

‘Every day feels like Friday, every Friday feels like the end of the term.’

Restarting ‘the worst school in the country’

An autoethnography.

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ABSTRACT

This research paper details an autoethnographic investigation into a tumultuous year in my professional life that affected my identity and personal existence. I became the manager of a failing inner city secondary school for boys identified as having emotional and behavioural difficulties. The school had been deemed as being in need of 'Special Measures' for several years and had at times been colloquially labelled as the worst school in England.

I recorded not just my experiences but also my most intimate thoughts and feelings about what I experienced during the academic year 2002 – 2003. This was achieved through the production of a reflective journal that was nearly 300 pages long on its completion. The thesis is drawn from the contexts surrounding the school and its population as well as from the data I recorded in the journal.

On finishing this paper I still do not understand how a school can be allowed to degenerate into the lawless and uncaring environment I encountered in September 2002. What I have discovered during my research is the importance of humanity, compassion, respect and equality when attempting to recover a school that has been disregarded and left to rot. I have been shocked and challenged by the physical, cognitive and emotional demands made by working in the environment described in my thesis. The journey of my self through the year in question can be genuinely described as harrowing.

My fervent hope is that this research can help avoid what happened at Osbourne occurring in any other educational establishment. My reflections on Osbourne have helped me reach the conclusion that at the moment I simply cannot leave the school even though I am exhausted by it and my health has suffered. I cannot trust the school to anyone else at the moment; we have been through too much together. As I think this paper will demonstrate, I have given my self to the school.

Preface, Research journal, Osbourne school, Wandsworth

18/04/02

Phone call to headteacher.

The advert in the 'Times Educational Supplement' stated that the job would provide a challenge and the opportunity to make a difference. The list of benefits was exhaustive and included the offer of 'a substantial one-off golden hello payment'. I was intrigued, especially as the headteachers mobile phone number was only to be rung after 8 p.m. My current post was demanding working hours of between 12 and 14 hours a day and at least one day at the weekend. School management can be isolating and I was beginning to doubt if there was anyone else in the world that lived the same life as I did. The entire advert was couched in a creative and tantalising manner that certainly struck a chord within me even though I was not actively looking for a new job.

I contacted James, the headteacher, at about 5.30 p.m. on a Thursday night. We were both tired and he informed me that he had just come from a meeting with the school governors. In spite of our contact being at the end of a long day, towards the end of a long week, I felt there was a positive instantaneous connection between us in terms of professional respect, values and personal empathy. I warmed to the man yet struggled to come to grips with the story he told me.

James and I swapped some personal details and we had a lot in common. We were both in our mid-thirties, family men who were committed (possibly over-committed) to our careers in special education. Both of us had achieved senior management

positions whilst relatively young but most importantly I felt we were both talking identical language in terms of what we valued.

The story I was told about Osbourne School was shocking, yet was recounted in a non-sensational, empathic manner. Osbourne is a residential special school for boys with severe emotional and behavioural difficulties aged between 11 and 16 years of age. The headteacher told me that the school was in 'Special Measures' following an OFSTED inspection in January 2001, which was possibly "the worst inspection in the history of OFSTED".

James had told me that he had been leading the school since November 2001. After one week he had been thinking, "how can I get out of this place?" After two weeks he said he felt that... "I know I can't leave until I have sorted this place out". He described the job as "emotionally wearing and draining" and that he had "completely changed his way of living" since arriving at Osbourne.

Incidents that had occurred during the last academic year included boys raping boys, a near fatal hanging and numerous occasions of wounding with a weapon - for which there had been no consistent exclusion policy. There were 60 places on the school role. The average attendance was about 50%. 80% of the boys were in the youth justice system, 40% of them were looked after by social services and 7 of the boys were serving or awaiting custodial sentences. 50% of the students came from other London boroughs. The half-mile surrounding the school perimeter had one of the highest crime rates in London.

James said that he was operating a holding situation until the end of the summer term when the school would be closed and then reopened. The parallel he drew was with the Afghan war with the allies waiting for the marines to arrive in September, (sic). This cavalry would be in the form of the new recruits who would join the school in September to replace many of the old staff who would not be employed in the following academic year.

On reflection

I instantly liked James, his approach and the language he used. I immediately felt I would like to find out more about the school and the context.

My imagination conjured up a tall Victorian building with a big yard and an American style cage in which the teachers park their cars. Even though James's descriptions were notably undramatic and failed to deliver any hint of self-aggrandisement, his constant assertion that the school had been unsafe and remained so had a substantial effect on my imaginary constructions.

I picture the boys as a mixture of cultures but associating mainly with their own ethnic group. I see them in my mind as being sullen, seldom solitary and running everywhere, echoes of lives in empty and soulless places. I do not see them as a threat or beyond my personal and professional experience. As a survivor of care homes and an experienced and well-qualified special needs professional I am instantly reflecting on the cause rather than the effect of what makes children behave in the ways James described.

Maybe my images are based upon the past rather than the present for I think my mind is delivering me images of an inner-city kid's home I was unfortunate enough to reside within. I see the students at Osbourne as young, small and lost and this fails to change even when I reflect on the details of the phone call. Warnings from my university studies that most people who work with disenfranchised children do so for vicarious reasons float into view, but it's too late; I've been doing this job a long, long time.

I imagine small, middle-aged staff disinterested in the children, lacking empathy but possessing furtive and haunted looks. My vision of James is 5ft 10", a heavy evening shadow on his chin from early morning, slim, but unbendingly strong. I feel he has a tropical mind where anything could grow and an arctic intelligence that helps him define his visions from his imperatives.

I arrange to see the school the next Thursday and I am excited and ready for the visit as soon as I put the phone down. The want inside me shows itself through a dry mouth. I can scarcely say anything to anyone about the phone-call for I know I will betray my already gnawing desire to work at Osbourne.

1. INTRODUCTION

This first entry into my research journal was written over a year ago, before I had experienced Osbourne School in any meaningful way. Some of what this extract reports makes me smile in a rueful way as I reflect now on my inexperience, idealism and over confidence. My words portray me as an optimistic, well-qualified individual who had been immunised against the unexpected in the professional arena through a combination of hard-won personal and professional growth. The last year has shown me time and again how ineffective and pallid my imagined invincibility proved to be. A new job starts from where we are and I believed that I was ready for any challenge the school would present. I arrived at Osbourne with an identity that had been constructed and shaped by complex social processes. I brought to the school a self which amongst other things was gendered, sexual and generational -located in time and space, (Coffey, 1999, p.159). My identity was also occupational and forged during many years spent working in special schools. Britzman (1986) notes that teachers bring to their schools not only their personal biographies, but also....

“Their implicit institutional biographies – the cumulative experience of school lives – which, in turn, inform their knowledge of the student’s world, of school structure, and of curriculum”, (p. 443).

The first journal entry clearly demonstrates a self-confidence that my personal and professional biographies combined to service me with an identity strong enough to survive and positively influence whatever Osbourne and its students presented to me. This paper aims to document what I experienced throughout the academic year that followed this entry and the events that led me to concur with Bakhtin (1986) that however settled or in control you feel, something will always .. ‘reveal the perpetual incompleteness of identity’.

This last year has upset both my personal and professional equilibrium. My identity has been challenged, destroyed and invited to be reconstructed through experiencing a school and pupils I never imagined existed. Writing the journal and thesis feel like important elements of the rebuilding process; physical manifestations of a desperate search for strength, self respect and positionality as a teacher, lover, father, student and individual that has been initiated by a year at Osbourne.

From the complacency of twelve months ago I find my self searching for answers as to why the last year has left me feeling inadequate, confused and foolish. I have been enlightened and comforted by Jean-Paul Sartre who stated that if there were a creator he left human beings with two fatal flaws. That we were created without knowing who we are and therefore we are continually in search of ourselves. Secondly, we were created with mental tools inadequate to the task of sound self-definition, (cited in Cesara, 1982).

The truth of these words resonates through many of my journal entries. Confusion, panic and a lost, hopeless fatigue imbibe many of the entries. I feel sorry for myself when I read lonely, pleading passages when I cannot see the sense of my efforts and the school I am trying to change. Irrespective of the desperation of many of the entries; writing about my experiences has provided some understanding of the year. Discovering -through the luxury of reflection at a physical and chronological distance -... 'a structure of meaning within which I can understand my own experience' (Atwood and Tomkins, 1976, p.167), has been an invaluable gift for my efforts with this paper.

There are more ways than one to understand reality, (Schafer, 1973). To sift meaning from the mindless detritus of much of this year through writing a journal is a specific way in which I have tried to glean sanity and understanding through self-reflection.

My thesis will aim to present the, (to my mind), incredible events of the year and reflect on the changes to my body and identity that have been precipitated by these experiences.

There is a danger that becomes apparent when reading sections of the journal and my commentary on them that a reader may feel that the work is sensationalist, voyeuristic and founded on egocentric vanity. I hope that the honest amazement I express and the challenges posed by a school way beyond the limits of my experience and anticipation will not be misinterpreted. This is an honest story that provided me with a deep and sometimes scathing process of self reflection. Any self aggrandisement that may be apparent is either due to my lack of ability with words or to the genuine amazement that I still feel that the school has managed to evolve so positively in such a short period.

I have been aware for a long time that 'school' has a special place in people's thoughts, fantasies and memories, (Mitchell and Weber 1999, p. 2); and that issues of school formed the core of my professional and personal identity. I was proud to be an experienced manager in special schools after spending years teaching children with special educational needs; mostly with success and always with enjoyment. A masters degree in 'special and inclusive education' gave me an internal confidence and a professional aura that lent itself easily to the senior professional status I helped construct around and within my self. Completing the National Professional Qualification for Headship and successfully undertaking the first part of a qualification that would eventually pronounce me 'Doctor of Education', helped convince me of the rightness, depth and success of my career. This professional landscape was accompanied by a comfortable, fulfilling personal life that centred on

socialising with people involved in schools. My voice was accepted formally and informally as carrying knowledge and authority within an educational arena.

The contexts of my life that I have outlined were to be crashingly interrupted by what I did not know and what I had not imagined existed in the form of Osbourne School. I was to find out that there was much I did not know about education or myself.

I didn't know a school that had been in complete meltdown for seven years could still exist. A place where all semblance of any construction of school and education I knew or guessed at had gone. Somewhere my personal and professional biographies would count for nothing and I would find myself clawing for status, identity and voice with the other individuals thrown together in the same building. I didn't know that I was going to go to school to face aggression, violence and extreme verbal assault on a daily basis. I wasn't aware that I would work with children with such intractable problems that the impact a Local Education Authority (LEA) or a school could have would be negligible (Klein, 1999 pp 1-2).

I knew that OFSTED usually gave a school requiring 'special measures' two years to improve sufficiently to be taken off the 'at risk' register, (O'Connor et al 1999, p.150), and I had experience of such establishments. I didn't know though what it would be like to work in a school that had been 'at risk' for seven years. I was entering a school that had survived permanent closure by a combination of restart, amalgamation and relocation. A school that had to remain open or the LEA would be bankrupted if it had to place the 'end of the line' pupil population into non-maintained provision if Osbourne foundered. I had no experience of a school that due to its OFSTED inspection of 2001 had unwillingly entered the local and national media witch-hunt to find the 'worst school in Britain', (ibid, p 240). My experience, my

education, my background and my imagination all counted for nothing from day one of the Autumn Term 2002 at Osbourne.

Osbourne School is located within an inner city and is a secondary school for boys identified through their educational statements as having emotional and behavioural difficulties, (EBD). The school is designated to have up to 60 boys on roll aged between 11 and 16 years of age; at the time I joined the school there were 32 boys on roll and the average daily attendance was approximately 20 pupils. In the academic year 2002 – 2003 nearly 30% of the pupils were taxied to the school from other boroughs.

At the beginning of the academic year recorded in my research journal Osbourne employed eleven teachers, six teaching assistants, four residential social workers (left over from the boarding provision that had been closed in July 2002), a full time social worker, a school councillor, a librarian, one learning mentor, three administration staff, two premises staff, and part timer cleaners. The catering and grounds maintenance was contracted to external providers. This staffing list demonstrates that the school was significantly over funded; receiving more money at that time than an 850 strong comprehensive secondary school two miles away that was also deemed as being in need of special measures.

The purpose of this paper is to record and reflect on my experiences during my first year at the school. To fulfil these criteria I constructed a journal throughout the period in question and this document forms the data for my research. From my very first day at Osbourne it became apparent that the challenges I was faced with would leave indelible impressions on my personal and professional identities and within this paper I wish to expand, reflect on and learn from these experiences.

My paper consists of three main sections. Following this introduction will be work concerned with the methodologies of the research, the journal and the thesis. I will then relate some of the physical and emotional challenges issued by the school that threatened to swamp my professional demeanour that had been constructed during twenty years of working in special schools. Before concluding I will discuss issues of identity and the difficulties and changes undergone by my 'self'.

Italicised extracts from my research journal are interspersed throughout the thesis in the hope that they can convey my experiences with a raw emotiveness that contrasts with more reflective academic writing.

There is so much I did not know before I went to work at Osbourne; there is still much to reflect on and increase my learning. Above all I have discovered in the last year that...

“Man can live three weeks without food, three days without water. But he can't live three minutes without hope” (Gryn, 1996).

Informal visit to Osbourne School, 25/04/02

After what I had been told on the phone much of the visit to the school came as a surprise. I left the train at Wandsworth Common and walked for half a mile along a stretch of fabulously expensive bistros, bars and designer shops...it wasn't meant to be like this! Alongside the common was an exclusive looking recreation ground where pre-season cricket training was proceeding for teenagers dressed in immaculate whites... it wasn't meant to be like this either. But looking down the hill towards the prison I could see that somehow the school clung to the last road and corner of what could be described as a nice, even exclusive area. The incongruity was painful. England's worst school attached to the edge of an area of multi-million pound houses. What impact for the students when they climbed from their school transport and saw the expensive cars driven by expensive women on their way to drop their children at high walled private prep-schools? What impact for the homeowners who would draw their evening curtains in their four storey Victorian houses with a last shake of the head at 'That School' across the road? I later gleaned that Osbourne was known by the local residents as 'The Monkey House'. The nickname stems from ethnicity, not the behaviour of the students.

The school building itself came as a shock. Instead of the Victorian monolith I had braced myself for there was a modern, neat building standing in compact grounds. I had a long wait to meet James and I was horrified when he eventually appeared. 6ft 2", cropped hair (probably from a number 2 clipper), pinstripe suit and ramrod straight. 'Oh god' I thought, 'he's an army lad and this whole trip has been a waste of time, there's no way that we are going to share common ground over anything, especially special education'. The smile was warm, the handshake firm and the voice

as understated but as expressive of confidence as his bearing. I immediately thought that I preferred him on the phone. Yet James was warm and he was honest and he had a healthy and consuming passion about the school and the students he was entrusted with. The interior of the building was grim and resoundingly demonstrated the poor and undedicated teaching that James informed me about. At best the environment was austere but in most areas it was foreboding and threatening.

The few students we met obviously respected James and may even have had some affection for him. He told me his nickname was 'FF' which stands for 'Fucking Fed', this gave me my first public smile about his appearance, this was reflected back and a glow of mutual connection seemed to flutter again. The boys we came into contact with were cheeky in an endearing way with James and seemed keen and proud to bandy words with him. I remarked about the personability of a charming black student of about fourteen years of age. I was shocked by James's comment later that the boy was known as 'the worst revenge attacker in Wandsworth', who would... "always get you if you crossed him no matter how long he had to wait".

We exchanged greetings and a few words with a wan, thin youth who we met in the corridor. When we talked later James told me that the boy had been raped at least three times and infrequently attended school. The strong suspicion of the social worker and other school professionals was that the boy was undergoing continuous abuse at the hands of a local shopkeeper who provided him with employment for several days of the week. The youngster had given up his boarding placement to live with the man. On a subsequent visit to Wandsworth I saw the two of them walking together. The man large and unkempt greedily held an off-license carrier bag full of

cans of beer. The boy walking a step behind, eyes fixed on the pavement, shoulders hunched, hands bunched in pocket. The most anonymous of walks.

On this visit I felt that Osbourne would take me to the ends of my empathy and experience working in such a damaged environment with such disenfranchised children. I felt no fear and no pity just an overwhelming sense of the enormity of the job that awaited at the school and a growing awareness that I wanted to be a key part of the resurrection.

2. METHODOLOGY

Introduction.

Eighteen months into studying for a doctorate in education, (EdD), my long-term research plan was thrown into confusion. Since starting the distance learning course I had aimed to research the positions of families who had children attending residential special education placements. This was a field in which I had completed a significant amount of work already and was a topic that continued to stimulate my passion and interest. I felt sure that I had the contacts, the literature and the drive to produce a paper I could reflect on and use to inform my work.

My successful application to Osbourne School meant that this research plan became impossible to execute. I was aware that my new appointment would be demanding and that basing my forthcoming research project alongside my work context would be necessary. Beyond this I had little idea of how and where to direct research within a new job that I was still somewhat ignorant about.

I found myself cognitively disengaging from the EdD course and beginning to suggest to myself that deferring for a year whilst I came to grips with my new post might be the best idea. I shared these thoughts with the course director (who was to become my supervisor for this paper). She reminded me of our shared interest in autoethnography and how this methodology might lend itself to research linked to my new appointment. She had experience of failing inner-city schools and suggested to me that keeping a reflective journal as research data would offer me some catharsis from a job she rightly predicted would be very demanding. I distinctly remember verbally agreeing with her whilst being internally amused at the idea that my new post would demand an escape valve. I was at that time supremely confident in my professional abilities and personal strengths.

At a series of informal meetings my future supervisor worked hard to convince me that a work centred autoethnography could be valuable to my self as well as being academically viable. The results of her logical persuasiveness has been an extensive research journal, this paper that is drawn from the data and a degree of personal reflection that I have never before experienced.

In this methodology section I aim to discuss autoethnography and how it has evolved as an academically acceptable research tool. The intimate relationship between the research field, the researcher and the writing of ones self at the centre of the research are relevant issues that are addressed within this chapter. Examples of some of the different writing styles I used in the journal are submitted with brief explanations of the reasons for their employment. This segment of the paper then examines the relationship between journal writing and redrafting and how these processes meld with the construction of the thesis as memoir work. Some of the ethical considerations entwined into my position as insider researcher are also considered.

The decision to write a 'different' ethnography

Since embarking on a masters degree in education six years ago I have discovered that I like to read ethnography and anthropology for pleasure; for example Hurston, 1942, Malinowski, 1967. I have also become interested in the methodology of ethnography and how this has developed and widened in the last few years. In spite of these literary experiences the decision to write an autoethnography concerned me as I realised there would be a considerable challenge involved in making my thesis academically sound within the methodology chapter.

In response to this concern I can state that my research does fulfil many 'traditional' criteria of ethnographic study. My work reflects an extended period of

intimate study, intense observation and extended occupancy of the research context, (Van Maanen, 1982, pp 103-104). Access and entry into the research arena were sensitive components of the research, (Janesick, 1998, p.29) and are discussed fully in section four of this paper. There are tensions affirming the paradox of being a researcher who is both an insider and an outsider at the same time, (Pring, 2000, pp.104-105); that will be addressed later in this section. The work I carried out attempted to acknowledge the perspectives, communications and interactions of the groups and individuals I was working with, (ibid). I also fulfilled Hammersley and Atkinson's demand that an ethnographer has to be part of the social world they are studying, (1983).

Combined with meeting these guidelines I believe my research addresses the advice that honest ethnography has the responsibility to ...

“Tell stories from the side of policy that is never asked to speak, to interrupt the hegemony of elite voices dictating what is good for this segment of the population”, (Fine and Weiss, 1998, p.31).

Stephen Ball reiterates this with his demand for ethnography to be ... “disruptive... about giving voice to the unheard”, (1994, p.4). Meeting the expectations of these authors whilst working/researching within the location of Osbourne School has encouraged me to seek academic grounding for what I hope is an adventurous, autoethnographic method of research that disturbs and gives voice to the extraordinary events and people I encountered in my work context.

Further reassurance in my quest for academic validity is offered by Denzin who asserts that qualitative research is moving towards its sixth ‘moment’ which is characterised by reflective, experiential texts that are ‘messy, subjective, open ended, conflicted and feminist influenced’, (1994, p.559). Coffey, (1999), also acknowledges

the feminist and post modern contemporary research movements as contributing to an understanding that research texts can contain emotive, personal and complex issues such as those within my thesis and journal, (p.152). The realisation that the researcher and those who are researched are 'gendered, racialised, sexualised, embodied and emotional; (ibid, pp. 125-126), gives what has proved to be a fundamentally personal autoethnography the foundation to build a complexity of issues upon.

Much of my research journal is written in an emotive style that reflects not just what I said and thought but also what I could not or dare not say or do. To represent the most intimate and personal thought within an academic paper has taken courage; not just in the revelation of self but also in the ambition that an investigation of the personal can be academically acceptable. However Charmaz and Mitchell, 1997 and Van Maanen, 1988, are encouraging when both assert that the narrator of an ethnography having an impersonal, near invisible status is now questionable.

There have been concerns that more traditional theory and methodology may not afford qualitative researchers access to expressing their emotions in sufficient depth whilst presenting their work, (Gubrium and Holstein, 1997, p.57). This has led towards a new language of qualitative method that is alive with emotionality and inner experience, (Coffey, p.136). The new acceptability of 'brute being' and 'passionate engrossment' (Gubrium and Holstein, 1997, pp.57-59) with a research subject I believe lends my research writing academic authenticity.

Recording research using autoethnography represents the utilisation of an alternative approach to textural representation, (Coffey, 1999, p.147), and epitomises the diversity of recent ethnographic work reflecting an interpretive turn within this research method, (ibid). Mulkey argues for research texts that are more messy; not only to present the challenging and disturbing writing demanded by other authors, but

also to allow for the development of more creative forms of representation, (1985). I feel that my autoethnography meets these strictures.

What is autoethnography?

After being fortified by the academic guidance I have outlined it became important to try and discover a workable definition of autoethnographic methodology. The way that autoethnography has evolved however makes precise definitions and applications problematical but it can be understood as

“...an autobiographical genre of writing and research that displays multiple layers of consciousness, connecting the personal to the cultural,” (Ellis and Bochner, 2000, p.739).

An autoethnographer will move between gazing inward towards the self and looking outward toward social and cultural aspects of their experience, (Reed-Danahay, 1997). As this happens the distinctions between the personal and the cultural may become blurred and indistinct. I consider these hazily defined borders as being strengths of autoethnography and this has helped designate what I have aimed for with my research; that is...

“.... Institutional stories affected by history, social structure and culture, which themselves are dialectically revealed through actions, feelings, thought and language,” (Ellis and Bochner, 2000, p.739).

Within this framework is my story and how I connected with the research field. Writing the autoethnography presents the interconnectedness of the self and the field as symbiotic and adds a critical reflection to the story and the ongoing quest of trying to make sense out of who we are and what we do, (Coffey, 1999, Agar, 1986, p.xi).

Autoethnography is similar in practice to ethnography in that it records and reflects upon people and voices, interactions, communication and encounters. Both methods can adhere to Krieger's conclusion that social science should reflect the unique personal self of the writer, (1979). As well as providing a vehicle to represent myself through the academic year 2002-2003; I would agree that autoethnography has allowed me to make more sense of the daily ebb and flow of life at Osbourne School than a more traditional ethnography written without the explicit personal representations would have done, (Quinney, 1996, p.356). The work has also helped me reflect on and understand the grip of the past upon the present, (ibid) in both personal and professional terms.

Writing an autoethnography has been cathartic on many occasions – my supervisor was right. In my experience Ellis and Bochner are also correct in that undertaking autoethnography can be intensely therapeutic, (2000, p.754). This has been particularly relevant for me during the thesis writing stage when from both physical and chronological distance I was able to reflect back on the school and my self and see how both had developed.

Whatever the audience for my autoethnography, I hope my experiences will be able to inspire some critical reflection from others; what is referred to by Rorty as 'the inspirational value of reading,' (1982, in Ellis and Bochner, 1996, pp.22-23). The process for researcher and reader may prove to be intimidating and enhance a feeling of vulnerability but the end result will not be boring or sterile, (ibid).

My self at the centre

Since starting my research journal I have been aware of issues that could arise when placing oneself as the pivot of a research project and the main subject of a thesis drawn from autoethnographic data. The dramatic improvements I recorded that occurred in a dangerous, physically threatening and violent environment could be read as entreaties for praise or self-adulation. The rigours of fulfilling the role of researcher/worker are made explicit in section four of this paper and could be translated as sympathy seeking. The concept of autoethnography in general and my research in particular could be branded as egocentric and as over stating my self-importance. I hope that a critical reader will not find me guilty of these charges and this next sub-section endeavours to justify the reasons for the placing of my self at the centre of a research project.

It is now more common for researchers to reflect upon their field experiences; however issues of identity, selfhood and emotion are still often referred to and interpreted in tangential ways, (Coffey, 1999, p.1). The same author calls for recognition that fieldwork is personal, emotional and identity work and that these issues are intimately related and are understood best if research is acknowledged as being part of a process of self presentation and identity construction, (ibid). If the self is acknowledged only as a research tool then opportunities for growth and reflection may be lost and the identity of the researcher remains partial and fragmented.

There are now attempts to locate the self more centrally as part of the research project by... "Treating the self as a unit of analysis," (ibid, p.124). There are different ways of doing this and no specific genre (ibid), however autoethnography is one

research methodology that seeks to do this and can provide meaningful insight through the process.

The self; ones identity and personality, are continuously shaped by interactions, relationships and experiences that do not of course stop when research is being carried out ... “to deny the impact of fieldwork on the construction of self rather misses the point,” (ibid, p.158). The self should not therefore be viewed as detached from the practical and intellectual processes of fieldwork but should be acknowledged as being able to change and more finely attune the researcher to what is happening in the research field. This is true in the case of my reflections on the autoethnographic text I produced where my research into my self revealed significant challenges and changes experienced by my identity throughout the research. Without placing my self at the centre of the fieldwork, insufficient emotional depth and reflection would have meant that these important developments were not fully recognised and reported.

Again this is grounded in feminist discourse that locates itself as gendered, embodied, sexualised and emotional; incapable of participating in research that is neutral or hygienic, (Coffey, 1999, p.12). There is then a place for emotionally intelligent autoethnography and if we ignore our emotions by denying they exist and impact on our work, this will diminish the knowledge we produce; (Gearing, 1995, p.209).

Personal narratives that place the self at the core of the research process are becoming more common with authorities on qualitative methodology, (Coffey, 1999, Atkinson and Silverman, 1997). There is widespread agreement that centralising the self in personal narrative can offer the benefit of uniquely privileged data, (Coffey, 1999, p.115). This is certainly the case in my autoethnography where fulfilling the

dual role of worker/researcher afforded me the most intimate access to the extraordinary events both around and within me. Fieldwork became identity work, (ibid).

Some of my journal entries during the research process fulfil the criteria of ‘confessional ethnography’, (Van Maanen, 1988, Atkinson, 1996), where the self is written into the research process as part of a narrative or story. This can serve to both reveal and restore the self, (Coffey, 1999, p.117), and the benefit of this partnership was affirmed by my experience.

Placing my self at the centre of the research process infused the data with a realism that would have been impossible to reproduce from a more marginal position. With such strange events being recorded on a regular basis I found myself reading the research journal thinking – ‘I hope that people can believe that this is what I am actually trying to live through?’ Positioning my self at the centre of the story and recording my most intimate and dangerous thoughts helped me to seek authenticity through a voice that was frequently confessional and divulgent, hoping that readers would believe and engage with me...

... “The narrative is therapeutic not only for the teller but also for the audience(s). Viewing, hearing or reading a confessional (interview) invites complicity with the penetration of the private self... dramaturgy ... affirms the interiority of the self. It displays the emergence of a true self that escapes the bonds of private reticence.” (Atkinson and Silverman, 1997, p.313).

Positioning my self at the centre of the research was beneficial to the authenticity and urgency of the material I presented. There is an ongoing concern in research methodology that a critical distance between the researcher and the research field has to be maintained if meaningful critical reflection is to be undertaken. It is this issue I shall now discuss.

Too close or not close enough to the research?

I could not have lived closer or thought more intimately about the research project than I did during the academic year 2002 - 2003. As a worker I was absolutely determined to do anything and everything to help Osbourne propel itself out of 'Special Measures.' This meant fifteen-hour days during the week, work at the weekends and a physical, emotional and intellectual commitment to the school that I felt was unusual enough to be the focus of an autoethnography.

In tandem with this professional context came my role as researcher. Various stimuli from my personal history meant that once I had decided on the research nothing would stop me from submitting my thesis on time. My perspective on my identity meant that to submit late would represent abject failure. In practical terms this resulted in almost all available time away from school when not engaged on school work being directed towards dictating about, writing about or thinking about issues concerning Osbourne. I was constantly, overpoweringly close to the research project. There existed then a challenge to attain a position balanced on the 'interface between familiarity and strangeness,' (Coffey, 1999, p.19) that could afford me critical reflective distance.

Traditionally the image of ethnographer is as a stranger, (ibid, p.20).

Historically the researcher progresses towards enlightenment whilst achieving a

personal and professional distance; over-familiarity is seen as a problem, (ibid).

Delamont, (1992) and Geer, (1964) submit that an innocence of the research context and the maintenance of a detached relationship between researcher and researched is what provides the space for analysis, original thought and a rounded appreciation of the context.

In spite of these positions the concept of researching as an ‘other’ remained for me problematic and blurred. Coffey argues that by trying to adopt the role of stranger the researcher will do no more than deny the situatedness and connectedness of the fieldwork and the research; and that this relationship can never be removed, (1999, p.22). As I have stated, I do not think I could have been any more immersed in Osbourne School. Nevertheless, however familiar, (and some people said obsessed) I was with the school, there remained a sense of strangeness. This feeling and the thoughts it promulgated went beyond surprise at observing the events that were happening and extended into bewilderment at the cognitive, emotional and identity based changes I recorded for the research into my self. The school, the members of its community and the occurrences were unusual enough for a sense of otherness, (and anxiety), to coexist alongside my constant exposure to the school. I became familiar with strangeness but the multiplicity of circumstances and characters representing the abnormal kept my reflections energetic and far from blasé.

