<center>**Chapter 10**</center>

<center>**Do I live out my values of empowerment in my practice with students and does my practice need improving?**</center>

Introduction

The text in this chapter has derived from action inquiry into my practice as a teacher and educator in response to the inquiry question: "Do I live out my values of empowerment in my practice with students and does my practice need improving?" My inquiry consisted of:- a) Observation and reflections on my teaching over a two-year cycle which spanned a range of classes with mixed groups of both black and with students; b) Observation by an external person of two of my teaching sessions of a module for black students only (Black Workers in White Welfare Agencies) over the same two year cycle, one in each year. And C) My observation of and reflections on my teaching of the same module over the two years.

The need to keep this thesis within manageable proportions has meant that I have had to be more selective about what I present, so I have chosen to present text from my teaching of the module for black students, which is in keeping with the general aims of the research. I have focused more on the sessions which were observed by the external person but I have included material from my teaching of other sessions in that module. I have presented the material in four parts **Part 1** *Reasons for My Inquiry*; **Part *2* *My Methodology;* **Part 3** *First Cycle of Inquiry*; **Part 4***Second Cycle of Inquiry* and **Part 5** *Overall Evaluation of My Practice*.

Part 1
Reasons for My Inquiry

Rowan (1981), in his description of the research cycle, argues that at certain points the gathering of more and more information is not enough and decisions have to be made as to what to aim for and what the major contradictions are. He argues for the need for action, which may require some daring and some risk-taking. He states, "Action itself is the thing to get into. In action I am fully present, here now…I must be ready to improvise if unexpected reactions occur. I have to be really with the others" (p.99). Inquiring into my practice with black

students is where I chose to improvise and take action as I noticed my reactions to what was emerging in the Co-operative Inquiry.

My engagement with the co-operative inquiry led me to be curious about a claim I make that I empower students and, in particular black students in my teaching in ways that would lead to social action. But do I really achieve that? I was interested in knowing whether I lived out my values of empowerment in practice and what my contradictions were. I asked myself, if one of my aims in this research was to inquire into black students' experiences in higher education, how did they experience me as a black lecturer and how did I contribute to their experiences. This led me to ask questions of myself about my practice as a teacher and facilitator. I asked questions like: "What impact has my role as a black teacher had on my students, especially black students?" "Does my practice need improving?"

My claim for the empowerment of students stems from my belief systems and political orientation towards critical thinking and self-actualisation and from the notion of a critical pedagogy. I subscribe to student-centred and self-directed learning. I see students as bringing special knowledge, experience and skills to a course. I wish to encourage the development of knowledgeable and skilled practitioners, who can offer critical questioning of existing structures and services. One principle that I believe underpins my teaching therefore, is that students in my classes should be actively engaged in their learning so that their ideas and thinking are challenged in ways which provoke them to reconsider, and better articulate, their understanding of the subject matter and make new meaning that could lead to action and change. I wanted to know whether I encouraged this, and whether my teaching was interactive and challenging. I wanted to ascertain whether I did provide a safe environment in which students could take risks and face their truth and in which exploration, challenge and change could flourish.

Tensions, dilemmas and contradictions are inherent in empowerment practice and I am aware that although I may subscribe to discourses based on concepts of emancipation, liberation and democracy and aim for students' freedom of choice, unintended consequences may arise. I may impose such frameworks and my model of practice may dominate and unintentionally oppress students. Nevertheless, empowerment is a goal which I want to pursue and I wanted to know what happened in my practice, what actions I took, how I behaved, in the pursuance of such a goal. I was aware that such an inquiry would involve needing to be self-critical and deconstruct my practice for any oppressive behaviours and actions. Therefore, during 1997 and 1998, I chose to embark on a

research inquiry into how my practice affected black students and how it contributed to their empowerment, if at all. I shall outline my methodological approach and methods for inquiring.

Part 2

<u>Methodological Approach and methods</u>

The main inquiry question that preoccupied me was whether or not I empowered students and, if I did, how it happened. I looked to action research as a method for answering these questions. This was because, at its best, action research is transformational in that it can challenge teachers to look at their practice and the culture in which they are practicing (Elliotte, 1991). Applied to classrooms, action research is an approach to improving education through change, by encouraging teachers to be aware of their own practice, to be critical of that practice and to be prepared to change it.

Mcniff (1988) proposes action research as the means by which teachers as researchers can reflect on and improve their own practice. Yet one of the challenges to action research is that it is what good teachers are supposed to be doing anyway; that is, being continually aware of their class practice and attempting to improve that practice. Stenhouse (1975) suggests that this type of action research should be a venture which is undertaken deliberately and that the inquiry process should be systematic. He argues that action research is 'a systematic enquiry made public'. It is not the random, *ad hoc* activity which characterises everyday life, although it accommodates within its method those random, surprise elements of predictability and creation.

Action Research especially in the education field, has drawn particular impetus from the work of Schon (1983), who entitled his book, "The Reflective Practitioner". For Schon, the reflective practitioner is one whose practice is accompanied by 'thinking in action', a concept he uses to distinguish the style of thinking deployed by experienced practitioners from that of, say, the academic commentator who takes abstract or theoretical concepts and then applies them to particular situations. Although this account of how professionals think has been qualified or contested by subsequent commentators (Brown and McIntyre, 1993), I am still influenced by this vision of an intimate and interactive relationship between thinking and action.

Granted that the teacher is in control of the action-reflection-cycle, it seems still to be the case that a certain theoretical course of action guides the practical decisions in action of

teachers in each and any situation. The nature of research, in this dominant tradition, is that theory forms and informs practice. Researchers propose certain inquiry questions, which are then implemented within practical situations. In the light of these criticisms I looked to another form of action research in which the practice informed the theory and which was in keeping with my values about the relationship between theory and practice.

The power of action research in the educational context has been presented in the work of Jack Whitehead. Whitehead's (1993) work has been instrumental in promoting the idea of action research as a way of improving personal practice, where practice takes the form of critical 'reflection in action on action' by the individual practitioner. The strength of his contribution, in my view, is that he is offering a form of educational inquiry which empowers practitioners to generate and control their own process of change. It shows in action the conscious development of understanding that leads to an enhanced practice.

I am particularly interested in his idea that I could view my self as a living contradiction of my own educational beliefs. Whitehead is keen to keep the teacher-practitioner at the centre of the inquiry, and introduced the notion of 'The Living I', in which educational inquiries have, as their centre of interest, the individual practitioner who is conducting the inquiry. Unless we keep the living 'I' in our educational discussions, he maintains, action research loses touch with reality.

I took into my inquiry therefore his dominant theme, the notion of the 'self' existing as a living contradiction, that is: when I say I believe in something and then I do the opposite, I exist as a living contradiction. So when I say I am student centred and empowering in my teaching practice with students and then I am not, I am denying my values in my practice. I also aimed for my inquiry initiative to follow Whitehead's pattern of statements based on the action-reflection cycle which he reformulated. These statements act as a general formula for tackling practical educational problems in a systematic way. They are:

1. I experience a problem when some of my educational values are denied in practice.
2. I imagine a solution to the problem.
3. I implement the imagined solution.
4. I evaluate the outcome of my actions.
5. I reformulate my problem in the light of my evaluation.

This action -reflection spiral is a basis for teacher self-improvement. It can be tied in with a set of questions, which act as a starting point for change:

1. What is your concern?

2. Why are you concerned?

3. What do you think you could do about it?

4. What kind of evidence could you collect to help you make some judgement about what is happening?

5. How would you collect such evidence?

6. How could you check that your judgement about what has happened is reasonably fair and accurate?

My Method

In using action research to develop my practice, I was searching for new ways of looking at the familiar. I believed that my practice could have become so routinised and familiar that it would be difficult for me to see it with new eyes. I needed to step outside it, to look, listen and observe from a different angle in order to gain fresh insights. I invited other pairs of eyes, in the form of an external observer and students to help me look. I also wanted to become aware of the process of contradiction, if any, by externalising from my observation what was going on in my classroom.

I set out to achieve this externalisation by engaging in cycles of planning, action, observation and reflection. I planned to have my teaching observed over a cycle of two years in one particular teaching module. The taught module, which was the topic of inquiry, was a module called "Black Workers in White Welfare Organisations" which was intended for black, second year students only. I asked my colleague (Cathy) to sit in on two of my teaching sessions and give me feedback on my actions. As this was an all-black group, it was important that it was a black member of staff doing the observation, so I chose Cathy for that reason. Also, she was familiar with my research and in tune with the purpose of my inquiry. The students knew her, as she was the Course Leader and had taught some of them, so they were likely to feel comfortable with her. I also requested and got written and verbal feedback from the students about my practice over the duration of the module. I kept a journal for recording my thoughts, observations of and reflections on my teaching in this module as well as in other modules across other disciplines over the two-year cycle.

The chosen Module for my main focus of the inquiry

"Black Workers in White Welfare Organisations" is amodule offered as part of a package of modules named "Issues in Social Work" from which students had to choose. Other modules were for example, "Men in Social Work", Women In Social Work" so that people chose an area of study on the basis of identity and interest. An underlying assumption in having same identity groups is that they can be advantageous for students' learning. In group work literature, for example, there is evidence of the efficacy of same race groups (Davis and Proctor, 1989) showing their advantages, particularly when the group task is associated with issues of personal and racial identity, racism, social oppression and empowerment.

The black workers module aims to assist black students to find their voice, share their racial experiences and help prepare them for their positions as professionals in white organisations. The intention of the course is that students should experience collaborative, mutually supportive, and positive learning, thereby reducing the danger of experiencing failures that may be attributable to racism. Another intent is to ensure that the course should be *intrinsically* valuable and empowering (a process of self-appraisal) as well as *extrinsically* valuable (a means of gaining strategies for challenging racism in the work place, improving their practice).

