

Chapter six

'Accounting for my work' - a description and explanation of what went on in the appraisal I did with a member of my department and how it conflicted with the monitoring role I was expected to have by the school management.

Introduction

I wrote in the introduction to my work that my research had developed as a result of "contingency and decision". The next paper certainly grew out of these things, and I hope it shows something of the tensions I felt in my job at the time.

My job, like my 'self', has myriad parts: I'm a classroom teacher and head of department and so have responsibilities for students and staff. Yet so far I had only attended to one part of my work, that with students. My original decision had been to try to understand and improve my practice concerning talk in the classroom and this had developed into a concern about how I improved the quality of dialogue between myself and my students. As I began to understand something about my accountability and how it linked me to others I became interested in the quality of dialogue I had with colleagues and intended to look at the way I worked with others in my department. However the work I ended up doing was contingent upon decisions made in the school about how teachers should be appraised and monitored.

As a head of department I see talking to humanities teachers about the work as important so that I can understand it and in order to give them the space to reflect on their contribution to the learning in school. I want to understand how humanities teachers make decisions about their practice and engage with their ideas. I also know that rhetoric is all very well but does it match what really goes in my practice? Can I live out those values?

Putting together some thoughts about showing how I work with others it seemed sensible to use the opportunities offered through the appraisal process. I was about to appraise the work of David Ross and he was happy to let me use the work we did together as part of my research. Appraisal at our school was a process that expected teachers to “*research, evaluate and share*” and so encouraged reflective practice and dialogue with others in order to improve the quality of education. The school policy statement says “*our appraisal scheme is based on the fundamental concept that teachers are competent professionals who continually wish to improve their practice and that of their students. We have adopted a view of appraisal which is based on the concept of professional research and development*”. I was happy with that and looked forward to working with David.

However, at the same time as I was preparing to be an appraiser the Management Team introduced a monitoring system to monitor the classroom performance of all teachers. All teaching staff were to be observed in sessions and the observer was to check their performance against a check list to indicate whether a teacher had achieved 'basic' or 'higher' level. As my paper shows I was outraged by such a system and wrote "*My educational values have never been so immediately challenged and denied by the people I work with*".

What was contingent in this work then was the need to try to transcend the imposition of others in creative and educational ways. I was determined to respect, understand and listen to the explanations of other teachers as they try to make sense of their work. I was not prepared to be a ticker of lists in order to show someone's competence.

The anger and tension I felt in having to cope with what was expected of me by the Management Team ie monitoring colleagues, and in trying to live out what I expected of myself was sometimes overwhelming. Those close to me at school and home supported me through difficult weeks. I was, however, clearer about my educational values at the end of the work I did with David and therefore understood something more about my educational development. I was clearer about my respect for individuals; the necessity for carefully negotiated and educational dialectics between those individuals, others and their contexts; and my concern for the improvement of learning.

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June 1993

Until recently my research has centred upon my concerns as a classroom teacher as I’ve tried to understand and improve the quality of dialogue and collaborative work that takes place between myself and my students. I’ve characterised the work I do with students as collaborative because “ *it allows parity in dialogue despite the unequal power relationship*” and the work we undertake “ *enables both of us to change because of our insights and our developing understanding of our own educational development*” . I believe that collaborative work based on dialogue is crucial to improving the quality of education in school so I now want to look at another aspect of my work in school, as head of the humanities department and as an appraiser, to see if I can live out those values when working with colleagues.

In writing this account of my practice I am attempting to show what it is to work with students and colleagues to improve our work in school. In the telling of this story I am holding up my work to public criticism because I am accountable for the work I do and my accountability

links me to others, students and staff. I believe that my integrity as a teacher and head of department can only be sustained by my willingness to be open to informed criticism of my work and to be held to account in this way.

The main part of this paper will be a description of the work I did with David Ross from November to March 1993 as a part of the appraisal system. I was the appraiser, David the appraisee. All teachers in the UK now have to be appraised and at Greendown our appraisal policy statement says:

“ All staff have a right and a duty to be part of an appraisal process. Our appraisal scheme is based on the fundamental concept that teachers are competent professionals who continually wish to improve their practice and that of their students. We have adopted a view of appraisal which is based on the concept of professional research and development where staff accept a research role which will enable them to evaluate their own performance and undertake professional development. Such evaluation must, within our appraisal system, involve a sharing of experience with other professionals, in which judgements are directed at the further development of teaching and educational management”.

