacher I was saturated by the detached, technical, scientific and predetermined approach to assessment that only gave a partial picture, not representative of individual or whole-child achievement. By focusing on educational assessment and the notion of a fairer assessment I have emphasised my commitment for social justice and fairness. I have always worked in socially and culturally diverse communities. I believed the young children were disadvantaged and I experienced them, at first hand, disadvantaged by the national assessment procedures.

I have moved away from the traditional action reflection cycles of action research that were adopted in my earlier case studies. I am now looking for learning links or relationships between the various stages of my research as I encounter the complex landscape of educational assessment. These stages, constituted by a number of case studies, are each treated like an action research spiral. Although they are not necessarily chronological, they tell a story of the development of my own living educational theory. I need to see and feel what things mean. Like the artist Fiona Banner (2002) I am trying to make abstract things real and so I am exploring the relationship between the words and the visual images of my work. I am creating a mind map or mindscape to remember and articulate my intuitive practitioner knowledge (Buzan, 2003; Murgulies, 2002). I am combining the text and visual image to analyse and generate data and to communicate my research. By using memory maps I am making the most of my natural capacity for visual and spatial organisation.

I describe the case studies through a visual and tactile metaphor of a multi-layered jigsaw puzzle. It represents the interlinking key thoughts in my learning throughout the action research process of my research, it shows unpredictability and

untidiness and a multi-layered approach to reflective writing and learning that leads to uncovering my tacit teacher knowledge (Follows, 1999). I seem to be getting a child's eye view of the landscape because I, too, am an (in)experienced learner. My learning characteristics are not fixed. They are related to previous experience, previous competence and beliefs that influence the current learning that occurs through multiple channels using multiple intelligence (Gardner, 1993). This directly relates to the notion of a set of linked case studies reports written at different times showing a clear evidence of autobiographical learning in relations to the researcher's understanding and (re) actions to practice (McNiff, Lomax & Whitehead 2003 & 1996).

Whilst engaged in action research I explored the differing nature, purposes and outcomes of action research and its importance to professional growth of teachers and the challenges of collaboration and change. At the beginning of my research journey I used action research as an individual teacher to develop ideas mediated through a university, then I used it as an infant head teacher supporting teachers to introduce national initiatives and I appeared to apply the theory of action research intuitively. Now I seem to be

explicating the theoretical framework that I created for self-analysis of my own practice of action research in order to understand and apply action research to my work as a head teacher/teacher and a teacher researcher.

Appendix 4

**All About Us
By
Polly & Robert**

All About Us

By

Polly & Robert



The title *All About Us* by Polly and Robert is a fictional title, as I have made the book, not Polly and Robert. It represents the title chosen by the two children who were the central characters of the story. The drawing is from Polly's portfolio, showing two children. The drawing supports the joint book notion. Normally I would ask the two children to draw a picture of themselves to make a cover of the book look realistic, or ask one of the children to draw it, maybe whilst the other wrote the title.

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This is me, by Robert.

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Things we see in the town and country, by Polly.

Things we see in the town and country, by Robert.

What is there to see? How best can we understand what we see? How can we put our understanding to good use?

Some of our work in Class F (Year 1)

Animals and plants in the pond and the woods, by Polly.

Animals and plants in the pond and the woods, by Robert.

What is there to see? How best can we understand what we see? How can we put our understanding to good use?

Something that really happened, by Polly.

Something that really happened, by Robert.

What is there to see? How best can we understand what we see? How can we put our understanding to good use?

Some of our work in Class W (Year 2).

Things that happen in the summer and winter, by Polly.

Things that happen in the winter, by Robert.

What is there to see? How best can we understand what we see? How can we put our understanding to good use?

On the way home from the park, by Polly.

The adventures of Tom Tom the puppy, by Robert.

What is there to see? How best can we understand what we see? How can we put our understanding to good use?

Introduction

This book enables us to look at two children's work and assess their learning, development and attainment. It tells us about the achievement of Polly and Robert, who attended Oak Tree infant school for three years (Years R/1/2) 1994-1997.

Setting the Scene

In the autumn term (1994) when Polly¹ and Robert² were nearly five years old when they started school. Polly had a younger brother Mikey and Robert had a twin sister called Verity who started school with him. They were in Class S³ and their teacher's name was Janet⁴. Previously they had been in the nursery class for a year. They often visited their new reception class with the nursery teacher or their parents and Janet visited the children at home, too. When Polly and Robert started school they came to school in the mornings (part-time) and then after about four weeks they came to school in the mornings and the afternoon (full-time). Six weeks after the children started school Janet discussed the Baseline Assessment⁵ results and how the children had settled into school with their peers.

At the start of each day the children showed their parents around their classroom and shared a storybook with them and then chose a book together to take home (home/school reading scheme). During the mornings Polly and Robert might draw a picture and experiment with writing in their books. Polly liked dressing up in the role-play area and painting. Robert liked making models with the building blocks and Lego, and watching what his twin sister was doing. They both liked sharing books with an

¹ Polly D.O.B. 08.01.90, pupil information record.

² Robert D.O.B. 12.11.89, pupil information record.

³ Learning and Teaching Policy, Oak Tree infant school, 1997. Class S was one of three reception classes. The class letters for the nine classes were SUNFLOWER. The reason for the letters for the classes making a word gave a focus to letter and whole word recognition. Its significance meant that each child belonged to a class (letter) and each class belonged to the whole school (word). It also gave an interesting study of the growth of sunflowers as the children moved through the school. The topic was revisited during the year in each class and in whole school assemblies.

⁴ Janet is a fictional name for the class teacher.

⁵ Baseline Assessment, Park LEA, helps to establish each child's stage of development and attainment on entry into school and forms the basis for discussion with parents during the child's first term in school. (See Chapter 5 Learning from Assessment and Pupil Data: exploring the evidence).

adult in the book corner. At playtimes they played with their friends in the other two reception classes in the outdoor play area and visited each other's classrooms for assembly. At lunchtime they ate their school dinners or packed lunches together. During the afternoons the children might be busy in the classroom, sometimes they did cooking and singing or PE in the hall. At the end of each school day Polly and Robert met their parents in the classroom and chatted with Janet.

During the year Janet planned the curriculum around six topics (with her two year group colleagues). Each topic was related to the children's interest levels and based on extending their first-hand experiences of their environment. Each topic included a related story focus, role-play area, and interest table and an outing.⁶

In September (1995) Polly and Robert into Class F with their friends and their new teacher was called Sue.⁷ They moved into the new classroom near a newly converted classroom near the big playground. At the start of each school day the children still showed their parents around their classroom, shared a storybook and chose a book to take home. But at the end of the day they met their parents in the big playground. At playtimes Polly and Robert played with their friends in years 1&2 in the playground and at lunchtime they had school lunch or packed lunch together in the dining hall.

Polly continued to enjoy dressing up in the role-play area and particularly enjoyed adult attention and any adult led activity. She had a short span of concentration and learning difficulties related to language and literacy development.⁸ Polly was placed on the Special Education Needs Register, she was included in the school-based speech and language programme and she received additional support for reading. Polly was sometimes an unhappy little girl who was sometimes unpopular with the other children

⁶ The topic approach was part of the 4-year curriculum framework, which integrated the subjects of the National curriculum Key Stage 1 and the Desirable Outcomes and included a cycle of topics for each year group to maintain the progression and balance of the curriculum.

⁷ Sue is a fictional name for the class teacher, she was also deputy head teacher.

⁸ Speech and Language assessment Record, Speech and Language Therapist (1995-1996) *'Delayed expressive language and comprehension of language'*.

because of her unpredictable mood swings and behaviour, but her friends were Sara, Danielle and Jenny.⁹

Robert was a serious minded little boy, but he had a wicked sense of humour. He had excellent concentration and thoroughly enjoyed all aspects of learning. Robert went to France for holiday and returned to school with a wonderfully detailed diary (Writing and pictures) describing each day's activities. Robert had a secure circle of friends including his twin sister Verity and her friends but also two of the more able boys Andy and Peter.¹⁰

Sue continued the curriculum planning (with her two year-group colleagues) around six more half-term topics and welcomed the children and their parents at the termly and end of year open evenings to discuss the children's progress and their annual reports.

In September (1996) Polly and Robert moved into Class W (year 2) and their teacher was called Kate.¹¹ This time their classroom was near the school field. The start-of-the day's activities were as before, but also, Robert helped his mother to organise the home/school reading scheme and Polly shared a book with Jenny and her mother. At the end of the day they continued to meet their parents in the big playground. Polly was an affectionate little girl who still benefited from adult supported activities and her favourite self-chosen activities included making her own picture and storybooks in the graphics area and dressing up in the role-play area. She did not like PE but liked swimming lessons. Robert was a popular, very friendly and easy-going boy. He was self-motivated and usually tried to think of an original approach to his work. He enjoyed PE and he was very strong and supple and he could climb to the top of the climbing ropes. Robert was identified as being able and talented and was placed on the Special

⁹ Sue and Kate's (deputy head teacher and senior teacher) professional comments and Polly's Formative Assessment Records

¹⁰ Sue and Kate's (deputy head teacher and senior teacher) professional comments and Robert's Formative assessment Records.

¹¹ Kate is the fictional name for the class teacher (senior teacher).

Education Needs Register.¹² He sometimes worked on extension tasks with his friend Andy.

Kate continued the curriculum planning (with her 2 year-group colleagues) around 6 new half-term topics. Also she welcomed the children and their parents to the termly and end of year open evenings to share their progress and the annual reports which included the children's attainment in National Curriculum Key Stage 1 SATs.¹³

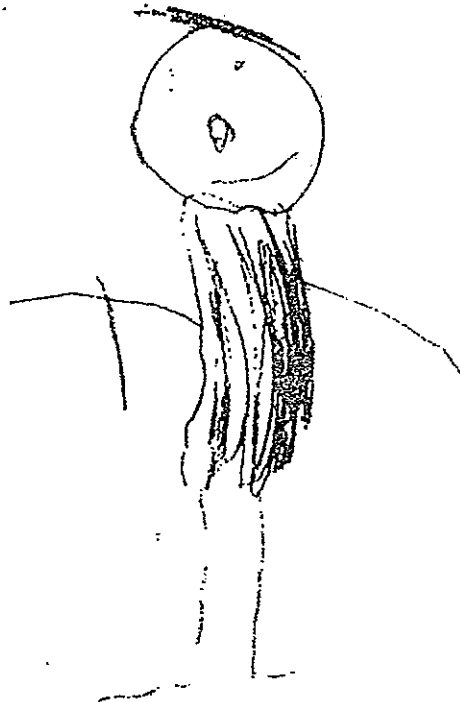
¹² School SEN Register.

¹³ See Chapter 5 Learning from Pupil and Assessment Data: exploring the evidence.

Learning from Polly and Robert.

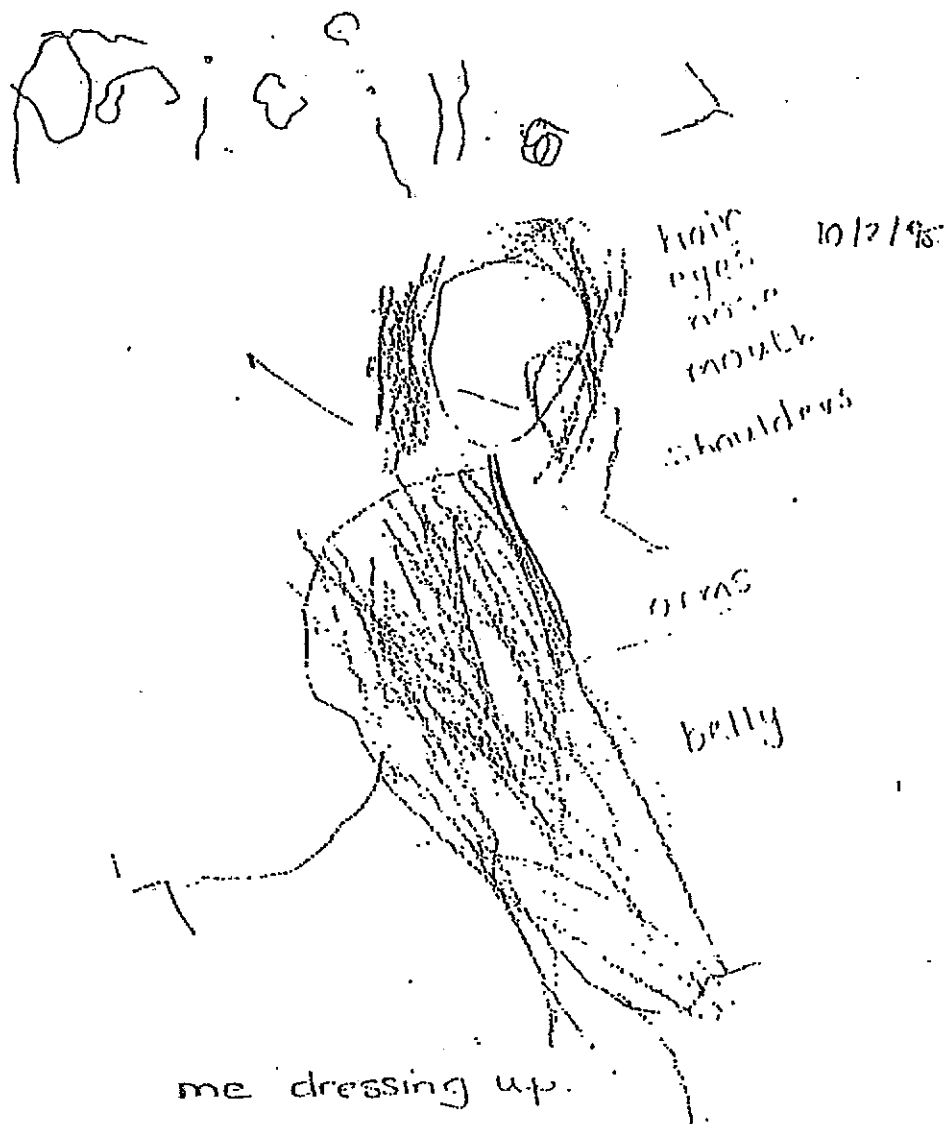


Some Of Our Work In Class S.
(Year R, Reception).¹⁴



¹⁴ This is a fictional title page; see explanation on the book cover.

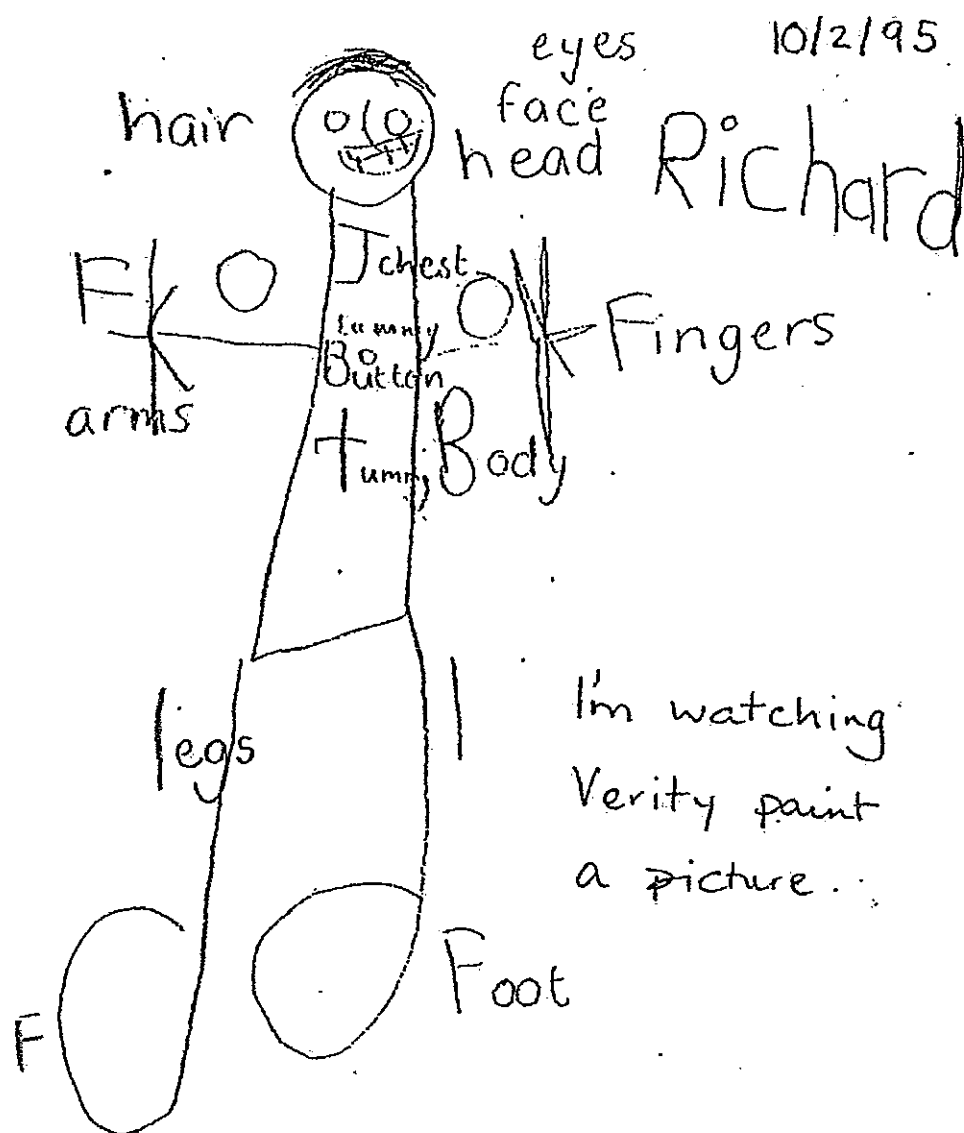
This Is Me In Class S, by Polly.
(Year R, Reception).¹⁵



¹⁵ This picture is taken from Polly's portfolio (10.02.95). This is a fictional caption.

This Is Me In Class S, by Robert.

(Year R, Reception).¹⁶



¹⁶ This picture is taken from Robert's portfolio (10.02.95). This is a fictional caption.

What is there to see?

Polly and Robert drew a picture of themselves. Both pictures show a recognisable but individualised human figure with some body parts, facial features and clothing features. Both children wrote their name and Robert wrote the first letters of some of the body parts. The adult written captions show the names of some body parts and what each picture is about:

Polly – *Me dressing up.*

Robert- *I'm watching Verity paint a picture*¹⁷

How best can we understand what we see?

Janet planned the topic¹⁸ - *Starting School* and was making a class book with the all the children in class S. The class book was called - *Starting School: things I like doing in my new class*. The book had three sections to include the drawings from children in the three seasons of birth-groups as they became settled in new class. Each section of the book was made approximately during the children's first full time week in school. Polly and Robert drew their picture (10.02.95). Robert was an autumn birthday but his full time was delayed due to illness in the previous term. Polly was a spring birthday and so the two children drew their picture on the same day, possibly in the same group.

Janet organised the class (24 children) into small groups so that the children could participate in both her planned teacher/adult directed and independent activities. The range of activities included a drawing and writing activity, role-play area, painting activity, book corner and individual reading, and a number game activity. This arrangement enabled Janet to sit with the small group of children who were asked to do their drawings for the class book whilst she had oversight of the other

¹⁷ These are fictional captions that represent Polly's favourite activity and Robert's way of doing things- following his sister's lead.

¹⁸ Oak Tree Four-Year Curriculum Framework- cycle of ½ termly topics.

small group activities. Sam and Jo¹⁹ were also in the classroom working with the other children whilst Polly and Robert were sitting with Janet doing their pictures. Janet encouraged each child to talk in turn about their pictures whilst they were drawing.

Janet: *That's a nice picture...tell me about your picture.*

Polly: *It's me...me dressing up.*

Robert: *I'm watching Verity paint a picture. I might paint a picture of my dad's car next...*²⁰

Polly and Robert dictated the caption for their pictures and Janet wrote it. Then the children wrote their name independently. Afterwards they went with Sam to the office to make a photocopy of their pictures. They went back to the classroom and gave one copy to Janet and stuck their pictures in the class book. The next day Janet showed Polly and Robert their pictures and talked with them (in turn) about the body parts they had drawn.

Janet: *Here's your lovely picture Polly...tell me about all the parts of your body that we can see in your picture.*

Polly: *Um...that's me belly and that's me arms.*

Janet: *What else can you see?*

Polly: *Mouth and nose, there!*

Janet: *What's that on your head?*

Polly: *Me 'air of course!*

Janet: *What about that bit at the top of your body?*

Polly: *Sojers, (shoulders)...can I go back to the 'ome corner', now? I want to play with Jenny.*

Janet: *Here's your lovely picture Robert...tell me about all the different parts of your body that we can see in your picture.*

Robert: *Well, that's my head and at the front is my face. There are my two eyes, my mouth and teeth and my nose in the middle.*

Janet: *What's next?*

Robert: *That's my whole body...body begins with b...I'm not sure what arm begins with.*

¹⁹ Sam is a fictional name for the nursery nurse and Jo is a fictional name for the student.

²⁰ The conversation between Janet, Polly and Robert is a fictional conversation. It represents the conversation between the teacher and the two children, an integral and crucial part of the assessment process (Meeting, Autumn 1999).

Janet: *Some of the letters are magic and they can change the sound they make but their name stays the same.*

Robert: *Well! If you tell me the name or the sound of the letter I can copy it from the alphabet chart on the wall...I can write the first letter for tummy, fingers, foot... that's the same as fingers, legs.*²¹

Polly dictated the body parts of her picture and Janet wrote them. As Robert dictated the body parts to Janet he attempted to make the initial letter sound of each word and wrote most of them copying from the alphabet chart on the classroom wall as he went. Jane completed the rest of the letters of each word for Robert, and he read each word back to Janet.

Polly and Robert both drew a formalised and recognisable human figure, (self-portrait), with some body parts and features. Polly drew tentatively using light pencil movements. She drew the outline for the head and body and lines for the arms and mouth. She used scribbles for shading and features of her figure. Robert drew a well-defined outline for the head and body, and lines for the arms, legs, fingers and feet. He drew recognisable features on the face.

Polly's attempt to write her name showed her to be at the early stages of handwriting. She was familiar with the letters of her name and the order of them and used lower case letters. She has made letter like shapes, which were unconventionally (Polly was left-handed and this could be an indication of her pencil grip, control and unconventionally formed letters).²²

Robert's attempt to write his name showed him to be at a more mature stage of handwriting. He was familiar with the letters of his name and the order of them and used capital and lower case letters appropriately. The letters were of consistent size and correctly formed (Robert was right-handed). He also used auditory and visual clues to write the first letter of the body parts.²³

²¹ The conversation is a fictional conversation, see footnote 29.

²² Writing Developmental Framework, Reading Development in the Primary School, Park LEA and formative assessment records.

²³ As footnote 31.

Janet used the Park LEA baseline assessment²⁴ guidance notes to record the two children's stages of development/levels, (1-5), in relation to three of the six areas of development, (profile statements) shown by a star (*), which are:

1. Social development;
2. Response to learning*;
3. Communication in English*;
4. Early reading and writing*;
5. Mathematical concepts; and
6. Processes in science.

Baseline Assessment-composite scores	Polly	Robert
2. Response to learning	Level 2	Level 3
3. Communication	Level 2	Level 3
4. Early reading and writing	Level 2	Level 3

Polly scored stage of development, level 2 and Richard scored stage of development, level 3, for the three profile statements, (2,3,4), listed above. This indicates that Robert was at a more mature stage of development than Polly, for the areas of language and literacy.

Then Janet used a copy of Polly and Robert's pictures for the *Draw a Person* test.²⁵ A score is obtained by allocating a point for each item (body part) included in the drawing. Janet asked Polly and Robert to tell her the body parts that they had drawn in their pictures to confirm what she could see. She acted as scribe for Polly and Robert wrote the first letters of some of the body parts and Jane completed the rest. Polly scored 8 out of 24 and Robert scored 14 out of 24.

²⁴ Park LEA Baseline Assessment Scheme was an accredited scheme when Baseline Assessment became statutory from September 1998. Park LEA scheme had been used in schools for many years. The Baseline Assessment consists of 6 broad areas of development- 1. Personal and social development, 2. Response to learning, 3. Communication of English, 4. Early writing and reading, 5. Mathematical concepts and 6. Processes in science.

²⁵ The 'draw a person' test forms part of the Park LEA Baseline Assessment Scheme.

Robert scored 6 more items than Polly, which suggested that Robert's level of intellectual maturity was greater than Polly's.²⁶

How can we put our understanding to good use?