The same was also true for me when balancing knowledge and ignorance of the research field. My previous learning and personal/professional experiences had been enough for me to be successful at the interview for my new post and I could talk about education and schools past, present and future with passion and insight. Irrespective of this Osbourne was totally unpredictable to me and I could in no way divine what was going to happen. The school was such a combustible tinderbox of

unstructured, desperate individuals and destructive histories that my ignorance as researcher/worker meant that new experiences and information were thrust upon me constantly. My knowledge and experience counted for nothing during most days and my research journal records and reflects on this ignorance and stupefaction.

If a researcher loses the ability to stand back from the knowledge they are experiencing they may face analytic problems, (Coffey, 1999, p.23). This is also accurate if ... “the perspective of the researcher becomes indistinguishable from that of the host culture,” (ibid). This second point became partly true for me when I adopted some secondary identity defence strategies; (discussed fully in section four), when I began to ape some of the boys behaviour to make my life easier in the school. This issue was diluted by the fact that I was aware that these secondary behaviours were occurring and they became a strategy upon which to reflect rather than a subconscious defensive reaction that clouded my judgement.

The main challenge that was issued by my closeness to the research in terms of maintaining a reflective and analytical position was the hopelessness of the schools position and the many soulless days that pulverised my spirit with their negativity. On these not infrequent days – especially in the first six months – my reaction, (intellectually and emotionally although never physically) was to think – ‘forget it.’ The interconnectedness of my role as researcher/worker meant that the reaction of ‘forget it’ encompassed my research context as well as my employment status. On these occasions contributing to my research journal let alone reflecting in an academically acceptable way was not possible. I often lifted my self out of these despondent moods by contributing to my journal, (usually after about a week of silence); convincing myself that at least my academic ambitions were ‘on course’

even if the school continued to fail spectacularly and my professional identity was in crisis.

In these despondent interludes the loss of my intellectual ability to reflect and investigate meant that meaningful research was not carried out. In evaluating the entire research process these interruptions were not enough to stop me from agreeing with commentators who have argued that it is necessary ...

“for full identification and total immersion in a culture, in order to facilitate analytical fieldwork,” (Coffey, 1999, p.32).

This, in my experience, became resonantly true when my research cycle of separation, transition and reintegration took place on a daily basis, (see section four). The boundaries between work, research, professional and personal relationships became so blurred by the demands of the school day that a conscious surrender to total immersion within the research field was the only way of securing analytical terrain. Trying to understand and reflect on my life from a distance where the boundaries between the roles of researcher and worker had dissolved because of the speed and frequency with which the research cycle was occurring rapidly proved to be an exercise in futility.

When I understood this I shared my decision to relax and accept the overwhelming role of researcher/worker with those who loved and cared for me away from Osbourne School. With this, (strictly time limited) step taken, my anxieties about not fulfilling roles properly and many of the daily difficulties of the separation and reintegration stages of the research process ceased to be as troublesome. Critical, reflective distance was achieved through my (and those around me), acceptance that total immersion in the research arena was crucial to the successful communion of my selves as researcher and worker during this phase of my life.

I believe that my continuous engagement with the school on every level gave me what Patti Lather refers to as ‘catalytic validity,’ (1991, 1993). This is the extent to which research motivates those carrying it out to make sense of and critique what is happening in order to carry out change, (Sikes and Clark, 2004,). This represents research as praxis, resulting in committed, informed action, (Carr and Kemmis, 1986) that comes from a process of seeking emancipatory knowledge that increases awareness of contradictions hidden or distorted by everyday happenings or occurrences, (Lather, 1986, p.260, Sikes and Clark, 2004,). My closeness to the research allowed me to focus on my own experiences, perceptions and interpretations through autoethnography. The depth and messiness of detail that total immersion in the research reveals has combined with a personal style of writing and reflection to provide me with an opportunity to empower myself and transform my situation, (Sikes and Clark, 2004,).

Autoethnographic study does raise issues for the researcher and can have limitations. It is also a demanding discipline and discussions surrounding the boundaries of autoethnography form the next sub section of the paper

Autoethnography: issues arising.

The giving and accessing of voice through the autoethnography I have authored remains problematic for me and open to the subjective interpretation of the reader. The study of my self even though specifically aimed at not being egocentric necessarily reflects my central position within the project. Locating the body of the research within me bestows the power of voice and opinion into my writing. A cursory, uncritical read of the research may yield a sympathetic reaction for me and represent me as an educational crusader battling against children who are awful in an

effort to establish an effective inner city special school. The ingredients for a traditional good versus evil/good overcoming evil read are all there, the 'hero' is even white, male, heterosexual, non disabled and superficially middle class.

This interpretation would however miss one of the main objectives of the paper which was to find a voice for the mistrusted and disenfranchised young people I was working with. Within the thesis I feel this is made explicit through the chapters on 'school meltdown' and 'the boys' that trace the causes as well as the effects of the behaviour displayed within Osbourne. However when reading the research journal as a 'stand alone' autoethnography without the explanatory thesis I do not think that I prioritised finding a voice for the pupils explicitly enough and would focus on this more if conducting a similar project.

One of my aims for the research was that some of the intimate reflections within the text would encourage an audience to trust the material and hear previously inaudible voices speaking through my words. The likelihood of this ambition being realised is called into question by Strathern, (1987, p.17) who states that even an insider researcher cannot claim to truly represent the voice of anyone except themselves. Other writers are equally critical of access to a range of voices being attributed as a quality of outsider ethnography. However Lejeune, (1989) and Deck, (1990) state that first hand experience and knowledge of the culture will lend authenticity and authority to the text and the voices it seeks to amplify.

The production and analysis of lives through ethnography and autoethnography should be concerned with the giving or restoring of voice, (Coffey, 1999, p.129). At various times my autoethnographic journal represents a monograph, at other times detailed discussions are recorded, stories are written that seek to portray an increasingly intimate and reflective voice, official reports are included to

purposefully strip away opinionated voice and present facts as they were formally recorded. With the intentional exception of this last style of journal entry, the entire document was written reflectively in an attempt to capture and give voice to the voiceless... 'giving them physical and textual space and a written voice is a particular strategy of ethnographic representation', (ibid, p.150). My uncertainty comes as to whether I have asked the reader of my autoethnographic journal who has not accessed this thesis to 'listen too carefully' and that previously inaudible voices have remained so.

The major reason for this happening is that my voice may have overpowered others through the texts I have written. Nevertheless with all due respect to the importance of listening to others at the school, my voice has to carry clarity and volume for the autoethnography to be more than a paper exercise. My writing gave me much of the knowledge, conviction and reflection to push for school improvement with an education authority that in my opinion had been criminally negligent whilst overseeing Osbourne's degeneration into the chaos that overtook it. If the voicing of my experiences, efforts and learning helps any school avoid what Osbourne went through it is worthwhile - even at the expense of talking over some of the disempowered voices of the children I was working with.

With my self and my voice centralised within the research I became aware that my autoethnography was what one lay reader, (who I specifically asked to read my work to comment on punctuation) described as 'a really good read.' Although there are many positives to celebrate about readable and accessible research the comment worried me. The happenings at the school were sensational and intriguing but I did not want to author a paper that would be regarded first and foremost as lurid. The history of Osbourne had resulted in it attracting a considerable amount of

sensationalist publicity and this was a situation I did not want to exacerbate through my writing. Difficulty arises when trying to strike a balance between an accurate autoethnography that records physical, emotional and intellectual struggles to come to terms with extraordinary occurrences in a school whilst trying not to titillate unwelcome voyeurism within the reader.

When the local and tabloid press discovered the 2001 Ofsted report on Osbourne it ...

... “translated its official language into lurid journalese, considerable interest was provoked. People wanted to know the gory details and whilst it is impossible to know what was arousing curiosity; prurience and voyeurism are likely to have motivated some readers to seek out the full account on the internet; (the report was taken off the web for a while because of the overt interest). Journalists chose their words to appeal to their clienteles and to attract extra readers to their papers”, (Sikes and Clark, 2004).

Truthfully recording events and interactions at Osbourne without constructing a sensational ‘good read’ proved to be impossible. It is beyond my authorship to unequivocally re-present ‘reality’ and it is important to recognise that ‘writing is not an innocent practice’ and that in the social sciences there is only ‘interpretation’, (Denzin, 2000, p.898). If this is the case then it must be acknowledged that my autoethnography has the same relationship regarding its words and the effects they may have upon the readers as the journalists who also chose to write about the school, (Sikes and Clark 2004,).

The justification I offer for creating an autoethnography redolent with verbatim reports of pupils’ obscene language and wild behaviour is an attempt to convey what it actually feels like to be in the environment of a failing EBD school in meltdown. The writing hopefully makes an ‘imaginative contact’ with the reader, (Goodson and Sikes, 2001, p.50), more so than traditional academic styles. My aim

was also based upon an inclusive agenda. Why deny what is actually happening as this would further denigrate and disengage the young people portrayed in the research? The journal may well be 'a good read' and have a significant emotional impact on readers who may be astonished at what has happened within a school. However the key to reading as well as writing autoethnography appears to be the ability to maintain a critical distance and it is this position that can desensationalise my autoethnography of Osbourne.

My final concern with adopting autoethnography as the methodology for this research is that of confidentiality. There largely remains a state of ignorance about this research within Osbourne itself. Before starting the project I formally and informally sought the permission of the Chair of the schools governing body to carry out the research. He was not disinterested but quickly took the view that he did not really understand what I had written to him about and 'everything would be fine as long as it didn't affect my work and I would not leave on completion.' In September 2002 he had little idea where the research could lead and to be fair, neither had I. My other colleagues took and still maintain a detached, slightly amused position that I am 'doing research.' Attempts to explain are greeted with polite indifference and disinterest; they are preoccupied with other things.

Now in April 2004, there sits on my desk an autoethnography and nearly complete thesis that could threaten and ruin reputations, careers and personal lives. The confidentiality of these intimate and revealing writings is vital; yet what is the point of the work if it is to be filed as 'closed access' forever? Much of the value of the paper lies in its candour but this depends on detail and honest revelation that cannot be shared beyond relationships with my supervisor, examiners and typist.

The university and those involved have to agree to maintain the confidentiality of the paper or else it will have to be ruthlessly edited thus losing its immediacy and importance to me. All names have of course been changed but the detail of the work means it would be straightforward to discover which failing, inner city secondary school for boys with EBD is involved. The autoethnography and subsequent thesis will have to remain confidential or else the unfairness and damage this would cause to the school and those who feature in its story would destroy the validity of the research methodology. Edited sections of the paper and the lessons learned from my experiences will be used in a variety of arenas that I will amplify in the conclusion to this thesis. The location of the autoethnography and the identity of its cast must however remain camouflaged.

The final subsection in this methodology chapter investigates the mechanics and processes of producing an autoethnographic journal and subsequent doctoral thesis.

Producing an autoethnography

The research journal I created as my autoethnographic data has a rawness about its presentation that symbolises much of the content. I managed the practicalities of producing this ongoing research journal by using a 'Dictaphone' to record events and my reflections upon them. The tapes – usually between one and two hours of recording – were then passed to a friend who I paid to transcribe them onto floppy disk. When this work came back to me I would then edit typographical errors and add details to the events and extend my reflections with the benefit of hindsight. These additions were minimal and I was not overly stringent with grammar, sentence construction and hunting down every spelling mistake. What I wanted was a visceral

record, a piece of writing to communicate with; something basic that dripped urgency that I could privately interact with and remember through. The 273 pages of the journal reflect this ambition and have taken heed that ...

... (with stories), “the fine honing that comes from constant reconstructing, retelling and polishing also removes them farther and farther away from the reality they are supposedly portraying,” (Sutherland, 1997, p.21).

My autoethnography is not polished and does not pretend or want to be.

Constructing the journal, (even though my main contribution to its practical production was through recorded speech), fulfilled many of the identified advantages of writing. I was not influenced by audience reactions/expectations, I had to organise my thoughts within a certain structure, it represents a fixed and permanent record of a period of time and the journal gives my experience a status and a significance worth exploring; (Crawford et al, 1992, pp.47-48). The way the journal is written constitutes the next subsection.

The style of my autoethnography

My research journal is written in the first person. The majority of it is conversational and reflects what I felt about particular events and the position of the school in general. It is a dialogue with my self and accurately represents my general confusion, emotional disquiet and physical discomfort through the academic year 2002-2003. The autoethnography was also a vehicle I used for debate to try and find resolutions for certain issues

All these happenings and different attitudes have come about at the same time as our ‘clamping down’. Cause or coincidence – I’m not going to commit myself finally one

way or the other at present. I don't think we would have had any kind of positive response to our expectations without the relationships being in existence that have been built up so painstakingly upon such huge investments of time, emotion and understanding of suffering that were made by some of us in that first term. We have tried so hard to make ourselves count to the kids and it seems that we have achieved this to a degree. Scaffolded by these relationships we are now making demands of the kids, (they are still making huge demands of us), and at the moment, ten days into the term these seem to be answered positively.

A lot of my unhappiness and confusion at the moment is actually the fact that I think I'm miffed by the state of affairs that I have just outlined. At Osbourne I am used to being the 'SEN expert' who everyone consults on matters such as relationships with the pupils and it looks like in this case I have been proved to be comprehensively wrong. I have continuously and vociferously stated that I felt that HMI were inaccurate in their judgement of where the school is in terms of its development and what the kids would be able to work with and tolerate. However the signs are that the school and the boys are mostly happy, (with one or two spectacular exceptions), with the new boundaries that we have set.

*I remain doubly confused because this 'clampdown' challenges so much of what I thought Osbourne would be after making all those initial sacrifices, the exhaustive bridge building and the provision of as many opportunities as possible for the kid's emotions and communications to express themselves through. **I thought these things would be enough.** Really, I was convinced that the pupils would reach out when they saw me reaching so far towards them and taking all the shit and abuse and kicks and punches and everything else I've put up with and coming back for more, day in, day out without missing a minute. And all this based upon what I always*

thought was a fairly successful personality. I've never had and great difficulties charming my way in life with any group of people – even building and roofing gangs when doing part time work when I was a student. In truth I thought the kids would find me irresistible sooner rather than later and would come round to my way of thinking through persuasiveness and personal connection once the initial rejection had worn off. I did think my way would facilitate a crucial change. Not necessarily some evangelical resurrection of values and the magical formation of a caring, equality based community but I thought the tide would irrevocably change and the kids would start reaching for me and the school and I wouldn't have to put myself out so much all of the time. This happened in a limited way but not as much as I thought or hoped for on a consistent and lasting basis.

Now I've come back and been part of a new more direct approach. Compared to any way in which I have ever worked before this feels somewhat like shooting from the hip but we have achieved beyond what I anticipated and I think I'm fundamentally challenged; I'm also disappointed. I'm not sure exactly why I feel like this. Maybe I'm disappointed with myself for being wrong. Maybe I'm disappointed, disappointed for being naïve or soft and feel that what I thought was a concrete, unmoveable value based attitude towards education has been significantly challenged by this more proactive and ultimately more confrontational strategy. Internally I am deeply unsettled and disturbed because my experiences of the first ten days of term go against everything that I've ever held close in my SEN practice.

I'm an SEN professional who has always prided himself on humanistic values with approaches and strategies aligned to teaching and management that are above all empathic. The way we have started the term does not feel empathic but seems effective for many pupils and positive for the atmosphere and progress of the school. I haven't

yet pinpointed where the solution to my internal debate may lie and I think I'm possibly scared of the answer!

Away from the main style used throughout the journal are various stories. Later in the thesis I have included 'Home visit to Jimmie Francis'; a story that focuses on the abject poverty that many of the pupils live in. These occasional stories were written following an event that made a particularly significant impression on me. They were not dictated but typed immediately into my computer when I returned home at the end of the day in question. There was no planning to them; they were words that moved something inside me to feel that they just had to be recorded. They are more carefully edited than the rest of the journal as I wondered if they could be shared with a wider audience than the rest of the research. These stories contain more dialogue than other journal entries and often access a deeper voice from within my self than the rest of the autoethnography. This is an example of this different style of story telling...

The February half term provided my first appearance in court as a professional teacher. Seljit, the boy who along with his friends had made such explicit death threats to me that we permanently excluded him from the school and prosecuted him was scheduled to appear in court during the break.

To make the best of a bad journey to London I had arrived at work at 6.30 a.m. as usual and with James had started interviewing prospective teaching assistants at 7.30a.m. What a great start to the holiday, (we actually worked until 8p.m. that night catching up on tasks undone through the hurly-burly of term time and creating an action plan for the next half term leading up to the next visit of the inspectorate).

Today is the second day of the 'break' and I have already e-mailed two documents to school and have been working on begging letters to 'Standards Fund' administrators and evaluating the HMI action plan.

Balham Youth Court was the venue for Seljit's trial. He was being charged with affray and with his already long youth offending record there was danger for him that he might receive his first custodial sentence. I had received the support of his mother for pressing charges against him as she has serious difficulties with him at home and in her words... 'someone needed to teach him a lesson'. She said that Seljit had recently had a... 'bottle stuck in his mouth but even that has not learned him'. His mother is one of Osbourne's more supportive parents and she has a good job as a P.A. in social services. We have also recently taken on Seljit's brother Walter as a full time teaching assistant so there appears to be far less case for Seljit's wild behaviour than there is for many more of our other students.

James and I overestimated the journey and arrived very early. We parked and sat outside a café having a sandwich and coffee, enjoying the unexpected February sun. We had been comparing and rehearsing the incident forms we had written back in December when the incident had occurred. Even though we were not meant to collude we wanted to make sure that there were no discrepancies in our accounts after putting up with so much from Seljit. We were not vengeful we were just being as thorough as we are with everything else to do with the school. James often gets mistaken for a policeman and the pair of us sitting around the corner from the youth court, suited and booted with newly cut hair must have looked to the whole world like a pair of coppers waiting to give evidence. As I reached into the inside pocket of my suit to pull out a document, two lads who had been approaching looked at me and took to their

heels at top speed. I wondered if they thought I was about to serve them with a warrant of sorts?

Again the misconception as we entered the court building. This time from the private security guard lolling at the entrance kiosk...

'You are the officers for which case'?

'Sorry, Pardon'?

'Which case are you here for? You are policemen aren't you'?

'No we're teachers'.

'Oh it's just that you do sort of look like...'

'Yeah I know thanks'.

It is strange for me being on the right side of the establishment and being one of the 'have' club rather than the peripheral figure I have always seen myself as and been comfortable with. Putting on a tie that morning and donning my newly cleaned suit I felt that I was dressing powerfully; to deliver what message...?

'Don't fuck with me and my school sonny'?

'Ah yes your honour, look at me, upright and respectable, a bit like you in fact , lets fuck this little shit up together'?

This writing seems to now be following the thought script of 'The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner'. Strangely I have the thoughts of the anti-hero Smith and the status of the 'Toffs' he and I so despise.

My social and spatial confusion is added to by the events that precede the hearing.

The representative of the 'Crown Prosecution Service' (how grand) bustles in. She is 30ish, black and enormous. Endlessly hassled and busy yet somehow finding time to be sympathetic and supportive without really listening, obviously reading the papers for the first time. She takes in detail with her ears and eyes at the same time and within a couple of minutes knows the case as well as I do.

She exits the room and then returns and says that she has been discussing the proceedings with the defence lawyer who wants to make a deal as he does not want to... 'Take on and disagree with two respectable headteacher's who he knows he has no chance of discrediting'. (I am an insider, a 'Toff' and I cannot be discredited!. If only they knew how hard I often try to discredit myself.

The policeman who I have spoken with many times over the phone about the case and yet never met now joins us in the prosecution witness room. He is tall, falsely social and wears a pink shirt; I dislike him immediately and can feel the feeling is mutual ...

'This Seljit then, what a wanker. He's just turned up and is giving it the large that he's got people waiting for him round the corner in case anything happens with you two. What a wanker or what?'

His voice is surprisingly cultured and at the end of each stanza his false, courtesy laugh lasts an incredibly long time – a falsetto giggle that begs you to dare to break off eye contact and be the loser before it's finished. The three of us sit there and exchange the boring, predictable, anecdotal male banter of – 'my job's really hard and difficult with a big physical element don't you know', and I become progressively more jaded and nervous as this facile interaction continues. I have met many policemen and always seem to end up engaging in this primal territory marking exercise with them. They are never as interesting as coppers on telly.

The clerk of the court comes into the room and calls for me. He is instantly likeable in his rumpled beyond belief brown suit, similarly rumpled smile and astonishing likeness to Gene Wilder. Wobbly legged I follow him thinking... 'oh my god it's the head teachers' office yet again,' except I remember that it's not me this time who's for it, I am the one doing the telling, the grassing, the splitting. I'm on the side of the angels!

The court is quiet and dim with the surprising sun penetrating even this dark, dry, place; the sunbeams letting dust dance within them to the same rhythm you find in museums and libraries.

I deny any belief, (wondering if I lose any establishment points for this) and read from the atheist card in a soft, well-spoken voice that my body chooses as being the best representative of ... 'dedicated, hard working public servant grievously wronged.' My mind tells my voice to read the longer, more obscure words with confidence and volume to convey my image of educated belonging as strongly as possible.

The magistrate is avuncular and reminds me of the more benign middle age Dickens characters engaged in business and the professions. Beneath the sheep's clothing there is an authority and sharpness which he shows me later that seems to surprise me and the others in the court. I ask the clerk for some water and hold it lightly in my fingers whilst drinking to try and not betray again the shaking that I know the defence council saw when I first held the plastic cup.

The prosecutor helps me through my lines and I think I've done well. She prompts me frequently with ... 'was there anything else, what happened then, did anything else happen,' and each time she does this she sends me into a minor panic because I know I have left something out. I am painfully aware that exams were never my strong

point. I think I have done ok and I have not once looked at Seljit during this exchange. I continue to ignore him constantly, (why), and turn to my right to face the defence council who is thin with horned rim glasses and immediately reminds me of a social worker who I particularly dislike. He tries to pick holes in my story and I sense he is angry that he has nothing to go on and we have made him challenge us and he knows he is not going to get anywhere.

In spite of this there is a frustration I feel with his endless and obvious attempts to discredit me and my story. Unwittingly he makes me feel the anger of the victim again and I am grateful to him because of this. Each time I challenge the councils assertions Seljit grabs him and whispers urgently into his ear. I am glad to see the boy so unsettled. After one of my answers Seljit tuts and hisses his disagreement and the magistrate yells at him, gives him a real broadside and demands an answer of acquiescence which is sullenly given. It is reminiscent of so many of the exchanges I suffered in my unhappy school days; but I have no sympathy. The magistrate also vents his spleen on the defence council who is becoming repetitive and desperate. Following this he is syrupy and gentle with me and I think we all know the case is probably going just one way.

In the end I am telling myself to concentrate, concentrate, and concentrate. I wear the defence down through consistency not cleverness or authority although I am surprised that unlike television courtroom dramas I get away with giving some quite spiky and arrogant answers as well as adding contextual information to some of my responses. I wait for the magistrate to remind me to 'only give the relevant / required answer' but it never comes. I become more adventurous and even cheeky; knowing that I am winning and can finally fulfil some of my more iconoclastic urges.

I finish on a strong note telling the court that I have never felt the need to ... 'exaggerate the impairments, disabilities or disadvantages of any of the students identified with SEN that I have worked with over the last 17 years. I have also never felt the need to take a student to court before.' On the way out I make eye contact with the defence council and shake my head in a contemptuous gesture, his eyes seek the floor immediately, he knows; he must have known all along.

I pass James who has been called next. The policeman in the waiting room hails me with... 'wow, 35 minutes, what were they doing to you in there, you've been ages.' I sit down and try and engage him with my feelings about the atmosphere and the strange, forced communication that takes place in a court room but give up quickly and resign myself to listening about drugs busts, rucks, big players and the violent society.

James bounces out after about 10 minutes looking as fresh as a daisy and obviously having enjoyed being the centre of attention in such a sustained and power orientated environment. I imagine the judge would have loved him and the feeling would have been reciprocated.

James has an enormous amount of social currency and emanates power and authority and seldom reflects on his status or influence. He tells me that he once applied to be a magistrate. I am in no way surprised.

As we are leaving the building and the policeman goes to give evidence the Gene Wilder look alike makes for me and puts his arm around my shoulder ... 'fuck me mate, what a great job you do, good luck to you, well done.' When this has happened in the past it makes me feel angry but 'Gene' makes my day, I wish I could tell him.

I murmur to James... 'I feel like I've been raped,'

'Never mind, I really socked it to them, gave the defence hell, it was great. Do you know when I walked in Seljit said – 'all right sir' – cheeky fucker. Well we did it, we bloody did it.'

'I need a drink, come on lets go to a pub.'

'No, bollocks, we've got loads to do it's just a little hurdle jumped over to make the school better.'

I am quiet and tired in the car and want to go home. One of the other boys involved in the incident fails to come to the court so they are all back there in a month's time but I have done my bit for justice and for the system.

In complete contrast to this style I also included in the journal official incident reports I had to write and submit to governors disciplinary committees. The reason for incorporating these descriptions was that I wanted to see how I would feel in the future when reflecting back on violent incidents that involved me when what I read was recorded without subjectivity or reflection. When revising these purely factual accounts now I still feel the same anger and frustration as when I read reflective, emotive reports of similarly aggressive episodes ...

MERVIN WALKER INCIDENT FORM. 20/05/03

At 10.55 a.m. I observed Mervin and one other student (Graham G) smoking behind the tree that has the wire swing attached to it. I observed this through one of the high windows in the DT room.

At 11.20 a.m. I asked Mervin to leave his P.E lesson and come with Reggie Grade and me. We went into the resources room where I told Mervin what I had observed. I

reminded him of the school rules and informed him that he had to go home and he would receive a one-day exclusion as consistent with school policy.

Mervin immediately became very agitated and started shouting that 'I was not smoking,' 'you are always picking on me,' 'fuck you I'm not leaving school, you can't exclude me,' 'you're a cunt here just like you were at St. Peters,' (a previous school we had both been at), 'fuck you, fuck off, you're a liar, I wasn't fucking smoking.'

I told Mervin that I had seen him and that he wasn't going to bully me into changing my mind. Mervin pushed me out of the way using his shoulder and picked up a large kitchen knife from the food technology resources tray; he waved the knife in my direction.

I approached Mervin who was standing by the fire exit and asked him to give me the knife. He said 'why should I.' I told him he was being silly and asked him again, I then gently took the knife out of his hand.

Mervin then started shouting that he was going to 'fight' and 'kill' Les who had 'stitched him up' and 'never gets sent home for smoking.'

I followed Mervin to the front of the building whilst calling other members of staff on the walkie-talkie to close down the building and try and ensure that Mervin could not get in.

Mervin walked to the front of the building and tried to climb in the windows of the 10C tutor room. A member of staff held the window so it could not be opened further; I did the same from the outside. Mervin was shouting/screaming at the top of his voice 'do you think you are bad,' if you're bad just touch me and see what I'll do,' 'touch me and I'll punch you up,' 'I swear I'm going to get you Jonty, I'm going to punch you in your face.' Two year 10 students who were participating in a lesson in the room (BB and MM) shouted at Mervin to 'fuck off' and MM tried to spit at Mervin

through the window. Mervin then stated that he was going to 'kill MM' and he was going to 'have two fights before he left school that day.'

Mervin then went into the year nine classroom and tried to climb in through the window. Once again the window was prevented from opening further by the staff on the inside and myself on the outside. I said to Mervin that he was making a small incident into a big thing and that he should leave quietly. I requested through my radio that another senior member of staff contact Mervin's family for additional support.

Mervin continued to verbally abuse me and threaten me with physical violence as before. He then bent down to the ground and picked up a piece of broken glass that was approximately six inches long. Mervin approached me until his face was about an inch from mine. He shouted that he was going to 'cut me' and 'kill me.' I told Mervin to put the glass down which he threw into a bush as he walked around the front of the building at the corner where the reception area is located.

By the chimney stack Mervin rushed back to me and pushed me with both hands into the wall. As I rebounded from the wall he pushed me back again and repeated this another time continuously telling me to 'fuck off' and that I was a 'fucking cunt.' He was crying and becoming extremely distressed and his mouth had become full of dry saliva.

I followed Mervin towards the back of the building reminding him that it was time to go and that I could arrange for someone to bring him his trainers and sweatshirt.

Mervin said that he 'wasn't going home until he had punched Les' and that he was going to 'fucking bang' me. Again he turned and ran at me and pushed me into the staff room window.

The noise alerted a student (RB) who had been resting upstairs and he put his head out of the window and Mervin asked him to 'come down and open the door so that he could come in and get Les.' I told Mervin that this was nothing to do with Les although another boy was going to be excluded for one day for smoking. Mervin pushed me into the staff room window again.

We went around to the rear of the school where Mervin again tried to access the school through windows in the 10A tutor room. I held the window closed. Mervin was becoming ever more agitated and put his forehead to my forehead whilst knocking his head on mine (with little force) and screamed at me repeatedly that he was going to 'fight me', and 'if I thought I was so hard why didn't I try and take him,' and 'honestly Jonty you're dead, I'm going to fucking kill you.'

In a quiet voice I told Mervin to calm down and that he should behave and that he wasn't going to bully me or intimidate me into changing my decision or story about the fact that I had seen him smoking. Mervin again put his forehead to mine and started knocking his head on mine slightly harder than before.

I told Mervin that he had to start behaving and reminded him about his college placement on Friday.

Mervin said 'fuck college, fuck you' and head butted my forehead (50% force). He kept his head on mine and was screaming at the top of his voice 'do you want some, come on let's go if you want some, come on, take me, I'm going to fight, I'm ready to fight.'