By stating that teachers will “ *research, evaluate and share* ‘ appraisal becomes a process which encourages reflective practice and dialogue with others in order to improve the quality of education within the school and is therefore something I am happy to be involved in.

But life in a school isn’t always so straightforward and simple. Instead of rushing into a description of the work David and I did, I just want to pause to place our work in context. Our work took place alongside a new, formal system of monitoring staff in school; such a monitoring system wasn’t intended to be collaborative or based on dialogue and such a contradiction in my working life was difficult. My educational values have never been so immediately challenged and denied by the people I work with. It’s important then that you understand what was going on around us when David’s appraisal was taking place.

The monitoring system

The monitoring system was introduced in September 1992 despite widespread criticism and hostility to it by the majority of teaching staff. It was to be carried out by three groups of senior managers: the head and deputies; senior teachers in charge of Key Stages in the school and heads of department. All were required to visit classes, observe teachers and complete a check-sheet to show whether the teacher concerned had achieved the list of ‘basic’ and ‘higher level’ competencies. The governors’ policy entitled “*Institutional quality assurance and the professional development of staff*” stated that the system of monitoring basic practice

“defines minimum classroom performance indicators and defines minimum professional practice through the use of performance indicators for all staff... the indicators are designed to be as objective and simple as possible although some degree of qualitative judgment is inevitable” (Nov. 92)

The monitoring system was described to parents in a newsletter thus *“Greendown has been redesigned ... one result of this has been the introduction of systems for quality control to regularly check and assess the quality of teaching... We have set up a classroom ‘ quality control’ system where all staff are regularly observed teaching and where standards of performance of staff and students can be improved... as part of this Senior staff undertake regular monitoring sessions... As from this September the Head and Deputies conduct regular surveys of a whole class ... Key Stage Senior Teachers make regular inspections of the classwork and homework completed by students; Heads of Departments visit subject teachers and advise on specialist techniques, assessment and the introduction of the National Curriculum.”* (Parents Newsletter 1992).

The management team seemed to think that monitoring and appraisal complemented each other but I couldn't see how. Monitoring to me was a system of surveillance which measured a teacher's competence against a set of criteria defined by the management team; appraisal was about reflective understanding, collaboration and dialogue between teachers. This was a terrible contradiction for me. As David's head of department I was expected to monitor and judge his teaching according to what the management said were 'hard- edged ' objective

criteria set out on the checklist; as David's appraiser I was expected to engage in a dialogue about his practice and support his attempts to improve it. Andy Larter described the contradiction exactly:

" You can't imply, through some checklist, that someone is incompetent and then... at a later date, say, 'Really you are competent. It's just nobody's perfect' You can't be Big Brother one week and the Good Shepherd the next " (Larter , A. 1992)

I wasn't isolated in my concerns about monitoring; they were shared by many of the staff. A senior advisor in the County was invited into the school to talk to the first group of 'monitored' staff about the process. Their comments were noted for discussion and included the following points out of a list of 16:

"- teachers felt that the monitoring sheet should be changed in the light of experience. They felt it operated like a checklist.

- they were concerned as to how the information was to be used. They didn't want it linked to pay policy.

- they asked who the senior management talked to as a result of monitoring

- there is confusion between monitoring and appraisal.

- teachers were unclear about the purposes of monitoring"

Such points highlighted the confusions about the monitoring process. My department used the words '*tiresome, ineffective, insensitive, insulting and punitive*' to describe the whole business. And there I was in the middle of it expected to appraise and to monitor.

In saying that I preferred dialogue to monitoring I was told by the Head that I was '*too soft*' and that dialogue wasn't '*objective and hard-edged*'. The language of the management team was one of rationality, efficiency and control.

