

## Chapter five

*‘ Accounting for myself’ - a description of my work with a whole class and an attempt to explain what I mean by accountability.*

### Introduction

Today, 23rd May 1994, before writing this introduction to Chapter 5, I spent most of the morning with the deputy head ( curriculum) discussing my department’s proposed strategic plan and budget for 1994 to 1996. I saw students at break and lunch time and knew that I’d prefer to be with them in the classroom than in the meeting. The whole morning reminded me about why I wrote the following paper. It had grown out of wanting to give myself and the students I teach a voice in a society and school that seemed to ignore us. Teaching and learning seemed to be taking second place to management and efficiency in schools when I wrote about Poppy’s class. It struck me today that things haven’t changed much. My meeting with the deputy head wasn’t about education, teaching or learning but about ‘ value for money’ and ‘total quality management’.

Our discussions were about future plans and funding for the Humanities department: we’re offering new GCSE options in 1994 to 1996; introducing a new non- exam Religious Education course in Key Stage 4 and developing our work in assessment and so need to bid for funding out of the school’s development money. We had already been allocated a base-

line budget for stationery, photocopying, repairs and to re-new texts but that base-line budget wasn't enough and I had to make a case for more money for that and for development money.

The deputy head was concerned that I hadn't written the strategic and tactical plans forms in the appropriate language. Writing now, I'm struck that I can't remember the difference between strategic and tactical plans. Ah well. He wanted me to write more precise performance criteria for members of my department and to show more exact ways of monitoring them. When it came to increasing the base-line budget he kept asking me was I able to show "value for money"? I had worked out the cost per student per year for stationery but found the process of being questioned about how many sheets of A4 lined paper and graph paper a typical 14 year old student would use in a year a little tedious. I'm not saying that budgeting is unimportant, just that it seems to be over important in my school at the moment.

Before writing about Poppy I was concerned that the language of academics wasn't my language; before writing this paper I was concerned that the language of school and government wasn't my language either. I wrote:

*"The most important obstacle for me in writing about my teaching was the language I intended to use in writing about my class. It was different to that used by the management team at school and by the government. Their language about teaching and teachers*

*appeared to have little to do with me and yet what they say and the way they act directly affects my working life. Their words and definitions have an authority and power which affect me directly”.*

Then, as now, the key word in public life seems to be “accountability’. In school we have strategic plans, tactical plans, performance indicators, performance monitoring and so on. But where’s the education in all that? Martin Kettle in “The Guardian” September 1993 wrote:

*“It used to be said that those who can, do, while those who can’t, teach. Cruel but, in any case, no longer true. Today a more appropriate version would read: those who can, do, while those who can’t go into management... the education reforms... have been carried out in the name of efficiency. In many cases, for efficiency read simply reduced costs... What has now become too clear for comfort is that the pursuit of efficiency has itself become an inefficient task... Across much of the public sector today the buzz word is “quality”... the aim of total Quality Management is homogenisation of practice and the elimination of individual initiative..”*

In school the pursuit of ‘quality’ and use of the word ‘accountability’ seem to me to have a lot to do with management and little to do with education. I wrote the following as an account of my practice with a year 10 class over the year 1991 to 1992. I wanted to write about the class, their work and to reflect on what it meant to them and to me. I wanted to build on the work I’d done with Poppy and try to understand the importance of spoken and written

dialogue in my work. In doing so I hoped to show what I think my accountability in education means and how it goes beyond the kind of practice that can be measured in performance indicators. I knew by this time that I could 'speak for myself': it was time to account for myself.

## Chapter five

***‘Accounting for myself’ - a description of my work with a whole class and an attempt to explain what I mean by accountability.***

### **November 1992**

In July 1992, having described my practice with one year 10 student, Poppy, in which I showed how we had worked together in a collaborative and supportive way to improve the quality of our work, I wanted to put that practice into context by describing what I'd done with the rest of her class. Was I able to show that I could work collaboratively and supportively with other students? How had my work with Poppy and the understanding I'd come to about dialogue informed my work with the rest of her class?

My work with Poppy had taken place among her class, 10 Mh, and yet I wrote about Poppy as if we'd been in a room on our own. I'd seldom mentioned 10Mh in my paper, only once recognising they were there by writing that Poppy and I *..talked in the classroom during a morning session. It took place amid a lot of activity as students were going in and out of the room to do observations, surveys etc. Poppy and I were interrupted a number of times and there's a lot of noise on the tape.*" Writing about one student as if the others didn't exist is like writing about the eye of the storm: it appears calm, peaceful and intense but ignores a whole lot

of other things that are going on in the classroom. There isn't just her class to consider either, as what goes on in the rest of the school affects our work too. The image of a Russian doll comes to mind as I write: a student, her class, her teacher, the school, the local education authority, the DFE and so on.

My original intention, then, was to write about my practice with 10Mh over the year September 91 to July 92. It seemed a logical step to take and a simple enough paper to write; but it wasn't. A lot got in my way. This year I have understood the curse "may you live in interesting times". These times are 'interesting' because of government policies that affect the work of all schools and the people in them.

