

## Developing Research Informed Professional Practice through Postgraduate Professional Development (PPD)

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### Introduction

The International Masters Programme in the Faculty of Education supports practitioners in a range of public service professions including Nursing, Social Work and Teaching in developing Research Informed Professional Practice.



Through this programme professional practitioners learn to:

- bring a research lens to their work by, for example, critically reflecting on their own practice, challenging their taken for granted assumptions and better understanding and thereby contending the use of data in their workplace
- explore, analyse and critically evaluate theoretical positions, research findings and policy discourses relating to their work
- carry out their own research to inform their professional practice



This Research Informed Teaching initiative meets the HEFCE's requirement that funding is used to ensure courses support the development of students' experiences of research and work as researchers. The aims of this development are to:

- design, explore and develop an online virtual learning environment which supports the development of critically reflective practitioners, identifies a wide range of approaches to practitioner research together with case studies, illustrative examples and writing tools and support, aimed at beginning researchers, and provides a vehicle for disseminating practitioner research findings

- explore two issues for future development across the European context of the IMP, the belief that professional practice can be improved by considering it through an academic lens, the limitations of barriers to this and the view that new programmes like the MTL should assess professional practice at M level, what might actually be assessed and how

The first phase of this project is nearing completion - materials are now developed and are awaiting publication on the IMP student support website prior to their evaluation. This part of the project is reported in the rest of this document.

This second phase is being tackled via:

- a consideration of the nature of professional practice at a theoretical level involving an analysis of the work of Donald Schön, socio-cultural theorists like Etienne Wenger, and the views of John Dewey on the nature of experience, leading to a publication (in review)
- an empirical research study on the nature of teacher expertise across 3 secondary school subjects (En, Ma and Citizenship) and three countries representative of those involved in the IMP (Den, Eng and Ger) which is ongoing. Initial findings will be reported at the European Conference on Educational Research in September 2009.

When completed this work will illuminate the processes expert teachers are engaged in, allowing us to consider how they relate to and might be improved by working at masters level as the QAA define it, barriers to this with a particular emphasis on teacher identities, whether there could be an alternative practical view of masters level, and how this might best be assessed. This second phase of the project will be reported at a later stage.

## **Background**

Postgraduate study has been identified as amongst the most effective vehicles for professional learning (Soulsby and Swain, 2003), and for teachers in England the Training and Development Agency has committed large sums of money towards funding Postgraduate Professional Development (PPD) for through masters degree study in partnership with Higher Education Institutions. The General Teaching Council for England have also produced a framework for professional development in which PPD is central (GTCE, 2003).

It has been suggested that PPD is successful because it allows practitioners to have a sustained and deep critical engagement with their practice (Soulsby and Swain, 2003). In this, PPD also has the potential to offer an approach to professional learning which recognises fully the complexity of expertise and is therefore better placed to support practitioners' development.

The development of workplace expertise is complex. Most professional development programmes suggest that professional knowledge, skill and understanding can be acquired by individuals during designed learning opportunities and then transferred to the workplace. This simplistic view has been challenged. Some critics point to the situated nature of professional practice, others to the cognitivist assumptions

implicit in such models. An alternative is provided by Schon (1983; 1987) who considers professional knowledge to be knowledge-in-practice encompassing what Sternberg & Horvath (1999) call tacit knowledge: knowledge which is grounded in professional activity and cannot be fully expressed. Such knowledge can only be created by practitioners in the context of their practice.

Knowledge for Practice			
Knowledge	Policy	Professional Learning	Research
A body of empirically verifiable knowledge is generated by experts	Disseminate/update teachers' knowledge-base to attain pre-determined goals	Teachers 'bring back' 'best practice' to their classrooms: knowledge users	Researchers, not teachers, generate knowledge
Knowledge in practice			
Constructed by Teachers in specific contexts	Focus on schools as learning communities for teachers and learners	Teachers: active agents- knowledge construction & re-inventing their practice	Systematic documentation of teachers' knowledge
Knowledge of practice			
Is problematic and contested	Should empower teachers as transformative agents	Learning is social and communal: committed to seeking significant questions	Conducted by teachers as agents of their own learning