Stephen Ball's analysis of the effect of government policies on schools fits nicely here as he believes that there is a shift in the governance of schools from professional and collegial in style to managerial and bureaucratic. He wrote:

"in effect, control is to be exerted over teachers' work by the use of techniques of management and the task of schooling is increasingly subject to the logic of industrial production and market competition ... Teachers are increasingly subject to systems of administrative rationality that exclude them from an effective say in substantive decision making"

He goes on to show that the restructuring of teachers' pay and conditions, specialist training for school management, central control over the curriculum and the possibility of comparative testing of schools, teachers, and students, reconstruct teachers as technicians and

headteachers as managers with the following elements of classical management theory being in evidence:

“First, decision making is formally lodged with the management team, separating policy from execution. Second, systems of quality control, time and motion study, and monitoring are brought into play... Third, efforts are being made to link pay and promotion directly to performance” (Ball S 1990)

And I am part of it all, subject to it and administering it as a member of the senior staff and in being told that I am not hard- edged enough I again recognise the truth of Ball’s analysis that

“management stands in tension with its imperfect servants. The managed are fragile, prone to irrationality... surfeits of emotion. Opposition to control, to change, to methods of efficiency are treated as the worker’s problem... The problem is taken to be in the person rather than in the system.” (Ball 1990)

In those terms, my ‘ problem’ was I didn’t think that the monitoring ‘system’ would improve the quality of education in the school. How did I resolve this conflict of being appraiser and monitor? I’m not sure that I did. I tried to diffuse some of the tension by appearing to conform to the school system: instead of me monitoring all the humanities department I arranged for us to monitor each other; we filled in the forms and returned them to the head. That didn’t stop us being monitored by the management team but it helped. In an interview with David we talked about the monitoring process and his view was I had ‘ *defused the tension by*

getting us all to monitor each other. It got over that anger of someone ticking boxes because Giles (in his second year of teaching) could do it to you - that's really important"

When I was monitored by the deputy heads I was very angry at the comments made about my practice. The process didn't allow for me to talk about my values and intentions but concentrated on, among other things, whether my lesson started on time, whether I took a register and whether I left the room in a good state. On my monitoring sheet one deputy wrote next to the point *"the teaching strategies and resources used accurately reflected the learning needs of the individuals in the class"* 'most'; another wrote ' *varied and excellent*' .

All I could say to that was ' so what?' I didn't feel that anything educational was going on in the process. I was being checked up on. There was no dialogue, simply a checklist. Their use of checklists gave me no confidence that they wished to understand and learn about my practice. They appeared unconcerned about their own practice as monitors. Opportunities to create new understandings were lost in what John Bazalgette has aptly described as:

" lists - the accountability of the petty bureaucrat, the restrictor of humanity. " (In his analysis) *"The fantasy is that if I fulfil the terms of a list given me by someone else then I have discharged my accountability. But in the world of learning, changing maturing children the prospect of that kind of accountability is appalling"*.

(Bazalgette J. 1992)

I felt no trust in my monitors' judgment and even if the opportunity had been offered I would not have wished to share with them concerns about the flaws I know are in my practice because that would not be reciprocated. After that experience I was even more determined to concentrate on the process of appraisal and to celebrate those values of dialogue and collaboration.

Accounting for my work with David Ross

The appraisal process was new to both of us and the first thing we had to do was to understand what we expected from it. We knew that the purpose of appraisal is to help teachers to reflect on their professional development but what did that look like in practice and what did it mean for us?

The work I've written about in other research papers was concerned with students and with them I always had time to build up trust and a relationship; after all I see my classes at least three times a week and they have the expectation that I will talk to them, criticise and evaluate their work. With colleagues it's different. Why? Because although talking, criticising and evaluating our work as teachers seems to be an obvious thing to do, it's often done at a distance from the reality of the classroom. To talk in a department meeting about the work you're doing is fine as you can dress up the best bits, play down the awful bits and

give colleagues thoughtful advice about how to try the same sort of thing in their classrooms but to be observed in the genuineness of the classroom can be painful. In my experience the observer always seems to sit by the child with the messiest work who hasn't a clue about what is going on, just like the exam moderator who always seems to want to see the coursework folder that I had hoped to hide. Being seen in the business of teaching is to be exposed as the teacher you are and facing up to that isn't easy.