Since writing that paper about Poppy I have read much about what teachers should be doing and how they should be doing it. The writers haven't always been academics but have often been politicians, and their missives on education and teaching have had an effect on the way my school and its curriculum is managed and has inevitably touched on my work in the classroom, with 10 Mh and other classes.

The National Curriculum is still being amended with far-reaching consequences for teachers and students. Professor Paul Black who helped devise the government's

tests for students recently accused ministers of a “ *monumental cock-up*” ( *The Guardian* 1991) over changes to the National Curriculum. He believed that changes were disruptive and teachers were beginning to think that the curriculum wasn't worth taking seriously because it was bound to keep changing. At the beginning of September 1992 when the government announced yet another 'further review' of English teaching.

Melanie Phillips of '*The Guardian*' was moved to write that the constant changes in the curriculum indicated “ *a turbulence of constantly changing politicians and advisers, driven by panic and political opportunism to change their minds all the time. But there is one deeper, unpalatable reason for such neurotic behaviour. It is that the government simply does not trust its teachers to exercise their professional judgment. As a result, it feels driven not merely to lay down broad parameters but to describe in ever closer detail what they must do* ” ( *The Guardian* 11.9.92)

The message that “ *the government simply does not trust its teachers*” seemed to me to be mirrored by the way changes were made in my school and I began to feel, as the year progressed, that the school managers didn't trust its teachers' professional judgements either. It now seems important not to simply put my work with Poppy into context by writing about her class, but to put my work in the classroom with 10 Mh into the wider context of school and politics. Not to do that would be to distort the experience of what I did.

The most important obstacle for me in writing about my teaching was the language I intended to use in writing about my class. It was different to that used by the management team at school and by the government. Their language about teaching and teachers appeared to have little to do with me and yet what they say and the way they act directly affects my working life. Their words and their definitions have an authority and power which affect me directly.

My school management team and the government published documents during 1991 to 1992 describing what they expected competent teachers to be able to do. Words and phrases they used like 'accountability', 'performance indicators', 'line-manager' and so on confound me. I am not sure what is meant by them or if those writing them agree on their definitions. I was heartened to realise that I am not alone in my dislike of this new language appearing in education and all over the public sector. Stuart Hall, in the last issue of *Marxism Today* December 1991, described such language as part of the cultural revolution of Thatcherism. He argued that Thatcherism was the engagement of a '*hegemonic form of politics*' in which '*the market*' and '*market forces*' were to be made into the principle of social life. Hall argued that market forces had changed the public centre .." *there is not a*



*school, hospital, social service department, polytechnic or college in the country which has not been remodelled. The practices of daily life, the professional ethics, the language which is spoken in meetings, the way documents are prepared, work routines designed and priorities defined and fixed, have been totally reframed... most people spend their waking hours learning the new language of incentives, cost-effectiveness, quality audits, performance indicators and the rest of the managerial newspeak...ways of thinking, formulating strategies and defining objectives which reflect the actual practices they are engaged in have become 'lost languages' and a whole new form of institutional non-speak has been born."*

During the year I was working with 10Mh I was assailed with this new language from the government in official documents and in newspaper articles; from HMI who inspected the school ; and the school's management team of head and deputies who responded to HMI criticisms in their planning for the next school year. I received document after document to read, comment and eventually act upon. The aim of all this was said to be 'quality in education'. At the end of the year I understood a little more about market forces when a close colleague was made redundant; I am still puzzled by this stated aim of 'quality education'. Is it in conflict with the kind of quality I try to achieve?

From September 1992, in the management drive for 'quality' my work and that of all teachers in my school is to be monitored for 'basic' and 'higher' performance. I have been told that I am accountable to my line manager. I am the teacher who is *"accountable to Mr. M and Head for the efficient performance of all duties and to Mr. S for her work as a Key stage Leader"* . My job brief for the year '92 to '93 has charts for my tasks, my performance indicators, my monitor, operational methods, timelines and so on. I often feel that I have moved from education and children to work for British Telecom or Esso who have clients and products.

John Bazalgette, director of the Grubb Institute seems to voice my concerns exactly. He wrote *" What happens to children in all this? Do they slip in and out of the discussions, sometimes fully on stage, sometimes waiting in the wings or peeping round the tabs? I have no doubt that they are in everyone's mind, though often unreferred to. But that is the trouble: our silence about them can mean that at critical times we may leave them out of account and unwittingly base decisions on our own interests."* ( Bazalgette 1992)

In my new job brief I have been given the task of 'monitoring student performance' and must define ' student performance indicators'. Reading that sort of language before attempting to write about 10Mh is off -putting. Is working collaboratively with students on my task sheet? Is my judgment of quality very different to my

management team's? In the government White Paper on education July 1992 it says:

*“ Schools are now much more accountable for the education they offer to their pupils... The objective has been both to put governing bodies and headteachers under the greater pressure of accountability for better standards and to increase their freedom to respond to that pressure”.*

My headteacher is now to be accountable for better standards in my school. I am now accountable to my line manager for the ‘ efficient performance of all duties”.

