

“A new sense of purpose”

By Chris Thomson

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I noticed a few days ago that I submitted my final research proposal on the 18th October 2012. That means the dissertation I’m about to submit has taken just over 7 months to complete.

I’ve been researching storytelling and how we use it at work. Stories have fascinated me for a long time so I’ve really enjoyed smuggling them into what I do for a living. I’m a training consultant and I work with universities and colleges.

The story of how the dissertation got written is probably more complicated than it should have been but has had important effects on how I work.

I actually started thinking about this dissertation in 2 years ago but couldn’t quite settle down to a topic. I started with a very complicated idea that would have meant interviewing people across the whole country over many months.

In the end a friendly word from Guy, my tutor, made me realise that I was probably biting off more than I could chew and to try something I had a chance of actually finishing. We settled on a new idea of a case study about a team working at Sheffield Hallam University.

That too came to a juddering halt. I’d not been feeling that great, my confidence was at a low ebb and my deadline had been brought forward. I needed to work fast.

In the end I chose to focus on what I should have been looking at all along. The organisation I work for, Netskills, has been interested in storytelling for a while and here was a great opportunity to take a good close look at what we were doing about it.

And it was probably possible to do it in 7 months.

The thing about studying part time is that life has a habit of intervening.

When I joined Netskills in 2010 I'd been on this course for a year. It was a time of massive change for my family and me. We'd moved to a new city, had to make new friends and were finding our feet in new jobs.

I'd been working with schools before. It was a job I'd absolutely loved and had become expert at a few things but now that had all changed. The culture I was now working in was very different and for a long time I was anxious that all the things that I had been good at weren't really all that valuable any more.

Everyone else seemed to be expert at something but I spent the first couple of years at Netskills feeling rather lost and lacking purpose.

Doing this research has meant spending a lot of time reading and trying to understand what stories actually are and why we tell them.

While I've been doing it I've built up quite a bit of knowledge about something that I love and I've discovered that a lot of people share that interest with me and want to talk about it.

So, I find myself regaining that sense of purpose I felt I'd mislaid 3 years ago.

Soon, once this dissertation is handed in, I'll be able to file away all my papers and return the books to the library and then it's just about the wait until I find out whether what I've done is worth those few extra letters after my name. M. S. C.

Right now though I need a break and think my kids would really like their daddy back.