It just isn't straightforward having someone in your classroom, especially when you know they're watching you. Although I'm used to having other teachers and adults in my classroom working with students I certainly get edgy when someone like an inspector or a member of the management team comes to observe me. The monitoring process had not helped me to resolve that feeling that in being observed I am being judged by another person who places themselves in the role of expert. I'm David's head of department and so there is an unequal power relationship. In the school order of things I am expected to judge his work; he isn't required to judge mine. However I like to think that I was sensitive about being in someone else's classroom ; we did know something about each other's work and we were prepared to work from a basis of trust in each other as colleagues. I asked David at the end of the whole process of appraisal had he felt vulnerable or threatened during it and his reply was reassuring. He said "*No because I know you and know you don't judge me because you*

don't know just that bit of me. You know the whole context of my teaching and this specific context"

David's Concerns

David and I were used to working together and seeing each other in the classroom before the appraisal: not only are we in the same department but he also supports some Year 11 students in my humanities class . He had been interested in the research I'd been doing involving journals and dialogue; had read some of my papers and had also attended some action research meetings in school. In July 1992 David had written a short paper for the school's action research group about some work he'd done with Andy Larter; they'd done some videotaping and interviewed some of David's students.

That paper seemed to mirror some of my concerns about collaborative work and dialogue. He had tried to explain that he wanted his students to achieve and produce work of quality, recognising that students need to pass exams but he also wanted the work to be 'authentic'.

He defined authentic like this

" It's hard to define exactly what this means in the context of education. It has something with their work being a truthful representation of what they had to say about the subject. It also has to do with decisions... Students are faced with the decision whether to work, to conform to a set style, to impress their teacher their peers, their parents, to get a grade or to

write to express something of the subject of the writing. Writing authentically means to choose to write because they want to say something about the subject. It means their writing will be original, interesting, fresh , even weird.”

He had liked the work done by a girl in his class and wrote “ *The quality seemed to be linked to her security... she could ask for help and ... my comments were taken in the right way. Our relationship meant that my comments were not seen as criticisms which labelled her as a failure, but as a stepping stone to doing a piece of work. My intervention was hopefully a dialogue, a two way discussion, and not just me giving orders.”* and in summing up where he was so far he wrote “ *There is clearly a link between the teacher/ student relationship and the quality of work produced. This has to do with making the student secure enough to write for themselves, ask questions and enter into a dialogue about their work and not just take on comments unflinchingly”*

(David Ross July 1992)

David seemed to be struggling with questions about how to encourage students to write well and to communicate their ideas in their own way. He was trying to understand how a teacher can intervene in the most positive way to support students. I recognised those concerns from my own practice.

David had read my paper on Poppy and then on 10Mh because that's the class he supports and he was interested. He'd written back a brief note about 10Mh *"Thanks... very enjoyable and readable. ... I liked the balance between giving an account of kids work and putting it into the political context of current right-wing educational ideology. I like the way you use journals - I have/ do use them with mixed success - I guess I find the time constraints the problem... I feel I still want to go for the things I feel are important but feel so often that I haven't place/ time for them..."*

We approached our first appraisal meeting where we could set the agenda for appraisal with David knowing I was interested in collaborative work based on dialogue with students and me knowing that he was interested in this idea of authenticity, of students writing truthfully and wondering if his teaching fostered or restricted that. And that provided us with a good starting off point.

Our dialogue throughout appraisal illustrates something about the nature of true dialogue as described by David Bohm who wrote that what is essential is that people who engage in dialogue do not hold onto their initial ideas non- negotiably but are prepared to listen with interest and are prepared to understand each other and to develop new meanings. *" If people are able to engage in a real dialogue, then there can be a free flow of meaning"* (Bohm 1989)

My role as appraiser was to recognise David's concerns. I wanted to understand those concerns and support him in improving his practice. Unlike the monitoring process, appraisal does not expect me to go into his classroom with a ticklist and inform him what the problems are. Appraisal makes demands upon me to understand and in doing so I think new understandings are made. As Bohm writes "*In a dialogue you are going through a state where I tell you what things mean to me and you will listen and say what it means to you. I will learn something in this because I see it means something different to you - it will go back and forth. So the meaning will be different at the end of the dialogue from what it was in the beginning.*" (Bohm 1989)

Such a dialogue would allow us both to learn , improve our work and have insights into our own educational development.