What does it all mean? Accountability seems to be the key word. I don't like it because it seems to be at the heart of the market place and to indicate finance, value for money and performance indicators. But I am reminded of another meaning of accountability, one that would allow me to write about 10Mh in the way that I want. As J.Bazalgette argued

*“ It is perhaps one of the greatest travesties of language during the past decade or more that ‘accountability’ has been given that narrow, market-place connotation... we must be struck by the fact that the root of the word is ‘account’: to give an account is ‘ to tell the story’...”*

The focus for this paper then, is the rendering of an account of my practice with 10 Mh over the academic year 1991 to 1992. I want to try to show the process of

learning and evaluation that went on and why it has a 'quality' about it. It goes beyond the kind of practice listed in performance indicators because reflective practice is concerned with the real life of the classroom and has a vitality that any bureaucratic tick list cannot contain. Everyday in my classroom I have to make judgements about the work of the whole class. I have to understand clearly what I am trying to achieve over a period of time and then how to organise the work of the classroom in each session so that we can work towards achieving those aims.

In September 1991 I began teaching 10Mh a two year course which could be certificated at GCSE in English, English Literature and Integrated Humanities . I taught them for about six and a half hours a week, having worked with other humanities/ English teachers in the school to devise a course that would fulfil the criteria of the exam boards as well as providing a stimulating, interesting course for our students. We all taught the course knowing that it had a limited lifespan because of the National Curriculum and its demands for certain Programmes of Study in English, History and Geography but the possibilities offered by the course are so great that we don't intend giving it up until we have to.

The two year course is organised around these conceptual tensions in year 10: change and continuity; individual and society; equality and inequality; and in year 11 freedom and constraint; conflict and cooperation. Such conceptual tensions allow us to explore a wide variety of topics and issues like the differences between schooling and education; local history; the changing role of women; Germany in the 20th century and so on. Students are encouraged to read a wide range of literature; to use drama and role play ; to do some field work and some original research. The course is flexible enough for us to incorporate current affairs. When the Berlin Wall fell the class I was then teaching were able to spend time discussing what such an event might mean for Europe and I remember joining in their discussions knowing that the government had decreed that in their National Curriculum history in schools would end in about 1970.

At the end of our course students are required to produce two portfolios of work. English and English literature demand 7 to 10 pieces of written coursework showing evidence of a range of writing while Integrated Humanities demand 10 pieces showing evidence of understanding and communicating ideas, original research, and the interpretation of evidence. That's a very broad outline of the course and as a group of humanities teachers we continue to work together to

produce different teaching materials, to set appropriate assignments and to mark and moderate coursework.

All classes demand a certain amount of administration from its teachers. I not only need to know what I'm going to teach to the whole class and how that fits into the exam syllabus but also the needs of the individual students and how their portfolios are developing. My mark book simply shows attendance and whether I've received work from students. I also keep a record for each student which shows the work in the portfolio, the mark I've awarded it and which exam criteria it fits.

Marks are meaningless unless it's understood by students and moderators why I've awarded them and so each piece of assessed work has to have a frontsheet which gives details of the work leading to the assignment, assessment criteria, marks and comments on why they were awarded.

At the end of the course there is a complex procedure for awarding the final grade and the procedure is different for English, where the entire folder is graded from A to ungraded, and Integrated Humanities where there is an aggregate mark for the folder 0 to 100%. While such administration is necessary and time consuming it isn't something which concerns me very much. I just do it automatically like

checking my bank statement. I know I need to be accurate and it informs what I do, but it doesn't dictate my everyday practice.

That curriculum provides me with a framework in which to work. I have to translate the demands of the exam boards and the planning of a team of humanities teachers into 'my' course to suit 'my' students. I have to breathe life into those words on a page. I like what Derek Morrell, a founder of the School's Council said in 1968.

*"The curriculum, if it exists at all, is a structure erected on a base of reciprocal personal relationships. In a curriculum we are concerned with human beings, whose feelings and aspirations are far more real and immediately important to them than the cognitive development which is the educator's stock-in-trade."*

(Morrell, D. 1969)

What I do in the classroom is a response to exam requirements but how I do it is ever-changing to meet the needs of the individuals in the class.

**Introducing 10Mh**

It's difficult to know how to introduce a whole class. A class list is just a list of names that says nothing about the people on it. I could add to the class list some kind of grading such as each student's predicted grades at GCSE in English and Humanities but I'm not sure if saying someone is possibly A or B or D is useful or important for what I'm trying to do here.

I wrote a description of 10Mh for other teachers in June 1992 as part of the explanation of my cover work when I went on a school trip to France for a week. It was written with affection, has more than a grain of truth in it and maybe reveals something about my relationship with the whole class. I outlined the work set and then wrote...

