

Chapter 3

Choosing Research Approaches

Introduction

In this chapter I discuss my methodological approaches to the research presented in this thesis and give a brief overview of the various cycles of inquiry I engaged in whilst researching, analysing and writing about the experiences of black professionals and black students. In approaching the writing of this chapter I was challenged to find an appropriate form which would reveal the various stages through which the research study passed and which would honour my research activities. I also experienced a struggle to articulate the complexities, concerns, principles and values that underpin the exploration of choosing research approaches. Choosing and arriving at approaches was an emerging process and I chose different methods for different phases of the research.

I shall therefore, present:

- My choice of school for locating the study
- My reasons for rejecting quantitative methods and for choosing qualitative methods
- My choice of methods, action research
- My struggle to conceptualise co-operative inquiry
- My understanding of research epistemology

I have divided the chapter into four parts in order to accommodate these. In **Part 1** I outline a theoretical framework for understanding the research inquiries I engaged in. In **Part 2** I outline the philosophical and ideological bases for the methods used and comment on the usefulness of some of these methods. **Part 3** presents the research methods used. **Part 4** consists of inquiry methods used for making sense of the research.

Part 1

Framework for understanding the research inquiries

The research inquiries I adopted can be understood within a framework presented by Reason and Torbert (1999) who offer an epistemological basis for integrating quantitative, qualitative and action research. I offer a thumbnail sketch of their arguments. They present an argument for integrating what they refer to as first, second and third person dimensions of inquiry which would generate quantitative, qualitative and action research that 'supports full human flourishing'.

They describe first person research/practice skills and methods as the researcher inquiring into her or his life with awareness and being choiceful in

their actions. They use the terms "upstream" and "downstream" in reference to first person research. By upstream they mean that as researchers we move towards paying attention to how our habits and thoughts help and or hinder us from knowing experientially or widening our attention.

First person inquiry "upstream" helps us to clarify the purposes of our inquiry for others and for ourselves and identity "where we are coming from" (Reason and Marshall, 1987). This would suggest that researchers develop an awareness of life issues that they bring into the research, unresolved issues from their childhood, for example, that may interfere with the conduct of their inquiry (Heron, 1988). Methodologies of first person inquiry "upstream" include autobiographical writing, psychotherapy, meditation and other disciplines that develop mindfulness.

First person inquiry "downstream" refers to our need to pay attention to our actions as researcher, to see whether there are providing us with the outcomes we desire and by looking back "upstream" endeavouring to see if these actions are congruent with our purposes. First person "downstream" research/practice can take the form of examination of day to day behaviour drawing on self-awareness, moment to moment mindfulness and reflection in action. First person inquiry is told in our own first-person voices in contrast to second person inquiry which represents intersubjective voices of co-participants in our research practice.

Second person research practice refers to mutual inquiry that requires researchers to be engaging and consulting with others in conversations and dialogue. One approach to second person research is co-operative inquiry (Heron, 1996). I shall describe this approach in more detail below, but basically it is an inquiry strategy that involves all participants in the research as co-researchers participating in all activities of the research.

Third person research practice refers to the third-person objective voice and would involve people in a more impersonal way as opposed to first and second person inquiry. However, one of its aims is to empower participants to create their knowing-in-action whilst collaborating with others. The participants involved do not necessarily know one another personally or have direct access to one another interpersonally. Third person research may use quantitative methods such as questionnaires, for example, but whatever the method, it is used in a participative way to illuminate issues of concern to those involved. Amongst its aims are those of reaching a wider audience either with new theory or through reflective texts, of transforming popular opinions and policies and creating institutions and practices which have lasting value.

The thesis spans all three forms of inquiry although there is more of an emphasis on first and second person inquiry. There is a connection between first and second person inquiry in the co-operative inquiry that Cathy and I initiated which involved group planning, collaboration and reflection with other black professionals and black students. During the process of inquiry members of the group, including myself, returned to our separate lives and

practices and engaged in first person research with the support of the inquiry group. For example included in the thesis is one of my experiments which I took into my work setting to inquire into my practice as a teacher with black students. Other examples of action others took and the outcome of participating in the inquiry will be reported later. Also included in the thesis is my engagement in first person "upstream" practices, where I focused on issues to do with what Reason (1988) refers to as critical subjectivity, which is my primary subjective experience as a researcher as I lived through my inquiry.

There were some attempts at third person inquiry attached to the project that Cathy and I initiated in which questionnaires were used to ascertain information from past students about their experiences of the Brunel social Work Course, in particular. However, lack of space in this thesis does not allow me to include some of this information. Furthermore, a research assistant conducted a large part of this work. Some of what is reported in this thesis can be considered as third party in the sense that, at various times, groups of black people were brought together for collaboration, some of whom did not know each other personally. One of the aims was to generate a body of knowledge which would reach a wider audience and to influence institutions and create practices which would be long lasting. A couple of the chapters in the thesis represent reflective texts and are aimed at a wider audience in order to influence practices and policies.

I shall discuss those research practices later, but I want first to present the philosophical and ideological underpinnings of the research practices and the theoretical influences on the choice of methodology.

Part 2

Philosophical Assumptions:

My research concerns have focused on the interplay between quantitative and qualitative research, the relationship between intellectual traditions and personal scholarship and the nature of subjects and objects in research and how we relate as participants.

Quantitative research

In choosing research approaches I was not attracted to quantitative research because of some of its philosophical assumptions as outlined by Hammersley (1995).

- that what is taken to be the method of the natural science is the only rational source of knowledge;
- that this method should be applied in social research irrespective of any supposedly destructive features of social reality;
- that quantitative measurement and experiment and statistical manipulation of variables are essential, at least ideal, features of scientific research;

- that research can and should be concerned with producing accounts which correspond to an independent reality;
- that scientific knowledge consists of unusual laws;
- that research must be objective, with subjective biases being overcome through commitment to the principle of value neutrality.

This neo-positivist methodology, adapted from the natural sciences treated people as objects about whom knowledge was to be collected dispassionately. The processes of collecting data, analysing and writing it, whilst depending on social interaction and professional authority, were presented as simple and transparent. "What was considered 'value free' research is now seen as an obfuscation of the power relationships involved" (Schrijvers 1993, p33-41). Firstly, the agenda for research was set by professional social scientist, in a way that was later revealed to be ethno-and euro-centric (Rohrlich-Leavitt et al 1975; Schrijvers, 1979). Secondly, 'the researched' had no input in defining relevant topics of research. Third, they were objectified and disempowered during the research process; and fourthly, it tried to deny or nullify the influence of the research process on 'the researched' by making the researcher invisible in the results. Far from the results being useful for their liberation 'from oppression', they were produced primarily for the academic community and secondarily for use by governments.

However, there are lessons that can be learnt from positivism. There is little doubt that the positivists were dramatically wrong about many things, for example about the verifiability principle and about the theory of neutrality of observation and little doubt also that their views have had some negative consequences of social research. However, this does not render their work of no value. Indeed, they still have much to teach us. However useful the promise such a reality may be in the physical sciences, it is not always appropriate or effective in the arena of human inquiry. In that arena, there is no tangible reality; everything that social inquirers study depends on how it was socially constructed and the meaning and interpretations we give to this. Thus the usual distinction between ontology (the nature of reality) and epistemology (how one comes to know that reality) collapses. Inquirers do not discover knowledge by watching from behind thick lenses or a one-way mirror; rather, it is created by the interaction of inquirers with whatever is being inquired into.