Our initial meeting

At the beginning of our initial meeting David read out some of his responses to questions from a sheet listing possibilities for discussion in appraisal:

David: *What's important to me and how I would like to be a better teacher? At the moment it's this business of how can I get students to write authentically or to work authentically - in talk and writing?*

Erica: *Why do you use the word 'authentically' ?*

David: *What do I mean by authentic? It's easier to describe when you see it. Someone produces a piece of writing and you think they've just gone through the motions with it - it's boring, there's no passion. Like I've just taken in a whole set of assignments on 'the family' and a good deal of them are very boring... It seems so vague, words like 'authentic'. Am I just clutching at something? There is something like good and bad writing. I've seen authentic writing. I suppose I need to work out what writing authentically is like for some students.*

Erica; *I get the impression that 'authentic' is about real learning because it's about being able to represent what you think about what you've learned for yourself, being able to represent that to other people. It's not about jumping through hoops, answering other people's questions in a way that they want you to.*

David: *I think that's significant isn't it? Because I think what I'm interested in is self expression - someone has processed something and worked out what they think about it and can express it. So the process of learning is about understanding. I suppose that underpins my educational philosophy.*

Erica: *I don't think students can write authentically without confidence. And maybe to write authentically you have to be given an authentic assignment. If you're given a closed, obviously structured assignment that's what you'll get back.*

David ; *You want to give students security in the structure. You give them lots of questions to help and those questions just become the assignment. I'm bad at giving choices. I tend to be*

very structured because of wanting to give them security and to get away from this “ I don’t know what I’m doing’ With reading journals I’ve avoided giving specific questions. It’s more letting them get on to say what they think and they’ve been much fresher and more interesting and had lots of things to say... This structure v freedom is important...

We were trying to understand something about student writing. Neither of us seemed to value ‘taught’ assignments that would end up with us marking 30 worthy but dull essays of the same kind. We were coming to understand ‘authenticity’ and yet were still struggling with how to support students to write well.

A contradiction in my practice

I don’t think I understood at the time the significance of those words ‘ structure and freedom’ for my own work. I can now see that I was trying to provide through the appraisal process a structure for David so that he felt secure enough to be free to explore his ideas about learning and teaching. I wasn’t expecting him to jump through the hoops of the monitoring system or to simply answer my questions. I had the expectation that we would work authentically and in doing so learn about our own and each others practice. But that freedom to explore ideas isn’t easy to obtain even with the best intentions. And now in the process of

writing about what went on I feel troubled that I may slip too easily into speaking for David.

After all this is an account of my work; it is for David to account for his. Although he said he didn't feel vulnerable during appraisal he did feel vulnerable when I first drafted this account.

After reading some of the transcripts he was honest about his feelings:

" I found the appraisal process quite strange because I wasn't expecting it to be something I'd feel vulnerable in. There was one moment, I remember, that I was digging myself a hole and finding it difficult to get out of it. It was one of those situations where I was creating more problems for myself by talking about it. Eventually we worked through it but I did find it frustrating. It made me think about stuff and work through ideas and that was fine but (in your account) it came through quite strongly how confused I was feeling and how I worked myself up in knots"

David has allowed me to write about his appraisal but his words sharply reminded me of his vulnerability . Because I am linked to others I cannot write about my practice without writing about them but I am accounting for my work alone.

Continuing appraisal

We met to talk again before I went into David's classroom. I then went in as an observer simply writing down every thing that David did in a session on 'Of Mice and Men'. I gave him

my notes and we spent some time discussing them, trying to focus on a few concerns and framing those concerns into questions.

I suggested these questions “ *How do I /we encourage students to express their own views in response to a text ?*”; “ *How do I/we arrange my time in class so that I can talk to groups and individuals?*”; and “*How do I /we achieve a balance of support / structure in an assignment so that students feel supported and yet free to express themselves in a way that’s fresh and original?*”

and David used them to re-write those he thought were most important

“ *How do I set up work to give students the opportunity to write authentically ?*” and “ *How can I talk to individual students to effectively help them with their work in the classroom?* “.

We agreed that these would guide our work and I wrote to David the following letter:

15th November 1992

Dear David,

I’ve just spent some time listening to the tape of our conversation of 6/11/92. We talked about a whole range of things and so I’ll try to write here about those issues that seemed to be important to you and seem relevant to your appraisal.