Mervin then pushed me into the side of the building and went to the year seven classroom where he again tried to gain access through the windows. Sally Wagstaff held the window closed and asked Mervin to calm down. Mervin was very very distressed and crying and spitting on the floor. Reggie Grade came to the window and

tried to tell Mervin that he had spoken to Mervin's mother. Mervin shouted Reggie down and appeared to be too agitated to be able to listen. Reggie came outside to reiterate and clarify his message but Mervin shouted him down again and told Reggie he was 'a fucking cunt', and he could 'fuck off.'

I challenged Mervin about his language and he put his forehead on mine again and told me he was 'going to punch me' and 'do something to me.'

He butted me again (80% force), pushed me away twice and flicked his hand into my face twice hitting me in the eye. I repeatedly asked Mervin to calm down.

Mervin then climbed onto the roof using the railings by the entrance near the gym. I radioed inside to make sure all the upstairs windows were closed. Mervin climbed down the other side of the building and went to the gym door. The P.E teacher who was unaware of what had been happening opened this and Mervin tried to shoulder his way past me into the gym. I stood in the doorway and Mervin returned to the front of the building round by the kitchen corner. I followed him asking him to calm down and he turned to me again and pushed me, catching me off balance so I nearly fell over (witnessed through the window by the kitchen auxiliary).

Mervin then tried to access the building by the door near the kitchen and was trying to get other pupils to open this for him. I stood in front of the door to prevent him from kicking and punching it and further disrupting the school. He pushed me into the door and walked onto the grass near the bungalow. I followed Mervin and was able to give him some space as he had stopped trying to access the building. I radioed to Mark to come and talk to Mervin.

Mark took his glasses off and approached Mervin, as he got nearer he made verbal and physical contact with Mervin. He gently put his hand on Mervin's back but Mervin became agitated again. I radioed inside and advised that in five minutes we

would call the police to remove Mervin from the site if he was not showing signs of calming down.

Mervin started to calm down and from a distance I shadowed Mark and Mervin as they walked around the site. After a period of approximately 20 minutes (12.20) they came and sat at the picnic benches near the gym entrance to the school. A dialogue between the three of us ensued and I approached Mervin and gave him a hug. Mervin put his head on my chest and said 'I'm sorry I hit you Jonty, I'm sorry I butted you.'

The three of us went and ate lunch together and Mervin and Mark went to Mark's office to talk about what had happened. Mary Crowhurst contacted his mother by telephone.

Whatever the chosen styles of the journal, it remains to a degree an exercise in power and control. The choice of language, discourse and words depicting my experiences are my decisions and as Wittgenstein noted the choice of particular grammars and vocabularies reflect the choice of particular realities, (1968). The options I took as researcher/worker about the nature, form and type of representation used have implications for the people I wrote about, the audiences for the paper, the type of understandings I manage to communicate and how the work is located in terms of academic legitimacy and authenticity, (Fine et al 2000, Richardson, 1997, Sikes and Clark, 2004). These implications concern and reflect power; power which impacts upon the situation, the self and those who are being researched and represented in the writing.

The roughness of my autoethnographic journal does not diminish my pride in it. This was demonstrated in that on its completion I paid over £100 to have three copies of it hard bound in an academic style by a professional bookbinder. One copy

was sent to my supervisor as a token of thanks; one copy is my working copy whilst the remaining mint edition sits in pride of place on my book case. I am proud of the fact that I produced the journal during an excessively demanding time in my life and I am proud of the story it records. The journal will help me remember an important period of my life and how the writing represents memory work is the area I will now discuss.

Ethical considerations.

The research project presented me with dichotomies and clashes in terms of both identity and ethics. There are blurred boundaries as to whether the research is into, for or with those recorded in the journal and thesis. All of these different research positions have far reaching ethical considerations attached to them, (Griffiths, 1998, p38). As a covert researcher I felt able to record anything in my research journal and in this context I was researching into the school. The research and subsequent reflective writing process has improved my practice and relationships within the school and in this way I have been researching for Osbourne. The work also represents the opinions, ambitions and criticisms of many of those involved in the story so even though this may not have been openly declared, in this way I have also researched with members of the school community.

My identity, which forms the integral part of this research, is multi-faceted and as the paper demonstrates, is a mobile, flexible entity. In the same way the ethical stance of this paper cannot be conceived of as being a straightforward morality, frozen at one particular moment as the correct approach. As with other aspects of the research it has to be located within personal, historical and social contexts that were frequently subjected to tides of circumstance making them fluid entities.

The many strands of identity that this paper aims to interrogate mean that a list of explicit ethical guidelines was impossible to demarcate. In spite of this I remained determined that central to the project was...

“An equal respect for and appreciation of every individual: a recognition that persons are constructed and interpret themselves in relation to the power relations in society... and an understanding that there are no hard and fast rules or certainties to be had, so moral decisions are always judgements in particular contexts”, (ibid, p 135).

The data I recorded was informed by participant observation and throughout most of the data collection period I maintained the role of covert researcher. This yielded a richness of material that would have otherwise been inaccessible if I had conducted information gathering in more formal ways. However this position brought with it a risk of exploitation and betrayal and this consideration has had to remain at the forefront of my reflections during the writing process and beyond this when considering the audience for this paper.

The most stringent ethical consideration for this paper is how it can be used on its completion. The context is so rarefied that even though I will attempt to afford the research all possible anonymity through strategies such as aliases and not mentioning the location of the school; to a reader versed in special education Osbourne is currently still notorious enough to be easily identifiable.

The potential unmasking of my most intimate reflections could have drastic consequences if the paper was identified and used out of context by a third party such as an antagonistic reporter or a disgruntled ex member of staff. For this reason explicit collaboration is needed between the university and myself to ensure that the finished paper maintains its confidentiality. If the paper is ever to enjoy a wider readership then it will have to be in an edited form where the school and those within it – including me - can be afforded protection.

Barnes states that institutions and administrators are more able to defend their interests than private citizens, (1967, p 206) however one of my primary ethical concerns has been to 'foresee and avoid potential areas of concern' for the school, (Celnick, 2000, p 99). Trying to seek advice and collaboration on this issue has been all but impossible whilst discussing the research with the governing body at Osbourne and the 'Local Education Authority' has been a fruitless exercise. Both entities are so supportive of what the management team has been trying to undertake at the school that they have both refused detailed explanations of my research and literally told me to... 'do what you want as long as you keep delivering at the school'. The establishment then does not seem then to have too many concerns about protecting itself. This may be partially due to the fact that the school has received so much adverse publicity in the past those involved with the school are of the opinion that nothing could be that bad again.

The focus then moves to the protection of the individual. Those I have spoken with informally, both staff and pupils, are mildly interested that I am writing a journal / story / thesis in which I discuss them. All interest however seems to evaporate when I reveal that everyone I mention has an alias. I have offered parts of the journal that do not discuss personalities other than my own to colleagues to read. This invitation is either politely declined or if a colleague has taken a section of the paper, when I ask for discussion at a later date it appears that the extract has not been read.

With this level of disinterest in mind it has been important to guard against complacency. Gallagher et al, state that ethical issues can easily be ignored during in-house social research because the consequences of not paying attention to them can easily be perceived as benign, (1995, p 33). This has been an important reminder for me as my daily access to the research participants and data could easily breed

carelessness for their rights and privacy. This issue has become especially pertinent as I near the submission date for this paper. Colleagues have become more interested, (possibly because they now have more time as the school is more settled), in the fact that I might be close to gaining a qualification that for me means so much; everyone knows the story of my own personal failures at school. This has catalysed interest in what I have been studying and requests for materials from the journal and the paper have become relatively frequent. The interest in the paper has also increased due to the fact that Osbourne has now started the process of federating with the EBD primary school in the borough. That school is at the stage in the cycle of school recovery that Osbourne was when I first experienced it. Governors, staff and the education authority have remembered that I wrote about Osbourne in its darkest of days and have encouraged me to share my writing with the primary school to encourage them during the initial stage of school recovery.

Being able to keep my journal and thesis strictly confidential has been made easier by having writing available that I have no compunction in sharing. I co-published a chapter in an academic book with my supervisor concerning various aspects of the story of Osbourne. The paper that was written during my first year at the school and contains enough detail to apparently satisfy those who express a wish to read about Osbourne without jeopardising the confidentiality or integrity of any of the participants.

As with everything to do with Osbourne School the key lies with respect. My ethical duty is to afford the school and those within it the confidentiality and respect they deserve after the difficulties they have lived and worked through.

The journal as memory and memoir work.

Writing a record of the events of my first year at Osbourne has been immensely beneficial and informative to my planning for the future of the school... ‘understanding the past has helped me rewrite my future,’ (Mitchell and Weber, 1999, p.48). New personal memories still come forth when I review any section of the autoethnography and as such the work qualifies as memoir writing. Miller, (1997) points out that memoir can exist as a kind of curriculum vitae that can include ‘thick descriptions of school memories.’ Mitchell and Weber state that this kind of ... “richly textured curriculum vitae can contribute to professional development,” (1999, p.48), and this has been true for me.

Memoir writing puts a focus on what is remembered and how it is remembered, (ibid). This is done through the process of telling and retelling which has been replicated through my process of dictation, editing and writing section four of the thesis. The different styles of writing I employed also make a claim for the work to be memoir work ...

... “Memoir is the intersection of narration and reflection, of storytelling and essay writing. It can present its story and reflect and consider the meaning of the story. It is a peculiarly open form, inviting broken and incomplete images, half recollected fragments – all the mass (or mess) of detail. It offers to shape this confusion and in shaping, of course it necessarily creates. (Hampl, 1996, p.209).

Fulfilling these criteria of memoir work hopefully adds further academic legitimacy to my autoethnography. Discussing the relationship between my journal and thesis constitutes the final subsection concerning methodology.

Journal into thesis

For some time I have been in some confusion as to what constitutes my autoethnography? I could not decide if it is made up of just my journal, only my thesis or a combination of the two? Even though the journal and the thesis are completely different pieces of writing they are intertwined and mutually dependant. The construction of both in their own way, have contributed significantly to the growth of my self since the start of the research project. The importance of investigating the personal has been reiterated through the formation of both pieces of writing.

It has proved beneficial to write the methodology section after the rest of the thesis has been completed as this has given me the opportunity to reflect on how the entire paper has 'come together'. I now feel that both journal and thesis make up my autoethnography and I shall argue that even though the journal and thesis are individual, the thesis represents a redrafting of the journal and has been a reflective process that has in its own way recrafted my autoethnographic self.

Patricia Hampl discusses memoir work as being able to not only tell stories but being able to listen to what they tell us, encouraging us to return to them and write other drafts, (1996, p.209). For Hampl as for me, the first draft (journal) does not have to be strictly true, interpretation plays a large part and it can be that what is seemed to be remembered may be full of half truths, (ibid, p.206). As with my journal writing, Hampl states that pretty much anything can happen in a first draft and that ... 'a careful first draft is a failed first draft,' (ibid). The significance of the first draft is mostly to give shape to the confusion and confusing images in the memory, (Mitchell and Weber, 1999, p.49). These references to the first drafting of memoir work tally accurately with my experiences and ambitions whilst constructing my research journal.

Hampel writes that the second draft of a work should be a revisiting, a new observation of the materials and a working backwards to see and review what is true and what is significant, (1996, p.210). This has been the process involved in writing my thesis. Challenging facts and interpretations has been an important personal and professional process for me whilst writing this paper. The only part of the journal that I did not question or alter for submission in the thesis is the original language used, as I said, I needed the journal to retain a matt finish.

The close relationship between the journal and thesis through the process of revisiting helped construct a new relationship for my self with the past and this is exemplified by some of the reflective work in section four of the thesis. The contextual work in section two and three has also generated a new interpretation and vision of the past and future for me. The contestations and new reflexivity recorded in the thesis is only partly about what happened, it is mostly an investigation into my interpretation of what happened.

The relationship between understanding the past and the present is symbolic and ongoing. Norquay understands her 'here and now' differently by examining her 'there and then' and confronting some painful truths, (1993, p.247). By reflecting on the present situation at Osbourne School I can also understand the past in different ways. Reinterpretation never stops, writing my thesis from my journal reminds me that

.... "like so many texts, logs and letters we write over the years, it contains gaps and silences that take on new significance when interrogated from the perspective of who the rememberer has become," (Mitchell and Weber, 1999, p.54).

Whatever I have become has been irretrievably shaped not just by the experiences recorded in my autoethnographic journal but by the process, insight and reflective journey provided by writing the thesis. The redrafting of the research data

into an academic paper has proved to be, in terms of identity work and knowledge of self, as important a part of the autoethnography as the school based experiences the research is founded upon.

Presenting my autoethnography in an academically viable and acceptable way constituted a significant challenge. The year of school reflected in the paper contained enormous challenges to my professional identity as an experienced teacher and school leader. It is these issues that the next section of the paper focuses on.

3. THE INTERROGATION OF A PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY.

Introduction.

When I became involved with Osbourne School there was no evident attempt at behaviour management, there was no duty of care and no discipline. Tolerance, trust, loyalty and support were non-existent amongst the staff and completely absent from the relationships between the adults and the children involved with the school. A culture of bullying existed that was perpetuated by most of the pupils and those who were meant to be educating and caring for them. Drug taking was commonplace, violence and fighting occurred on a daily basis and many of the pupils carried weapons. The concept that school is a place for education and positive social experience had been rejected by both the supposed teachers and learners. Osbourne had disintegrated; it failed to provide a constructive, enlightening environment and had even ceased to keep the people within it physically and emotionally safe.

I had been made aware of these extreme difficulties from my first telephone engagements with the school and they were reiterated to me during an exhaustive recruitment process and throughout the period of April-September 2002 when I was visiting the school on a regular basis to assist in managing its closure before the autumn restart. In spite of these warnings I remained confident that I would be 'the one' to make a real difference and was convinced that the pupils and staff would somehow become imbued and subsequently 'cured' of their negative experiences and outlook by the irresistible combination of my positive personality and dedicated professional expertise.

The level of disturbance at the time of the school restart quickly ruined the confidence and optimism I expressed. The personal and professional challenges issued by the school resulted within a week of me joining Osbourne full-time to actively seek to

secure my old job. This section of the paper will demonstrate and reflect on the extreme challenges that provoked this reaction from me and so attacked my professional identity that soon after joining Osbourne I was considering not just leaving the school but turning away from an education based career altogether. The disintegration of a school is a harrowing experience for pupils and staff. Corrigan (1979) studied a school where the conflict was at such a level he felt compelled to describe the situation using military language. He discusses the 'Guerrilla Warfare' the pupils waged against the staff and the constant 'mucking about' in lessons that represented part of a socially class based cultural resistance...

"Carrying on in class represents the ability of the boys to continue their normal way of life, despite the occupying army of teachers and the power of the school, as well as their ability to attack the teachers on the boys' own terms," (p.58).

The situation recorded by Corrigan was mirrored at Osbourne but when his whole book is considered the resistant and oppositional behaviour he researched pales compared to the situation I experienced. The brazen aggression towards staff at Osbourne astonished me. There was no attempt made by the pupils to hide the violence, contempt and abuse they targeted the adults with. If you intervened in a fight or disagreement amongst the boys then invariably the antagonists would unite their physical and verbal differences against you and the 'real enemy' would swiftly be attacked. Members of staff were also frequently attacked without the catalyst of a third party being involved.

The shameless overt bullying and physical intimidation of staff was shocking and symptomatic of a school without leadership, authority, respect or relationships.

Werthman, (1963), highlights that when teacher authority has broken down then all

behaviour that once legitimised that authority is suspended and this was the case at Osbourne.

Usual school niceties such as cooperation, being polite, putting your hand up, punctuality, waiting to be dismissed and deferential address are all suppressed when staff lose authority. Defiance pervades even physical demeanour and boys develop a... 'casual and disdainful aloofness to anyone making normative claims on their behaviour,' (p.221). The anti-authoritarian walk Werthman witnessed pupils adopt to physically represent their disdain was replicated in the Osbourne context... 'A little too slow for the occasion, a straight back, shoulders slightly stooped, hands in pockets and eyes that carefully avert any party to the interaction,' (ibid). At Osbourne this was known as the 'Gangsta walk', (sic), and would become more pronounced in situations of conflict or when an adult was attempting to exert some authority.

The total breakdown of authoritative, caring relationships at Osbourne undoubtedly exacerbated outwardly aggressive as well as defensive behaviour. Even though significant behavioural disturbance is in no way unique to the school I was working in, the depth of the rejection of the adults and the combination of overt and covert resistance was immense. I have yet to encounter through literature, first-hand experience or hearsay another school containing the same level of disruption as Osbourne displayed when I became involved with it. The outrageous behaviour constantly demonstrated by the pupils reflected the length of time the school had been in crisis and the lack of empathy and thought that had been missing from the numerous rescue packages that had failed.

Members of staff losing individual battles for authority are part of a destructive cycle of failure for schools, staff and pupils. When the collective self-esteem of a school becomes battered then all aspects of school life suffer. Children misbehave and truant,

demoralising the staff and providing them with endless stress. The teachers are then at a low ebb and their teaching becomes careless and lacklustre. Staff attitudes towards pupils become punitive, everybody goes home unhappy, some never come back, (Klein, 1999, p.13). This cycle had repeated itself several times over many years at Osbourne and the school was in a desperate spiral of hopelessness.

In 1999 Tim Brighouse identified imperative prerequisites that had to be in place if positive outcomes were to be attainable for inner city children in difficult schools.

Brighouse stated that a professional network of therapists, clinicians and social workers has to exist for the families of the children and be available to support parenting skills. Schools need to be sufficiently resourced with teachers and experienced teaching assistants. Effective inter-agency and multi-disciplinary working and networks have to be established and secondary schools must offer value-added for the pupils with intense, interest led courses of study, (O'Connor et al, 1999 pp vii-ix)... "To fail on any one (of these prerequisites) of them is to stack the odds against a secondary school... 'at the wrong end of a pecking order'" (ibid). Brighouse also points out that marketisation and increased competition in all areas of schooling isolates children and some schools quickly become 'sinks, skips, and dustbins,' (ibid). Osbourne was colloquially spoken about as a 'toilet school' that only 'contained shit'.

I have heard these derogatory labels applied by other schools in the borough, the families involved with Osbourne, LEA officers, the local community and saddest of all by the children who were supposed to attend and the staff engaged to work with them.

None of the essential elements espoused by Brighouse were in place at Osbourne and difficult, 'unplaceable' children from other LEA's had been added to the roll. The total lack of support for pupils, their families and the staff drove the disengaged and

frustrated behaviour of the pupils to exceptional levels. Staff who were bewildered by the boys behaviour were impaired further by their lack of experience and the failure of external agencies to provide support, advice and training. The elements needed to reclaim a school outlined by Brendtro et al (1992) - 'positive relationships, brain friendly learning, discipline for responsibility and the fostering of pro-social values and behaviour' were also all missing from the Osbourne equation.

With an entirely new staff team I was 'parachuted' into this catastrophic situation with the minimum of preparation, resources and support. On reflection it is unsurprising that I immediately felt that my professional biography could never be the same again.

Well on day one at Osbourne with the kids in, I just thought I've made the biggest mistake of my life.... I had... thoughts, really concrete thoughts about jacking it in, they're advertising my old job at the moment and even though it's ten grand less it looks very, very attractive. At most I thought about scraping through for a year then going and getting a nice job somewhere, head of a quiet village middle or primary school in leafy West Sussex. This is what the first day and indeed the first couple of weeks did to me.

Just the noise, the breaking up of fights, the 'in your face,' the language, the aggression, nastiness, the culture, everything I mean I thought I'd seen it all, I really thought I'd seen it all before I went to Osbourne, but really I hadn't seen anything. It was awful; I couldn't even speak on the night of the first Monday. The Tuesday wasn't much better; to be honest it was an equal nightmare. Wednesday, Thursday, Friday were better or maybe I had just started to construct my defensive shell, (physically and emotionally). I'm really proud of what we're trying to do but it was

almost the same this second week, especially Monday and Tuesday. When you're picking up the crap the children have experienced in the weekend it's just awful, awful. It's so tiring. I mean I get up at twenty past five to get there. Kids are in breakfast club at eight they're out at 2.30 and on a couple of those days I've been counting minutes, almost seconds until you reach some sort of calm when the kids leave the building. It's then that you have to start running and managing a school because ten seconds calm or thinking time during the school day is unimaginable and unrealistic. Then you get home at eight o'clock too tired and just numb, absolutely numb from what's been thrown at you all day.

It is difficult not to always think and write about this period at Osbourne School in a negative and seemingly sensational way. So much of what I have recorded in this paper portrays a gloomy, fearful year in my life that was punctuated constantly with aggression and violence manifested through cataclysmically poor pupil behaviour. In spite of what I feel were extraordinary occurrences within a school context I hope to describe events without glorifying or lionising them by presenting myself as hero or martyr.

The bleakness of style and vocabulary in most of my research journal accurately reflects the personal and professional desperation and captivity that I felt during the period of the school restart. There were no joyful days to alleviate the strain and intensity of what I worked through. Every day for me represented an intense and depressing struggle trying to find solutions for frightened, aggressive pupils and intimidated staff whilst attempting to maintain a professional demeanour and vision. My experiences have undoubtedly changed me for ever and even now when I read some of the journal entries from the first few months I feel my blood pressure rise, my

pulse quicken and anxiety and stress flood back into me. With the experiences I have garnered I am sure that I could not and will not undertake another similar challenge in my teaching career.

Somehow I kept going to school. Why and how I kept going to work are questions I still ask myself and are frequently asked of me. Part of the answer I think was a genuine personal desire to change the school, to succeed in what I had promised to myself and others that I could and would do, make Osbourne better for everyone; including me. Some of my motivation was financial; I couldn't just walk away from a handsome salary and suspend the many commitments involved in looking after my large family. Underpinning this was the feeling that I could not negate twenty hard-earned years of professional experience and admit defeat.

My escape plans about finding alternative employment either in another school or away from education altogether felt that they were more than just fantasises at the time but something within me resisted translating these thoughts into action. What stopped me from physically leaving was I think more than personality strands within my self such as stubbornness and a highly developed sense of team / collegiate spirit. There was a professional core within me that refused to surrender or die. I was proud of my work with children in a variety of schools. I had previously managed a school experiencing difficult circumstances and this had given me an ideal that somehow, someday I would enjoy success at Osbourne. My career preserved somewhere within me the hope that at some stage I would feel again as if I was walking into a school not a battlefield every morning and that I could come to work feeling like a teacher, not a security guard.

Throughout this experience the maintenance of a professional identity and displaying the acceptable behaviours and constructive thoughts associated with this phenomenon

presented a unique challenge during my first year at Osbourne. The details of this struggle are represented in the next section of this paper.

How do you teach here?

I believe in schools. I have worked as hard as I know how throughout my career to attempt to make the schools that have employed me positive, safe and welcoming environments for all children. The majority of people think that schools can make a difference to the pupils and staff within them and there are not many individuals or groups who believe that there are schools where making a difference is beyond human capacity, (O’Conner et al, 1999, pp 115-116). The need to create a positive school ethos and a safe educational environment is crucial for pupils. School plays a vital part in most lives and along with family and friends is one of the three central elements in adult memories of childhood, (Sutherland, 1997, p.135).

The importance of school experience is relevant to all children but when a pupil is identified as having ‘additional needs’ then the six hours a day they spend in school can make or break their existence and identity, (Klein, 1999, pp xiv-xv). Trying to create an environment that would become supportive for vulnerable pupils and staff facing an extreme situation in terms of school meltdown was one of the significant professional challenges issued to my management of Osbourne School. In spite of all the difficulties and setbacks through the year I remained determined that if it were possible, the school would interrupt the cycle for boys who had experienced the disadvantage and emotional upset of... “drifting into a nihilistic wilderness in which nothing had meaning or value, least of all education”, (ibid, p.60). I was salvaged and inspired by reading about successful inner-city schools for damaged, defensive, aggressive children where school represented for the pupils...

“.... the centre of their existence. the one safe refuge in their chaotic lives, their lifeline to normality... simply their salvation”, (ibid).

Even though my enthusiasm and ambition for school improvement was threatened and dampened on numerous occasions, part of me at least managed to retain this expectation and vision. I wanted to help create something unique, wonderful and above all positive in terms of inner-city EBD provision that would be built from the wreckage of a spectacularly failed school. This was my professional challenge and as this paper continues to detail, it was a task so demanding that it impacted on every area of my life and identity.

As my journal demonstrates there were many occasions when the school broke down during the year in question as the pupils and staff struggled to believe that my vision for the school was achievable and could possibly be worth all the sacrifices, pain and attritious hard work. The pressure that was exerted onto an almost entirely new staff team in September 2002 was immense; I was the only person who had any experience of working in a special school. The new team was hired with the help of an extravagant advertising campaign that featured handsome recruitment and retention bonuses. In spite of this a full complement of permanent staff was not secured until halfway through the summer term. A significant number of the teachers did not have teaching qualifications that were recognised in England as having ‘Qualified Teacher Status’, (QTS). This appears to be the case in many inner city schools but inexperience and a lack of formal qualifications were not ideal prerequisites for working in a failing school that had a history of prolonged decline.

The inexperience within the staff team placed an additional strain on my management of the school in terms of support, guidance and professional development. As well as

walking around the school throughout the day offering crisis and conflict intervention to the staff and pupils, I worked outside of the school day with many staff who were new not only to the exceptional circumstances of the school but who had not worked in an educational environment before. Through formal and informal observation I saw basic mistakes in pedagogy, communication skills and classroom management that inflamed the combustible behaviour of the boys. I frequently spent large amounts of time with colleagues who were desperately trying to make sense themselves of the incredible circumstances they had to work in whilst privately doubting if those same colleagues could possibly have the stamina, personal resources and commitment to turn the school around.

I had arrived at Osbourne from a school that was attended by children with profound and severe physical and cognitive impairments where the abundant expertise and experience of the staff was regularly honed by focussed training sessions. The contrast in the level of skill between the two groups of staff could not have been more marked; even the senior management team at Osbourne was -apart from me- bereft of any experience of special schools.

However this group of people were the best people in the opinion of the many selection panels who had applied for the advertised jobs although when we were interviewing and appointing new staff we had not anticipated that the level of resistance among the pupils would be so high. Witnessing these well meaning, mostly hard working people being emotionally lacerated throughout what often seemed like endless school days by cynical, uncaring, ingrained aggressive behaviour was extremely distressing. One result of this was to make me internally angry and impatient when my years of experience with 'challenging' children were telling me to be calm and patient and that the school would eventually begin to improve. Internally

suppressing basic human instincts and emotions rapidly became a defining personal and professional requirement of my first year at Osbourne.

When I reflect on the academic year 2002 – 2003 I marvel at the way that most of the staff stayed at the school and remained committed to helping the boys. Some colleagues walked away from the school, I did not blame them at the time and I do not blame them now even if they left so quickly they did not work a contracted period of notice. After two months one teaching assistant walked up to me in the main corridor of the school halfway through a morning, threw her keys at me and announced that she was leaving Osbourne as the school management ‘have no idea how to work with these children’. Even though she had no previous school experience and was a member of staff the management team had identified as needing a significant amount of support, this episode shook what confidence I had left and depressed me into thinking that she may be right.

If it had been suggested to me two months before this incident that I could in any way be influenced into questioning my professional identity and practice because of heated, informal comments made by a teaching assistant walking away from a school without even giving in official notice; I would have rejected the scenario as risible.

Yet my experienced professional foundation had been seriously eroded. When I was away from my colleagues and the necessities of having to present an optimistic, upbeat persona I was in crisis and constantly wondering if we had employed the correct approach to try and turn the school around. The teaching assistant had verbalised my worst fears and exemplified to me that staff at all levels were concerned about the lack of improvement in the school.

My professional identity, which I had thought of as being so strong, began to rely on the colloquial encouragement of people who had never seen the school. Individuals

who knew nothing of my professional life but were willing to donate me positive platitudes that I was doing the 'right thing' based purely on the fact that they personally liked me became illogically vital to me as I reviewed my management of Osbourne.

My professional relationship with the staff at Osbourne became increasingly symbiotic. Even though I was quietly disturbed about their lack of knowledge and mistake strewn practice they earned my respect and increasing dependence because they kept coming to school, taking more punishment and trying their utmost to change Osbourne into a positive environment. Staff sickness was almost non-existent, the level of mutual support demonstrated on occasions such as the daily staff debriefing was extraordinary. To chair these meetings and experience the catharsis shared amongst this group of people who were experiencing the awfulness of the early days of the restart was a privileged adventure. I reflected that all the people who attended these meetings would be earning significantly less money than me and yet the work they were contributing to the school and their loyalty to the boys was immeasurable. I had wondered if I would have to try and lead this group of staff in a messianic way but they inspired me and taught me much that my years of special school experience had not even begun to inform me of.

There are again parallels with the story of Hackney Downs School. Many of the staff at Osbourne as well as at Hackney Downs worked seven days a week and well into every evening to try and turn the school around, (O'Conner et al, 1999, pp. 89-90). At Osbourne the commitment of the teachers, teaching assistants and learning mentors went a long way towards ameliorating the impact of their inexperience. Genuine respect for pupils with challenging behaviour has to be based on an essentially humanistic view of the children. Staff must believe that the children have good within

them and need positivity within their lives, (Travell, 1999, p.12) and most of the adults involved with Osbourne reflected this necessity in the most trying of times.

In my beleaguered position I found many of my colleagues' professionalism, willingness to listen and dedication uplifting and a constant source of encouragement. My positive perception of the staff existed alongside feelings of guilt that I was managing people who were coming to work and having a dreadfully unhappy, upsetting time... "hard working staff should not have to work where they are insulted and abused by those not prepared to abide by the rules", (O'Conner et al, 1999, p.89). I was constantly frustrated by my impotence in not being able to improve my colleagues' working conditions.