Student Group

I chose a learning group composed only of black students who happened to be predominately Afro-Caribbean women and who were in the last year of their two-year training. I chose this group to work with for the following reasons:

A) I liked teaching this group in that module and it was the module which provided the basis of the paper, written by Cathy and me which led to the research for this thesis. It was in keeping with the general theme of my research interest in black students' and professionals' experience in organisations.   So, as well as inquiring into my practice, I was also satisfying my research aim of exploring with students/professionals their experiences.

B) These students were also at the time, in practice placements, which gave them the opportunity to theorise from live practice. Some were mature students with years of practice experience as unqualified social workers and, in some cases, Social Care Managers.

C) The students were close to becoming professionals and, being in their last year of training, would have had a breadth of experience, skills and knowledge to draw from.

This group offered the diversity I needed. I thought that the diversity of experience and previous study, brought by the students, suggested strongly that a process of collaborative learning would be both possible and desirable.

What kind of evidence did I collect and how did I collect such evidence?

I gathered evidence in the following ways:

1. By having my teaching observed over two cycles of inquiry spanning two years. In this way my inquiry existed on an observational level. I engaged in dialogue with the observer, after the first observed session, and discussed her feedback. I took notes from her verbal feedback. I also used her written feedback.

2. Over the two years I kept a journal in which I captured moments during the observed sessions showing the living reality of how my educational values were being denied. I described how I felt I was not living up to what I believed in. My journal included descriptions of my actions, observations and reflections in other taught modules. In that way my inquiry existed at a descriptive level.

3. I sought students' feedback in the form of a questionnaire at the end of the module teaching. This was not planned as a big programme of evaluation but came about as a result of recognising that I had omitted, in my planning, to invite feedback in a systematic way from the students immediately after the first observed session. However some students voluntarily gave me verbal feedback from that session and made reference to it in writing on their questionnaire form

4. I noted their feedback, attempted to overcome problems stated and took action to improve the situation. For example, from the experience of the first cycle I learnt that a tape-recorder would have been helpful and decided to use one for the second observation.   I also noted the reasons for my actions. My inquiry, then, was at an explanatory level.

5. I set up an observation of another session in the same module one year later to show how my values were in the process of realisation. I tape-recorded the observed teaching session.

In this way I was engaging in a process of systematic, critical inquiry to enable me to proceed with the realisation of my educational values in and through my practice. In summary the phases of the inquiry with the external observer present were:

Phase 1- Planning for observed teaching session I reflected on values, beliefs and focus of interest

Phase 2 – Teaching first observed session I reflected on teaching through discussion and a recall process

Phase 3 – Plan for teaching of second observed session I reflected on first observed session, using feedback from students and observer

Phase 4 – Teaching second observed session I reflected on the session, using feedback,

Phase 5 – Post action – reflection, analysis and evaluation.

Presenting my analysis of the inquiry

The basis for the analysis of the reflective conversation documented throughout this section is derived from the sources of evidence stated above. These include feedback from the students, as they progressed through the teaching and learning in this module on the social work course, the observer's verbal and written feedback on the observed sessions, my reflections, including journal extracts (anticipatory, retrospective and reflection -in –action notes taken during classes), and sensemaking of my actions and overall practice.

I have chosen to present a more detailed analysis of my actions and behaviour during the two sessions observed by Cathy, which includes extracts of my interaction with the students, using pseudonyms for the students. I have chosen these two points in time because I want both to offer some richness in the data and to reveal my interventions so as to illustrate the process that was going on in the classroom. This exposes my practice to the reader, so that they may get a flavour of what happened, and see both some of the challenges and difficulties I faced and how my practice improved. Between the first and second account the development in my ability to be self-critical is demonstrate. The data is more detailed in the second observed session because, by then, I was using a tape-recorder with the aim of showing my development over the two cycles. In my analysis of the first observed session, I weave in some feedback both from students and the observer with my reflections on my actions. In the second inquiry, I present my actions and reflection-in-action during the observed sessions and do more commenting on myself and on my own interventions. In my overall evaluation I integrate the observer's feedback and students' feedback.

Part 3

First Cycle of Inquiry –year 1

The observed session

Contracting with the student group

I began by preparing the group just before the start of the Module, by introducing the idea of the inquiry. I wanted to give the students the option of saying 'no', whilst being mindful of the consequences in terms of the impact this might have on the power relation between the students and myself. Had they said "no" then I would have abandoned the exercise. I placed the inquiry within the context of the overall research and the work that Cathy and I were involved in and sought their permission for Cathy to sit in on one of my teaching sessions. Some students were already familiar with our work and had read some of our writings on the experiences of black students. Some were complimentary about it, saying that they found it useful and supportive and wanted to help in any way they could.

I gave them a couple of weeks to decide. At the end of the two weeks I checked with them again and obtained their agreement. This was a twelve-week module and I chose to have the sixth session observed. I chose that time because I thought that the group would, by then, feel comfortable with each other and with me, that the culture might have been established and that they might feel less anxious about an outsider entering.

Preparation and planning with observer

I discussed with Cathy my teaching plans for the session and worked out with her at what stage in the session it would be relevant for her to sit in. We agreed that she would observe the parts when my facilitation skills would be on display when I was in interaction with the students since the students were going to work in small groups on their own for some of the time, we agreed on where Cathy would sit, bearing in mind she was not part of the group and was concerned to ensure that she was not going to be too conspicuous.

Preparing the group

I started the session, which was to run for one and a half-hour, by reminding the group that Cathy would be doing the observation and told them when she would arrive. I introduced Cathy, when she arrived, reminding the group of her purpose and role, that she would not be taking part in the discussion and that the focus of her attention would be

more on me and less on them. I wanted to put them at their ease so that they did not feel they were going to be judged or criticised. I wondered whether the group members were going to be their natural/authentic selves or whether they were going to "play to the audience", so to speak. I was concerned as to whether they might feel constrained by an 'other' presence and whether or not they would co-operate.

Topic for the session

The subject for discussion was 'Black workers working with black clients and black workers working with white clients'. I took an active learning approach with this topic of the "Black Client-Worker Relationship". I used small and large group work and challenging questioning to deepen the group's understanding. Their first task was to work in small groups, identifying and discussing the issues prompted by a set of questions, which were:

1. What are the expectations that a black worker might have of a black client?
2. What are the expectations that a black client might have of a black worker?
3. What would your feelings be if you were rejected by a black client, and what would you do about it?

They then returned to the large group with their feedback for discussion.

I shall go on to discuss my interventions, using as headings and subheadings some of my principles, inquiry questions and value claims, which I referred to at the beginning of this chapter.

My Interventions and reflections

Did I create trust and safety and was I working anti-oppressively?

I noticed that there were particular times when I was not working anti-oppressively. This happened when I became very anxious, which was more evident at the start of the whole group discussion. I chose to stimulate the discussion by asking each group to feed back according to the questions they were asked to consider rather than getting each group to feedback on their whole discussion. The reason for this choice was based on my past experience of teaching this subject and working with this group which had taught me that we would run out of time before having discussed most of the issues. In addition, I wanted everyone's voice to be heard so that I would compromise on the amount of

questions we got through rather than leaving a group to miss out on the opportunity to participate fully.

When I began to facilitate the discussion I was very nervous. I was not feeling safe and wondered what impact I was having on the students. I wondered about the safety of the whole group. I noticed that I was engaging in what Heron (1993) refers to as 'clock time'. 'Clock time' is rapid speech time which, Heron says, is the norm for the traditional teaching and learning culture. I was conveying information, evaluating and giving my opinion in fairly long bursts. I was being verbally dense. I was using that approach to displace my anxiety. I did not feel sufficiently grounded.

I became aware that when I was tense I paid less attention to my pacing, I was not fully aware of my presence and my silences were short. I tended to say too much and speak for too long not allowing enough space for student centred learning. My silences were not entirely free of urgency or tension and at times the purpose for my speaking was, at an unconscious level to relieve anxiety. As the session continued, I became more in touch with my anxiety and used breathing exercises to lessen and to give myself support. As I gradually became less anxious, the pace of my interventions changed and I noticed that some students became more open and participated with the informality and ease which had become the culture of group.

By the end of the session, with the increased informality and my feeling less anxious, some students were able to feel more comfortable with the pace for learning. This was evident in Sandra's feedback:

I found the session fairly easy to follow and understand. Agnes maintained a reasonably effective pace of teaching, to cater for the different individual levels of understanding within the group. Agnes would always keep the group following the planned content for the session and would stop us if we were going off at a "tangent", however she was flexible enough, yet firm in her teaching methods. Agnes would always stop within the sessions to ask if everyone was following her and offered to go over or explain again if something was not clear. I found the session was well structured and planned which helped me to analyse and question areas of my working relationship with clients.

On reflection, I believe my anxiety may have caused me to be more constraining than usual I became more controlling because I wanted the session to go well and in that way, I was being oppressive. at the beginning of the session, for example, I imposed too tight a structure which was too formal and was against the working norms of the group. The

observer's presence was impacting on me. I felt that I needed to perform well and I believe that my needs influenced my performance. I was too much in performance mode. A sense of urgency to "get it right" did not allow me to use my voice in an empowering way. That may have contributed to my not listening to the meaning of what some students were saying. "Speaking in clock time" probably left some students feeling impoverished and disempowered.

<u>Can my strategy of working experientially be justified in respect to learning?</u>

I tried to work from the experience that the students brought, paying attention to content, process and feeling. I attempted to explore the emotional effects of learning and, at the same time, assist the students to pay attention to emotional blocks to learning. I used challenging questions to deepen understanding by working in this way I intended to enhance learning by evoking deeper, inner resources. How successful was I at doing this and what evidence did I have for such a claim to empowerment? I gave the students permission to acknowledge their feelings, especially when they were lost in what they were saying. She said that I tried to encourage full participation, and used inclusive comments to help students to feel included and supported when they got stuck. She also said that I worked in an enabling way, holding together what the students were saying and offering helpful summaries, by voicing out what I thought others were saying, especially when they had difficulty in exposing themselves.