Socio-cultural views (e.g. Engeström et al., 1999; Lave and Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998) have been identified as more helpful in understanding workplace learning. These challenge the orthodoxy that learning is an individual phenomenon, with knowledge acquired in one situation available to be used elsewhere. In socio-cultural views experts are no longer seen as the holders of principled and deeply indexed knowledge which they can apply effectively in the solution of routine and non-routine problems; rather they are those who participate fully in the norms, discourses and practices of the workplace communities in which they are expert. Learning is no longer the acquisition of knowledge within the mind of an individual, but is the movement from peripheral to full participation in such communities. Full participants adopt different stances towards the tasks in which they engage than peripheral participants, they position themselves differently and are positioned differently by others. So learning involves changing position or stance, which Burr (1995) argues influences and is influenced by learners' identities.

Thus professional practice is complex, and the improvement of professional practice requires sophisticated approaches which address not only the degree of competence of the practitioner but also how they identify with their work. In addition, practitioners engaged in PPD often have many hurdles to overcome – they are almost all part-time distance learners with full time work commitments, and for many it is a long time since they last engaged in academic study. The present initiative seeks to develop a specifically designed online community which supports such individuals, allowing their professional expertise to grow within a complex web

of distributed knowing and collaborative learning, specifically focusing on critical reflection and practitioner research (Elliot, 1991; Halsall, 1998; Stenhouse 1971; 1975).

## **The International Masters Programme**

An opportunity to reflect on and change your practice whilst developing new skills:  
*“the enhancement of practice and professional expertise must co-exist ...with ... critical reflection and analysis.”*

The MA (Ed) in the Faculty of Education at Plymouth is taught through a modular programme specifically designed to suit the needs of busy people studying part-time and often at a distance from the campus. This is called the International Masters Programme (IMP). The IMP at the University of Plymouth is an MA programme which is particularly relevant to professional practitioners such as teachers, nurses, social workers and police officers. It focuses on the professional development of practitioners, which is why the main award is Master of Arts in Education. The programme is international because it is also taught in Sweden, Holland, Germany and Switzerland and is looking to develop elsewhere.

Assessment of each module on the programme is in the form of an assignment in which, amongst other things, students are expected to:

- use writing to persuade others
- adopt a critically reflective stance to their work and that of others
- link theory and research to practice so as to better understand and improve practice
- describe their own research aimed at improving their practice

*“I think that the whole thing has been really beneficial to me personally and to the school.”*

*“The quality of the provision in my lessons certainly improved.”*

*“It was good for me personally, had spin offs for the other things I do in life and gave me confidence to talk in a different way.”*

**Lynn, Teacher and Masters Graduate**

## **The IMP Rationale**

The IMP is a large (the largest postgraduate programme in the university with nearly 2000 students), cost-effective (low overheads and a small, self-contained, self-managing and self-sufficient core teaching team) and extremely successful programme (because of its flexibility, adaptability and responsiveness it has been both innovative and entrepreneurial). Established for nearly 20 years it has stood the test of time. It has an excellent reputation for quality teaching, academic rigor and high standards in the resultant MA(Ed). It is beloved of tutors, students and

graduates, many of whom suggest working on it, and for students completing their thesis, is life-changing. These are unique, substantive and sustainable selling points.

The IMP is not skills based; it understands the centrality of content. It does not divide between academic and professional knowledge; rather it sees this as a distraction as the distinction is crude (Aristotle's distinction between *poiesis* and *praxis* is more helpful). It is not looking for ways of making itself more like professional practice; it seeks to improve professional practice by applying an academic lens to it. In all, it is rooted in considerable research with a sound underlying philosophy and as such is both substantive and persuasive. The faculty's newly launched EdD is rooted in the same rationale and was praised by the approval panel and external commentators for its inventiveness, originality and attempt to be a genuine professional doctorate and not just a taught doctorate by another name. They saw it and the IMP as being of a very high quality - as indeed did the IMP Periodic Review in 2007.

Underpinning the IMP is the assumption that by bringing academic and research understandings and approaches to bear on professional practice we can improve it. And writing is central to and irreplaceable in this academic stance. Each module effectively provides a lens through which professional practice is viewed. Two particular theoretical positions provide a backbone to the modular programme: pragmatism and social theory. Pragmatism is emphasised at all levels: knowledge is considered in relation to its usefulness rather than its truth; the relation between what is known and how it is known is emphasised; and the usefulness and limits of various claims to knowledge are evaluated throughout. Thus, although each module has a social theory core, other philosophical, social and psychological perspectives are also considered for their contribution to a wider understanding.