*" Mark and Janine have been away but they could do the above if someone could explain what to do.*

*Wayne will do what he wants. Louis will have everything at home so either let Andy(Larter) deal with him or make him start from scratch. Steve will want to go fishing. Gavin will sway a lot and mumble; smile at him every now and then. Jane will explode at least once; she wants to be noticed and she'll miss me. Lee will pretend to work but really play on his game-boy. Stewart will write a great deal of something. Matthew will count his compact discs at least twice a lesson. Chris will*



*chew, fall off his chair and say his mum is horrible every half an hour. James will smile at him with understanding. Arthur will work. So will Andrew. Jo and Poppy will talk endlessly. April will come out with the most surprising comment when you least expect it. Simon will follow Arthur. Alison will finish everything in two minutes. Tania and Laura need shouting at but I've never tried it. Louise and Helen will giggle and work. Louise is good at telling Helen how to improve her writing. Julie will want to see Jools ( Dowling)for counselling but he'll come to her. She spends the lesson waiting for him. Wayne might decide he's had enough so let him draw a boat. Neil Hammond doesn't work. He thinks I think he does but he doesn't. Robert will pretend that he's never heard of me in his life and that any coursework is a cosmic error."*

When I returned from France I read that to the class who were delighted with such a description. I explained to them my dilemma of wanting to 'picture' them for this writing and they all wrote a short description of themselves. Here's some extracts of what they wrote:

Louise: "*I am a quick learner and I do well in most subjects... I have a lot of ideas inside my head but find it difficult to get them down on paper"*

Tania: *“ I guess I do work hard most of the time but I get confused fairly easily. My weakness is that if something goes wrong I give up. I like things to go right the first time.”*

James: *“ I’m usually interested in the work and could work harder in class. I don’t usually get confused about the work. In our group we make fun of each other. I consider myself strong enough not to get wound up about it.”*

Matthew: *“ I think I work quite well. not as fast as I could but I work quite well anyway. I actually enjoy coming to class... My weakness is concentration. I can’t concentrate long enough. I get side-tracked.”*

There are twenty seven students in 10Mh. I can’t write about them all in the detail that each deserves. It’s stating the obvious to say that they’re all different with different needs but that’s what they are.

What I want to do now is say something about *what* I try to achieve in my teaching of Mh, and show something of *how* I try to achieve those things in practice.

In my teaching I may be unsure of grading a piece of work, how to organise a class on a windy afternoon or how to set up an appropriate session to deal with a controversial issue but there are things I’m sure of. These certainties underpin everything I aim to do. I want to work in a way that enables students to grow in self

confidence so that they develop a positive and optimistic view of learning and to encourage independence of thought. I try to show my students that I value their opinions in the dialogue I have with them. I want to be direct and honest; challenging yet supportive. I try never to set myself up as the source of all knowledge in the classroom and attempt to teach in a way that values questioning and accepts that knowledge is constructed and provisional.

There's nothing that radical about those things. The HMI's framework for Inspection say that judgements must be made in inspections about the quality of learning and that when learning is good

*“ pupils respond to the challenge of the tasks set... Work is sustained with a sense of commitment and enjoyment. Pupils are sufficiently confident and alert to raise questions... They evaluate their work and come to realistic judgements about it.... Pupils converse confidently and with mutual respect.”* ( Framework for Inspection. 1992)

Over the year with 10Mh the quality of their learning improved and this was reflected in their writing where many students showed an increased confidence in expressing their views and wrote in an increasingly powerful way about issues that they had come to feel strongly about. Louise's work shows an increasing confidence and improvement . She moves from this:

September 1991: Independence and Leaving Home

*“As we grow up and become adults we start wanting more and more independence. One way to become totally independent is to leave home, but is that all it’s cracked up to be?*

*Put it this way, you haven’t got any privacy, you keep getting nagged at, you have to be in at quite a considerate hour because your parents have got work the next day...”*

to this:

June 1992: The changing role of women

*“ Women in the 1800s had no rights at all, as Caroline Norton said as she fought bitterly for child custody and divorce “ I do not ask for my rights. I have no rights, only wrongs”*

*A married woman had no legal existence. She had no vote. She was the property of her father from the time she was born until she walked down the aisle. Then she was given to her husband and from then on all her possessions, from her underwear to her wages were her husbands... She could not make a will as she had nothing to give”.*

Louise ‘s first piece is formless, hesitant and laboured. The piece in June is well structured and confident.

Another good example of improvement is Jo's work. Some extracts from her writing show how she improved. Her first piece is a bit wooden! It has none of the engagement of her later pieces

September 1991: Independence and Leaving home

*The subject of my leaving home is something I've thought about alot during the past few months. I think its because I'll be leaving school as well. I hate school and can't wait to get out. I see it all as a great adventure, and fun; even the less appealing aspects such as the lack of money and house work.*

*I'd like to live in Shaw or Old Town or Wootton Bassett. In my first few years of independence I don't want to be away from my family"*

In this next piece " *Should Greendown become an all-girl school?*" she has begun to write with some interest saying in a review of her work:

*"I had lots of ideas for once. I just kept thinking and I had loads to question. Some came from the articles we had. I wrote pulling my ideas in as I went, trying to get them in some order"....*

November 1991: Should Greendown become an all-girls school?