Qualitative Research

As a consequence to these challenges to positivism, alternative ways of researching and developments in thought related to naturalistic, interpretive and qualitative inquiry have opened the door to a much broader array of research, some of which is credited with an holistic approach. These paradigms have pursued an interpretive task which seeks to describe the historical, cultural and interactional complexity of social life as is shown in the work of Lincoln and Guba 's (1985) "naturalistic paradigm.

Researchers with such approaches refuse to dissect the situation into measurable variables, and afford the kind of attention to naturalism (studying

the situation as it really occurs, not as it seems when modified by the research procedures) which would rule out 'treatments' or control groups. Qualitative researchers work from a different philosophical tradition, one which looks for meaning behind social action. This involves more than observing the social world; it requires interaction with the social world. As a researcher(s) you must be part of the process and you need to understand the symbolic nature of social action in the search for meaning. Interpretation or making sense/meaning is involved not only at the final stages of a research study, it is also involved at the collection of the field text stage. These paradigms endeavour to develop accounts that more fully represent people's lived experiences. Explanations are derived from the ordinary understandings at work in any cultural context and from the everyday behaviours of social process that surround and shape people's lives. However, even these explanations have their limitations, because they fail to provide any essential link between theory and practice.

More recently, therefore, we have witnessed the re-emergence of a tradition that carries this process some steps further, a tradition that does not embrace values of objectivity and elimination of bias, but which has an explicit concern with ending inequality and with taking the side of oppressed and marginalised groups. These research approaches have variously been described as 'action research', 'collaborative inquiry', 'co-operative inquiry', 'participatory research', 'emancipatory research', 'empowerment research'. Cameron et al (1992) characterise research in three ways: ethical research (research on); advocacy research (research on and for) and empowering research (research on, for and with). The additional 'with' implies the use of interactive or dialogic methods as opposed to the distancing and objectifying strategies associated with positivism which these approaches have adapted. The central aim of these approaches is the empowerment of research subjects, which may include the sharing of decisions about the aims, methods, and conclusions as aspects of any study.

When choosing methods of researching the experiences of black professionals and black students, I was attracted to those methodological approaches that advocated the notion of empowerment because I wanted to develop accounts that more fully represented their lived experiences. I wanted to bring into my work a model of empowerment that was a strongly value-based attempt to build on strengths and to research with people to enable them to understand their experiences and take control of their lives. It is unusual amongst research methods in that it contains these specific elements of previously disempowered people taking control and taking action.

Research about black people gets caught within systems of top down, authoritative knowledge with researchers and professionals judging the outcome of their work from a position of knowing what is best so that they end up with keeping people in a position of supposed inferiority. They prescribe recommendations which are about expecting individuals to adjust to that which they cannot control, including pathologising natural responses to injustice and inequality (Anderson, 1996).

I wanted, therefore, to use research methods that recognised unjust social structures, that had a practice-based parallel in empowerment, in the recognition that the problems oppressed groups face can never be fully understood if they are solely seen as the result of personal inadequacies. I saw and the need to base intervention on a wider questioning of the causes (Mullender and Ward, 1991).

Furthermore, I did not want my research to be too tightly bound by the framework of scientific methodology, which would result in my missing much of the texture and nuance in social relationship because like Marshall and Reason (1993) I believe "research is a social process negotiated and pursued in relationships with others"(p.2). I was interested in methodological practices that supported the need for rapport in establishing good research relations. I sought from the outset a methodology that would not be advocating a "value free stance". I also believe that research is not something separate from the researcher's life, especially when the research is in an area which matters to the researcher(s) and in which they already have a role to play. These beliefs played a part in my search for appropriate methodologies. The search took me towards looking for paradigms of research that would reflect these views. Consequently, the research approaches presented in this thesis take seriously the critiques of traditional research methodologies, approaches that are based primarily on humanistic psychology and critical theory. In the previous chapter I outlined the principle notions of critical theory so here I shall present briefly the principal notion of research approaches based on humanistic psychology.

Approaches based on Humanistic Psychology

This approach validates experiential knowledge. The subject is conceived as an autonomous and self-directing agent. Through co-operation, collaboration and dialogue, s/he is able, by reflection on her/his experiences, to come to a consciousness of her/his need for emancipation and to enter into co-operative research with others in order to achieve this end. The collection of works based on these ideas are to be found in Reason and Rowan (1981), Reason, (1998) and Reason, (1994). A contributor to these collections, John Heron, in setting out the philosophical basis for what has become known as 'new paradigm' or 'participatory' research, does not reject the empiricist concept of the application of social research of causal laws in nature, but he posits a thesis of 'relative determinism', in that "there are creative acts of self-directing agents within that order" (Heron 1981, p.21). He suggests that the basic explanatory model for research behaviour (in both researcher and researched), is that of intelligent self-direction – commitment to purposes in the light of principles-combined with relative determinism. Subjects become co-researchers, since if they are not privy to the research thinking, they will not be functioning as intelligent agents. A central idea here is the notion of intentionality, in action, people are conscious of their purpose in doing what they are doing and their meaning in acting. In collaborative research such intentions are available mutually to the researcher and research subjects. The general explanation of human behaviour which is drawn from this is that human beings are "symbolising beings, who find meaning in and give meaning to their world through

symbolising their experience in a variety of constructs and actions" (p23). To fully understand this, one has to participate in it through overt dialogue and communication with those who are engaging in it. These are ideas taken from phenomenology, but a model of participatory research takes this further in research practice, in an attempt to share power and to aim for equality at every stage of the research process.

Within this scheme, language is viewed as the original archetypal form of human inquiry which enables people to state propositions about their experiences in terms of general concepts. In other words, agreement about the meaning of language is what gives it its symbolising power. So long as the rules governing a language are generally accepted, language is a channel for direct and clear communication.

Another assumption is that empirical research on persons "involves a subtle, developing interdependence between propositional knowledge, practical knowledge and experiential knowledge" (Heron 1981, p.31). The researcher's experiential knowledge of the subject is most adequate when researcher and subject are fully present to each other in a relationship of reciprocal and open inquiry, and when each is open to construe how the other manifests as a presence in space and time. In that space, knowing emerges that can be expressed through stories or images, for example, which is presentational knowledge. In terms of the 'truths' which emerge from this process, it is accepted that the hope of effective research is to generate true propositions, ideas and theories and is expressed in statements which sometimes uses language like 'about'. So the expressions are more *about* rather than from. The truth-value of a proposition is partly a function of its correspondence with extra-propositional dimensions of the world as encountered. Where 'truth' purports to be about persons other than the researcher it has indeterminate validity, no secure status as truth, until s/he knows whether those other persons assent to, and regard as their own, the norms and values of the researcher:

"For an authentic science of persons, true statements about persons rest on a value system explicitly shared by researchers and subjects, and on procedural research norms explicitly agreed by researchers and subjects on the basis of that value system. Here again, the model of co-operative inquiry" (Heron 1981, p.33).