The key location for assessing the well being of a school is in the classrooms. When I first visited Osbourne I witnessed excesses of behaviour around the school, I saw the disinterest of that current group of staff and read the appalling incident reports and depressing attendance statistics. From this I anticipated that the pupils would be demonstrating in lessons what Woods, (1990) calls 'extreme work avoidance', (p.169). This would indicate a total lack of commitment and is a context where extreme counter-cultures flourish (ibid).

What I discovered was in fact that much of the behaviour in the classrooms before September 2002 was less overt than in other areas of the school but was in its own way just as damaging. There was in place an unspoken but agreed stand off between staff and pupils, what the same author calls 'counterfeit work' was taking place, (p.172). An extreme bargain had been struck where the teachers had stopped trying and the pupils were having no educational demands made upon them. There was no productivity, no monitoring or accreditation; just a semblance of work and order achieved through mindless activities such as copying drawings from the board, (ibid).

This bizarre informal agreement added nothing to the children's education but helped preserve the sanity and attendance of the staff and gave the impression to a passer-by that an atmosphere of quiet study and teacher authority existed. It also seemed to give the pupils the chance to 'recharge their batteries' before embarking on their next cycle of wild behaviour around the school.

The new staff team was recruited with the understanding that they would teach lessons that would stimulate, challenge and excite the pupils in the classroom. This would satisfy our management vision that the school was trying to fulfil its function as an establishment that educated; it was hoped that proactive teaching would also placate the understandable demands of inspectors who had been horrified at what had previously taken place in the classrooms.

The reaction of the pupils to the loss of their quiet classroom truce was spectacular and was demonstrated through the high level of disturbance they transferred into lessons. Any 'ground' that was made up with inspectors now seeing well planned, stimulating lessons was defeated by the increasingly dreadful behaviour adopted by the pupils in class to counter the demands made upon them. Supporting the teachers whilst they attempted to teach rather than just supervise pupils was one of my major commitments during the school day. It was a draining role that called for constant immersion in crisis, high tension situations that were frequently physically intimidating. I became the guardian of the staff, the person they would call for when things were beginning to go wrong, I also became their mascot and their favourite, the manager who would always support them. The pupils also began to rely on me attending critical situations and their dependency and trust in me began to germinate. This was a far cry from any school management I had previously encountered but at

least indicated that I was beginning to connect with a part of the school with some element of control.

The search for what constituted the appropriate curriculum for the boys at Osbourne formed an ongoing debate amongst the school management team. As a failing school Osbourne was able to disapply itself from the National Curriculum. In terms of longevity the school needed to link what was delivered during its time of crisis with what could be taught when it became a successful school and could no longer disapply from the centrally prescribed teaching format.

The National Curriculum is becoming more flexible allowing children with emotional and behavioural difficulties more time for vocational and personal development work, (Stakes, 1999, p.75). It is also documented that courses dealing with real world problems and practical applications increase students' intrinsic motivation and provide learning opportunities that offer more personal and active involvement, (Klein, 1999, p.119). One of the difficulties in managing at Osbourne lay in the opportunity offered by a more flexible approach towards educational provision to play 'curriculum god'. Decisions had to be made as to whether a pupil 'deserved' or could 'cope' with a broad and balanced curriculum or did they 'merit' a timetable focussed on activity based vocational access? These subjective judgements about individuals and the relative strengths of different curricula provision carried with them tremendous responsibilities in terms of being able to omnipotently decide what was 'best' for a pupil. These deliberations were usually carried out with the minimum of input from the boy or his family who would usually declare themselves disinterested or uncaring as to what the school offered.

Moving too far away from the National Curriculum and providing alternative activity and vocational based learning can move pupils further away from the mainstream; not

only in educational terms but also in the context of society. If pupils are going to enjoy personal and professional fulfilment in their lives then they will have to interact positively with several socio-cultural demands and norms. Ongoing opposition to the National Curriculum at Osbourne could well be interpreted as a soft option and as offering a reduced chance of reintegration for the boys into the mainstream at any stage of life as interaction with normative expectations have not been made.

The dichotomy of disapplication is summarised by Giroux (1993). He comments on the teacher Mr. Keating in the film 'Dead Poets Society' who in disregarding mainstream curriculum and education... "demands no sacrifices, no risks, no attempt to deconstruct the relationship between the margins and the centres of power... resistance (to the mainstream) serves only to depoliticise and decontextualise", (p.44).

During 2002-2003 Osbourne offered what I judged to be a necessary 'curriculum of containment'. Even though the school officially only disappplied itself from three subjects, - (humanities, religious education and modern foreign languages), the timetable was packed with physical education, cooking and woodwork lessons. To a degree, much of what was taught was left to the discretion of class based teachers and during the first six months of the school restart many of the boys proved their expertise in negotiating themselves in and out of favoured and despised lessons.

Although these factors helped the school to calm and settle, in the longer term these were unacceptable arrangements if the school was to aim to reach a stage where it would be judged not solely by the behaviour of its pupils but also by their attainment.

Deciding what would be best for the pupils during these changing phases of the school was a problematic issue and the difficulty in maintaining a professional, objective viewpoint during this process was a further challenge in itself.

I had never anticipated having my views on curriculum influenced by impressions of pupil's behaviour or how they had recently interacted with me. However these were very real factors that were active within me when deciding the educational provision that would be offered to many of the boys. The temptation to use reduced timetabling and a narrower curriculum offer as a vengeful sanction for previous behaviour or as a way of attempting to control future behaviour was immense and presented a significant obstacle to a professional demeanour and clarity I desperately wanted to preserve.

There also existed equally crucial and problematic decisions as to how much time a pupil was allowed in school every day. Many of the boys appeared to cope more successfully with a shortened school day and many of them wanted to only attend maths and English lessons or what they called 'real school'. It was very tempting when adjudicating on the length and content of particular individuals' school days to settle for the quietest life possible; succumb to the pupils myopic wishes to access a very short day in return for a reduction in poor behaviour and decreases in stress that would be experienced by the staff. Decisions to shorten a pupils time in school can vastly impoverish their educational and social experience but in the unsettled months of the school restart I often made a decision to place pupils on reduced days, (or an individualised timetable as it was known), when I knew I was not making the best decision for them as an individual by failing to challenge them sufficiently.

The contested decisions I had to take demonstrate one of the major changes in my professional outlook that has been brought about by my time at Osbourne. This is the belief that the school is more important than the individual. Before I joined Osbourne I believed that any school I managed could be flexible and welcoming enough to accommodate any pupil irrespective of their ability or attitude. Working at Osbourne

has changed that outlook and I now feel that a school has to set itself up in a certain way and have some expectations and rules that are sacrosanct and to which all pupils and families must adhere. If this means the school being inflexible in certain ways and diminishing some individuals school access and experience in terms of shortened days, lessened attendance and even exclusion then so be it. An element of believing that a school should run for the greater good has prevailed within my professional psyche following my experiences at Osbourne. This represents a significant departure from a position I have adhered to for many years in that if things are not working then it is the school and its representatives that are wrong and need to change.

Most of the boys who were on role at Osbourne had plenty of reasons to be angry with the world in general and often with schools in particular. Many of these factors will be discussed later in this section but from the beginning of the school restart it was imperative to ensure that the staff were not giving the boys a reason or an excuse to misbehave and 'act out'. Insisting on the highest standards of classroom provision and professional conduct was not always easy when working with colleagues who were being subjected to consistent, undeserved abuse and intimidation. There were several occasions when I disciplined a member of staff with whom I had the utmost sympathy for their understandable reaction to the treatment they had received in the prelude to an incident. I had to outwardly suppress this support and instead work through the professional code of conduct with them that I had introduced to the school whilst maintaining a critically objective and sometimes unsympathetic stance with the colleagues involved. Away from Osbourne I would verbalise feelings as to what I would have liked to have happened to particular pupils in certain circumstances; outcomes that were often far worse than the member of staffs' verbal retort to a pupil that I would have had to have taken action over.

Peter Woods has recorded what pupils consider to be teacher's most undesirable characteristics. These include 'not listening, exaggeration and lies about behaviour, ignoring, over instruction, sarcasm, put downs, name calling, public humiliations, shouting, racism, lack of effort, ineffective teaching and unhelpfulness'; (1990, pp 41-47). These factors lead to anger and a feeling of powerlessness for pupils which in turn can lead to what could be described as EBD.

Osbourne is far from perfect; but following its renaissance the teacher behaviours Woods describes are completely missing or have occurred in one or two isolated incidents that have been rigorously dealt with by the school management. An exhaustive programme of staff supervisions and lesson observations indicate that staff are now only very occasionally responsible for inciting poor pupil behaviour and this occurs only when they deliver lessons that are not stimulating or challenging enough. This is uncommon and is not linked to a lack of effort or dedication but stems from pressure on time. It is almost impossible to prepare five hours of exciting, practical learning opportunities on a daily basis so occasionally a teacher delivers a lesson that is found to be disinteresting by the pupils and in these circumstances the teacher may be said to be the cause of poor behaviour. The Osbourne pupils do not afford teachers 'easy' lessons as can occur with most mainstream classes where pupils can work independently for some of the time and staff can prepare, 'catch up' or 'take a breather'. I find it hard to blame a teacher for delivering the occasional lesson based around worksheets but the boys are less understanding.

Within this context it is possible that I am too 'soft' with the teachers and that my opinion is unfairly biased by my experiences of what the school has been through and by how much many of the staff have sacrificed to help Osbourne recover. However the still frequent LEA inspections affirm that all of the lessons taught are at least

satisfactory but an ongoing issue for the staff is that satisfactory lessons are often not stimulating enough to ensure good behaviour from the boys.

Staff at Osbourne treat pupils with the utmost respect and consistently endeavour to work with individuals to create meaningful, successful, differentiated learning experiences. The criticisms pupils level at the school and the teaching staff are now almost always unfounded. If an individual does have a genuine issue then an apology and redress is swiftly found without reference being made to the differences in pupil and staff status that more traditional schools rely upon and insist are enacted. In spite of this original school structure that is designed to give the pupils status, equality and voice, the boys frequently blame Osbourne for most of their behaviour and the reasons behind it, taking little heed of the respect paid to them. Most of the pupils verbally and physically demand to be treated with respect but repay this by demonstrating that they think they have the right to treat the adults in the school with contempt and utter disrespect when the mood takes them.

Since its restart the school and the staff can respond positively to the unfair criticisms verbalised by the pupils. In the midst of heavy pupil criticism it has been important for colleagues to remember that children do not live at school, they live in the world.

Pupils have a variety of strong influences bearing down upon them such as home circumstances, popular culture, peer groups and communities that combine to influence them far more than school ever can. When working in the pressurised environment presented at Osbourne it became extremely hard to contextualise the fact that there is a limit to the influence a group of educational professionals can exert into a young persons life. The members of staff grew into a highly motivated group of people with stringent expectations of themselves and the boys they worked with. The

realisation that we might only be able to 'do so much' because of other negative factors in a pupils life became a difficult yet vital concept to grasp.

All children bring a huge variety of diverse experience to school; in the case of the Osbourne pupils their lives have often had a physically and emotionally destabilising effect upon them, (Klein, 1999, p.87). Working with a pupil to allow them to realise that they are responsible for their behaviour and that it is only they who can control what they are doing forms an important part of the Osbourne curriculum. External advice and guidance can only do so much and I agree with Klein who states that the crux of the solution lies beyond the remit of any school and that... "It's the resiliency of the child, in the end, that is the most decisive factor in their fate", (ibid).

My experiences at Osbourne confirm this as true. Schools and those who work in them can help individual children but there is a strict limit to this that is directly related to circumstances at home and the levels of different intelligences within the child. A key element in bridging a difficult home life with some success at school is multi-agency work, directed and managed by the school and reaching beyond the child and into their family and community. Osbourne has progressed a long way towards providing all it can for children with EBD and other difficulties. Further improvements will have to be facilitated by extending the influence and direction of education beyond the school gates.

The causes of behaviour are pluralistic and interwoven and poor behaviour manifests itself in several ways; both at school and in society as a whole. Creating a school where the ethos and practice of the staff surround the pupils and their families with positivity and empathy continues to be crucial to the success of Osbourne. Building a school where the boys cannot locate the causes of their poor behaviour within the staff

has represented an enormous professional challenge and has been closely monitored by a variety of inspecting bodies.

The issue of inspection and how staff related to this entity constituted another challenge to managing at Osbourne and again provided several conflicts and anomalies concerning what I felt internally counter-balancing against the preservation of a professional appearance. As previously stated, Osbourne School had received unwelcome media speculation as to whether or not it was 'the worst school in the country'. What was not in question with the LEA and the school governors was that it had received a mauling, (albeit deserved) at the hands of the inspectorate. The inspection report from 2001 had swiftly been removed from the OFSTED website as it had quickly gathered publicity for its extraordinary contents and became infamous as the 'worst inspection report ever'. The report was used as a baseline by OFSTED sub-contractors when working with trainee inspectors to show them how bad a school can be and yet still remain open.

Possibly because of the infamy gained through its notorious OFSTED report or the frequency of school inspection even the new staff group of September 2002 quickly developed a siege mentality towards inspection and this was a negative stance that had to change. Educational rhetoric puts a positive value on progress and change; whatever does not change is seen as stagnant and stultified rather than simply enduring or stable, (Weber and Mitchell, 1995, p.31). On a practical level for the school this meant an inspection from the L.E.A. every two weeks and an inspection from HMI every term that always looked for initiative and change. Because of the advanced state of neglect every area of the school had been in, other visits from financial auditors and organisations such as the 'Health and Safety Executive' were similarly frequent. Trying to work with staff to enable them to regard inspection as a

possible source of constructive criticism and encouragement rather than a threat to be reacted to defensively was a key issue in the struggle to build staff morale.

The story of Hackney Downs School again reveals parallels with Osbourne. Staff in Hackney became disillusioned by external pressure on the school and by the constant visits, (O'Conner et al, 1999, p.39). Ever-present review had a negative effect on staff; morale plummeted and sickness rates rose due to pressures of inspections, (ibid, p.44-46). Even though Osbourne did not experience the same extreme detrimental effects on morale and sick leave, many of its staff shared with the Hackney Downs professionals the bitterness left by certain inspections. The question of how well the inspectors would have fared teaching under similar circumstances, (ibid p.122) was a frequent discussion point in the staff room following an inspection.

For Osbourne to survive it had to live with frequent inspection, listen carefully to action plans and development points and act accordingly; this proved to be especially difficult with some of the HMI inspections. The lead inspector was always accompanied by a different expert who had their own agenda or speciality. This led to a lack of consistency concerning which were the most important key issues to address arising from an inspection. The frequent change of emphasis brought about by different inspectors who appeared to want to make their own personal impact during visit was difficult to accept in a positive manner and undoubtedly led to some confusion as well as decelerating school improvement in some areas. I often wondered if some of the inspectors had also been influenced by the well publicised history of the school and saw it as an opportunity to enhance their reputation or voyeuristically add some juicy episodes to their library of anecdotes.

In spite of this and the constant, simplistic HMI conclusion that... "pupils successful in work have no need for poor behaviour", (MacGrath, 1998, p.29), I was determined

to show the staff that inspection could be positive and had to be worked alongside. If our vision and expectations for the school overrode the foci of the inspectors then it was probable that Osbourne would close again even if it was being run with the best of intentions and managed rigorously.

I spent hours picking through lesson observations and inspection reports to find and then positively reframe guidance and recommendations for individual colleagues and the staff as a whole. This was time well spent as I felt that colleagues were frequently working under such enormous pressure that insensitive, heavy-handed inspection feedback could have made some of them despair. This journal entry makes it apparent that I was not always able to supply myself with the same constructive outlook...

I felt the same resentment and defensiveness towards the school during the recent HMI inspection, where I'm delighted to say that for the first time in its history the school has been judged as making 'reasonable progress' whilst in special measures. The best judgement Osbourne has previously received was 'limited progress', but this was reasonable progress, which sounds a very trite and contrite word to mean so much to us, but I think that it is probably the equivalent of other schools achieving beacon status. So great celebrations but I did feel very defensive and protective about the school when the inspectors came in. I have experience of several major inspections including OFSTED, HMI and LEA and I found it very difficult to take their criticism. I found a lot of what the inspectors said to be true but I found a lot of what they said to be simplistic and out of context in terms of time frame. I don't think for one minute they understood where we are currently placed as a school. A lot of what they wanted to say and what they wanted us to be doing immediately was I thought at least a term in front of where it should be and that was really

disappointing. I don't think there was enough acknowledgment of the amount of ball-breaking slog that has been put in by me and James and all this crap about not taking schools personally really is a pile of horse shit in the context of how emotional and upset I felt during my interview and feedback session with the inspectors.

I kept this opinion and reaction to my journal and successfully managed to put a brave face on my instinctive reaction to many of the issues raised by inspection.

I had held a view when I was recruited to the school that I would occupy a somewhat detached position, empowering members of the school community with words of wisdom issued from a distance that would afford me critical, reflective space. I imagined that much of my role would be strategic affording me the opportunity to draw on my years of experience to offer solutions to individuals, small groups and the entire school.

Instead of the senior professional image I had imaginatively conjured I was in fact 'hands on' with the pupils and staff all day, every day. The luxury of detached, strategic thought was totally denied to me during the working week and I was confronted with a daily face-to-face battle that constantly challenged my presupposed expertise and professional identity. I felt that the staff and pupils were over dependent on me and that I did not have the physical or professional resources to deal with this. My confidence evaporated at an increasing speed and I frequently doubted if I had anything to offer any members of the school community. For much of my first two terms at Osbourne I felt that I had become a professional failure and wondered if I would ever want to piece my career together again.

The physical demands of my work at Osbourne also threatened to overwhelm my professionalism as well as my health. The next section of this paper details the

physicality of my experience and the emotional exhaustion I frequently felt during the academic year 2002 – 2003.

A physical and emotional challenge to a professional identity.

My journal frequently refers to the fatigue, isolation, exasperation and hopelessness I often felt whilst working at Osbourne in the first few months. What my record does not adequately portray is the anger and fear I often experienced when single-handedly patrolling the school, confronting nakedly aggressive behaviour that made me feel vulnerable as a person and insecure as a professional because of the cognitive responses some of this behaviour produced within me.

The revenge fantasies I sometimes internally enacted were explicit but limited to a small number of students who had targeted me for specific intimidation. I am positive that these boys felt that the behaviour they displayed towards me could not possibly hold any physical ramifications for them as they were well aware that I had a reputation as being impossible to ‘wind up’. I doubt that even in their wildest dreams they could imagine what I fantasised as being my rightfully enacted revenge in a meeting away from Osbourne where I would picture myself administering a physical lesson to the bullies who tried to scare and hurt me in the school. These thoughts are so far removed from my motivations for wanting to teach and work in schools that they still surprise me when I revisit them. Even though I am surprised at some of my reactions I still feel no shame at these feelings as my professional self triumphed over my emotive reaction and my revenge fantasies have so far been nothing more than an internal catharsis and.

My professional and personal selves are now much more secure as the school is more successful and settled. In spite of this I have not been able to read the following

section from my journal without again constructing detailed revenge strategies that focus on me physically hurting the pupil in question. Eighteen months after this particular incident I still need the comfort of an imagined violent recompense to help me cope with the physical pain, insomnia, extended feelings of impotence and intense hatred for Jethro that this episode then and still evoke within me.

I am exhausted and run down by getting up at 5:20 in the morning, not seeing the daylight, not having the time or motivation to do any exercise, drinking too much and eating crap food on the move. These factors combine with the fact that my job entails me to be on my feet all day trying to find resolutions for conflict and I've previously stated this is wearing in itself. Finally, I have had quite a nasty flu bug and my body doesn't seem to be responding to the rest and intensive loving care that I'm lavishing upon it at the moment and this shows that I am run down and my immune system is struggling to fight a rearguard action against this dreaded bug.

On top of these factors part of my current unhappiness and displacement is rooted in the particularly nasty and vicious assault made on me in school last week which has made me feel unwell. Not only because of the physical consequences but also because it has made me feel threatened, anxious and nervous as well.

The assault in question was perpetrated by a student called Jethro Lee. Jethro Lee only came to school for three hours in the first term of new Osbourne. He came for three hours, slept, woke up, threatened to 'smash my face through the back of my head' and then walked out of school. He's attended twice for a couple of hours this term. One of the reasons for his long time out of school is the fact that he's been in hospital recovering from an overdose of crack cocaine. According to members of staff who've known him in the past he's about half the size of what he used to be. Because

of his lack of attendance he has no investment in the school, no engagement in the school and certainly was never going to be willing to put himself out to cooperate with us in any way. School in his mind was still the anarchistic, boundary-less zoo that it was six months ago.

Jethro Lee gets transport to the school because he lives in another borough. He bounces out of his taxi, this big fifteen year old and I say 'morning Jethro' and I let him through the door... 'Fuck you, you prick'

Oh well. So I followed him to his class and he went in wearing his coat and his baseball hat. I reminded him that the rules now said that it was school uniform in lessons and no hats or hoodies to which his response was to tell me to 'fuck off' again. So I followed him into his art lesson and he responded to my next reminder about school uniform by looking at me and telling me ... 'you don't know who I am, you think you can get in my face telling me to do things, you can fuck off or else its gonna be the worse for you, I'm gonna fucking kill you'.

I was shaken but I wanted to give Jethro some time to adjust to the way we are trying to run the school now so I went to get the learning mentor who I thought might have a better connection and more chance of success with him. In the next lesson which was woodwork I checked on his progress through the window in the classroom door and still nothing. He was sitting cross-legged on a work bench like some big Buddha wearing a baseball cap playing with a hammer. Everybody around him including some very disengaged, angry young men were all in school uniform, all getting on with their work and he sat there, playing menacingly with the tool whilst watching all the staff, especially me, very carefully through his hooded eyes.

I agreed with the learning mentor that I wouldn't let Jethro go into the next lesson which was drama, rather than confront him there and then and cause disruption to

that lesson with so many kids working so well and with so many tools around. The woodwork teacher told me later that he'd also reminded Jethro Lee about the importance of wearing his school uniform or else he'd have to leave the lesson and his response to the woodwork teacher was... 'if you want me to leave the lesson you're gonna have to make me leave the lesson, you're gonna have to take me out'. Sadly this is probably how he remembers the school.

I stood at the door to the drama room at the lesson changeover time and said to Jethro... 'You're not coming in until you wear your school uniform properly'. He looked at me incredulously, 'what', I said... 'You're not coming in until you're in school uniform'. Opposite the door to the drama room are two steps that go up to the boys' toilets. He walked backwards onto these steps and braced himself to rush me. I braced myself for his attack but a fight broke out in the drama room behind me. It turned out to be a play fight but it was very convincing and I had to leave the confrontation with Jethro to go and attend to this disturbance. Of course by the time I'd finished separating Ray and Lennie and making sure that there was no real issue, Jethro Lee had accessed the drama lesson and was again sitting on a table cross-legged watching me closely and smiling a victorious smile.

After break time I got a radio call that Jethro Lee was out of class. In the meantime I'd spoken to his granny who is his primary carer as he has been kicked out of his home by a combination of his mum and social services. Mum is a crack dealing prostitute who uses the house for business dealings. I rang granny, told her 'look this, this and this has happened this is what he's said to me this is what he's done'. Her response was... 'I can't believe it; I've never ever heard him swear'! So once again I knew we were right to confront this behaviour as we had yet another instance of a youngster using Osbourne as a place to choose to behave badly when they are

capable of behaving perfectly well in other arenas of their lives, even really challenging ones. I also said to granny that Jethro Lee was back in on a part time integration program from nine o'clock until eleven o'clock and that it was time for him to go now, as it was quarter past eleven. She agreed and she said to pass on the message that she was waiting at home for him.

When I got the radio call I found him walking down the corridor. The learning mentor who is an experienced and brilliant judge of the kids and their behaviour had been tracking him all day and remarked that Jethro seemed to have grown in stature when he thought that he wasn't going to be confronted about his uniform any more. I'd had to leave him and stop giving him attention and persistence as I had been called to other major incidents and so he had thought that he'd won the skirmish about his uniform and on a larger scale he would be able to behave how he wanted around the school - just like the old times. Jethro Lee had started to strut and walk around like 'Jack the lad' a bit more and the learning mentor wasn't comfortable with this. In his words he said he'd been seeing him... 'getting prepared to be confrontational, getting prepared to fight all day'.

Walking down the corridor with him I said ... 'Jethro, I've just spoken to your gran and told her about your language, she's expecting you at home because its time for you to go', 'fuck off, who do you think you are, who the fuck do you think you are talking to me like that; get out of my fucking face, fuck you'.

This went on all the way down the corridor to the entrance to the gym. He threw the gym door open which hit my foot and bounced back much more softly towards him.

He turned to me and screamed... 'You fucking cunt, what are you fucking trying to do smash my fingers in the fucking door', ... 'don't speak to me like that, that's not how it is here any more, people do not behave like this anymore'.

Suddenly 'bang' he pushed me with his full force in the throat using both hands.

'This isn't how it is here anymore, this is not how it is, and you don't behave like this anymore this is not what the schools' about'.

'Bang', he did it again, 'bang'; he did it a third time. We were building up quite an audience of boys by this stage and I kept my hands by my sides and I kept saying to him... 'things have changed, this isn't what happens anymore'. He rolled my tie up in his hand and punched me in the throat, walked back a couple of steps and then suddenly moved up a gear. Even though he'd been very aggressive it was nothing to what I saw in his eyes, he changed. Quickly both his fists clenched and he threw himself at me but amazingly was grabbed by other students. At this stage I would have gone for a physical intervention with him but I didn't have to because the boys got there first. Calmed by their unexpected intervention he turned round and he walked out of the school.

He's walked out of the school for the last time because he has been permanently excluded for that assault on me. The local education authority in the form of the head of performance and standards rang me to see if I was alright. He talked to me at length and reassured me about my practice because I was worried as this was yet another permanent exclusion that I'd been involved in.

The principle educational psychologist came down to the school to talk to me and I was very shaken and very, very angry. I'm still very angry about this and I was able to verbalise some of this anger to the Ed Psych. I told him that I was just so fucking angry that somebody thought they could come into the school that we've tried so hard to make safe and remove all that hyper aggressive behaviour from and think they can walk in and just do what the hell they want.

I was livid, so angry and I'm still angry now. I said to him that actually what I really felt/feel like doing is going round to Jethro Lee's house, picking him up by the hair and slapping his face, (he's not even worth punching), just slapping his face continuously and telling him that this is how it feels to be bullied when you choose to be defenceless and do nothing for the sake of the other boys at the school and for the sake of all the peaceful values you are trying to imbibe the other boys with. This is how it fucking feels to be hit when you can't do anything about it.

I yelled my frustration out at the Ed Psych and shouted... 'How dare he walk in and assault me having wound it up all day'. The wise response was to tell me that what I did during the assault just standing there repeating the same placid guidelines, standing sideways with my hand outstretched, raised palm at waist height simply saying 'stop' will have been why the other boys jumped in. That he said is the strongest message that could have been given.

Following this incident I visited my doctor who signed me off work for a week. His examination revealed that my airway was one third closed and I had deep and extensive bruising to my windpipe and chest. The doctor advised me to start wearing body armour and repeatedly spoke about what could have happened if Jethro had been carrying a knife. He did not appear to understand what I told him about my attempts to restart the school founded on values such as trust and respect and that wearing protective equipment would make this approach redundant. His view was that I had four children at home and they, not the boys at school represented my primary responsibility.

Jethro was permanently excluded from Osbourne which his grandmother who had been his main carer for years said was the right decision. The police encouraged me to prosecute Jethro for common assault but I refused. I am still unsure as to whether my

reluctance to pursue formal justice came from a wish to leave this incident behind or was subliminally linked to a vigilante fantasy that one day I would get even in my own way.

The frequency of physical assault tired me, eroding the stamina of my body and spirit. The aches and pains I felt at the beginning and end of each day when the adrenalin had left me were very real, inducing bitterness within me and caused those around me to question if I was in the right job or performing in the right way at work. I had always promulgated that you should not need to be large, male and have played contact sports to be able to work in an EBD school. I became less assured of the rightness of this belief.

Many of the pupils at the school appeared however to draw some comfort from the large size and male gender of the school managers. Touching and embracing were prevalent throughout most school days. The majority of the boys had little idea about personal space and what constituted appropriate touching. I worked hard with all members of the school community to turn the closeness of physical proximity we all found ourselves frequently experiencing into something positive. As I worked in a mobile role around the school I frequently found myself in situations where I offered physical comfort and support to pupils and staff. During a visit to Osbourne my supervisor for this paper recorded ...

“There’s lots of hugging. I’ve never seen so much physical contact in a school, not even in a nursery. It’s odd, remarkable, to see these males, lads and teachers, touching each other and so naturally. In any mainstream school I’m sure this would provoke homophobic accusation and abuse. Here it’s what they do”. (Sikes and Clark, 2004).

Much of the physical interaction I enjoyed with the pupils and with the staff as well as being instinctive was aimed at relaxing them, diffusing problematic situations and

formed part of the painstaking process of trying to build positive, trusting relationships with all the members of the school community. The physicality of many situations was accompanied by clowning around and constantly firing one line of humour at the pupils to make them laugh and forget what had been upsetting them. The idea of managing the school and the people within it from a distance was just not possible. Introducing a positive influence into Osbourne demanded a commitment of body as well as soul even if this placed one's professional identity and career in a vulnerable and transitional position.

Nevil's favourite lesson is design and technology, after five minutes he stormed out of the DT room, out of school, over the fence to the playing fields opposite, "going home, going home". I ran after him to talk him back. That happened three times in the first hour, I had to climb over fences to chase Nevil, to talk to him and he trusts me and he likes me and he trusts James and he likes James. That's all behaviour that you can work with and actually I love this guy to bits, often end up with him having a few tears and being cuddled by me, and that's great. But when he really blew yesterday on about the fourth time out of class he ran down the corridor and broke the strongest sort of reinforced glass with his fists and his head before I could get to him. The damage he did to himself using this sort of power was incredible and I can't believe that he's managed to actually break these windows, I mean it's serious heavy duty security glass but break them he did.