*Before I start writing and launch myself into a long and difficult thinking session, I'd like to mention a few things ( which will become obvious by the time you've finished reading.)*

*Firstly and most importantly sexism is a big issue in my writing. I note of inequalities and suggest how they could be changed, at the same time as voicing my anger*

*Secondly, I hope I show no preference to either mixed or single sex schools.*

*Having never been to an all girls school, it would be irresponsible of me to say I prefer one type of school to another,.*

*As it stands it would take too much re-organisation for this school to become an all girls school. But we're only talking theoretically of course...."*

And from then on she seems to write with increasing authority and confidence.

*December 1991: Education or schooling?*

*... Education is a valuable thing. It should teach us , nurture us, lead us in the direction of learning. It should allow us to form our own views and opinions. It should challenge our intellect, recognise our talents, let us be ourselves.*

*So education is a precious thing to all of us. However most peoples view of education is marred by one thing - a system, an organisation, a law, an institute.*

*SCHOOL.*

January 1992“ Just like a Jackie story”. Wider reading .

*...I more than read this writing, I absorbed it, relating points to my experiences, working through its complicated meanings.*

*And I was enlightened!*

*I thought about things I'd never thought about before. I realised how much applied to me and what I'd read. And I realised what truth it spoke. To somebody else, the ideas may seem absurd, they did to me at first. But the more I thought about them, the more they made sense..."*

June 1992: The Changing role of Women

*"... The woman in law and industry was virtually nonexistent. Even her clothes restricted her: feet were cramped into too-small shoes to the point of crippling her; corsets pulled in the waist to imitate a wasp-like figure and women would often faint because they couldn't breathe. Skirts were floor length and full with petticoats, making movement difficult. When you are controlled by even your clothes, you're in no position to protest."*

At an end of the year in an interview with me Jo acknowledged that her commitment to her work was greater.

**Interview Jo with Erica 3.6.92**

*Erica: At the beginning of the year you wrote to me “ What am I good at? Writing what teachers want to hear”. Do you still think that?*

*Jo: No. No I don't...*

*Erica: And now?*

*Jo: And now I've got to write what I want . I have to write for myself, no-one else.*

*Erica: Do you write for me or for yourself?*

*Jo: I write for both of us because I want to get good marks, don't I? So if you give me a list of points I'll put them all in but I do have to write for myself...*

Those extracts illustrate something of the writing students did. My work with them was a mixture of reading to them and with them; showing videos; discussing issues in small groups , as a class and individually; and stressing the importance of drafting and redrafting in writing. I wrote to them in journals and log books and tried to talk to everyone as much as possible.

Students like Mark valued both the written and spoken dialogue, as he explained to Andy Larter who interviewed him at the end of the year. listening to the tape of their conversation I was surprised that Mark felt that I was very critical. I'd believed that I wasn't critical enough! Andy asked Mark about the independent research Mark had done:

*Andy: It's all about smoking? What have you actually done?*



Mark (outlines what the enquiry is about) *This is the best part of it, the enquiry log book. This is where I got all my ideas down and if I had a problem I wrote them in here and Erica wrote a few comments and I went from there.*

Andy: *She wrote back to you?*

Mark: *Oh yes, she wrote back to me, of course, which I always find helpful. Erica's comments always help me more than anything really.*

Andy: *What kind of comments does she write? Helpful things?*

Mark: *She's very critical. Very critical.*

Andy: *Can you give me an example?*

Mark: *Oh yes. Like if I'm saying a load of drivel she'll say it's a load of drivel... She'll give me the ideas about what I have to do and then I go from there. Then I show her what I've done and she'll write "Have you done this? Or asked this person this?" Just to make sure.*

Andy: *She puts the onus on you to do the work.*

Mark: *Oh yes*

Andy: *But is quite prepared to advise and criticise. Is that the only contact you've had with her, through the log book, or do you sit down and talk to her?*

Mark: *I've sat down and talked to her a few times when I'm really stuck. Sometimes I can't really go by comments alone... When I had all the information I wasn't sure about writing it up. I was really stuck about where to start. What I did, I got a sheet and went through all the things I needed to do with her and Erica went through everything with me and then I was all right from there on. So it just needed sorting out...*

I can't possibly write about everything that went on with 10Mh but I do want to say something about journal writing and student evaluation of their own work.

Journal writing and student evaluation of their work are central to my practice.

They're all about critical thinking , engagement and dialogue. I want to give several examples of the kind of things they generate and concentrate on Jo's journal in particular.