All these assumptions raise a number of questions about, for example, the feasibility of power sharing and a goal of equality in the research process, of dialogue (and implicit consensus); about the failure to acknowledge a wider social political context and about commitment to the ideal of participation. Theorists in drawing into the idea of 'emancipatory' research other knowledge bases to inform and expand its potential, have tackled some of these problems. The main contributions have come from Critical and Feminist theories. I am not afforded space in this thesis to present these ideas although they have informed my work. The research approach, emanating from humanistic psychology which dominates the work in this thesis, is action research.

Action Research Approaches

Action research re-emerged in the 1980's as a significant form of research into practice. Action research can take on a variety of forms and can be individual or collaborative. Action research means different things to different people and it is broad ranging. I have chosen a path, within the range of action research which has an explicit set of social values surrounding the notion of emancipation of research subjects and which is enacted through processes of critical inquiry that have the following characteristics:

- *Democratic*, enabling the participation of all people
- *Equitable*, acknowledging people's equality of worth.
- *Liberating*, providing freedom from oppressive, debilitating conditions.
- *Life enhancing*, enabling the expression of people's full human potential

Action research is movement away from efforts to uncover generalisable truths towards a new emphasis on local context and practical action. Local context action research provides a model for enacting action-oriented approaches to inquiry, applying small-scale theorising to specific problems in specific situations (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994).

Action research works on the assumption that all participants - those whose lives are affected by the problem under study – should be engaged in the processes of investigation. Participants engage in a process of rigorous inquiry-in-action, acquiring information, (collecting data) and reflecting on that information, (analysing) in order to transform their understanding about the nature of the problem under investigation (theorising). This new set of understandings is then applied to plans for resolution of the problem (action), which, in turn, provide the context for testing hypotheses derived from group theorising (evaluation). Knowledge acquisition/production proceeds as a collective process, engaging people who have previously been the "subjects" of research. The researchers are co-subjects, self-reflective participants, reflective observers of interactions, analysers of data, and author/s of the resulting narrative.

Action research methodologies aim to integrate action and reflection. Collaborative exploration helps participants to develop increasingly sophisticated understandings of the problems and issues that confront them. It challenges research practitioners to develop reflective skills. As participants and researchers rigorously explore and reflect on their situation together, they can repudiate social myths, misconceptions and misrepresentations and formulate more constructive analyses of their situation. By sharing their diverse knowledge and experience participants can create solutions to their problems and in the process improve their lives. Such knowledge is gained only through action. According to Torbert (1981), "the model of collaborative inquiry begins from the assumption that research and action, even though analytically distinguishable, are inextricably intertwined in practice. Knowledge is always gained through action and for action" (p.145).

The role of the researcher facilitator, in this context, becomes more facilitative and less directive. The ultimate validity and usefulness of a study rest on the awareness and integrity of the researcher as she or he observes and interacts

both with those people who are participators in the study and with the data during the course of the analysis.

One criticism levelled at action research is that because of its focus on the local context it can become consumed with local facts and local theory and the validity and legitimacy of its results and reports becomes open to question in that they address a narrow local audience. It is important, Therefore, to integrate more than one research practice approach in generating knowledge from research.

Part 3

Research Methods used

Although more than one method was used in the research, the model of co-operative inquiry in generating dialogue, based on an action research format, in particular informed Cathy's and my choice. I used action inquiry in education, as it relates to the classroom, to inquiry into my practice as a teacher. I shall present full explanations of co-operative inquiry methods below. However I have chosen to present my discussions of the action inquiry methods in education in the chapter in which I discuss my inquiry into my practice as an educator so as to place it where it relates to the material it generated.

I shall present the second person inquiry approaches that Cathy and I employed the cooperative inquiry method and then lead into dialogue as inquiry.

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Co-operative inquiry

Cathy and I chose co-operative inquiry as a method because we liked its philosophical assumptions and arguments. Co-operative inquiry is a radical way of doing research. It is a form of action research which is a way of helping people with similar interests and concerns to come together, in collaboration, to examine their experiences, make sense of their lives and to develop ideas that may change their world and work practices. In that way, it has a political element which is about taking action towards change and 'transformation'. (Reason, 1998). This element was particularly attractive to us in working with a group of people who have been oppressed in society.

Heron (1996) defines co-operative inquiry as an inquiry strategy which:

"involves two or more people researching a topic through their own experience of it, using a series of cycles in which they move between this experience and reflecting together on it. Each person is a co-subject in the experience phases and co-researcher in the reflection phase. It is a vision of persons in reciprocal relation using the full range of their sensibilities to inquire together into any aspect of the human condition with which the transparent body-mind can engage" (p.1).

As a method it presents as being very accessible to ordinary people who are seeking to engage in research that involves change. It is a way of doing research with and for people rather than on people (Reason, 1988). Its philosophical assumptions are as outlined by Heron, (1994,1996) and Reason (1988,1994,1998):

- *Self –Determination and Choice*

People are self-determining; they have the potential for making choices and for taking responsibility for their actions. This idea complements the ideas we set out in our initial paper, which were that we believe that black people should view themselves as having choice, should work with the concept of agency and take responsibility for how they construct their experiences.

- *Co-researchers and co-subjects participating in the activity*

A Co-operative approach to research breaks down the boundaries between researcher and subject. This means that all those involved in the research are co-researchers and co-subjects, generating ideas, focusing, designing, managing and drawing conclusions together. In traditional research, the roles between researchers and subjects are mutually exclusive. The researchers contribute most of the thinking that goes into the project; they conceive, design and execute the project. They also take all the responsibility for drawing conclusions from it. The subjects only provide the actions and data to be studied. We were attracted to the notion of equality implied in the co-operative principle, especially as black people have been the 'other' in research in the past and were 'researched' on rather than 'researched' with. Critiques from black women, for example, Bhavnani (1991), Mohanty (1991), expose the eurocentric and oppressive underpinnings which marginalise "Others" and raise questions as to whether such research can be claimed as emancipatory and if so, for whom.

- *Authentic Collaboration*

In Co-operative Inquiry, this relationship between researcher and researched is replaced by what is described as 'collaboration'. This method requires the researchers and the subjects to be working co-operatively in an active relationship with each other, with the result that what is being researched is self-generated by everyone involved.

- *"Extended Epistemology" (theory of how to know)*

The primary source of knowing and the primary instrument for research, is the self-directing person or persons who are engaged in their experiences, expressed through their stories and images and which are understood through theories which make sense to them and expressed in actions in their lives. Knowing, in this way, will produce deeper analysis, deeper insights or a resolution of issues. The experience of exploring together in this way could lead to our own personal growth and development. This process involves four different kinds of ways of knowing referred to earlier; experiential,

presentational, propositional and practical. This emphasis on different ways of knowing is particularly attractive because it offers possibilities for opportunities to be provided in which black people's experiences could become central to an understanding of their oppression. It also implies an insistence on black people as 'knowers' of the world and that their political literacy will emerge from their reading of the world, that is, from their experience, leading to collective knowledge and action.

