CHAPTER TWO

METHODOLOGY AND VALIDITY

We have been dilettantes and amateurs
With some of the greatest notions
For human betterment.
We have been like spoilt children:
We have been like tyrannical children;
We have been impatient and imperious
Demanding proof when listening is required,
Tearing things down when they don't do
What we want them to do.
From *Mental Fight* by Ben Okri

In this chapter I set out the methods that I have used in my study and the ways in which I consider this methodology to be valid. Before looking at the specific methods I have used, I explore some of the underlying ideas on which they are based. Following this I look at the way that the concept of *dialogue* underlies these methods and has a bearing on my inquiry before exploring relevant validity issues.

Action research

As I have shown in chapter one, action research, and therefore my inquiry, is based on non-dualistic, participatory philosophy and, as such, has developed methods which are congruent with this departure point. This philosophy accepts, most importantly, that the researcher cannot be separated from the field of research. If this is the case then we cannot have 'researchers' and 'subjects' but only 'co-researchers' (Reason 1994). We cannot be objective as our presence makes us always part of the field of inquiry.

The use of questions

The initial stage of this kind of inquiry is the honing of a ‘quality question’ (Hawkins 2004). Indeed the first part of an action inquiry is to find and

deepen our questions. As I showed in the Introduction to this thesis, the purpose is not to find an answer but to find out more about the question and see how it leads to the discovery of fresh questions. Although, of course, some provisional answers are found, they are always contingent and may soon be out of date. My own questions in this inquiry evolved as follows:

1. ‘How can I best go about understanding further my own relationship to cultural difference?’ changed to
2. ‘Can I as a white woman and psychotherapist meaningfully engage in dialogue with people of colour?’

When I go into a question it begins to change. But what does ‘going into’ a question mean? For me it means holding the question in awareness whilst I experience my life (Moustakis 1990:43). For instance when my question was ‘How can I best go about understanding further my own relationship to cultural difference?’ I did various things:

- I brought the question overtly to the attention of my supervision group (at CARPP) and my friends and colleagues. Particularly in relation to the supervision group I was specifically challenged to concentrate more on myself as a white woman.
- I reflected in writing. This included a piece about being English and brought home to me the sense of guilt I carry about being white and English and thereby part of a people that have benefited by dominating others. This is further reflected upon in a piece specifically about guilt and shame (see ch 6).
- I carry it about with me in my everyday life. I notice my attitudes and assumptions more often and it leads to acting and relating differently. For example I commented in a group that I had assumed all the white people in the group were English. Often I make a note of this in a diary or notes of sessions so that I can refer to it when I write up at a later date.

Finally it led to changing my question to a third one:

1. 'How can I as a white person and psychotherapist understand my own place in a diverse world where white people dominate'.

This question has become the one that is most basic to my inquiry.

Cycles of Action and Reflection

The changes to my inquiry question are examples of what in action research are called 'cycles of inquiry'. In these we act, then reflect and then act again in the light of that reflection (Heron and Reason 2001:179). Of course the action and the reflection are not always clearly separated. Action and reflection often intertwine. Deciding to talk to another in a reflective manner may also be a form of action but the elements of action, reflection and further action in the light of that reflection must be present for the endeavour to be called Action Research.

I find that the Learning Cycle described by Kolb (1984) is useful for understanding why the apparently simple notion of cycles of action and reflection is so powerful, particularly when put together with Argyris and Schon's (1978) notion of single and double loop learning (see below). Kolb's learning cycle leads from concrete experience to reflective observation to abstract conceptualisation to active experimentation and that leads again to concrete experience. This cycle shows the process that is gone through from the practical experience through reflection to a change in action.