Janet set about planning the next steps for Polly and Robert's learning, their next learning goal. She shared Polly and Robert's pictures with Sam and Jo and together they planned the next drawing and writing activity and decided on the learning intention for each child, which were:

Polly's learning intention: *Write letters of her name in the correct order and with the letters correctly formed.*

Robert's learning intention: *Develop independent writing of high interest words.*

Janet: *When we talk about the children's favourite activity in the outdoor play area (nursery/reception playground) we could follow it up with each child making their own zigzag book, (with pictures and captions) about their favourite activities. They might choose riding bikes, playing on the climbing frame, pushing the doll's pram, running or maybe playing with the sand.*

Sam: *So when Polly writes her name on the front of the zigzag book, I'll get her to show me the first letter on her name card, then I think I'll get her to trace over each letter with her finger before she writes it, that will help her to remember the start and finish points for each letter and the order of the letters in her name.*

Jo: *Shall I introduce a picture dictionary to Robert so he can try to write the captions for each picture in his zigzag book?*

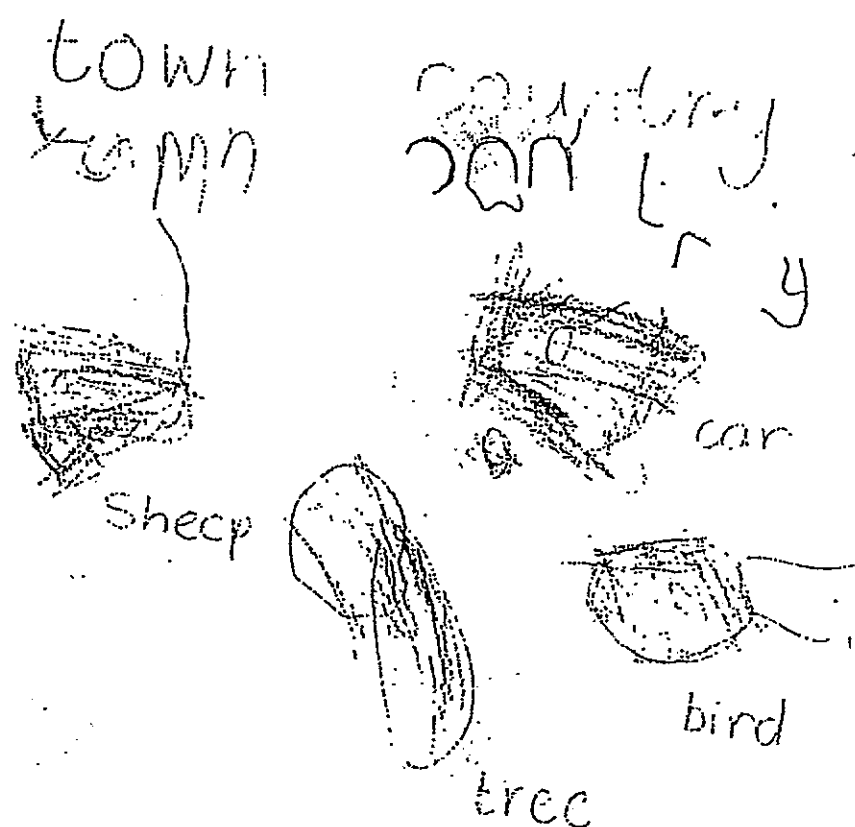
Janet: *Yes, they're both good ideas, and when the books are finished we'll suggest the children put them on top of the benches for everyone to see, before they take them home.*²⁷

²⁶ Diagnostic use of children's drawings, Goodenough (1926); Koppiyz (1968); Kellogg (1972).

²⁷ The conversation is fictional conversation. It represents the conversation between the 3 adults as they collaboratively plan the next learning activity for Polly and Robert.

Things We See In The Town and The Country, by Polly.

Class S (Year R, Reception).²⁸



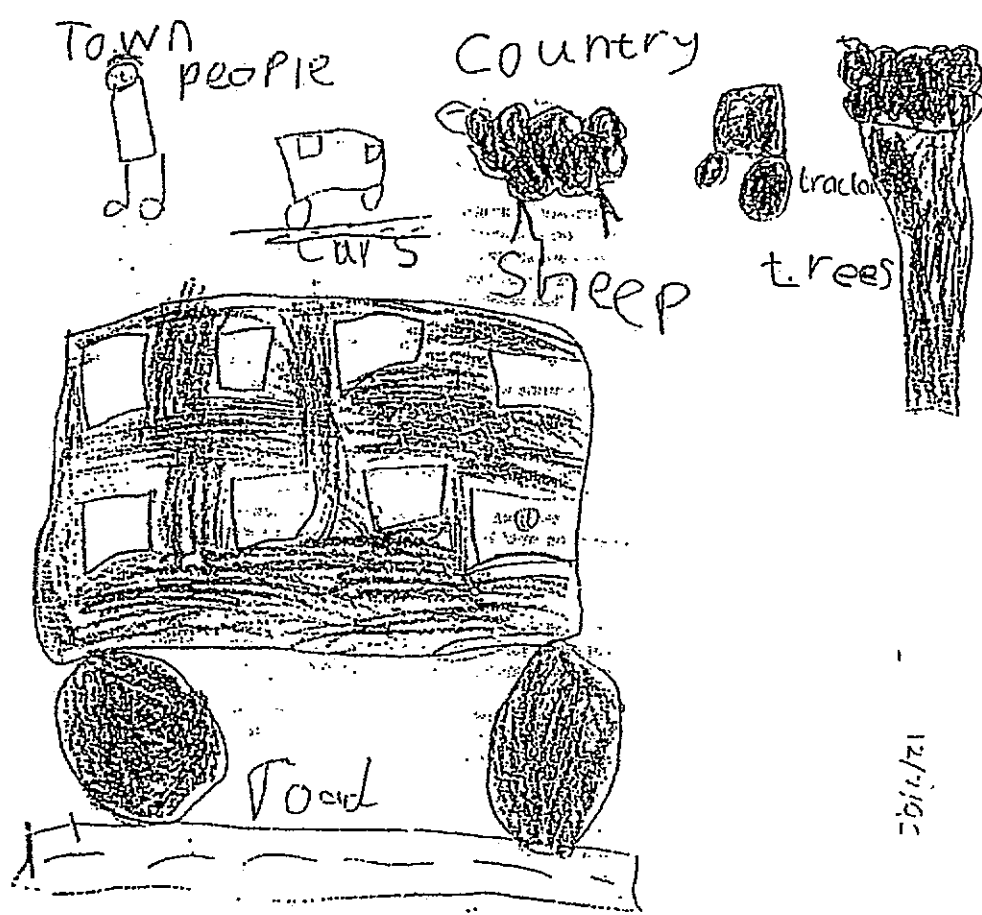
12/7/95

²⁸ The picture is taken from Polly's portfolio (12.07.95). This is a fictional caption.

Things We See In The Town and The Country,

by Robert,

Class S (Year R, Reception).²⁹



²⁹ The picture is taken from Robert's portfolio (12.07.95).

What is there to see?

Polly drew four semi-recognisable shapes that form the characteristics of her picture. There are two adult captions- *town & country* and adult written names to the four items in the picture- *sheep, car, bird and tree*. Polly attempted to copy some of the adult script.

Robert drew a more complex and recognisable picture, which features a person, a car and a bus on the road. It also shows a sheep, a tractor and a tree. Robert wrote the words- *town & country* and a name for each item in his picture- *people, cars, road, sheep, trees and tractor*.

How best can we understand what we see?

Janet planned the geography topic- *Town and Country*³⁰ and introduced it to the children in class S by reading the children's story- *The Town and Country Mouse*, which compares the two contrasting homes and lives of the two main characters. The story encompasses the learning intention- *Able to talk about where they live and their environment* (Desirable Outcomes, 1996) and *-Able to state similarities and differences between different contrasting parts of the environment*, (NC KS1Geography AT5). Janet had also taken the children on a local walk to a busy road and the local shops and on a class visit to Chapel Farm.

Janet assessed all the children's learning towards the end of the topic and her assessments were related to the learning intention outlined above. She arranged for the children into small groups so that they could discuss the differences that they had learnt about *the town and the country*. After the discussion Janet showed the children how to make half the paper for the things in the town and the other

³⁰ Four-year cycle of ½ termly topics, Oak Tree Four Year Curriculum Framework, covering the Desirable Outcomes, (superseded QCA (2000) Curriculum Guidance for Foundation Stage).

half for the things in the country and she showed them the word cards with *town* & *country*. Polly and Robert then drew their pictures. Janet encouraged each child to talk, in turn, about the picture they were drawing.

Janet: *Come on Polly I'd like you to draw some of the things you saw when you walked down the road with Sam and at Farmer Compton's farm.*

Polly: *I'm busy in the farm shop.*

Janet: *Come on, come and draw the picture first...*

Polly: *OK....I've finished!*

Janet: *Please, tell me about your nice pictures.*

Polly: *That's a sheep and a bird on the farm and the big tree in the playground and a car.*

Janet: *I wonder if Farmer Compton's farm is in the country or the town?*

Polly: *In the country, 'cos we went on the coach there!*

Janet: *Robert would you like to tell me about the things you saw when we walked down the busy road and when we went to the farm?*

Robert: *Yes, this is the 198 bus that goes down Bridle Road it can't go to the farm 'cos it will get stuck in the narrow road like our coach did... there's lots of cars too 'cos its a very busy road...when I go home with Verity and mummy there's lots of people too...At Chapel farm we saw 100s of sheep in the field... that's farmer Compton's tractor...the one that pulled the trailer round... and the big trees in the woods...Chapel Farm has got lots and lots of fields in the country.³¹*

Polly was very unsettled and made tentative drawings to represent the events being talked about. She talked a lot about the animals and trees at the farm (the children had walked across a field with lots of sheep, were able to stroke them and then walked through a wooded area, saw and heard lots of birds). Polly attempted to copy under Janet's writing. She was able to copy the 4 letters of the word *town* and 5/6 letters of the word *country*. She wrote them in the correct order, some unconventionally formed and used letter like shapes with vertical and horizontal reversal of some letters. Polly enjoyed chatting about her visit to the farm and knew the names of some animals and used immature names for some of them. She really wanted to go and play with play-mat and the model of the farm and the animals and be the shopkeeper in the farm shop in the role-play area!

³¹ The conversation between Janet, Polly and Robert is a fictional conversation. See footnote 31 & 32.

Robert was really keen to take part in the activity and he drew 4 features for the town and 3 features for the country. He talked in detail about seeing various features on the local walk (offered the number of the bus) and the visit to the farm and often referred to the farm play-mat (displayed and continually used in the classroom). He used captions/labels from the town and country models (which he had previously written with his friend Andy) and a picture dictionary to independently write his own captions for the picture. He then read them back to Janet.³²

Janet assessed the children's learning in relation to the planned learning intentions (written above), moderated her judgements with her two year- group colleagues and recorded her findings on the two children's pictures and their records of achievements.

Polly: Working towards NC KS1 Geography, Level 1.³³

(Level Description, Level 1: Pupils recognise and make observations about the physical and human features of places. They express their views on features of the environment of a locality that they find attractive or unattractive. They use resources that are provided and their own observations respond to questions about places).

Robert: Working within NC KS1 Geography, Level 2.³⁴

(Level Description, Level 2: Pupils describe physical and human features of places, recognising those features that give places their character. They show awareness of places beyond their own locality. They express views on attractive and unattractive features of the environment of a locality. Pupils select information from resources provided. They use this information and their observations to ask and respond to questions about places. They begin to use appropriate vocabulary). (Key Stages 1&2 of the National Curriculum. Level Descriptions describe the types and range of performance that pupils working at a particular level should characteristically demonstrate).

How can we put our understanding to good use?

Janet made plans for the next learning steps in Polly and Robert's learning, their next learning goal. She shared Polly and Robert's pictures with Sam and together

³² Writing Developmental Framework, Reading development in the Primary School, Park LEA, and formative assessment records.

³³ Assessment recorded on Polly's picture, and her record of achievement.

³⁴ Assessment recorded on Robert's picture, and his record of achievement.

they planned the next drawing and writing activity and decided the next learning intention for each child. They also planned their future learning in Geography.

Polly's learning intention: *Write letters of the title of her picture correctly formed.*

Robert's learning intention: *Write annotations for his picture in whole sentences.*

Janet: *I think we can get the children to draw and write about the Road Safety display...when they bring the dummy road and kerbs, the road signs... and get the children to take part at crossing the road.*

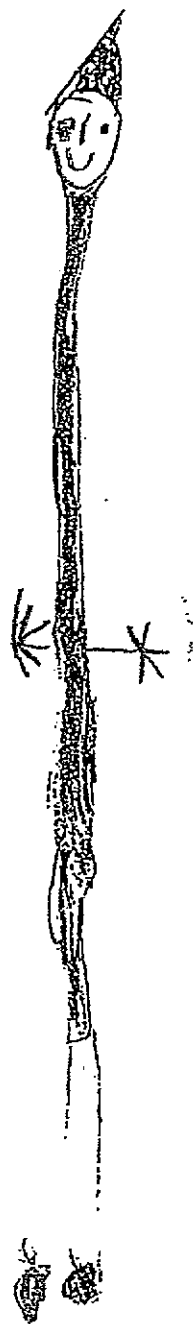
Sam: *Robert's group could have captions 'on the road' and 'on the pavement' and then they could choose what vehicles and people they want to write about...they might write 'lorries and vans go on the road'.*

Janet: *Perhaps Polly and Jenny could work with Karen (learning support) to help her write a few letters and words carefully. Karen can write each letter/word on a card then Polly can watch her and then copy it... Let's just check on the topic plan so we can find out the next opportunity to re-visit the learning intentions for geography... Oh yes, they're going to visit Golden Stable Woods in year 1.*³⁵

³⁵ The conversation is fictional, see footnote 39.

Some of Our Work in Class F.

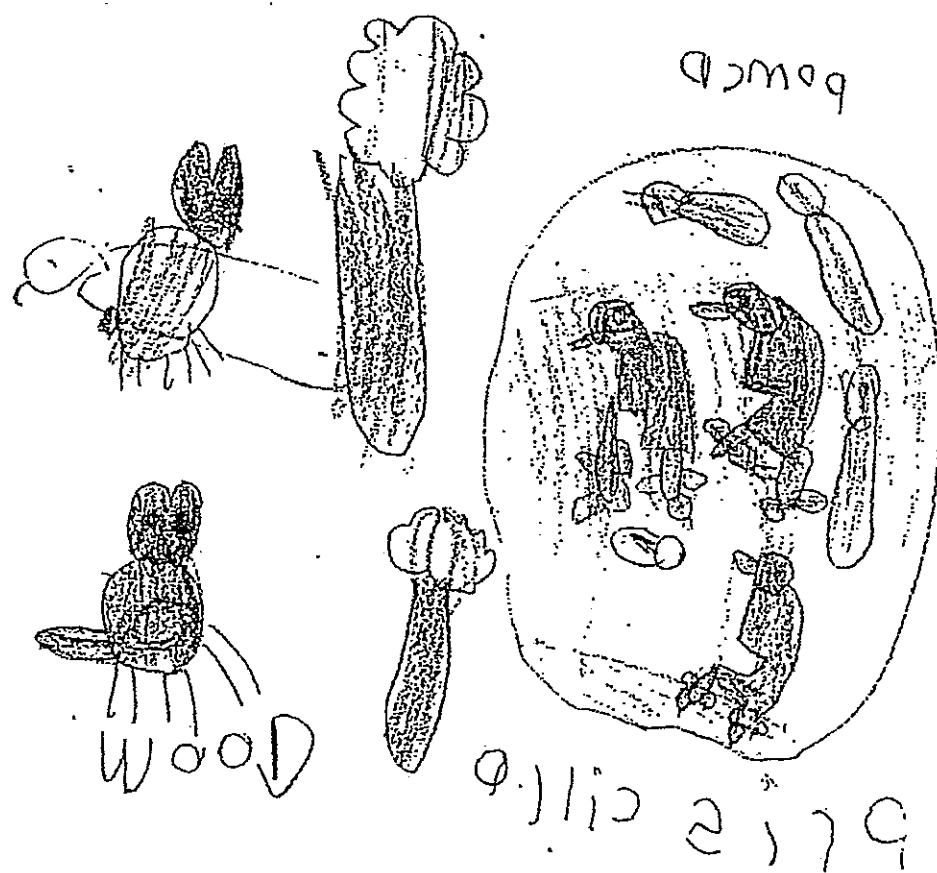
Year 1.³⁶



³⁶ This is a fictional title page, see explanation on book cover.

Animals and Plants in the Pond and the Woods, by Polly.

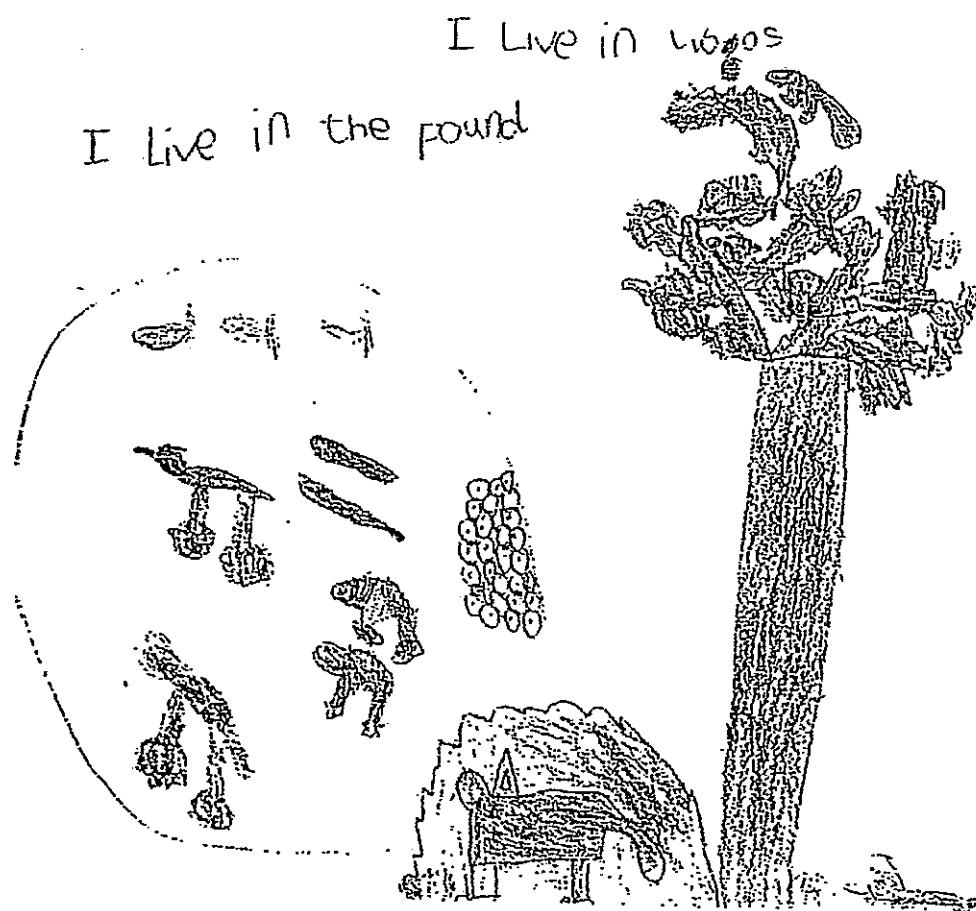
Class F (Year1).³⁷



³⁷ This is a picture taken from Polly's portfolio (October 1995). This is a fictional caption.

Animals and Plants in the Pond and the Woods,
by Robert.

ClassF (Year.1).³⁸



³⁸ This picture is taken from Robert's portfolio (October 1995). This is a fictional caption.

What is there to see?

Polly folded her paper in half. On one half she drew a complex set of pictures including two trees and two animals and a bird. On the other half she drew a pond with three ducks and four tadpoles. Polly has written two captions - *wood & pond*.

Robert also folded his paper in half. On one half he drew a complex set of pictures showing a pond with three fish, two ducks and two frogs, tadpoles and frogspawn. On the other half he drew a large oak tree with a squirrel and an acorn at the top, and at the base of the tree a fox in his den, a hedgehog and a toadstool.

How best can we understand what we see?

Sue planned the science topic³⁹ - *Animals and Plants*, and she introduced it to the children in class F by reading a version of the traditional children's story- *Little Red Riding Hood*, which highlights many animals and plants in the story-line and created Grandma's house in the role-play area. The story encompasses the learning intentions:

Able to recognise and identify a range of common plants and animals, (NC KS1 Science AT2, Level 1) and Able to sort living things into groups, and recognise that different things are found in different habitats, (NC KS1 Science AT2, Level 2).

Sue also involved the children in a walk through the school grounds, through the wooded areas and to see the school pond. The class visited Millers Pond and Bridle Woods, both, near the school to compare and contrast the animals and creatures living there.

Sue assessed all the children's learning towards the end of the topic, and assessments were related to the learning intentions, outlined above. The assessments were made during a small group activity so that the children could discuss the different things that they had seen on the walks and the pictures were

³⁹ Four year cycle of ½ termly topics, Oak Tree Four- year Curriculum Framework.

part of that activity. The assessments were based on Sue's conversation with Polly and Robert whilst they were doing their work.

Polly: I'm drawing a big round for the pond, there's 3 little ducks and 4 tadpoles...they like living there.

Sue: Tell me about the woods, then...

Polly: Um.... two great big trees with lots of leaves, a squirrel, a baby rabbit and a bird ...that's me name and that says wood and pond... I've written them meself, (myself).

Sue: Thank you Polly, that's lovely...tell me about your picture Robert, please.

Robert: Well, over here are all the things that live in the pond, 'cos it says 'I live in the pond', there's some sticklebacks, and 2 mallard ducks, 2 frogs and a tadpole without its legs and tail and frogspawn at the edge...over here it says 'I live in the woods'... can you see the squirrel? He's at the top of the oak tree trying to get and acorn to eat... there's the fox in his den a prickly hedgehog under some leaves and a toadstool.. they're poisonous ...did you know that? My dad told me when we went to Coombe woods.

Sue: That's really good Robert.⁴⁰

Polly happily but hastily drew the picture. Her drawing of the pond animals showed their animal form and some of their features, (duck's beak, eyes and webbed feet and tadpole's tail, head and eyes). Her drawings of the animals in the woods showed similar features (rabbit, fox, bird, head, body tail, eyes and ears, with a few extra legs!) and two individualised trees. Polly enjoyed chatting both about the animals in her picture and added some extra ones that she had seen on the walks and remembered from stories. She attempted to write the name of the habitat for each set of animals. She spelt *wood* correctly and used letters of consistent size and recognisably formed but incorrect starting and finishing places, capital *D* used. She attempted *pond* hearing and writing the initial and final consonants and used mirror writing. Polly has written the letters of her name using letter like shapes, consistent in size, most unconventionally formed. She had reversed each letter

⁴⁰ This conversation is fictional, see footnote 31, 32 & 43.

and the order of the letters of her name (mirror writing is quite common with left-handed children).

Robert carefully drew the creatures in the pond showing some of their features (he used pictures in the story for his own reference as he was drawing them). His drawing of the tree shows some individual branches and leaves as well as the strong trunk and he has introduced the idea of scale (tree/animals). Richard spoke in great detail about the animals and their habitats and added extra ones from a walk with his family.

Robert wrote the captions for his drawing independently and structured both sentences. He has introduced a capital letter at the beginning of the sentence, and most letters are correctly formed with correct starting and finishing points. He is aware of the initial and final consonants of *pond* & *woods*, (spelling error from possible haste).⁴¹

Sue assessed the two children's learning in relation to the planned learning intentions (written above), moderated her judgements with her two year-group colleagues and recorded her findings on the two children's pictures and their records of achievement:

Polly: Working within NC KS1 Science AT2, Level 1.⁴²

(Level Description, Level 1: Pupils recognise and name external parts of the body, using words such as head or arm, and of plants, using words such as leaf or flower. They observe and describe a range of animals and plants in terms of features such as colour, or size of leaf. They recognise and identify a range of common animals, using terms such as fly, goldfish or robin).

Robert: Working within NC KS1 Science AT1, Level 2.⁴³

⁴¹ Writing Developmental Framework, Reading Development in the primary school, Park LEA & formative assessment records.

⁴² Assessment recorded on Polly's picture and her record of achievement.

⁴³ Assessment recorded on Robert's picture and his record of achievement.

How can we put our understanding to good use?

Sue made plans for the next learning steps in Polly and Robert's learning, their next learning goal. She shared the two pictures with Lyn.⁴⁴ And together they planned the next drawing and writing activity and decided the next learning intention for each child. They also planned their future learning in science:

Polly's learning intention: *Able to write a sentence(s) from left to right.*

Robert's learning intention: *Write a descriptive sentence(s) to annotate a picture.*

Sue: I think Polly needs a marker to start her writing... I think I'll let her use my small butterfly stamp to make a border on the left-hand side of the paper... she likes my stamps...then I'll talk her through the starting points of the letters, again. We'll read the story- 'Can I live here?' and then the children can make their own little books.

*Lyn: I think Robert and Andy might like to make a big collage about the story then they can make their own captions for the different animals and what their homes are like...Let's just check on the topic plan so we know when the children will re-visit the learning intentions for science next year...*⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Lyn is a fictional name for the nursery nurse.

⁴⁵ This conversation is fictional, see footnote 30&46.

Something that really happened, by Polly.

Class F (Year1).⁴⁶

Patiscina



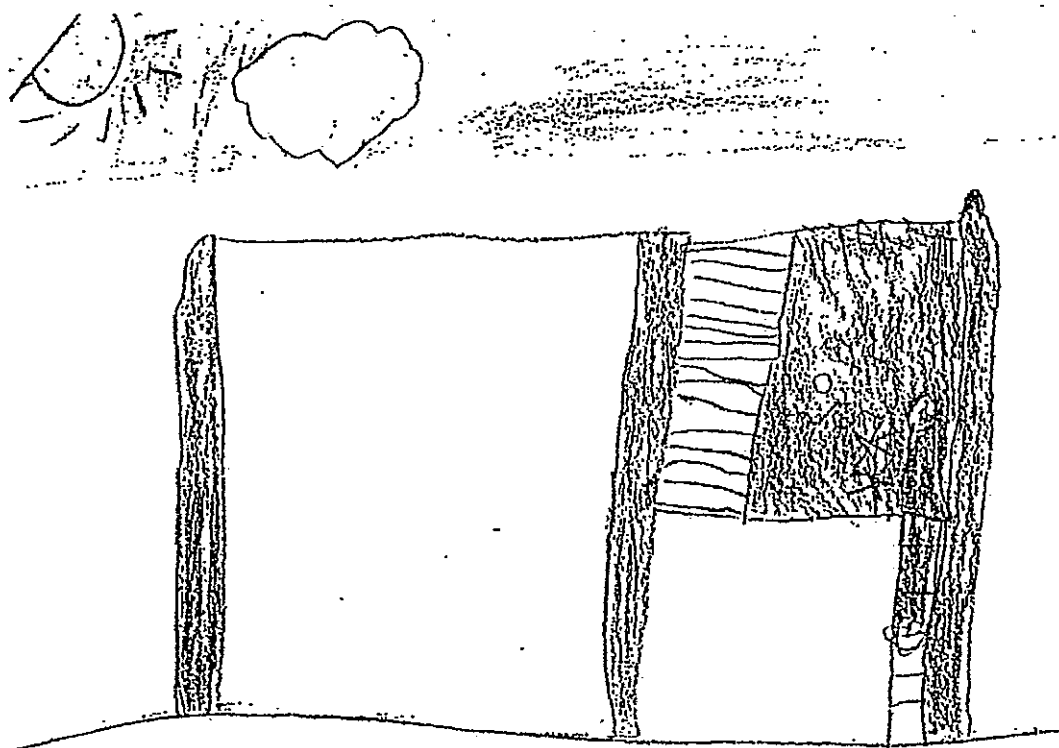
my friends

I took my friends to the
woods

⁴⁶ This is a picture from Polly's portfolio (Summer 1996)

Something that really happened, by Robert.