This is also the case for the EdD, and it is envisaged that the majority of EdD students, like those on the IMP, will be public service professionals studying part-time and often at a distance. In both programmes organisation suits part-time distance learners in full-time employment, and teaching approaches are discursive, research focused and include considerable independent study as is necessary at masters' and doctoral level.

The IMP assessment modes, specific writing frameworks, are foci of a whole research stance to professional practice. They operate organically, blending into one another, going in and out of focus, in order to accommodate the complexity of social practice. They scaffold 'seeing professional practice through an academic lens so as to improve it'.

The IMP appeals not just to education professionals, but to all involved in complex social practice. Education applies to public service professional practice in two ways. Firstly it relates to the nature of professional expertise and the ways in which such expertise can be promoted. And second, it relates to the activities of public service professional practitioners: with teaching the point is formal education; with nursing preventative medicine is educative, as is learning to manage one's own illness and

care for others; in policing, community building and so on involve identity change and so are educative; prison work involves rehabilitation which is educative as is restorative justice; social work involves identity change and empowerment; and youth work involves non-formal and informal education.

Regarding the future development of the IMP: we are anticipating a further Training and Development Agency bid will be awarded from 2010-2013 for Postgraduate Professional Development with teachers in schools; we are also looking to expand our specialist provision with teachers in the areas of Special Educational Needs Coordination, and Mandatory Qualifications for teachers of Hearing Impaired and Visually Impaired children; we are seeking to develop further inter professional and cross professional work with social workers, youth workers, occupational therapists, nurses, police officers as well as teachers; and we are seeking to expand our work with FE lecturers in Partner Colleges.

## **The Project: an outline of phase 1**

The first phase of the project comprised first a data gathering exercise to ascertain the key areas for support needed by IMP students beginning the programme, second a consideration of each area in detail using research to develop suitable approaches to improving students' understanding, and finally an evaluation of the effectiveness of the developed resources by tutors and students.

## **Identifying areas of difficulty for IMP students**

This was done in a number of ways:

- an analysis of student assignments and tutor feedback from 2006-8
- an analysis of external examiner comments from 2006-8
- a focus group meeting with tutors and students
- an invitation via the student and tutor newsletter for suggestions and ideas

This led us to refine and identify a small number of key areas which students would benefit from extra support. As part of the project we had decided to target students new to the IMP - some of whom had not engaged in academic study for many years. Thus materials would provide an induction resource as well as ongoing support. However we also wanted the materials to be helpful to IMP tutors, many of whom are contracted, part time, and located at considerable distance from the university. Finally we wanted the materials to link to Resined (see Appendix 3), the online research in education materials aimed at students approaching and engaged in the dissertation phase of the IMP. We felt these materials would be useful to a much wider group of students, but in their present form were challenging and so wishes to provide an intermediary for new students.

The key areas identified were:

- criticality
- approaches to practice based research
- critical reflection
- writing as a form of inquiry

- making an argument in academic writing

### **Criticality**

This was the main area of difficulty for IMP students. The notion of justification using evidence seemed to be easily understood, but was not reflected in students writing. Following Moon's (2004) definition of criticality we adopted a stance using Poulson and Wallace (2004) as a basis for linking critical reading to critical writing. We identified three broad layers of evidence that students might use in justifying their assertions: their own personal experiences in anecdotal form; their formalised experiences using approaches to critical reflection and practice based research; and the writings of others. To the latter we added the notion of considering the confidence one can have on the ideas of others and their relevance to one's own context and work.

### **Approaches to practice based research**

Many students were confused by their notions of proper 'scientific' research and had a simple 'realist' view of research findings using a correspondence notion to truth. This led them to see their own small scale qualitative research as invalid. We adopted a pragmatist stance by considering the trustworthiness one can have in research and the confidence one can have in its appropriateness to our own practice.