Argyris and Schon (1978) developed a similar theory of learning which involved both 'single loop learning' and 'double loop learning'. In single loop learning action and reflection lead to further learning that is completed within a single, coherent frame of reference. In double loop learning, the second loop reflects on the first learning loop in a way that explores its attitudes, values and assumptions. This second loop ensures that the learning is deepened beyond the most obvious layer. It is the second loop that actually digs below a question and finds new

ones. Adherence to the single loop alone may lead to finding an efficient way of behaving but does not lead to new understandings. For instance, in relation to my first question mentioned above, I might have found politically correct ways of staying out of hot water by adhering to a single loop but would not have understood myself within the field I was studying. I would only have changed my behaviour but not the context in which my behaviour arose so that any change would be superficial and would not have led to any real changes to my basic 'organising principles' (Stolorow and Atwood 1992).

In developing this theory Argyris and Schon were influenced by Bateson's levels of learning (Bateson 1982:257) in which the perspective of each level can be viewed from a new place. Hawkins (1991), also influenced by Bateson's levels of learning, extended this further to include 'treble loop learning'[1] in which the new paradigm of the double loop can itself be reflected upon. Treble loop learning brings an attitude in which there is less personal attachment to an outcome and a sense of the greater, transpersonal purpose served by the learning in the first two loops. Interestingly his prompt to find a third loop came from Argyris' lament that double loop learning was so rarely found within organisations (Hawkins 2004). Hawkins (1991) recalled that Bateson (1982:275) had said that each level of learning could only be understood from the level above. That meant that the double loop was unlikely to occur without a perspective from a possible third loop. The implication for me is that it is important for me to be open to a sense of a greater purpose for my work.

Inquiries that use cycles of action and reflection can also be understood in terms of single, double and treble loops (Bradbury and Reason 2001). Here are examples:

[1] In Hawkins' original he used the term 'treble loop learning'. Others including Torbert have called it 'triple loop learning' (Torbet, W. R. 2001:250)

- A single loop cycle is one in which the inquiry keeps within its own frame of reference. *An example from this study is my finding a 'politically correct' way to change my behaviour.*
- A double loop cycle is one in which a new perspective on the whole inquiry cycle is found. *In this study I have shown how questions changed through allowing a reflective stance in my life.*
- A triple loop cycle is one in which the whole is seen within a spiritual context with less attachment to ego concerns and a greater purpose found.

Bateson shows how learning level three on which the treble loop is based is 'difficult and even rare in human beings' (Bateson 1982:274) and an experience of it is almost impossible to describe except maybe through the use of poetry, so I hesitate either to claim such an experience or to describe it! It is not something we can 'make' happen. We can say it happens 'by grace' (Hawkins 2002). In other words it happens not because we deserve it or have worked for it but because we are open to receive. This openness to receive may be facilitated by spiritual practices such as mediation but if we undertake them *in order* to achieve anything we are paradoxically not likely to do so. We can only be open and suspend expectation.

In applying this idea of single, double and treble loop cycles to my own inquiry, I can see that I started by trying to understand how I could improve my practice when working across cultural difference. I understood at the beginning that this involved understanding my own cultural standpoint. However when I began to see that the whole inquiry was about *being white* rather than understanding others, there was a shift of perspective. I was aware of what Hawkins describes as making a ‘shift not only in where we are looking but also in how we are looking.’ (Hawkins 1991). It involved being less task-orientated and allowing a shift of consciousness to take place in which such a change of perspective could happen. This could only occur when I was able, as I

show in the example below, to drop a defensive stance to those who challenged me, and became clearer about the overall purpose of the research being about whiteness, my one essential departure point. The example is as follows:

An exploration of a 'moment' in the White Cooperative Inquiry Group

This piece explores a 'moment' in my white cooperative inquiry group in which I show double and singe single loop learning. The places marked with an * show where the learning changed to a double loop.