Class F (Year 1).⁴⁷



on Sunday me & Victoria
playd on ar climing frim &
mummy did the grdørning

⁴⁷ This is a picture from Robert's portfolio (Summer 1996).

What is there to see?

Polly drew a complex picture showing four recognisable human figures and two large trees. She wrote her name and a caption underneath her picture.

Robert drew a complex picture showing a climbing frame and one human figure. He wrote three lines to explain what his picture was about.

How best can we understand what we see?

Sue planned an independent writing activity for the children to experience writing about a *real event*. The writing activity involved the learning intentions:

Able to write about a real event, (NC KS1 English AT3 Level 1-2) and Able to write a sentence accurately, (NC KS1 English Level 2).

Sue introduced the writing activity with a class discussion about *Things that really happen!*

Sue: *Who can read my writing on the flip chart?*

Andy: *It says 'things that really happen'...like me going swimming.*

Sue: *That's right Andy...can anyone think of anything else that really happens?*

Sarah: *My mum had a baby and I can skip.*

Peter: *I might go to the park with my brother....*

Tom: *I went to Disneyland yesterday...*⁴⁸

Sue wrote the children's suggestions on the flip chart and then they all read them together. Then she asked all the children to draw their own pictures about *something that really happened*. The children worked with their friends (small ability groups) for this activity. Sue sat with Polly to help her with her writing.

Sue: *You've written your name really nicely, Polly.*

Polly: *Yes and I've written 'my'...can you help me do the rest?*

⁴⁸ This conversation is fictional, see footnote, 31,32,43 & 52.

Sue: *What would you like to write?*

Polly: *I took my friends to the woods...we played hide and seek then had a picnic and saw a foxand I can write 'I'.*

Sue: *See if you can write 'took'. Can you sound it out?*

Polly: *I've already done 'my' ...'friends' starts with 'f' ... 'woods' is like this... I've finished ..It says I took my friends to the woods!*⁴⁹

Robert finished his picture and the writing independently and then showed Sue and read her the caption. Polly drew a picture to represent her *real event* and rehearsed the story. The picture shows two large trees, three friends and herself in the woods. She enjoyed chatting about her picture; things they saw and the games they played there.

Polly wrote the letter of her first and second names. She made a good attempt by copying the letters from her name card. Polly was beginning to write familiar words *my, to & I*, and hears and writes initial and final consonants of the words *t, f & wds*. She attempted to write the sentence *I took my friends to the woods* and read it back to Sue.

Robert divided his paper with a ruler to separate the picture and writing. He drew a picture of his *real event* and rehearsed his story. The picture shows features of the sky with a cloud and sun, and it shows a structure that is recognisable as a climbing frame and a figure (himself) climbing a ladder and a line showing the ground. Robert was able a sentence accurately and left spaces between each word. He has used lower case letters, which are of consistent size and clear ascenders and descenders. He was able to write familiar words *on, me, Victoria, Mummy, did & the*. He was able to find words in the dictionary or word list, *Sunday, climbing frame*. He wrote the sentence *On Sunday me and Victoria*

⁴⁹ This conversation is fictional, see footnote, 31, 32, 43, 52 & 60.

*played on our climbing frame and mum did the gardening and then read it to Sue.*⁵⁰

Sue assessed the children's learning in relation to the learning intentions (written above) and moderated her judgements with her two year-group colleagues, and recorded her findings on the children's pictures and their records of achievement:

Polly: Working towards NC English AT3, Level 1.⁵¹

(Level Description, Level 1: Pupils writing communicates meaning through simple words and phrases. In their reading or their writing, pupils begin to show awareness of how full stops are used. Letters are clearly shaped and correctly orientated).

Robert: Working towards NC English AT3, Level 2.⁵²

(Level Description, Level 2: Pupils writing communicates meaning both narrative and non-narrative forms, using appropriate and interesting vocabulary and showing some awareness of the reader. Ideas are developed in a sequence of sentences sometimes demarcated by capital letters and full stops, simple, monosyllabic words are usually spelt correctly and where there are inaccuracies the alternative is phonetically plausible. In handwriting letters are accurately formed and consistent in size).

How can we put our understanding to good use?

Sue planned the next learning steps in Polly and Robert's learning, their next learning goal. Sue and Lyn looked and talked about the two pictures together then planned the next drawing and writing activity and decided the next learning intention for each child, in relation to NC KS1 English AT3 Levels 1-2.

Polly's learning intention: Able to write high interest words using phonics and picture dictionary.

Robert's learning intention: Able to write high interest words accurately and use capital letters and full stops.

Sue: I think we'll get all the children in their writing groups to make a group diary about things we do at school next week...they can take photos of various activities... and write the captions.

Lyn: That'll fit in with the days of the week...and telling the time too, that's planned for maths...is anyone coming in to help or talk to the children

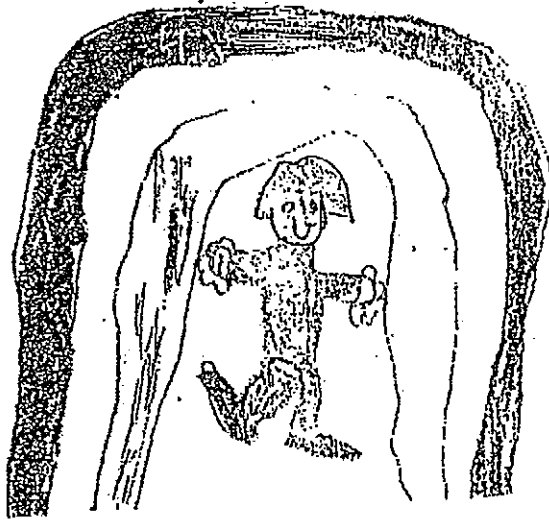
⁵⁰ Writing Developmental Framework, Reading Development in the primary school, Park LEA & formative assessment records.

⁵¹ Assessment recorded on Polly's picture, and her record of achievement.

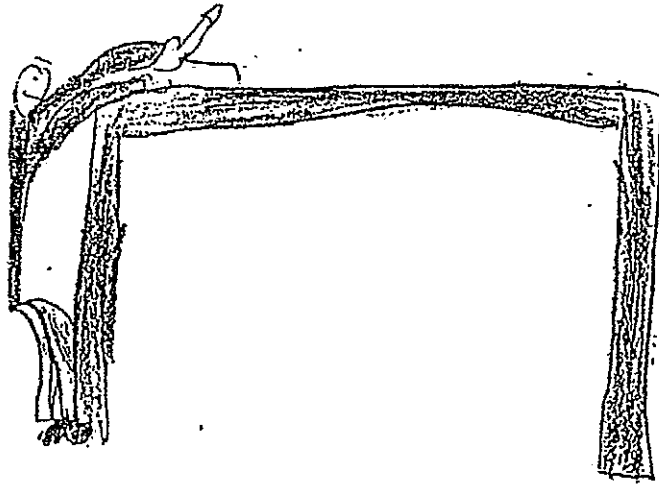
⁵² Assessment recorded on Robert's picture and her record of achievement.

*next week?*⁵³

⁵³ This conversation is fictional, see footnote 30, 34, 46 & 57.





Some of Our Work in Class W.
(Year 2).⁵⁴



⁵⁴ This is a fictional title page, see explanation on the book cover.

Things That Happen in Summer and Winter, by Polly.

Class W (Year 2).⁵⁵

Name. <u>Pavita</u>	Date. <u>October 17th 1996</u>
In Summer it is <u>hot</u>	In Winter it is <u>cold</u>
so we <u>go swimming</u>	so we <u>wear coats</u>
	
What else happens? <u>we wear T-shirt - shorts</u>	What else happens? <u>It rains</u>

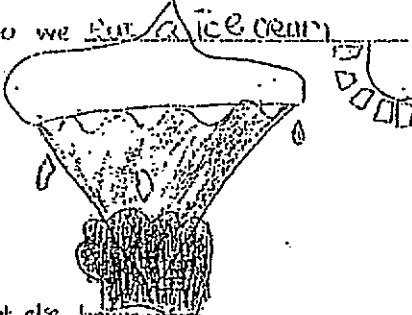
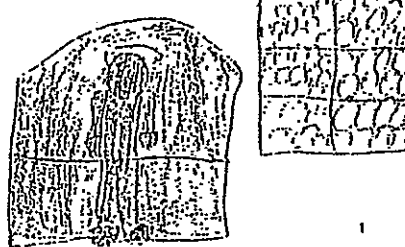
Geography AT 5

Knows the effects of weather on people and surroundings

⁵⁵ This is a picture from Polly's portfolio (17 October 1996). This is a fictional caption.

Things That Happen in Summer and Winter, by Robert.

Class W (Year 2).⁵⁶

Name: <u>Richard</u>	Date: <u>October 17th 1996</u>
In Summer it is <u>hot</u>	In Winter it is <u>cold</u>
so we <u>eat ice cream</u>	so we <u>eat hot food</u>
	
What else you <u>feel hot</u>	What else you <u>feel cold</u>
Geography AT: 5	
Knows the effects of weather on people and surroundings	

⁵⁶ This is a picture from Robert's portfolio (17 October 1996). This is a fictional caption.

What is there to see?

Polly drew the pictures for a work sheet about the contrasting weather in summer and winter. Her picture clearly shows Polly's individualised human figures. An adult (Kate) has completed the writing on the work sheet.

Robert drew the pictures clearly representing the two situations being questioned- a melting ice-cream cone being held in the sunshine and a person standing in a doorway and lots of people inside looking out through a window. Richard completed the writing on the work sheet- name data, missing words in the sentence and answers to the two questions.

How best can we understand what we see?

Kate planned the geography topic⁵⁷ using a children's story - *The Wind and the Sun* and created a television studio (weather station) in the role-play area. This topic involved:

The learning intention - *Knows the effect of weather on people and surroundings*, (NC KS1 Geography 5c, Level 1-2).

The two work sheets followed a class discussion and were part of an activity to assess the two children's learning at the end of the topic and were based on Kate's conversation with the two children both during and after they had completed the work sheet.

Kate: *I like your pictures, Polly.*

Polly: *That's me and Mikey going swimming and my mum in the rain.*

Kate: *Now do the writing for me.*

Polly: *No!*

Kate: *Alright, help me read the writing and I'll write the missing words for you...then you can show me your work Robert.*

⁵⁷ Four-year cycle of ½ termly topics, Oak Tree Four-year curriculum framework.

Robert: *That's a great big ice-cream...its melting...I had one like that when we went to Littlehampton...it was really hot! And that's me waiting to go home...and all of us looking out of the window at the snow.*⁵⁸

Polly reluctantly completed the task. She needed continuous adult supervision and encouragement. She drew Mikey and herself going swimming and her mum in the rain. Polly was unwilling to write and so Kate helped her to complete the task together.

Robert completed the work sheet independently and happily read through his work to Kate. He wrote quickly and confidently on the lines and spaces provided- two spelling errors due to haste.⁵⁹

Kate assessed Polly and Robert's learning in relation to the planned learning intentions, moderated her judgements with her two year-group colleagues and recorded her findings on their record of achievement.

Polly: Working within NC KS1 Geography 5c, Level 1.⁶⁰

(Level Description, Level 1: Pupils recognise and make observations about physical and human features of places. They express their views on features of the environment of a locality that they find attractive or unattractive. They use resources provided and their own observations to respond to questions about places).

Robert: Working within NC KS1 Geography 5c, Level 2.⁶¹

(Level Description, Level 2: Pupils describe physical and human features of places, recognising those features that give places their character. They show an awareness of places beyond their own locality. They express views on attractive and unattractive features of the environment of a locality. Pupils select information from resources provided. They use this information and their own observations to ask and respond to questions about places. They begin to use appropriate vocabulary).

How can we put our understanding to good use?

⁵⁸ The conversation is fictional, see footnotes 31, 32, 43, 52, 60 & 61.

⁵⁹ Writing developmental framework, Reading development in the primary school, Park LEA.

⁶⁰ Assessment record on Polly's picture and her record of achievement.

⁶¹ Assessment record on Robert's picture and her record of achievement.

Kate planned the next learning steps in Polly and Robert's learning, their next learning goal. She planned the next drawing and writing activity and decided the next learning intention for each child.

Polly's learning intention: *Able to complete the writing on a work sheet independently.*

Robert's learning intention: *Able to complete a work sheet spelling accurately.*

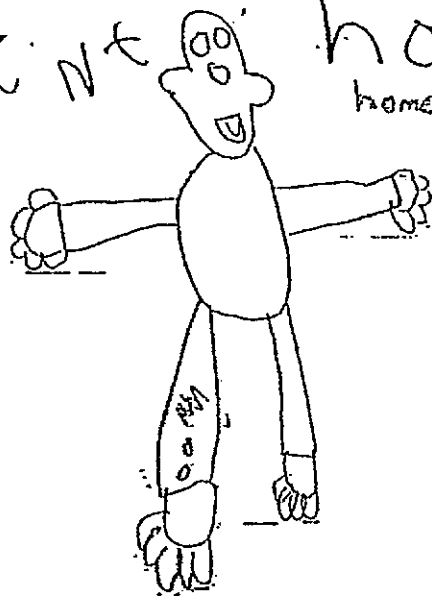
Kate devised a work sheet about their class visit to the local library- *I need to wear these clothes to school / I need to bring this food in my packed lunch.* She made captions with Polly's group to help them with the key words and suggested that Robert and his group used a dictionary to help with the accuracy of the spelling.

On The Way Home From The Park, by Polly.

Class W (Year 2).⁶²

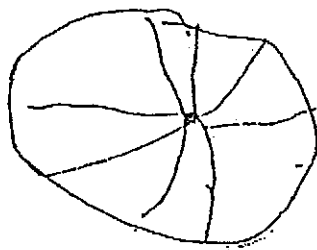
⁶² This is a story taken from Polly's portfolio (May 1997). The caption is the title of her story.

WENT to the ^{Park} ~~pk~~ke
A ^{monkey} ^{mikey} ~~make~~ ^{dropped} dropped ME-
I GOT A God NEK
I WENT ^{home} ~~hom~~ to
tell



ME
my

mummm



The Adventures of Tom Tom the Puppy

by

Robert.

Class W (Year 2).⁶³

⁶³ This is a story taken from Robert's portfolio (May 1997). The caption is the title of the story.

Once upon a time there was puppy and his name was TomTom. He was Seven in age. For colour he had a black back ground and little white spots all over him. One day the puppy and his owner went to the park and TomTom got lost.

2

A kind boy called Paul found TomTom and called him Bobby. The boy who lost him

back at his home asked if he could have another pet, but this

time one you didn't have to walk

every day. At Paul's house

Paul was filling very happy-

he was throwing a ball for

bobby to go and get.

One day Paul and his family went on a picknick, and Bobby went after a rabbit, the rabbit went down a hole. Bobby dug and dug, and when he was nearly there, he stopped. He tried to get out,

4

but he couldn't. Paul and his family, searched and searched

but they couldn't. They went

to the nearest place ^{police} station

and ^{reported} him, they said

he had a Red collar with a black back ground and white

5.

Spots all over him. Back down
in the hole Baby had broken his

collar and got away. He knew

he was close to his old home, so
he remembered his family's smell

and sniffed his way home, but the

excitement was not over yet.

Chapter 2

A lost rabbit.

You know the boy who lost

a puppy well, he had a rabbit and

that got lost too. You might wonder

how his rabbit got lost, well well

tell you. He was putting some food

into the cage and suddenly the
rabbit jumped out.

7 :

The rabbit ran and ran. Stephen

tried to catch the rabbit, but he
couldn't. Stephen said to his

mother, "My rabbit ran away as

well as my dog." Just as he

said that they heard a knock

on the door it was Tom Tom,

"Tom Tom" shouted Stephen.

8

"Now we must find your

rabbit Stephen" said Stephen's mother.

The rabbit was having the time

of his life. He had been round

by a boy named Richard. Richard

was having a party. The rabbit

had been put into a cage

and was drinking away like mad

All though the rabbit was very sad, he was having the time of his life, but suddenly he felt he must find his old home, so he jumped out "I must find my home. I must find my home. I must." he thought. Then he came to a dark house. He thought "I must have a rest. I must."

He stopped outside the gate. With a tremendous bound he flew over the gate, he ran up to the door and scratched on it, a very bad tempered man opened the door. He said 'What's wrong? Then he looked down, he saw the rabbit. The man did not like animals all though he had never seen a animal before. But he was sure he did not like them. 'go away'! he shouted, much to the rabbit's surprise.

But the rabbit did not go away, he jumped in to the house, and the man ran after it, the rabbit ran up stairs, the man did not run up stairs, the man had been told that up stairs was a ghost of horror, and who ever went upstairs, got killed by the ghost.

So he did not go upstairs. He thought great! and with the rabbit, hearing that he came charging down stairs, at top speed. The rabbit jumped out ^{the} window, and got lost again. This time a very nice man found him. His name was Billy.

13 Chapter 3

Billy liked his new pet.

Billy lived 6 miles from Stephen's house. Because he lived by the sea,

so there was no hope of Stephen

and his family finding him,

in less he ran away again. But

he did not run away...not until

20 weeks later.

14

20 weeks later the rabbit thought,

"I won't have it, I must run away

from Billy and find Stephen

again." The rabbit ran half a mile,

and found a house. A boy found

the rabbit and said, "can I keep

him for the night?" his mummy

said "yes." The boy was called

Take. People called him one eyed

Take, from a story from the libr-

ery. The rabbit stayed for one

night, and ran away again.

A kind girl found the rabbit.

Her name was Rebekah. Rebekah liked her new pet and asked if

she could keep the rabbit.

16

Back at Stephen's house, Stephen

asked if he could have a nuther pet

and his mummy said he could, so

they went to the pet shop,

and this time they bought

a cat, they took the cat home,

and decided to call it cuddles,

the cat. I hope the cat does not

17

run away like the other pets

did. At Rebekah's house, it was Rebekah's bad time.

Rebekah did not want to go to

bed, because she was so afraid that her cat would be stolen, but after a little while she fell fast asleep, and

had a dreadful night mer - it was

about her cat being stolen, and

the next day they thought that

18

that had happened. But the cat

had only run away again.

so they went to the nearest

police station, and told the police-

man at the desk what their cat was like. The policeman

said "we will keep a look out for

your cat." "all right" said Rebekah,

in tears. "come on" said Rebekah's daddy "lets go home." As soon

as they got home Rebekah

burst into tears. "your cat will come

back" said Rebekah's daddy. But

it did not come back. It had gone

to a nuther person's house for the

night. Her name was Katy.

20.

By this time the cat was

half a mile back home. Katy

liked her cat very much, and

the cat, her daddy and her

self, played a game where

Katy was in bed, and her

daddy pretended to steal the cat

But when the morning came

they thought that that had
happened! So they phoned the
police, and told them what their
cat was like, and the man said
"we had a cat exactly the same
that's been stolen." "oh rilly," said
Katy. "tell me where you live
and i'll send some police men

22.
round to search the ground
round your house. Our house is
at 22 Stuart Crescent Shirley Croydon
 Surrey." "All right" said the police
"I'll send some police men round
straight away" "All right" said Rebekah.
"can they come here in our car?"
"I don't think there will be
enough room" said Rebekah's daddy.

"All right" said Rebekah. "do you
want a lift?" said Rebekah's daddy.
"no" said the police man "we will
go in a police car." "come on
then" said Rebekah's daddy. "what are
we waiting for lets go" "all right"
said Paul, the police man. "lets
go - but don't go over 90 miles per hour

24.
"ok" said Rebekah's daddy. "race
you. And I bet i'll win" "oh
rilly?" said the police man. "we could
pretend we are going to
so we could go faster than you."
"so that would be cheating" said
Rebekah's daddy. "no" said the police man. "so we
could call Skateland yard. & i'll

25

"oh all right we will not cheat."

"Good" said Rebata's daddy. "Then

we will not take a shot out and
win" "you little cheaters." "I know,

said Rebata's daddy "you pretend you

are going to an inter-joke

and we will take that out and
we will see who gets more fun-

all right?" "all right." said the police

26

non.

What is there to see?

Polly wrote a short story called - *On The Way Home From The Park*. She drew a picture to represent the event. She drew an individualised figure of herself showing the main body parts and features, her injured knee and a roundabout and swing.

Robert wrote a story called - *The Adventures Of Tom Tom The Puppy*. He wrote three chapters 1/2/3 and numbered 26 pages. He introduced some punctuation (full stops and commas and speech marks). He wrote in the printed script and used capital letters appropriately.

How best can we understand what we see?

Kate planned an independent writing activity for the NC KS1 SATs writing task. The children previously wrote a *story plan* that included: *Who is the story about? How will the story begin? Where does the story take place? What will happen in the story? How will it end?* Kate previously shared storybooks with the less able children and suggested that they could write their own story based on one of the storybooks, but put themselves as the main character.

Polly liked the children's story *On the way home* (Jill Murphy) and based her own story on it and called it *On the way home from the park*. The more able children had a free choice of what to write about and Robert called his story *The adventures of Tom Tom the puppy*.

Polly enjoyed this writing activity and completed the task independently. She understood that writing represented the sequence of events not just the drawing. She added the drawings after the writing to emphasise the significant events in the story-her hurt knee, a ride on the roundabout and the swings. She wrote with confidence something quite new. She used mainly lower case letters only a few letters are reversed *n, h, a & y* and she left spaces between her words. She wrote

familiar words *went, to, the, me & mummy* and used both visual and auditory clues, initial and final consonants and some vowels to spell the words. Polly used the story plan to sequence her story.⁶⁴ She then enjoyed reading her story and talking about the picture to Kate, the school secretary and the head teacher.

Robert was very keen to his own story but he didn't want his story to end and wrote during the course of the day with reluctant stops for play time and lunch! His writing showed a clear printed script (his preferred style when writing long stories). He confidently used capital and lower case letters appropriately and experimented with speech marks and apostrophes. He developed the story line following the story plan and used detail, humour and a variety of characters (many named after his friends). Robert didn't want to illustrate his story (he wanted it to be a *real* story with chapters like the stories that he enjoyed reading. He enthusiastically read his story to the class at a number of story times and it was enjoyed by all and ended with a spontaneous round of applause!⁶⁵

Kate was required to assess Polly and Robert's writing task using the NC KS1 SATs writing guidance sheet assessment criteria.⁶⁶ The two writing tasks were internally moderated with the two year-group colleagues and then externally moderated by the Park LEA English advisor. The two children's attainment in the writing SAT was judged to be:

Polly: Level 1

(Level Description English AT3, writing, Level 1: Pupils' writing communicates meaning through simple words and phrases. In their reading or writing, pupils begin to show awareness of how full stops are used).

It was agreed, by all the assessors that Polly's writing met most aspects of the Level Description for Level 1.⁶⁷

Robert: Level 3

⁶⁴ Writing developmental framework, Park LEA.

⁶⁵ As footnote above.

⁶⁶ NC KS1 SATs writing guidance sheet, Key Stage 1 assessment arrangements 1997, SCAA.

⁶⁷ Polly's attainment in SATs was recorded on her work and her record of achievement, and reported to her parents, July 1997.

(Level Description English AT3, Writing, Level 3: Pupils' writing is often organised, imaginative and clear. The main features of different forms of writing are used appropriately, beginning to be adapted to different readers. Sequences of sentences extend ideas logically and words are chosen for variety and interest. The basic grammatical structure of sentences is usually correct. Spelling is usually accurate, including that of common, polysyllabic words. Punctuation to mark sentences, full stops, capital letters and question marks is used accurately. Handwriting is joined and legible).

The consensus of the year 2 teachers was that Robert's writing met most aspects of the Level Description for Level 3 but the external moderator felt that his writing was only borderline Level 3. She insisted that his previous writing, (from his English books) was scrutinised and that he copied out a section of his story using joined up writing to confirm that he was able to do it, (there were examples of joined up writing in his books). Only then was the external moderator satisfied that Robert's writing demonstrated Level 3!^{68 69}

How can we put our understanding to good use?

Kate planned the next learning steps in Polly and Robert's story writing based on their enthusiasm and the original story plans that they had devised.

Polly and Robert's learning intention: *Able to write a story for different audiences.*

Kate gave Polly and Robert opportunities to write stories and make them into books including different ways to illustrate them, (both, as an adult led and independent activities). Polly and Robert wrote a number of different stories with different audiences in mind e.g. writing a story to read to the nursery children and giving it to them for their book corner. Writing an adventure story about life on a narrow boat following the class visit to Camden Lock and their boat trip on the Jenny Wren.

⁶⁸ Robert's attainment in SATs was recorded on her work and her record of achievement, and reported to his parents, July 1997.

⁶⁹ Cross-reference Chapter 5 Learning from Assessment and Pupil Data: exploring the evidence.

The End

Appendix 5
Developmental Profile

Entry Profile for Academic Year 1997/98 Appendix 5

Admission Number:.....

Surname:.....

Date of Birth:.....

First Name:.....

Gender:.....

School:.....

Date of Entry:.....