### **Critical reflection**

Some students had difficulties recognising that this did not involve therapeutic introspection, but rather an outward looking stance linking one's own experiences to those of other researchers and writers in order to help better understand them and act on them with confidence that one's actions will neither be unhelpful nor a complete waste of time. Here we made extensive use of Moon's (2004) research and developmental materials.

### **Writing as a form of inquiry**

Richardson's (2000) views formed the basis for this work which challenged a dominant view amongst some students that writing was simply reporting what had already happened. Writing involves more than reporting – it is also a reflective act which is an essential part of the process of knowledge construction. The product is a record of thinking and reflection, of an individual's struggle to make sense of the world, and as such allows the process of knowledge creation to be scrutinised. Richardson (2000) summarises this view of writing as a method of inquiry thus:

“Although we usually think about writing as a mode of ‘telling’ ... [it] is also a way of ‘knowing’, - a method of discovery and analysis. By writing in different ways we discover new aspects of our topic and our relationship to it. Form and content are inseparable.” (Richardson, 2000, p923)

### **Making an argument**

Students had some difficulty in identifying the key features of arguments and often write either polemics or meandering assignments which seemed vague and drifted

towards conclusions. We adopted a debating perspective suggesting a clear argument should present both sides in detail, critically analyse these and then come to a balanced conclusion.

Each of these was then couched in induction, support and wider contextual themes, and in so doing we came up with the following structure for the online resource.

## **Developing the online materials: Sections of the Research Informed Professional Practice Virtual Learning Environment**

<b>Section</b>	<b>Outline</b>
1	Induction (open access): general information, expectations, what you do in an assignment; examples; recordings of student experiences
2	Basic information: structuring an assignment; tips; drafting; submission; Harvard; ethics; glossary; links to handbook
3	Introducing the modes: include UAT stuff at student level
4	Using electronic resources: library resources; end note; managing big files in word
5	Introducing practitioner research: links to RESINED
6	Study skills
7	The deep criteria and developing criticality

We drew on research on the design of VLEs in the development of our resource. There is a wide literature relating to online teaching and learning in general. However, in their review of 76 published studies on online teaching/learning, Mary Tallent-Runnels and her colleagues (2006) found research inconclusive about how and why online approaches should be used. They were able to say:

‘... online instruction is welcomed by students because it provides learners with convenience and autonomy. This positive attitude toward online learning is more evident among students who have prior experience with computer assisted instruction and who are proficient in computer skills. Even students who have little experience with technology in teaching and

learning find that online course experience eases their computer anxiety and improves their computer proficiency.’(p116)

Because of the nature of VLEs we decided to make the materials as multi-dimensional as possible - linking pages for quick movement around the resource but also making use of texts, interactive diagrams, photographs, video and mp3 extracts, PowerPoint presentations, and samples of student assignments annotated to exemplify particular points. We also wanted the students to be able to respond if they wished to these, but without this being too onerous for tutors, and so included the opportunity to answer questions which would be automatically marked or which led to an opportunity for self assessment. Finally the possibility to email tutors with queries was included to support unforeseen or complex issues.

## Evaluating the materials

This has not yet been completed because the development of the materials described above was stalled through two specific difficulties: first, unexpected demands were placed on the project team linked to the move of the faculty from Exmouth to Plymouth coupled with a change of leadership in terms of both style and strategy; and second the loss of three of the project team of six who were promoted to jobs elsewhere without replacement meant that the remaining team members were under huge time and work pressure and unable to draw on their ex-colleagues support, knowledge and skills. This is largely why the completion date for this project has been pushed back. In the autumn term we will complete the evaluation of phase 1 of the project and complete phase 2.

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## Appendix 1: Excerpts from Section 5 – Practitioner Research

### Carry out research

*... to inform your professional practice*

An **Evaluative Case Study** is an enquiry into an educational programme, system, project or event to determine its worthiness, as judged by analysis by researchers who will convey this to interested audiences. It is:

- Conducted within a localised boundary of space and time, for example your setting with a particular group of pupils during a particular half term
- Conducted into interesting aspects of an educational activity, or programme, or institution, or system
- Mainly in its natural context and within an ethic of respect for persons
- In order to inform the judgements and decisions of practitioners or policy makers

**Action research** is a practical approach to professional inquiry in any social situation. The context for professional inquiry might change, but the principles and processes involved in action research are the same, regardless of the nature of the practice.