Richard, a member of the White co-operative inquiry group, says he lives in a black neighbourhood but does not engage with black people. On thinking about this after the group is over I decide that it might be interesting to ask the question 'what do you feel at the prospect of initiating a conversation with a black person you meet in the street?' I decide to suggest to the group (possibly on the email) that we all think about this question before the next group. Before I have a chance to suggest this to the group I mention it to the university supervision group. The white people in the group understand my posing this question as a way of suggesting that each of us might go about doing first person research into our own responses. The black person thinks I mean that it would be helpful to intercultural relations to do so and questions this.

I mentioned this occurrence in the group to Peter who said he suspected that between Richard's comment and my suggestion there were several stages which I missed out and am largely unaware of which the black group member may have picked up on. My first response was defensive but then I began to see what he meant. I decided to try and find those stages by slowing down the process.*

Here is my attempt:

- *Richard says he lives in a black neighbourhood but does not speak to black people and wonders why not*
- *I feel a resonance in myself. I have lived in black neighbourhoods and not known many black people. Others also seem to resonate with this. There is a murmured understanding. Someone else says they are in the same situation.*

- *After the group this piece of conversation stays with me.*
- *The question of what 'action' might happen in an action research group also stays with me.*
- *In thinking about and emotionally remembering the moment about the black neighbourhood it strikes me as having something of a 'nub' about it. I wonder why this is the case. I think about behaving differently and realise that I feel afraid. I wouldn't know how to approach someone that I didn't know. Would it be appropriate anyway? Would it be felt as patronising? If it was for my needs why should the black person engage with me?*
- *These thoughts are all had very quickly, almost out of awareness.*
- *I have the thought that we might all engage with considering what it would be like to approach a black person and see what comes up.*
- *Peter thinks that a more interesting question is 'How can I engage in my multicultural neighbourhood?*
- *I think: maybe a prior question is: 'Do I want to engage in my multicultural neighbourhood? Or maybe 'How much do I want to engage in my multicultural neighbourhood'.*
- *How did I arrive at that thought? I thought: That question assumes that I want to.*
- *I say to Peter that I have a tendency to jump stages and make intuitive or undeclared leaps.**
- *Peter wonders if these are okay in psychotherapy but not in action research.*
- *I think: although in psychotherapy much of the work is done through registering and working with felt responses, the best work is done when the process is slowed down to understand them better. I am best able to do this when I feel good about myself. I can then be open to correction without loss of self-esteem. Detailed study then becomes interesting and I can move between self-states (playful child, attuned mother, concerned friend, academic, therapist etc) smoothly.*
- *Here was another leap. Lynne Jacobs suggests that we become dissociated (fixed into one self-state) and rigid in our thinking when we feel under threat – often through feeling shamed. I am suggesting here that detailed exploration of any particular 'moment' is not only part of the discipline of action research, but also of psychotherapy and that that is what supervision encourages. Someone else can 'play' with you in*

discovering more about a situation. A sense of play loosens our attachment to an outcome and helps ensure that we don't dissociate. That is why it is so important not to shame people in supervision but to encourage a sense of play.

Having been through this process I can see that the thought of the member of the supervision group who was black was more to the point.' *October 2002*

I have marked by an asterisk two places where I think I allowed myself to push past a defensive stance. It is hard to describe what is involved in this but it is a moment where I allow myself to let go of my narcissistic self and know that I am just a participant in a larger dance. This allows me to question my own assumptions because I am less caught up with appearing to be correct. On re-reading it I find that I do not quite follow the logic of understanding more clearly at the end that the black member 'had a point'. Although I think this may not be logical, I also know that somewhere, just out of awareness at the time, I knew, in the way I describe above, that my insisting on good co-operative inquiry grounds for suggesting this line of inquiry into thoughts about approaching black people was defensive. I had, in fact, hoped it might lead to 'better relationships'. My thoughts given here in relation to what I wrote last October are an example of another cycle of the process.

First, second and third person research

Questions can initiate inquiry processes which then occur in the arenas of one's own self inquiry, an inquiry with co-researchers or research within the wider world. Several action research authors (Heron 1996; Reason and Bradbury 2001:xxv; Torbert 2001:251 - 257) have termed these modes, first, second and third person research.