You were concerned to teach in a way that gave you time to talk to groups and to individuals.

You wanted to be able to teach in a way that encouraged students to voice their own concerns and points of view.

The word 'authentic' came up a lot and it was easier to show what you meant, by quoting from students' work, than to define it. It seemed to mean something like students making their own contributions in writing, not just going over what they know you want. You seem to value students' writing when they make their own understandings explicit and seem to be able to express themselves in a fresh, original way which engages you, as the reader.

We discussed the problems of wanting to give students structured assignments so that they felt secure when writing and yet that very structure sometimes works against them being able to express themselves in a real way.

Perhaps a way forward would be for us to look at the whole process of setting up an assignment through to the final drafts, looking at how you intervene, and then to judge whether some of those drafts are 'authentic'.

I could start collecting information about what students think about their writing in your classroom: How do they go about writing? Do they write for you and does that affect the way they write? How do you help them to write?

If that seems useful you could give me the names of two students that I could talk to about their writing and I could observe their work in class.

This will inevitably sound a little vague until we have some evidence to work on.

I'm happy to keep that Tuesday session 3 slot for working with you. Perhaps I could begin this week by simply observing these two students and writing a description of what they do.

What do you think?

Erica

He replied:

23rd November 1992

Dear Erica,

Thanks for the stuff on appraisal. I think you summed it up pretty well. I'd like to use the work on 'Mice and Men' as a case study through which to look at these themes of authenticity, structure/ freedom, teacher/ student dialogue and questions.

I'd like to gather all the work of two students from first notes to drafted and redrafted assignments. I'd like you to look at the way I set up the various processes in the light of my themes and to watch the way I work and talk in the classroom.

Also, maybe we could interview the two students before/ during/after about their perception of the whole process.

Two possible names would be: Kevin F. and Catherine M

How does that sound? David

Our letters too show collaboration. We are both clear yet tentative using words and phrases like '*perhaps a way forward..*', '*I could*', *what do you think?*' Such questions demand a response and a dialogue.

I met with the students suggested by David, recording our conversations and transcribing them so that David and I could discuss their perceptions. In the end we concentrated on Catherine because I'd spent more time with her and our conversation seemed more relevant to David's concerns. I talked to her for about forty minutes and enjoyed our conversation. My questions were genuine: I really wanted to know how she worked on her writing and how David's practice had helped her, not only for the purposes of appraisal but also because gaining insight into a student's work can help my practice. This kind of work shows how my accountability is linked to staff and students. As a teacher I'm interested in how Catherine works because that informs my views of how to help students write; the process helps Catherine to articulate how she writes and this may help her to improve; as David's appraiser I need to understand what his students think had helped them so that David can use that information to improve his practice. The inter-linking of these conversations is a form of collaboration.

Learning through dialogue

David and I met again after the class had finished reading 'Of Mice and Men'. He began by saying that their essays had left him feeling slightly disappointed because they were fairly well organised and used quotations from the text and yet there was something missing, something like the 'authentic' voice. He was struggling with these ideas of how could he get students to write the kind of piece he thought they needed for their exam folders without giving a firm structure and yet that structure seems to mitigate against the very writing he valued.

As we talked we referred to the transcript of Catherine and myself. I explained to David that in talking to Catherine I'd been interested in her ideas about the book, what she'd written in her assignment and how she'd gone about putting her ideas together. I read some of the transcript out:

Erica: *What's the assignment you have to write?*

Cath: *Write about George and Lennie*

Erica: *What did you write? What kind of things did you put in it?*

Cath: *About the relationship between George and Lennie and how Lennie's death affected George.*

Erica: *Tell me a bit about it. What do you think about their relationship?*

Cath: *Strange. They loved one another in a way. They weren't gay, they just liked each other. they were the only two men that travelled around together because the others were on their own.*

Erica: *Why did they do that?*

Cath; *Don't know.*

Erica: *They weren't related were they?*

Cath: *I don't think so. Maybe they wanted to know at least somebody would listen to them. George told Lennie things knowing they'd go no further than Lennie because he couldn't remember them but at least he'd told somebody.*

Erica: *Do you think that dream they had helped their relationship?*

Cath: *Well it gave them something in common but they had the dream on different levels. George wanted it for security and independence and Lennie wanted it for rabbits. But they wanted the same thing.*