How was I able to work in those ways, what actually happened?
Here, I cite an example. One member, Kyle, told a story of her involvement with a black client to illustrate a point she was making in response to the question about her standards of professionalism with black clients.   She told a story about how a male black client who, she thought, was crossing a professional boundary when she allowed him to kiss her hand as a way of saying thank you at the end of her work with him. She shared her discomfort about both of their actions and her dilemma when working with black clients, of needing to work with appropriate professional behaviour codes. She questioned whether there was an over-identification between herself as worker and the client and what this meant for the success of the work. She shared her struggles as she tried to make sense of the meaning of the behaviour and the questions she had about acceptable codes of conduct as a black professional. She asked, **"Was I being too friendly? What was he trying to say to me? And is it different for white professionals"**.

The story and her questions tapped the energy in the room and other students interrupted with challenges, presenting different views, seeking clarification, making interpretations and connections to their own experiences of their practice with black clients. I noticed that this student had not fully completed telling her story. She was struggling to make sense of it and was probably seeking approval for her behaviour with the client. I noticed that some students, who I thought had interrupted prematurely, had misunderstood her. I wondered if she was feeling misunderstood because I noticed that she kept relating the incident in different ways. She kept repeating and explaining. I tried to help her to make her point clearly by encouraging her to reflect on her question of whether she was being too friendly.   I asked: " *did it take away from what you were trying to give to him*?" I invited her to notice that she was viewing actions as negative. I asked, *"in what other possible ways could you have viewed your intervention?"* I wanted to assist her to reflect on her own standards and on the effectiveness of her practice. I asked her how she felt about her work, and asked her to comment on how she felt about her relationship with the client. Her response did convey to me that she was not any clearer so I tried to help her to clarify what she was saying and asked *"how have you defined professional for yourself? I imagine you have some standards in your head"*. I was trying to encourage her to work with different ways of knowing. I was tapping "the imaginal mode" (Heron 1993).   I invited her to engage in fantasy and speak out her ideal standard, ideal way of working with black clients. She responded well to this invitation and I noticed a relief on her face.

I noticed that the rest of the group had also become stuck and I did not feel that I was being particularly empowering in that I was not listening well. I thought that I has given too much attention to one individual so I moved on and tried to move the group on. Here, I was trying to balance the needs of the individual and the needs of the group. I tried to include the whole group by inviting them also to engage in the exercise. This enabled others to join in and they all spoke about their ideal and more questions and issues were generated. In this way of working, reflection was aided by means of a dialectical interplay with imaginal process, using spontaneous and directed imagery and stories. I was encouraging the students to integrate learning from their emotions, perceptions and imagery as well as from ideas. I had a strong focus on their learning grounded in personal experience and emotional awareness.

There were times when I wondered whether my intervention was more challenging and less supportive because I noticed that Kyle was not making her point and was getting frustrated. On reflection, I realised that I could have assisted her more by first

acknowledging her feelings and struggles, by naming the fact that I noticed her struggling to make her point, before challenging her to think of other possibilities. I realised that I was focusing more on the content of what she was saying and not paying enough attention to her feelings, and her struggles to express herself.   I felt that she probably needed my help to assist her to find the significance and meaning of her story. Her struggles reflected black workers' personal and professional dilemmas when working with black clients and I stated that. This statement helped to free up the energy in the group who made more connections and elaborated on the sense they were making of Kyle's story. It encouraged more students to reflect on and share some of their dilemmas and issues. Some students linked the subject matter and the discussion to other informal experiences in their lives when they had been clients in receipt of a service, or to their practice, when they had been in a power position of giving a service. I worked with the process in the room and with more material generated by inviting the students to reflect on their practice experience with black clients.   Their reflections highlighted issues of transference, over-identification and projections in the black worker-client relationship.   I picked up on their sensemaking and worked with these concepts, acknowledging the significance of them, and I made some general statements, which were teaching and learning points. The students were looking at how the knowledge they had gained was helpful to them both personally and in their practice. They were engaged in what Schon (1995) calls" the scholarship of application".

I was engaged in experiential teaching which was grounded in personal experience and in assisting the students to recall direct, experiential knowledge, which Heron (1993) has called "knowledge by acquaintance". This meant that the students tapped personal encounters and inward reactions, which they externalised and tried to make sense of by drawing on the knowledge generated by their peers in the group. The structured experiences which I got them to engage with in the learning situation gave rise to such encounters, reactions and actions which were immediate. The students then reflected on this first-hand experience, and by doing so 'tuned' it into learning. According to David Boud, experiential learning is the process of being sensitively 'tuned' in to that encounter and then reflecting on it (Boud et al, 1985).

I Worked with Process and content to help students to feel validated
I tracked the process and content making links with what had gone on or beensaid previously. The observer confirmed ″You referred back to when some of them said that whey were ″being harder″ on black clients. You made the link between clients and

workers by asking them, 'what makes it different if it is a client who does this to you, rejects you, rather than a worker?'"

Working with content I made connections with past and present experiences, with similarities and differences in working with black clients and white clients, picking up on points raised and elaborating on them. I named what I observed in the group process. For example when they became stuck with dilemmas and contradictions, I said " *you seem to be wrestling with a number of professional dilemmas, and there are many for you as black workers for whom the issue of rejection from black clients also seems big".* I also named the issues and offered theoretical concepts to help the group make meaning. For example, I said, *"what seems to be coming out of this discussion is that there are lots of issues for the worker. The agency might define the boundaries, but you need to know how to be yourself with black clients. I can hear that around the issue of friendliness and you wanting to know where to draw the line, your line. If you do 'good' work with a black client and they are grateful you want to leave with something and leave them with something".*

The observer's feedback confirmed that she saw me offering opportunities to make links and connections with ideas generated from the discussion. *"You would say things like what we are exploring now is how…".* She also said that I found points of connection between the group members and built on these to make them apparent. I helped students develop their understanding by 'pulling out' the salient points in their statements or stories. *"You introduced ways in which the issues were not so clear-cut, for example when you asked the group if they had similar struggles with white clients. You also introduced the issue of rejection".*

I worked with the skill of reflecting back what I had heard and naming the dynamics I had observed, which seemed to help some group members to feel valued. This seemed to give confidence to the quieter members and to encourage them to find their voice. Some students were not able to name issues so easily and I noticed that, when I did this, the group was more engaged. I wondered whether in this way they were able to gain insight and feel heard, understood and validated. These comments from students confirmed their experience of finding of their voice and feeling validated.

Sule expressed:

"I felt able to get my voice heard. Also your eye contact was given to me which enabled me to speak and people were stopped from dominating discussions. You encouraged me by paying attention to what I was saying…I felt acknowledged after I talked".

And Richard said:

"You listened to what I was saying and you were able to hear and understand what I was saying or trying to say. I felt heard by my contribution being validated by yourself and other members of the group"

Jasmen said:

"You did not allow the things I said to hang in mid air. You worked on what I brought to the group, which helped me to get a better understanding of the issue, myself. It also got other members of the group to hear what I was saying, which might not be very clear at first. You always say, "did you hear what- said"? This helped me to listen and to reflect on what I had heard".

Working in those ways have I met my claims that *a) students should be actively engaged in their learning so that ideas and thinking are challenged and b) students should be challenged and motivated to take steps to make new meaning?* I tried to encourage the students to feel free to speak, use their voices, not silence themselves and validate what they had to say, to value it as important, but also tried to challenge their views where necessary. I challenged them and encourage them to challenge themselves and each other in order to deepen their understanding.

I challenged by asking direct and sometimes probing questions during the discussion such as: *"what might you do with a client who is different from you in their level of consciousness about racism?"* I moved backwards and forwards making links with what had gone on earlier in the discussions, sticking with one point as long as possible. I tended to ask students to clarify their opinions or meanings and say how they arrived at these. In this way they could hear themselves aloud, as having something important to say, and others could listen and learn from the sharing of their experience.

I noticed that I felt a temptation to go deeper and deeper and expand on one issue at the expense of the other issues being explored. For example, I got the group to explore the power relations between the client and worker by saying, *"let's hear more about the power issues that may be present between you and the client"*. This had the advantage of helping some students to clarify and deepen their understanding. The disadvantage was that

other students' issues may have been missed out. Was I taking a very powerful position by following my interest with such tenacity? Was I being too directive or leading too much? I was faced with this challenge of striking a balance between facilitator directing and student directing. I experienced the dilemma of choosing whether to work with breadth versus modelling how to go deeper without becoming too challenging or too critical, and creating too much discomfort for the students. This was a critical learning and teaching issue for me in terms of empowering students to learn. This student reflected, in her comments, her experience of my teaching dilemma:

Sandra said:

"Agnes questioned our ideas, thoughts and feelings, in a challenging way, which at first I felt was very powerful and overwhelming. It felt as though she was confronting every suggestion and comments we made or asked which I felt did scare me a little and put me off from participating within the group to begin with. On reflection I realised that this approach was a method of "pin pointing" and focusing us, as she was making us critically analyse the thought process we were using that brought us to the conclusions and ideas that we had arrived at". This enabled me to really evaluate and analyse my thinking and understanding of the client and worker relationship".