### **a) Journals**

I didn't go into 10Mh in September 1991 and tell them that I was trying to achieve critical thinking, engagement and dialogue in my teaching. What I did was to issue blue exercise books and call them journals. I explained that the journals were for written dialogue ; they would not be marked but I'd reply to all their writing and expected them to write back. Sometimes I'd set what I wanted them to write about; sometimes it would be up to them.

I knew that journals would work for some people and not others. From experience I knew that some students would write regularly and some would write only when directed. Using journals is always a bit of a risk and I'm never sure what will happen with them. What matters to me is the kind of dialogue we try to establish in them. The initial sustained effort of me writing and responding to everyone seems worth it if it helps students to think about what they're doing and if I can gain an

insight into what they think and how they work. Writing in journals sets the tone for the kind of work I expect in class. It also gives me clues about the interests and strengths of the students I teach.

Journals enable me to have a dialogue with my students which is 'individual'. In class I can talk to individuals or groups for only short amounts of time and that discussion is inevitably on the immediate task. When I respond to draft writing or mark completed assignments I usually tend to be encouraging but critical. My comments are very focused on that particular piece of work but in journals there can be all sorts of dialogues about a range of ideas and topics. I hope that if we can write honestly in the journals when there are no judgements to be made about the quality of the work and no marks to be awarded then some of that honesty can rub off into other dialogues when judgment and marks are relevant. I suppose I see it as part of the process of building up a trust between those I teach and myself.

For the first entry students wrote at length and with a directness I liked. I responded in a way that I hoped was encouraging. I began asking them to write about themselves as members of the group and as learners.

3.9.91 April wrote

*"Mh isn't the best class in the world but I wouldn't want to be in any other class... I find doing the same thing for a long space of time difficult. I also find spelling difficult although it has greatly improved since the first year. I find it difficult to 'make something out of nothing'. Translation - I can't do a long piece of writing from a small piece of information. I don't like talking or doing anything in front of the class. I don't mind reading as long as it's something I choose. I really enjoy drawing and doing posters. I normally do my work as soon as I get in..."*

*PS I am useless at poetry.*

I replied

*"I'm impressed at how clearly you see yourself as a learner. And I'm interested in the business of 'making something out of nothing' - I know exactly what you mean and when I'm writing I tend to get information overload so do let me know if I strike the right balance for you..."*

Louise. 3.9.91

*"... Sometimes I don't like to speak out when we have discussions because I'm afraid I'll get laughed at or get it wrong... Sometimes I don't know what to write or can't come up with original ideas... I'd like to do well in my GCSEs and I will try my best. I'm a bit scared I'll fail."*

My reply:

*“... don't be scared of failing ( there isn't pass or fail at GCSE) just be determined to get stuff done. You'll soon be into the swing of coursework/ classwork. The main thing is to try everything and be determined to improve”*

Arthur wrote

*“Mainly I like working in Mh because everyone is fairly friendly and has a good imagination. I tend to find some creative writing difficult, but I am usually good at sci-fi, fantasy writing because I can let my imagination go wild. I am good at doing projects and I usually work a lot better on my own, but if I don't enjoy the work I don't get as much done. How am I going to organise myself?”*

3.9.91 Jo wrote

*“ Erica - Mh has a nice atmosphere about them. Not a working atmosphere, a happy rowdy aura... we know each other now, well, we're used to each other. I find this difficult, writing this. I want to keep myself to myself at school... Things I'm good at? Writing what teachers want to hear. I can't think of anything I like ( at school) Truthfully.*

Jo's frankness surprised me. I felt put in my place and a bit put out., as if she'd said 'you're the teacher, teach, and leave me out of it' I'm not used to that kind of rejection. It's why I want to spend some time showing what happened in our work.

I was wary of how to approach Jo. I value involvement in humanities and she didn't seem to want to get involved so I tried to write back in a way that was challenging but not threatening.

#### 3.9.91 My reply

*“Jo - your letter intrigued me. I respect your need for privacy and will try to balance the needs of the course in terms of you having to express views and opinions, feelings and personal information with your wish to keep things to yourself. It's a bit cynical to say you write what teachers want - but you may be accurate in knowing how to play the system. Let's be straight with each other and see what happens. OK?”*

#### 4.9.91 Jo's reply

*“ I can't think of any comments for your comments.”*

Jo didn't like talking to me in class either but the journal eventually provided a way of really communicating to each other. I can pinpoint the day that Jo and I started to write meaningfully to each other. The whole class were writing a story in response to discussion about independence and leaving home. I didn't feel that the atmosphere in the classroom was right for writing - it was too noisy and people

were chatting. I asked everyone to be quiet and to write in their journal and tell me how these stories were going.