Erica: *So why did he kill him? That shocked me.*

Cath: *Yes. But he resented Lennie a bit because he always had to think what Lennie was doing and he had two people to look after instead of just one. He knew that if Lennie went off on his own he'd end up dead anyway because he didn't understand what he was doing so he'd get hung for it or just starve.*

Erica: *Sometimes he behaves like a father, sometimes like a brother.*

Cath: *he killed him himself because if someone else had killed him they wouldn't have done it in the back and he would have been frightened when he died. This way he died happy instead of frightened.*

David was quite surprised at some of Catherine's comments he said

“ I’m interested in some of the comments she makes about the relationship because that hasn’t come through very clearly in her second draft... being less structured meant that a lot of them missed things out... she doesn’t come across as ‘bright’ in her draft as she does when she talks to you”

Erica: No she doesn’t. She’s very articulate and she knew exactly what she was doing. She talked a lot about the different characters.

David :but she hasn’t referred to them much here (in her draft)

Erica: I can’t work that out. She liked the book, she thought the things you did in class were good but she did find difficulties with the assignment sheet.

We referred back to the conversation with Catherine when she talked about the structure

David had given. She talked about the activities during the reading.

... Erica: So, you’ve read the book and now you’ve written that assignment but what went on in the middle? What helped you to put your ideas together for that assignment?

Cath: We did a diary on what we were thinking in different stages of the book on the characters and what was happening.

Erica: Did that help?

Cath: In a way because then you start thinking of the different characters right at the beginning because at the end it’s hard to think of the characters in detail, all in one go.

Erica: So you can build up a picture as you go along?

Cath: *You understand all the characters a little bit from the beginning. You understand them more as the book goes on instead of trying to understand them all at once at the end. I didn't include all the characters in this.*

Erica: *You didn't need to did you? What kind of things did David do? What kind of activities did he do that helped?*

Cath: *What do you call it when someone takes on the role of a character?*

Erica: *A hot seating?*

Cath: *Yes. Different people doing the characters. That was all right but people got embarrassed and couldn't think of things to say. That wasn't much help because you're supposed to write what you think not what the other person thinks. So, if someone thinks something different it's not much help.*

And then talked about the actual assignment. Catherine was critical of her work and recognised that some of David's structures weren't helpful but she valued talking to him.

Erica: *So, you read the book and you've got a few thoughts in your journal and you've done a few activities in class so do you do that (your draft)? How do you actually get it all together on paper?*

Cath: *We had a sheet that said what sort of things to include in the first paragraph, second and gave a rough plan but I didn't stick to that very much.*

Erica: *Why not?*

Cath: *Because it said write about this in two to four paragraphs and some of the things were repeated so I included them in the same paragraph. That was OK except the end isn't very good.*

Erica: *What's wrong with the end?*

Cath: *It just sort of stopped. I didn't understand the last thing... I haven't got the sheet.*

When I spoke to Catherine she was about to give her first draft in for David's comments before she had another go. I asked her how she'd know what to improve.

Cath: *he's going to mark it.*

Erica: *What do you expect him to do? What kind of things?*

Cath: *It hasn't got any quotes in it... I couldn't find my copy of the book.*

Erica: *Does Dave write all over it or does he put questions for you?*

Cath: *I think he just puts questions and gives examples.*

Erica: *One of the things that concerns him is that he sometimes worries that if he gives you a very detailed plan about how to do the essay you end up all writing the same essay because he's given so much structure you're not free to write what you want to write.*

Cath: *I think it just needs a title...*

Erica: *Do you like a very open title?*

Cath: *Yes...*

Erica: *When you read it through are you very critical of your own work?*

Cath: *Yes. This isn't very good. I wouldn't hand this in.*

Erica: *but you're happy to give it in as a draft?*

Cath: *Yes. Bits of it are all right. It needs to be longer and a bit more detailed...*

Erica: *Do you want a teacher to tell you exactly what to write or do you want them to give you lots of freedom to choose yourself?*

Cath: *A bit of both. They can tell you what they want you to write about but not specific characters or things like that.*

Erica: *You don't want to be tied down too much. You want a framework, don't you? Is that what you're saying? How does David help you to get good assignments out of you?*

Cath: *If you get stuck he'll come over and talk to you.*

Erica: *What's helpful - the talking or the writing on your work?*

Cath: *Both sometimes. We do brainstorm a lot.*

Erica: *Does that help?*

Cath: *Yes.*

David still wasn't happy about the way he'd set up the assignment although he was beginning to see some positive things in the work he'd done.