These are some of the reasons why Cathy and I became attracted to Co-operative Inquiry when we set out to find a methodology that would fit with our ideology and philosophical assumptions. We believed Co-operative Inquiry to be commensurate with a black ideology that expounds equality, self-determination, empowerment and working within a democratic process.

Ways of working in a Co-operative Inquiry Group

All of this is done within what is called a "community of inquiry", which can take place over a short period of time or extended over a year or more. Depending on the kinds of questions to be explored, it can take the form of a short workshop or big event of several groups of people. Whatever form is chosen, all parties are seen as inquirers, co-researchers, co-subjects working in a cyclical fashion between phases of action and reflection, reflection as co-researchers and action as co-subjects, and knowledge is derived via this process (Heron, 1981 Reason, 1988). These cycles between action and reflection is repeated several times, and such a process can produce rich experiences gained through discussions, storytelling, fantasy, movement, and psycho-drama and has the potential for experimenting with new forms of behaviour and producing new ways of knowing. Peter Reason sums the process up in his statement:

"The essence of co-operative experiential inquiry is an aware self-critical movement between experience and reflection which goes through several cycles as ideas, practice and experience are systematically honed and refined"(Reason, 1988 p.6).

Phases of the Inquiry Cycle

This cycling process includes four phases of action and reflection:

1. People coming together with shared interest to plan

In the first phase, a group of researchers comes together to identify the problem or the activity to inquire into. The question or questions for exploration are agreed. Action to be taken is agreed upon and procedures for recording their own and others experiences are established. Formulation of the topic is a lengthy process, which engages the researchers in propositional knowing.

2. Engagement in Action

Secondly, the researchers become co-subjects and engage in the action agreed, recording their process and its outcomes. They test out in practice whether there is a mismatch between their ideas and what happens in reality. This process involves noticing, self-awareness, and observation of what is happening to them in order to develop better understanding of their experience. This phase engages the inquirers in practical knowing

3. Full engagement, fully immersed

Thirdly, the co-researchers fully engage in their experiences with deeper engagement in reflection and action. At this stage, contradictions are highlighted, connections made, experiences and understanding are deepened as the co-researchers engage in creative explorations, undertaking experiments in practice. Such processes can produce rich experience and data gained through discussions, storytelling, fantasy and movement which has the potential for producing new ways of knowing. This involves the inquirers in experiential knowing.

Inquirers are challenged to stay open to their experiences, as there is a temptation to simplify what is heard, seen and learnt. This might come about because they might experience difficulties in dealing with contradictions, simplifying the data to make it understandable, in one way, and making more and more connections to make it more meaningful and understandable in another. This is a deeply involved phase where inquirers are challenged to stay focused and cope with practical and emotional crises so that creative insights can be gained and can be expressed in presentational knowing.

4. Feedback and evaluation- Co-researchers re-assemble

In the fourth phase, the co-researchers get together to focus on the overall inquiry and reconsider the original questions in light of their experience. At this stage, the questions may be modified, reframed or rejected. The group may choose to re-engage in a second cycle of action and reflection and focus on the same or different aspects of the overall inquiry. Propositional knowing is usually experienced in this phase.

Setting up the group – practical considerations

- *Initiation*

Any group of people could initiate an inquiry group but, more often than not, one or two people with an idea they wish to explore may initiate it. At this stage, those involved require enthusiasm, motivation and a passionate interest.

- *Group getting started*

This process begins with bringing together a group of people who might be interested in joining in the project. The invitation maybe formally initiated with a circular letter or informally done because the group is self-evident. The size of the group may vary and the variety of experience and quality of facilitation experience required would be determined by the size

- *Negotiating a contract for working*

At this stage the agenda for establishing the process of the inquiry group is discussed. Initiators may present proposals for discussing the formation of a group. The process of the co-operative inquiry is discussed and people offer ideas, suggestions, questions and challenges. Practical issues like time, dates and commitments are also discussed. Decisions are made for joining the group

- *The Research Plan*

The group devises a programme of meetings paying attention to the amount of time required to engage in the cycles of action and reflection. Ground rules maybe established at this stage and roles discussed and distributed. Leadership roles and facilitation roles are considered and a decision may be made as to whether leadership is rotated or whether one or two people facilitate on behalf of the group

- *Writing*

The research audience should be discussed and arrangements made for written feedback and for how texts will be approved. Decisions will need to be made about who will be scribes and whether one or more people will take responsibility for writing up the group experience

Outcomes from co-operative inquiries

Co-operative inquiry groups can generate different ways of knowing and can produce the kind of knowledge that extends beyond the theoretical knowledge of academia. Communicating the outcome can move beyond the tradition of writing articles, books or theses. Writing is but one means of speaking from the study, and data may be given which is very difficult, or even undesirable to write about. This way of inquiring produces four sorts of outcomes which correspond to the forms of knowing: experiential, presentational, propositional, and practical. Heron (1996) describes these thus:

1. "Experiential outcomes are to do with transformations of being, which come out of the engagement with the process of the inquiry.
2. Presentational outcomes disclose this subjective-objective reality in terms of non-discursive symbolism, sound, song, music, movement, line, colour, shape, composition, and also in terms of metaphor and analogy via poetry, story-telling dramaturgy.

3. Propositional outcomes are to do with 'knowing that'; they report aspects of the research domain in terms of descriptive and theoretical statements, the traditional version of research findings.
4. Practical outcomes are to do with 'knowing how'; they are evident in the range of skills and competencies which inquirers have developed within the research domain.
5. Co-operative inquiry incorporates a notion of self development and self actualisation which says that a person can become more whole as a result of education and a greater awareness of self (Heron 1992, Reason 1994). This involves learning to integrate a sense of self with a deeper way of communicating and interacting with others in the world (Heron 1992, Reason 1994). This principle in particular spoke, to one of our concerns and has informed the approach we have taken to the inquiry.

Validity

The validity of the outcome is tested by the extent to which there is:

- *Coherence between the different ways of knowing.*

This is where we experience congruence between practical, experiential, presentational and propositional knowledge.

- *whether there was authentic collaboration*

The inquiry will not be fully authentic until, and unless, all participants are in full collaboration, contributing at every stage of the process. Attention has to be paid to leadership and to the relationship within the group and between the group members and the initiators of the research. The collaboration will be inauthentic if the group members are "rubber stamps" rather than fully contributing to decision making. All voices should be heard rather than there being one person or subgroups dominating the process.

- *how the co-researchers dealt with the stress, distress*

Co-operative inquiry can bring with it emotional distress. Unexpected things may be discovered in the process, as members engage deeply in life issues and examine their experiences. Therefore, the group will have to pay attention to possible projections and disturbances in the group and space will need to be provided to manage any distress.

- *the balance between chaos and order*

Co-operative inquiry processes can throw members into chaos and disorder, especially in the early stages, when leadership and decision-making processes are being established. This is also the case in phase three when the group takes more risks and become adventurous. This sometimes leads to confusion and uncertainty and members run the risk of managing the anxiety with premature order and overcontrol. There is no guarantee that

chaos will emerge but, if and when it does, managing this process requires adequate preparation, patience and tolerance.