Going deeper has the advantage of assisting students to expand, open up and develop their understanding, and this can be empowering for some students but I can become too challenging and very disempowering if I make unrealistic demands on them. At times, I believe that I was too demanding and this was confirmed in the observer's feedback. She stated that she thought I had a high expectation of the level of understanding in the group and she wondered whether my standards were unrealistic. I think that I do have to question my expectations of students' level, of understanding to see whether they are too high because I noticed that I became impatient when some students had difficulty in understanding issues pertaining to knowledge that I thought they should have had. This was more evident when I thought we had covered the topic in previous teaching sessions and felt that they should have remembered it. At one point I heard myself telling the students that they should know. The observer noted this and she commented that she thought I took an authoritarian approach, in such instances, and almost reprimanded students for not being able to recall previous teaching. I too noted this example of my behaving in such a disempowering way.

At one point the group was struggling to explore issues of black consciousness. They got stuck when Kyle asked, **"what is black consciousness? Who defines it?"** I asked, *"Why are*

we struggling with this when at the beginning we defined the term 'black' and discussed some of this. I thought we had a shared understanding". I thought that we had explored that question in an earlier session and that the group should have moved further than they had done. I failed to hear the reflexivity in the question, the need for the group to return to it and reflect. I also made assumptions about our shared understanding. I was not allowing for the fact that meanings may change over time and that I needed to engage in checking and re-evaluating rather than reprimanding.

I felt that I became very authoritarian and parental, to the point of being punitive, in my attempt to get them to reflect back on past teaching. I noticed when I did this that some students looked as if they felt criticised. Other more confident students said that they felt like they were being *'told off'*. Some challenged by saying **that *"it was a long time ago and we forgot".*** And, I noticed that one or two student's stopped participating.

Clearly, this is an area for improvement in my practice as silencing students in this way is a disempowering act and I am contravening my values. Indeed, some students highlighted in their feedback that I should improve the way I challenge because they found my style a hindrance to their learning as it blocked them from taking risks. Richard said that he did not feel assisted to learn sometimes because, **"I occasionally felt that your style of challenging was a little patronising and direct. I feel that you could have been a little more aware of the different levels of knowledge present in the group...I was fearful of being challenged therefore did not always ask questions or comment as I felt I should have done".**

From this and other feedback, it is evident that there were ways in which I lived out my values in practice and there are some clear ways in which I did not. Therefore, there was room for improvement and I needed to reflect on what I could do differently.

What areas of my practice should I be improving?

As I reflected on my teaching and learning and made plans for making changes I found Boud and Walker (1991, 1992) and Baird's (1990) models of reflection helpful. Boud and Walker's idea is that reflection-in-action is part of a wider learning cycle in which there is preparation for the experience before it begins, digestion of it and reflection on it after it is over. Similarly, Baird recognised three kinds of reflection, which he named Anticipatory Reflection (pre-teaching), Contemporaneous Reflection (during teaching) and Retrospective Reflection (post teaching). In part 4, when I discuss the second cycle of

inquiry, I shall focus more on anticipatory and contemporaneous reflection and, in part 5, I shall engage in more retrospective reflection. In this section, I shall engage in some retrospective reflection on my actions so as to note my learning, identify gaps and decide on what needs changing or improving.

Retrospective Reflection:

According to Baird, retrospective reflection should encompass learning from the experience regardless of the perceived success of the session.   The key to retrospective reflection might well be in the question: Why was the session "good" or "bad"? In retrospect, there were a few areas of my practice that I thought were good and that the students and observer thought were empowering which I want to continue. I want to continue to:

- work experientially and try to be student centred by engaging them in preparation and planning and in sharing the decision making.
- help students to feel more included and more supported.
- In terms of my interventions, work with the strengths and the knowledge in the group and encourage students to share, use their voice and speak from their experiences.
- challenge to promote depth and understanding and assist students to engage in critical reflection on their experience.

For me, retrospective reflection means learning from my experiences. I learnt that one major challenge for me was engaging in the actual act of reflection-in-action. I had to find a way to take time out to do this reflection when the session was in full swing. This notion of time for reflection revolves around an ability to structure teaching so that time is available whilst the students are still 'on task', otherwise, the need to reflect during teaching may persist but be unresolved.

Another major challenge I noted from the first cycle was the need to on my feet or make 'on the spot' suggestions. This required me to have a breadth of experiences to call on from which to make suggestions in response to the situation. One of the ways in which I counteracted this was to tap the students' experiences. In some cases, presenting the problem to the group helped them to take control, especially where the subject taught was not so knowledge reliant. By being involved in their learning the knowledge was imported through them. It required homing in on different sets of skills, skills pertaining to group work and an understanding of adult learning.

Being removed from the situation and having time to reflect after the event, were important in shaping how I might respond in future to students' learning so that I should not 'make the same mistakes twice'. How could the learning from one session shape my thinking about other situations? Recognising a problem, or problems, would be the start of the reflective cycle. The main problems which I began to recognise were that I ran the risk of oppressing some students when I became anxious. I managed my anxiety by becoming over controlling, becoming teacher-centered rather than student-centered. Although I met my claim for challenging students to think, there were times when I did not challenge in a supportive way. My style and method of challenging were at times too provocative. In this way, I contradicted my value of providing a safe and trusting environment. I was also, not as tolerant with the pace and level of understanding/developing a knowledge base as I should have been. I may have been too demanding of them.

On a practical note, I realised, with hindsight, that I should have tape-recorded the session to help me with retrospective reflections. I also made the mistake of not getting feedback from the students immediately after the observed session. I noticed the contradiction in my values. I value the notion of equality. I believe that research participants should be subjects and not objects, yet I omitted to get their views of how they felt the session had gone. Although I rectified the situation and invited feedback retrospectively, on the session and my teaching during the whole module, it was nevertheless a powerful position to take as a researcher.

Accommodating learning – what changes do I want to make in preparation for the second cycle of Inquiry?

I have learnt that there were ways in which I was a 'living' contradiction in terms of my practice. Reflecting on my interventions, there were times when I did not empower students but some of the feedback from students showed how I may have done better than I had thought. Nevertheless, there was still room for improvement. In terms of what needed to change I began with the cue from the feedback of the observer which pointed me in the direction of paying attention to the way in which I used questions. A significant fact for me was that some students had found my style of challenging a hindrance to their learning and this required my attention. The two major areas I wanted to pay attention to, therefore were developing supportive ways of challenging and developing varied methods to work with more silent members, especially those who are scared to take risks. I

wanted to make changes to my style of challenging to make it less autocratic. I wanted to work more holistically and to enter the second cycle of inquiry with a reminder of the different ways in which I thought a teacher could oppress, disempower and hold on to their power. These were by:

- Silencing through style and/ or method
- Disallowing
- Instruction from the front – one dimensional power
- Not tapping knowledge in the group
- Being the expert teacher – all knowing
- Not enough sharing

On a practical note, I decided to tape-record the observed session and to invite feedback from the students immediately after the session to augment validity. I would also invite feedback on my teaching of the whole module to monitor change in my practice.

Part 4
Year 2 – Second cycle of inquiry

Anticipatory Reflection

Before embarking on the second cycle of inquiry I engaged in reflection prior to taking action which Baird (1990) and Van Maanen (1991) refer to as "anticipatory reflection". Anticipatory reflection (reflection for action), for Baird, is a way of apprehending and attending to a situation in anticipation of the experience. For Van Maanen:

 "Anticipatory reflection enables us to deliberate about possible alternatives, decide on courses of action, plan the kinds of things we need to do, and anticipate the experiences we and others may have as a result of expected events or of our planned actions. Anticipatory reflection helps us to approach situations and other people in an organised, decision-making, prepared way" (p.101).

In preparation, I reconsidered the feedback I had been given and considered possible ways of dealing with situations differently. I wanted to pay particular attention to the structures I was creating so that people could feel free to tap their personal power and transform their experience. So, within my action inquiry, I wanted to engage deeper in

holistic learning and work in a holistic way with the students, seeking to generate a co-operative learning culture.

Holistic learning, according to Heron (1993), means learning how to engage much more of the whole being in the learning process. Heron describes his "whole person model" as consisting of four basic psychological modes – the affective, the imaginable, the conceptual and the practical. The affective functions are feeling and emotion, the imaginable functions are intuition and imaginary (imaginary includes perception, memory and imagination), the conceptual functions are reflection and discrimination, and the practical functions are intention and action.

He postulates that 'whole person' dynamics work as an up-hierarchy in that, what is higher is tacit and latent in what is lower. He explains that in the lowest level is the formative potential of higher levels, the higher levels emerge out of the lower; what is lower grounds supports and nourishes what is higher. So out of the affective mode emerges the imaginable mode. From the imaginable mode proceeds the conceptual mode, the domain of thought and language, and this is the basis for the development of the practical mode. These modes are interdependent. He signifies learning in the imaginable mode as the source of all subsequent conceptualisation.

Heron also states that working with a model of the whole person would require in the actor a level of consciousness that would involve intentionally functions such as feelings and emotions, intuition and imagery, reflection and discrimination, intention and action. This would mean that I would participate fully with the whole of my 'being' in my teaching so that I would be able to notice and manage my emotional responses to the situation and grasp intuitively the significance of what was going on. Within this model I incorporated Torbert's model of action inquiry (1991) which he refers to as "extended consciousness-in-action". This meant widening my attention to: a) what was going on in the whole of my teaching world, b) staying focused on my goals of improving my style of challenging and engendering more trust, c) the strategies used to achieve my goals, and d) my current actions and their outcomes. It also meant noticing and amending any incongruities between these two components (either through action or internal revision or both). It would also mean that I could reflect on the issues involved and formulate my intentions for future actions. Such action inquiry would involve me in a process of reviewing, reflection and goal setting. I took some ideas from both theoretical models and sought to work with them in an integrated way.

I take as my starting point the planning for teaching the module, then I explore the second session which Cathy observed and, finally, I examine my interventions.

How did I plan for the teaching in this module?