Jo wrote

*"... I didn't get very far with my story writing. I was willingly distracted. It's quite difficult to find ideas."*

19.9.91 I replied

*' Yes, I agree - willingly distracted is the word. I get uptight/ frustrated when people don't work in class. Should I?'*

Jo wrote back immediately in red ink with an arrow pointing to her question *"Do you take it personally? As if we're misbehaving against you?"*

My reply

*"... about whether I take things personally. I suppose I do. I take my work seriously and think about lessons/ students quite a bit before preparing what we do. I suppose I want students to understand that - but then again why should they? Some of my lessons are boring and not good. I usually know the ones and feel bad about them but then again I'm human and mess things up like anyone else...."*

That 'straight talking' in the journal did us both a lot of good. Jo's perception of me as a teacher changed so that I appeared to become a whole person rather than an impersonal instructor. Through her journal and with some understanding of what she felt about being a girl in a mixed class I was able to engage her in something she felt strongly about. Some of our dialogue was through talk but a lot of it was through journal writing. The journal took us out of the immediacy of the classroom situation and gave us time to explore other things.

After participating in a difficult class discussion about the role of women in the 20th century I spent some time during break with Jo talking about her feminism and her anger at what she recognised to be injustices at school and outside school. She wrote a quick note in her journal.

*" Thank you for our talk. So far, I've only ever been able to talk to Poppy about that sort of thing"*

Next session accompanied Jo to the Resource Centre to choose a reading book. She had always concentrated on novels and so I showed her the women's' section. So she wrote in her journal



*“I’m going to the Resource centre more now. I want to get through all the feminist books on display.”*

13. 11. 91 Jo writes in reply to my request for the class to think about what books they want to read for a wider reading assignment.

*“I’d like to carry on reading feminist stuff. Does it have to be fiction? If so, do you know any feminist fiction? I’m more prepared to give books a chance if I know they’re about something I’m interested in”*

13.11.91 My reply

*“Does it have to be fiction? Yes, only if it’s going towards GCSE English Literature but having said that I’d want to encourage you most strongly to read a full range of feminist literature including autobiography. I think that sort of reading helps you to sort out your ideas and values.*

Jo wrote in the margin

*“I’m not too keen on the autobiography”*

I continued

*“What’s feminist fiction anyway? Something written by a feminist? ( Jo underlined that) Or a book containing strong women as central characters?...”*

*Why not start on these short stories? All of them are written by women and most have strong and independent female characters.*

*Another interesting thing to do is to read books as a feminist so it doesn't really matter what the story is you criticise / talk about it from a feminist viewpoint"*

Jo wrote in the margin "*Good idea*"

I cannot claim that journal writing was like that for all 10Mh or that students like Jo kept up that kind of intense dialogue with me for the whole year. There were three months when 10Mh didn't use those journals at all because a student teacher was working with me and journals weren't appropriate, but they do illustrate an important way of working for me. I hope the way I write in their journals helps students to write in a direct and critical way about their ideas and their own learning. Mark said to Andy in their interview "*she won't change my opinion, just advises me what to do with my opinion. She'll say everyone's entitled to their opinion*". I hoped that the journals would help students to consider and question their opinions about many things.

#### **b) Student evaluation of their work**

I have often talked with other teachers about the need for students to reflect critically on their work. We usually agree that it's important because we hope that if students can reflect on what went well and what the weaknesses were then they could use that understanding to improve the quality of their work next time. The trouble is it's difficult to put into practice. How can any learner be encouraged and supported to stand back to be critical of the process and the outcome of their studies? I find it difficult enough to do it in my own work.

With 10Mh I tried to encourage reflection at different points in the process of forming ideas, drafting a piece of writing , re-drafting, writing and editing. When a piece of coursework was finished I asked students to complete a coursework review using questions from a prompt sheet as a guide. They were also asked to write a self assessment of their work at the end of a term for the school's reporting system.

I was aware that a balance had to be struck between reflection and getting on with the work! I hoped the reflection would help them and me to understand the way they went about organising ideas and writing.

At the end of the first term in December, I asked the class to write and tell me something about the way they worked now, after a term in 10Mh. Some students gave me an insight about the way they worked and their concerns about their work. I learned that all students seemed to accept that drafting and re-drafting was a valuable process. They also seemed to accept that writing was about communicating *their* ideas.

Arthur wrote this in his journal

*“ When writing a piece of coursework I:*

*i) get some ideas on the work ( what’s going to happen?)*

*ii) Think of a good starting point*

*iii) Quickly ‘reel off’ my first draft*

*iv) show my draft to other people, to get more ideas*

*v) correct spellings etc. Add and take out unwanted pieces ( paragraphs)*

*vi) write final piece.*

*I’ve have improved a lot since entering the 4th year eg I never ever re-drafted my work.”*

Jo wrote

*“ Maybe I’ll start off with notes and plan my first draft on those. I find this a good way of writing as I can check off the notes as I go. My first draft is basically my best*

*work. I may change words and edit sections or whole pages but it remains almost unchanged from its first scrawlings to its 'best'...*

*I've recently become dissatisfied with my writing, especially my old stuff. I've tried to make my writing sound different but I didn't make that much effort. my writing often depends and reflects my current moods.*