Erica: *It looks to me as if what you wanted them to do has worked.*

David: *In what sense?*

Erica: *You've given them enough structure and enough sense of security for them to write their first literature essay in year 10.*

David: *Yes. I've certainly found it a learning experience for me... I've got more confidence ... the think journals and writing diary were obviously helpful and seem to have been effective in creating some authentic writing. I don't feel that I've resolved this question about structure yet because I was aware that I was frustrated - why didn't they write about the dream? I wanted them to talk about that and therefore I think there's a gap in their assignment. but unless I tell them... I mean I should have said ' make sure you talk about this and this and this'*

David is so aware of the contradictions in his own practice that it was almost painful for him.

Erica: *I've exactly the same contradictions in my classroom. It's not fair to expect students to enter into a guessing game with you.*

David: *That's exactly it... so perhaps it's possible to give a broad structure like you need to to talk about their relationship, who they are , the dream.*

Erica: *Well you're not saying I don't like your ideas or you are wrong and you cannot write that. You're giving them enormous freedom to actually deal with the text themselves. You are saying it's usually agreed that the central things that people who read this book discuss are... if you disagree you've got to make a good case for that otherwise tackle them but in your own way.*

David: *I think that helpful because you're saying that structure isn't content but it's a skeleton on which to hang it. And they have to create a structure for themselves and how they are going to do that without me? But you can still say do you think it's important or how is it important ?*

It's nice when they come up with something totally different and you think I've not thought of that... I guess they can still do that within the structure I've provided.

Erica: *Because they can say something original about George and Lennie. but if they were to write an essay about them and didn't have them in it there would be a problem.*

David: *OK. That makes me feel better. I'm happy with that.*

Erica; *You do allow them to disagree with you and to challenge and to think and to express things in their own way. The structure you give is simply a helping hand.*

David; *Yes. How do you set up assignments like on Nazi Germany?*

I've left the transcript there because with that question David shows again the collaborative nature of our work. Together we have been trying to make sense of these ideas about structure, teacher intervention and authentic writing by exploring David's practice but in doing so I've been exploring my practice too. In asking that question David implies that he knows what I *think* about setting up assignments but is asking what does it look like in your practice? That question could lead us to more work together .

Our work was educational because we both learned through it and have shared that learning with others. I've written this paper. David went on to write about the development of his ideas through the appraisal process. He wrote a short paper about his unreal expectations about students' work and yet showed how he recognised that his students had produced some good writing.

" I still had a sense of frustration with some of them. Some competent and thorough writers had still given me work which seemed to miss their view on something important. this reflected my interest in how to structure a piece, while still giving space for individual expression. After my final talk with Erica, the feeling seemed to be that it was OK to say " you

must talk about this subject, this theme, this character' while letting them say what they wanted to say about each item...

In my concern to encourage them to write 'freely' and not 'copy' my ideas, there was a danger that I was asking them to write in a vacuum with no clear idea of what was being asked of them...

At the end of all this I hope that both myself and my students have learned something... I hope that they are more trusting of the potentialities for developing a piece of writing through redrafting. I hope that they are more ready to say what they want to say when they write.

As for me... I have more realistic expectations of what students are capable of at different stages of the course. With regard to my two questions, I have more faith in the possibility of achieving a balance between structure and openness. It is possible to give a clear structure and yet within that encourage students to say what they feel about the subject.

(Ross D Feb. 1992)

Perhaps I should say that our lessons began on time, we took registers and left the room tidy but I didn't really notice....

In this paper I have tried to show what it is to work with a colleague to improve the quality of our work in school. It is an account of competent, enquiring practitioners who are attempting to be reflective and who are prepared to hold up their practice to criticism so that it may be improved. It isn't about quality control but about the development of quality through dialogue.

It is about accounting for my work by the rendering an account that is valid and just.