This time I chose to involve the students much earlier in the planning of the whole module. My use of authority and way in which I engaged in decision making were called into question as I was aware that how decisions were made would contribute to the nature of the relationships that were established. I have found Heron's definition of the facilitator's authority (1993), a useful framework. I also found Heron's decision- Modes in Group Facilitation (1989), to be an invaluable working guide which helped me to respond appropriately.

I had to pay attention to the negotiating process in terms of how much I delegated to the students' decisions about the content or learning methods. I was directive with regard to the objectives of the students' learning and assessment of this, whilst negotiating the programme and the methods of learning but I delegated to them the resources for learning. It was important that they were given choice, at the planning stage, and that they made their choices and decisions based on having gained clarity about the course, my intent, and my values. This was vital, both in principle, and particularly in practice, in a culture in which I was introducing new sets of values about education to be operated alongside old models of education. It was clearly immoral, and not at all empowering, to spring the new educational values on students after the teaching had started: This was all the more so when the ways in which they had been taught so far had lead them to expect the old authoritarian values of unilateral direction by staff or, at best only partial involvement in their learning. So it was better to be directive at this stage, to make clear what my values were and to invite students to join if these values appealed to them.

In planning the teaching content with the students I wanted to make the module more empowering so I tried to empower the students by distributing power between me, as facilitator, and them, as learners. I noticed that I was not being directive about of all the educational decisions. I used my power and authority more subtly. I was choosing the appropriate, decision-making mode, being mindful as to whether I should direct, negotiate or delegate at the contracting stage.

In setting the culture and in preparation for creating a safe learning environment, I was directive about the aims and methods of teaching.   However the contract, consisting of the group rules and agenda setting, was negotiated. I did retain some of the control over some of the content. I took their suggested topics and ideas, which came out of a brainstorming exercise for agenda setting, and planned a few of the sessions.   My planning was based on the traditional ground of propositional knowledge grounded in experiential knowledge.   I did this with the aid of experiential exercises which were interspersed during my input and group's input.

Preparing and planning with the observer
Cathy and I met to plan a few weeks before the module started. We reflected on the feedback from the first cycle and I stated clearly what I wanted her to observe. We also agreed on the use of a tape recorder, to record the session, as it would make it easier for her to focus and widen her attention instead of concentrating on noting the content. We discussed when would be the most appropriate time in the life of the group for her to intervene. We agreed that she would observe the whole session this time. In preparation for the observation of the session, we reflected on her role and task again and agreed when would be the best time for her to observe and that the students should suggest where she should sit.

Preparing the group
I prepared the group in a similar way to the first cycle. I sought their permission to engage in the research before the start of the module. I told them about Cathy and her role.   Again, there was no objection. I sought the students' permission to tape-record the session.   I asked them when would be the best time for Cathy to attend and they all agreed that it should be nearer the end of the module. On the day of the session, I reminded them of Cathy's role and task and allayed any anxiety that she would be assessing them. I discussed with them where they thought Cathy should sit. I noticed that this time I was working more co-operatively, engaging the students in the decision making process. I was more comfortable to do so this time.

Topic for the session
The topic that was chosen, jointly, for discussion 'The Personal and Professional Development of Black Social Workers' was chosen jointly. The students had asked for

this issue to be considered because they wanted the opportunity to explore their strengths and gaps in their practice. They also wanted to take the opportunity to explore and identify the profile they would be taking into organisations. We had jointly agreed the timing of this in the Module. They were coming to the end of their training, so it was the right time to embark on an exercise which would assist them to engage in self-reflection and help with choices about presentation of self to organisations. It was also the right time to engage in an evaluation of their practice as professionals; an exercise that would directly assist them in formulating job statements for employers. This was part of the preparation and planning process of entering as black professionals into white agencies.

Contemporaneous Reflection

If anticipatory reflection is a starting point for a practitioner to develop ways of thinking about approaches to teaching, and retrospective reflection is a vehicle for learning from attempting such approaches, then it is through contemporaneous reflection that a practitioner can learn from and about their practice in action. This is when the complex and dynamic nature of teaching may be developed so that it becomes immediately responsive to learning. However, being able to incorporate this type of reflection in practice is not easy and engaging in reflection-in-action could bring with it many challenges some of which I noted from the first inquiry.

Did I continue to empower the students during my interventions?

I began the session by giving the students a task. Working in pairs they took turns to share their experiences with the use of inquiry questions and then feed back their deliberations for discussion in the whole group. The questions for consideration were:

1. What has the process of education and training done for you so far? Highlight successes and identify gaps that still need developing
2. Reflect on the teaching and learning at Brunel; comment on your positive and negative experiences as well as general experiences

I offered the group some parameters for their explorations. I asked them to pay attention to the personal, as well as the general and structural, to help them to make meaning. So I

started the session, paying attention to the affective mode of learning, by asking the pairs to take time to relax to elicit positive emotions. I asked them to take turns to identify positive and negative emotional responses to their experiences. This, I thought, would honour the individual history and experiences which they brought to their learning. I moved on to the imaginal mode by asking them to share their stories in groups of four, so that one pair joined with another pair. In these small groups, stories were built up and connections made which allowed for affirmation and valuing, and a positive emotional climate for learning was created.

I then moved to the conceptual with the whole group, although it was evident from feedback that this process had begun in the pairs and small groups. Questions and answers were offered across groups and discussion held within the whole group.

Facilitating the whole group discussion

Oscar began by recapping what he knew before attending the course and said that the course had validated his knowledge of structural oppression and how it had contributed to the lives of black people. This resonated with the group. I noticed that people were nodding and making acknowledging sounds and I spoke to this saying, *"Is this echoing other people's experiences"?* Peter intervened, elaborating on what had been said, and enlarged upon the way in which the knowledge gained in the Course had helped him. He said that the Course had offered him models for understanding his experience. Working in the imaginal mode he described his experience as being thrown up in the air, everything that came from himself and everything that he thought he held solid was in the air.   The course had given him some theoretical models to help him put things back together.   He said,**"The course stripped me of me, it said don't use 'me' use the model. I came here as a square and have been thrown up and I had to catch all the pieces. I had to put it all back together and it is not a square anymore, different shapes, and it just feels like, Who am I in a sense, but gradually you learn to put yourself back in a certain order. And you know that you can use these models but still got to use self as well".**

Peter shared his experience of fragmentation, integration and transformation whilst others in the group listened attentively; there were echoes throughout of "ums", and "yeses", as well as non verbal means of acknowledgements and signs of connections being made at different levels. I asked Peter to identify points at which he felt he had come together. I asked this question to assist him to identify where and when the integration had taken place so that he could hear how he had made his changes and so that others could learn from his experiences.   I also wanted the group to hear that it was possible to have such

feelings to come through intact. I was aware that I had chosen to talk about his integration because I was feeling anxious, responsible, criticised, and worried that the course might be stripping students of self and causing fragmentation. At that moment I experienced this process as being negative. I was aware that it was the outcome of my need to have him stress the positives of his experience.

Wanita connected with Peter and shared her experiences of loss; her loss of confidence in the first year of her training she stated how the Black Workers Module had helped her to structure her thoughts which had helped her regain confidence. She said,**"The course helped me to structure the way I think and attach reasons and meaning to what I know. It enlightened my awareness and helped me to act on my awareness"**

I tried to bring in more voices by saying, *"It sounds like there were lots of triggers for some people"*. I said this because I wanted the group to explore more deeply the connections they had made for themselves. I wanted them to speak of their positive experiences but I wonder whether I was being too controlling. Remembering my experience from the first cycle of inquiry, I was concerned that I should not lead the agenda too much because of my anxieties. My underlying agenda may have been that I wanted to hear positive feedback about the course and I was also aware that the notion of students constructing their experiences into the positives and successes were themes from my research which I might have imported into the group.

Nevertheless the group entered the space of exploring their successes and validated their experiences. Some said that they felt that their personal values were verified and validated. They thought that their mere presence, as black people, at the University was a success in itself because it would help their friends and others to feel encouraged to do the course and to take on further training or feel confident to enter higher education. June said, **"But a greater success is the success of just being here. I know that just my presence here helps other people who had the same experiences as me and felt that they could not possibly do this. While I was out there I too didn't think that I could possibly do this, but now I am here I could encourage others I know to do this as well".**

That statement encouraged others to share their disbelief that they could 'make it' and it took them a while to appreciate the fact that they had. They went on to explore their experiences of learning and how they had experienced the teaching. They spoke of their difficulties in grasping the new language, the jargon spoken. They thought that some lecturers made unrealistic assumptions about the level of their cognitive development in

relation to the subject matter, that they expected them to grasp concepts quickly. Some felt that they were not in a place developmentally or at a point in their training to understand some of the concepts. I became aware of my feelings of guilt on hearing this because I remembered the feedback from the first cycle of inquiry about my expectations of students' knowledge. I worked with my feelings and took the opportunity to behave differently. I wanted to know how I could help and tried to encourage the students to explore the point further. I asked, *"what would have helped"?* I wanted them to explore their ways of knowing and learning as well as obtain feedback, about other ways of teaching and possible changes we could make, which I could share with my colleagues.

