

WORK AND THE INNER....PART TWO

I was to be head for something like 20 years and in all that time I was to experience OFTEN this same reality that had been so helpful to me during the Headship interview. Sometimes it would be on nothing short of a daily basis. Often there were those little coincidences - like my thinking of a story or exciting theme for assembly just “out of the blue” and then finding books or materials to support this “just by chance”!

One of the most memorable of these – and certainly one that caused some amazement amongst the rest of the staff-happened when I was stuck for a topic to do with the children in the first week or two of a new school year. I always aimed to do something a little different and, hopefully, of real interest to the children at that time, especially, to get them off to the best possible start for the new term. It was also interesting for me to do something I had not done before. But on this particular year I was struggling to come up with anything I had not done before. I asked my colleagues to help but nothing really “clicked.” Then came the day before term and it struck me that I would do a topic on “Elephants.”

I did not know where that idea came from but I had not done that before and the children usually enjoyed anything to do with animals, so I settled on that. The *next day* a large brown envelope came through the school post addressed to “The Elephant Expert”! It was a complete pack of ideas and activities about elephants, covering- wait for it!- ALL THE REQUIREMENTS OF THE NEW NATIONAL CURRICULUM!! We were truly amazed! At first, I thought a friend had sent it, so I rang him. No, he had not. This pack had been sent by a Conservation group into all schools. My colleagues were green with envy- all that time-consuming planning done for me! All I had to do was check it and change it to suit my children. At that time, when the National Curriculum was so new, we were spending hours on such planning. It was really good not to have to do this for once! The ideas and activities proved to be excellent and we had an educational and happy time with it. Even the parents joined in and we made a hall display of everyone’s paintings, photos, pictures, writing etc for everyone to see.

It was by no means always as positive and easy as this. In fact, I was to be most aware of Latihan help in my most challenging times and, goodness me, my Headship was to have enough of those.

The most dramatic and one of the most difficult times was when I encountered something of a parent's revolt against the many changes going on in the school, largely because of the rush of Government initiatives in the wake of a National Curriculum. Virtually nothing was to be left unchanged as the Government embarked on an educational revolution, so that administration, finances, the way schools were managed and, of course, the whole curriculum was changed. This involved a massive demand on teacher's time outside the classroom to try to make sense of it all, let alone to try to implement it. The changes came fast and furiously and it was to become a struggle just to keep up and even then few staff were sure they were understanding things properly, let alone doing it "right." Generally, teacher's morale dropped to an all time low and many old hands left and the Government had to try massive financial handouts to attract "good quality people" into the profession.

When I first became Head I was responsible for about £3000; in a couple of years it was over £100,000 with only very basic training in how to handle it! When, for example, I told a friend who was a Director of a small company the amount of training I had for using computers for management, he stared at me in disbelief: I had one day's training whereas everyone in his business would have had at least a week! Things were made more difficult in our case because of a general belief that the changes were leading to lower standards and, in particular, in one of our teacher's classes. Both beliefs in my view were completely unfounded. Nonetheless the whole thing came to a head at our Annual Meeting For Parents- a meeting set up by the Government for parents and Governors to meet together to "discuss the Governing Body's work over the past year." This seemed a good idea except that usually few parents attended: many schools having one or two, some none at all! This year our very large hall was full to the brim with VERY noisy parents! Just about every parent was there- over 100 of them!

This was huge test for *me*- me and not the Governors because usually they would not have sufficient knowledge of the curriculum or other educational matters to deal with things in the amount of detail that would be needed. I was in effect on

trial here as any criticisms of the school, or staff in the school, would in the end be seen as my responsibility. There have been, and still are, moments in my life when I am “given” a confidence I do not normally have: it just seems to come “out of the blue” and feels like a gift. This has most often been when I have most needed it as on this occasion when both the school’s and my, reputation were clearly on the line.

As I drove to the meeting, I knew what was ahead of me: the village had been buzzing with it all for days now. Yet inside myself I felt strangely as if I could “hear laughter in the background”, followed by a real upsurge of happiness and the words “Now we’ll show him!” formed clearly-again inside myself- and they left me feeling on top of the world! Next came a feeling of tremendous strength (which I most certainly do not normally possess!) and then the image of there being “an ocean inside me...the tides of this life could sometimes reach the shores of this Inner as now!” I actually felt impregnable!