Development Profile

Please tick ☒ appropriate Stage box and enter the corresponding number in the final column

1) Personal and Social Development	Stage 1	Stage 2	Stage 3	Stage 4	Stage 5	Number
a) Independence						
b) Relationship with peers and awareness of others						
c) Relationship with adults						
d) Awareness and sensitivity						

Please tick ☒ appropriate Stage box and enter the corresponding number in the final column

2) Response to Learning	Stage 1	Stage 2	Stage 3	Stage 4	Stage 5	Number
a) Concentration on child's chosen activity						
b) Curiosity and enthusiasm						
c) Memory and recall						
d) Decision making						

Please tick ☒ appropriate Stage box and enter the corresponding number in the final column

3) Communication in English	Stage 1	Stage 2	Stage 3	Stage 4	Stage 5	Number
a) Understanding instructions						
b) Extent and range of vocabulary						
c) Use of language						
d) Speaking and listening						

Please tick ☒ appropriate Stage box and enter the corresponding number in the final column

4) Early Writing and Reading	Stage 1	Stage 2	Stage 3	Stage 4	Stage 5	Number
a) Process of early writing						
b) Attitudes to writing						
c) Use of letters						
d) Composition (using an adult as scribe when necessary)						
e) Print awareness						
f) Attitude to books (in English or heritage language)						
g) Interaction with books						
h) Rhythm and rhyme						
j) Use of story props						

Please tick ☒ appropriate Stage box and enter the corresponding number in the final column

5) Mathematics	Stage 1	Stage 2	Stage 3	Stage 4	Stage 5	Number
a) Mathematical language and communication (i)						
(ii)						
(iii)						
b) Using and applying Mathematical understanding (i)						
(ii)						
(iii)						

Please enter the score number in the box

6) Draw a Person

Teacher's signature:

Class:

Date:

Appendix 6

Soon After The Storm: A Tale Of An Ofsted Inspection

Soon After
The
Storm

The Tale of an Ofsted Inspection

Introduction

The story tells the tale of an Ofsted inspection that took place at Oak Tree Infant School. The Ofsted inspection took place in January 1997, when the school was deemed to require special measures or judged to be a failing school. The Ofsted Handbook (1995) states:

The purpose of inspection is to identify strengths and weaknesses so that school may improve the quality of education they provide and raise the educational standards achieved by their pupils (p8) ... Systematic collection of evidence is at the heart of inspection and resulting report should be as fair and just a representation of the school as possible (p19).

This story explores the meanings of this statement and it is a personal account of the head teacher throughout the Ofsted inspection process (before, during and after the inspection) and related documentation, diary extracts, records of conversations with colleagues and professionals support this personal account.

The author is concerned to maintain confidentiality of the LEA, Ofsted inspection team and the school community (school staff and the governors, parents/ carers and children). Therefore she has substituted fictitious names for all the people included in this account. She has used the animal and bird characters of the children's story *After the Storm*, by Nick Butterworth (Collins, 1992). The main characters are Squirrel/Head teacher, Fox 1/chair of governors, Hedgehog/ Ofsted registered inspector and Mole/LEA assigned school inspector. The other characters are grouped- Birds/school staff, Rabbits/1-280 children, Hares/1-500 parents/carers, Fox/2-16 governors, Badgers/Lea inspectors and advisors, Mice/1-5 Ofsted inspectors Mice 6-12 HMI and school improvement team.

The story focuses on a large oak tree that is blown down in a storm and would appear to fit in with the name *Oak Tree Infant School* that has been adopted for the infant school. The story is set in a park, which is also an appropriate location as Oak Tree infant school had extensive grounds and many oak trees and similar

birds and animals. That is where the similarity with the real story ends as the real story line has not been followed. The story line for this account is the events throughout the Ofsted process.

Throughout the story there are references to the three sections of the Ofsted Handbook. They are:

- I. The Ofsted Framework: Inspection requirements
- II. Guidance on inspection requirements, the conduct of inspections
- III. The inspection schedule and guidance on its use.

The references are made in an attempt to clarify the conflict, contradictions and confusions that arose during the Ofsted inspection process. The references are numbered, underlined and typed in *italic*. They are followed with additional information, expressed in the author's feelings and included with her questions as she continues to seek the truth, the fairness and the significance of the situation. These are typed with single spacing.

Setting the scene...

April 1996... One quiet afternoon, squirrel realised that she still had the pile of brown envelopes from the morning's post, unopened on her desk, (not unusual, as she found opening letters particularly difficult, as she had one arm in plaster at the time). A gentle flick through the pile showed her the familiar logo of OFSTED in the corner of one brown envelope. Instinct told her that she'd better open this one first- What's this more papers to read? No, a letter informing her that Oak Tree was to be included in the Ofsted's programme of school inspections, for the school year 1996-1997. Also included was lengthy questionnaire to fill in about the characteristics of the school, the school activities planned for the forthcoming year, suggested times when the school could or could not accommodate the inspection. Squirrel had expected to get this letter at some point soon, as she had anticipated that the Ofsted inspection would take place at some point during the next school year 1996-1997. She had already been planning with staff, the extensions to the school's documentation and curriculum policies, since the previous January. Squirrel completed the questionnaire and sent it back to Ofsted and waited for the news of the inspection team, the date and length of the inspection.

OK so far, no conflict, contradictions and confusions!

Part 1 - Before the Ofsted Inspection

About 2 months later, July 1996... a telephone from Hedgehog " Hello, Squirrel. Can you guess why I am calling?" Squirrel wonders why she is calling. There was slight pause on Squirrel's part as she tried to think of half an intelligent answer rather than sounding completely stupid and baffled and it was getting near the end of the summer term anyway! Surely Hedgehog didn't want Squirrel to get involved

with her in another Park LEA mathematics project, (Squirrel had previously worked for Hedgehog as an advisor on a mathematics project in 1987) or even join the Park LEA working party with councillors for raising standards in mathematics. Squirrel replied " No, not really, I haven't got time to do the second cycle of John's head teacher appraisal with you this term!" (Squirrel had shared John's appraisal with Hedgehog the previous year and was wondering when the next stage would come). Hedgehog continued, " I'm ringing about your Ofsted inspection. It's to be a Park LEA team and I'm to be the registered inspector. How do you feel about it? Squirrel took a sharp intake of air, before she replied, probably rather weakly, "Ah, that's a surprise to have a local team, especially as all the inspectors know me (Squirrel had worked in Park Lea for twenty-six years) and as you know Oak tree. Oh, by the way. Can I ask who the other inspectors will be? Hedgehog went on to explain, " Well, at the moment the inspection will be 5 inspectors. There's Mouse 1 (female) the early years inspector, there's Mouse 2 (female) the SEN inspector, there's Mouse 3 (male) the humanities inspector, there's Mouse 4 (female) the visual arts inspector and lastly Mouse 5 the lay inspector who works part-time for the Play Group association.

(Mouse 1, the early years inspector, was the attached inspector for the school's nursery class. Mouse 2, the SEN inspector was previously deputy head teacher of a local MLD special school, which Squirrel had previously worked with to provide work experience for its secondary students. Mouse 3, the humanities inspector, had a secondary background and worked with local councillors and union representatives on a committee of which Squirrel attended. Mouse 4, the visual arts inspector, with a secondary and further education background had recently worked with the nursery teacher on a working party developing an art curriculum document).

Hedgehog continued, " I'd like to make a short pre-inspection visit to meet the staff and make the domestic arrangements. Is that OK? Can I come in to see you next week? Squirrel replied, " Yes, of course. What about next Thursday morning?" Hedgehog finished by saying, " It will be nice to see you again Squirrel, see you next Thursday at 9.30 a.m." Squirrel felt that she needed a nice distraction and some fresh air to draw breadth! She went down to the nursery to help with the children who were in the outdoor play area. Fortunately her presence there was quit usual and she soon got involved with the children. But what did she need to do next? How would the staff react to the news of a local secondary biased team with Hedgehog as the registered inspector for Ofsted? How would they react to her coming in next week? So near the end of the summer term, in the middle of writing annual reports, getting ready for open evenings, new children visiting, year 2 children visiting Oak Tree junior school and planning the activity day for the children.

About one day later another telephone call, this time from Fox 1, " Hello, Squirrel, I've just hear about the inspection team. Can I come and see you tomorrow? Squirrel replied, " Yes, that's fine, see you tomorrow". When Fox 1 came in she was obviously agitated. "My husband is worried about Mouse 1, the early years inspector, being on the team because she knows the school. The others are al right because they don't. Squirrel gently replied, " Yes, whilst I can understand you concern about Mouse 1, she is the only inspector who has early years experience and the others have a secondary background and they appear so wary of young children and the particular organisation of the classrooms. Each of the staff had worked with all the inspectors in someway, either on curriculum projects or INSET".

(Squirrel had to try to answer very tactfully as Fox 1's husband had considerable influence over the Park LEA and tried to advise/influence the activities of the

school governors and the school. Squirrel needed to seek advice from Mole, before committing herself more definitely. She felt she was walking on eggshells).

Squirrel thought that it was time to phone Mole, " Hello, Mole, has Fox 1 rung you about the inspection?" Mole replied, " Yes, we had a chat about it. Anyway, how do you feel about it Squirrel?" " Well, I'm very surprised that we are having a local team with Hedgehog as the registered inspector. I've worked with her and I've worked in Park LEA for a long time and they must all know something about Oak tree and me. Fox 1 wants me to request that we have another inspector instead of Mouse 1. Who else is there with early years or even primary experience? The other primary inspector in the LEA was the assigned inspector before you. So what can I do? Mole thought for a moment, " I suggest if you want to keep Mouse 1 on the team you keep the rest of the team".

Now to break the news to the staff! Well, Squirrel went to tell Owl 1 first, armed with a mug of coffee and a chocolate biscuit. Owl 1 could read Squirrel like a book, she probably said " Oh, that's the best piece of news you've told me this week and you won't need to tell me anything else until next term". Squirrel thought carefully whilst getting ready for the week's staff meeting- Should she slip in the Ofsted news in the diary update, visitors coming to school or AOB? At this stage in the term, whatever she did, the news was sure to go down like a lead balloon! Squirrel had previously told the staff about the Ofsted letter, and to expect the inspection at some point in the next school year and the staff had already worked that bit out. Anyway Squirrel re-arranged the agenda to talk about the Ofsted inspection team at the beginning of the staff meeting. She had to know everyone's feelings and she needed time to talk it through with everybody there. The staff quite understandably raised all their reservations that Squirrel had raised with Fox 1 and Mole. When Squirrel shared Mole's advice- everybody appeared to accept the situation and the

visit of Hedgehog the following week. Also they shared the details of Park LEA's pre-Ofsted INSET package that would take place next term.

Reference 1:

Code of conduct for inspectors: Inspectors should evaluate the work of the school objectively (p9).

The inspection has to be undertaken without bias or preconceptions about the school. No Inspector should be part in an inspection if they have a close relationship with the school. Inspectors must be absolutely impartial, and be seen to be impartial, in their treatment of all those with whom they come into contact. Judgements must be based on sound evidence, which has been carefully weighed, collected from a range of sources and firmly based on the criteria on the inspection schedule. Inspectors must be careful to avoid making premature judgements (p8).

The inspection team was a local team, from within Park LEA, and all the inspectors had prior knowledge of Oak Tree, members of staff and governors. Similarly Oak Tree community had prior knowledge of the inspection team.

Squirrel had strong feelings of reservations about the Ofsted inspection team:

How could the inspectors evaluate the work of the school objectively?

Equally how could the school evaluate the work of the inspection team objectively?

Reference 2:

An inspection must be carried out by a registered inspector assisted by a team of trained inspectors which is sufficient and competent to conduct the inspection... In the inspection of primary and special school, and pupil referral units, (PRUs), where the teams are small there must be a combination of phase and subject expertise and without undue fragmentation of the team. Primary school inspection teams must be competent to inspect the full age range present in the school, including nursery provision (p11).

Reference 3:

Quality Assurance Requirements – To ensure that inspections are conducted to the highest standard, contractors for inspections are required to submit to Ofsted details of their quality assurance arrangements. These must cover: the induction, support, selection and deployment of inspectors (p11)

The inspection team included only one inspector who was nursery/primary specialist inspector. Although the other five inspectors had received the Ofsted primary/secondary inspection training, and 2 had received the SEN training. This information was taken from their CVs.

Squirrel had more feelings of reservation about the Ofsted inspection system, procedures for inspection contractors and the inspection team:

Were the team of trained inspectors sufficient and competent to inspect the full age range present in the school, including nursery provision?

Did the contractors for inspections submit to Ofsted details of their quality assurance arrangement?

How did Ofsted check these arrangements?

Hedgehog's visit to Oak Tree was quite brisk and efficient, a brief visit to all the classrooms to meet the staff and get an idea of the layout of the building. – but a pity there was no time to talk to the children! Then Squirrel received some sad, end of term news. Owl 1 came to Squirrel with news of her poor health due to a check up at the hospital, she needed a hysterectomy (ASAP) there could be problems and she'd been put on the priority list for admission to hospital. What should she do because of Ofsted? " well you've got to have the operation, let's wait until you get the date and then we can make plans. You might be better and back in time for Ofsted anyway!" What else could Squirrel say.

Interlude for the summer holidays & beginning of the autumn term 1996...

Oak Tree just about opened on time (2.09.96) after yet more maintenance work to the boilers in the summer holidays, but no heating or hot water. Only cold water and half the toilets in use- the reception/ nursery toilets but no toilets for year 1 and year 2, and which children did we have in school, year 1 and year 2! Long walks to the loo were the order of the day, as the toilets were the other end of the building. A really great start to the new school year and new term!

More staffing news... Squirrel received the resignation from Swallow 2 (one of the NNEB's in the middle of the summer holidays). She was trained to work with the speech and language therapist for the school based speech and language programme. How was Squirrel going to get a replacement? In fact a new Swallow

started work at the beginning of November, and Oak Tree had to do its own training for her on the job. Robin 1 (school secretary) had been notified that she would be required for Jury Service within the next three months - wonderful! Just when Squirrel had planned to get all the paper work ready for Ofsted after she had got all the new children's personal details on the computer and included them on the computerised register system. Owl 1 returned to school with no news about her admission to hospital (she was understandably very emotional and physically fragile) Sparrow 1 was unable to return to school as she had broken her leg whilst on holiday. Squirrel phoned Mole, 6 September, to discuss staffing issues and arrange a date for his visit to school to set the pre-Ofsted INSET programme for the autumn. She also requested an additional day's inspection of Oak Tree involving him and Badger 1 for classroom observations.

Squirrel received the second brown Ofsted envelope about this time explaining the length and approximate dates for the inspection. The school was to receive a 5-day inspection that would include the nursery, school and the attached behaviour unit. This was factually incorrect, as whilst Oak Tree worked closely with Park LEA behaviour unit to re-integrate or maintain EBD children in school and their staff worked in school, Oak Tree did not have its own unit attached to the school. Though that would have been very useful!

So Squirrel notified Ofsted by phone and pointed out the inaccuracy of the data that they had returned to Oak Tree. Squirrel asked if it would be possible to have the same amount of inspection time as other similarly sized schools. This was agreed and Oak Tree was allocated 3 days in the first half of the spring term. Squirrel actually stated on the first Ofsted form that new children would be admitted into reception classes then, and had shown a preference for the second half of the spring term.

Reference 4:

Time allocations for inspections... In order to cover the work of the school adequately, a specified minimum number of inspection days, including those of the lay inspector, will be spent on direct inspection. The minimum tariff of days on site is set out on the relevant Instruction to Tenders (p11).

Squirrel felt surprised by this error and hoped that the information was forwarded to the registered inspector.

How was this error made on the number of days for direct inspection of Oak Tree?

Why was the correction not forwarded to the registered inspector?

Squirrel had a meeting (10. 09.96) with Fox 1 when they talked about the current and expected staffing situation, her conversations with Ofsted – the new length of inspection and proposed dates, her conversation with Mole and all the details about the pre-Ofsted INSET for staff and governors. Then Mole came to school (1.10.96) and he planned the LEA one-day inspection with Squirrel. They talked about the agenda for the day – morning classroom observations in the year 2 classes and in the afternoon feedback with Owl 1 and Squirrel, discussion about the importance of them continuing to analyse the SATs data, for the cohorts 1993-1996 etc more work done on it, and when to start the Pre Ofsted INSET. He suggested the use of the Ofsted training video for classroom observations (Ofsted only had junior classroom situations on the training video, and he didn't feel that mattered – Squirrel did feel that it mattered and she knew all the birds would question this too). Squirrel and Mole planned the senior management and curriculum interviews with all the Foxes. Squirrel pursued the idea, and the value, of Oak Tree having an additional day's inspection by himself and a Badger with primary school experience.

One or two days later Squirrel had a phone call from Mole. He told her that he had a problem finding a Badger to help him do the day's inspection, because they were either involved with other Ofsted inspections or they knew the school, or they were part of the Ofsted inspection team. (At that time Park LEA had vacancies for primary inspectors and the advisory service, as the education department was

being re-structured and the roles of the inspectors and schools' advisory service were being re-defined). But Badger 1 the senior primary inspector would be able to find a day – would this help? The only day that they could both manage was 31.10.96. Was that OK or was it too late! What choice did Squirrel have? She respected Badger 1's judgements, she was very thorough and direct and honest and the Birds would certainly all know exactly what they needed to do after her visit and that's what Squirrel needed. So the date was put in her diary.

The autumn term continues... Squirrel received a letter of resignation on 16.10.06 from Thrush 2 (a reception teacher) and IT co-ordinator following her successful interview at another school. Now it increasingly looked as though Squirrel would be having 2 temporary agency teaching staff for the Ofsted inspection in January. She did consider taking one of the classes herself. Squirrel rang a teaching agency and found out the availability of agency teachers and put in a provisional request for 2 agency teachers for the spring term. She agreed to pay for an additional week at the end of term. The new birds would then have a chance to work with the current birds, get familiar with the school's curriculum planning and procedures, get to know the rabbits and the hares and be involved with the arrangements for the Ofsted inspection in January.

All the birds attended the staff training day (28.10.96). In the morning they watched the Ofsted training video and in the afternoon Mole set the scene for the Ofsted inspection procedures etc and set the dates for curriculum co-ordinators interviews, 13.11.96. Then Robin 1 was called for jury service. Squirrel managed to employ Hare 1 to do the basics in the school office – at least she didn't have to collect the dinner money! Swallow 1 started working in the reception year so Oak Tree re-started the speech and language programme. But what about that Ofsted paper work!

Then 31.10.96 came... the one-day Park LEA inspection of Oak Tree with Mole and Badger 1. We certainly found out what we still needed to do! A very busy day that involved dual classroom observations, management interviews and feedback. Whilst everybody appeared fairly positive and together about the forthcoming Ofsted, Squirrel felt they needed a different perspective, a lighter approach to their preparations so she arranged for input from Badger 2 at a staff meeting, 18.11.96. Squirrel knew that she would be able to generate open discussion and people would express their feelings. Squirrel felt this would enable them to complete their preparations for Ofsted before December when Christmas activities and excitement would be upon them. The teachers got immersed with the children again – after all Ofsted was not supposed to interfere with the normal running of Oak Tree.

Only Squirrel had to get the paperwork ready for Ofsted by the beginning of December. As well as delays with Robin 1's duties, it actually became too much for the office computers, she had to put in an order for two new ones and hoped for immediate delivery. But no such luck! The delivery date would be the end of January or even the beginning of February. The foxes were unhappy with the financial outlay. But the computers were essential for the efficiency of the school and Squirrel showed that the potential savings to the staffing budget by using the insurance money for the long-term sickness of the two birds would cover the cost. So she confirmed the order for the office computers. Good job Squirrel's home computer worked!

About the middle of November... Owl 1 was notified by the hospital that her operation had been cancelled until further notice. What could she do? In fact she arranged to have the operation done privately and was admitted to hospital

13.12.96. At least that was the end of the waiting for both her and Oak Tree. But she definitely wouldn't be in school for Ofsted. Squirrel immediately telephoned the teaching agency and arranged for CVs of any strong birds with experience of teaching at KS1, and an understanding of lively young birds, not phased by the thought of an Ofsted inspection - quite a tall order!

Squirrel and Owl 1 interviewed quite a lot of birds from the agency and decided upon two newly qualified teachers who appeared very enthusiastic, not phased by the forthcoming Ofsted. This was their first job and first school since leaving college (one from Kingston University and the other from Dublin), so one had some knowledge of the national Curriculum and one did not. One was early years trained and one was junior trained. What a good job they could come into school for a week before the end of term! Squirrel and Owl 1 agreed that Owl 1 would begin her sick leave 6.12.96, a week before her operation.

Reference 5:

Quality of education provided – Teaching – Supply teachers:

Teaching by supply teachers is part of the provision made by the school and should be inspected as such. Supply teachers will not necessarily have close knowledge of the pupils. The quality of the teaching they offer may be affected by the quality of the information the work the class has been doing and should be doing and by whether they are expected to teach a one-off lesson, with or without materials provided. Where the incidence of supply teaching is significant, inspectors should note whether it has a bearing on the quality of provision and on pupils' attainment and progress (p73).

Squirrel was pleased with the provision that she had made for the induction programme for these two new teachers?

But she was rather worried about the short time before the inspection:

How quickly could they gain a thorough knowledge of the children before the Ofsted inspection?

Did they have a secure knowledge and understanding of the subjects or areas they had to teach?

Would this have a bearing on the quality of provision and on the pupils' attainment and progress?

Squirrel reported the SATs (1996) results to the Governor's Curriculum Subcommittee [(25.11.96) 3 Foxes attended]. She had previously discussed her approach with Mole. They both thought it would be a good idea to widen the discussion not just the rabbit's attainment in SATs but their progress from entry

into school. So this was to be their first opportunity to share the findings from their enquiry about the children's attainment and progress. Pity Mole couldn't come to the meeting! Owl 1 decided she wanted to present the findings of the enquiry – that was fine by Squirrel as Owl 1 had done most of the actual analysis and after all she was the school's assessment co-ordinator and far more expert than Squirrel and familiar with the finer details. This was also her last week in school before she began her sick leave. But Fox 3 (the chair of the curriculum committee) began to ask specific questions about the SATs results, he was following a very detailed pre-written script and was quite aggressive in his approach. Squirrel had to suggest that their analysis examined all the points he was making and actually provided informed answers to them, it also gave everybody a detailed, clear picture of the characteristics of the school and the educational needs of the children.

Squirrels had a mixture of feelings:

Both Owl 1 and Squirrel felt very angry at this reaction to the presentation of the enquiry. Squirrel felt very sorry for Owl 1. Squirrel knew she had really struggled this term not only as a class teacher. Squirrel knew how much work Owl 1 had put into their enquiry, how much time she had spent analysing the data and typing it up, so that it was a very presentable piece of work for the governors. In addition, it was Owl 1's contribution to Ofsted, as she wouldn't be in school – though she had muted the idea of coming into school to present her work and her role as deputy head teacher, to the inspectors. Squirrel told her to wait and see- although secretly she wanted her to do that!

The next day Mole rang Squirrel to ask how the meeting went – he seemed resigned to her comments and disappointed. He had put a lot of work into the enquiry too. Mole visited the school (4.12.96) to improve the presentation of the school development plan for Ofsted. He came to discuss the efficiency section of Ofsted, look at presentation of school budget and attend the evening meeting with governors to discuss school aims etc and interview individual foxes. Squirrel had a meeting (5.12.96) with Park LEA's financial advisor to explain presentation budget

as required by Ofsted. This was different from budget headings that LEA and school used. No fox was able to attend this meeting.

9.12.96 was the first day of new temporary senior management team and when Hedgehog came to school to meet Fox 1, Pigeon 1 and Squirrel, Squirrel knew that Hedgehog had taken compassionate leave and had returned for this meeting. Also she was surprised at the change in staff, "What a time to take over as acting deputy!" Squirrel was sure this was meant to put Pigeon 1 at ease, but she sensed it made her more nervous. Squirrel quickly added that Pigeon 1 was already very involved with management decisions (which she was) and this could be a good professional development opportunity for her – what else could she say to boost her confidence! The meeting continued briskly explaining the formalities that everybody would need to follow and it was agreed to delay the Ofsted inspection a week. It would definitely be the week beginning 20.01.97. But horror of horrors! Ofsted had not informed Hedgehog about the change in length of the inspection, (a reduction from 5 days to 3 days). She was very agitated and had obviously planned the schedule for the inspectors. She expressed a personal dislike of 3-day inspections-there wasn't enough time and everybody gets pressured. Great that's reassuring! Squirrel tried to calm the situation and gently gave her a copy of the letter from Ofsted, which confirmed that Oak Tree was to have a 3-day inspection. This would be 20-22 January. Quite a tense situation!

Reference 6:

Refer to Reference 4 – Time allocation for inspections (p11).

The delay of the inspection was for four reasons:

- 1. Squirrel had previously requested a change of date to allow the children and the staff to settle into school after the beginning of term, (6.01.97) and to give them time to take down the Christmas decorations and start some new displays.*
- 2. To complete the youngest reception children's admission, before the inspection.*
- 3. To allow Squirrel to arrange the circulation of the parents Ofsted questionnaires in the New Year, rather than with their children's Christmas cards.*

4. *To have the pre-inspection parents meeting with the Ofsted inspectors, 14 January. This was instead of having to arrange things in the middle of the Christmas activities.*

5. *Sadly, these arrangements were to accommodate the extension of compassionate leave for Hedgehog.*

Squirrel delivered the school documents for Ofsted to Park LEA department (16.12.96). This included the completed Ofsted Head Teachers Form (HP).

Squirrel had been sent the secondary head's form, so wondered why she had found it difficult to complete, and she had to wait for its replacement.

Reference 7:

Information, which will be, required from the school before the inspection... other information the school wishes to be considered, including any documents about, and the outcomes of, any school self-evaluation activities. (p 22).

Squirrel felt really optimistic about the school's evaluation report and was hopeful that the inspectors would find the report on their enquiry into the children's attainment and progress as a good example of explaining the school's context and its commitment to self-evaluation and raising standards?

Spring Term, 7 January 1997... Sparrow 1 gave Squirrel her written resignation but said she could stay until after Ofsted. She was still having trouble with her injured leg. Squirrel sent out the parents' Ofsted questionnaires. Some were returned to school, some in envelopes some not and some put in the collection box for the Sainsbury vouchers! Then Squirrel had a phone call from Hedgehog who thanked Squirrel for delivering the school documents, but would Squirrel be able to provide more detailed timetables for the classes? They did not highlight the separate NC subjects clearly enough. Squirrel knew that other infant schools had experienced this from other secondary biased inspection teams. The teachers were not very pleased, but we produced copies of the timetables that made more explicit reference to the separate NC subjects. Hedgehog received them on 16.1.97.

Secondly, she was concerned how the team was going to inspect the 4-year-olds and the 5-year-olds separately. (The quality of education and provision for 4 year olds in nursery and reception classes was a new Ofsted initiative). Could the rabbits wear different colour stickers/badges for three days? Squirrel was very unhappy at this arrangement. Hedgehog could not understand that this would put extra pressure on the birds, hares and the rabbits. It was different from the normal routine, many rabbits were new to the nursery or reception class. The rabbits might forget or lose their badge and get upset. They might swap their badge with a friend, and what would they do with their badge when they stripped off for PE. Squirrel thought it best to discuss it with the birds and Hedgehog suggested that she rung her back. The teachers were very against stickers/badges idea - they remembered the large pictorial birthday charts in each class, and felt the rabbits would know their ages and would enjoy telling the mice this. Squirrel rang Hedgehog back and she reluctantly agreed with the suggestions.