Carr and Kemmis (1986) describe action research as being about:

- the improvement of practice
- the improvement of the understanding of practice
- the improvement of the situation in which the practice takes place

It is impossible to separate these three areas in the complexity of practice in social situations. A simple representation of the action research cycle is as follows:



## Case Studies – Teacher Examples

### **Title: *Promoting exploratory talk in the classroom***

**Initial ideas:** This class teacher has already identified a number of suggested approaches for developing exploratory talk in his reading of the National Oracy Project materials. He intends to audit levels of exploratory talk in his Year 5 classroom using a structured observation schedule, introduce an approach and review the level of exploratory talk generated. He will then repeat this process once more. He intends to observe a group of 4 articulate and high attaining children each time.

Some issues raised by the tutor:

- How many approaches will he evaluate?
- Why were these selected?
- Is the range of sources and reading too limited?
- Is the approach to audit trustworthy?
- How structured is the observation schedule and how will this affect the data collected?
- What are the pros and cons of structured observation?
- How will observations be analysed?

### **Title: *One child's inclusion in mainstream schooling***

**Initial ideas:** This classroom assistant is assigned to work solely with a child with moderate learning difficulties in a mainstream school. She intends to describe the child's day to day experiences and interview him to ascertain his feelings about these. She then intends to draw on the literature relating to such inclusion to make suggestions about how this child's experience can be improved.

Some issues raised by the tutor:

- Clarify the rationale - what is the research question?
- How does the research question link to the data being collected?
- Clarify definitions and context with reference to appropriate literature
- Have the ethical issues been fully explored?

### **Title: *A survey of 15 year old students' written comments on their annual reports, and their beliefs and attitudes about writing these comments***

**Initial ideas:** This deputy head is concerned with the quality of student's comments on their end of year reports. He says they are entirely descriptive and predictable. He wants to identify why students, even those who are high achievers, do not write evaluative comments on their reports. He intends to give a questionnaire to the whole of Year 10 (14 and 15 year old students), exploring their views about this activity and look at their answers alongside a copy of their Year 9 comments. He then intends to select 4 students to interview about their ideas, before making suggestions about how this process can be improved.

Some issues raised by the tutor:

- Essentially this is a simple study
- Intention matches method
- Might have been more adventurous, but the present study is manageable and achievable
- Need to focus on data collection methods: What are the strengths and weaknesses of questionnaires? What are the strengths and weaknesses of interviews? How was the sample chosen and how do you justify this? etc

## Appendix 2: Excerpts from Section 7 - Criticality

### Bringing a research lens to professional work

*... by, for example, critically reflecting on your own practice, challenging taken for granted assumptions and better understanding and thereby contending the use of data in your workplace*

“Critical thinking is the capacity to work with complex ideas whereby a person can make effective provision of evidence to justify a reasonable judgement. The evidence, and therefore the judgement, will pay appropriate attention to context.”  
(Moon, 2004)

Being critical in academic enquiry means:

- Adopting an attitude of scepticism
- Questioning the quality of your and others’ claims to knowledge
- Scrutinising claims to see if they are convincing
- Respecting others as people at all times
- Being open minded, willing to be convinced
- Being constructive, utilising scepticism and open mindedness to achieve a worthwhile goal

(Poulson & Wallace, 2004)

#### **Box 1.3**

*Practice makes perfect – or does it?*

*Which of these statements do you agree with, and why? Your answers will reflect your assumptions about the relationship between different kinds of knowledge and their ability to influence your own and others’ practice.*

- 1** ‘Research and theory merely tell practitioners what they know already, but perhaps hadn’t thought about in that way.’
- 2** ‘Practitioners should do as they are told; policy-makers know best.’
- 3** ‘There’s nothing so practical as a good theory!’ (A favourite saying of the social psychologist Kurt Lewin)
- 4** ‘Research gets at the truth but practice is biased because it is driven by ideologies.’
- 5** ‘Great talkers are not necessarily effective practitioners; knowing what to do in theory is not the same as knowing how to do it in practice.’
- 6** ‘Good practice involves making choices about action; theory and research help to inform those choices.’
- 7** ‘Researchers simply identify patterns in practice so there’s no need to inform research with theory.’
- 8** ‘You don’t need to know any theory to be an effective practitioner.’
- 9** ‘Trainers have the solutions to practical problems so put their prescriptions faithfully into practice.’
- 10** ‘Theory is bunk – practitioners need to know what to do, not why they should do it.’