I caught up with him and he's sitting there, head swelling, fist swelling, mind and language all over the place with the force he's been smashing himself into stuff with, and then he starts, 'want to die, I want to die, just watch I'm gonna kill myself, I'm

gonna kill myself' and I believed him. It was awful; his state of distress was just dreadful. James came and found us and we talked him round. He trusts us, and James who's slightly less hands on cuddly than I am with the kids came and cuddled him as well and we helped him find a place in his mind where he could start to put himself back together with the love and support that we are trying to base the school on.

James and I are two of the highest paid school managers in England, let alone London. In spite of this, (or maybe this is why) we then went into an impromptu routine which involved me picking Nevil up, James then picking me up, me then picking James up in turn to interrupt Nevil's mood and behaviour and make him smile, which it did. And it was fun even though I hurt my back. I wonder how many schools you get that sort of school management in?

Much of the touching that took place between the boys and myself reflected the lack of a father or another male role model from a different generation in the boy's lives. Approximately 90% of the pupils did not have a father or permanent male adult at home. Whoever the boys lived with, whether it was family members, foster carers or were looked after by 'Social Services' it was rare to find anyone at home who trusted the school or the education system. This meant that the touching that was harmless and well meaning at Osbourne was open to misinterpretation away from the school and could easily be construed as unprofessional or worse. Managing the transformation of Osbourne from an uncaring, unfeeling establishment into one that genuinely cared for the boys without further estranging emotionally and physically inadequate parents and carers constituted a significant challenge.

Many of the parents of 'at risk' children are as alienated from the school system as their offspring, (Klein, 1999, p.113). This estrangement had been increased in the recent past at Osbourne by the school only offering infrequent home contact in the form of letters and phone calls that carried bad news of truancy or poor behaviour. As the school restarted, the senior management team rigorously encouraged staff to phone and write to those responsible relating any positives that had occurred for their child. After some months parents began to accept the sincerity of this communication and the fact that it was a permanent feature of their relationship with Osbourne. Many parents quietly began to offer the school and their sons more support. Osbourne in turn began to offer parents more access to the school in both social and educational terms. A belief began to be held by many of the staff that the school should be... "like a village that's raising not only the child but the parent, too", (Cataldi in Klein, 1999, p.66). This partnership is especially vital for the many boys who attend the school whose family has no father figure and are growing into adulthood without male guidance at home.

I am not suggesting a confusion of roles between teacher and father figure. This is unacceptable to me on a personal level and has been proven to be rejected by pupils, (Woods, 1990, pp 1-26). I would however state that appropriate, respectful relationships between single mothers, others who fulfil the role of carer and male education professionals can be an important element of a successful support network for a boy with emotional and behavioural difficulties. The importance of a combination of formal and informal input and partnerships is in my experience a salient feature of effective support networks for 'at risk' children. It is also important to have a reflective framework with which to examine and absolve the reasons for the

level of insertion into the pupils lives that is demanded of professionals working in a context such as Osbourne.

To this end it is important to realise that families of inner city adolescents have largely been superseded by the tribe as the guardian of their cultural identity and survival, (Klein, 1999, p.138). The tribe picks up the slack created by a large amount of disjointed families living together in a concentrated area. When this combines with a negative home-school relationship a pupil can find himself alienated to all except his street group. This was a common occurrence with the Osbourne boys but the school has begun to demonstrate that their can be an effective role for the education professional in helping fractured families repair relationships with their children.

I found the family liaison work at Osbourne to be immensely rewarding but emotionally draining. Maintaining a professional identity whilst dealing with complex family situations usually called for a controlled approach that offered little chance of personal catharsis. Sometimes the circumstances endured by families seemed to be never-endingly tragic. Trying to work in certain contexts whilst preserving some personal and professional distance proved in some instances to be impossible.

Becoming embroiled in situations where for instance the family was involved in prostitution or on another occasion was using one of the Osbourne pupils to smuggle drugs internationally tested my emotional stamina and professional endurance.

One of the most stressful elements of working at Osbourne was trying to communicate with families who you were aware through experience were going to be difficult or aggressive. Making phone calls at the end of a school day to inform parents of an exclusion was a particular episode I dreaded as I anticipated the abuse and arguments that frequently occurred during the call.

On several occasions I was verbally threatened with physical violence both in the school and when visiting pupil's homes by parents and carers. I was also physically attacked by parents on two occasions during formal meetings at Osbourne. I was told twice in my first two terms at the school that I was going to be 'executed' for interfering in 'family business' and during one home visit one of the boys fathers threatened me with a kitchen knife.

I was physically scared by all of these incidents and felt a sense of powerlessness when confronted with angry parents and carers who had no idea how to cope with their angers and frustrations. I began to experience a significant amount of stress before communicating with families and carers and began to experience a type of panic over some incidents that made me feel physically unwell.

These anxieties that were invoked in me are exemplified by this journal entry detailing an incident with a parent I had previously experienced as being abusive and unpredictable unexpectedly turning up at the school.

Michael is a very big lad in year eleven who is known by the school staff as having a difficult and unpredictable mum. Michael was walking out of school one day with a cigarette in his mouth. He leaves at one o'clock, as all the year elevens do. He was asked not to smoke and took the cigarette out of his mouth then put it back in, was asked not to smoke again then in complete defiance lit up the cigarette with other children around who not only witnessed him smoking but also heard and saw him ignoring the staff.

I was acting headteacher at the time and took the decision to exclude Michael for a day as we do for any child who smokes on site. I had a very difficult conversation with his mother that evening that contained a significant amount of personal abuse

levelled at me in it and ended up with me saying... 'if that's your attitude then there's no point in continuing this phone call'; and Michael's mother slamming the phone down.

The next day Michael was excluded from school but he appeared around the corner of a classroom I was in and asks... 'which lesson am I in sir'? I said 'I'm sorry Michael but you're excluded for today' and this six foot four lad with a criminal record as long as your arm turns round and runs off shouting 'mum, mum'.

I thought... 'oh god I don't need this. I'm running really, really fast here. I'm managing the school successfully, everything's happening, it's going really well but I'm under lots of pressure and I've got lots on the boil at this particular moment, shit, I do not need his mum here fucking up my entire day with her useless, fuckwit son who has been taking the piss out of everything we have been trying to do. Fuck, fuck, fuck, fuck, fuck, fuck, fuck, fuck'.

I knew things would be very difficult with his mum so I ran, I took to my heels and I ran the length of the main teaching corridor and went and hid in the literacy support room, convincing myself to think... 'if she really wants to come and find me she'll go to the office and they'll ring me on my mobile.

Even in the unique hurly-burly madness that is Osbourne I did not find a reason that would stand any examination in hindsight that I was doing a right thing by literally running from this difficult parent. I think I ran because I just simply could not face any more conflict at that moment. I don't think I'm a very conflictual person, (unforgiving probably,) but anyway I think maybe I'd just reached my/the limit for an hour or a day or whatever and just didn't want or couldn't take any more crap or pressure at that moment.

Anyway she did find me, and very quickly as well. My mobile went berserk two minutes after I thought I'd secured a hiding place... 'Mrs Franklin-Dinton is looking for you, where are you, what are you doing' the panicking secretaries voice yelled at me.

So I took a deep breath and came out of the literacy support room and walked back into the main area of the school. The mum had obviously been raising merry hell because in that walk that lasted just a few seconds four members of staff ran up to me and said words to the effect that... 'Mrs Franklin-Dinton is looking for you, she's going wild'. I intercepted her and Michael at the top of the teaching corridor and invited them to my office. For the next hour I incurred implicit criticism and lots of personal comments, all of which I stood up to but in a very controlled manner, trying not to give away my previous feelings and thoughts about the meeting and the family. I could feel a pounding in my ears from my blood pressure and could feel the pressure on my chest from the tenseness of the situation. I felt physically awful and knew that my red face and constant shifting of position in my chair in desperate search of comfort gave my unease away and that this volatile and aggressive woman was enjoying my pain.

Once the ranting and raving had finished we did manage to find some common ground. Michael has been failed horrendously by the education system, the local education authority and by Osbourne School. I have some sympathy for the family; a lot of their hardships reflect many of the political and philosophical difficulties I have with what I perceive to be an unjust and unfair education system that favours the haves and widens the gap for the have nots.

But the personal, racist, genderist abuse that I received in a sustained manner has no place in a school and diluted any empathy and sympathy I may feel. However I

genuinely grieve for the mother of a youngster with special needs who has been let down spectacularly by so called service providers for years and years. The 'verbals' I encountered was just a case of me picking up some of the rubbish that had accumulated over the years. I felt very sorry for her but in spite of many threats and entreaties I held my ground over the exclusion and Michael left the school that day with his mother and did not attend any lessons. He did not deserve to be a member of our community for a day after his behaviour. But life shouldn't really be that difficult for me. My health should not be made to deteriorate even in that short time and the abuse that was levelled at me should not be the part of anyone's working day; all over a completely cut and dried episode of a pupil choosing to ignore a very simple but non negotiable rule about no smoking on site.

The school has been in such a complete state of meltdown and put up with so much abuse for so many years that many of the parents have forgotten how to interact with the most basic of school policies and partnerships that are so crucial to the success of vulnerable young people and the healing of a critically ill school searching for a cure. Part of the medicine has to come from the families; without it the school will die a slow and inevitable death and all the dedicated, palliative work of the professional will be in vain.

There are many reasons why families who have boys at Osbourne are unable to offer their child or the school enough support for the pupil to succeed or develop the desire to behave. Poverty, domestic violence, neglect, child protection issues, mental and physical illness, divorce, separation, medication, sexuality, criminal activity, drug and alcohol dependency, inadequate housing, neighbourhood gangs, isolated unsupported immigrants, language barriers, unemployment, race and religion are factors I have

encountered as obstacles to working with pupils' families. Underpinning these external pressures may be negative, frightened perceptions and experiences of school. All of these issues that seldom exist in isolation make effective working with families extraordinarily complicated and time consuming for a school and any external agency trying to support various situations.

Throughout the academic year 2002-2003 I tried to consistently visit as many families as possible on a regular basis to try and build an understanding and a sense of partnership working for the sake of the pupil in question. To accomplish these visits I began to sleep at Osbourne for either one or two nights a week and my health began to deteriorate as I spent less time away from the job and became more distanced from other aspects of my life. The majority of the visits I undertook were to big, anonymous estates where my white face and smart work clothes marked me out as different. Once again my professional life called for a physical commitment as during these visits I experienced attempted street robbery as well as having my car vandalised. Taking the school in the form of my self into the boys homes was nevertheless an invaluable experience and provided me with an insight that frequently appalled me when I saw first hand the circumstances which the pupils had to cope with...

Home visit to Jimmie Francis

I drove to visit Jimmie in the company of one of our year 10's, Wayne. He had been disruptive for a few days and was becoming increasingly isolated from staff and pupils. I gave Wayne an honest talking to; told him he was not liked, told him that he was being quietly racist to staff, told him that he was just a stirrer and did not have the bottle to be a fighter and thus had little respect at the school. I broke him down

and then gave him the chance to build himself up....I was surprised that he took the opportunity so readily.

Maybe we had not been listening closely enough to this boy.

“So what’s wrong then? What’s making you behave like this? What’s the big issue? Because I’m clever, in a year I’m going to be called ‘Doctor’ but I’m not bloody psychic so if you don’t tell me what’s wrong, how the hell can I help you and where are your school trousers, it’s not red nose day again”.

Wayne hides his poor speech and processing skills behind a slightly effeminate, lisping street drawl that is often barely discernible.

“Trousers is split man, didn’t you see? They is split on the bottom and they’re shit.

Ain’t got no money for trousers.

Why didn’t you tell someone, we can sort this easy.

I dunno man, I dunno, like it’s not easy.

Yes it is. Here’s £20, whilst I go on the home visit you go and buy yourself some trousers. In fact here’s £25. That’s trousers, a fizzy drink and a sandwich and you’re to eat the sandwich in front of me (Wayne rarely eats properly), and I want a receipt for the trousers.

Is this your money or the schools?

Mind your own business.

Can I have a roll not a sandwich”?

So that is how I got to be in the car with Wayne and we had a nice time as he forgot some of his inhibitions and street poses in a wave of gratefulness for unexpected goodies and solutions (why does it take so long for these kids to trust me). We chatted

about cars and women and tried to find some common ground in our musical tastes; we even laughed a couple of genuine laughs.

He was useful as well as good company as he knew the flats at the back of Clapham Junction where Jimmie lived. We climbed out of the car and headed our separate ways arranging to meet in 45 minutes.

The estate was awful and immediately imposing and threatening with small spaces glowered over by enormous blocks, demarcated by wrecked cars and different tags of gang graffiti.

Jimmies' block was called 'Scholes House' and was the biggest building. It reminded me of TV images of areas of Moscow and East Berlin rebuilt quickly by morally and financially bankrupt administrations to cover the scars left by World War Two bombers. How strange that in my mind I always see these monstrosities as foreign and never instantly associate them with my green and pleasant land.

I estimated 15 stories high and seemingly hundreds wide. I used the urine soaked stairs to reach the second floor where number 14 was located. I looked up to check the lights on the stairs in the massive hallway I found myself in. All gone or just useless, smashed glass. This place would be a different proposition at dusk and beyond.

I turned right and pressed the intercom buzzer for 14, silence. I buzzed again and heard a click...

"My name's Jon Clark from Osbourne School. Here to see Jimmie and Mrs. Francis".

Silence, just a click as the huge metal security door is released.

The corridor which faced me was the longest I had ever seen, maybe 200 meters from end to end, dim lighting all the way and that cheap, shiny, seamless brick red stone floor that seems to dissolve warmth and amplify sound.

I waited probably five minutes after I had rung the doorbell until the door opened. Jimmie stood there looking confident, pleasant and well dressed; the stench hit me immediately. At his invitation I followed him past a couple of bedrooms and downstairs. The filth was inches deep and I descended trying to decipher if it was just animal or also human excrement that assaulted my nose, my sympathy and my disgust.

We stopped at the bottom of the stairs and Jimmie knocked on a door that had probably once been white...

“Mum, is it ok? Mum, can we come in? Mum, can we come in”?

No reply. Jimmie turns to look at me and shrugs, peers through the crack of the door and enters.

This I guess is where the majority of the smell originates from. I stifle a gag by pretending to rub my nose but am really biting the bottom of my hand. I have never been able to stomach the smell of faeces, not even when changing my own children's nappies. But this, this is stale and established and cannot be removed conveniently with a scented wipe. This will be a squalid, filthy, hovel that will hold its smells and secrets until the happy day the bulldozers move in.

The room has two utterly threadbare settees that look and smell dangerous to sit on.

What is left of a carpet probably covers about 20% of what it once did. Even though it is only just gone 11 a.m. 'Jurassic Park' is reaching its fantastic climax on an

expensive looking TV/DVD combination in the middle of the room. The sound seems to be louder than any cinema I have ever been to.

At a wooden table next to the window sits mum. She is buried beneath three infants with another threatening to burst any second from her tummy which protrudes from underneath a sweaty, grease stained, sleeveless grey jogging top. Her trousers match the top in every way, she has no shoes. One of the children (who I discover later is her one year old grandson Cornelius) smiles a beautiful smile at me every time he looks at me. I am smitten by his smile and try not to look at the nappy and his bare, faeces smeared chest and tummy.

Come on Clarky boy. Concentrate on the job. Concentrate on this. Don't throw up. Don't grab the baby and run. And do not in any circumstances go to the bog or you know you'll lose your breakfast and they may hear you.

"Hi, Mrs Francis, thanks for seeing me and giving me your time" I shout.

What a fucking stupid thing to say, that's the one thing she has is time. She'll be sitting here every day looking at the telly not wanting to move she's so shit scared of going out of the door and getting hit because she's fat, white, ugly and pregnant.

Come on, you're a people person allegedly. Say something interesting for Christ's sake.

"It's great weather at the moment", I wonder if she knows; the curtains are drawn.

Jimmie watches me intently.

I gather myself and breathe as deeply as my nausea will allow to yell another piece of small talk. I give up however as the 'Velocoraptors' are in the kitchen hunting for the

children and a lot of metal saucepans are hitting the floor in a deafening fashion.

Jimmie gets the point of my inactivity after a bit and turns the volume down.

I seem to have mum's attention for the first time. As our conversation stumbles then becomes easier we share bits of each other and find we are the same age. She looks awful. Eyes so heavily bagged her face looks like an old grey post office sack.

But there is life there, a small spark that is somehow still glowing in a battered tinder box within her that was once a little baby, a little girl playing in the sun, somebody with hopes and aspiration, somebody who was doing more than just basically existing.

I am scared for my daughters.

What has brought her to this? What monster has overpowered her life and imprisoned her in this cave? What can I do, what can I do, what can I do?

I like mum and I like Jimmie and we talk easily for a time. I hope I do not give them too much hope.

I talk about how people can escape. I use my standard stories about how going to school can help you get a job. The point of having a job is that you get somewhere nice to live, (I do not look at mum when I say that) a nice car... "Yeah it's true. I'm only a teacher but I've got an Audi TT. They're shit man, why didn't you get a Porsche? Well I couldn't really afford one". Snort of derision from Jimmie. Careful you don't aim too high Jimmie, you're sitting in a flat where there are four human beings with shit on them...

“It’s a good school. There is a lot there for you. I was in children’s homes when I was young but I worked hard and made it” (does anyone know how hard)?

“Seriously, people do make it. Looking at you I see a winner. You’re smart, good looking, your mum loves you and you know a lot of stuff”: (all true). “You can make it if you really go for it”. And fight, and steal, and cheat, and scrap and work all the hours god sends to overcome class, prejudice and the secret club that excludes grotty, shitty kids like you and me without a fair hearing. “You can, believe me”.

So hope flickers. Maybe unfairly, but if you haven’t got hope in this place then you have nothing.

After 20 minutes a glowering black man of about 25 enters and is briefly introduced. He looks at my suited whiteness, ready smile and outstretched hand for a long time before he offers the briefest of touches. He puts a DVD, a bottle of Coke and an extra large Twix on the table. He goes through his pockets and puts the change carefully on a place mat watched intently by Jimmie and his mum. There is about 30p, mostly in coppers. The seriousness of this payback reveals so much. With a long stare at me he leaves the room and mum rips open the Twix taking a huge mouthful before perhaps remembering my visit and spitting the chocolate carefully back into the wrapper for later use. “Sorry. No, no, it’s fine, please carry on”.

Bloody hell Clarky, you’re sounding like “The Importance of Being Earnest”.

Another cucumber sandwich Cecily? No thanks, just a piece of regurgitated Twix don’t you know.

This proves to be the turning point of the meeting as she is now rushed as the sweet has overtaken me in her curiosity and interest. The ember that I thought I had seen

does not reappear and she becomes monosyllabic. Her eyes flicker to the screen which now only has the credits playing but seems more attractive than anything I can offer.

Jimmie becomes fidgety. He knows enough to be embarrassed by his mum and tellingly asks to visit the school without her.

As I leave the room with quick pleasantries I am puzzled by the silence of the babies, not a grizzle or a squeak. Maybe I could smuggle Cornelius out and no one would know if he's this quiet?

At the top of the stairs there is a sleek black cat. Jimmie has the front door open for me but starts speaking about the cat. I don't like cats but listen to a Jimmie I had not heard or met before. He becomes a child, enthusiastically chattering about a love and a passion. He goes on almost unprompted for about five minutes about cats and kittens and feline behaviour and enraptures me from start to finish. Maybe he will make it?

There is no difficulty or embarrassment on leaving. He is still dreaming of his cats and his sudden childishness has made me forget the smell.

He could do well at the school. It depends how strong he is.

Why didn't the babies make any noise or cry.

I have tears in my eyes as I write some of this.

Am I that different?

In spite of all the difficulties and social impairments I saw many times whilst visiting the pupils' family homes, the most disenfranchised pupils at Osbourne were those without a family or the boys who had been taken away from a family because the home situation had completely broken down. None of these children have been

successful at the school yet they still get placed onto the Osbourne roll as the school continues to be a catch-all for pupils the education authority have little idea what to do with.. The difficulties experienced by these children is widely publicised... “Those ‘Looked After’ by local authorities are widely recognised to be one of the most disadvantaged (groups) of all, (Britton et al, 2002, p.3). Many ‘Looked After’ children do not have the continuity of one carer or foster placement due to their behaviour and frequently end up unwillingly participating in a game of ‘accommodation pinball’, (Jackson & Thomas, 1999). Issues concerning interrupted residency and experiences of multiple carers have a destabilising and detrimental effect on the performance at school of boys who are looked after by social services. The boys who I visited in ‘Social Services’ housing seldom rose from their beds to see me irrespective of the time I called. They did not provide me with emotional anxiety or physical discomfort, it was as if they felt so defeated they could not be bothered to fight against the circumstances that had so disempowered them. Osbourne has provided me with physical and emotional scars. When I decided I wanted to teach I had no idea that working in a school could be so attritious and tiring. The cumulative effect of working in such challenging circumstances meant that my stamina, health and optimistic professional demeanour were seriously eroded over a period of time. I had not expected that a career in education could be so difficult and feel as if it were draining the energy from my mind and body. The next section of this chapter details some of the other professional dichotomies I was faced with during the academic year 2002 – 2003 that I felt equally unprepared for in spite of twenty years experience of working in special schools.

I never expected this at work.

Having any sort of positive impact on a school at its nadir of crisis takes time; time in which the assault on one's body and identity takes an exhausting toll. Time, in a failing school under pressure from many areas but mostly from the behaviour of its pupils is at a premium. I had never worked at the pace I experienced at Osbourne. The days were a blur of frenzied interactions and hastily prepared meetings. I arrived at work by six in the morning and from the moment I entered the building I was aware of the pressure of numerous formal and informal deadlines that would impact on me throughout the day. I fell into a vortex of work where the intensity I allowed myself to feel meant that I did not take a break until I left the school building. Even when I visited the toilet I would make phone calls or contact colleagues on the walkie-talkies to check on some aspect of the school.

Time was hugely constrained by the task of managing the pupils during the school day. Children with problems and difficulties absorb an enormous amount of school time, (O'Conner et al, 1999, p.34). The story of Hackney Downs School frequently refers to the difficulties of being a senior manager in a failing school beset by chronic pupil behaviour... 'Senior staff are constantly diverted from educational tasks and are sucked into crisis management', (ibid p.35)... 'School is often the front line and only line of defence for defenceless children and senior management time can be unacceptably taken up monitoring and addressing this', (ibid p.37). 'Enormous amounts of senior management time are taken up by the casual admission and mid-term entry of disaffected and disruptive students', (p.64).

The constant need for reactive, quick fix management also prevailed at Osbourne and put tremendous pressure on the senior management team (SMT) to furnish this demand whilst demonstrating educational progress to the frequent LEA and HMI

visits. This provided an excruciating professional decision in that trying to find time when the school managers were not emotionally or physically exhausted to concentrate on developing strategic aspects of the school meant leaving classroom colleagues to fend for themselves without the support of the SMT. If this happened then staff would quickly become disillusioned with the school managers and a chasm would open amongst colleagues that could prove to be fatal to a small school. The alternative was for the management team to support the classrooms for the entirety of the school day and leave longer-term solution finding to weekends and holidays. This was predominantly the decision that was taken. This decision in turn impacted on what should have been recovery time for the management team away from the problems at Osbourne as well as placing additional strain on out of school relationships and commitments. All the members of the SMT at Osbourne questioned what constituted acceptable professional dedication as life away from the job became increasingly compromised.

The balance and demands of managing a school in meltdown was difficult to achieve even when working fifteen-hour days. Prioritising certain issues often, (behind closed doors), came down to the statement... 'we can't do everything; what do we have to do to get the school through today'? A dreadful behavioural culture combined with disinterested, unsupportive families; scared, anonymous external agencies and demanding, intrusive inspection frequently made me despair that I had the time, resources, resilience or desire to think and act strategically and help change Osbourne School for the better.

Time was not just at a premium during this year at Osbourne; it was a priceless, often unobtainable commodity both professionally and personally. My inaccessibility to my family and life outside work was a constant source of worry and stress to myself and

to those who loved and cared for me. In spite of working all the hours my body and mind could physically support, I frequently had the feeling that I did not have time for anything.

Trying to include external agencies and families in solution based work aimed at tackling the cause rather than the effect of poor behaviour can be frustrating, futile and problematic. Schools in crisis often find themselves... “swimming in an impenetrably thick liaison soup”, (O’ Conner et al, 1999, p.35), when trying to garner support from outside the school to take some of the pressure away from an establishment working with challenging pupils.

It is important as a school to focus on what you can do and acknowledge that it may not be possible to be all things to all children, (Klein, 1999, p.91). Schools must have external support to work with student’s complex and profound needs, (ibid). I have cited Brighthouse (1999, p.viii) stating that multi-agency working and external support is imperative for the success of vulnerable children attending inner city schools. I have also recorded that no such support was in place when I joined Osbourne.

It is important however to recognise that establishing a network of help that will provide a genuine opportunity for a youngster to empower themselves reaches beyond clinical interventions and social services input. Research from the USA suggests that help for boys of Osbourne School age who demonstrate ‘at risk’ behaviour is...

“most effective when part of a network that includes peers, pets, parents, hobbies, & environmental sources of support”, (Ball, 1998, p.22).

The usual situation for the Osbourne children was that none of this supportive framework was available. Having worked in a variety of special educational settings I found it beyond belief that social services, educational psychology, speech and

language therapy, child and adolescent mental health services, the youth offending team, occupational therapy, the 'Connexions' service, the police, the education welfare service and the local community had set the needy boys of Osbourne adrift in a disastrously managed school that failed to offer even a modicum of care or expertise. Accusational questioning would have been easy but there was no time to exhume the past. For many of the older boys in the school their time had run out and their behaviour reflected that they understood this.

Effective multi-agency work involves partnerships between professionals and families that can be the key to the survival and progress of a child whose life is in crisis.

My most immediate focus for mediating external support at Osbourne was aimed at co-ordinating a professional relationship with social services. Many of the boys and their families had been assigned social workers, however there was no information from social services coming into school. The boys' files in the school office were in a disgracefully neglected, disorganised state. It was impossible to access a picture of what had happened and what was happening in the lives of the pupils and what constituted their existence away from school apart from the information the pupils themselves volunteered.

My experience of working in special schools meant that I became immediately responsible for resurrecting effective multi-agency working. The children desperately needed joined up thinking between school and support services as this journal entry demonstrates...

One more year 11, Jermaine, turned up for two hours one morning, lovely guy. When he didn't turn up the next day the learning mentor rang his house to see where he was.

His mother had died of a drugs overdose that night. We went round and visited the house which was a slum, a filthy squat, not a house. But the squalor and awfulness of the surroundings paled into insignificance with the sadness within the dwelling at the awful events of the nights before. I don't know when we'll see Jermaine again?

During my time at Osbourne I have learned that professional boundaries that were traditionally uncrossable have become blurred and teaching may now take the form of prioritising and promoting emotional growth and learning. This is acceptable as part of the new ethos of the school has been to embrace the philosophical and professional perspective that teaching should be holistic, even therapeutic. This ethos works as long as teachers and external agencies are clear about the complementary yet contrasting roles they have to play in supporting 'at risk' pupils. When this occurs a diluting of traditional demarcations that may have stunted the developmental chances of children in the past can take place and an effective professional relationship exists where it is realised that...

“teaching is therapeutic but is not therapy and therapy cannot be teaching but can be educational”. (Stanley, 1994 p.44).

The long running trauma that had beset the school was also exemplified by the fact that there were many boys on the school roll who had never attended Osbourne. Hackney Downs School also had pupils who were “haunting attendance figures like ghosts”, (O’Conner et al, 1999, p.38). As in the case of Osbourne, Hackney Downs had older boys whose long-term truancy reflected that they had dropped out of society as well as school, (ibid, p.94). Whether the non-attenders were scared of the school,

just couldn't be bothered to come, or had other issues seemed immaterial to the LEA & HMI who consistently exerted pressure on Osbourne to raise attendance.

The attendance issue portrays many of the dichotomies I felt when attempting to manage the school when it, (and I), were at our lowest points. Do you commit time and energy to convincing the LEA an 'invisible' student should be taken off the school roll? Do you remember your inclusive principles and do everything you can to trace the boy and persuade him to come to school? Do you ignore the situation and thus have one less troublesome pupil coming into the school every day but at least taking up a place on the school roll that will not be accessed by a child who attends? These strange, excruciating debates can only be experienced within a school in crisis struggling to balance short and long-term objectives with survival.

We have to get our attendance up and at the moment our attendance can only be at a maximum around 80% because we've got 9 kids on roll who are basically ghosts, we've never, ever seen them. We've taken a very difficult decision to try and move them off the roll. This is such an agonising move to make because I have inclusive beliefs and so does the school and we want all the kids to always have a place without having to write any of them off which is essentially what we are doing. But I think the old EBD adage of 'work with those who can and sustain those who can't' could possibly be added to in the context of Osbourne with – 'tell those who never turn up to piss off – or else the school will not exist for any of the pupils because it'll be closed because of poor attendance'.

Some of my tension surrounding the topic of the roll is that I know I am beginning to run a school where I'm over aware of and too answerable to some of the statistical measurements that are rife throughout education and this is affecting my perceptions,

my planning and maybe even my hierarchy of values. I know I've made this point before and it can't be an unusual tension, but when it comes down to basically writing off a kids' school place to welfare services then I think there's an extra level to this debate, an additional dimension of seriousness which is worth considering. On the personal level the realities surrounding these decisions are an eternity away from some of the ivory towered sermons and debates about inclusion that I have been privy to during my higher education courses.