The students went on to suggest that lecturers should take time to observe and check for understanding, deliver their material at an appropriate pace, focus on their delivery and presentation and make it lively. They gave an example of how a particular lecturer had brought his lecture to life for them, and I asked, *"How was it brought to life"?* This question provoked interest on the part of a number of students who then went on to give examples of how the teaching could be brought to life. I acknowledged their suggestions and asked *"What's your part in all of this, how can you help yourself and help the person who is doing the delivery in terms of your learning?* I was trying to help them to challenge their possible reliance on the lecturer, on received knowledge. I wondered whether they saw themselves as passive learners. Rosa rose to the challenge and said, **"I have responsibility to question and ask lecturers to break down what they are saying".** Others said that they went to other students to get help with understanding. Others said they read and I asked, *"How much contribution do you make to talking to other students, talking to lecturers and reading?* From this question the group went on to explore the balance, in terms of time spent gaining knowledge from books, compared with dialogue and discussion, and discovered that they relied heavily on the authority of the printed word. Some acknowledged their need to use other ways of learning and agreed that they needed to make more use of a variety of sources of knowledge. Their understanding about the process of learning and how they learned, was deepened whilst focusing on teaching delivery in terms of pace and level and methods of teaching.

They also made some constructive comments on how knowledge was generated, relating this to their experiences of writing for academic purposes. They felt that they had to write at a particular academic level which did not include their ways of knowing or their use of experience. Peter (referring to his experience of trying to make the link between experiential knowing and propositional knowing) said, **"We don't always remember what we**

know and we are not making that link that we can use what we know. When I try to transfer what I know to the essay the task seem so big and difficult to grasp".

I asked, *"what is that academic level?"* This simple question provoked a great deal of discussion of their experiences of the world of academia which included feeling alienated from universities. There were comments about the world of academia being white and some commented on their feelings/experience when they saw black lecturers in the Social Work Department. Maryanne said, **"Before I came to university I had a perception of university, which had nothing to do with reality. It was just in my mind and I thought, well, one, black people don't go there, they have no role in there. I was not expecting to see black lecturers and stuff like that. So I thought it was a white place and out of my remit. So walking through the doors now, seeing you Agnes and other black lecturers has been so empowering because of role modelling, and that. You see other black people and it helps you to aspire".**

The need to see black lecturers and to have them as role models was an important theme for some students. It gave them confidence. Richard said, **"Its about having a role model, coming here and seeing black lecturers, black students, black social workers, I say well, you can do it. Because I actually relate to them, and I think if these people can do it then I can do it and I think that's what made it so accessible".**

The group deepened their understanding of the meaning and the importance of having self-confidence, because some felt that some black people viewed themselves as not worthy of having a degree whilst others 'knock' each other for pursuing one. As a way of taking the discussion to an even deeper level I asked the group why they thought that some black people chose to behave in this way. They went on to explore their values with regard to education and the role and influence of their parents in relation to those values. They discussed structural racism in education and the education process. I summarised the discussions at that point, making links between the personal and the political, by reflecting on what had been said, what I had liked about the discussions and the interesting phrases used. I made reference to the way Peter had said he had made sense of his experience and reminded them about the importance of reflection in helping with sensemaking and integration.

I was working at the conceptual mode. I noticed that this year I was paying more attention to working with the notion of different ways of knowing at different levels, so that I facilitated groups in a way that paid more attention to the anxiety in the group and to the

defences in operation. I continued to work with a balance of process and content, moving backwards and forwards between the two at the level of the individual, group, practice organisation and society. I wanted the students to experience different ways of knowing and different levels of comprehending, to witness multiple meanings unfolding before them. In this way, I was trying to challenge differently, more holistically, so as to help them integrate the personal and professional and link theory to practice.

I noticed that they presented some of their experiences in binary terms, practical and academic, theory and practice, and I wanted to assist the group to begin to understand the importance of integrating these concepts and not see them as opposites. I assisted them to challenge these ideas by inviting them to consider other possibilities and not view them as being in one category or the other. I noticed that I was being challenging in a different way, that I was less 'full frontal' and did not focus too much on individual statements but more on the whole group, supporting group members to think in different ways about the questions I asked.

Some were able to make the link. Maryanne said, **"I suppose you have to be practical as well as an academic, practical in your academic application".** Others were not able immediately to make the link and continued to share their experiences of how difficult it was for them to use academic terms and shared how this made them feel. A few people, for example, said that they felt ashamed that they did not even know what a "semester" meant when they first entered training. I was aware that semester is very much an American term so was not surprised that some students were not familiar with it. Instead, I chose to explore the notion of shame, of being ashamed of not being familiar with academic terms, by saying *"Its about shame, are we ashamed that we did not have the kind of education that we hoped for, that we wanted? That we hoped we would get? What are you ashamed of?"* Mary answered, **"If you did not value the experiences that you had then you feel shame"** Richard responded, **Yeah, but for me I think the shame is gone".**

This issue of shame is a theme I have experienced among many black students in the past and I was aware that being ashamed of not being educated was an issue in the black community. So I wanted to help the group to place their experiences in a wider context of structural racism and help them to make connections between the personal and political.

I wanted to return to the student who spoke of her shame about not knowing what 'semester' meant because I wanted her to explore her feelings of shame since she said that she felt stupid for not knowing such a simple thing. I said, *"So you did not know what the word semester mean, how were you going to find out? What stopped you from asking?* I also wanted to take the discussion into exploring the notion of not knowing and value not knowing. I said, *"So if we imagine that we should know it because other people know it then what? We should not ask? We feel ashamed to ask, to ask because people might think what"?* Collective voices: **"STUPID"**. *So where does this notion of stupid come from*? I asked. I couched my question in a challenging way, challenging the notion that we should know the simple thing.

I wanted the group to question the way knowledge is acquired, to explore the notion of stupidity and the importance it has for black people in the socio-historical and political context of institutional racism. Black people have been perceived as stupid as far back as slavery. I asked the question in a general way, to tap other peoples' feelings, as I assumed that other students might also experience feelings of shame for similar reasons but might have difficulty admitting it. I did not want Josephine to feel further ashamed, by being spotlighted and exposed, because she had taken the risk of sharing her feelings. Working in this way, I invited the students to affirm and develop emotional responses, to try to resolve the negative by cognitive re-framing and emotional discharge. I made the assumption that these negatives were an impediment to learning.

The group went on to share their experiences of institutional racism in education and how they were criticised at school and the lack of opportunities that were available to take on professional training. I felt that I was allowing the students through sharing their experiences to take control of their learning. I took on the position of 'not being the only knower' in order to encourage new learning. I tried not to occupy the 'expert's' seat and, if I did, it was temporary to demonstrate that I had experience and expertise but was not an expert on 'blackness'. To take on the expert role is to de-emphasise and devalue the experiences and knowledge of the students in a way that is oppressive. I noticed that in this cycle of inquiry I was paying more attention to the power relations and was more concerned to listen. I was more willing to give up power to empower the students so as to be able to identify strengths in them.

As a consequence some students shared more personal experiences and the feelings attached to those experiences. Craig shared some of his fears on entering his training:

" When I was at school I wanted to be an architect because I was good at technical drawing but I was not encouraged and I was also frightened. I had a fear of the unknown and still did when I came on this course. Before I came on this course I had not studied for over twenty years, I made excuses that I had a family with commitments, debts to pay. But until I made that first step into the unknown by coming here I did not know it was not that difficult. It has not been that difficult after all".

I acknowledged his feelings, his fears and confirmed the meaning he had made in linking his personal experiences to racism in education, how he had worked with the internal and external. I also reiterated the ways in which he had broke the cycle of fear by going to the general and cited ways in which other black people had broken the cycle of fear so as to be able to achieve. I was encouraging students to speak from 'I', the 'self'. This came from the belief that 'the source of knowledge is located in the self', from 'subjective knowing'. I tried to challenge the notion of the truth of experience as relying on rational consciousness. As students connected with Craig's experience they shared their own experiences of entering training.

I noticed that some of the students were only commented on the similarities in their stories and not on the differences, so I challenged the myth about uniformity of experience by getting them to describe their experiences more fully and in more depth. I also encouraged them to explore feelings emanating from their experiences so that they and others could hear similarities and differences or make connections with different aspects. This provoked further discussion among the students and some shared deeper, more personal feelings of fear and, as they spoke, they became very emotional and tearful. Oscar, looking tearful, reflected, **"Sometimes I look at why I am in social work also looking it as a black person in social work and I want to know what I am doing...(pause)".**

I was touched, as he appeared very emotional as he asked such deep questions of himself. I noticed that I became very emotional and observed that the room was deadly silent with everyone attentively listening. He took the discussion from the conceptual mode, where the students were trying to make generalisations, operating from the cognitive, to the affective mode of emotions and feelings (Heron 1993), back into the self and the group was fully engaged. I asked Oscar, *"And what has been some of your answers to what you are doing here?"* In response he said, **"Well, (pause) I am just (pause) I know that I am intelligent and I have got a contribution to make and I have got a right to stand up and say things. Also in the future I want to develop myself, develop my skills in public speaking so that eventually I can stand up in front of these directors to get money to develop**

community programmes. But for a long time I did not see that I can do that". I continued by asking, *"And now, has the process of education and training helped you to get there?"* I wanted to help him to know how he had gained confidence and to think how he could achieve his goals, and I also wanted to remind the group that this whole discussion was about them making sense of their process of education and training as black professionals.

I brought in other members of the group by linking what Oscar was saying with what had gone on before about feelings of shame. Oscar, I thought, was struggling to speak about his shame especially as he went on to speak about his family background, confidently introducing into the room members of his family who went to university. He thought he was not intelligent enough to enter university to do a degree like other members of his family. I reflected back to him confirming that he was here, now, in a university.

I summarised the discussion, by focusing on the general points made, and asked the group to consider what they would say about black students and learning at this stage of the discussion. At this crucial point I introduced the deeper point of the exercise and I underlined a vital piece of feedback. I wanted to demonstrate an appreciation of what had been said and what had been done. One student, Maryanne, read out something she had written:

 "I have learnt from this experience that black student have an aptitude for this type of learning lots of reflective evaluating skills suited to academic learning using both sides of the brain".
This comment provides some evidence that I had achieved at least one of my objectives and that was to engage the students in holistic teaching and learning.