- *the balance in the cycling process between convergence and divergence and between action and reflection*

Depending on the topic being explored, the cycling process can be convergent, which means that the co-researchers look at the same issue more than once or in more detail, or the cycling may be divergent, in that the co-researchers look at different issues on successive cycles. The group needs to decide, but attention needs to be paid to the balance between how much time is spent reflecting to gather experience and how much time is spent in action, trying out actions.

- *Rooting the research questions in politics*

Validity of the material produced is further assured by rooting the research questions in the personal and social political experiences of those who pose them. It is argued that the questions have emerged as a result of a large investment of time, creative energy, and concern. The questions also have meaning in the lives of the researchers and this ensure that they are unlikely to cut corners or want to arrive at quick, easy answers (Salmon, 1992).

In the next chapter I shall discuss how we used this method of inquiry with black professionals and black students to explore our experiences. I shall also evaluate the co-operative method in Chapter 5

Dialogue as Inquiry

Dialogue was a feature of the research in the Co-operative Inquiry and in later stages of my research. In the Co-operative Inquiry it was used to help identify problems in order to solve them. I also engaged in dialogue with students in the inquiry into my practice as a teacher and engaged them in discussion of issues to do with their experiences of teaching, learning and writing, for example. In both inquiries, I engaged in dialogue with participants retrospectively to gain feedback on my writing of texts emanating from the inquiries.

Dialogue can be a powerful method of integrating inquiry and intervention and it can contribute to the intermingled process of knowing and changing (Tandon, 1988). Inquiring dialogically with participants in the Co-operative Inquiry (see chapter 4), and also engaging with groups of students and professionals around the writing of the text for this thesis (see chapter 6), has lead to enhanced understanding and significant changes in my practice and in the personal and professional lives of other participants, as will be reported later in the thesis.

There is evidence in the research literature which supports the notion of change emanating from dialogue. Practitioners of participatory research in communities-sometimes referred to the "southern tradition of PAR" (Fals-

Borda & Rahman, (1991); Hall, (1993), Selener, (1997), base their work in part on Paulo Freire's practice of dialogue. Freire (1972) states that dialogue become the vehicle for critical consciousness and praxis. Action and reflection together can generate understanding and bring about changes. Buber (1988) stresses the importance of dialogical relationships in bringing about change. He states that healing and development evolve from the intersubjective realms of the dialogue. He suggests that the term dialogic does not refer to speech, in the ordinary sense, but to the fact that human beings are inherently relational. Dialogic relating provides the medium for the growth of awareness, learning, problem-solving and self-development.

Working with dialogue as inquiry and action has some implications. For example:

- *Mutual impact* - In dialogue as inquiry both the researcher and participants learn from each other; they also learn together from the very situation that they are a part of and are engaged in analysis of. The interests of all parties are mutually inclusive and supportive in dialogue. Dialogically relating in that way emphasises joint phenomenological exploration of what is, so that we need to speak the same language of present-centered experiencing as participants and give equal value to each person's perspectives. The use of common language is central to the 'I-thou' dialogue.
- *Validity* – In dialogue, validity implies an authentic representation of reality. The data-collection and information gathering process which is most relevant to all parties involved in the inquiry determines its validity. The process, via which the data is collected, cannot be disconnected from the context and content of dialogues. This challenges researchers to be inventive about their methods of data - collection.
- *Impact on people's lives* - Such a process of inquiry can have substantial impact on people and their lives. To that extent the notion of the value neutrality of the researcher is a myth. Dialogue, as inquiry becomes a political and ideological process. For this reason researchers need to state their value positions and in most cases not only state it but behave according to those values. Their values have to be authentically displayed. Dialogue can result in increased empowerment of oppressed groups as healing and development evolves from their intersubjectivity.
- *Understanding and change* – when the processes of knowing and changing occur at the same time the researchers face dilemmas if the situation under study undergoes changes through the process of the study so that what is finally studied is something different from what was originally intended. Dialogue as inquiry presents this dilemma.

So dialogue can be hard or, indeed, impossible to achieve, even where the intentions of all parties are good, because the individuals or groups have differing interests. It can appear possible but turn out, in the event, not to be so. Becoming part of a dialogue process, being involved, committed, interested and concerned with others at the social level could lead to dialogue

at another level, with self, and in the pursuance of making sense of and generating knowledge from process as well as from content. It certainly brought into focus for me the notion of 'process'.

Part 4

Making sense as processes of inquiry

Bringing process in focus as inquiry practice affirms both how important it was in my work and the role it played whilst I was engaging in depth in sensemaking. Sensemaking became an important inquiry activity and my sensemaking activities involved *analysis* and *making visible subjective processes*. I engaged in cycles of inquiry in the process of making sense, which involved first person inquiry into my subjectivity. Whilst engaging in these inquiry activities I had to apply certain research disciplines in order to establish quality. Such disciplines involved engaging in a process of introspection, reflexivity/reflective practice, consciousness and awareness in order to generate subjective knowledge. Also, whilst inquiring into the analysis of the data and the process of writing, I engaged in the discipline of writing and journaling as first person "downstream" inquiry. I shall discuss these sensemaking activities below.

Analysis

In terms of analysis, I have used Weick's (1995) notion of sensemaking, which he applied to making sense in organisations, to help with making sense of my research and the way in which I created my thesis. According to Weick, the concept of sensemaking literally means the making of sense. It is about making something sensible. It is also about how we choose to make sense of our situations. Sometimes, sensemaking is used to mean "putting something within a frame of reference", meaning a generalised point of view that directs interpretations. For me, sensemaking is also a thinking process which I use retrospectively to account for, or explain, events. It is how I attribute meaning to events. It is constructing events so that I engage in an interpretative process so as to understand and share understandings about events, although, according to Weick, interpretations should be viewed differently from sensemaking. Weick (1995) differentiates between interpretations and sensemaking thus:

"Sensemaking is clearly about an activity or a process, whereas interpretation can be a process but is just as likely to describe a product. A focus on sensemaking induces a mindset to focus on process, whereas this is less true with interpretation. To engage in sensemaking is to construct, filter, frame, create...and render the subjectivity into something more tangible...And sensemaking suggests the construction of that which then becomes sensible.... it highlights the invention that precedes interpretation" (p.13-14).

Weick went on to describe seven characteristics that distinguish sensemaking from other explanatory processes such as interpretation and understanding, for example. These seven characteristics are *identity*, *retrospect*, *enactment*, *social contact*, *ongoing events*, *cues*, and *plausibility* and I will now explore them briefly.

Identity

In terms of an individual activity, sensemaking begins with a sensemaker and the sensemaker herself is an ongoing puzzle, undergoing continual redefinition. Sensemaking begins with a self-conscious sensemaker. A researcher's sensemaking process could derive from her/his need to have a sense of identity. By that I mean, her/his general orientation to situations that maintained her/his self-esteem and are consistent with her/his self-concept. What a particular situation will mean to a researcher is dictated by the identity s/he adopts in dealing with it, and that choice, in turn, is affected by what s/he thinks is occurring. Discovery by how and what s/he thinks indicates who the researcher is. So for example, throughout the research, my multiple identities as a black woman, teacher/educator, student, political activist and researcher played a significant role in what I noticed, the choices I made and sense I made of what I encountered. Also important was interpreting what I saw, heard and experienced within a context of the identity that a white, British, racist society has constructed for black people.