I do know a couple of the anonymous kids from the roll through home visits and I know that their circumstances are particularly tragic and difficult and they've never had a chance, just as the school's never had a chance to really work with them. The closure annual review dates have been set by me and we'll be saying goodbye to the strangers' names from the roll. I regard these boys with a weird, distant affection, especially those of them with more exotic names like Marlon. When I'm doing the check every two minutes to see who's in class and who isn't in class these gaps are always there on the register that don't have any ticks by their name at all. Sometimes I smile indulgently and on quieter days construct soft and nice stories around these names that will never be put to faces.

During the year 2002- 2003 the school transformed its attitude towards truancy. For many months, boys who did not attend were tolerated as they provided the school with a 'holiday' and not enough attention was paid to the reasons behind non-attendance, (Britton et al, 2002, p.47). Many of the reasons for Osbourne tolerating – even welcoming – some truancy are summarised in this journal entry. It is an extraordinary experience to be an education professional managing a school whilst fervently hoping members of the school community will not attend...

Attendance is one of our key issues with the inspectors, however when it gets to about nine o'clock, nine thirtyish and some of the kids who you know you are going to have trouble with haven't turned up for school yet; sometimes you begin to hope. You think 'oh great, oh brilliant, maybe a day without Jeremiah, maybe a day without his endless, futile arguments about school uniform. This is awful and goes against every inclusive and value laden principle I've ever signed up to, studied, applauded and debated. But often I just stand there thinking 'oh good, I hope so and so doesn't turn up, bollocks to the attendance figures I could do with a day without the stress and the angst of such and such. I could do with a quiet day'. Then you might see one of the difficult kids walking along the street towards the school and you think 'oh shit he's here'. They walk down the corridor and if it's Ray its 'morning Ray', 'fuck you pussy hole', or 'morning Jeremiah', 'silence / grunt', or 'morning Alex', 'what are you doing talking to me white man', and you think oh shit, here we go again, I'm in the middle of all this negativity and subliminal aggression that occasionally boils over; shit, balls, fuck, bollocks and HELP. It can be so, so, so wearing this conflict, this living on your nerves is near to impossible when your confidence has been shaken and your untouchability as a teacher ignored and invaded.

Matters changed for the better during the year. As the school began to cope we targeted and chased specific non-attendees into school, tried to reintegrate them into the new set-up and then identify another boy to 'convert'. The school extended its dedicated pastoral team of learning mentors from one to three, each had a specific areas of attendance to focus on. The learning mentors and the senior management team tried to visit boys and families at home on a frequent basis to garner clues as to

why non-attendance may be an issue. The culture of truancy ran deep at Osbourne and according to the 'Education Welfare Service' (EWS) had been established in some of the families associated with the school for generations.

The tide of non-attendance has begun to be turned but several other factors have to be addressed and areas of support in place if truancy is ever going to be eradicated from the school culture. Most importantly, the desire to not have certain pupils attend the school has mostly been eradicated from the thinking of the school staff and management as their confidence and authority has increased.

The challenges to professionalism at the school were immense. With all the extreme difficulties being experienced by the school one issue that I have been delighted and surprised not to be dealing with is racism.

It has been exciting to have the opportunity to manage an inner city school that does not in this context reproduce existing socio-cultural divisions but provides a 'cultural interruption, a window on the world through which matters might be objectified', (Woods, 1990, p.123). With the exception of one Asian pupil, (who has now left the school); there was little or no racially fuelled language, behaviour or violence at any time in the year.

I articulated my pride at this fact to a senior psychiatrist who works on a consultancy basis for the LEA. As Osbourne settles, so his involvement with the school is increasing although he has experience of the school at its lowest point. I stated that I thought the reason for the lack of racially motivated behaviour at Osbourne lay in the excellent inter-race relationships modelled by the staff. My desire to address this area thoroughly is reflected in the fact that when I recruited a Rastafarian learning mentor, I told him that even if he... 'hated me', if the kids were watching we would give the impression of having an excellent relationship'.

When I told the psychiatrist this anecdote he told me to keep believing that the explicit modelling of relationships was crucial to all behaviour in the school; he also purported another theory.

He suggested that the lack of racial tension within the school was attributable to the fact that all the boys were so marginalized that they... 'all felt black', (Copperbeeche, <an alias> 2003). Dr Copperbeeche was of the opinion that his conjecture was reinforced by the fact that almost all of the pupils, black or white, engaged in 'rap-street' talk, listened to 'gangster-rap' music and dressed in 'ghetto clothes' (ibid).

I feel that a combination of positive role modelling and shared interests in marginalised, traditionally ethnic minority activities may be part of the answer to the puzzling question of why there is no apparent racism at Osbourne.

Perhaps another piece of the answer lies in the observation that the majority of black and mixed race pupils who join the school generally settle more quickly than the white boys. 60% of the Osbourne pupils are Afro-Caribbean, a further 25% are of mixed race; but as I have stated there is no apparent tension between these groups or trouble between them and the white pupils. Most of the white boys at Osbourne are opposed to anything to do with the school or with education. The majority of the black and mixed race boys communicate in various ways that they place some value on what education can do for them. It is the process and mechanics of schooling and school based relationships and personalities that are the problematic issues for them.

In spite of these differing perceptions of school there remains a lack of division between different ethnic groups

My experiences at the school make me wonder if the white boys who originate from South London's original indigenous population come from so many generations of

failure that they have become apathetic and overpowered by their circumstances; locked into an unbreakable cycle of being victims and have-nots.

The homes of white families I have visited have almost always been squalid, dirty, hopeless residences in the context of any population. Possibly then, racism is invisible at Osbourne not just because of good staff relationships and a feeling amongst the boys that they are so rejected by society that they have to unite in some ways against a more powerful enemy. Perhaps many of the white boys and their families are so used to feeling defeated that they cannot summon the motivation or energy to blame other racial groups for their circumstances thus invoking what I expected to be an ongoing battle within the school.

As I know from socialising in pubs and restaurants with black and mixed race colleagues, there is no shortage of racism and racial abuse in the area in which the school is situated. Whatever the reasons and influences; racism within the school appears to be a battle that has been won or has not been fought.

Once again Osbourne has provided a professional surprise. Secondary schools that are local to Osbourne experience a frightening degree of racial tension and violence especially at break times and around the perimeter of the school. I prepared myself for the worst before working full time at Osbourne in terms of thinking that I was going to have to constantly solve difficulties based upon differences of ethnicity. The lack of racial disquiet again makes me reflect on how under-prepared I was as for all that I would encounter in my new role. Understanding the lack of inter-ethnic tension at the school forms another vital part of the challenge to being an effective professional at Osbourne and undoubtedly needs to be investigated through further research.

The way forward.

Reducing the level and frequency of unacceptable behaviour within the school was, and remains, the ongoing priority. Improved behaviour between the boys and a reduction of unacceptably poor behaviour directed towards staff by pupils will forever be the key to Osbourne being an effective school.

A good EBD school has staff who are firm, fair, responsive to individual need and capable of creating and maintaining an orderly environment, (Visser, 1999, p.107).

To improve the behaviour of the pupils there needs to be a ... “rubber boundary with structure and routines that can move to accommodate individual need”, (ibid).

Once again this links deep-seated personal and professional values to an improvement in the core of the school and the ethos of the staff. Employing and training empathic, humane staff is a vital element of addressing the cause, not the effect of poor behaviour and gives the school a chance to educate pupils, not police them.

Behaviour management systems, sanctions and rewards are useful, but if used by a staff whose ultimate aim is not to give children the opportunity to empower themselves to learn and succeed; their function will be social control, (Klein, 1999, p. 150).

The behaviour of many of the pupils at Osbourne demonstrated an exceptional challenge to the staffs’ professionalism, integrity, identity and health. A value-based approach founded on a belief that the children could improve and the school would become easier was an essential motivation for staff to keep attending the school. For the first six months of my time at Osbourne I marvelled at the resilience and drive of many of my colleagues who remained dedicated to the children and the school in spite of the most appalling behaviour being levelled towards them...

Adil runs out of class every ten minutes or so. His whole talk, all his conversation is drugs related. I don't think he's very bright and he certainly has absolutely no social skills. He's a sort of ridiculous mad character. Typically he'll run up to you with a handful of grass cuttings after the council mower has been across and say 'come on man, you want some grass, you want some grass, buy this grass from me, hey, fucking buy this grass from me, we'll go and smoke a bong pipe together, come on, come on lets do it'...and it's just constant, just constant. Maybe it's his way of trying to survive and maybe to try and shut out the horribleness that is Osbourne on a day to day basis. The other day Adil tried to snort up sawdust in the DT room to demonstrate his obsession with drugs and the drug culture to another pupil who had encouraged him to do so. He needs outside agency help, he doesn't need to be at Osbourne School, there are many more issues with Adil than an EBD placement should have to cope with. Irrespective of impairment I think that attending Osbourne has been punitive for many of the pupils and they of course hide their distress and vulnerabilities behind a loud façade of wild behaviour. The stakes increase and so does the behaviour as they all egg each other on to be just that bit wilder and that bit more aggressive and outrageous. Throughout this process the staff take a tremendous physical and emotional battering.

Then there's Seb in the same class, whose father died when he was two. He's been excluded from four EBD schools already, gets taxied in from Hounslow every morning, Mum's a hooker and a nice lady but Seb told me this week she beats him black and blue with her belt. Seb and me have made an immense connection and one of my arguments or discussions with other members of the SMT at the moment, is that over dependency is better than no dependency, that's sort of where we are with Seb. His temper when he flips is incredible; he really just throws everything at people and

buildings. I had to restrain him on Wednesday having followed him around for two hours, up on the roof, everywhere, telling him that we care. This all happened after Adil had been baiting him for hours over the fact that his father's dead. Really explicitly cussing him. Cussing along the lines of 'digging up his dad's grave so he can fuck him up the arse because he's still gay even though he's been dead for ten years' etc etc.

How can anyone tolerate this kind of cussing especially over the event in your life that has left such damage to your emotion? How can anyone blame him for being so angry and volatile?

My feeling is that what's between Seb and me at the moment he's put in place awaiting its failure. He is much more comfortable with people letting him down as this fulfils all his expectations of life and relationships. I know he genuinely likes me but he is still anticipating at every meeting to be let down, I hope this does not happen but I'm sure that he'll feel at some stage that I have and then all that affection and trust and loyalty will be transferred, my guess, is on to James and that's fine, because we're not in this job to score personal goals. (Am I really being honest here, I'm not sure because my relationship with Seb means a lot to me). If as a school we start giving him some adult male relationships to build that's going to be really good. I'm not sure there is anything better we could do for him. When James and I restrained Seb this week I was probably doing 90% of the restraint, James was just holding one of his wrists. All Seb's head butting, kicking, spitting and language was directed at James so even when he had just about completely lost it I was still his favourite person and he was still sort of looking out for me.

The breakdown of structure at Osbourne meant that behaviour fed behaviour and negative group responses replaced individual instinct and thought. Placing any child, irrespective of impairment, in a school in the same state as Osbourne is a mistake and damaging as well as punitive for a child. I do however believe that there is a context for well run EBD schools and away from the specific example of Osbourne in crisis I would agree with Klein who states that ... “there are some children with EBD who need to be separate, for their own sake as well as for the sake of everybody else”. (1999, pp. 24-25).

It is my firm belief that there are children whose EBD is so entrenched and overt that they need specialist schooling. I readily concede that placing a group of adolescent boys with these similar needs together in a school may catalyse certain behaviours. Yet as Osbourne is beginning to demonstrate, a well organised special school can be an environment where children with EBD can achieve and progress and behaviour can be channelled and improved.

Recent government responses to EBD have moved from addressing individual needs into supporting effective professional educational practice, (Howard, 1999, p.42).

This is wise as it has been demonstrated that traditional clinical sanctions, even counselling, have little effect on EBD, (Visser, 1999, pp 98-99). Developing a differentiated, caring pedagogy that simultaneously gives freedom and support to pupils to grow emotionally and achieve academically appears to me to be the most relevant intervention.

The population of mainstream schools needs to be protected from uncontrolled, dangerous, aggressive pupils. The centrally dictated school agenda of academic achievement and conformist behaviour is incompatible with the successful management of challenging behaviour in large, non-specialised schools. It is

impossible to see how the limited time and resources available to a busy, result driven school could possibly be shared with pupils who need sensitive, available adults ready and willing to support them for large percentages of the school day. The demands of inclusion driven authors such as Clough, (1998) for schools and attitudes to change so all children can be educated together are in my view presently unattainable dreams within the context of EBD. The unequivocal inclusionist agenda of 'schools for all' remain visions where the consequences for many children would be physically dangerous, socially isolating and educationally disastrous. My experiences at Osbourne have confirmed my feeling that the educational mainstream needs distance from some children who may also need protection from some of the possible consequences of their own behaviour. Ambitions that all children should be educated together may be more realistically aimed towards disaffected children rather than those with genuine EBD as they can be more easily educated towards having control over their behaviour and reflection on the consequences of their actions.

The most vital element in attempting to change pupils deep seated, negative expectations, preconceptions, experiences and stereotypes of teachers and Osbourne was to focus on introducing respect into the school on every level. I agree with Klein that respect is as important as curriculum and assessment and needs to be holistically related to staffing, timetables, class size, tutorials, feedback and sanctions; everything, (1999, p. 81). When a school has mutual respect within it every minute of every day, it can begin to ... "transcend the past, dominate current issues and commit to enabling students to reclaim their futures", (ibid, p. 82).

Staff for the new Osbourne team were interviewed and recruited with the absolute baseline that they would always treat the pupils and each other with respect; at the time we did not know what an enormous professional challenge maintaining this

approach would involve. Pupils were prompted and reminded constantly about the importance of respect within the school community and progress was eventually made. There has for instance not been one occasion in the year where a member of staff has shouted at a pupil. This is especially useful if a boy shouts at a member of staff. A gentle reminder that... 'no one talks to you like that' remains an effective, unthreatening, respectful challenge.

Improvements in ethos, relationships and respect, the very core of a school, takes time to filter into a 'payback' in terms of pupil performance; but things do improve more rapidly in qualitative ways.

The road to school recovery is not through hysterical tabloids quoting sensational inspection (O'Conner et al, 1999, p.241) and the ensuing witch-hunts and blame culture. School recovery stems from positivity, humanistic staff, senior management that aims to raise the status and morale of pupils and staff, sound school policy, good communication, stamina and professional values that course through every interaction and initiative within the school. With these foundations in place it is possible to broaden the agenda for improvement.

Working with the boys at Osbourne in the circumstances I have described in this paper made immediate and lasting impacts upon my career and how I viewed the professional aspects of my life. Investigating and reflecting on the changes to my identity I experienced in my first year at Osbourne forms the penultimate and for me most meaningful section of this research. What I have so far recorded in this paper is contextual and sets the scene for what I discovered about my identity during the period of this research.

4. IDENTITY AND SELF

Introduction

Working at Osbourne has left me with indelible physical and psychological imprints; I will never be the same again. I have faced many challenges whilst working at the school, some of which I have been able to rise to; others defeat, hurt and trouble me beyond any previous personal or professional experience.

Researching within my place of employment offered privileged opportunities in terms of engagement and immersion into the research arena. This advantaged position also exacerbated the strain and emotional intensity that is often exerted by fieldwork, (Wengle, 1988). The intricate relationship between my private, professional and academic lives during the academic year 2002-2003 interrogated my identity, self-presentation and physical capabilities.

I was angry during the year of my research at Osbourne; angrier and more frustrated than I can ever remember being. The strain of maintaining a professional approach at all times whilst being treated to sustained and frequent abuse and disrespect by most of the pupils and their families was immense. The anger I wanted to respond with had to remain closeted as a fantasy, (Hochschild, 1983, pp 85-86), the ongoing emotional suppression I had to enact as an education professional built up stressful pressures in my personal life.

Through my reading and discussions with fellow students on my course I gained comfort by realising that I am not the first person to be engaged with a research project that brings about feelings of irritation and wrath, (Wengle, 1988, p. xix).

However the professional confines and demands surrounding my inquiry increased my emotional responses irrespective of how deeply I tried to hide them. I felt that I encountered a complexity and intensity of research experience that was thicker than

most of the ethnographic texts I accessed and projected beyond the emotional encounters of my peers engaged in different research arenas.

Much of my time researching for this paper included experiencing emotions that I thought I could never feel within the context of a school. Malinowski, described by Wengle as ‘a founding father of anthropology’, (1988, p.107), has diaries that like my research journal, are seasoned with corrosive references to those he is researching (1967). Again this reading was reassuring in helping me become aware that it may not be uncommon to feel animosity towards those you are researching with. However I feel that the labyrinthine weave that was created by researching in my own difficult work arena crafted my ethnography as a self-developmental journey that has unusual depth in terms of my literary and interactional experiences of research. Those I felt jaundiced towards during the research process were interwoven into all my identities and accompanied my self wherever I existed.

Malinowski's personal circumstances meant that his negative feelings towards those he was researching with could at any time have been translated into the action of leaving the field if he felt he could no longer cope with his field experience. Even though there would have undoubtedly been ramifications of this action, by reading his work and the work of those who have commentated on his research and his life, it is apparent that the consequences of him exiting the research arena would be less for him than for me. The time I spent in 2002 – 2003 as researcher / worker revealed to me the additional pressures of being ‘trapped’ within the research field. Unless I resigned from my job and gave up my livelihood and responsibilities to my family then there was no escape from the research context that was hurting and exasperating my personal and professional identities.

Teaching and research both need self-control and an understanding of the contexts involved. Whilst undertaking either of these disciplines the self cannot be negated or ignored but should remain at the centre of the process. My self encountered many emotional and physical challenges in its quest to simultaneously centralise the roles of successful professional, competent researcher and empathic family man.

This section of the paper addresses these challenges that were issued to my identity and my sense of self. Firstly I will trace some of the traditionally recognised issues raised by participating in fieldwork and link these to my dual role as researcher within my own work context. I will then examine whether the experience of being a worker/researcher can be beneficial. The final section probes the psychological impacts that fieldwork can have on identity and self and the defensive responses that may be enacted to counter these challenges.

The challenge of fieldwork

Wengle summarises the experience of fieldwork in contrasting terms. He states that researching can be ‘emotionally gratifying, joyous and contain a host of positive experiences’, (1988, p.x). He also describes fieldwork as potentially ‘dark, limited and ego-serving’, (ibid). Both descriptions could be accurately used to epitomise different stages and facets of the researcher/worker role I held at Osbourne School.

Several authors refer to participating in fieldwork as a rite of passage that contains three subsections: separation, transition and reintegration, (Abbott, 1982, Alland, 1975, Van Gennep, 1960). My experiences agree with the existence of this process but suggest a more complex cycle exists within my context.

I continue to participate in a short-term cycle of research/work every day. Separation begins with a reluctant early rise, transition begins during the long car journey into

work which I use to review situations and plan the day ahead; reintegration on a daily basis includes removing work clothes, showering and rarely mentioning what has happened at school. I prefer as full a reintegration as possible on a daily basis and this frequently includes shutting away from the events of my day at school.

In the longer term the phased process is not as clearly delineated. The separation and transitory elements of my cycle as researcher/worker have been completed but long-term reintegration cannot occur whilst I am still employed at the school. Even though the researcher part of my role should formally cease in the near future, the transitory release of my worker self is not currently planned for. What formally remains of me at Osbourne is the employee but after the emotive punishments and rewards of the year as researcher/worker my duality of role will continue to exist informally. The researcher part of my identity at the school will retreat to a liminal, nebulous location but will not die. My personal history has forever defined for me at Osbourne the role of researcher/worker and there remain ongoing issues to learn and reflect on. At some stage this process will end - probably when I move to another job - and transition will take place but until then I will continue to live within the complex, coexistent identity I have constructed and that has been constructed around me.

Highs and lows have been amplified by my bifurcated identity. My work and the process of research both separately and together benefit me with rewarding bursts of optimism and understanding. Together and apart my employment and academic efforts brought me periods that felt hopeless, meaningless and depressed. Both parts of my identity as researcher/worker constructed, implicated and reproduced my self, how I viewed others and the relationships I had with others, (Coffey, 1999, p.1).

Issues of identity, selfhood and emotionality (ibid) coursed through everything that linked me to Osbourne, including my research.

Recognising that fieldwork has been personal, emotional and above all central to my identity throughout the last year has been a key element of my survival and growth as a researcher/worker, (ibid). This centrality is reinforced by my conviction that my role of researcher/worker will continue beyond the formal length of my research project. Experiencing, understanding and developing my positionality as both researcher and worker has not just redefined my career and hopefully gathered a qualification. It has changed all of me.

To embark on a dual role in what promised to be an extremely challenging arena was catalysed by a union of emotional, intellectual and psychological needs. I have never experienced such a demanding year and I often ask myself if it was all possibly worth it?

My role as researcher/worker, was it worthwhile?

Assuming the dual identity of researcher/worker placed demands on my selfhood as well as challenging the physical organisation and comfort of my life. Employment at Osbourne meant a five a.m. start, slow journey home, endless difficulties at work and a demanding schedule trying to look after my geographically divided family. The job also brought me considerable status, a princely salary, excellent future employment prospects and immense job satisfaction.

Researching at Osbourne brings a consuming workload to weekends and school holidays and further pressure on a demanding family life. It also brings me status, self-esteem, has furthered my career and brought me a catharsis that has allowed me to work with optimism even when I felt my job threatened to defeat me.

As both researcher and worker there have been occasions when I felt close to giving up and have frequently doubted the significance of my experience. Like Levi-Strauss

I have been consumed by doubt, questioned why I have abandoned time with my friends and family, regretted the amount of energy I have expended and foolishly endangered my health through an excessive workload, (1977, p. 428). I have doubted the meaning and reason of what I tried to do in 2002-2003 as a researcher and a worker as well as questioning the meaning and impact of my role as researcher/worker.

There is substantial evidence that fieldwork can be traumatic, (Turnbull, 1961, Chagnou, 1968). There are also accounts of the stress and difficulties involved when working in a failing and troubled school, (O'Conner, et al, 1999, Rosser and Harré, 1976). Combining the roles of researcher and worker in a challenging context can in my experience increase both the demands and the benefits to the individual engaged in this role.

There have been times when I have poured passionate words into my research journal and verbally enacted aggressive frustrations and fantasies at the end of days when I have had to exert the sternest of self-control at work. The catharsis this has afforded has been invaluable. There have also been occasions when I have deeply resented opening the pages of my journal to record incidents I have actively and subconsciously attempted to banish from my mind because the memory of them inevitably disturbs my relationships, poisons my thoughts and interrupts my sleep. Making the judgement 'is it worth it' is not easy. Mitchell and Weber state that... 'The scars of school experience remain with most of us', (1999, pp 6-7). The positive result of suffering the infliction of these scars for me has been to make the past usable so that remembering serves to 'illuminate and transform the present', (hooks, 1989, p17). I can reflect that the constructive use of experience has made the year as researcher / worker worthwhile.

Being a researcher in my school has helped my remembering. Without my journal and subsequent work it would be impossible to recollect how bad the school was and what dramatic improvements have taken place. This is important both in terms of personal history and as a baseline for the school improvement being continually striven for. If I had been a researcher who was not employed to lead the school then the passion, desperation and intimacy of the journal would not have been recorded in the same way as the events at the school could not have been felt and lived similarly by a person in the school purely fulfilling the role of researcher. Remembering is important as when I revise certain parts of the journal now I develop the strength and conviction to try and drive the school forward and never let it regress in any way towards the chaotic and dangerous atmosphere that once dominated.

The recognition of the strengths and weaknesses brought about by a dual role as researcher and worker has been an important checking point to help me 'measure changes in myself', (Firth, 1972, p.15). Concluding that the worker/researcher role is positive because the 'experience in the field is me', (Wengle, 1988, p.106) has been an important recognition for my selfhood and identity.

I will now examine some of the many challenges I experienced in my time at Osbourne. Not the verbal and physical attacks detailed in previous sections but the psychological process of fieldwork that attacks the worker/researcher sense of self. These experiences catalysed various behaviours I activated to defend my sense of self against attack in an attempt to maintain and strengthen a self-representation that found itself threatened and under extreme pressure in the research arena.

Identity and challenges to the self

The process and experiences of fieldwork have been central to my identity throughout the construction and execution of the research project at Osbourne School. Although there have been many positive results for a variety of stakeholders involved in and around the project, for me much of the process has been attritious and challenging in a variety of ways.

Wengle states that fieldwork is.... “Always, to some degree, identity - dystonic”, (1988, p.ix) and my experiences concur with this assertion.

Other sections of this paper have discussed the enormous challenges issued to my role within the school as worker. Consistent physical and verbal assault and the exhaustingly long hours of work involved in trying to turn around a failing school are examples of demands made by the job I was employed to do.

Researching in ‘the field’ also made demands that were physical, intellectual and emotional; my identity as researcher/worker was fiercely interrogated throughout this process. Problems with disorientation, worry, depression, fatigue, loneliness and stress are frequently encountered by those undertaking research in the field, (ibid, p.xviii). An overpowering sense of anxiety accompanied me throughout the time I would have been formally identified as researcher/worker. Anxiety is connected to a ‘fear for ones entire being’, (Tillich, 1952) and this is how I felt for much of the academic year 2002-2003. All the negative problems Wengle associates with research in the field such as stress, worry and anxiety not only affected my self-esteem, but also impacted on my vision of my self. The impact of these issues changed depending where I was located within the cycle of separation, transition and reintegration. The consequences of my personal turmoil not only influenced my identity and personality but also how I recorded and interpreted my research journal.

The difficulties involved in entering into a demanding role as researcher/worker may be increased by a lack of knowledge about the research field that is to be accessed; however there may only be a limited amount of preparatory work that can be undertaken. I make frequent references in the early part of my research journal to the fact that 'I had never seen anything like Osbourne even after twenty years spent working in special schools'. My supervisor for this paper visited the school and was so surprised by what she encountered that she co-wrote a paper entitled... 'No one told me there were schools like this', (Sikes and Clark, 2004). So in this case preparation before entering the research field would have been largely meaningless as it is probable that I was involved in a unique school context.

Irrespective of why the researcher/worker may be under prepared for a shocking immersion into a new field, the consequences can be significant for the individual involved. To a degree, the identity of the researcher worker may become invisible, (Wengle, 1988, p.5). Past status suddenly counts for nothing and the present is so full of ambiguity, paradox, conflict and confusion that the future cannot be grasped or even imagined.

This is the story of Osbourne School; well it's the story of my first two weeks at Osbourne School. It's almost difficult to know where to begin so I think what I'll do is I'll talk about the children and then that'll lead me into talking about everything else. Its Saturday the 21st September and I'm sitting in my garden in the sun and it feels great and for the first time in two weeks I don't feel like falling over and just curling up and going to sleep and I don't feel... numbingly frustrated or... crushingly sad or just challenged to the depth of my patience, my energy... and everything inside me, and the reason I don't feel like that today is because yesterday I wasn't at school,

yesterday I was on a course, it was boring but it was important for my professional development, but it meant I had a bit of space from the school which is why I have the energy to write this journal today. The perverse thing is, is that yesterday while I was sitting on this course with lots of other school managers all of whom were dressed in suits and had lovely fountain pens, the funny thing is that I actually wanted just to be at school, perverse and masochistic or what! Maybe I'll put it down on my job description or personal description as dedicated and professional...

My identity had been interrupted. The years of hard work and study suddenly counted for nothing, I had no status and I immediately lost sight of the future I had previously mapped out for myself,

At the end of my first full day at Osbourne with the pupils attending school I returned home, sat at the table, put my head in my hands and wept. I kept repeating a simple statement ... 'what have I done'. It took one day for anxiety to become the defining piece of my identity, one day at school for all my previous hard won experience to evaporate and count for nothing. On reflection I am able to agree with Eliade's symbolic representation that entering the research field can evoke notions of death, (1958).

Tuesday's pretty bad, but god, Mondays, they're just soul destroying, they're dangerous and they're exhausting. It's just constant issues, and fights and arguments and aggression and that just rumble round and round and round all day and nothing and no one ever really gets settled.

Kids just wind each other up all the time on a Monday – and often all the other times on other days – and a particular flashpoint is in the dining room, chucking food at

each other till one of them breaks. Then you get an incident like Mervin jumping up on the table to give himself the leverage to catapult himself down to stamp on somebody's head. Sometimes just the verbal taunting or the spitting or the looks or the intimidation is enough to ignite the situation that the pupil is searching for but at the same time dreading. The point of no return when they have to act the gladiator and prove themselves in combat yet again in front of their peers. The vanquished are left to lick their wounds in the ignominy and isolation of ridicule that the defeated have to endure at Osbourne.

And with all this Mondays are awful, I dread Mondays and I hate them when I'm working through them and I hope we can try and put in some swimming or something into the timetable to make it all a bit more bearable, cos they're dreadful, futile, absolutely futile. Monday has the pathetic echoes of wasted weekends where nothing is achieved by the kids and no souvenir of success is reflected in their Monday behaviour, no trophy of self esteem, no medals of satisfaction are borne through the school gates of a Monday morning.

This 'fragmentation of self' is traced in Coffey's commentary on an ethnography undertaken by Kondo, (1990), (Coffey, 1999, p.35). The researcher, although at a different stage of the research cycle to me 'recognises she was in danger of losing herself', (ibid). Kondo writes from her research field... 'Let me escape before I am completely transformed', (Kondo, 1990, p.24 in Coffey, 1999, p.35). I also experienced dreams of escape and understood this need to plan a getaway, to hold onto (no matter how unrealistic) the hope that the awfulness of the present is only temporary. Almost immediately on joining Osbourne I made several phone calls to my previous boss, making enquiries as to whether the post I had just vacated had been

filled in the hope that she would recognise my distress and ask me to return. I had immediately recognised the pressures on my personal and professional life and needed an exit, (or the fantasy of an escape), before they overwhelmed me.

I lost most of my frame of reference, my contextual safety blankets and sense of perspective on entering Osbourne. I feared transformation of my identity and personality and constantly fretted over 'what I might become'. Coffey states... "with the momentum of fieldwork, and our desire to be part of the field, the self can be lost, found, altered and recast" (p25). I had no vision of the future apart from a gnawing desire to get away but I was very aware that the 'present' at Osbourne was threatening to insidiously invade my identity and slowly but surely engulf my personal history.