I pulled up at the school only to find so many cars there already that it took me ages to find a space- and I was early. I walked into the hall alone and already it was full! I took my place at the front, central to everyone’s view. The Governors either side of me were unnaturally quiet and humourless. A lady, the leader of the parent faction, in fact, walked down the central aisle, dressed in a bright red dress and hat (**no missing her then!**) and sat right at the front in a seat that someone had *RESERVED* for her. Then my chair of Governors noticed that following her were some obvious supporters who did not have children at the school but had chosen to send their children to private schools. Strictly speaking, they should not be allowed at this meeting because the law specifically said the meetings were for Governors and parents only (consequently none of the teaching staff- except the teacher Governor- were here either. Thus, I was also denied their support: this was to be a one man show.) Immediately, my chair of Governors got up from her seat and went boldly over to the group and asked them to leave. Normally this probably would not have been done because these evenings were usually good humoured and full of interesting talk. They refused at first but after a commotion and some raised voices with the promise that the evening would not go ahead unless they left, order was restored and these well dressed-up “soldiers” went, presumably to the local pub to await news! Then the meeting got underway...

Many questions and comments had been carefully prepared. The law also said that these had to be submitted “in the box provided” at least 24 hours before the meeting “to allow for necessary facts to be assembled” so I knew what the first questions were. Usually as the meeting went on more questions would arise there and then and that, I suppose, is when things could get tricky. Again, however, my Chair handled things protectively by saying at the beginning that only questions submitted in advance would be dealt with at this meeting. As it turned out that did not have to be enforced. I answered the first question forcefully and comprehensively I thought; then the next...and so on. Soon I was actually enjoying myself and especially enjoying this new-found feeling of personal strength! Question after question came and went...then a note was passed along the line of Governors to me from a Governor who used to be Head of the school: “This is going really well,” it said, “Well done!” I could see the meeting visibly relax as the 100 or so parents quietened: they were really listening to me. I had often encountered times when the children in school listened so intently to me that I felt “I had them in the palm of my hand” (I loved those times and often “hammed things up” or played them along for the hell of it!) This, however, was the first time that I experienced this with such an audience of adults. I have to say I loved it as much as with the children: it was such a feeling of control!! I knew full well though that this was not “my” control. Both with the children and with these adults I knew the control came from the “Somewhere Else” of the Latihan!

From all points of view, the Governors considered this to be a very successful evening. After the meeting the parents did not seem to want to go home. So many came up to say how much they enjoyed the evening and how grateful they were. Many came up and simply shook my hands and said things like “Congratulations!” and “You were magnificent!” My former Head said “I was so proud of you, John” One of my non-teaching staff who was also a parent said “Wow, I have never seen you so....so...assertive” The next day several of the Governors called into school to say how well the whole thing had gone and I even received some little gifts from them (very unusual!)... a big bouquet of flowers, a bottle of whisky, some chocolates...

I have to say, I was deeply affected by all of this. The parents and I were much closer after and, during my time as Head, I grew to consider many of them to be personal friends rather than simply parents of children at the school where I

worked. I also felt totally convinced now of the reality of the Inner life (“Now we’ll show him!”): of those deeper forces that had become so evident to me through the Subud Latihan. In spite of all the things that had happened to me I was the perennial doubter: I could always find an alternative and less “supernatural” explanation. In my work, I simply could not do this. I had spent 30 + years before Subud being nervous, ill at ease, lacking in confidence with people, especially large groups of people. After Subud, I was to take this sort of thing more and more in my stride as I spoke to large audiences of teachers, educationalists, Governors etc etc. I KNOW that without the latihan I would not have been able to do this- and possibly I would not have had the opportunity either. I had not for the previous 30 years after all.

Not all my Inner help was on such a large outer scale as this, of course. I remember my lowest times when I had gone into school feeling depressed and even bewildered by what was happening to me and my family and *the moment* I stepped into the school building those feelings seemed to be taken away from me. I wrote at the time that “it does not matter what state I go into school in or even how unprepared I feel for the day, it is as if “my classroom organises me” because as soon as I get there, ideas just come and I feel myself inspired and even excited about my day! And even if that does not work, I have only to see the children and all thoughts of myself vanish. Then I get some blessed relief from my own life as I get so involved with theirs!” This, of course, was the explanation I gave to those many people who saw me so unhappy outside of school and who wondered how on earth I could carry on working. They simply could not understand how my job actually released me from so much pain even if it was only while I was with the children. As soon as they left, of course, the black clouds would immediately gather round me again...Because of the help that school gave me at this time I learnt to treat my time there much more wholeheartedly and seriously because I felt so grateful to it!.

Perhaps, one of the most helpful pieces of “advice” my latihan gave me was the most specific, direct and simple: I was to be close to the latihan in my work and one way to do this was simply to sing AS IN THE LATIHAN to myself. I was to do this a lot and especially when I was most harassed. Even years later it made me laugh when colleagues would say: “You sound happy, John!” or when one of the children would say as I sometimes heard them: “Mr. H is always happy. He is

always singing!” These would be times when I was at my least content and my most stressed! I hope now, as I think of it, that this singing did something, at least, to shield them from how I was really feeling!”