Hedgehog and Squirrel talked about the arrangements for the Hare's meeting with the Mice. Would it help and would she like Squirrel to be at school to meet her and Mouse 4? Would she like Squirrel to introduce them to the Hares before she withdrew from the meeting? (The head teacher and/or chair of governors are not allowed to be present at this meeting). Squirrel had suggested this for two reasons. Squirrel felt it would be more welcoming for the Mice they could probably do with a cup of coffee before the meeting. Also, the Hares that came to the meeting would be uncomfortable by a formal meeting with strangers, particularly inspectors, (rent, housing, police, tax and education inspectors could be lumped together under the same umbrella). She sounded very happy with Squirrel's suggestions.

Reference 8:

The Parents' Meeting – The Parents' Meeting is an opportunity to inform parents about the inspection and to fulfil the statutory requirements to seek parents' views on the school. The registered inspector should be

accompanied by a member of the inspection team to record the views of parents...The head teacher or chair of the appropriate authority may, of course, wish to be present at the start of the meeting to introduce the registered inspector. (p26).

14 January 1996... The day of the Parents meeting with Ofsted inspectors. Squirrel gave Hedgehog the 51 completed Ofsted questionnaires out of the 280 sent out, (I have just noticed an error on the Ofsted report because it says 218 were sent out, that can't be right - bit late to correct it now!). Squirrel, Hedgehog and Mouse 4 had a coffee and then went to the hall to meet the parents - 13 parents and one little girl called Rabbit 4, aged 5 years, who had come with her dad. Good job Squirrel had offered to come, somebody needed to do the child minding! The meeting lasted about an hour. Squirrel then had coffee with Hedgehog and Mouse 4, who shared the discussions from the parents meeting. They gave Squirrel positive feedback from the parents -which was very encouraging because everybody had spent a lot of time encouraging and involving the parents with their children's education and including them in as many ways as possible during the school day.

Squirrel went into school (Sunday, 1901.97), There was a community let during the weekend, NTC (Naval Training Corp) that organised an activity group for children 6-11 years. She needed to check they had tidied up, the rooms had been cleaned, and the inspectors chocolate biscuits and coffee cups were still there!

Part 2 - During the Ofsted Inspection

20 January 1997 - Day 1... Squirrel arrived at school fairly early to put the kettles on ready for the introductory meeting with the staff and Hedgehog and Mouse 1-5. Check the messages -no staff phoned in sick that was something!

8.15 a.m. Coffee is made and the meeting gets under way. A quick welcome from Squirrel, each subject inspector and each curriculum co-ordinator arranged a time for their meetings. It had been agreed that all full-time birds would meet the mice

after school, as the birds wanted their breaks and lunchtimes free. All part-time birds would meet their mouse on Tuesday lunchtime or after school. The foxes would meet the mice Tuesday afternoon and after school. Representatives from the community would be in school Tuesday morning 11.00-12.00. These included the community policeman, school nurse, a community support worker who was also affiliated to one of local churches, and parent governors. Squirrel would be available during the school day as well –she had 13 meetings, some planned and some conversations on the hoof with the mice during the 3 days. Everybody was now in Ofsted model!

9.00 a.m. Well, Hedgehog and the Mice were already around the school – somewhere! Maybe in the classrooms with the parents and the children, sharing books.

9.30 a.m. Squirrel went to a reception class to check on the attendance of a little rabbit. On the way she met Hedgehog " Squirrel I'm supposed to have observed a mathematics lesson, but it was really a language lesson, can she do a maths lesson for me."

Squirrel was somewhat taken aback with this comment and replied, "Perhaps the bird was introducing some new specialist maths words with the rabbits- it's a new topic and she might need to do that as the rabbits are very young and they may be unfamiliar with the words. We need to put an emphasis of language development here, as a significant proportion of the rabbits have delayed language-poor comprehension and/or expressive language. " (Thrush 1, was the year group leader and the new maths co-ordinator and Hedgehog was the inspector for maths).

Reference 9:

Code of conduct for inspectors – Inspectors should carry out their work with professionalism, integrity and courtesy. All inspectors need to recognise that the process of inspection is demanding for schools, and that it can be very stressful. The way in which the inspection is conducted should contribute to reducing any stress to a minimum. The conduct of inspectors

should instil confidence, minimise disruption and anxiety and ensure the co-operation of staff and members of the appropriate authority. Inspectors should be well briefed and treat all those involved with the school with respect. (p18).

Squirrel had feelings of surprise and horror:

Squirrel thought that Hedgehog's comment was very harsh and premature since that was her first lesson observation, and Squirrel didn't envy poor Thrush 1, when it came to her subject interview.

What a way to start an inspection, how could Squirrel reduce the anxiety of both the inspectors and the staff?

10.15 a.m. Assembly. The Birds looked extremely tense and the Rabbits were restless (not unusual on a Monday morning). There were the three year 1 classes and one year 2 class. Two of the year 2 classes were having their swimming lessons and the year R classes had a separate assembly – so a planned story with a moral, and a continuing echo of a Rabbit's voice " my shoe lace is undone". Mouse 3, questioned Squirrel on the absence of the two year 2 classes and what provision did the school make for their missed assembly and collective worship.

Squirrel occupied herself for the rest of the morning, and hid in the dining hall at lunchtime, lunch duty became a favoured activity!

2.00 p.m. Panic button sounds in Squirrel's room. All classrooms were connected to Squirrel's room by an ancient but effective panic button system. A buzzer indicates some form of emergency in a classroom. Robin 1 and Squirrel looked at each other in horror –an intruder, a serious accident to a child? What could it be? The light on the control board indicated the nursery. Squirrel speedily went there. Enter the room calmly, in case a Mouse is there. Squirrel catches the eye of Starling, (the nursery teacher, an NQT who was appointed to the school in September), who was surprised to see her. Squirrel enquired if there was a problem as the buzzer has sounded. Both she and Swallow 1, (the NNEB) said everything was fine. The Rabbits, (nursery children) are too small to reach the buzzer. Then Squirrel looked towards the buzzer and noticed Mouse 3, leaning against the wall and the buzzer, clipboard in hand, unaware of what he had done.

The problem was Mouse 3 was observing a nursery class leaning against the wall clipboard in hand, obviously with minimal interaction with the children! I explained what he had done, suggested it might be better for him if he moved to another part of the room and suggested a child's chair to sit on might be more appropriate.

3.15 p.m. Hedgehog rushed into Squirrel's room and informed her that Pigeon 2, (one of the teachers) had scored a 6/7 on her classroom observations, so she therefore needed to be advised of that judgement. Squirrel was horrified, but of all the teachers, she was a weaker and formal teacher, (in one sense more suited to Ofsted). She was a year 2 teacher and the class had been out of the school, for part of the morning, for a swimming lesson. Squirrel had received various pieces of horror stories from The Birds, (staff), during the day of how negative the inspectors had been and how threatened they felt, how strangely the children had reacted. Therefore, Squirrel negotiated that the teacher be given a second chance and if the findings were similar the following day then it should be reported. Also there was already a very vulnerable staffing situation and Squirrel didn't want her phoning in sick. She wanted the school to be able to show the literacy support programme that operated on Tuesdays. So she couldn't afford for anybody to be absent.

3.30 p.m. Squirrel went to the SEN meeting with Owl 3, the other co-ordinator and Mouse 3. The school had a large number of SEN children, and a number of children in the final stages of the statementing process. The teacher was new to the SEN responsibility. Squirrel and her shared the SEN co-ordinator role. Squirrel had the admin role, attended external meetings, telephoned professionals etc. The co-ordinator organised the child observations, had a supportive role, was the IEPs' adviser with the other class teachers and liaised with the educational psychologist. Squirrel was amazed that this arrangement was openly challenged by Mouse 3,

rather than noted. She had no idea of the staffing context, their reasons behind the arrangement, which they felt was working well.

Over a comforting cup of coffee, staff relayed their experiences of the day. The significant comments for Squirrel were the number of quick ten-minute lesson observations, some at the beginning, some in the middle, some at the end of lessons, never a complete lesson. The Mice were always rushing around. There was little interaction with the children.

5.00 p.m. Hedgehog came back to see Squirrel, and she quietly explained the situation with the panic button in the nursery. Would she be able to ask The Mice, the inspectors to avoid leaning on them tomorrow, and would the Mice be able to get down to the level of the children and were they actually going to talk to the children. The Birds (the staff) had fed back to Squirrel that they felt the children in all the classes were very wary of the inspectors, as they had kept their distance and had not conversed with the children. This was very unusual as the children were quite used to having extra adults in the classroom and enjoyed their company. Still Squirrel hoped that everybody would be more relaxed tomorrow.

21 January 1997 – Day 2... 8.30 a.m. A liaison meeting with Hedgehog. Squirrel wondered if this was the right moment to talk about the enquiry of the children's attainment and progress. Pigeon 1 had been unable to gain a meeting about it yesterday (she had also taken the trouble to visit the Owl 1 to familiarise herself with the information, so she was disappointed). Squirrel tried to discuss it but was firmly told it was part of the school documentation and it would be considered with that. Hedgehog went on to discuss the INSET the school had planned for the school year. Why wasn't mathematics our school focus on the development plan and what did I think of the Park LEA maths adviser? This confirmed her meeting with Thrush 1, (the maths co-ordinator, this was her first year with this subject)- it

hadn't gone very well. Squirrel had spoken to her- she was very fed up when she went home. The school had mathematics as the secondary curriculum focus and had in place mathematics INSET for after Ofsted.

Reference 10:

The inspection process and school improvement:

In that an inspection, of necessity, takes place over a short period of time, inspectors should consider the school's own priorities for development, evidence about the past attainment of pupils and any evidence from the school's own analysis of its provision or standards (p10).

Squirrel's angry feelings:

Squirrel was very perturbed with aspects of the conversation about mathematics. She felt Fox's comments were very harsh on Thrush 1. Squirrel felt her comments about the work of the Lea inappropriate and she obviously hadn't read the school documentation. Squirrel had recognised mathematics as a development area, it was the second school priority.

Why couldn't the inspectors believe what we were saying?

Were the inspectors considering the school's own priorities for development?

9.15 a.m. Hare 1 came to see Squirrel. She had covered for Robin 1's absence whilst she was on jury service. She was also an ex-teacher, and knew a bit about Ofsted, but had not experienced it herself. Her comment was very alarming - "I've never felt the tension in this school before. The atmosphere is usually so calm, but I can feel the tension in everybody, even the children, it's ghastly!"

For most of the morning Squirrel felt like a spare cog. But at least the Birds would have a brief respite at assembly - today was hymn practice, and some of the songs were lively, so perhaps it would relax everybody- perhaps the Mice would smile! No chance!

At lunchtime Squirrel had a quick conversation with Pigeon 1. She was also the English co-ordinator and was Reading Recovery trained. She had developed the literacy support programme and was released, one day per week, to work along side teachers and children in the classrooms. Not a single inspector had observed her. She was very disappointed. Squirrel found Mouse 1, the inspector for English and discussed this. Was it an oversight? This project was a major school initiative and Squirrel wished it to be included with collection of the inspection evidence. No

she hadn't scheduled it for the afternoon but would be able to discuss the project with Pigeon1 after school. Well that was something! But she would not have time to observe her working with the teachers and children. But yet another meeting for Pigeon 1.

Reference 11:

Discussion with staff, the appropriate authority and others involved with the work of the school.

Discussions with the head teacher... staff with particular management responsibilities and class teachers provide important sources of evidence relating to roles responsibilities, procedures and policies. They are essential to the professional dialogue between staff and inspectors, which contribute positively to the inspection of schools and helps inspectors to establish the context of what is seen (p31).

Squirrel's feelings of frustration:

How could we provide important sources of evidence when we staff were denied discussion time with the inspectors?

How can work of the teachers be acknowledged without this dialogue?

Reference 12:

Curriculum and assessment – Inspection Focus.

Inspection centres on the extent to which the content and organisation of the curriculum and its assessment provide access to the full range of learning experiences and promote the attainment, progress and personal development of all pupils. The curriculum comprises all the planned activities within and beyond the timetable (p75)

Main sources of evidence – during the inspection.

A comparison of curriculum plans and practice will be obtained from:

...Discussions with teachers, support staff and pupils, concentrating on how curriculum organisation affects pupils' attainment and progress (p80).

Squirrel's feelings of 'unfairness':

How could the birds and she explain the content and organisation of the curriculum and its assessment without an opportunity for discussion with the inspectors?

How can they explain how curriculum organisation affects pupils' attainment and progress?

First staff casualty- a very distressed Sparrow 1, following her meeting with Mouse

4. Sparrow 1 felt she had been intimidated, and the rabbits criticised unfairly. She felt the Mouse 4 had little understanding of the rabbit's background and their experience or not of music before they came to school, or what was appropriate at KS1. She felt Mouse 4 had little understanding of the value of music to support the children's speaking and listening skills and language development – and

enjoyment. Finally, she didn't like the school music area in the school hall. The Hares (using the Sainsbury vouchers) had recently purchased many new musical instruments. Sparrow 1 and Squirrel had completed an audit of all the musical instruments, they were now accessible to all the rabbits and their birds as well as the music teacher, rather than hidden in some dark cupboard and never used! We had made an exciting, very visible display for all to see and had found a way to enable greater use of the musical instruments- the rabbits were very enthusiastic about this too – but the inspector wasn't!

Reference 13:

Code of conduct for inspectors – The conduct of inspectors should instil confidence, minimise disruption and anxiety and ensure the co-operation of staff...Inspectors should treat all those involved with the school with respect (p18)

Squirrel felt appalled by Mouse 4's comments:

This situation certainly did not instil confidence and minimise anxiety in the staff. Sparrow 1 was not being treated with respect.

1.30 p.m. Hedgehog had been waiting in Squirrel's room for about 15 minutes, whilst she had been consoling Sparrow 1. Now for a discussion on 'management and efficiency of the school', but first, Squirrel felt she had to explain the reason for her delay. Squirrel and Hedgehog continued with the meeting discussing the school budget and challenges our school context (pupil mobility) had on that. Squirrel again requested that the enquiry on the children's attainment and progress would emphasise this point too. It was very important to include it. "No!" was her short answer. Then came a rabbit (a child) with a message from her teacher (The teacher judged as being weak). Rabbit 2 (aged 6) needed a little bit of help in PE he'd climbed on top of the highest PE stool and wouldn't come down. Squirrel knew Rabbit 2 was a very emotionally fragile little boy and needed her help before he disrupted the lesson - either to resolve his difficulty or bring him out of the lesson. Whatever was needed she didn't know how long it would take.

Well, Squirrel found Rabbit 2 and he climbed down from the PE and sat with her, but she couldn't console him and he was quite vocal! So she had to carry him out of the hall screaming. Usually children calmed down in her room, but Hedgehog was still there. So they had to sit in the entrance hall (no obvious distractions) and she had to hold Rabbit 2 screaming as he'd threatened to run home in his vest and pants. Squirrel couldn't take the chance and let him go. So they waited and struggled together for about 15 minutes and Hedgehog sat, waited and watched! Squirrel didn't think Hedgehog was familiar with this situation. Suddenly, Rabbit 2 stopped screaming, said he needed to go to the loo- was it a genuine request or ploy? He needed the loo, got over his upset and fortunately his friend had brought his clothes, so he got dressed, said he didn't want to go back to his class and stayed with Robin 1. Squirrel gave a brief account of the little boy and the reason for his distress then she and Hedgehog finished the discussion about the management and efficiency of the school.

3.30 p.m. Owl 3, the SEN co-ordinator, retold the situation of Mouse 2, hearing the children read in her class. Rabbit 1 (aged 5) was a less able reader at the beginning stages of learning to read and quite a shy, apprehensive little girl. She had observed Mouse 2 waiting for Rabbit 1, to start reading her book – no response from the little rabbit – “What are you waiting for, you are going to read to me,” said Mouse 2. The teacher tried to help the situation and explained “ Well actually, Rabbit 1 is waiting for you to go through the book first and talk about it, then you read the adult text and Rabbit 1 will read the child's text afterwards”. Mouse 2 looked surprised at these suggestions. The rabbit's experience of sharing a book with an adult was spoilt!

Reference 14:

Gathering the inspection evidence. Within their assignments individual inspectors should allocate time to collect the range of core evidence on which the judgements of the team must be based. This includes...iii. hearing pupils read. (p 28: par 42).

Registered inspectors will also need to ensure that during the week of the inspection a sufficient sample of literacy and numeracy skills is taken by: i. Hearing at least three pupils from each year group read... pupils should read from published materials or schemes, library books and samples of their own writing. (p30: par 59).

Squirrel again felt feelings of 'unfairness'.

How reliable was the judgement on that and possibly other children's attainment in reading?

How confident does a young child, particularly a less able, shy child feel about reading to a stranger?

How can an inspector be familiar with the approaches of different published reading materials?

Squirrel overheard quite a heated discussion between Sparrow 2 (the art co-ordinator) and Mouse 4. She went to help out. Mouse 4 had questioned the rabbit's immature drawings and paintings on a display and Sparrow 2 was struggling to explain the children's starting points on entry into nursery or school. She also tried to explain the approaches used to encourage the rabbits to experiment with the different art materials, to express their feelings and encourage them to communicate. "But these rabbits should be appreciating art, they should be taken to art galleries by the hares," replied Mouse 4. What about the Sainsbury's paintings for school project? Why wasn't the school displaying those masterpieces? Squirrel explained that two had been given to the junior school as they were more appropriate for that age range, and the other three were either displayed around the school or in the topic boxes to be brought out when the topic was being studied. Sparrow 2 became very distressed and Mouse 4 went away! (She left the school early). Squirrel went into consolation mode, again!

Reference 15:

Refer to Reference 13- Code of conduct for inspectors.

Again, Squirrel felt appalled by Mouse 4's comments:

Again, this situation certainly did not instil confidence and minimise anxiety in the staff. Sparrow 2 was, also, not being treated with respect.

Mouse 4's approach was very aggressive, was it her approach or was it the Ofsted brief?

Didn't she realise the ages and developmental stages of the children, and the financial situations of many of the families? Taking children to art galleries was not a priority for a lot of parents!

Meanwhile the meeting with the Fox 1 and Hedgehog was still going on in Squirrel's room. Eventually, Fox 1 went home without a word to Squirrel or even an enquiry after the staff. Squirrel felt very disappointed. Fox 2 expressed how difficult the finance meeting with Hedgehog had been. A little later Squirrel went to console a third Bird (Owl 3, one of the agency NQTs) who was upset at the number of Mice who had visited her classroom during the day and their manner. Squirrel gave her a lot of reassurance, she certainly needed it!

Reference 16:

Refer to Reference 13/15 – Code of conduct for inspectors.

Owl 2 came to see Squirrel, and said Mouse 2, had said there wasn't enough evidence of IT and could she re-arrange her timetable for Wednesday to include repeat activities with the NNEB and some children and some IT equipment. Mouse 2 said she needed to observe activities. She could not use previous plans and photographs as evidence of the children having done the work.

Reference 17:

During the inspection:

Where a subject is not being taught at the time of the inspection, the report should state this fact clearly. In such a case, evaluation of the pupils' attainment and progress in the subject should be based on the work previously completed by the pupils, if this constitutes a sufficient sample, together with such other evidence as may be available (p13).

Squirrel felt more 'unfairness':

Why could not the inspector evaluate the pupils' attainment and progress based on work previously completed?

6.00 p.m. Meeting with hedgehog to review the day. Squirrel expressed concern at the pressures placed on the birds. She then reassured Pigeon 1 who had experienced difficulties with mouse2 explaining the approach to design technology and our consideration of the children's experiences and developmental stages. But she was pleased to have explained the literacy project with Mouse 1 the English inspector. She had also been able to discuss the pupil mobility with her as 50+%

of the children taking part in the project had changed. Mouse 1 had expressed surprise!

22nd January 1997- Day 3... 8.00pm Meeting with hedgehog and mouse1. They had a discussion about the staffing structure and recent staffing changes. A question Did squirrel know why Owl 1's absence had made so much difference to the management of the school? Squirrel thought the answer was obvious. Hedgehog and mouse 1 suggested lots of schools have their deputy absent even for Ofsted. Squirrel replied that she felt it could greatly effect the management of any school especially if the deputy was experienced and the rest of the staff far less experienced especially if she had been in poor health for a long time. The inspectors appeared bemused by my response. Wasn't it a pity that owl 1 was not well enough to come and discuss her role her contribution to the management of the school and her work with the enquiry examining the children's attainment and progress! Squirrel then requested an opportunity for her to discuss both the enquiry and the curriculum framework with an inspector, as this had not happened. No opportunity was given.

The day included the mice interviewing selected rabbits and studying samples of work and classroom observations. Although squirrel was glad that the mice were now talking to rabbits, the school day was disrupted. The discussions were very hasty and the rabbits confused. In addition the inspectors were studying the displays of rabbit's artwork. They had used oil pastels to illustrate a story that they had shared. Squirrel knew how hard the rabbits had worked, how creative they had been how much collaborative work had occurred. She had actually been invited to the class by the rabbits to see their achievements but hedgehog and mouse 4 were being openly critical and unappreciative and speaking in very loud voices.

Reference 18:

Code of Conduct for inspectors – Inspectors should carry out their work with professionalism, integrity and courtesy...Inspectors should act in the best interests of the school. (p19).

Squirrel felt very angry about criticism of the children's art-work:

What were these Mice wanting?

What criteria were they basing their judgements on?

By the end of the day everybody – Mice, Birds and Rabbits seemed exhausted.

6.00 p.m. Final meeting with Hedgehog and Mouse 1. Squirrel was presented with written directive to ensure all the Health and Safety signing around the school was in place immediately. This was unbelievable –there had been a very lengthy Health and Safety meeting with Robin 2, (the site manager) and Hedgehog during the inspection and no mention had been made then. Also the school should have an entry phone system in place, on the main entrance. Again no discussion was possible. Squirrel was unable to describe the security procedures that were currently in place, and our vigilance for children's safety. Squirrel was unable to explain the plans made by her to discuss these two issues with the Health and Safety inspector who was visiting Oak Tree. The school was also due a full Health and Safety inspection, 5 March 1997. (This was for one day. It was very thorough and proved to be successful, everybody was praised for the policies and practices. In addition, the H/S inspector was very perplexed by the Ofsted directives).

Reference 19:

Health and Safety. Inspectors are not expected to carry out an audit of health and safety working procedures, but to report of what they have seen (p93).

Squirrel really felt very perplexed, she could not understand Hedgehog's aggression:

Why was Hedgehog exceeding her Ofsted brief?

Part 3 - After the Ofsted Inspection

(24.01.97) Squirrel received a phone call from a colleague squirrel that had an Ofsted inspection at the same time. She described her experiences, all very

positive and the mice even bought her staff cream cakes. What a different experience! She listened gob-smacked and embarrassed whilst Squirrel retold her experiences. Squirrel had a phone call from Mole. "How's everybody?" "Battered and bruised" was the reply. Squirrel also relayed her concern that one of the Mice had taken a local INSET course that was attended by an Oak Tree junior school teacher. This Mouse had been heard to say –"Well that's another school in the Park LEA we gave a hard time to!" Squirrel considered this comment to be totally unprofessional. The findings of the inspection were still confidential and had not even been reported to the school. She expressed a strong wish that this comment be noted and shared with the Park LEA, and Badger 1.

Reference 20:

Code of conduct of inspectors – Inspectors should carry out their work with professionalism, integrity and courtesy. (p18).

Squirrel felt very angry:

How could a Park LEA inspector be so damaging and unprofessional about a local school, or any school come to that?

A very quiet cloud seemed to spread over everybody, as they got back to some kind of normality, they all needed space to breath again after such a suffocating few days.

One week later... (28.01.97) Squirrel received a phone call from Hedgehog who was in a very distressed state. " *I'm sorry Squirrel we've had to put the school on special measures. We have looked at all the evidence in great detail.*" She then read Squirrel the official statement and said she would inform Fox 1. But before she does would Squirrel and Pigeon 1 like her and Mouse 4 to come in tomorrow and go through the procedures for reporting to the Foxes?

Squirrel's feelings:

Although Squirrel had felt the inspection had been particularly difficult, the result had been a complete shock. Having read about other schools placed on special measures or deemed to be failing, there appeared to be some known and obvious factors to their difficulties. She was unaware of any

particular difficulties to Oak Tree infant school apart from the 'standards' issue as expressed by the 'raw' SATs results. No concern had been expressed to be by the Lea about the SATs results or the quality of teaching that had been highlighted by Ofsted. Fox 1 did not contact the school, before the governors meeting. Squirrel was very surprised and disappointed.

What next... Squirrel needed to break the news to Pigeon1 and Owl 2 and she needed to arrange a special staff meeting with the birds. Not a lot of time! At the staff meeting (29.01.97) the birds received the news with similar shock and horror. Squirrel explained the procedures she had to follow at the governors meeting the following evening. The teachers strongly felt they had to have the opportunity to put the feelings across to the governors and the inspectors, through the teacher governor (who was Owl 1). Understandably Pigeon 1 felt very vulnerable. Squirrel arranged for Owl 2 to be a teacher observer at the meeting. Owl 1 and the bird representative drafted specific questions. These questions included consideration of the school's SATs results over four years (the school enquiry into the children's attainment and progress), consideration of the pupil mobility, consideration of the unique staffing position, and the composition of the inspection team.

Hedgehog and Mouse 4 orally reported the findings of the Ofsted inspection on 31 January. This was reported to Squirrel and Pigeon 1&Owl 2, Mole and Fox 1. This was prior to the governors meeting. This was a full governing body meeting, attended by all the Foxes, by Mole, and Fox 1 and Mouse 4. Hedgehog gave the official statement –" Following the Ofsted inspection of Oak Tree Infant School, 20-22 January, it is deemed to require special measures". The Foxes were each given a draft copy of the inspection report to read. There was an endless silence! Five Foxes exclaimed, "This is not our school we do not recognise the school from the report. What does this mean? What happens next?" The specific questions from the birds were expressed and noted. We were informed that at this stage it was a provisional decision by Ofsted, and the school would receive a second 2

day inspection in about three weeks time. This time Mice 6 and 7 would visit the school. After the meeting a working party of four foxes was set up by Mole and Squirrel, to start the process of producing the action plan.