At this stage, with the pupils seemingly immune to any offer of education or communication from the staff, the only truce that could be drawn was in discussion with the boys about what they valued. Listening to them colloquially describing or imagining stories about drugs, weapons, fights, crime and mopeds offered some relative peace in days filled with conflict. Danger lay waiting for my identity in that I was on the fringe of initiation into the knowledge, symbols and rituals of the boys. I was being offered the knowledge, (*Sacra*) and if I participated in this knowledge I would be afforded a peripheral place in the pupil sub-culture that existed at the school, (Turner, 1967, p. 108).

A particular guideline I frequently repeated to staff was 'do not buy into the boys culture; they have to buy into ours'. The difficulty at this point was that accessing the boys' culture presented the only quiet time at the school. The temptation was tantalising. It was difficult to refuse these opportunities for interaction with the pupils because it is natural to want to try and connect with the environment you are in ...

“Selves and identities are fragmented and connected; open to shifts and negotiations. They are ambiguous, the outcome of culturally available and defined interactions, actions, meanings and values. The self is not so much complete and rounded, as partial and multiple. This has consequences for the self in the field and the ways in which the self interconnects with others in the field,” (Coffey, 1999, pp. 36-37).

I refrained from interconnecting with the culturally available discussions of crime, drugs etc. This created pressure for me within the working day as I was unwilling to submit to pretending to be interested in what I thought were destructive and pointless issues. So I remained a constant outsider and continued to be treated by the pupils with suspicion and contempt. My identity was afforded some protection by my non-engagement with the boys’ informal discussions but at the same time, having refused the available connectivity to the boys, my identity became fragmented and reframed through feelings of isolation.

The boys continued to ignore me unless they were verbally or physically attacking me. My relationship with James was warm yet fleeting as at this stage as we were both working exceptionally hard at different issues and in different locations trying to keep the school open. I was the staff mascot, fulfilling an informal role as the ‘experienced special education professional who they looked to for advice, comfort and counselling’. I was quiet at home. Either I could not muster the words to describe the unpleasantness of the day or I would quietly and calmly state that ‘I did not wish to discuss school’. This I hoped would help some sort of daily reintegration into the life I once had but it also increased my isolation.

These situations meant that I lost the mirroring function of significant others. I had my research journal to reflect with but that constituted a debate with myself. I had lost the sense of self-esteem and self worth that is usually reflected back from others,

(Wengle, 1988, p.9). I started to become over-reliant on myself as I was not receiving the responses I needed or had become used to from elsewhere.

I began to spend more time at work. Sometimes I would rise in the middle of the night and be at my desk working intensely by 4am. I became obsessive about trivialities at the school, providing my own mirrored responses to my impotent attempts to solve bigger issues. I became 'solution based' with my family. Almost every interaction I had at home would be concluded with me instructing or recommending a course of action. I became over-emotional when leaving my children. I drank too much and would tell the real story of Osbourne only to transient strangers in pubs. I despised and at the same time needed their adulatory responses. I was endlessly calm and tolerant at work and insatiably dissatisfied with every other aspect of my life. I was recasting myself, (Coffey, 1999, p.25).

The role of worker/researcher was not an inert process but represented a constant interaction and negotiation (ibid) with my identity to try and find a 'me' who could survive in the emotional vacuum I was becoming stranded within. This is where the difficulties of the dual role of researcher/worker were at their most intense. I had not travelled to a new location to undertake a piece of research that when complete I would return home after a day, a week or a month and set about the process of reintegration. I travelled to my research every day and had to temporarily relocate myself there before journeying home to attempt to activate different parts of my identity for a new audience.

The daily change meant that I could not effectively establish a field identity or role (ibid, p.23) that would be durable enough to preserve other parts of my self until the situation at the school became more tolerable. The role of juggling and negotiation within my self and with others that I experienced during the fieldwork was immense

and as Coffey states this situation is frequently over simplified and understated, (ibid, p.24).

Even though I was a willing outsider to the group of boys who attended the school I was engaged with my research as an insider and could not become detached to the school as both roles of researcher and worker could not allow this. My personhood which included age, race, gender, class, history and sexuality was located within the school for several hours each day, (ibid, p.57). Even though I was choosing to refuse some of the interactions offered by one group I was unfulfilled by my interactions with other groups and a sense of otherness and isolation continued to grow. I was centrally located within the fieldwork but this only resulted in purely negative or limited connectivity.

The identity loss experienced by an individual entering a new or incompatible arena can be called 'culture shock', (Woods, 1990, p.28). A lot of disorder and disruption within schools can be traced to this phenomenon, (ibid). My culture shock was precipitated by not just losing the mirroring functions of others, I had entered an environment that was bereft of all the signs and symbols that I based and orientated my social interactions on. Physical contact, gestures, facial expressions and the language I was exposed to had all turned into threatening weapons and were no longer signposts I could refer to when seeking indications that my life and career were heading in the right direction...

.... "All of us depend for peace of mind and our efficiency on hundreds of these cues, most of which we do not carry on the level of conscious awareness", (Oberg, 1972, pp.74-86).

There is a significant amount of literature reiterating the importance of maintaining a stable sense of identity. The anthropologist Wallace mentions the 'desperate fear' and

‘desperate emotional crisis’ that accompany an identity loss and the struggle to reframe the self, (1968, p.48, 1966, p.139). Another description I identify with is supplied by Cohen who describes having an identity as ‘having boundaries and guidelines for life’, (1964, p.15). He continues this theory to its conclusion by stating that if an individual loses boundaries they frequently become psychotic or die, (ibid). A psychological view of the impact of the loss of identity is offered by Cottrel who believes that individuals will resort to any means to preserve their identity including giving up life, (1978). McCarthy also relates identity loss to death but in a symbolic context, (1980).

These are strong messages to relate to what after all is a job working with children that I chose to write a research paper about. I have included these references however because I believe them to be true and relevant to my experiences as recorded in my journal. Admittedly I did not contemplate giving up my life to preserve my identity, (although my life was threatened verbally and with weapons on several occasions; so it is possible that I was so committed to my role as worker/researcher that death could have been a consequence). However the impact of my work and research had a very deep impact upon my self. In terms of identity I rather sadly discovered a note in the margin of one of these books I was rereading prior to writing this section that recorded... ‘So much of me has died at Osbourne’. Looking back through other notes and references I am sure I made this annotation during the excesses of my ‘culture shock period’. I was also considering a symbolic double suicide as a researcher/worker by contemplating giving up my studies and seeking employment away from the educational arena. For these reasons I believe that a psychological image linking identity loss to symbolic death can be in some contexts realistic.

As I have stated, the role of researcher/worker who visits the research field for a portion of one day, every working day, before returning home can bring its own difficulties and increase other problems. The establishment of an effective field role is one difficulty that arises in this situation and is a subject I will return to. The issues surrounding 'reverse culture shock' are complicated by the researcher/worker visiting the field on a daily basis.

Reverse culture shock involves the experience of returning home from the field. If this happens on a daily basis the constant culture shock of entering the field and reverse shock of returning home can be tiresome and emotionally draining. This was especially true for me as I moved from the separation stages of the longer-term research cycle into the transition stage. As I begin to adapt to work and survive more effectively, so the returning to my previous life in the evenings became more difficult. Boundaries became blurred and my identity became less spontaneous and more planned. Although not always apparent to me, this exerted pressure on those who had known me before I went to work at Osbourne.

Reverse culture shock is subject to the same explanations as culture shock. It is the loss of newly found signs, symbols and behaviours that allow the researcher/worker to survive and be effective in the field, (Wengle, 1988, pp.31-32). Mitchell and Weber illustrate reverse culture shock during their time researching in schools. When they returned home one evening they found children happily 'playing schools' – schools that were totally different to the unhappy, contested establishment they had been researching in all day, (1999, p.19), The researchers were taken aback, they had forgotten or decided to leave behind other peoples perception of school and were shocked to rediscover them.

Some of my reverse culture shock also focussed on my children. Talking to them about their day at school and listening to what was important for them about school never ceased to surprise me. I would occasionally tell my daughters about an outlandish piece of behaviour at Osbourne or a story that I thought would make them laugh about my day at work and would watch their surprise and incredulity at what had become the norm for me.

My journey from inner London to the delightful rural town where I live was often accompanied by feelings of escape and rejuvenation. There was one particular point on the journey where conurbation gives way to farmland that always signified to me... 'that's it, day over'. But after this moment of geographical exultation some of the bitterness of reverse culture shock regularly occurred.

I live in a town that is almost exclusively populated by people who are white. The standard of building, general cleanliness and the environment are far superior to where I work and where the pupils I am responsible for live. People who live near me seem more relaxed, less defensive, less threatening and even appear to drive in a more considerate manner than those in London where I work.

In spite of the physical and environmental differences and advantages that were evident when comparing my living and work locales; the experience of reverse culture shock was still disturbing. For me this centred on the feelings that above all, no one understood what I'd seen, heard and done since I left home that morning. I was appalled by their ignorance and complacency however in many ways did not want my retreat from work to be contaminated by having to discuss the details of my day with people who may think or may try and think they had an opinion about what happened in my researching/working day.

Further difficulties about the challenge of successfully fulfilling the role of researcher/worker whilst experiencing significant identity challenges and reframing are supplied by Schmiedeck, (1979). He demonstrates that of all the bonds that help maintain an individual's sense of identity, none is more important during young adulthood than those related to occupation, (pp.157-164). This suggests that my role as researcher/worker, where the challenge to the work side of my identity was extreme, would be a situation where my entire identity could be exposed to the most powerful of attacks.

My experience suggests that this is true even though this is the first research project I have undertaken that has been located within my place of work. The work place during the time of research was exceptionally difficult and would have challenged my identity without the additional role of researcher. Whatever the role or duality of role I was performing, the identity dystrophy and personality negotiation I experienced was ever present and challenging. Accepting that identity challenges linked to occupation can be extreme, it is problematic to try and compare how difficult and far reaching the challenges to my identity were in terms of comparison to other research and researchers.

It is important to my sense of self to be able to portray how difficult I found the academic year 2002-2003 without writing a paper which sounds pleading or enters into a 'my research was tougher than anyone else's argument. There are two factors that I think help define the depth of difficulty I encountered that are described as being central in determining the impact and intensity of identity change that may be experienced by a researcher, (Wengle, 1988, p.17).

The first factor relates to the relative degree of overlap or difference between the researcher and those he is researching with, (Oberg, 1972, p.84). Basically the more

like the research subject the researcher is, the more mirroring will be received back and the attack on identity will be less.

For me this is a very contested and complex context. In many ways I could or should be close to the boys at Osbourne. Due to issues of child parenting, bereavement, poverty and adoption I have travelled away from these identities under the guidance and protection of others. Well-meaning people have encouraged me and provided me with circumstances to cross environmental and class divisions. The invitation was issued to me to move from a below the poverty line, socially outcast, petty criminal background, (which describes many of the children at Osbourne), to a respectful, value led, high achieving, working class family.

This is an invitation that much of me has accepted. The result is that I legitimately own a house and two cars, have always worked hard and been gainfully employed, I try hard to be a good family man emotionally, physically and materially. I have several professional and academic qualifications.

I know however that I do not belong as such to the segments of the worlds I live in. I occasionally feel closer to the Osbourne boys than I do to other people and locations in my life. I share and admire their iconoclasm and anti-authoritarian posturing.

However, I dislike and cannot comprehend their fixation with drugs and homophobia.

I enjoy driving expensive cars and eat out several times a week. However I abhor private education and the fact that within the town I live in there are small areas of housing being built behind security gates and a purposeful contempt exists towards others who are less fortunate than many of those who live in my neighbourhood.

So a 'sameness' comparison is a difficult measure for me as I have a confused idea of who I am and thus have not got much of an idea as to how cognitively aligned I am with the pupils/research subjects at Osbourne. Nevertheless the profound experience

of my culture shock and my construction of secondary identities (to be discussed) to help me survive at the school suggests to me that I had moved a significant distance from my nature due to the opportunities afforded to me during my nurture. All suggestions, theories and models appear to implicate me as being subject to intense psychological identity challenges during my time as researcher/worker. I had moved away from my once close identity with the boys and my re-immersion into that life resonated deeply felt shockwaves through my changed identity. For many months I felt that nothing helpful to me was mirrored back by the boys.

It is possible that a return to Osbourne signified only a small change in my experience and for this reason was more difficult to cope with. If I had chosen to research in for instance another continent then maybe I would have been expecting a hugely different culture that would have had little chance of emotionally and intellectually embroiling me ... 'the researcher may find it easier to isolate and not be affected by the more obviously different than that which is similar', (Wengle, 1988, p.17). I suspect that my varied personality dynamics meant that I was to a degree familiar with the research context whilst approaching it as a stranger. This may have placed me in a uniquely vulnerably position in terms of my identity. My boundaries were thoroughly confused.

The second factor that influences the degree of identity changes experienced by a researcher is the state of self upon entering the research arena, (ibid, pp.18-19). I felt secure about Osbourne before I experienced it in its entirety. I have previously stated that before September 2002 I felt that my personal identity and professional history were strong enough to cope with anything a school based role as researcher/worker would be able to confront me with.

I maintain that this is mostly true. I have passed through an exceptionally traumatic time when a significant amount of identity reframing and challenge has occurred. I have had to employ defensive psychological strategies to help me survive in my roles as researcher/worker at work and away from work. I have outlived this process and even though my formal identity as worker and soon to be informal identity of researcher/worker are still challenged and reframed, my identity is much more settled. I have a stronger sense of myself now than ever before and this is founded on an equilibrium that balances the much smaller vacillations within my identity. I believe that a major factor in achieving this less challenging counterpoised self is the strength and depth of identity and personality I had built up before my involvement with Osbourne. This brought me short-term relief in that I had the strength and self-insight to 'keep going' through the most difficult days of researching working. The longer-term benefits of a solid, pre Osbourne strength is being able to reflect back, position my experiences of 2002-2003 within my life and use the lessons of that time as researcher/worker to educate others and my self. Osbourne has also given me the opportunity to enter new arenas in the future with an improved, stronger sense of self. I have benefited from remembering.

Defensive responses: defending against the challenge.

The fragmentation and reframing of identity does not occur without struggle or conflict. With the self threatened by the loss of points of reference from a previous existence and the disappearance of the mirroring function of significant other people and objects, a defensive response will take place....

“One of the few things about human beings that can be said with some degree of surety is that they will fight like hell and use every means at their disposal to maintain their senses of identity”, (Wengle, 1988, p.21).

The behaviours that take place may not just try to prevent identity fragmentation but also seek to be reparative in mending damage already done, (ibid).

A straightforward defensive reaction to being newly located in a hostile environment is to reach out to the place that has been left behind. I returned home on most of the days I worked at Osbourne and enjoyed the comfort of this reintegration. My reaching towards a symbolic continuity with what once had been, involved my fantasising about a return to my previous place of employment.

I had been happy enough in my last school. The job was challenging yet doable, the emotional and physical rewards were good and I enjoyed a high status as a manager who within the charity had successfully brokered the position of staff governor/trustee. The place however was riven with problems beyond my control or influence. A corporate approach to management had disaffected most of the staff and upset many of the families of the children who boarded at the school. An enormous amount of the public money that funded the children was siphoned into areas that had little or no impact on the children’s lives. ‘Fat cat’ salaries existed for administrators and those at the top of the ‘corporate services’ department; front line staff in the education and care directorates were increasingly treated with casual contempt irrespective of seniority or experience. I voted with my feet and went to work at Osbourne.

I have mentioned that I kept in frequent contact with my headteacher at the charity. My position as ‘head of lower school’ proved difficult to fill for a variety of reasons and was still vacant when I started my new post in September 2002. I would ring my

previous boss at least once a week and she would ring me with the same frequency. I used to shake with excitement before making my calls, they were the only reality of my escape fantasy and the tangible product of my connection with a yearned for previous existence.

I always asked my ex-headteacher if an appointment had been made to the post I used to hold. When the answer was 'no' I trembled with anticipation; waiting, almost imagining the magical words ... 'Why don't you come back'? The words never came and I never dared ask directly if she would take me back. I think the refusal and crushing of the connection with my previous life and the quashing of my escape fantasy would have been too catastrophic to deal with. I remember the pulverising feeling when I was told an appointment had been made and the immediate mind search for another dream beyond Osbourne or a link with more pleasant employment.

At a particular point in my life I had been convinced that on every moral and material point I had to leave my previous school. Yet almost immediately on experiencing Osbourne I was begging internally for the opportunity to return. My identity had come under a fierce attack and my immediate defence was to reach out to a place I had known to be fundamentally flawed and that had never challenged me to give everything or fully interrogated my self.

My previous headteacher only outlasted me by a term before she privately told me that she was leaving for another job. The reason she gave me was that she could not stand seeing money from LEA's being misappropriated and misspent. I knew she was right and applauded her for the decision she took. To my lasting shame I penned a letter to the Chief Executive of the charity explicitly telling him that I was the correct choice to take over from her the management of the education directorate; I did not receive a reply. The attack on my identity had clouded my logic and impaired my

moral judgement; even now during a series of bad days at Osbourne I occasionally fantasise about returning to my previous school. The need to defend my identity appears to have dominated my decision-making and what I knew to be right and wrong.

I continued to socialise with my ex-colleagues, not at their invitation but by 'turning up' at the pub I knew they always went to on a Thursday night. They regarded my career move as 'brave' and 'fantastic' and knew the opportunities that would open up for me if I was successful in my new post. They ogled my 'unbelievable' salary and occasionally would quietly, (and I am aware of the irony), inquire about vacancies at my new school and their suitability for a job. They were embarked on a different escape fantasy without having the symbolic continuity needs that were impacting upon me. I wasn't however visiting the pub to talk about Osbourne, even though I had to recount a few 'juicy' stories every week to gain acceptance to my group of ex colleagues. I wanted to hear about the children and families I had worked with, hear gossip about previous work mates and gently probe as to what would be the feeling of the school if I returned. I was seeking a remembrance from other people as to what I once had been and gained comfort from their well meaning yet unsubstantiated answers that I would always be needed and welcomed back at the school that I had left for the best of reasons.

At this point of the research cycle I was engulfed by the ramifications of the separation period, whilst at work I tried to learn how to survive and much of this involved being isolated as previously discussed. When away from Osbourne I was mainly focussed on psychologically trying to seal myself off from what I regarded as the awful reality of my employment context.

I also sought a physical separation from my work. When I returned home at the end of a day I would strip off my work clothes immediately and carelessly discard them, desperate to escape their cloying symbolism of the day I had endured. I went through a phase of spraying deodorant into my shoes on a nightly basis as I became convinced they smelled 'of the school'. Following the removal of my clothes I would shower and slowly begin to relax and allow myself to reintegrate into the comforts of being away from the field.

Distance from the problems at Osbourne could also be sought through how I described the school and the boys...

"...Denigrating the other is a remarkably efficient way of isolating oneself from disturbing influences that emanate from interaction with that other", (Wengle, 1988, p.18).

Throughout the separation phase and for several periods during the transition phase of my long-term researcher/worker cycle I rarely spoke about the school or members of its community in a positive way. This defensive behaviour did however eventually end. The school and the behaviour within it gradually improved and I would agree with Wengle when he points out that...

"...the usefulness of isolation is probably limited to certain specific and short-lived instances when the student-initiate (researcher) feels a deep need to defend his sense of self against disintegrative inroads", (1988, p.18).

Keeping my journal, which was to serve as the data for this paper, also helped me maintain a sense of identity. I could share secrets and thoughts that would have been wholly inappropriate to share with anyone or that could have initiated lengthy debates and arguments for which I had neither the time nor the energy. Some of the revenge

filled vitriol I recorded in my journal not only fulfilled a much needed cathartic function but also helped keep parts of my identity that were being attacked or suppressed relatively intact.

To start with Donny from year eleven. I don't care what happens to Donny as long as I never see him again. He was a bullying racist bastard from a bullying racist bastard father. Fair enough he's been let down by the education system and is a product of the worst of Osbourne; but on top of that whatever psychosis, illness or just sheer bastardism he has inside him, the cost to the school of having him in just for three hours a week was immense. His totally unreasonable, violent, bullying, anti white racist behaviour is something that I'm not prepared to go through ever again. His life prospects are extremely bleak but that doesn't bother me in the slightest. I've had enough of Donny; he's gone from the school but it's still difficult to even speak his name without feeling angry aggressive and vengeful.

Danny from year eleven I feel completely different about. Even though he did time in Fichwell over Christmas-three months for assault and robbery-Danny turned out to be more than a project or a lost school boy for me, he turned out to be an ally and a friend. I made him an 'assistant learning mentor' in the school; I've given him several hundred pounds of my own money to try and keep him away from his favourite hobby/living-stealing mobile phones. I've spoken and linked extensively with his father who's out of prison at the same time as Danny for the first time in his adult life. He's also trying to make a go of it.

Danny has responded by giving me some absolutely vital help with some of the younger boys in the school who are getting into weed and other drugs. This has meant that I can try and work with their families to help them, armed with invaluable

street knowledge. When you confront a parent with the news that you think that their son may be involved with 'soft' drugs they always ask the same question... 'Where does he get it?' With Danny's help it is useful for all of us, for me to be able to provide answers on occasion. There's a very protective, empathetic streak within Danny for the youngsters in the school, especially the year sevens. Even though he still gets into trouble with a variety of police and public. Even though he's a fighter outside of school and his attendance as an assistant learning mentor is pretty awful; I think Danny's a friend of mine and I think I'm a friend of his.

Last week he came in and told me he's started doing some labouring at forty pounds cash in hand a day working with his dad. He proudly asked me would I mind if he went down to one day a week as an 'assistant learning mentor'. Well that's more than he usually manages (and I haven't seen him since), but that's fine. We'll keep in touch. The police call him the biggest thief in Wandsworth and a one-man crime wave. However I've given my cash card and pin number to Danny on several occasions and told him to go and get another hundred pounds out to keep his fingers to himself. I hope he doesn't always spend all of it on weed but on the other hand I'd probably just go and waste it on alcohol.

He's been good for me Danny. He's good for some of the other kids and I think he's good for the school. I hope against hope that he's just beginning to be good for himself.

Anthony is a year eleven who I talked about in September as the one riding a teachers bike just on its back wheels across the main road on the way back from a football match and kicking the side of a police van. I think 'grudging admiration' was one of the phrases I used. We haven't seen Anthony since his sixteenth birthday; he hasn't turned up at school once. Apparently he's working with his dad in a garage and

seems to be ok. That 'grudging admiration' for Anthony surfaces again within me. He is so convinced that he has no absolutely no time for the school and can gain nothing from it he has just done what all teenagers promise they will do... walk out of school and not come back. Well Anthony had the balls to do it and is working, wow.

We were talking about him the other day and everyone involved in the conversation remembered a particular incident. On the very first induction day when we revealed to the kids that it was a no smoking site they were all sitting in there in the first (and only) assembly. Anthony, with his big gold chains on down to his waist shouts out 'fucking bollocks' at the top of his voice. We were all new to the school, new to the all the culture and we didn't deal with it, didn't challenge it, didn't make a joke of it, didn't use any of the things we would use nowadays to cope immediately with a situation like that with some sort of response then follow up later. I think I'll remember Anthony to a degree because of this incident. It is a fantastic example of where the school had disintegrated to and the hunting licence that the boys had been granted in a lawless sub culture.

Jonathon, big fat lazy Jonathon has done nothing this year. He turned up to two work experience placements for fifteen minutes. He briefly came into school a few times, was rude and abusive to the staff because of significant issues of self esteem and that's the way things were at Osbourne and we haven't seen him for months.

Bizarrely, his mother is meant to be or was meant to be a governor of the school; we also haven't seen her for months. I very much doubt whether Jonathon gets out of bed before three o'clock every day. He's an unfortunate product of bad old Osbourne; if we'd had him start at a different time in the school's lifespan we'd probably have been able to help him do something with himself. We could have provided him with opportunities to motivate and empower himself but instead this large, fat, oafish boy

dealt with the horror that was Osbourne by retreating into himself. He really is a harmless kid who ended up in the worst possible place and has learned anti social survival techniques that will probably stay with him for years; if not for ever.

Osbourne has definitely ruined young lives.

Gary in year eleven who came to a couple of sessions each week right up until the year eleven leaving date was also damagingly and horrendously misplaced at Osbourne. He tried to hide his skinny, white vulnerability by adopting a mad screaming abusive sexually orientated persona. He reminds me of the story from Colditz about the prisoner who pretended to be insane to get himself sent home but unfortunately actually became insane through his dedication to his role. I wonder if much the same has happened to Gary.

Poor mad weird Gary. Again I don't miss him and I feel no connection or affection to him. On paper he is a kid who maybe I feel I should be close to or be able to do something with but he never gave me any message that I could do anything for him, or indeed that I held the least interest or currency for him. I suppose my focus during this year seems to have moved from working with needy individuals to a different project, (maybe grander, maybe not so grand, maybe bigger, maybe smaller). The project being trying to heal Osbourne, so that the mistakes and the broken damaged children scarred by an appalling school are never repeated. Maybe this goes a little way to explaining or excusing my lack of connection with individual kids such as Gary. I sound like I am seeking absolution from myself, which is a strange, and maybe fruitless place to seek this solace. By these tokens I also don't miss Gary as he did nothing for the school except disrupt it. I do think he's another damaged indictment of the awful, barren, emotionless place that Osbourne was for many years.

To say that Michael is probably the best pupil in terms of prospects from that year eleven group says a lot about what a hopeless, abandoned and pathetic year they were. Through the extensive dedicated work of one member of staff Michael will be accessing a college place next year, he is lucky to have had this support. His sullenness, deliberate obstructiveness and plain downright intimidation of staff almost means that he doesn't deserve this chance. As I said he is fortunate to have accessed this member of staffs doggedness and this work has been generated by the fact that his mother, (who I've written about extensively), is a pushy, mouthy, aggressive, intimidating advocate for him, I hope he leaves his Osbourne behaviour at Osbourne as he goes on through life; I think he will.

Like Donny I really wish Dravid nothing but unhappiness in the next stage of his life. His ever-present aggressive intimidation and bullying of staff and children was repulsive. His behaviour, which he undoubtedly saved for Osbourne was atrocious and was like a malignant cancer that ran through the school when he walked up and down the corridor. God only knows how many children and staff came to school terrified and depressed when that bastard was in his physical and verbal pomp within an establishment that celebrated and accelerated his kingdom. His behaviour means that I have no time for him physically, or in my mind, or in any part of my emotion or heart. I hope he gets his come-uppance.

Poor Kieran, poor, poor, poor Kieran who religiously turned up at school even for the meaningless end of year tests. These were internal tests that we gave year eleven which meant nothing, just satisfied some legal criteria and ticked a few LEA boxes whilst the last nails in the coffin of a deceased and dead year were hammered in. Kieran was the only one who turned up for all three internal tests. Lost and startled, immediately defensive, stiff and abrasive as he walked into Osbourne. Damaged

beyond repair by the experiences he had at the school and continues to have on his estate. Violent, unpredictable, needy, punched, punching, bugged literally in a place that will forever in his mind awaken terror; unfortunately he doesn't know how to leave. He will come into the local pub when you're in there and then stand, unwilling and unknowing how to complete the connection that he's tenuously made by walking in there and standing mutely at your table.

Kieran is a tragedy. The people who let Osbourne go down the pan should spend time with Kieran then maybe their sleep and their conscience will be interrupted as much as mine is by him.

James Turner sporadically turned up through the summer term, usually using Osbourne as an open area to smoke cannabis. He appears to have been in and out of hospital recently with alcohol poisoning, he's only fifteen just turned sixteen in fact.

He's looking at a hopeless life and that's a shame and a waste. If he'd come to Osbourne at a different time, if we'd got him early he'd have every likelihood of being in much better shape by now. All he is now is a shadow of a life, an out of place extrovert, a white boy who speaks like a black boy desperate to find acceptance on the street. However his otherness and the outstanding otherness of his family will exclude him from all but the most peripheral and shady of sub cultures. His mother bought a title which means that her communications with the school are signed 'Lady Panter'; it should be funny but it isn't.

Jermaine who's mother died tragically during the winter turned up for the second time this year a couple of weeks ago, desperately searching for a connection, looking for something. As always we try and find room to accommodate the boys. We sat him down for a chat and a cup of tea and set him up to do some work experience for the next few weeks in P.E; everybody was hugely enthusiastic. Jermaine looked like he'd

found maybe a part of what he was looking for and we offered to start him the next day, which he enthusiastically accepted and it all appeared great. That was four weeks ago and we haven't seen him since. Maybe he'll turn up again in a year or so and if I'm still there I'll probably offer him the same thing then maybe he'll disappear from all of our view for another year? Who knows but it may not be a bad guess. Year eleven have disappeared from Osbourne taking with them the worst of the destructive legacy of the old school that they inherited and contributed to. Their leaving date has come and gone; no sadness, no happiness, no event, nothing. Nowhere boys who had the misfortune to be part of a nothing school. With the exception of Donny and Dravid I somehow hope they can emerge from the vacuum in their lives that was Osbourne and find creative, supportive environments so the school becomes nothing but a bad, ethereal dream to them.

Being able to retreat to my journal and express myself without fear of judgement or contradiction proved to be a vital part of my defence against identity fragmentation. Firth describes her diary keeping during her research as providing her with a 'lifeline, a checking point to measure changes in herself' and 'an emotional outlet' with which to balance the changes in her world, (1972, p. 15). These words express the importance of my journal keeping and the entry I have just included in this paper reflects aspects of my identity that were under extreme pressure but I needed to preserve. 'Competitiveness, iconoclasm and dark humour' are three aspects of my self that are present in the journal but muzzled or missing from my identity in other areas, of my long term cycle of separation and transition.