Retrospect

Sensemaking is also done retrospectively. To learn what I think, I look over what I said earlier. I make meaning of my lived experience. People may well, through retrospective reflection, develop insight and awareness of an enhanced sense of self and, perhaps, some useful skills and strategies for change. Research may thus bring about changes in practice. Involvement in the research could give participants opportunities to recount their lives and experiences. Recounting is, necessarily, a self-reflective process and may lead to important changes and, for some, could lead to active participation outside the research. In the inquiries participants were offered opportunities and encouraged to dialogue in a way that enabled them to reflect critically on their lived experiences retrospectively and to take on making changes. Engaging in dialogue with participants in the research, to reflect in retrospect on the text generated from my inquiries, allowed for changes to be made to the text that was finally included in this thesis.

Enactment

Enactment is about action *in* the world rather than conceptual pictures *of* the world. Action is a precondition for sensemaking as, for example, when the act of speaking or verbalising makes it possible for people to see what they think and what they know. In research it is possible for participants to construct reality through action and create new features of their environment which did not exist before. People are part of their environment and in their action create materials that become the constraints and opportunities they face. The idea of enactment invites close attention to interdependent activities, processes and continuous change. Engaging in action research into my practice as an educator was one way of me finding out what I knew and did not know about the way I teach and whether or not I empowered students.

Social

Sensemaking is a social process in which intersubjectively shared meanings, shared language and social interaction take place through talk, discourse and conversation in order to maintain and sustain social contact. It is important to talk in terms of shared meaning and how meaning is socially constructed, as shared meaning is important for collective action. Moreover, the experience of the collective action is shared. In terms of social activity, sensemaking is not a solitary act because what a person does internally is contingent on others. Participating in a co-operative inquiry, for example, with black professionals and black students collaborating in dialogue, offers the possibilities for sharing and new meanings to be generated. The meanings that are made and the conclusions arrived at are determined by our socialisation, who socialises us and how we are socialised. So, as researchers, what we say, single out and conclude is determined by how we are socialised as well as by the audience which we anticipate will audit our conclusions.

Ongoing

"To talk about sensemaking is to talk about reality as an ongoing accomplishment that takes from when people make retrospective sense of the situations in which they find themselves and their creations. There is a strong reflexive quality to this process. People make sense of things by seeing a world on which they already imposed what they believe" (Weick, 1995, p.15).

This process is captured in Pirsig's statement cited in Winohur, (1990):

"Any intellectually conceived object is always in the past and therefore unreal. Reality is always the moment of vision before intellectualisation takes place. There is no other reality""(p.82).

In research terms, sensemaking is always ongoing and very often I found myself in the middle of complex situations where there were no self-contained certainties on which I could build. Working with the notion of sensemaking, I have been able to make sense of some uncertain situations, that initially made no sense, especially complex and ill-defined situations, in which political issues were all mixed up together. I was repeatedly trying to disentangle these situations by creating, then revising, and then making provisional assumptions about them.

Cues

This means paying attention to the way we notice, extract cues and work with what is extracted, as cues are crucial for their capacity to evoke action. Extracted cues are seeds from which we develop a larger sense of what is occurring. The process of noticing, by which cues are extracted for sensemaking can be distinguished as noticing refers to activities of filtering, classifying and comparing whereas sensemaking refers more to interpretation and the activity of determining what the noticed cues mean. The importance of this, in research is that researchers pay attention to what they notice and how they respond to events, since if events are noticed people make sense of them and if events are not noticed they are not available for sensemaking.

The social context of the research could affect what is noticed and our sensemaking, as in some cases the context incorporates politics. How people

are located in the context, in terms of levels of hierarchy, may provide norms and expectations that constrain explanations. So what researchers single out to focus on as content for explanations is only a small portion of what is actually happening because of context and personal dispositions. This meant that I had to pay close attention to the research process as well as the content and the politics of choosing and selecting from the research data for interpretation. This included the theoretical frameworks chosen and the explanations given in my analysis.

Plausibility

Sensemaking implies that there is something 'out there' that needs to be agreed on and constructed plausibly. However it might not always be possible to make sense of what is out there, and in addition it may not be necessary to be accurate in trying to make sense. In terms of making sense of research data researchers need not focus too much on accuracy in their analysis but on plausibility, pragmatics, creation, invention and reasonableness. To avoid becoming overwhelmed with data researchers need to filter, separate, discriminate and, in some case, categorise. So as the researcher I needed to be more concerned with knowing enough about what I thought and felt and be open to possibilities in order to get on with my research project, which meant that plausibility, took precedence over accuracy. I also gave precedence to the possibilities that arose out of processes.

Making visible subjective processes

Making space for speaking about the subjective processes in research, which involved the working of the 'self' (self-the-sensemaker and sensemaker-of-self), was important in selecting what I would report. A major part of who I have been as the researcher and how I have informed the research requires engagement in reflection. The researcher's values and practices are deeply implicated, both in the directions and outcomes of the study (Crawford, 1995). Usher and Edward (1994) write about the need for reflexivity as a resource, within a research study as a foreground to the research construction and in order to reveal the values, politics and epistemology, or subtext of the research project. Indeed, Usher et al (1997) describe research as "the practice of writing and rewriting selves and the world" (p.212). They highlighted processes of personal and social change occurring through engagement in inquiry and asserted the importance of the self in the research practice. They state "How the self is disposed as an engaged inquirer is a neglected dimension of reflective research practice" (p.213). In order to re-engage with the neglected dimension in research we need to engage in states of consciousness and awareness.

Similarly, Rowan (1981) argues that the researcher needs to have the ability to be engaged in free-floating attention, listening with the third ear, intuitive sensing, mindfulness, consciousness and awareness when making sense of research during *encounter and making sense* moments in the research cycle. It requires a kind of contemplation "the ability to 'unfocus' from the person or group or data we are studying and to allow a kind of communion to emerge, such that we are at one and the same time in touch with our own process and with the other"(p122).

Reason (1988) also stressed the need for researchers to engage in a process of sensemaking that focuses on their subjective experiences which he termed critical subjectivity. Critical subjectivity he describes as state of consciousness which involves self-reflexive attention to the context in which we are operating. Critical subjectivity invites us to pay attention to our primary subjective experiences and not suppress them but instead be aware that there might be biases in accepting this perspective as a way of knowing.

Consciousness/Awareness

In addressing the question on consciousness and awareness I draw on phenomenology as a basic perspective and on Gestalt therapy, which has absorbed key elements of this perspective. To position my argument I find it useful to begin with the ascent of introspection as a psychological concept which I worked with. It is an approach I have taken in making sense in the research. The focus on introspection is the observation and analysis of one's own thoughts and feelings, placing a value on subjective experience as a legitimate mode of research inquiry.