## Explore, analyse and critically evaluate

*... theoretical positions, research findings and policy discourses relating to your work*

As a critical reader of the literature:	As a self critical writer:
Consider the authors purpose in writing the account	State your purpose in what you write to make it clear to your readers
Examine the structure of the account to help you understand how the authors develop their argument	Create a logical structure in your account that assists you with developing your arguments, and make it clear to your readers
Seek to identify the main claims the authors make in putting forward their argument	State your own main claims clearly to help your readers understand your argument
Adopt a sceptical stance towards the authors' claims, checking whether they support convincingly what they assert	Assume that your readers adopt a sceptical stance to your work so you must convince them by supporting your claims as far as possible
Question whether the authors have sufficient backing for the generalisations they make	Avoid making sweeping generalisations in your writing which you cannot justify to your readers
Check what the authors mean by key terms in the account and whether they use these terms consistently	Define the key terms you employ in your account so that your readers are clear what you mean and use these terms consistently
Consider whether and how any values guiding the authors' work may affect what they claim	Make explicit any values that guide what you write
Distinguish between respecting the authors as people and being sceptical about what they write	Avoid attacking authors as people but are sceptical about what they write
Keep an open mind, retaining a conditional willingness to be convinced	Assume that your readers are open minded about your work and are willing to be convinced if you can adequately support your claims
Check that everything the authors have written is relevant to their purpose in writing the account and the argument they develop	Sustain your focus throughout your account, and avoid irrelevancies and digressions in what you write
Expect to be given the information that is needed for you to be in a position to check any other literature sources to which the authors refer	Ensure that your referencing in the text and the reference list is complete and accurate so that your readers are in a position to check your sources

## Exploring quality and depth in reflection

(many thanks to Jenny Moon, Bournemouth University for permission to use this)

After reading these accounts, go through all of the accounts and identify features of the reflection that progressively change through the accounts. For example, the accounts change from being 'story' to focusing on issues in the incident. In the later accounts there is more recognition that there are multiple perspectives etc. List the ways in which the accounts 'deepen'.

### The Park (1)

I went through the park the other day. The sun shone sometimes but large clouds floated across the sky in a breeze. It reminded me of a time that I was walking on St David's Head in Wales – when there was a hard and bright light and anything I looked at was bright. It was really quite hot – so much nicer than the day before which was rainy. I went over to the children's playing field. I had not been there for a while and wanted to see the improvements. There were several children there and one, in particular, I noticed, was in too many clothes for the heat. The children were running about and this child became red in the face and began to slow down and then he sat. He must have been about 10. Some of the others called him up again and he got to his feet. He stumbled into the game for a few moments, tripping once or twice. It seemed to me that he had just not got the energy to lift his feet. Eventually he stumbled down and did not get up but he was still moving and he shuffled into a half sitting and half lying position watching the other children and I think he was calling out to them. I don't know.

Anyway, I had to get on to get to the shop to buy some meat for the chilli that my children had asked for their party. The twins had invited many friends round for an end-of-term celebration of the beginning of the summer holidays. They might think that they have cause to celebrate but it makes a lot more work for me when they are home. I find that their holiday time makes a lot more work.

It was the next day when the paper came through the door – in it there was a report of a child who had been taken seriously ill in the park the previous day. He was fighting for his life in hospital and they said that the seriousness of the situation was due to the delay before he was brought to hospital. The report commented on the fact that he had been lying unattended for half an hour before someone saw him. By then the other children had gone. It said that that several passers-by might have seen him looking ill and even on the ground and the report went on to ask why passers-by do not take action when they see that something is wrong. The article was headed 'Why do they 'Walk on by'? I have been terribly upset since then. James says I should not worry – it is just a headline.