Methodologies that incorporate these three have been important in my inquiry as they encompass those that ensure that my research includes my own self-reflection as well as reflection with others in small and large groups. It is not always easy to mark definite differences between the three as the borders between them can be hazy but making these definitions helps us to more rigorously understand the context in which

our research happens. It helps us to understand how far our own private experience informs our inquiry (first person research), how far a collaboration with other individuals informs it (second person research) and how far it operates in society at large (third person research).

First and second person research

First person inquiry is a *personal* exploration. Here a reflective attitude is taken to the experiences which address our own inquiry questions, as I show above (Marshall 2002). First person research may nevertheless involve others in challenging and supporting us, thus helping us to reflect and generate fresh perspectives. It is also important to remember that first person research is carried out within an intersubjective field, so arises from this field and in turn has an effect upon it. First person research can never, then, only be about us as individual, 'isolated minds' (Stolorow & Atwood, 1992).

I have found that involving others has forced me to move from single loop to double loop learning in that it has helped me to fundamentally question my own perspective. I have had a number of conversations with others during the course of my research and some of these are analysed in this thesis, particularly in chapter 6 where I have had conversations with people who have collaborated with me in work within organisations.

The inquiry becomes second person research when the others involved can in some way be called co-researchers. In second person research two or more people share inquiry questions or questions that relate to the inquiry. Usually this involves a formal inquiry process such as a co-operative inquiry group (Reason 1998; Reason and Bradbury 2001). As I have shown in chapter 1, action research, because of its non-dualistic way of understanding the world, does not accept the notion of a researcher having ‘subjects’ on which the research is carried out. Action researchers regard all involved both as researchers and subjects. Ideally all decide on the field of inquiry, how it is to be studied and use themselves, their experience and the dialogue between them as the

‘subject’ of the study. When these conditions are met, then a co-operative inquiry can take place. I have undertaken second person research through a co-operative inquiry group which explored the experience of being white. This is further discussed below and in chapter 4.

Various issues have been identified by Ladkin (2004) which show how the way that co-operative inquiry groups run is very complex and throws up dilemmas which are not always easy to resolve. Issues of leadership and ownership of the inquiry may be present however carefully it is set up, and this is certainly something I have found, as is discussed in chapter 4. Similarly conversations and interaction I have had with others could not be definitely called second person research as the questions concerned were clearly my own and no formal inquiry process was set up. My initial impetus for talking to other people was to foster and encourage my own inquiry. Maybe, as I intimated in the Introduction, this inquiry involving others could be called ‘an extended first person inquiry’ as the thoughts fostered in those with whom I interacted could potentially spark a first person research inquiry of their own whilst also contributing to my understanding. The dynamics of bringing new understanding may well have arisen ‘between’ us in an intersubjective inquiry even if a formal inquiry process was not set up.

I also employed the methodologies of questionnaires and interviews to stimulate reflection. I describe these below.

Third Person Research

I engaged in third person inquiry as part of my research, particularly in relation to my work within The Bath Centre for Psychotherapy and Counselling (BCPC). This work has shown how my inquiry addresses wider societal issues and ones that relate to the psychotherapy profession as a whole. The work with this organisation is described in chapter 7.

I have found that third person research is often more challenging and gritty and seems to be less likely to be collusive than second person research. It brings an extra dimension to the learning, however painful and disturbing (Brown and Clough 1989:33).

Avoiding collusion in the inquiry process

Third person research often cuts through our defences in a way in which smaller, more personal groups may not, where the danger of collusion is greater. Reason and Rowan (1981:245) have suggested several ways of cutting down on collusive behaviour in small co-operative inquiry groups in their discussion of validity issues in collaborative research. They show how constant reflection on experience and a good level of self knowledge should allow for sufficient questioning of collusive processes

Third person research is often not as collusive and therefore far from comfortable, particularly if it involves working with large groups (Brown and Clough 1989:33) but, if we are able to take the learning from it, is often very profound. Nevertheless, as is suggested by Reason and Bradbury (2001) above, good second and third person research should also be based on rigorous first person inquiry.