In the section that follows I offer further evidence of developments in my practice under the two central themes, empowerment and disempowerment and end with areas for further development.

Part 5
<u>Reflective Evaluation of my practice</u>

<u>Empowerment</u>

As a starting point I return to one of the questions that I set out at the beginning of this chapter – "*how do I provide a safe and supportive environment for students learning*?"

I tried to create a culture that was safe enough for students to feel that they could risk speaking out their experiences and in which they could feel listened to. Trust, safety, feeling listened to, being able to use your voice, and generating dialogue are some crucial ingredients for empowerment and I was pleased that the general feedback in this area affirmed the fact that I enabled the groups to work because there was trust and safety. Audrey commented on how she had experienced me help the group to feel safe, **"During this module Agnes helped the group to feel 'safe'. All the students had the right to voice their opinion and the right to be heard. Agnes made everyone feel equal. This included herself. She also used the term 'we black people' which helped the group to join and be more willing to talk openly...During this module Agnes made a great effort to encourage all students to be involved in the sessions. If you did not say anything Agnes would ask your opinion. Agnes made it clear that she was also learning and that the module was a learning process for all".**

This statement also offers evidence to support one of my principles, which I referred to earlier*, "that students in my class should be actively engaged in their learning and that my teaching is interactive".*

Richard noted how he was helped by the safety in the group:
"Group feeling safe and knowing that I could talk, be heard and listened to. The group was open and the trust was there".

I noticed that I was listening more attentively during the second cycle and the observer commented specially on the way I was listening in the second year and thought that I modelled this well for the students, who also listened well. She thought that I listened to content as well as process. This student commented on how he felt listened to:
"You listened to what I was saying and you were able to hear and understand what I was saying or trying to say. I felt heard by my contribution being validated by yourself and other members of the group"

My other claim is that "*I subscribe to student centered and self-directed learning"*:
Student centered learning can also be empowering and the responsibility for learning was placed on the students, who were at the centre of the experience. I have become much more of a resource and consultant available to be called in to clarify, guide, discuss and support when needed by the self-directed, active learner. I have begun to focus on reflective learning rather than teaching or lecturing and to focus therefore, on a student-centred approach. Consequently, the amount of stand-up teaching I do has become

greatly reduced, compared with my old approach. Maryanne confirmed this in her comment, "**Once I got to understand your teaching style after the first session, I recognised that we learnt from our interactions with each other, and that your role enabled us to become aware of and understand our internalised racism, for example, and most importantly it gave me knowledge of 'self'**".

I have tried, in my teaching, to encourage the habit of reflection and to recognise the importance of learning which emerges from reflection. I have actively involved the students more in the learning and reflection process and encouraged them to reflect critically on practice to help with the integration of theory and practice. I wanted to help them with the dialectic relationship between theory and practice, the personal and the professional and the relationship between the micro and macro in understanding racism, particularly internalised racism. On what basis can I claim that the outcome of this was empowering? My main sources of evidence were my reflections, the feedback from the observer and students' feedback.

I offer a journal extract of my inquiry into how my practice was improving in terms of assisting students to use reflection as a learning tool. I wrote this during the second cycle of inquiry, based on a teaching session in the Black Workers Module, and I used a student's feedback as the basis for my reflection.

Extract (25-4-1998 – students quotes were noted during the session):
Today I experienced the integration of theory, practice and action in the making as I witnessed these black students demonstrating their learning and using their experience. As I write these words I feel full, my eyes filled with tears and I am feeling choked. I don't know what all this means but I imagine it's because I feel elated. I felt good, happy, pleased and excited at the end of the session today. During the session I felt relaxed as the group took control and dialogued, engaged in conversation. I witnessed before me evidence of the kind of teaching that I strive for. Now as I begin to reflect on it I cry the tears of joy. Joy at achieving what I felt I longed for and as students got up and walked out of the classroom one by one expressing their pleasure with the session, with their learning, muttering words of appreciation, I knew I 'got there'. I knew I achieved the kind of transformed classroom that I believe to be helpful to black students. What I saw happening was students engaging in conversation, talking and struggling to stay in dialogue as they tapped powerful feelings, relating their stories with passion.

For years I have wished for the moment when I see a black group spark with passion about their experiences; when they stay in struggle to express those experiences in ways that they could be

heard by each other and appreciated for what they are saying and not judged negatively if they said something that was against the status quo. It was good to observe, contribute to and experience being in a group with black students where people listened, challenged themselves, encouraged others with their explorations. I enjoyed watching them give each other permission to get things wrong, not having the 'right' words to express themselves, saying 'tell it as it is', creating space and time for reflection.

I observed them putting into practice some of what I have encouraged and modelled, listening, assisting to articulate, allowing space for stories, going deeper. So when I heard someone say "its not as simple as that, it goes deeper than that" then proceed to explore deeper and inquire more into what they were saying, my heart warmed. So what I witnessed was a group of students empowering themselves. For many of the students it was the first time that they experienced truly dialoguing in an all black group that began with a story, or the relating of an experience and it was allowed to be explored and expanded without interrupting negatively or destructively. This was a different experience from that which has sometimes been reported of some black workers support groups.

There was still the usual competing for space, interruptions, raised voices and passionate expressions of disagreements, but this process was allowed, held and given permission by all not just me as the teacher. I was not teaching from the front. This was truly self-directed teaching and learning. We came through the session feeling that we arrived somewhere we wanted to be. No one left the room when things got too difficult, too painful or too frustrating.

I witnessed the beginning with a story told by one of the students and the group evolving their story around his. They went through the tumble of the experiences tapping into their knowledge – historical, socio-political and economic- coming full circle back to the original story from the student with new understanding.

During that time I became aware of how much my practice had improved as a teacher and group facilitator. I started the session by offering the group an opportunity to take some control of the rest of the curriculum, turning over a few of the sessions to them. One person took up the offer and tested whether I was really giving them that amount of power and asked "do you mean today's session, when can we start?" I said yes although I had already planned the session. I did not feel tied to the session and knew that it could be done at another time. They had just had a four week break from college teaching, they had been in practice placements and as this was their first

teaching session in college I wanted to give them the opportunity to ground themselves and share their experiences from practice.

Patrick began by relaying a story of an experience he had on his practice placement. He started by saying that he had an experience that made him more aware of the power of internalised racism and the impact it has had on him. He shared a story of his recent experience of a social work case conference he attended where he found himself among a group of professionals who happened to be all black except for one white man who was a client. His partner who was also a client was a black woman. This was an unusual situation for him to witness, as often it is the professionals who are all white and the client black. He noticed how uncomfortable he was in that all black setting and kept looking out for more white people to join the group. As he sat waiting for others to join the meeting, one by one as they came in he noticed that they were all black.

The chair of the conference was a black woman. He recalled how he became aware of his need to have more white people present as he noticed his discomfort during the proceedings. He also experienced huge discomfort with the black woman as chair. He said that he kept "looking out for her, for whether or not she would get it right, whether she would make a mistake. I was anxious for her, anxious that she should do a good job". To his surprise the meeting went well and in his words, "the chair conducted herself competently". He was only able to relax after half way through the meeting when he realised that "she was not going to get it wrong".

He said that when he later reflected on that experience he "felt bad and ashamed, ashamed that I felt I needed more white people in the room". He related how he reflected on the work he did in this module where we explored expectations of black managers and remembered the list his working group arrived at and how unrealistic they were being. He realised that he had unrealistically high expectations of the black woman chair. "I did not want her to let me down, she was not allowed to be herself, but in that position as a black woman she was representing the black community. She had to be the perfect role model".

He reflected that experience in the group, demonstrating in that process his learning, awareness, noticing, reflecting and theorising about internalised racism. He reflected on the fact that he had internalised that black people was not as competent as white people that is why they did not occupy many power positions in social services departments, so these professionals at the case conference could not hold such power and authority. He said he caught himself thinking that they were not competent enough. He knew about internalised racism but experiencing it in that way made him feel that he came to know it again in a different way. He was demonstrating his renewed

sense of knowing in his sensemaking. The group, witnessing this took on to do the same by adding their voices to the story, making connections with their own experiences of racism in terms of power and powerlessness.. They reflected on the gender and race issues and the position of men and women in society, the different power positions black women hold in welfare organisations as compared to black men who occupy less powerful positions.

During that exploration I noticed how much I was asking inquiry questions and speaking to the process in the room, in the present. I have noticed that I have done that more this year with this group paying attention to process and content, generating theoretical ideas about, and from the process. I was working at multiple levels, the individual, group and drawing conclusions about issues that black communities and society need to pay attention to.

What is evident from this extract is that this student's (Patrick) learning was gained from practicing reflection-in-action and both he and the other students were engaging in critical reflection and critical thinking during the discussion. This supported my claim to having a "*political orientation towards critical thinking and self-actualisation".*

Partick's feedback, in the extract, and other students' feedback supported my claim " *I see students as bringing special knowledge, experience and skills to a course and I wish to encourage the development of knowledgeable and skilled practitioners who can also offer critical questioning".*

I helped the students to reflect on their experience, review it and attribute some meaning to it so that they did not necessarily react to life as a series of happenings which passed through their systems undigested. I helped them to conceptualise by asking them to say what sense they made of discussions, the meanings they attached to their statements and the significance for them of incidents or stories asked them to be aware of the mutual influence of these on each other. Whether or not they considered the happenings or events as racism, they needed to appreciate that 'happenings' become experience when they are digested, when they are reflected on and synthesised.

The observer's feedback from both cycles of inquiry also confirmed that I had worked well with the stories from the students, helping them to reflect on the meaning of their stories and, at the same time, helping them to integrate aspects of 'self'. Cathy cited the exploration of the students' experiences of academia and commented: "for example, when you asked good questions: what would have helped? What's your part in all of

this? What is your fantasy of academic language? Where are you now with the issues of the practical and academic? Also focusing on how they broke the cycle of fear. Here you were trying to help them to interpret their experiences and different aspects of themselves". This, she thought, was powerful and resulted in empowering others to 'speak out' from 'self'.