When Squirrel received the minutes of the governors meeting she was very concerned that the minutes were very bland and did not outline the specific questions raised by Pigeon1, Squirrel and Foxes. Squirrel requested that the minutes be amended to represent a more accurate account of the meeting. Fox 1 objected to this. 3.01.97 was a busy day - phone calls and faxes were sent between Squirrel and Mole for drafting letter to HMI to request a primary inspection team, and time for the school to discuss the curriculum framework, school literacy initiatives, school evaluation study of pupil performance data, school compositional factors as well as data on PISCE. 6.02.97 Squirrel had a phone call from HMI to inform her that inspection would be 25-26 February 1997. (Two weeks notice, as half term was in between and they would be coming on the first day the school opened). As Squirrel was required to be available in Court, as a witness in a Child Protection Case on those dates, she enquired if it would be possible for another two dates for the inspection. " No" was the answer, the inspection had to be those dates. But the inspectors would make allowances for Squirrel's absence! How would the staff feel about her absence, especially Pigeon 1 and Owl 2? Oh well! What else could happen? At least everybody knew what time scale they were working to. Also Fox was not happy with those dates either, she had other commitments.

Squirrel compiled a portfolio of photographs of the current half-termly topic, using children's work and displays and Pigeon 1 and Owl 2 set about annotating the photographs with specific reference to NC subjects and levels. Squirrel had to provide the school's documentation (obtained back from the Ofsted team, with some difficulty), and additional samples of children's work from each class. Badger

2 arranged to start the INSET for the action plan and support any INSET with the staff. Squirrel, Mole and Badger 2 planned the Staff Training for the 24.02.97. A good school response to the Ofsted report – a positive impression given to HMI? 24.02.97 was a Staff Training Day when everybody had time to study the draft Ofsted report, to gain clarification of meanings, to find starting points. A very painful process for everybody! Squirrel also sought clarification, from the Park LEA and Ofsted, of the first of six key issues for action that was ambiguous. Badger 2 had been unsuccessful in her attempt to seek clarification.

Reference 21:

The report must include – key issues for action... They are likely to be few in number and should provide a clear and practicable basis on which the school can act (p48)

Squirrel felt that there were too many key issues for action, and that they were complex and in some cases ambiguously written. She was very frustrated at having to seek clarification of more confusion and angry at more pressure being placed on the school to sort out the difficulties:

Surely, Badger 1&3, (the senior Park LEA inspectors) or Ofsted could understand our difficulty? They could understand and sympathise with our difficulty but couldn't clarify or change the key issues, as they were LEA not Ofsted. Ofsted couldn't change them either.

How could we start to write the action plan when the first key issue for action was unclear? We were told to start with the second one and return to the first one at the end!

Key issues for action:

In order to raise the standards of achievement, and the quality of education, the governors, head teacher and staff need to focus far more on the curriculum provision, teaching in the classroom and the progress by pupils:

1. Improve standards in all subjects, and in particular in English, Mathematics, Science. To this end the following key areas for action need to be addressed.

2. Raise standards in literacy, IT and numeracy across the curriculum

3. Improve the quality of curriculum provision by:

Developing schemes of work to provide a framework of the depth of knowledge and skills required for each subject;

Developing assessment and use it to plan future teaching and to address the specific needs of pupils by matching work more carefully;

Develop more records of pupils' day to day progression;

Developing more detailed daily planning to address the specific learning outcomes required by all pupils in each session.

4. Improve the quality of teaching of the whole curriculum by:
Building on good teaching and achievements in the nursery into key stage 1;
Developing appropriate and consistent teaching and assessment
approaches to meet the requirements of the National curriculum and the
intended learning outcomes;
Improving subject and curriculum knowledge of the teachers;
Using time in the classroom for direct teaching of content, concepts, facts,
skills and knowledge;
Planning for general, specific and individual needs of all pupils in the
classroom, and in particular, implementing the IEP's by all teacher;
Raising expectations, pace and demand;
Providing appropriate in-service training;

5. Develop the spiritual, moral, social and cultural education by:
Planning and explicitly teaching these areas of the curriculum on a week-
by-week basis; Improve the content and quality of RE;

6. Strengthen the roles of middle and senior management, so that they have
a deeper knowledge of current curriculum and teaching requirements for the
National Curriculum, the spiritual, moral, social and cultural curriculum and
For whole school issues by, a far greater focus on curriculum issues;
Developing the role of the co-ordinators to be far more involved in the
development of their subject areas across the school;
Involving the governors in the WSDP planning from its initiation and in the
monitoring of cost effectiveness of the use of money;
Developing systematic monitoring procedures at all levels to include setting
of targets and checking on their implementation.

(Ofsted Inspection Report Oak Tree infant school, 1997).

Squirrel received a phone call from HMI and she was advised that Mice 6 and Mouse 7 would be travelling from Manchester and would be arriving at school at 9.30 the next day. Squirrel provided travel arrangements for them and located their hotel and directions to the school. This second inspection started with a meeting with the Mice 6 and Mouse 7, Fox 1 and Squirrel. The rest of the time was spent observing the classrooms, the birds and the rabbits. The school documentation was also scrutinised. Squirrel and Pigeon 1 were given a brief opportunity to discuss, the curriculum framework, and the performance data, including the enquiry on the children's attainment and progress. Mice 6 Mouse 7 left the school by lunchtime on the second day. Not really a two-day inspection! Just as rushed as the Ofsted inspection, but not as aggressively done. Squirrel was actually in school, as she had not been required to attend the court for the Child Protection case. Now to wait for their decision. Squirrel got this promptly from Hedgehog,

again the cold official statement "Special measures are required for this school.

Nothing can be changed, as Ofsted's decision is absolute".

Squirrel felt very disappointed as she and all the Birds had put in so much extra effort to show the school in a positive light. But again no enthusiasm from the inspectors, just cold and distant.

She wondered if HMI ever disagree with an Ofsted inspection decision?

Squirrel was sent a draft copy of the Ofsted inspection report to check for factual inaccuracies. She spent an afternoon with Pigeon 1 and Owl 2 and a long evening highlighting and commenting on 'ambiguities and factual inaccuracies'. The report had to be returned to Hedgehog the following day. There was only two weeks until the end of term and Squirrel needed to have the finalised inspection report and its summary. She had to arrange the printing and distribution to the Hares, the local community and press.

At the meeting (13.03.97) Fox 1 and Mole decided that the summary report should be distributed to the parents on the last day of term. Time-wise this was the only option, but Squirrel was concerned that the Hares would be festering all over the holidays with no explanation or support from the school. They would feel very confused before the parents meeting on the 14.04.97. Squirrel had prepared the factual information to aid discussion and to be selectively used for the press release. She was horrified that the Mole and Fox 1 not only used all the information but expanded it for a very detailed press release. Again this would be available to the public when the school was closed. Squirrel felt this was dangerous and potentially damaging to Oak Tree, the Birds, Rabbits and the community it served.

A report about Oak Tree Infant School was presented at the Park LEA education committee meeting (7.04.97) made up of elected members. It was prepared and presented by Badger 3. It contained a background of the school for the year 1996-1997 and the decision of Ofsted to place the school on special measures. It also

proposed the amalgamation of the school with the junior school. This report was available to the local press. Squirrel was unaware both of this meeting and this critical report about Oak Tree infant school. The local press published it in great detail both the summary of the Ofsted report and the inspectors report to the education committee. The birds, foxes, hares and Squirrel read the content of the report in the local press. Fortunately the first day of term (14.04.97) was a training day so the birds all had an opportunity to discuss the approach with the Hares the following day. The amalgamation issue was met with great interest and distrust. This was news to them! But it had been considered in 1988 prior to Squirrel's appointment. But what about consultation! Why all the secrecy? What a bombshell! A lot of additional pressure on the staff. Fox 1 gave no explanation. Everybody continued with the preparation of the action plan – this was another very tight schedule - only five calendar weeks. The draft copy had to be completed by 16 May and sent to Ofsted.

In the evening there was the hares meeting and approximately 60 Hares attended. The meeting was led by the director of Park LEA, Fox 1 and Fox 2, and Squirrel was available for questions, most of which were directed at her. There was a number of other Park LEA inspectors, advisers and foxes present. Hares were understandably aggrieved at receiving the report at the end of term. They did not recognise the school they knew from the Ofsted report. They did not recognise the birds they knew from the judgements in the report. They did not understand many aspects of it. They were very aggrieved that the school and their little rabbits had been reported in the press in this way. They were deeply upset that they had been labelled as disadvantaged, one-parent families, income support and their rabbits below the national average etc. They were deeply confused by the Ofsted inspection report. The amalgamation issue was raised and taken advantage of by both the director of Park LEA and Fox 1.

Beginning of the summer term 1997... Squirrel and the birds began a schedule of two twilight staff meetings and an evening action plan working party meeting per week. This enabled them to address each of the six key issues, openly discuss them, and report and feedback between staff, governors and the Park LEA. Squirrel planned, co-ordinated and collated the action plan process. Then she typed up the draft action plan for postage to Ofsted on 16.05.97. A very tall order, but all the Birds were determined if not too exhausted to complain. They really showed great loyalty and commitment towards each other and the task was completed with minutes to spare. The glue on the envelopes was still tacky as the courier sped off to Ofsted on Friday afternoon, 16.05.97, 2.00 p.m.

But there was more to happen that day... Squirrel notified the staff after school of her decision to take up a secondment and work with the Park LEA inspectorate (The Ofsted inspectors worked in the same office). She had been asked to take part in an early years project to extend her work on children's attainment and progress. 23 May (one week away) would 'be her last day at Oak Tree as she would be working at the LEA offices directly after half term. The birds were left wondering who the senior management would be since Owl 1 was still on long-term sick leave and the temporary replacement of the head teacher had not been decided. Pigeon1 and Owl 2 and all the Birds were left in complete confusion. Squirrel was unable to answer their obvious questions. "After all that work with the action plan who will help us now?" Those words still resound in her head. A brief and very quiet interlude followed and the birds were very supportive of Squirrel, but she still had not told the Rabbits (children) and the Hares (parents). They were informed, by newsletter, on the Tuesday but she could not tell who her replacement was, because she did not know herself.

21.05.97 Squirrel had a phone call from Mole. He explained that he was unable to make the meeting that afternoon to plan the Ofsted action plan meeting with Mice 8-12. A meeting was essential before the Mice came to school, Fox 1 was insisting on having a meeting on the 23.05.97. Oh, great! At this stage Squirrel really didn't think that anything else would have to be changed. Squirrel shared her displeasure, and said that she would be unavailable as she would be involved with the Birds and the Rabbits at her last whole school assembly. The day another phone call from Mole. He suggested that Squirrel and he met to prepare for the meeting. She agreed. The day of the Ofsted action plan meeting arrived with Mice 8-12. Badger 3, and Mole attended the meeting. Also present were Fox 1 and Fox 4, Pigeon 1 and Owl 2 and Squirrel. The meeting lasted two and a half hours and included a tour of the school. Mice 8 Mouse 9 recognised the commitment of the school in producing the action plan, and only a few amendments were recommended. Most of the questions were related to the school context were directed at Squirrel. They obviously did not know that this was her last day at Oak Tree infant school. Or did they? When Squirrel received the minutes of this meeting she found out that it was not a true record. This was taken up with both Ofsted and the Park LEA.

After school the birds were told the name of the new acting Squirrel but were unable to meet her until after the half term holiday, her first day in school. Squirrel and Pigeon 1 were required to complete an Ofsted inspection survey. She was advised that the survey would contribute to Ofsted's procedures for assessing the work of inspectors and the inspection contractors. This was not an anonymous questionnaire, so it could be directly related to the school and the staff working there. Nevertheless, they completed the questionnaire. It was Park LEA procedure for squirrels and foxes to report on their Ofsted report to members of the

educational committee. Fox 1 delayed this, so Squirrel did not have that opportunity.

Following Squirrel's secondment to the Park LEA inspectorate she resigned from her position as head teacher of Oak Tree, December 1997. Squirrel was unable to respond to any of the published reports related to the Ofsted inspection until after her resignation. She strongly felt those reports misrepresented the school the young Rabbits and Birds who worked there and the community it served. Only then was Squirrel able to put her side of the story about the Ofsted experience, the accounts reported in the local press and to the education committee and the reaction of the Foxes and the Park LEA to it. She sent copies of her response to all local councillors, members of the Park LEA inspectorate, Ofsted and all school Birds and Foxes. She heard Oak Tree was amalgamated with the neighbouring junior school to form a large primary school in September 1998.

The End

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After the **storm**

the tale of an Ofsted inspection

Margaret Follows

This tale is the professional story of a former infant head teacher and tells how Ofsted happened in her school. The tale provides an alternative picture to the one published by Ofsted. The author explores how Ofsted inspectors assessed the educational standards achieved by children and thus made their judgements with the consequent impact on the survival of a school.

This tale is written as a fictionalised account adapted from a children's book – not surprising as the storyteller is steeped in infant practice. The original story, about a large oak tree, provides the fictionalised context for Oak Tree infant school and Park LEA. The animal characters provide neutral identities for the people involved.

In the tale teachers are birds. Owl is the headteacher. Robin, Pigeon, Sparrow and Thrush are class teachers. The Ofsted inspection team are mice. Harvest Mouse is the Ofsted registered inspector. The governors are foxes. Red Fox is the chair of governors. The Park LEA assigned school inspector is Mole. The HMI inspectors are badgers. The children are rabbits and the parents are hares.

A sunny day in July 1996...

"Hello Owl, can you guess why I am phoning?" said Harvest Mouse.

"No, but I haven't got time for Tawny Owl's appraisal this term, or for another mathematics project and I cannot join the working party" said Owl quickly.

"I'm ringing about your Ofsted inspection. It's to be a Park LEA team and I'm to be the Registered Inspector."

Owl took a sharp intake of air.

"It's a surprise to have a local team. Who are the other inspectors?"

Harvest Mouse told her.

Owl mused. There were five. Field Mouse was the only early year's inspector in Park LEA and she regularly inspected Oak Tree's nursery class. Dormouse, the SEN inspector, had been deputy head of a local special school and Owl had provided work experience for her students. House Mouse was a humanities inspector. Wood Mouse was a visual arts inspector and one of the birds had worked with her recently on a working party. The last mouse was a lay inspector who worked part-time for the Play-Group Association.

No inspector should take part in an inspection if they have a close previous relationship with the school. Inspectors must be absolutely impartial, and be seen to be impartial, in their treatment of all those with whom they come into contact (Ofsted, 1995:18).

Harvest Mouse arranged a short pre-inspection visit. The visit was brisk and efficient. It included a visit to all the classrooms to meet the birds and to examine

the layout of the building. There was no time to talk to the rabbits.

The chair of governors

...Red Fox came into school the next morning because she was worried about the composition of the inspection team.

Where teams are small, there must be a combination of phase and subject expertise but without undue fragmentation of the team. Primary school inspection teams must be competent to inspect the full age range present in the school, including nursery provision (Ofsted, 1995:11).

"I am worried about Field Mouse being on the team because she knows the school. The others are all right because they don't", explained Red Fox.

Owl replied, "Yes, I understand your concern. But the birds have worked with all the mice, so the mice know the birds. Field Mouse is the only inspector with early years experience. The others have a secondary background. They may be wary of young rabbits' spontaneity and misunderstand the organisation in the classrooms." Red Fox left without the issue being resolved.

Owl phoned Mole.

"Has Red Fox contacted you?"

"Yes, we had a chat about the inspection team? How do you feel about it?" replied Mole.

"I'm surprised it is local team and Harvest Mouse is the registered inspector. I've worked with Harvest Mouse before and I've been in Park LEA for 26 years. Will it be an objective inspection? Red Fox wants a

Could the inspectors evaluate the work of the school objectively? Was the inspection team sufficient and competent to inspect both the infant classes and the nursery?

The birds examined the mice's CVs. All had undertaken the Ofsted primary/secondary school inspection training and two the SEN training, but Field Mouse was the only nursery/primary specialist. Dormouse, the SEN inspector had been deputy head of a local MLD special school. House Mouse, the humanities inspector, had a secondary background. Wood Mouse, the visual arts inspector, had an FE/secondary background. The other mouse was a lay inspector.

The birds queried the lack of information about the procedures under which the inspection contractors were to work. How did Ofsted check these arrangements? How could the school be confident about the inspection with so little information?

To ensure that inspections are conducted to the highest standard, contractors for inspections are required to submit to Ofsted details of their quality assurance arrangements. These must cover: the induction, support, selection and deployment of inspectors (Ofsted, 1995:11).

When Owl shared Mole's advice, everybody appeared to accept the situation.

Six months later

Harvest Mouse and her team inspected Oak tree infant school for three days in January 1997. Suddenly, the mice were scurrying around the school clasping their

"I am worried about Field Mouse being on the team because she knows the school. The others are all right because they don't", explained Red Fox.

replacement for Field Mouse. Who else is there with early years experience? The other primary inspector has no experience of early years teaching and was our assigned inspector before you. What should I do?"

"If you want to keep Field Mouse, you should keep the rest of the team," Mole replied.

The staff meeting

The birds had prepared for the staff meeting by reading the Ofsted Handbook. They had known that an inspection was due.

Owl summarised the developments.

The birds raised the points that Owl had raised with Harvest Mouse and Mole.

clipboards with fierce, busy expressions.

Owl felt an outsider in her own school. On the way to a reception class to check on the attendance of a little rabbit, she met Harvest Mouse.

"Owl, I've just left my first lesson observation. I'm supposed to have seen a mathematics lesson but it was really a language lesson. Can Thrush do a maths lesson for me?"

Inspectors must be careful to avoid making premature judgements (Ofsted, 1995:18).

Owl replied tactfully and positively, "Perhaps Thrush was introducing new specialist maths ➤

vocabulary to the little rabbits. It's a new topic and the rabbits are very young. They may be unfamiliar with the words, as many have just been admitted to school. We need to put an emphasis on language development here, as a significant proportion of the rabbits have delayed language, poor comprehension and poor expressive language."

Harvest Mouse's comments seemed premature. Thrush had carefully planned the lesson, she was the year group leader and the new mathematics co-ordinator. Harvest Mouse had a secondary mathematics background. Was she sufficiently knowledgeable about learning mathematics in the early years?

Inspectors should carry out their work with professionalism, integrity and courtesy. All inspectors need to recognise that the process of inspection is demanding for schools, and that it can be very stressful. The way in which the inspection is conducted should contribute to reducing any stress to a minimum. The conduct of inspectors should instil confidence, minimise disruption and anxiety and ensure the co-operation of staff and members of the appropriate authority. Inspectors should be well briefed and treat all those involved with the school with respect. (Ofsted, 1995:18).

Owl thought that Harvest Mouse's comments were hasty. It was Monday morning and it was Harvest Mouse's first lesson observation. What a way to start an inspection!

Day 2 ...

Robin collared Owl.

Wood Mouse had come into Robin's classroom to hear the rabbits read.

Registered inspectors will also need to ensure that during the week of the inspection a sufficient sample of literacy and numeracy skills is taken by:

- Hearing at least three pupils from each year group read... pupils should read from published materials or schemes, library books and samples of their own writing (Ofsted, 1995:30).

Little Grey Rabbit, aged five was chosen first. A shy, apprehensive little rabbit, she was one of the less able readers, still at the beginning stages of learning to read.

Wood Mouse had sat and waited for the little rabbit to start reading.

"What are you waiting for, come on, aren't you going to read to me?" said Wood Mouse.

Wood Mouse was unfamiliar with the storybook and had not asked Robin how she set about hearing the rabbits read. There was an established procedure that teachers followed that helped the reading process.

Tactfully Robin intervened, "Grey Rabbit is waiting for you to go through the book first and talk about it, then you read the adult text and Grey Rabbit will read the rabbit's text afterwards."

Wood Mouse looked surprised but was oblivious to the fact that Little Grey Rabbit's experience of sharing a book with her was spoilt.

Discussions with ... class teachers provide important sources of evidence relating to roles responsibilities, procedures and policies. They are essential to the professional dialogue between staff and inspectors which contributes positively to the inspection of schools and helps inspectors to establish the context of what is seen (Ofsted: 31).

Owl felt very disappointed and angry when she heard Robin's account. Could Wood Mouse's judgement on the rabbits' attainments in reading be reliable? Wood Mouse had not found out about the classroom procedures being used. The young rabbits would lack confidence in reading to a stranger anyway, particularly a less able, shy rabbit like Little Grey Rabbit. How can a Mouse that has no infant experience know about good practice in that field?

Eavesdropping ...

Owl overheard a heated discussion between Sparrow and Wood Mouse.

"These drawings and paintings are very poor and very immature for five-year-olds," said Wood Mouse.

"I think they are rather expressive and represent their ideas for the topic. In many cases these are the rabbits first drawings and paintings since starting school and not all the rabbits went to the nursery. Did you know that?" responded Sparrow.

Wood Mouse continued, "But these rabbits should be appreciating art and they should be taken to art galleries by the hares. What about the Sainsbury's paintings for school project? Are these old masters displayed in school?"

Owl saw that Sparrow was too distressed to say that taking rabbits to art galleries was not a priority for a lot of hares. Neither did she point out the financial situation of many of the families, with over 70 per cent of the rabbits entitled to free school meals.

The conduct of inspectors should instil confidence, minimise disruption and anxiety and ensure the co-operation of staff... Inspectors should treat all those involved with the school with respect (Ofsted, 1995:18).

Owl tried to sound cheerful as she interrupted, "Hello how's everything going? Were you asking about the Sainsbury's paintings? We've displayed three

paintings near each group of classrooms and put the rest in a topic box to be brought out when the topic is being studied. Two have been given to the junior school as they were more appropriate for that age range."

Owl was appalled by Wood Mouse's attitude.

Wood Mouse was an art inspector. She should not be so critical of the rabbit's artwork on a display. Was she aware of the differences in ages and developmental stages of the selection of rabbits' artwork on show? Did she appreciate the starting points of the rabbits just entering school? Was she familiar with the approaches used to encourage young rabbits to experiment with the different art materials? Did she know that the birds found creative ways for the rabbits to express their feelings in art and encouraged them to talk about it?

Sparrow went home early that day. She felt she had not been treated with respect and her confidence was shattered.

Owl spoke to Harvest Mouse about Wood Mouse's behaviour. Another Bird casualty ...

Pigeon was very distressed.

She said, "Wood Mouse was so unfair! She criticised the rabbit's singing without recognising these rabbit's lack of musical experience before they come to school. She does not know what is appropriate at key stage 1.

these mice want? On what criteria were they basing their judgements?

The third day....

On the third day Owl went to find Harvest Mouse to see if they could resume their meeting about the management and efficiency of the school that had been interrupted by a distressed little rabbit with emotional and behaviour problems. Owl wanted to talk about two major school initiatives.

Inspectors should consider the school's own priorities for development, evidence about the past attainment of pupils and any evidence from the school's own analysis of its provision or standards (Ofsted, 1995:10).

"Harvest Mouse. I'd really like to tell you about the school self-evaluation study. We've been analysing the assessment data for four cohorts of rabbits and we've been looking at the baseline assessment as well as the key stage 1 test results. It really explains some of the test scores and highlights the impact of rabbit mobility which is 50 per cent annually ..."

Harvest Mouse interrupted very firmly "I haven't

Sparrow went home early that day. She felt she had not been treated with respect and her confidence was shattered.

She is not interested in the value of music in supporting the rabbit's speaking and listening skills, language development and enjoyment. Oh, and she doesn't like the new music area in the school hall."

Inspectors should carry out their work with professionalism, integrity and courtesy...
Inspectors should act in the best interests of the school (Ofsted, 1995:19).

Owl understood Pigeon's distress. The hares had recently purchased many new multi-cultural musical instruments for the school with supermarket vouchers. Pigeon and Owl had made an audit of all the school's musical instruments. They had made an exciting display of the instruments, which were now more easily accessible to all the birds and the rabbits. They hoped this would encourage greater use of the musical instruments by everyone. The birds and rabbits were very enthusiastic about this – but Wood Mouse was not!

Owl was very angry

Pigeon felt that her musical expertise was being questioned and her confidence was sapped. What did

got time for another meeting but I may look at the report with the other school documents."

Owl was overcome with a sense of injustice and unfairness. How would she know if the mice had looked at the school's own analysis of its provision and standards? Could she be sure that the Mice would understand the school's priorities if there was no discussion?

By the end of the third day the Ofsted inspectors had gone!

After the storm...

A large grey cloud had spread over Oak Tree infant school.

A week later Owl received a phone call from a distressed Harvest Mouse. "I'm very sorry Owl we've had to put Oak Tree infant school on special measures because the school is failing."

Owl was devastated by the outcome.

A meeting was arranged for the mice to give feedback to the foxes. "This doesn't sound like our school at all," uttered some of the horrified foxes. The draft report was circulated.

"In order to raise the standards of achievement, and the quality of education, the governors, headteacher and staff need to focus far more on the curriculum provision, teaching in the classroom and the progress made by the pupils." Following this statement was a long list covering five broad areas where action was required. (Draft Ofsted Report).

Mole had expressed no cause for concern in the termly inspections about the quality of the education provided by the school, the educational standards achieved in the school, or the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils.

Owl wondered why Ofsted's evaluation was so different?

Owl and a Bird governor raised their concerns about the competency and behaviour of the inspectors and asked why the school's analysis of the children's attainment and progress had not been cited alongside the test results. Owl explained that the school was aware that test results at Oak Tree fell below the national average and that the school's study of four cohorts of rabbits, using baseline assessment as well as the key stage 1 test results, explained the reason for this.

These points were noted but there was no discussion and the meeting closed.

A draft report should be shown to the school to assist with the checking of factual content not to

have the judgements negotiated (Ofsted, 1995:35). The report must include key issues for action... They are likely to be few in number and should provide a clear and practicable basis on which the school can act (Ofsted, 1995:48).