Introspection/consciousness theorists, such as Wilhelm Wundt, William James, Sigmund Freud and Edmund Husserl (who developed his theory of phenomenology) concerned themselves with the study of awareness and with the notion that reality is known only through personal experience. For Husserl consciousness means to choose among possible things that might be noticed. From this perspective, consciousness may be looked at in terms of intentionality and as a manifestation of choice from among many possibilities that exist as potential experience rather than simply viewing awareness as 'what is'. I believe that by just focusing on "what is" we are depriving consciousness of the possibilities of "what could be", "what should be", "was", "could have been". These dimensions are important in the generation of personal knowledge.

Torbert (1981) argues that "an acting system requires sensual (or operational) awareness and suppleness if it is to succeed in effectively enacting new knowledge rather than in behaving either habitually or awkwardly. Without sensual or operational awareness and suppleness, new social theories cannot really be tested in action because persons will continue to behave habitually no matter what their rhetorical commitments" (p146).

As a researcher, I saw the goal of my work as not simply to support experience but to help people to notice, become aware of understand, draw meaning from, and assimilate experiences into an enriched ground. I believed that this rich ground would provide the basis for knowledge and recovery of personal power.

Also addressing consciousness Rowan (1981) suggests that a Hegelian position might be helpful in enabling us to understand what is going on in terms of making sense. He says that Hegel (1971) offered three levels of consciousness which are available to people in everyday life and Rowan rechristened them as "the primary level", "the social", and "the realised level". The primary level, he says, is where we all start and by using our subjective process, we jump to conclusions that suit our wishes. He called this stage

"naïve inquiry" because, although we want to make sense of the world in rational ways, we do it very narrowly, personally and in limited ways. However, in this stage, we produce rich and important material which we sometimes ignore. We are sometimes vulnerable and distressed and at the mercy of our feelings and at the mercy of more dominant people. Our tendency is to engage in denial and to move to a place where we have more control. We move to the 'Social Level' and become one-sidedly objective, becoming more interested in the facts, in what is true and what is false in what is real and what is illusion, what we can prove and what we can disprove. We move towards using logic in the scientific way and control people in the same way that we control things. We do this to ourselves too. We build tight structures around ourselves and give precedence to our masterful social part, which society demands, and push down our primitive, feeling part. When this is played out in society we witness top-down relationships. In order to release ourselves, we jump into the Realised Level, which Rowan described as objectively subjective. At this level, we refuse to suppress our subjective experience and find ways of entering deeper into it to rescue material which is raised to consciousness. When this material is brought up through the Social Level it is better informed and educated, much stronger and less vulnerable. At the Realised Level we are able to choose and own our feelings; we are also able to use creative ways of doing things for our research purposes and when making sense of the research experiences we encounter. In sections of this thesis I have shown how I have made sense by working with that level of consciousness by carrying out research in my own situation as the researcher.

The use of 'Self'

Action research requires the researcher's own attitudes, beliefs, perceptions and values to be brought into question. Griffiths (1990) argues that, as individuals research their situations, they bring their own selves into the research process and I have been concerned with the place of the personal in the research process. I conceived "personal" as a mode of self-description, as part of a process of theorising as well as part of a methodology.

As a researcher and educator I was providing a new discourse and frame with which participants could talk about and actually change their experiences. I too was embarking on a similar process. I, too, was in the process of becoming 'known' and learning to understand more deeply my investment in the continuing research project. I was struck by the importance of my personal biography in relation to my research and was forced to look back and attempt to trace the origins of some of my current beliefs.

Time and time again issues that I was dealing with in the context of my research made me uncover and examine some of the earlier and major influences on my development as a person. I was struck by the parallel I found in my work with students, as they struggled to understand themselves, and in looking at this aspect of my work I had to engage with some of the central ideas in autobiographical work: – How do I come to understand myself? What is significant in my life events? How do I select events and what

informs my choice? How do I pick out significant events? My attempt to understand my biography is through gaining a fuller understanding of the extent to which I have been socially constructed. However my deeper understanding came out of a process of critical reflection and conceptualising my experiences in a way that integrated gender, class and race. Griffiths (1994) argues that it is a mistake to think of autobiographical work as subjective or descriptive as compared to the research methods. She suggests that, like other methods, autobiographical work can be done well. In order for it to be rigorous and to meet the criteria for a reliable method of gaining knowledge it has to be critical.

In the biographical work in the thesis, I illustrate the power of self-reflection and the promise of action inquiry approach for the development of reflection. My argument here is that reflection is action-oriented and is social and political. Its 'product' is informed, committed action.

The use of Reflection

Reflection is an activity involving individualised interpretations and understanding. (Ixer, 1999). The concept has provided me with an accessible way into linking thinking and doing in order to improve practice and to draw positively on my subjective engagements. It involved using and enhancing my capacity for individual reflexivity, through which I looked at myself as researcher or as practitioner, in terms of what I know and what I do in order to change my actions. Reflective practice involves practitioners becoming systematic about their reflexivity, seeking to collectivise their personal experience, making links with wider professional and political issues that impact on practice, thus transcending limited reflection 'premised on individualism' (Thompson, 1995, p.78).

Reflection had an important role in my action research in the classroom, in the sense that I was a reflective practitioner. However, I was aware that not all reflection on practice could be considered action research. Griffiths and Tann (1992) have isolated five levels of reflective practice. These reflective practice levels comprise two levels of reflection in action, as follows: 'act and react' and react-monitor-react/rework-plan-act. The other three levels are reflection on action and include a review process of 'act-observe systematically – analyse rigorously-evaluate-retheorise-plan-act'. These authors argue that all five levels may need to be brought into play at different times if reflection on practice is to be effective. I used these levels to reflect on my 'self' and my practice.

My reflections on self were a process of transformation. When I paused to reflect, I raised the possibility of transforming the social world through my thought and action. By critically reflecting on how my history shaped my ideology and vice versa I was able to develop a deeper analysis of the historical and social situations which framed my actions. I have found reflection very powerful as an exercise in the analysis and transformation of the situations in which I found myself. It assisted me to express my agency as the maker of history as well as my awareness that I have been made by it. So

reflection is not a purely 'internal', psychological process. It integrates thought and action which are sometimes historically embedded. In no case is reflection 'apolitical'. It reveals a self-consciously critical analysis of the kind described by Friere as conscientization:

"....the process in which people, not as recipients, but as knowing subjects, achieve a deepening awareness both of the socio-historical reality which shapes their lives and of their capacity to transform that reality(Freire1972, p.27).

In such works (see Chapter 14), I stopped to think and to reflect in order to take stock of events that had happened and in order to prepare myself for action. The reflection process involved me looking at my thoughts and thought processes, and looking outward at the situation in which I found myself. I engaged in that process by considering the interaction of the internal and the external, using my reflection to orient me for further thought and action. In that sense reflection is thus 'meta-thinking' (thinking about thinking) in which I considered the relationship between my thoughts and action in particular contexts.

I paused to reflect and take stock of the issues confronting me as I engaged in and with my research in order to consider my action. I became aware of myself as a researcher and aware that how I acted would influence the course of events, both least for myself and for others too. I also reflected on how my stories influenced the purpose of my research.