Wengle records that the sub conscious can also contribute to the defence of identity, (1988, p.24). Anderson states that dreams of past memories from outside the research

field is a common phenomenon for researchers, (1971, pp 1120 – 1125). Sleep and the contents of my dreams was an ongoing issue for me during my time as researcher/worker. Having to get out of bed so early in the morning meant a 10p.m. bed time at the latest and this posed serious social and family difficulties because at one stage I was seldom returning home before 8p.m. Trying to strike a balance between some sort of meaningful communication with my family whilst accessing a suitable amount of sleep was a balance that I failed (and continue to fail) to find. My sleep pattern was erratic and unhelpful for many months. Typically I would immediately fall into the deepest of sleeps as soon as my head touched the pillow. I would usually then wake up at about 2 am, fret and worry until about 4.30/5a.m. then fall asleep again. When the alarm sounded at 5.23 am each morning it resulted in me being woken from a deep sleep, this unsatisfactory process when repeated on a daily basis added significantly to my fatigue and subsequent exhaustion.

I'm beginning to get seriously tired. I'm on the floor all day from ten to eight until three. The entire time that the kids are there I'm the fireman. It's called corridor support and I just go round problem solving, issue solving, fight breaking and intervening all day. On top of that I have huge management and personnel responsibilities to carry out as well. I'm receiving an enormous pay check in terms of any job let alone teaching but this has to be balanced with the emotional cost and the fatigue, what the job drains from me.

It's bloody hard getting up at twenty past five and getting there but I'm never short of adrenalin and anxiety which kick in like screaming, inseparable Siamese twins every morning when the alarm grabs me from my latest dream/nightmare about Osbourne. I'm always up for it but am becoming increasingly physically tired just

through the constant moving around and patrolling all the time. And then there's the bruises on top of that. I think I'm quite fit but I had acupuncture this week for some stress prevention and healing really. The Chinese doctor guy thought I was in good shape I think I'm in quite good shape as well but mainly because I've got good personal direction and personal objectives with this job and feel very driven and confident in myself, certainly out of school anyway.

The exception to this disturbed and unhelpful pattern were the occasional nights-about once a fortnight-when I would explicitly dream about escaping from Osbourne or about returning or still working at my previous school. Although the dreams would vary they were always happy and content childlike visions of a promised land –the sun would always be shining, everyone was smiling all the time and there would be a lot of informal comfort touching such as hand holding and arms around shoulders. On the nights that contained these dreams I would sleep deeply through the night and awake just before the alarm sounded. I would be much more phlegmatic on the days that followed the night filled with these visions. The difference in my self and persona would be marked enough for several adults and children to ask me during the day if I was 'alright'?

I think there was more than immediate comfort offered by these dreams. They may have helped preserve my identity by subconsciously suggesting that one day everything would surely be all right again and the difficulties I was encountering and being suffocated by were located in a temporary passage of my life. It is interesting to reflect on how my subconscious affected my behaviour the next day and that I frequently experienced a deep sleep filled with positive dreams after a particularly difficult day.

As the previous journal submission I quoted in this paper indicates, peaceful nights with comforting dreams were unfortunately not the norm for me. I would frequently jerk awake, talking or arguing with an image of one of the pupils I found difficult to work with. This half-asleep, half-awake dialogue would frequently last all night. Sunday nights were (and still remain), impossible in terms of accessing a good night's sleep. The time away from school at the weekend affords a deeper reintegration into a life removed from the field but this in turn leads to re-experiencing some of the difficulties of the separation phase of the longer term research cycle and the accompanying culture shock. Irrespective of what I try and think or do in preparation for going to bed on a Sunday, I have not yet managed a good Sunday night's sleep or accessed a comforting or identity maintaining dream to fortify me for Monday morning.

Dreams during the night can help defend the identity and the physical well-being of the dreamer who may be experiencing identity fragmentation, (Malinowski, 1967).

There is also the phenomenon that identity can continue to be threatened and fragment further when experiencing negative images supplied by the subconscious during sleep. In my experience the negative dreaming and subconscious imagery far outweighs the positive experiences and it is an increasingly unnerving experience to discover that one's identity can come under attack twenty-four hours a day.

As well as reaching out to previous experiences both consciously and subconsciously and keeping journals and diaries that are intimately cathartic, researchers may invest someone they see on a frequent basis with the mirroring abilities they used to access through others before they entered the research field, (Storolow, 1975). Even though the person or people who are invested into this role may be unsuitable and/or unqualified to offer what is needed, the researcher in a strange and hostile

environment may rely on them to ‘maintain or retrieve aspects of their identity’, (ibid, pp.596-611).

I experienced this process from both ‘sides’. I undoubtedly became James’s ‘mirror’. Even though he had not undertaken the role of researcher, his worker identity had been parachuted into a social and professional context that was unlike any experience he had ever had. He became desperately isolated, frustrated and lost; then he ‘found’ me.

I was a logical appointment to the school in many ways because of my experience, qualifications and ambition. I was not however an instant answer to the problems, nor did I possess charismatically superhuman powers. However, for a period of many months James regarded me as being imbued with these traits. I was in fact mirroring what he had previously thought of himself but had become incapable of reflecting back to his self because of the continuing failure of the school.

Historically James had experienced a brilliant life in many ways and he knew it. He became a deputy head teacher after three years classroom teaching and had enjoyed chronologically early success as a primary school headteacher. His excellence in martial arts, beautiful wife and enormous house all contributed to what he knew to be a meteorically successful life and James believed in his own brilliance and achievements. Then he came to Osbourne which was completely different to anything he had known or guessed at. The school contained people he had never come across and who were not interested let alone impressed by his ego-centrism and past record.

When the school did not instantly heal or even tangibly improve with the new team in place from September 2002, his self-confidence evaporated. James constructed in me what he had always seen in himself. I became his ‘identity-syntonic narcissistic object’; (Thrane, 1979, pp.321-41) everything I said or did he considered brilliant.

The demands of the role that James invested me with significantly increased the pressure on my identity. Everything I opined at work became 'truth' for James and I was put into a difficult position with the rest of the senior management team who did not carry the same influence with him. James began to seek my opinions and confide in me about his personal history and family life. I had to be cautious as the wrong word at the wrong time would have set him on a course of action he may not have thought through and could have proved personally damaging to him.

James trusted me as he had always trusted himself. He sought my judgement on everything and acted on my feelings implicitly even if I could not fully justify what I said logically. I was what he believed he had been.

Pressure continued to be exerted on my identity as the over-reliance James placed in me continuously spilled over into time away from school. My evening and weekend reintegration into life away from Osbourne became punctuated by numerous phone calls. My social and family life were further pressured and complicated by the communication James felt he needed to constantly access with me. The phone would usually ring six or seven times on both Saturday and Sunday with sometimes the only reason being given.... 'I just wanted to see how you are'.

The whole situation was difficult to explain or understand until I accessed the academic writing that explained narcissistic mirroring. Before reading several anthropological accounts of this phenomenon, (written from the side of the bestower of the role not the receiver); I felt very uncomfortable as my only comparable experience would have been as the receiver of a teenage heterosexual 'crush'. At the height of my position as narcissistic object, James would allude to what he saw as my physical attributes and these statements would always be accompanied by negative comments about the appearance or sexual prowess of his wife. I was directly told that

I was 'fanciable' and that James had fantasised about and on occasion wanted sexual relations with me.

James had always appeared somewhat obsessed with his body and clothing; constantly checking his reflection in a large mirror in his office or flexing his enormous muscles by performing a series of complex martial arts manoeuvres when the whim took him. Osbourne seemed to affect even his appreciation of his body and the expensive clothing he owned and some of this physical self-admiration was transferred to my massively inferior physique and cheap, ill fitting clothing.

As the school improved James was able to return to his previously unshakeable character traits of egocentric independent decision-making and excessive vanity. The pressure my identity felt from his near deification of my intellectual and physical capabilities gradually diminished. I was able to take more notice of my self rather than constantly worrying about how my next word or action would impact upon James's actions.

I experienced the phenomenon of mirroring from the other point of view. For a brief part of 2002-2003 I became over reliant on the judgements of Reggie who was one of the two 'heads of key stage' and was a member of the school management team. I arrived at this stage through a complicated journey. As I have previously outlined, my personal history provides me with some considerable social and cultural confusion. My birth family and adoptive family were diametrically opposed in their histories and collective values and this bifurcated upbringing muddled my perceptions of Osbourne and many of my other life experiences.

When I traced my birth family I discovered a brother who I immediately enjoyed a close relationship with. I admire much about him. One of his particularly appealing traits is his plain speaking, uncomplicated commentary and opinion on life that is

bereft of unnecessary platitudes and social diplomacy. These qualities are also present in Reggie. I recognised and welcomed this similarity; it was like having a piece of my brother at school. My identity was under pressure and threatening to fragment so subconsciously I bestowed on Reggie some of the other qualities I loved in my brother. I had no idea or no interest if these traits really existed within Reggie.

My brother is one of the very dearest people in my life. I rely on him and I need him.

My psychological defence to some of the pressure that was threatening to erode me was to try and bring him more closely into a place where I desperately needed the strength he always gives to me. Although I did no more than listen too closely and place too much importance on some of Reggie's 'hard-nosed' working class judgements about the pupils; some identity dystonic mirroring certainly occurred.

Kohut, (1966 and 1971), identifies the two areas of narcissistic projection and transference I experienced. James made me into a 'protectively qualified narcissistic object' by protecting and depositing pieces of his own self into me to make me suitable to become his source of mirroring, (1971). The 'narcissistic transference' I employed was to try to partly turn Reggie into one of my past significant others thus making him an effective source of mirroring for me, Kohut and Wolf, 1978, pp.413-425, Wengle, 1988, pp.27-28).

As well as using and psychologically transforming others into objects and mirrors that give the required reflection of qualities and symbols from a previous life, a researcher/worker may also enter into a process of 'recasting the self' (Coffey, 1999, p.25). Wengle refers to this as a 'secondary identification with the native culture the researcher is studying', (1988, pp.31-37). This involves the researcher/worker internalising some of the aspects of the environment surrounding them. An alternate or at least complimentary identity is produced that replaces or supplements the

fragmenting identity that is under threat from the symbols and otherness of the research environment.

The establishment of a field identity is relevant to the dual role of researcher/worker as well as to that of researcher. Research is a process that relies on personal engagement and interaction between the researcher and the researched, (Coffey, 1999, p.23). Successfully carrying out my role as worker at Osbourne relied on the same communicative and interactive success being established. Within my research context the crafting of an 'ethnographic selfhood for fieldwork and the finding, remoulding, and establishing of a field identity,' (ibid), directly partnered my professional search for a successful worker identity. Creation of a field role or secondary identity to a degree (with hindsight) seems inevitable.

The establishment of my field self was, and remains, a fluid transaction based on an immeasurable cocktail of communication, relationship and interaction. The movement within this process of identity smelting will not cease until I leave the field as both researcher and worker. The establishment of differently located secondary identities will probably then commence.

When I began to work full time at Osbourne I stated earlier in this section that I believed that the most effective way to personally survive at the school whilst aiming for school improvement was to not access the pupil's resistant sub-culture in any way.

Whereas I still believe in the rightness of this ambition it was in the long term unrealistic. I had not properly considered that ... 'fieldwork is not accomplished in isolation from the physical and social setting ... the intimate relationships and knowledge which originate from the research process help define identity in the field'. (Coffey, 1999, pp.23-26).

Just as I hoped to positively influence the behaviour of the pupils, so their behaviour expectations, communications and culture began, against my best intentions, to influence me.

I remained on my guard against constructing a secondary identity that would act as a mirror for the pupils because I saw it happening in some of my work colleagues and I recognised the dangers. A combination of this awareness and the adoption of some of the other psychological defence strategies detailed in this paper meant that I did not let or did not need a great deal of my identity to seek secondary identification. The employment of a secondary identity did however manifest itself within me in quite subtle ways. I also occasionally chose to exaggerate some of these adopted behaviours when working with individual children to increase my connectivity with them.

As months went by I found myself giving hints and small messages to the pupils that 'I had been a lad myself once'. My most forthright reference to fighting would be truthful verbal statements to pupils that I had been an infrequent yet successful fighter at school. I might make an occasional quick reference to a fight I had seen or been part of in a pub or when playing sport. I showed the boys some of the scars I have, usually letting them decide whether they were from a fight or from another source. I often visited the gym when the boys were using the boxing equipment and would join in by holding or punching the appropriate punch bags; (always making sure I punched hard enough to make an impression and be noticed). I joined in discussions about what was the most effective way of making a 'damaging' fist. I began play fighting with the boys; stopping when I was at an advantage and had made it clear that I would have hurt them if I had not stopped; thus proving, (I hoped), my superior strength, technique and experience.

Almost all of this behaviour that linked to a secondary identification was carried out in a light-hearted manner. I pictured myself as an avuncular male role model for the boys, fulfilling some of the gentler initiation into the teenage male psyche that had been missing from their lives. I was in control of this behaviour within school but noticed some faint changes in my self when away from Osbourne.

I became verbally disparaging of almost all males who I did not know; whether in real life or portrayed through the mass media. Many of my scornful comments focussed on male-centric evaluations of their imagined fighting capacity or 'supposed ability to survive at Osbourne'. To use the boys' parlance I became a little more 'up for it'. I would evaluate men wondering if they were 'harder' than me. I imagined fighting with increasing frequency and would find myself making a fist or shadow boxing if I thought no one could see me. My driving became more aggressive and for the first time in my life I began to meet the gaze of strangers and 'stare them out'; uncaring of the possible consequences.

To a lesser extent I let the boys have snippets of information that would lead them to believe I had experience of drugs. Although much of my communication referred to episodes involving my friends and family, I included myself enough to let the boys know that I had experienced 'social' drug use. I also subconsciously tried to establish a place high in the drug taking hierarchy by denigrating the pupils' drug taking, suggesting that they only had access to poor quality cannabis. The boys responded to this by giving me 'respect' from the group.

My speech also became influenced by the adoption of some secondary identification behaviours. I became lazy with my pronunciation and sounded more 'working-class' than I had done for many years. I consciously and sub consciously aped some of Reggie's hard, no-frills judgemental speech and reflected with satisfaction on my

newly found verbal toughness. This strategy of identity maintenance was impossible to locate solely at work. I endured puzzled looks and giggles from my family and loved ones whilst rendering unfamiliar behaviours such as producing judgemental, staccato like decrees in a broad south London accent about a family issue when at home.

My body language as well as my spoken language became more forceful and directed. My posture straightened and I began to march around the school in contrast to the hands in pockets shuffling gait that had been a frequently remarked upon feature during my time as a school manager in other establishments. When dealing with a behaviour management issue with one of the pupils, I began to make chopping actions with my hands when I was speaking to reiterate my decisive approach. I stood much closer to the boys when I wanted acquiescence to my wishes. I also began to stand in front of pupils, looking them directly in the eye rather than approaching and standing to the side that had been my successful non-confrontational approach to school based conflict for many years.

Most of the boys were very opinionated about cars. I owned a convertible MGF sports car and was surprised by most of the pupils at Osbourne dismissing it as a 'cheap car'. For many years I had coveted the 'Audi TT' sports car, which was in a different league in terms of price and performance to the MG. After a few months at Osbourne I spent £24,000 on a turbo powered, black Audi TT. The boys were delighted that I had purchased what they called a 'bad mans car' and my sense of self was subjected to less frequent attack because the car I chose to drive met with the approval of a group of boys aged 11 – 16 years old who mostly had to steal bicycles because they did not have the money to purchase them.

To a degree, some of my sense of self and identity was mediated by the experiences, relations and interactions of my workplace/research field, (Coffey, 1999, p.25). The experimenting or adoption of various strands of secondary identification often offered me little more than a sense of comfort and belonging and usually went unnoticed by other people.

Even though my adoption of a field/secondary identity manifested itself in subtle ways or in behaviour I could usually disguise, the fact is that secondary identification did occur. This is proven by my experience of reverse culture shock, which can only occur if some degree of secondary identification has taken place and thus exists to be shocked.

As I have stated, some of the behaviours I adopted as identity defence to the pressures I was experiencing were not confined to the time I spent in school. Realising the experience of reverse culture shock does not necessarily reduce the assumed behaviours. If the reintegration from the field is not deep enough or long enough to allow the need for identity maintenance and defence to diminish, the manifestations of a secondary/field identity will remain. This was the case whilst engaged on my short-term, daily cycle of separation, transition and reintegration into my role as researcher/worker. I was never away from the school long enough for reintegration to occur so I discovered that ...

“Establishing field roles can have a lasting impact on the concept of selfhood that extends beyond the boundaries of fieldwork,” (Coffey, 1999, p.26).

The duration and intensity of secondary identification is dependent on how threatened the researcher/worker feels. James’s over-reliance on me and in turn my

subconscious promotion of Reggie have waned then disappeared; these behaviours were only present whilst the school was at its worst.

Some of the other, less penetrating behaviours remain even though Osbourne is now a much less pressurised place of work/research. The continuation of some facets of a secondary/field identity is probably because they are successful beyond the need for identity defence strategies and the soon to be ended role of researcher/worker. My long-term role as worker in the context that hosted my research has come to rely upon strands adopted during the need for secondary identification for its effective execution. The boys respond to and like an 'Audi driving', 'hard-talking' school manager who 'knows a bit about fighting' and who 'probably takes a few drugs at the weekend'. It is difficult to think of totally rejecting these identities that were adopted, refined and ultimately successful in making a certain impression on the pupils.

The main difference in the post school meltdown period is the dilution of the feeling of reverse culture shock. I am much more successful now at 'leaving the school behind' and accepting and welcoming of the fact that the rest of the world is probably different to where I work. I also feel that I am more in control of 'deciding' behaviours that are going to be successful at Osbourne. The fact that a secondary identity has now become one that is used, rather than jumped into as a desperate defence tactic, makes these behaviours far easier to leave behind at work. Shrouding my in-school identity with a temporary persona in turn protects my self away from the school. The dissolution of my persona within my family has become the new threat to be guarded against and the priority of my conscious and subconscious defence strategies.

5. CONCLUSION

Introduction

To conclude this paper I feel it is appropriate to reflect on some changes I would recommend following my experiences at Osbourne School and the impact they had upon me. These changes encompass curriculum content and pedagogy within a school; changes to the ways in which schools are evaluated and developments to the way that LEA's approach failing schools. I will then explain how I propose to use the research data and experience, and consider with the benefit of hindsight what I may do differently now if I were to start the research again. I will then briefly consider future research issues that have arisen from this project.

Schools need to change

Osbourne is a school for pupils who are deemed to have failed; it is the end of the line. School staff, parents, the LEA and the boys themselves identify that if you fail at Osbourne you will never be offered another school place. However other schools can learn from what has been successful at Osbourne and this in turn may reduce the number of pupils who arrive in such 'dead end' schools. Paulo Freire writes that ...

... "Education must begin with the solution of the student – teacher contradiction, by reconciling the poles of contradiction so that both are simultaneously teachers and students," (1972).

Any school must have an authority within it that lies with the staff. I have learned at Osbourne that this authority is only truly meaningful when it is based on respect. The pupils I worked with during the research period totally rejected any attempt to establish authority by staff grounding hierarchy in the traditional territorial

maxim of ... 'you do what you are told because I'm a teacher and you're a pupil.'

This attitude provoked the most negative responses at Osbourne. In the mainstream schools I visit as a professional and as a parent I witness this attitude being similarly unhelpful; it just has somewhat less dramatic behavioural consequences than those recorded in my autoethnography.

Authority and any other relationships and interactions within a school must be founded on mutual respect to have any effectiveness beyond establishing a short term semblance of control. Entering Osbourne with a gentle, empathic, respect-led approach meant that the school took longer to settle than if the issues had been tackled with a confrontational, aggressive approach. The respectful approach meant that the staff went through a sustained period of physical and verbal abuse whilst the children who were desensitised by years of aggressive treatment by those who represented the 'system' rejected this strategy. In the long term the introduction of mutual respect ensured that the school genuinely started to heal and not just cover over its problems with a veneer of contested authoritarian control. Respect in teacher-pupil relationships is the way schools can win the hearts and educate the minds of pupils and families including the most disaffected and challenging. This message is beginning to spread outwards from Osbourne and mainstream colleagues who visit the school remark on the excellent staff/pupil relationships and how relaxed the children look when they are in adult company. Two local mainstream schools are reviewing school policy in the light of what they have seen at Osbourne.

Schools must accept and act on the understanding that a significant amount of the poor behaviour within them is the effect of the pupils' low self-esteem. A typical reaction of a new or inexperienced member of staff to some of the loud, outlandish behaviour still occasionally on show at Osbourne is to accredit it to over-confidence

or arrogance. The opposite is true and the low self-esteem of the pupils when they arrive at the school is accompanied by documentation that records low academic achievement and low expectations. Schools such as Osbourne must have detailed staff development programmes that result in employees being aware of the emotional as well as the intellectual circumstances of the pupils. Cultural diversity and an understanding of child development should also be explicitly taught to staff working with inner city children who are deemed as failures by their communities as well as by the education system, (Klein, 1999, p.52).

Educating the emotional intelligence of pupils is a vital part of what a curriculum should include. Goleman argues that emotion plays a greater role in thought, decision-making and individual success than is at present acknowledged, (1995, cover notes). Self-awareness, impulse control, persistence, zeal, motivation, empathy and social deftness, (ibid) have been shown by my experiences in the last two years to be as important as numeracy and literacy. Detailed and explicit personal, social, health, citizenship and education (PSHCE) is taught to all pupils at Osbourne as a formal, daily part of the timetable. All staff are encouraged to informally teach the skills listed by Goleman at all times. The school has also developed a proactive social skills programme that all members of the school community participate in. This involves an emphasis on one particular social skill, (that changes every week), such as turn taking or saying 'hello.' I would encourage all schools to employ such a programme if they do not already do so.

Osbourne can also provide an effective working example to other schools with the opportunities it offers some of the older boys to mentor younger pupils. As Klein points out; this initiative helps the mentor as much as the mentees, (1999, p.94). Some of the older boys have made a significantly positive impact on individual pupil

behaviour in school and have helped groups successfully complete lessons. The school continues to support this scheme although the one formal attempt to promote a pupil who had just left the school into a full time learning mentor post was unsuccessful. However this opportunity is being offered to two other leavers in September 2004.

Initiatives such as these exemplify not just the development of the school into an 'alternative' educational establishment but also reflect my personal journey as a school manager and an individual. Creating the autoethnographic journal and the subsequent reflective and contextual thesis have honed all sides of my self and contributed to the direction I have tried to give to the school.

Without the demands of my academic study I would not have visioned or been able to drive toward the future of the school. I believe Osbourne is becoming a caring, respect filled environment that can still primarily exist to educate the pupil's intellects and emotions. The school is beginning to make those who attend feel 'normal,' included and valued, able to have higher expectations of themselves and those around them. Pupils are beginning to be reintegrated into mainstream environments and become involved 'beyond the ghetto', (Klein, 1999, p.66). My professional experiences have melded with self-reflective academic enquiry and the extensive reading that accompanies this to pursue a holistic approach towards the Osbourne boys. Social inclusion through education can only take place by turning schools inside out and questioning everything, (ibid, p.122) and this is a process that has been catalysed by my research.

Schools have to change into communities where the relationships and interactions between members of the school community reach beyond hierarchical constraints, (Maclaren, 1986, Woods, 1990, p.54). These communities should support

a model of democratic education where teachers and learners mutually respect the capabilities of each other and the curriculum reflects the creativity and capabilities of the pupils; power is shared and decisions are taken collaboratively, (Woods, 1990, p.54, Harber and Meighan, 1989, p.ix).

From the chaos and wreckage of a school in meltdown have emerged successful practice, meaningful relationships and theories that can contribute to a more general debate about schools.

Shift the blame

For Osbourne and every other under pressure school within the inner city to develop there needs to be an appreciation that schools are not the root of the problems presently encountered in society. This is a view that is not wholly supported politically or colloquially and frequently in this day and age ... “When society has grown desperately unequal it tries to assuage its guilt by finding demons to blame in the form of failing schools”, (O’Connor et al, 1999, p.260). Even in the 1970’s there were warnings that schools could not compensate for the problems in society, (Bernstein, 1970); however the message from central and local government and the inspectors they still employ still appears to be that if you cannot successfully run a school that does compensate for society, you are personally to blame.

This is an unjust and completely unhelpful stance. Schools are not separate from their social, historical, economical or political contexts and cannot be held solely responsible for the results of these relationships. Schools such as Osbourne serve highly impoverished and unstable communities. The children who attend inevitably bring their problems into school with them and these impact significantly on the efficiency and academic attainment of the school. To have systems in place that

publicly humiliate and blame schools that attempt to deal with these issues is unfair and damaging and is the result of an auditing society seeking to exert too much control and accountability. This culture must change if the most challenged of schools are to be afforded the support they need to operate successfully.

The Local Education Authority: a share of the responsibility

Unhelpful blame towards schools such as Osbourne has in my experience during this research not been sufficiently shared by the education authority responsible for the school. To oversee the decline of a school in every conceivable facet of what it should be doing whilst ploughing £1.5 million of public money into it every year is negligent if not criminal.

This out of touch, uncaring approach is even more damning because the LEA seems limited in their willingness to learn from history. The Osbourne School management team has just taken over responsibility for the EBD primary school in the borough. The behaviour I have witnessed at that school in the last month was even more dangerous and life threatening than the situation I encountered at Osbourne two years ago.

LEA's need to be more efficient, decisive and reflective in their identification of and responses to failing schools. Every day that goes by within a school that has become an unsafe place takes many weeks of long-term strategic and micro recovery work to heal. The answer is not more inspections but possibly having officers who interact more regularly and sensitively with governors meetings, school councils, parent groups and senior management teams.

To question the most senior LEA executive officers about how they can be responsible for schools that are dangerous and in meltdown is a baffling experience.

The view that was represented to me was that with 93 schools in the borough a few bad ones are inevitable. There is a lack of knowledge and interest within the higher ranking LEA officers for the detail of the awful events that are taking place within schools they fund and allegedly control.

Education authorities must accept more responsibility for the operation of their schools. Local management of schools has of course devolved much of the responsibility for school management to governing bodies but this must not mean the abrogation of responsibility. LEA's must stay in touch with all the schools they are responsible for and support all members of school communities to make sure 'school meltdown' cannot occur.

How to use the research

The benefits of the research to my professional and personal identities have been immense and have been detailed in sections one and four of the thesis. Beyond these results issues of confidentiality for the journal and thesis are of paramount importance and both documents have to remain 'unreleased'. The positive impact for my self remains untarnished by these constrictions but the usefulness of the research does not end with me.

I have reached an agreement with the teacher training college I attended twenty years ago that their Post Graduate Certificate in Education, (PGCE), students will each spend two days of their one year training course in Osbourne School. At my suggestion the college want to broaden the SEN experience of their trainees as at present most of the special education input of the course focuses on issues of inclusion in mainstream schools.

This agreement between Osbourne and the college has been extended to my teaching sessions on the PGCE concerning ‘school recovery’, ‘the state a school can get into’ and ‘personal qualities you may need as a teacher.’ This teaching will be based on edited parts of my research journal and thesis. I will supply some of the stories that punctuate the journal in an unedited form. Using the research in a way where I can have control and desensationalise the sensational whilst teaching future teachers about what can go wrong in a school and how to try to avoid school failure is a privilege and reward for the research that I anticipate with great excitement.

How would I research differently?

As a reflective record of the events of the academic year 2002-2003, the autoethnographic research journal has withstood the scrutiny I subjected it to whilst writing my thesis. However with hindsight I would probably make some adjustments to the way I enacted my research.

On a mechanical basis I think I should have recorded into the ‘Dictaphone’ on a weekly basis. This would have helped my ‘remembering’ and provided a more accurate chronology of the events. A strict weekly routine would have helped the speed, accuracy and sanity of my typist.

The style of the journal developed over time. If I embarked on a similar ethnography now I would have the confidence to include more ‘written on the day’ stories to record some the really significant events in terms of the impact upon my self. Through experience I now know the depth of self-reflection and meaningful catharsis that can be attained by writing immediately following a significant event.

The work also lacks the first hand voice of the pupils. The research and my subsequent reflections would have benefited from knowing and considering how the

pupils felt about the school, its personalities and the events within it. By this I am not suggesting that interviews should have taken place but it would have been informative and interesting to record the views of the boys in more detail. Even at the beginning of my time at Osbourne, many of the pupils were willing to engage in sensible one-to-one conversations given the correct time (usually during lessons) and location. This was an opportunity I regret missing as tracking their perceptions and viewpoints would be helpful in future work with other failing schools.

Further research?

The specific pupil viewpoint I would like to research further after completing and revising this thesis concerns issues of race and racism. I would want to investigate if the boys have any sense of the lack of overt racism at Osbourne. If they were willing to recognise and expand on this phenomenon I would be fascinated to know if they in any way grounded this in the fact that they all feel disempowered and disaffected by their socio-economic status; sharing a societal position even more disenfranchising than race.

Informative research could be conducted with parents as to their views on school recovery. I would be particularly interested to inquire in other schools in the future the parents/carers views of the use of exclusion as a sanction during school recovery.

It will also be useful to research the perception of PGCE students who attend my teaching sessions based on my experiences at Osbourne. What will be the messages they glean from these sessions and can the story of the school be represented in an interesting and educational manner whilst achieving the correct balance between sensational events and sensationalism?

And finally...

Amanda Coffey writes that a researcher never completely leaves the field as that would constitute leaving ourselves, our pasts and our memories, (1999, p.109). Osbourne will always remain with me in my reflections on my time as researcher/worker, in my reflections on the changes in my self and as a corner stone of my career. I also agree with her that in remembering and reconstructing fieldwork we romanticise and emotionalise the field, the people and ourselves, (ibid, p.100).
however...

...”having no emotional connection to the research endeavour, setting or people is indicative of a poorly executed project,” (ibid, p.159).

To this end with varying emotions I remember, (without a dry eye), all of the extraordinary cast members of my autoethnography.

This is their story as much as mine.

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