### The Park (2)

I went to the park the other day. I was going to the supermarket to get some meat to make the chilli that I had promised the children. They were having one of their end-of-term celebrations with friends. I wonder what drew me to the playground and why I ended up standing and watching those children playing with a rough old

football? I am not sure as I don't usually look at other people's children – I just did. Anyway there were a number of kids there. I noticed, in particular, one child who seemed to be very overdressed for the weather. I try now to recall what he looked like - his face was red. He was a boy of around 10 – not unlike Charlie was at that age – maybe that is why I noticed him to start with when he was running around with the others. But then he was beginning to look distressed. I felt uneasy about him – sort of maternal but I did not do anything. What could I have done? I remember thinking, I had little time and the supermarket would get crowded. What a strange way of thinking, in the circumstances!

In retrospect I wish I had acted. I ask myself what stopped me - but I don't know what I might have done at that point. Anyway he sat down, looking absolutely exhausted and as if he had no energy to do anything. A few moments later, the other children called him up to run about again. I felt more uneasy and watched as he got up and tried to run, then fell, ran again and fell and half sat and half lay. Still I did nothing more than look – what was going on with me?

Eventually I went on I tell myself now that it was really important to get to the shops. It was the next day when the paper came through the door that I had a real shock. In the paper there was a report of a child who had been taken seriously ill in the park the previous day. He was fighting for his life in the hospital and the situation was much more serious because there had been such a delay in getting help. The report commented on the fact that he had been lying, unattended, for half an hour or more. At first, I wondered why the other children had not been more responsible. The article went on to say that several passers-by might have seen him playing and looking ill and the report questioned why passers-by do not take action when they see that something is wrong.

The event has affected me for some days but I do not know where to go or whom to tell. I do want to own up to my part in it to someone though.

### **The Park (3)**

The incident happened in Ingle Park and it is very much still on my mind. There was a child playing with others. He looked hot and unfit and kept sitting down but the other children kept on getting him back up and making him play with them. I was on my way to the shop and only watched the children for a while before I walked on. Next day it was reported in the paper that the child had been taken to hospital seriously ill – very seriously ill. The report said that there were several passers-by in the park who had seen the child looking ill and who had done nothing. It was a scathing report about those who do not take action in such situations.

Reading the report, I felt dreadful and it has been very difficult to shift the feelings. I did not stop to see to the child because I told myself that I was on my way to the shops to buy food for a meal that I had to cook for the children's party – what do I mean that *I had to* cook it?. Though I saw that the child was ill, I didn't do anything. It is hard to say what I was really thinking at the time – to what degree I was determined to go on with my day in the way I had planned it (the party really was

not that important was it?). Or did I genuinely not think that the boy was ill – but just over-dressed and a bit tired? To what extent did I try to make convenient excuses and to what extent was my action based on an attempt to really understand the situation? Looking back, I could have cut through my excuses at the time – rather than now.

I did not go over to the child and ask what was wrong but I should have done. I could have talked to the other children - and even got one of the other children to call for help. I am not sure if the help would have been ambulance or doctor at that stage – but it does not matter now. If he had been given help then, he might not be fighting for his life.

It would be helpful to me if I could work out what I was really thinking and why I acted as I did. This event has really shaken me to my roots – more than I would have expected. It made me feel really guilty. I do not usually do wrong, in fact I think of myself as a good person. This event is also making me think about actions in all sorts of areas of my life. It reminds me of some things in the past as when my uncle died – but then again I don't really think that that is relevant - he was going to die anyway. My bad feelings then were due to sheer sadness and some irrational regrets that I did not visit him on the day before. Strangely it also reminds me of how bad I felt when Charlie was ill while we went on that anniversary weekend away. As I think more about Charlie being ill, I recognise that there are commonalities in the situations. I also keep wondering if I knew that boy....

#### **The Park (4)**

It happened in Ingle Park and this event is very much still on my mind. It feels significant. There was a child playing with others. He looked hot and unfit and kept sitting down but the other children kept on getting him back up and making him play with them. I was on my way to the shop and only watched the children for a while before I walked on. Next day it was reported in the paper that the child had been taken to hospital seriously ill – very seriously ill. The report said that there were several passers-by in the park who had seen the child looking ill and who had done nothing. It was a scathing report about those who do not take action in such situation.