The next day Owl and two Birds carefully examined the draft report before returning it to Harvest Mouse with requests for specific amendments. But Harvest Mouse had been taken ill and was no longer available.

Mole helped Owl draft a letter to the Badgers complaining about the local team, the competency of the inspectors and the inspection team's failure to consider the evidence from the school's assessment study.

Four weeks later the two Badgers arrived to confirm the findings of the original inspection. Owl was too overwhelmed with the task of producing an action plan to act on their suggestion that she could file an official complaint.

Owl, Red Fox and Mole all contacted the Mice and the Badgers asking for the draft inspection report to be changed. "Nothing can be clarified or changed, as Ofsted's decision is absolute" was the response each time.

Before she resigned, Owl led and co-ordinated the production and completion of the action plan with the birds, foxes and Park LEA. Oak Tree infant school came out of special measures before it was amalgamated with the neighbouring junior school to form a large primary school in September 1998. **172**

Learning from the tale of an Ofsted inspection

The first part of this series in the last edition of MiE told the fictionalised story of an Ofsted inspection. This current article provides insight into the method of fictionalised story writing used by the author. A concluding article to be published in the next issue of MiE will offer a review of the literature on Ofsted.

Margaret Follows

Introduction

Earlier this year I read an article (TES, 2nd February 2001) which said that tales of horrible Ofsted inspections are myths and not a true reflection of the service. Well, I must have received a school inspection from a different service! Four years ago I experienced Ofsted as a headteacher of an infant school - and it was a disastrous experience that was deeply damaging. I've read about other equally horrible inspections (TES, 2nd March, 26th May & 8th September 2000) that have happened more recently than mine, despite claims from Ofsted that the new framework (Ofsted 2000) is reformed and offers high quality care. Cullingford (1999) says that everyone involved in an Ofsted inspection has tales to tell. These tales are easily dismissed as being merely anecdotal but how many separate cases are needed to accumulate valid evidence?

What did I do?

I wrote the professional story of my own Ofsted experiences as a fictionalised tale, adapted from a children's book with animal and bird characters to neutralise the identities of the people involved. Tomlinson (1999) says that headteachers' stories of their struggles are a legitimate methodology for leadership research and provide an alternative, richer understanding than many traditional leadership studies. I drew on data from the three stages of the Ofsted process at Oak Tree infant school and I compared this with the Ofsted Handbook (1995). I used the school's

Ofsted inspection report, my professional diary that was a factual record of the events, meetings and conversations that took place during the Ofsted inspection process, and my reflective diary giving a personal account. I wanted to explore how the Ofsted inspection process happened in practice in one infant school. I wanted to challenge how the inspectors assessed the educational standards achieved by children and made judgements about their attainment and progress. Like Macbeath, (1999) I wanted to present a rich and powerful picture of the school, that recognised the school's history, its unique cast of characters and the Ofsted narrative that unfolded over time in unanticipated and devastating directions..

I used my tale of the Ofsted inspection, written in accordance with the method of narratively (re)constructing a real life situation (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995; 1999), as a focus for triangulated memory work, which is a collective investigation of experience with a support group of research colleagues. I adapted the method of memory work, developed by Evans & Lomax (1996). This is an aspect of the co-researcher, self-study, reflexive action research methodology (Lomax, 2000). I circulated my tale and shared it at a meeting (28 April 1999) with six research colleagues - two headteachers, two teachers, an Ofsted inspector and a university teacher - who met regularly to validate each others work. We used our insider knowledge and experience about the evidence base and the criteria of assessment Ofsted used. I wanted to see how far the group could empathise with my tale and what sense they made of the picture of the inspection that I had presented. I wanted to use the meeting to help

me to unpack and deconstruct my own practice and tacit knowledge of assessment as it was shown in the tale. The meeting was taped and subsequently transcribed and analysed. Below are some extracts from my analysis.

Reading between the lines

I was surprised and dismayed at how much the research group read between the lines of my tale. It seemed that they were interrogating motives that I would prefer to remain hidden.

F. I wondered where you got the idea of the story? Was it the title?

P. Here it is - we know you've resisted writing about it for two years because it's so painful - now its After the Storm you're able to do it.

Md. Why that title? It's so significant and it could be so symbolic to your whole story.

P. You've shown us you like things from the world of infant children and infant education to use as a model of what you are doing which has relevance ... it's a way of framing the world that's meaningful to you ... but there are a lot of implicit meanings in M that are unknown to us.

Ma. Are the characters chosen for their qualities?

B. Foxes are sly and cunning and predatory, you can't help thinking that ... like some governors ... and mice scuttle a lot, running in and out of places just like inspectors ran in and out of the classrooms.

Md. You can't divorce the whole of your previous knowledge... from choosing this story and choosing these animals.

Filling in the gaps and spaces

At this time I had reservations about the clarity of my work and about explaining a situation that I was still emotionally inside. The group were looking from the outside. Oak Tree infant school and Park LEA were unknown to them all. The group questioned whether the story provided sufficient information for the reader to be able to empathise with the context, the size of the school, the numbers, the roles and relationships between the different people.

P. I think you should have children in the story
Z. The parents are missing too... your final sentence is that you feel that the community was cheated, that is - teachers, children and parents; yet only the teachers mostly appear in the story.

P. Perhaps if you put the children, parents and

teachers in ... your story you'd get a more rounded picture.

Md. Also the children and the parents were sort of adversaries weren't they? Some of the birds ... were helpless. They had a part to play in the downfall - they couldn't help the way things happened to them...

P. You've got to be clear. Is it a story of what happened to you (owl) or what happened to the school? The children and the parents ... had a role to play in the school but they didn't have a role to play in the storm that owl experienced.

F. You didn't include them ... the children and the parents (because) they were blameless, innocents.

Validation of my research

The following comments speak for themselves.

J. I was totally stunned to hear the inspection of her school brought with it such a negative and destructive outcome. On reflection, I was not so shocked that the system was capable of such effects but more that a colleague had experienced such judgement through an appalling process.... The inspection team sounded an embarrassing mismatch for the school.... There appeared to be numerous anomalies during the inspection process and the following report.

Md. The story unfolds dramatically like a tragic comedy. What a horrifying tale of events. Clearly Ofsted was devastatingly unfair. This begs the question, could Ofsted show a fair assessment if the rules had been followed?

J. The school to my knowledge was high on the scale of social, economic and educational deprivation and the external test results were overall below the national comparison... the additional irony was that M's own research was looking at tracking closely the progress being made by pupils entering her school with particularly low baselines of ability and the value-added impact of the school's intervention. Research that should have helped to prove the inadequacy and inaccuracy of the inspection team's judgement about the pupils' attainment was not taken seriously enough.

B. One thing I couldn't understand was...you thought you were being cheated by the Ofsted system, but you were at great pains during the course of the story to show that they were flouting their own system, their own rules. Is it just the team? Or is it the system?

Natural justice and fairness.

By writing the Ofsted tale and sharing it with research colleagues I was able to distance myself from the real experience and begin to understand the conflict, contradictions and the confusions; also to realise the strong moral purpose I have for seeking a fair assessment of the educational standards achieved by children at infant school. Could Ofsted ever be fair and just? Can Ofsted inspectors make consistent and informed judgements about young children's learning by looking at their work? Their interpretation is often hasty and fragmented, based on a quick look at an unknown child's completed or uncompleted work and maybe the child's explanation of it to an unknown adult. How can Ofsted inspectors make consistent and informed judgement in such an unnatural situation; especially if they don't understand the theory and practice of teaching young children or have experience of the way that young children explain their work? I remember my horror at some of the incidents I witnessed - the inspector's misunderstanding of the little girl trying to read; the criticism of the children's artwork and the music and art teachers being upset; the lack of awareness about the need for specialist language work in mathematics. If inspectors had limited experience of how young children learn or how they express themselves (particularly if English or language or self-confidence is limited) then how can there be a reliable judgement and a fair assessment? The Ofsted system itself was also unfair and unjust at that time (1997) because Ofsted didn't consider children's prior attainment or other contributory factors.

What did I learn about my own infant practice?

I was totally stunned by the outcome of the Ofsted inspection. It was so different from the local feedback about the school. I was left with a deep and real feeling of having been cheated or betrayed by the system. I felt that the community was cheated too. Writing and discussing the tale helped me to overcome these feelings of despair and powerlessness. I was also able to clarify and articulate the educational values that underpin my own infant practice and my role as an infant school head teacher. P's comment, you like things from the world of ... infant education to use as a model... it's a way of framing the world that's meaningful to you... but there are a lot of implicit meanings that are hidden suggested Macbeath's (1999) idea of semiotics - the analysis of hidden messages in texts and images. Atkinson & Claxton (2000), who explore the relationship between reason and intuition in professional practice, show how experienced teachers (like me) find it difficult to explain their practice and deconstruct the teaching and learning process. Discussion of the Ofsted tale with colleagues showed me how intuitively I worked with young children, how I kept the individual needs of the young

child central to the teaching and learning process and how I promoted the enjoyment of learning at Oak Tree infant school. The discussion reminded me that I see a story as crucial to the children's language and literacy development and key to raising achievement in learning, teaching and behaviour.

The writing and the deconstruction of the Ofsted tale and the discussion about the characteristics and values of owl highlighted the person in the professional. Day (2000) sees the personal and professional linkages as providing empirical support for the centrality of moral purpose in the motives of those involved in teaching. The story and its deconstruction helped me to clarify the core personal values around which my infant practice and approach to headship were organised. These included principles of collaboration and holistic thinking to do with caring for the well-being and whole development of children and staff; the modelling and promotion of respect, fairness, equality, integrity and honesty. I feel these core values are part of the humanitarian ethics that link my personal and professional self and explain the personal and professional difficulties I experienced with the Ofsted inspection. My values conflicted with the Ofsted response, which seemed to lack honesty, care, respect and trust; a lack of positive communication; a lack of collaboration in reaching judgements about the achievements of the school and its staff, children and parents; and an emphasis on failure rather than success. Schools were once seen as secret gardens but I experienced Ofsted as a world of secret judgements.

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Reflections

on Ofsted's Seven-Year Reign

Margaret Follows

I have just read two very contrasting articles about Ofsted. The first one says that the outgoing Ofsted complaints adjudicator concedes the need to reform Ofsted so that schools are given the extra opportunity to question its judgements (*TES*, 27 April). The second, written by its ex-chief inspector, says some schools find it hard to accept an adverse judgement from inspectors, but once the initial shock is past, most schools make real progress (*Daily Telegraph*, 28 April).

The Office for Standards in Education was created in 1992 to promote accountability and to raise educational standards. The Ofsted handbooks in 1993 and 1995 demonstrated a commitment to promoting *improvement through inspection* but in 2000 the new handbook added a commitment to the *improvement of inspection*. All schools are inspected by a team of trained inspectors under the direction of a registered inspector who manages the evidence base and ensures that sound and fair judgements derive from it. There are four main areas to be judged:

- The quality of education provided;
- The educational standards achieved;
- The effective management of financial resources;
- The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the children.

Ofsted claims that systematic collection and evaluation of evidence is at the heart of inspection and the resulting report is as fair and just a representation of the school as possible.

The first detailed review of Ofsted was undertaken by a group of 11 contributors to a special edition of the *Cambridge Journal of Education*. They all discussed Ofsted's fitness for purpose and some called for improvements in Ofsted's methodology, but few of the contributors questioned the need for Ofsted (Gray, &

Wilcox). Later studies continued to weigh up the positive and negative aspects of inspection, mainly suggesting modifications rather than its abandonment. (Earley et al. 1996; Earley 1998). A more critical view considered whether a different approach to school development, other than Ofsted inspection, would be more useful. For example, the notion of school evaluation has found considerable support amongst teachers (Macheath 1999).

Ofsted has attracted more controversy with time. One of the reasons for this is the way in which the Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools, alongside league tables of test results, has been taken by the media as the main source of information about educational standards (Maw, J. 1998). Woodhead, the chief inspector from 1993-2000, adopted a highly political role, which alienated many teachers. His controversial and adversarial approach counteracted some of the useful contribution the inspection process might have made to improving practice (Mortimer, P. 1998).

The president of the National Association of Head Teachers, a primary school headteacher, noted the *culture of mistrust* created by Ofsted. His view was that the *Kingdom of Ofsted* had remained virtually unmoveable since its creation. He saw the link between school self-evaluation and external inspection in the revised Framework as a possible catalyst for school improvement, but only if commitment for change came from the school and the school's own development plans were acknowledged (Brookes 2000). There is growing support for the idea that the schools own systematic evaluation processes should play a greater part in the arrangements for inspection and that schools should develop a culture of self-inspection using the Ofsted criteria (Ferguson 2000).

An Inspector Calls

An important independent review, undertaken by Office for Standards in Inspection with a grant from

the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust, was published in 1999 (Cullingford). The review set out to answer a number of questions: Does inspection improve the academic attainment of pupils? Are school standards actually improved by the Ofsted system? Do inspectors create more problems than they solve? Is Ofsted successful, within its own terms?

The views of headteachers showed that the extent to which heads valued inspection was related to a combination of factors that included:

- The value of the pre-inspection preparation process in terms of time invested and what was achieved;
 - The conduct and quality of the inspectors;
 - The expense of the inspection in relation to its contribution to school development;
 - The extent to which it provided a new focus for development;
 - The extent to which it provided a tool either for school management or relationships with the wider school community;
 - The residual effect on staff morale;
 - The extent to which school found it possible to implement the Ofsted key issues.
- (Cuckle & Broadhead).

In terms of my own experience, I was most interested in the discussion of how inspectors made their absolute judgements from the evidence base (D. Winkley). Winkley diagnosed the core of Ofsted's problem as the conflict between its theory and practice. He saw the theory as "a kind of depersonalised check... a blue print carried out to a rule-based agenda – a checklist based on a centrally conceived set of values as to what constitutes a good school" and concluded, "in practice, as an all-textual interpretation, the theory is mediated through the minds of individual inspectors." Winkley argued that the values of the inspectors could influence how evidence was constructed, leading to an under-critical or an over-critical approach. He thought that the school was particularly at risk when team and school values did not converge. I believe that this was a contributing factor to the inspectors' harsh and premature judgements of Oak Tree infant school reported in my two previous papers.

Winkley described the results of the National Primary Centre Study commissioned by Channel 4. This study related to the procedures that were followed in inspections between 1995-2000. Ninety five per cent of the headteachers of 200 recently inspected schools wanted Ofsted changed. They objected to the nature of the process that Ofsted adopted and the spirit in which the inspection team worked. I sympathised with the 40 per cent of heads who were critical of the Ofsted team, their judgements, the inspection report and the label of a special measures school.

Is Ofsted fair and just?

My own research examined how inspectors go about

making their judgements although I recognise that mine was a unique case that is not representative of all other situations. Like Winkley, I felt the formidable powers of Ofsted and believe that the inspection team was biased, unfair, unreasonable and unprofessional in the way it carried out its brief. I witnessed the exceptional stress of an Ofsted experience for the teachers and children. The teachers felt that the inspectors were aloof and unapproachable and the depersonalised nature of the process led to them experiencing powerlessness and feeling abused. I felt that this was particularly threatening in the trusting and caring environment of an infant school and I have to ask if this kind of practice is ethically acceptable in a mature, democratic society?

I experienced an Ofsted team that was insensitive to the ethos of an infant school. This may be partly the result of the government's urge to raise standards through a national curriculum and style of assessment that pays too little attention to whole child development. There is too much emphasis on areas of pupils' knowledge that can be easily measured and this marginalizes the processes of teaching, learning and school management that encourage the creative and culturally sensitive aspects of education and is particularly important for young children (Craft 1999; National Advisory Committee on Creative and Cultural Education, 2000).

The inspection team was a mismatch for my school. The inspectors took a managerial and numerical approach to their task and presented an analysis of the school's performance based on depersonalised numerical data that created a very questionable comparative instrument (in research terms). This gave an unrepresentative picture of the school's strengths and weaknesses that resulted in profound damage to a vulnerable school community and vulnerable children. The inspection team that came to my school were inexperienced in infant education and did not seem to understand the theory and practice of teaching young children. If you don't recognise how young children learn or how they express themselves if English or if language or self-confidence is limited, then you can't make an informed judgement and the school, the teachers and the children don't receive a fair and just inspection. The Ofsted methodology and the misty snapshots that emerged from fragmented classroom observations of unknown children and unknown children's explanations of their work to unknown inspectors compounded this problem. What an unnatural situation! I remember my horror at some of the inspectors' critical remarks about a 5-year-old trying to read, about the immaturity of a young child's painting, about the inappropriateness of using music and art to support language development.

In my inspection experience of 1997, Ofsted did not consider the bigger picture. It did not consider children's prior attainment and progress or contributory factors or evidence of them.

I agree with writers who have suggested that Ofsted does not take sufficient account of local circumstances (Faruqi 1996; Broadhead, Cuckle, Hodgeson & Dunsford 1996). I was denied the opportunity to explain the complex circumstances of Oak Tree infant school, young children's unpredictable traits on starting full-time school, the fragile emotions of many children, the hazards of social poverty and temporary housing, the disruptiveness of sudden staff changes or the meaning of the projected 1997 SAT's results which were the best the school had ever achieved. I also felt that the unique set of contextual circumstances (political, professional and personal) both inside and outside the school that accumulated and happened simultaneously during the year of the Ofsted process influenced the course of events. The inspectors made unchallengeable, absolute judgements which seemed to support the hidden agenda of local and national initiatives, rather than reflect the situation in my school. Maybe this is not surprising, given that it was LEA inspectors inspecting a local school although they were wearing Ofsted hats.

The negative outcome of the Ofsted inspection of the independent, progressive secondary school Summerhill (1999) and the result of the Independent Schools Tribunal that followed the headteacher's appeal against Ofsted was well documented in the popular and educational press (Guardian and TES, March 2000). A group of academic researchers was asked to produce an expert witness statement that supported Summerhill in making its case (Ian Stronach). It was very critical of the inspection process and found that HMI "had played scant regard to the school's aims, devised no methods to address these aims and merely assumed that those elements that diverged from Ofsted expectations should be ignored." HMI's written record of evidence was made available and it was clear that the subsequent judgements were sometimes bizarre and often prejudiced. During the tribunal hearing it was apparent that Summerhill School was on a secret Ofsted 'to be watched' list, made up of 66 independent schools. The judge condemned this as surveillance and unacceptable.

Schools were once described as being secret gardens. Is Ofsted a world of secret judgements? The Summerhill case seems to echo many of the research findings about Ofsted. It also raises the question of what schools can do if they are not well known or don't have adequate funds (Summerhill reputedly faced a legal bill of £150,000). Common Woods Secondary School recently became the first state school to successfully mount a legal challenge against Ofsted (TES, 1.12.2000). The first adjudicator to Ofsted was appointed in 1998 to review the handling of complaints, broker agreements where possible and to help the body improve its own handling of complaints. The adjudicator cannot alter the judgements made by registered or HMI inspectors, order a re-inspection or alter an inspection report. The TES (22.10.99) reported that only six cases of complaint out of 291 complaints to

Ofsted had been dealt with since the appointment and in all cases Ofsted complied with the recommendations. The latest figures covering 1999-2000 show that there were 300 complaints about inspection, 116 were formal written ones and of those 116 complaints 32 were partially upheld and five were upheld.

Does Ofsted really have a commitment to the improvement of inspection as well as improvement through inspection? Ofsted has to change to become a positive and popular inspection system. The reformed service could offer high-quality care for ailing schools. It could perform the traditional function of school audit and review as well as assessing schools' capacity to manage themselves. It could become the integrated quality assurance, review and improvement system that is standard practice in well-managed sectors of industry and commerce. It could support the rights of parents and children to have quality schools and the teaching profession to have high quality support. It could be a very effective and fair, just and popular (Reynolds TES February 2001). My own Ofsted experience was probably the worst experience of my personal and professional life that resulted in profound public and private damage, but unlike many teachers and headteachers who are reported to be leaving teaching I am committed^{and} remaining in the profession and in headship.

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Looking for a Fair Assessment.

Margaret Follows.

Background

My research is a reflective account⁷ of an action research enquiry at Oak Tree⁸ infant school, which took place during a period, 1995-1997, whilst I was the head teacher. This enquiry examined the attainment⁹ and progress¹⁰ of children from entry into school to end of National Curriculum Key Stage 1 (NC KS1). This enquiry began the explorations of my research. It provides the qualitative data to support the arguments and processes that I am pursuing and seeking to understand. Therefore, I am researching my own 'evidence based practice'.

The rationale of my research is directly related to the issue(s) of 'entitlement'. This includes the entitlement of parents and their children to receive a 'fair assessment' of their attainment at NC KS1. It also entitles teachers to a 'fair assessment' of their work. I now realise that I am entitled to use images of my professional life, as a head teacher, to represent 'layers of professional knowledge' in an infant

⁷ My reflective account involves self-study, using the method of memory work, (Schatz, 1994), and it shows a clear statement of my educational beliefs. The account is about evidence-based practice and it will contribute to the professional knowledge, which is related to the assessment of children's learning in the infant school.

⁸ This is a fictitious name for the infant school where I was the head teacher.

⁹ Children's attainment is related to the expected standard of performance, at the end of NC KS1. The expected level of attainment at the end of NC KS1, for all children of seven years, is level 1-3. The national norm is therefore level 2. The standard of performance is measured by the level of attainment in the NC KS1 Assessment and Tests, (SATs). (DFEE,1995,p17).

¹⁰ Children's progress is determined by the comparison of attainment at the end of NC KS1, (performance in SATs), with prior attainment on entry into school, (performance in Baseline Assessment). (SCAA,1997,p15).

school context. Finally, it entitles research colleagues to challenge and interpret the experiences and actions of my research.

The research includes statistical analysis of data related to the assessment of children's learning. I am also developing a research methodology that includes memory work¹¹ based on my 'different' story approach¹². I am using it, as a two-fold method of critical reflection, with a group of teacher researchers at Kingston University, and for my own self-study.

The paper describes my search for a form of representation that is meaningful to my own professional way of seeing - a form that I am entitled to use. It presents the idea of representing my research, which is about 'layers of professional knowledge' in an infant school context, through the visual metaphor of a 'multi-layered jigsaw puzzle' (MLJP).

Representing Layers of Professional Knowledge with a Multi-Layered Jigsaw Puzzle.

As an ex-infant school head teacher, I see the MLJP as a reminder that the children must have a central role in my work. A large interlocking floor jigsaw puzzle is used at the earlier stages of children's education and is a popular, practical activity that encourages co-operative learning as children work together or are helped by adults. The children use simple recognition, sorting and matching skills, all vital for success in the development of language, reading, writing and mathematics. Making an MLJP with young children goes one step further than making a simple interlocking jigsaw puzzle. Young children can learn, for example, about proportion or about the process of growth and life cycles, where the life cycle of a chicken is depicted by each layer of the jigsaw puzzle showing a stage in that process. Each layer of the puzzle provides a 'layer of knowledge' for a child.

I saw parallels between this and the action research process. As with making a jigsaw puzzle, the action research process is practical and problem solving and progressively builds on previous stages (cycles). A jigsaw puzzle is baffling when seen in pieces, but usually there is a stimulus, a wish to find out more by fitting the pieces together and ultimately to find out what the completed jigsaw puzzle will show. A child or a group of children can either start with a random piece or select and begin to make a favourite colour or shape, or find a familiar character, or start with a corner piece to make the frame for the jigsaw puzzle. Most young children naturally seek the help of others. Action research is also a messy and an untidy process that is often frustrating, and it relies on the co-operation and collaboration of the participants. Co-operative and collaborative learning has always been central to my work, both as a teacher of young children, and as a head teacher of an infant school working with other professionals.

My multi-layered jigsaw puzzle is a form of data representation and a form of communication. Lomax & Parker (1995) talk about visualisations as allowing '*their authors and their viewers to uncover implicit meanings about professional practice and enable these to be clarified and made explicit*'. Eisner (1996) wrote about these two aspects, that is the relationship between form of representation and form of understanding, and new representational forms being used to convey to readers what has been learned. He describes a number of forms of representations. These include, telling stories, using pictures, making diagrams and maps, and reciting poetry. I see my MLJP as a combination of telling stories, using pictures and making diagrams and maps. In addition, I see it as a practical, hands-on approach to my research.

¹¹ Memory work based on the use of story includes self-study to make critical reflections on my feelings, values and actions. It provides opportunities to validate aspects of my work. It includes a collective, group investigation of my experiences and my actions during the enquiry. It will help me to bring my research alive and it will help me to make it explicit to a wider audience. (inter-subjective level). In addition, members of the group, will be able to help me understand my work better. (intra-subjective level). Therefore, this method enables a double dialectic. (Lomax&Evans, 1996, p137-149).

¹² My 'different' story approach involves writing a fictionalised story of a personal account of my experiences as a head teacher.

My first attempt at representing my research with the MLJP

I tried to represent the action research process of my research to show its untidiness. I thought that this was similar to how I had observed a young child tackling a large floor jigsaw puzzle. I had drawn round the twenty pieces of a large floor jigsaw puzzle, on a large sheet of paper. Although I had drawn round each piece separately, with a space between each one, I had carefully selected the four corner pieces and the edge pieces and arranged them on the paper with the inside pieces almost in the appropriate places. Although I kidded myself I was showing the 'real' process of the first part of my research, which was marked by the same 'exploratory' actions I had observed in young children, I was in fact still using and seeking the security of a completed jigsaw puzzle picture. Initially I came up with twenty issues to examine and write about because my jigsaw had twenty pieces and I felt I had to use all the pieces of the jigsaw puzzle. I had to remind myself that *I had chosen* this jigsaw puzzle as a representation of my research and not to structure it. I soon re-arranged and reduced the issues to ten main issues.

As I proceeded with this activity I began to realise that not all the issues of my whole research would/could be highlighted in the first layer of the puzzle, so although I decided to retain all the pieces, some pieces remained blank. This would give me the flexibility that I was beginning to seek. The shaded jigsaw puzzle pieces could depict the issues remaining unclear or not even investigated at this early stage. I then began to examine each question and the related data and write about it, logically selecting each jigsaw puzzle piece and its question, one at a time - each jigsaw puzzle piece fitting neatly together, inside the fixed framework.