From the students feedback there appeared to be evidence of greater self-confidence, which flowed from a better understanding of self as a result of critical reflection on their experience. Kyle said, **"Taking part in this group was challenging because I had to confront the things I really feel and experience as a black female, and how I feel about my own black people...You alerted me to the work I need to do for myself which is about learning to appreciate and validate my experiences, thoughts, beliefs for myself; without relying on external validation consistently".**

And Jennifer commented
" I was beginning to learn about myself as a black individual, and how my ethnicity affected and informed my interventions with other individuals. I feel that I was arriving at some points of discovery concerning myself and myself in relation to others. My involvement within this group left me with some follow-up work for my own personal inquiry, and I am thankful that I have had the opportunity for these personal and professional issues to have been brought to my awareness".

As the students reflected on their own experiences they were take possession of them in new ways and gained, for themselves, knowledge that was true and authentic. Polanyi (1958), states that all knowledge has a tacit dimension through which understanding is possible, but experience alone does not lead to knowledge. Rational reflection upon examination of an experience is necessary to develop one's understanding. Polanyi calls this 'personal knowledge'.

In order to help students learn through reflection on their experiences there was a need to help them make the tacit explicit. In so doing, they were able to re-examine their experiences and learn from them in new ways which might not initially have been apparent. Through deliberately and purposefully reconsidering their experiences and by reviewing their thoughts and actions in the light of this type of rational reflection, they might have gained a deeper understanding of their experiences.   That was reflected in Josephine's statement, **"I had to think about issues I never gave much thought to before,**

for example, black professionals and my expectations of them. I understand their role now and about professionalism. It does not mean that because some black professionals appear unapproachable that they have lost their identity. I am looking at things objectively and feeling more positive about myself as a professional".

This comment confirms my belief that it is through developing a critical awareness of their subjective selves that the students would begin to see others as different and not judge each other so negatively. It is through their process of re-examination that they would begin to understand wider social, political and cultural processes which are responsible for producing their individual situations, both their own and each others. It is through new lenses that they would be able to understand the nature of oppression. To acquire these new lenses they would need to confront their internalised racism and I wanted to offer them the tools for doing so.

I took a questioning approach and modelled, I hoped, healthy questioning and challenging, although some of the feedback confirms that I would need to improve this area as my style of challenging was disempowering for some students. This was confirmed in the feedback from both cycles of inquiry.

Disempowerment

Having learnt from the first observation, and in feedback from students, that my style of challenging created a lack of safety in some students or silenced them I worked to improve this. In the second cycle I tried not to challenge their defences 'full frontally' by focusing too much on getting them to think or pressing them too hard to say what they thought. I have noticed a change, which has been confirmed by later feedback from students who said that they felt safe enough to share and to make themselves more vulnerable. However, it appeared from the feedback that I still need to pay attention to my style of questioning and be less direct.

The observer thought that my questions were challenging and had a positive effect in that they focused the discussion, helped the students to explore further and think more deeply. However, there was a double edge to some of my questioning. She cited an example of challenge to a student about her use of terminology. She commented, "You asked, what is that when it's at home? It's double edged because a) it's helping people to keep their feet on the ground, but b) it could make them feel self conscious about their

new use of language which is needed for the professional era we are in. You may run the risk of perpetuating their fear of 'not knowing', not knowing how to use the academic language ″. She also thought that my questions were incisive, enlightening and got to the heart of the matter, but the way I asked them could sometimes startle some students.

It was obvious that my style of challenging was problematic for some students. Although some students were helped to think with my challenging questions, others found them uncomfortable and were silenced by them. Craig captured the impact on him in this statement, **"Often too much challenging feels threatening and uncomfortable for the individual. It also makes the person feel worried about sharing their views openly for fear of embarrassment, or criticism from you".**

What have I learnt from my inquiring into my practice?

The use of action research approach grounded in reflective practice in the classroom, has been a potent learning experience as well as a satisfying one. I have learnt about the importance of critically evaluating my practice in that I was able to use reflection to value my expertise whilst being open to new ways of working. I have learnt that if we are committed to improving what we do, reflection helps us 'face up' to the situation we are in and, through reflection-in-action undertaken sensitively as we work, we can respond creatively in a way that will make a difference in the here and now. I have also appreciated that sustained improvement of practice relies on what Schon (1992) calls 'reflection on action', looking back and evaluating and learning from what we have done in order to develop 'intelligence in action' when difficult, on-the-spot judgements have to be made.

I have become aware that the problem with reflection-in-action is that the practitioner may not be aware that this is what they are doing at the time. It was only through retrospective reflection, when I analysed what I had done, that I became aware that reflection-in-action had taken place. I have appreciated, above all, that critical reflection can counter inequalities in practice and that reflection is a necessary component of critical practice. Critical reflection requires an awareness and commitment to anti-oppressive practice. To achieve reflective, anti-oppressive practice the practitioner has

systematically and 'self' consciously to 'reflect-in-', and 'on-', action.   I have learnt the importance of a conscious, reflective process, of 'constantly checking back with the value-base (empowerment) not only on what is being done but 'how' and 'why' it is being done.

The other most significant learning for me has been the consistency in the feedback that I have received about how challenging I am and both the positive and negative impact this has on learners. I have also been given the opportunity to explore further the importance of being an 'educator' and a 'teacher' and the similarities and differences between two.

Consequently, I have become more aware of the way I produce knowledge and I am behaving more self-consciously about it. I work to assist the students to do the same, encouraging them to question the nature of knowledge and how it is produced. On a personal level, I have chosen to make myself more vulnerable in my teaching and to allow the students to see more of 'me'. I speak more from 'I' revealing my passion and exposing my feelings more. I pay attention to my inner reactions, noticing my fear, if I feel fear and also noticing when I am becoming defensive and blocking my learning. I have begun to notice more how I listen to what is being communicated holistically and not just what is said. This may have resulted in what some of the reports from students revealed regarding their experience of me as their role model. I have ambivalent feelings about this. I am motivated to be and at the same time defensive about being a role model because of some students' feedback of their idealised 'god-like' image of me. It has made me realise that I may also fear the 'god-like' in me and that although I am fascinated by it, I am also fearful of it. I realise also that it is also human to feel that way.

I have become more aware of the skills that are needed for working in an empowering way and have reflected on those I have. Some of these are:

- My therapeutic skills of listening, reflecting back, being specific, questioning, checking for clarity
- My ability to give clear and specific feedback
- My ability to work at a different levels, listening for meanings at a meta level
- Reflective skills – self-reflection
- My ability to work with process and to make tacit knowledge explicit
- Making connections between the micro and the macro – making links between the internal and external, intuitive and cognitive

And when I am working effectively with those skills, I:

- stimulate thinking by assisting students to explore deeper and inquire so that they would develop the skills of reflection and critical evaluation
- take on board different views and work with difference
- am able to think on my feet
- present my 'self' with a sense of a strong, black identity
- command listening and respect with my presence
- enable learners to get their voice heard
- validate students experiences and assist them to value their ways of 'knowing'
- assist students to speak from 'I'
- work to provide clarity

When I reflect back on the second part of my inquiry question as to whether my practice needs improving the answer is that it does because whilst there were a variety of ways in which I tried to empower the students and myself as an educator, there were also ways in which I was being contradictory. There are areas of my practice that require further development. I need to:

- pay attention to working with appropriate use of my power
- offer more supportive challenge and less 'spotlighting' of learners
- develop further my skills in asking simple questions and inquiry questions
- develop working more holistically
- continue to work with my vulnerability and to value my strength in it
- facilitate in a more caring way, taking care of my feelings as well as those of the students

Concluding comments

Reflecting on Evaluating in Practice

In this research inquiry I have reflected on my knowing-in- practice. During the process of evaluation I have come to understand and value it more and see it both as evaluating *on* practice and evaluating –in- practice. I engaged in evaluating on practice when I recollected or anticipated in relative quiet and calm. When I evaluated-in-practice I was engaged in 'disciplined subjectivity', thinking on my feet and giving accounts of my way of working.

I experienced my inquiry as a social rather than a solitary activity, social in the sense of a collective activity with students with negotiated purposes and consequences, bringing in a collaborative dimension. In this way it had a public dimension. I had a purpose which was to evaluate my practice both for my own learning and the learning of others. As an evaluative practitioner I have generated knowing-in-action. Donald Schon (1983) summarises part of what this means for good professional practice:

"In his everyday practice he makes innumerable judgements of quality for which he cannot state adequate criteria, and he displays skills for which he cannot state the rules and procedures. Even when he makes conscious use of research-based theories and techniques, he is dependent on tacit assumptions, judgements and skilful performances.

For me, there is little doubt that undertaking this action inquiry was an intervention in the normal process of my teaching which has increased my skills in reflection in action. I know that throughout the entire teaching of this module I reflected on my work and did not simply isolate a couple of sessions for attention because of this inquiry. I believe I also modelled an approach to thinking and reflecting about practice and coupled this with my probing of individual's thoughts and views. Each individual was able to make her or his own mind about how much (if any) of what was happening to her/him needed to be incorporated in her/his own practice.

I do not believe that my way of working is novel or unique and I did not emerge from my inquiry with novel ideas about my practice. Inquiry into my practice has revealed to me ways in which I have not been empowering, and also ways in which I have been.

This chapter is technically a representation of the end of my research journey. However, in the next section of the thesis I continue on my journey with the thesis, to present evidence of the knowledge gained from my inquiries and offer my theoretical ideas.