It was the report initially that made me think more deeply. It kept coming back in my mind and over the next few days - I began to think of the situation in lots of different ways. Initially I considered my urge to get to the shop – regardless of the state of the boy. That was an easy way of excusing myself – to say that I had to get to the shop. Then I began to go through all of the agonising as to whether I could have mis-read the situation and really thought that the boy was simply over-dressed or perhaps play-acting or trying to gain sympathy from me or the others. Could I have believed that the situation was all right? All of that thinking, I now notice, would also have let me off the hook – made it not my fault that I did not take action at the time.

I talked with Tom about my reflections on the event – on the incident, on my thinking about it at the time and then immediately after. He observed that my sense of myself as a ‘good person who always lends a helping hand when others need help’ was put in some jeopardy by it all. At the time and immediately after, it might have been easier to avoid shaking my view of myself than to admit that I had avoided facing up to the situation and admitting that I had not acted as ‘a good person’. With this hindsight, I notice that I can probably find it more easy to admit that I am not always ‘a good person’ and that I made a mistake in retrospect than immediately after the event. I suspect that this may apply to other situations.

As I think about the situation now, I recall some more of the thoughts – or were they feelings mixed up with thoughts? I remember a sense at the time that this boy looked quite scruffy and reminded me of a child who used to play with Charlie. We did not feel happy during the brief period of their friendship because this boy was known as a bully and we were uneasy either that Charlie would end up being bullied, or that Charlie would learn to bully. Funnily enough we were talking about this boy – I now remember – at the dinner table the night before. The conversation had reminded me of all of the agonising about the children’s friends at the time. The fleeting thought / feeling was possibly something like this:– if this boy is like one I did not feel comfortable with – then maybe he deserves to get left in this way. Maybe he was a brother of the original child. I remember social psychology research along the lines of attributing blame to victims to justify their plight. Then it might not have been anything to do with Charlie’s friend.

So I can see how I looked at that event and perhaps interpreted it in a manner that was consistent with my emotional frame of mind at the time. Seeing the same events without that dinner-time conversation might have led me to see the whole thing in an entirely different manner and I might have acted differently. The significance of this whole event is chilling when I realise that my lack of action nearly resulted in his death – and it might have been because of an attitude that was formed years ago in relation to a different situation.

This has all made me think about how we view things. The way I saw this event at the time was quite different to the way I see it now – even this few days later. Writing an account at the time would have been different to the account – or several accounts that I would write now. I cannot know what ‘story’ is ‘true’. The bullying story may be one that I have constructed retrospectively - fabricated. Interestingly I can believe that story completely.

### **Appendix 3: Research in Education (RESINED)**

This is an online resource which supports students in making sense of research in education: <http://www.edu.plymouth.ac.uk/resined/>

The components are currently:

- Beginning Research
- Action Research in Education
- Case Study
- Interviews in Education Research
- Observation Techniques
- Education Research in the Postmodern
- Evaluation Research in Education
- Narrative Approaches to Education Research
- Presentations
- Qualitative Research
- Quantitative Methods in Education Research
- Questionnaires in Education Research
- Writing Up Research

As the components are on-line they can be accessed at any time that suits the student, providing they can find a networked computer (at home, work, your local library, any University campus, etc). All IMP (Education) students and tutors are entitled to make use of the materials free of charge.

However, only those students who enrol for the Masters phase will be eligible to undertake the 'Research in Education' module for credit. These students must undertake at least 3 of the '**tasks**' set (listed at the end of each component). One task must relate to the nature of educational research, one to methods of data collection and the other to data analysis. Although students at PGDipEd level may also undertake such tasks they are not entitled to feedback from the component tutors (although they may, by prior arrangement, be able to submit them to their PGDip module tutors for comment). MA (Education) students however, are entitled to such feedback. In addition, MA (Education) students must complete a Formal Proposal for Masters Dissertation (maximum 2,000 words), which is the sole means by which the module is assessed.

When you do visit RESINED, please take into account that it is still 'under construction' and will remain so indefinitely. We are working to improve things – putting on new components, improving what's there already and sorting out the presentation. We need your help in doing this, so please send your comments and suggestions to the module leader, Nick Pratt, at: **[nick.pratt@plymouth.ac.uk](mailto:nick.pratt@plymouth.ac.uk)**