*In pieces of writing where I'm expressing a strong opinion, I have to make it clear. I want everyone to understand and think and join me in thinking this way. To make it clear I emphasise, repeat if I have to, explain in length. I try to make my writing shout and chant to change ideas of others ( if they are unjust)*

*My writing sometimes turns out longer than I want it to be, which is OK if it's what I want to say, but it's hell to re-write."*

April wrote

*"I think I should re-draft more but I find it difficult. I do go through what I've written to see if it makes sense and if there are any spelling mistakes. I try to think deeply about my writing than I did in September. I look for questions and then answer them before you bring them to my attention. With the things I have strong feelings about the paragraphs tend to be longer and more in depth. the length of my writing is generally just long enough but I find it hard to know what to say...*

*i think through this term particularly I've looked deeper into the work ...*

*I think I am most pleased with my " flying into the Wind" work because it let me express my own opinions, which I think I am better at doing on paper than speaking them."*

Louise wrote:

*“ Yes, I think I’ve changed the way I write since September. I re-draft a lot more now. When writing about something I get what I want to say in my head and think of little sentences I could put in but it’s usually how to start off that’s the problem. Normally I sit for ages just thinking of what to put then all of a sudden it comes to me so I write...*

*I think my writing is of an appropriate length if it gets out what I want to say - it’s not the quantity but the quality.”*

In Integrated Humanities GCSE students are given credit in their independent study for evaluating their own work and for identifying the strengths and weaknesses of their research methods. Students’ evaluations often tell me more about my teaching than their learning. From the comments I read about the first large-scale piece of independent research that 10Mh did I knew that I should have given them far more structure and support in their writing.

Jo wrote this as part of her conclusion from the enquiry

*May 1992*

*I was very pleased with all my research. I had a lot to go on but now I think I did too much. I had too much information and, as I was writing my draft, I completely forgot my main question. I was just copying my research out.*

*I had sheets of writing, making some valid points and containing interesting facts, but it wasn't about the career choices of women. So, the more I redrafted, or the more I edited, and crossed out sheets of work. Even as I was copying up I would get sidetracked and I had to be brutal about what not to include.*

*Looking back I think my enquiry questions were too small rather than too big but then I wonder if I'd been able to handle the enormous topic of 'Women and Work'. It would probably have been a project which I fear my enquiry is now.."*

She wrote this in her journal

*"What's an enquiry? I wish I knew. I know what it's not. It's not meant to be a project or an argumentative essay. I suppose you're meant to 'enquire'. It involves research - surveys and interviews. It's difficult to write - I know that. How would I do it again? I don't know. I didn't really understand how to write an enquiry and I'm not exactly clear now."*

By the end of the year I knew 10Mh better. The majority of them had no problems approaching me about their work and engaging in useful dialogue. It was important to me that they felt that they'd made progress too. I asked Andy to try to find out something of what Mark felt when he spoke with him

*Andy: Would you say that during this year your work has improved?*

*Mark: I think it has. If I go back to all the pieces we've had marked, my marks have gone up. My writing has matured.*

*Andy: Has Erica had any role to play in that?*

*Mark; Yes. She's pointed out the facts that don't sound right and says change it, use more complicated words, better expressions, mature it.*

*Andy: She's forcing you to go back and look at your work and you're willing to do that?*

*Mark; Yes. For improvements.*

*Andy: You're keen to improve your work? And Erica...*

*Mark: She points out things I'm not sure about and that she's not sure about then...*

*Andy: Would you hand that work in then? Would you say take it anyway, I've done with it?*

*Mark: No, I don't do that. If there's something wrong with it she'll say that and I'll go and re-draft it.*

*Andy: And you recognise it anyway before you hand it in.*

*Mark: Yes. I'll think to myself that doesn't look right and I'll know she's going to say something when she reads it so I knew that anyway.*

*Andy: The criticisms she makes you're already aware of. So what is it about her saying it then that's helpful?*

*Mark: It's the fact that she says it!*

Over the year 1991 to 1992 that I worked with 10Mh I became increasingly to understand the importance of spoken and written dialogue with students. I was pleased to see them work with an increasing sense of commitment and enjoyment, able to raise questions and to evaluate their work in a realistic way. Those phrases are the indicators used by HMI to measure quality and yet reduced to a list they



seem meaningless. As the marks in my markbook are meaningless without explanation so do these indicators need explanation. What does it mean to work with a sense of commitment? Accounts of good practice need to be written so that students are not “ *lost behind the scenery or waiting in the wings*”. This paper has placed 10Mh centre stage. I have tried to show them and their work and to reflect what it has meant to them and me, their teacher. I have tried to “ embody” them.

The embodiment of students in such an account is different to:

“ ... *the embodiment of lists - the accountability of the petty bureaucrat, the restrictor of humanity... the embodiment of people kind of accountability is a spur for learning, vitality and maturity.*” ( Bazalgette J. 1992)

I have tried to show, by telling our story, what my accountability means.