In the preface to their edited book A Handbook of Action Research, Reason and Bradbury (2001:xxvi) say:

> 'We suggest that the most compelling and enduring kind of action research will engage all three strategies: first-person research practice is best conducted in the company of friends and colleagues who can provide support and challenge; such a company may indeed evolve into a second-person collaborative inquiry process. On the other hand attempts at third-person collaborative research which are not based in rigorous first person inquiry into one's purposes and practices are open to distortion through unregulated bias.'

Each context for the research (first, second or third person) can help us to reflect more rigorously on the one before it. In their paper *When First Person Inquiry is not Enough,* the European-American Cooperative 'Challenging Whiteness' (2004) show how they used the support of a co-operative inquiry group to help deepen the reflection of each others' first person inquiry. Second person research, then, can help us to engage in double loop learning in our first person research because others are better placed to see our blind spots and to fundamentally challenge our assumptions. Treble loop learning gives the learning a spiritual perspective in which a wider purpose appears.

Specific methods used in the study

Having explored the underlying principles in the previous chapter and various practices behind my methodology - including questions, cycles of action and reflection and the arenas of first, second and third person research - I now set out three specific methods that I used. They are:

- Co-operative Inquiry
- Interviews
- Questionnaires
- Diaries and other contemporary accounts of my experience

The way I have used all these methods is congruent with the principles and practices that I have outlined above.

Co-operative Inquiry

Co-operative inquiry was specifically designed by action researchers (Heron 1981:19) to provide a compatible methodology. It is one which accepts that the researcher is part of the 'field' (Reason 1994:10) so that all involved in the inquiry are accepted as 'co-researchers' rather than researchers and subjects.

A co-operative inquiry may be initiated by an individual or by a group of individuals. If an individual wishes to undertake an inquiry they may find others who are interested in the same endeavour and set up a co-operative inquiry to research the area. This was how my own co-operative inquiry was set up. However a group may be formed because, as a group, they were interested in a particular inquiry and decide together to use co-operative inquiry methodology. A group may also decide on a line of inquiry and employ a specialist in action research to facilitate the group (See inquiry carried our with health visitors, for example (Traylen 1994)).

However the group is set up, it is important that all those involved in the inquiry share both the inquiry questions and how the inquiry will be undertaken using this research methodology. Within the basic tenets of co-operative inquiry, groups are free to go about their inquiry as they wish so long as co-operative inquiry principles are applied. The most basic of these is that of cycles of action and reflection. The word ‘action’ may be interpreted widely to include actions taken within the group such as an exercise or a discussion, or outside the group such as undertaking a particular activity. Then, in the group, this is reflected upon by group members and this reflection leads to further action.

In my own co-operative inquiry group several ways of acting and reflecting were used. These included

- the use of structured exercises which were carried out both within and outside the group
- discussions in which ‘action’, such as discovering an attitude or assumption, were then reflected upon by the group.
- After the termination of the group a further cycle of action and reflection was carried out in the form of an interview of each participant. The detail of this is in Chapter 4.

The use of co-operative inquiry has been an important part of my research and the learning which arose within the group has led to several of my conclusions.

Interviews

I used interviews as a method when I felt the need to take my inquiry to others whilst not expecting them to join with me in *my* inquiry. I have called this type of inquiry *extended first person inquiry* (see above). There were various circumstances within my inquiry when I have felt the need to use interviews as follows:

- When the original experience on which I was drawing was carried out with others and I wished to check out my own experience against theirs. An example of this is in chapter 7 where I draw on material gleaned in working within an organisation with colleagues. The way they experienced certain events contributed to validating my own experience (see Chapter 7).
- After the termination of the co-operative inquiry group I interviewed group members to ask them to reflect back on their experience within the group (see Chapter 4).
- Following the use of a questionnaire I interviewed some of my respondents in order to better understand their responses or to ask them to reflect further on a matter that particularly interested me. An example is my interview of a particular respondent who used ‘politically incorrect’ language and I wanted to better understand her use of certain words (see Chapter 5).