Still, very neat and tidy. Still nothing creative, nothing evolving. Still no rich picture of my research, to share. I soon got bored and so did the long-suffering research colleagues, when I shared my work with them. I realised that had to separate the representation and the methodology of my research. Then I would be able to see how these two important aspects would complement each other.

My second attempt at representing my research with the MLJP

This began after I had written and shared a fictionalised story of the Ofsted inspection process at Oak Tree infant school with my research group. I was also reading the work of Clandinin & Connelly (1995) who use the metaphor of a landscape to depict a '*rich and compelling view of the epistemological and moral world in which teachers live and work.*' This is what I am seeking to do in my research. Clandinin & Connelly see writing as a method of enquiry that moves through successive stages of self-reflection. I began to see the link between a visual image and writing for creating knowledge - putting them together could really provide a rich picture.

These two incidents, i.e. writing the fictionalised story and reading the works of Clandinin and Connelly, really activated my creativity and imagination. Also, I remembered Bassey (1995, p4), describing 'a topography of social research'. I can relate, easily, to a 'knowledge landscape' and 'topography' (this is probably my educational background of geography and mathematics). But 'landscape' and 'topography' suggest horizontal two-dimensional constructions to me. They appear to give a description of the surface, a view of a landscape observer. I need to be actively involved. I need to actively find out what is underneath the surface. I need to work in a three-dimensional way as I uncover meanings - what is a 'fair assessment'? and discover new meanings both for/with others and myself.

When a real MLJP jigsaw puzzle is designed, the framework is often the first to be drawn and cut although it could be shaped differently for each layer. Then the picture is decided, and finally the inside pieces are cut to shapes that will fit together to make the picture. I am reversing the process with my MLJP metaphor. I am creating a jigsaw rather than fitting together someone else's design. I don't know what the picture depicting each 'layer of professional knowledge' will look like. I do not know what the framework for each layer will look like. At the moment I envisage the framework for each layer to be elastic. Fixed only at any moment in time when I need to take stock and describe an overall review of my research.

I am starting with one or two inside pieces and finding more than one relationship between them. There are only some inside pieces. I am just finding out the relationships between the different aspects of my research. I am finding out that these relationships are interchangeable, as new relationships are

discovered and explored, as other people begin to share in the process of my research rather than just the end result. I am beginning to talk about space, place and time, just as Clandinin & Connelly did using the metaphor of the 'professional knowledge landscape'. I also see this in terms of expansiveness and the possibility of the space being filled with diverse people, things and events in different relationships. Therefore, the pieces of my MLJP need to be interchangeable, and their orientation may change. At the moment I am retaining the traditional shape for each jigsaw puzzle piece, for ease of adult recognition. But I realise that I need to make the pieces interchangeable, so I am still undecided on their shape. I am considering a design of tessellating, coloured tiles, but I do not like straight lines. I think jigsaw pieces are more visually appealing and are more fun!

In a real MLJP each layer relates to previous and following layers, e.g. indicating each stage in the process of growth. In addition, each layer may be different in size and made up of pieces of different shapes and sizes. But in my MLJP each layer provides a 'layer of professional knowledge' in the meaning (s) of a 'fair assessment' of children's attainment. As I go on my research (ad)venture, through the process of searching for and discovering meanings, some aspects of the research may be traced through one or more 'layer(s) of professional knowledge'. Therefore, some jigsaw pieces may be repeated through a number of layers of the puzzle.

An MLJP to represent my current thinking

The first layer of the MLJP represents the first layer of meaning or a 'layer of professional knowledge'. Figure 1 is in black and white, but the jigsaw pieces for this first layer are colour-coded red in the original drawing. They show seven questions and my initial explanations of them. These initial explanations were made collectively with either colleagues from Oak Tree infant school or the group of teacher researchers at Kingston University. The MLJP shows some shaded pieces too, indicating that there may be more questions to be raised and more explanations to be sought. There are blue and then yellow colour coded jigsaw pieces stacked behind the red pieces. This shows the possible, further layers of the MLJP, representing the possible, and further layers of meanings or 'layers of professional knowledge'.

The 'multi-layered' way of exploring a question.

I have selected the question, *Does the Ofsted inspection show a fair assessment of the children's attainment?* as a focus to show how I envisage the different layers of the MLJP.

Layer 1.

I wrote an account of my personal experiences, as a head teacher, throughout an Ofsted inspection process. This account focused on a continuous period of one year. The first draft was a chronological, factual account. Related documentation, diary extracts and records of conversations with personal and professional colleagues supported this account. I wrote about events involving the people directly involved with the school (the school staff, the parents and children, the governors, the LEA personnel) and the Ofsted inspection team, HMI's and the School Improvement Team. Initially, I needed to include the real names or initials of the people in my account. This was to enable me to make accurate cross-references with the mass of archived data. Subsequently I substituted fictitious names for all the people in the account to maintain anonymity. I then cross referenced relevant sections of my account with material from the three sections of the Ofsted Handbook (1995) and expanded the account where further explanation was needed. I then included my own questions that arose as I wrote and edited my account. This layer of the jigsaw represents quite a long period of time during which I shared my writing with colleagues and got critical feedback on many occasions.

Layer 2.

For the purpose of enhancing critical self-study and critical feedback from others, I needed to provide a richer picture of my experience. I needed to bring my experience alive in my account. I needed a 'different' presentation. I decided on a fictionalised account. As an infant headteacher, children have always had a central role in my work. An important and enjoyable part of my work with young children included sharing, telling and reading stories with them. So I chose a favourite children's story, *After the Storm*, by Nick Butterworth (1992) as the fictional context in which to

set the Ofsted experience. The story focuses on a large oak tree and so I felt that it would fit in with the name, Oak Tree infant school, that I had adopted. The title and the story line had no significance for me choosing the story. But there are many animal and bird characters in the story, and I needed many characters for my account. The characters also provided fictitious names for all the people included in the account. This was very important as it is essential for me to maintain confidentiality and anonymity for the LEA, the Ofsted team, the school community, and myself. In addition, I needed story characters that had neutral personalities, so that I could focus on the events rather than the personalities. I wanted to talk about the situation and the issues that it threw up, not the individuals involved..

I presented the story to my research group and their collective examination of it in a 'memory work' session promoted much discussion. Members of the research group were able to draw on their varied experiences to highlight the gaps and the spaces in the account and 'the things written between the lines' were thoroughly explored. I felt unable to participate fully in the deconstruction of the my story because it was too personal to me but the taped discussion provided many different angles on which to reflect. The experience was very valuable for my critical self-reflections. I think that my fundamental beliefs, expressed in the story, remain unchanged. But, I have put a different emphasis on some aspects of the story and improved the clarity of some of the events. Subsequently I rewrote pieces of my 'different' story and recast some of the animal characters. Fictionalising the more objective account of the Ofsted experience and exploring it with a group of critical friends provided the second layer of my MLJP, the second layer of meaning or another 'layer of professional knowledge'. I have represented this second layer in my MLJP by pieces that are colour-coded blue.

Layers 3 and 4

The third layer of the MLJP has not yet been started but I anticipate it being created and explored as I examine the literature which would put my research in a wider social and political setting. At present this third layer of the MLJP is colour-coded yellow. Finally, a fourth layer, yet to be created will be a 'layer of professional knowledge' that could evolve from meanings that I discover when I examine professionalism in teaching in relation to my research.

What happens next?

I am currently working on two further issues. Firstly, the statistical analysis of data related to the assessment of children's learning that I made with two colleagues from the school. I intend to relate this to LEA and national statistics. Secondly, case studies (including assessment profiles and work) of two children who attended Oak Tree infant school. I will be analysing data from my research records and using fictionalised stories and memory work to construct different layers of knowledge in relation to these two aspects.

Conclusion:

I have introduced the idea of representing 'layers of professional knowledge' (my professional practice) through the visual metaphor of the 'multi-layered jigsaw puzzle'. I am suggesting that it shows my 'multi-layered' way of exploring the questions in my research. Also, I am suggesting that it enables a shared process, a double dialectic (Lomax & Parker, 1995; Lomax, 1999) of learning. With the intra-subjective dialectic, I am creating a representation that challenges my understanding of the practice that it represents. With the inter-subjective dialectic, I am sharing the meaning of this representation and allowing others to challenge that meaning. I am using the double dialectic as a way of making my understanding transparent and transforming it in the process.

I am beginning to sort out the 'chaos' in my research, as new relationships and patterns emerge in my quest to find a 'fair assessment'. This is enabling me to thoroughly examine the key issues of this symposium – action for entitlement to a fair assessment and researching evidence based practice. What do you think? Through this account of my research, am I beginning to account for myself as a professional educator? Am I beginning to achieve this with my idea of representing 'layers of professional knowledge' through the metaphor of the MLJP?

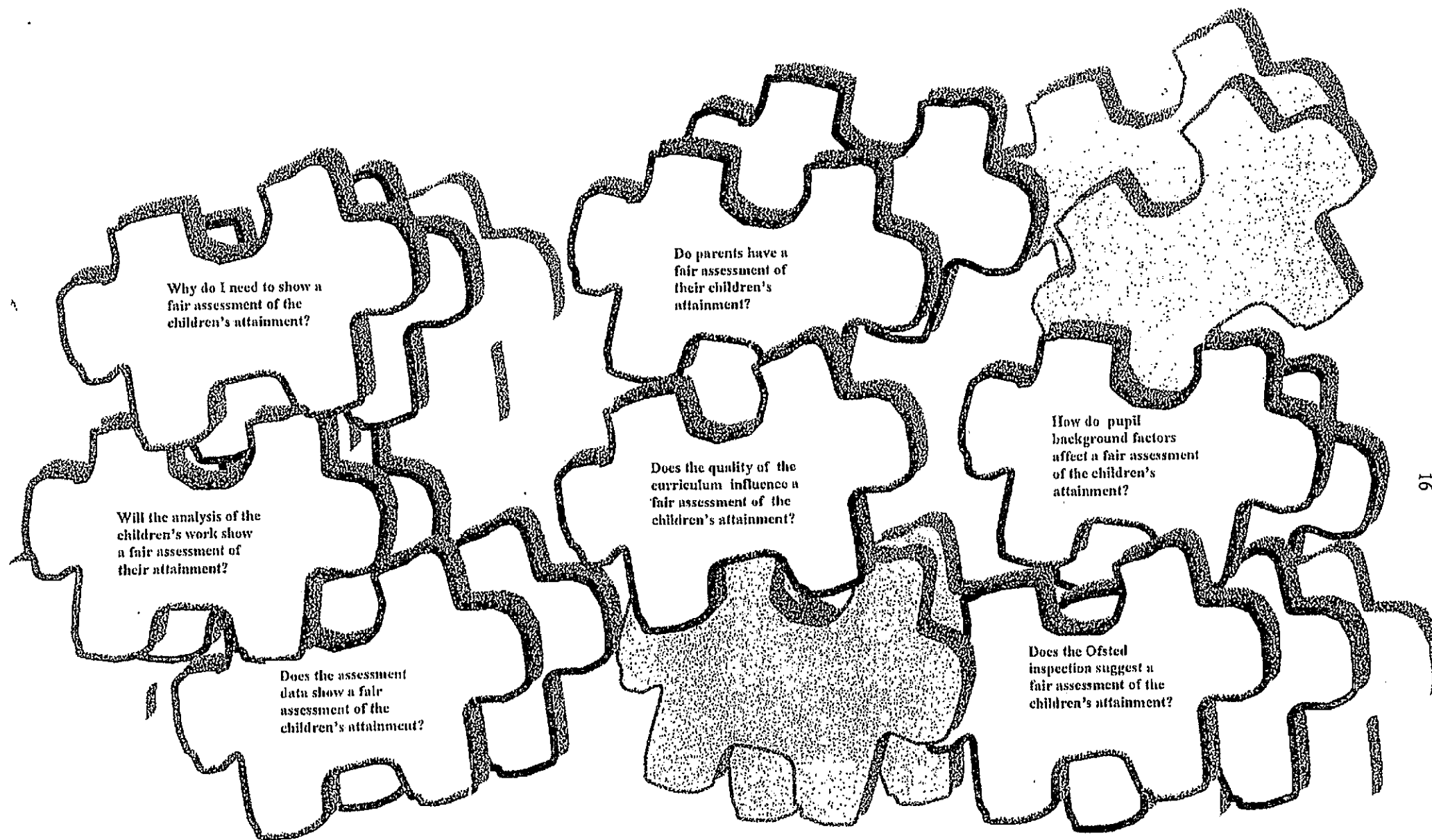


Figure 1. Representing layers of professional knowledge in an infant school context with a multi-layered jigsaw puzzle.

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NEWSLETTER

No. 2. June 2000

CARN Newsletter 2 focuses on *the aims of CARN* which are listed on the website:
<<http://www.uea.ac.uk/care/carn/whatis.html>>.

This is how some people saw their current action research fitting or extending these aims:

From: Richard Winter <richardwinter@wtree.u-net.com>

Reading through the CARN 'statement', I feel both reassured and challenged. Challenged, because I am reminded of how easy I find it to avoid innovative critical inquiry ('Surely, what I am doing at the moment is OK, isn't it?') and collaboration with others ('If you really want something done properly the easiest and quickest strategy is to do it yourself!'). And reassured to know that there are other people who think, as I do, that critical collaboration with others is really the only way - both for immediate 'problem solving' and, perhaps, even, for the salvation of humanity. The word 'reclaiming' springs to mind. The CARN statement articulates a way of RECLAIMING WORK (from impersonal 'systems' and power-obsessed 'managers') and of RECLAIMING WELFARE SERVICES (from unreflexive professional experts, unaware of the limitations of their understanding). A way of reclaiming (i.e. remembering) the creative potential of individuals. And in my own work, I am reminded of the fact that no matter how much careful effort I put into planning and organising students' work, when they finally evaluate the courses I 'teach' their main emphasis is always on how much they have learned from one another, from sharing each other's difficulties and from exchanging suggestions. I know I need to be reminded of this, because I always experience a momentary pang of disappointment, even though I know this is exactly as it should be. As we read in the 'Tao Te Ching': the good 'leader' is one who enables 'the people' to say, 'We did this for ourselves'. The task of the professional is to become invisible. And I am moved when I hear social workers, nurses, teachers and managers describing their on-going action research projects in terms which suggest that this is precisely what they are grappling with. They give me hope. And so does CARN. Long may we continue!

From: Jack Whitehead <edsajw@bath.ac.uk>

My present action research enquiry is grounded in my educative relationships with teacher-researchers from the Grand Erie School Board. It is grounded in my teaching, on the masters programme at Brock University, in Ontario. I am asking, researching and answering questions of the kind, How can I help you to move your enquiry forward?. This brings me immediately to a limitation of print. I am writing this on an apple-mac G3 computer with direct access to the internet. As I type the following url

HYPERLINK <http://www.bath.ac.uk/~edsajw/brgeoff.mov> I can download and play a video-clip of my work with Geoff Suderman-Gladwell, as he expresses his living standards of practice in terms of his pupils' learning. In a second clip at **HYPERLINK** <http://www.bath.ac.uk/~edsajw/jwgsg.mov> I show and explain how my living standards of professional practice are related to Geoff's commitment to enable his own students to create their own standards of practice and judgement in relation to their own learning. Part of my present enquiry is focused on the validity of multi-media accounts in which I explain my professional practices and learning in terms of my living standards of practice as a professional educator. My enquiry is also driven by the frustration of seeing living standards of professional practice inadequately represented in linguistic statements from organisations such as the Teacher Training Agency in England and the Ontario College of Teachers. These linguistic statements are then used, within national and provincial frameworks of accountability, in ways, which deny essential qualities in the living standards of practice embodied in the educative relationships between educators and their students.

I see my educational action research as contributing to, as well as 'fulfilling', our CARN aims. I don't like the idea of 'fulfilling' because it carries an implication for me of criteria I am expected to meet. What I want to do is to show that I am going beyond such criteria, in making a creative contribution to our community.

From: Rob Watling <RJW22@leicester.ac.uk>

The School of Education, University of Leicester is *hosting a new Action Research programme into Media Education*. This work is being funded by the University Research Fund and will last until December 2000 in the first instance. We have created a group of four professionals working in media education, supported by two members of staff from the School of Education, University of Leicester. The main aim of the project is to support these people in identifying, addressing and evaluating changes in their own professional practice. The group will work collaboratively and members will be involved in supporting each other in their work. The group have met for their first training session, and are now deciding the principal focus for their action inquiry. These will be posted on the project web page in June. See: <http://www.le.ac.uk/education/rjw22/lemon/merge.html>

From: Louis M. Smith <lmsmith@artsci.wustl.edu>

I continue to engage in all kinds of life writing - biography, autobiography, sketches and portraits. This is the area of practice that I want to engage others in thinking about. My specific project is the writing of a 2000 word biographical portrait of Charles Darwin for Joy Palmer (Univ of Durham) and Liora Bresler's (Univ of Illinois) '100 Key Thinkers on Education.' As I worked on this I began thinking about 'the selection problem,' that is, how does one squeeze Darwin into 2000 words? This issue was one of several similar ones raised in a biographical workshop with Craig Kridel (Univ of South Carolina) and Janet Miller (National-Louis University) in a recent AERA Professional Development and Training Session in New Orleans. I have written a half dozen or ten pages about this part of the practice of this piece of life writing. *I am interested in finding other colleagues who are engaging in life writing and how they study and understand the processes. On an earlier occasion, I made the argument that all of action research is autobiographical life writing. Any collegial disagreements with all or part of all this?*

From: Margaret Powell <MargPwll@juno.com>

I've shifted careers from twenty-three years in teacher education at a private four year undergraduate liberal arts institution to a local community college where I am now director of the Developmental Reading Lab. During my entire career, I've recognized, valued and relied on action research as a process and methodology in all curriculum development I've done both as a member of a very unique field based teacher education program and when working with in-service teachers and/or school districts. Currently, I'm shifting gears to work with developmental students in a local community college reading program. Starting in August of 1999, I began to completely rebuild the curriculum I inherited in this position, using action research as the basis for that re-organization. *This year, I completed an extensive self study of my process as teacher educator turned developmental reading program director. I have monitored the process of that change and have used my own self reflective data to begin the next stages of year two.* I have been strongly influenced by the work and practice of Lou Smith and have processed this study in an autobiographical life writing style. If this is of interest, please let me know.

From: Ann R. Taylor <ataylor@siue.edu> and Carol Aljets <caljets@ecusd7.org>

I am a university teacher educator and Carol is a 1st grade teacher (6-7 year olds). We both teach sections of an elementary methods of teaching mathematics class. We use the research-based concepts and practices we discover through reading literature for our college methods classes to inform the mathematical activities in Carol's 1st grade class. Conversely, we use our practice-based research investigating the mathematical thinking and learning of Carol's 1st graders to educate ourselves and develop curriculum for our pre-service elementary teachers. *In this way our work is based on 'collaboration and dialogue to develop research-based professional practice and practice-based research' about mathematics education.* Our latest project focuses on discovering what Carol's students understand about "place value", and specifically how they understand the digits in the number 16. Constance Kamii's work and research reported in Young Children Reinvent Arithmetic: Implications of Piaget's Theory, suggest that most traditionally taught 1st graders do not know that the "1" in "16" stands for "ten." Carol and I were intrigued by this research and so we conducted some of our own. We discovered that 50% of Carol's students did in fact understand the meaning of the digits in 16 (April). Then Carol, who uses methods based on constructivist understanding of learning, did some specific teaching to address this concept and now (May) 86% of her students understand the meaning of the digits. This research that began with literature and moved to a public school classroom has now returned to the university setting, where it has clarified for us, as teacher educators, what we need to stress to our college pre-service teachers about this important topic.

SPECIAL REPORT: Looking for a Fair(er) Assessment of Children's Learning, Development & Attainment.

Margaret Follows < mfollows1@compuserve.com >

Can I describe my critical, reflexive and collaborative enquiry into my *past* professional experience as action research? Can such enquiry facilitate my active and creative involvement in defining and developing my own and others' current professional practice? Can it lead to new professional knowledge? *I invite readers to comment on these questions in the light of my enquiry.*

I was Headteacher of Oak Tree Infant School for ten years. Now, no longer in post, I am engaged in an action research enquiry which uses my previous school experience as a focus for developing ideas about a fair(er) assessment of young children. My intention is to explore, critically, some of my own tacit knowledge by focusing on my past practice, which I represent in a fictionalised form. To do this I have involved professional colleagues who help me to deconstruct and reconstruct the past events so that we can learn from them together.

Making a StoryBook

As part of my enquiry I constructed a StoryBook called 'All About Ourselves' by Polly and Robert. My story book was based on the work of two young children and was constructed from real data: school learning and assessment policies; school assessment records; material from the children's personal portfolios which included examples of work, classteachers formative assessment records, individual records of achievement and baseline assessment; and curriculum plans which included annual and mid term topic planners and provided a framework for teaching over time. The StoryBook was made in the style that the children had used to make their own storybooks: a series of pictures drawn by the child and a text either written by the child or written by the teacher and copied by the child. My aim was to provide rich pictures of the children's learning, development and attainment during a three year period, 1994-1997. The two children I chose had very different expectations, achievements, abilities, learning styles, personalities, interests and life experiences; this meant that their routes to learning and the implications for teaching may also have been quite different. The StoryBook allowed me to develop a form of representing the concrete data which provided a picture of the whole child in a form that I felt was in tune with the reality of infant classrooms; but the StoryBook was also *my* construction, containing *tacit* knowledge about infant education.

Inviting Critical Responses

I used the StoryBook as a focus for a number of sessions in which I involved teachers and other action researchers in my deconstruction and reconstruction of my past practice vis a vis assessment. Following these sessions I edited the StoryBook so that its final form emerged from the critical research process in which I was engaged.

I presented an early draft of the story book to a group of research colleagues that included other headteachers, teachers who specialised in the infant years, and research supervisors. I presented the children's learning and attainment through their drawings, their emergent writing and their developing language skills. I wanted to explore the children's ongoing learning and development without reference to their attainment in national curriculum assessment or baseline assessment. I wanted to focus on classroom assessment and generate discussion away from the narrow and linear measurement of numerical scores to the developmental and conceptual stages of learning, as seen through the drawings. I wanted the drawings to pose questions about the children's learning and show their achievements during the three year period, rather than confirm results of their attainment. I wanted colleagues to have the opportunity to make their own judgements about the drawings and be able to visualize the classroom context for each learning activity.

The session challenged my thinking and raised questions that I had not considered. I had not taken account of how much my considerable experience and knowledge of events had structured my understanding of the StoryBook material. Observing young children draw and listening to their related conversation had always been a particular interest and fascination, and it had shown me many surprising aspects of children's learning. I knew the two children very well. From a teacher's point of view, looking at a child and her picture (in this case a picture that happens to be the draw a person test), gives an indication of the stage of development of the child, and so to what I need do next. But this experience was not part of the experience of those with whom I shared the StoryBook, some of whom were unfamiliar with infant school practice. I had expected others to see what I saw in the drawings, particularly their significance to what might come next in the children's development. But we did not have equal knowledge of the situation. I could read between the lines of the book to fill in the missing data. I realised that the story book had provided insufficient information about how assessment and learning happened in practice and about the pupil-teacher relationship that had supported it. The StoryBook did

not provide the information about the children that was available to teachers who could make informed judgments about the children and their progress. *This insight confirms my belief that teachers use their knowledge of the whole child when making judgments about particular pieces of work, and that this knowledge is essential to a fair assessment.* Although I had known this to be true from my experience, I had not taken it into account in preparing the story book. The infant classroom at Oak Tree School was a closed book to people who had not experienced it. How could I open this closed book?

Collaborating with Teacher Colleagues

I decided to rewrite the StoryBook so as to clarify the essential knowledge that teachers possess about the children they teach. I was able to involve two teacher colleagues who had a personal knowledge of my research context. The two teachers had been key members of my school staff when I was headteacher. They agreed to act as my research collaborators. Sue and Kate had first hand knowledge of the two children, having been their class teachers for two out of the children's four years at Oak Tree Infant school. I knew the teachers would be able to describe their classroom organisation and their relationship with Polly and Robert and that we could work together to explore the judgements that we made about Polly and Robert's work in relation to our inside knowledge and to the criteria and standards of assessment we used.

We had three meetings. We used the technique called 'memory work' to focus back together. We had concrete examples of the children's work before us and we addressed the questions, 'What, When, How and Why did we do this?' so that we could triangulate our memories. I tape-recorded these sessions. My work with the teachers focused my own memories of the events that took place, and I have used our joint insights in the most recent editing of the StoryBook. Now it provides a fuller description and explanation of the children's learning, development and attainment in relation to curriculum planning, classroom organisation, the context of each activity related to each child's piece of work, assessment records and the possible next steps in the learning for each child. A more holistic picture is beginning to emerge. The most recent version of my StoryBook includes a series of pictures with writing done by two children over a three year period with captions written by me. Following each pair of pictures I answered three questions about the children's work: What is there to see? How best can we understand what we see? How can we put our understanding to good use? There is an introduction which sets the context and provides background information about the children and there is a conclusion which draws together the analysis provided after each picture. The footnotes that support this analysis show the evidential source of my conclusions, clearly distinguishing between objective data and constructed data.

Interim Conclusion

When I was head teacher of Oak Tree infant school, I was constantly challenging the particular educational values that I brought to that leadership role. Although, the school policies were developed through consultation and involvement with all staff, they also reflected my educational values. My enquiry so far suggests that these educational values are at the heart of what I mean by a fair(er) assessment of children's learning, development and attainment. I also recognise that I have a long way to go in the enquiry before I can clarify these values sufficiently or amass enough evidence to convince others about what a fair(er) assessment might mean for practice and policy. At this stage my most important values are: keeping the needs of the whole child central to the learning process; using the assessment process as an integral part of the learning process; and building on what the child already knows and understands, and which emphasizes success rather than failure.

NEWS FLASH: *Don't miss the next CARN conference: 26, 27 and 28 October, 2000 in Dunchurch, Rugby, Warwickshire. Further details from Peter Ovens, Nottingham Trent University, Clifton Hall, Nottingham NG11 8NJ ncladmin@ntu.ac.uk*

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