In engaging in the process of critical reflection I used writing and journalling in a disciplined way as part of my action research practice

Writing and journalling

Writing

Most researchers are trained to write tidily and only when they are clear about what they have to say, and when their arguments are clear, organised and coherent. That way of writing can be static and mechanical. That way of thinking belongs to a relatively closed intellectual system. That way of writing ignores the role of writing as a dynamic creative process; it undermines the confidence of novice writers especially beginning researchers. That static model only contributes to silencing voices. Also that mechanistic mode of writing research text shuts down the creativity of the researcher and supports the exclusion of the researcher's 'self' from writing. By writing in an inquiry way the researcher may be challenged to move away from the mechanistic model, of leaving 'self' out but putting 'self' in the text. The challenge to the researcher is how does s/he lay claim to "knowing" something and at the same time nurture his/her own individuality.

Writing can play a crucial role in learning for researchers, and can be used as an aid to reflection on the research. Writing can improve traditional text because writers relate more deeply and in a complex way to their material making it possible for the writer to understand the material in different ways.

The deepened understanding of 'self' gives greater depth to the text and the text will be more present to self and to others. These are philosophical as well as practical problems which action researchers need to confront.

Action researchers may also have to face their own doubts and distrust in their "knowing". In order to do this writing can be used to "write what we know rather than to state what we know". (Ely et. al, 1997, p.10). Ely et, al further argue that we can reshape meaning through writing and this helps us clarify our understanding. They claim that as researchers "We write primarily because writing is at the heart of our endeavours to reflect, to be thoughtful, to tame and to shape the compost heap of data that is filled with disparate, confusing and overwhelming raw impressions. Writing helps us to consider, reconsider, plan, re-plan, make order, check with ourselves and others, and to tell the story of the research in precisely the ways that we feel do justice to it". (Ely et al 1997, p.15). **Journalling**, as a process of inquiry can be one way of helping researchers to do that.

Journalling

I have used journals, diaries, and record (note) books as writing tools in the service of reflection and of my learning. The use of journals to promote reflection has its origin in the use of diaries as a form of self-expression (Lowenstein, 1987). Proffo (1975) extended the process of journal writing beyond the mere recording of events. He developed the intensive journal as a tool for connecting thought, feeling and action. Ranier (1978) provided many resources to give journal writers the flexibility to make the process their own. Fulwiler (1987) offered a collection of articles oriented to the use of journal writing in education and which stress that writing enhances learning. He noted the increasing favour with which journals are looked upon in a variety of educational settings. Through the use of journal writing the reflective processes of the individual become apparent and an opportunity exists for shaping understanding and metacognitive processes (Glaser, 1991).

Individuals also use journal writing as an introspective tool for personal professional growth. For example, Marsick (1990) outlined ways of facilitating reflection in the workplace and identified journal writing as a useful tool for helping people become aware of their own practical reasoning and theory building, and to helping them make explicit their tacit knowing. Daudelin (1996) developed the 'reflection workbook', which provided guidelines for the use of a learning journal in order to record and explore the random thoughts and summary learning statements that occur throughout a work experience.

During research, personal journals can help to tap valuable inner resources. By listening for and valuing feelings the researcher is able to reflect calmly upon knowledge that has come from within. In research, the use of record books can provide a permanent record of a personal journey as a basis for continuing reflection. Reflection is defined by Mezirow as the "process of critically assessing the content, process, or premise(s) of our efforts to interpret and give meaning to an experience" (Mezirow, 1991, p.105).

The keeping of journals and record books could make it possible to step back and gain a wider perspective and to generalise and theorise from that perspective. It could enable the researcher to keep track of what was

happening in his/her development, and give her/him ongoing access to it. It could actually help the researcher to appreciate life and learning as a journey. Journalling could take researchers out of their deductive mode and bring them face to face with the metaphorical and more creative sides of themselves (Mezirow, 1990 and 1991).

I think the use of journals has the advantage of helping with the facilitation of an interaction between researchers and the personal growth and change taking place within them. If researchers work well with journals, record books and diaries they can generate creative action. They might be able to communicate better because they have found a language for writing down their experiences in their own words. They could be helped by the fact that their personal concerns have been given objectivity which, to a certain extent, separates them from themselves. This could mean that they might be able to talk about their concerns more easily.

However, a disadvantage of using such tools, is that to do so is very time consuming and some people may find that they may not have enough time to record all that they want to. Also journalling could be a messy activity. Journalling encourages exploration of thoughts and feelings in a non-linear way. It is a circular, reflective process. An experience is lived, it is recorded and explored as it is journalled and then, at a later point, re-experienced through re-reading. Sometimes, a great deal of material surfaces and this can be overwhelming.

Another disadvantage of journalling and record keeping is that it can be seen as a job to be done, a chore, so it may lose the aspect of creativity that is an important part of it. It makes a great call on the personal discipline of the researcher/writer. It may make demands that many researchers may not be accustomed to meeting.

How I have used writing and journalling in my research

I used my journals and notebooks to help me articulate my thoughts and feelings more concretely and, especially, in my own words. Writing down my experiences, I became more conscious of what I was feeling and doing and "being" – I found words to describe myself and my multiple identities and I found words to describe my research and my practice so that it was much easier to speak about myself and my research to others. It enabled me to identify and own feelings associated with my research and to appreciate them the more once I had used them in a way that was personally meaningful to me.

Writing down what had happened in the research, or how I had been affected by happenings in the research, helped me to identify feelings, keep things in perspective and indicated the direction of my thoughts. My motivation as a facilitator, for example, became clear as I wrote. I was helped to remember and recall later many aspects of various experiences that I would otherwise have forgotten. Many smaller issues would not have been "looked at" as fully and a characteristic pattern of feelings/behaviour would have been less likely

to have been identified or, if already recognised, would not have been effectively changed.

The self-expression involved in keeping the journals brought with it self-knowledge, so that the journal and record books were important instruments of self-knowledge for me. I used journals and record books as a means of creative self-expression. This ability to express 'self' and embody 'thoughts' and 'feelings' meant that many feelings and insights were captured that might otherwise have been lost. Not only were they captured, but they were also embodied in a way that enabled me to work more constructively and effectively with them.

Any deep thinking that I needed to do, I found more beneficial if I wrote it into my notebook or journal. This helped to raise my level of awareness, so that I came to be more observant in recognising situations in the research which might lead me to deeper insights. By providing an objective avenue, journalling helped me directly reflect on the most personally meaningful and important events of the research journey.

It enabled me to reflect, without inhibition, on my inward journey and opened me to questions I had formerly been afraid to know like, for example, my fears and blocks about writing and who I made my critical judges. There was information that was important for me to learn, but the learning was always seen in terms of a personal integration of that material with a view to growth and later application.

Journalling enabled me to see areas of learning, of knowing and not knowing, of growth and lack of growth, and to observe growth actually taking place. Changes in attitudes, values and behaviour were apparent over the years. My journal provided a useful means of monitoring growth and evaluating it at various stages. My notebook recording of my research provided for me an objectivity which helped me deal more effectively and constructively with experiences in my life and in the life of the research. Journalling was important for me in my development as a researcher and although journal extracts do not appear in a substantial way in the completed thesis more of it appeared in earlier drafts.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have tried to display my energy for thinking about processes of inquiry and how I have drawn from others to affirm and articulate my own research methods. In the chapters that follow I shall demonstrate how I have used these methods and processes of inquiry.

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