I regard my use of interviews as part of my first person inquiry because my respondents have not ‘bought into’ the full process and

my motivation for carrying out the interview is to better understand something myself. My methodology for interviews is not to tightly structure them other than by identifying key questions and lines of inquiry. I let the interview go in unexpected directions whilst being guided by the principles of dialogue (see below) (Moustakis 1990:47).

In order to make use of the information gathered from my interviews I first of all wrote them up in one of two ways:

1. by transcribing a tape
2. by writing an account using notes made at the time and on the day following the interview and checking them with people who were present at the interview.

Having made a written account of the interview I read it through, immersing myself in what I read and experienced (Moustakis 1990:49). I picked out aspects which seem most relevant to me:

- parts that further my inquiry question
- points that challenge my inquiry question
- points that seem to have a particular emotional charge.

The last point is interesting as it is similar to that which would particularly interest me as a psychotherapist as it indicates that something important to the speaker is being expressed. Years of experience as a psychotherapist have particularly sensitized me to these moments which elicit an echoing embodied response of my own. I am used to considering these responses to try to understand what they mean. Having immersed myself for a second time, this time on my own responses as well as on the original notes (Moustakis 1990:51), I am ready to start to understand how the material relates to my inquiry. An example can be found on Page 127 where I interviewed ‘Alice’ about her associations to the word ‘white’. I show

here how Alice's responses deepen my own understanding and relate to Dalal's theoretical formulations (Dalal 2002). Alice's response to my questions and mine to her, including bringing a theoretical concept to bear on what I have heard, helps me to think further and with more complexity about my inquiry.

Questionnaires

My use of questionnaires is also part of my first person inquiry although I hope that my respondents found the inquiry useful for themselves. As I explain in Chapter 4, I did not use questionnaires to gain statistically valid data, but to broaden the picture I hold of a question. Rather than try to make the 'sample' statistically valid, I chose people from my email address book who I thought would be interested in thinking about the issues (in this case about shame and guilt) and were likely to have already reflected on these issues. I do not consider the 'findings' to have 'proved' anything either. They did, however, widen my thinking beyond my own thoughts and imagination and indicated lines of inquiry. I was also able to follow these up by interviewing respondents.

I wanted the questionnaires to be specific enough to give me data which was relevant to my questions but open ended enough to give the respondents the opportunity to give truthful and idiosyncratic answers without having to squeeze themselves into a pre-formed box which can only arise from my own preconceptions. I was aware that I was asking busy people to give time to their answers and so, with the second one, I gave the respondents the option of replying on a graded scale of 1 – 3 whilst also suggesting they reply more fully in writing as well if they wished.

Having received the replies I put them all together (see appendices 6 and 8) and, as with my method of analyzing interviews, I immersed myself in the responses. I pulled out similarities and differences, things that surprised me and answers that I expected to find. I then

pondered the meaning of these findings and started to put my first thoughts in writing. As with interviews I gave further thought to this analysis and, through immersing myself again, began the process of coming to an understanding of how they further my inquiry (See chapter 5). More thoughts about my use of questionnaires and why they were devised in the way that they were are to be found within Chapter 5 where I have made use of them.

Diaries and other contemporary accounts of my experience

Over the period of my research I have kept some diary account of my experience, notes about my work including my work with clients and my reading and emails and letters to colleagues and friends. These contemporary accounts have given me data which has allowed me to track some of the processes I have gone through during the course of my inquiry. By looking back at these accounts I can not only see how my thinking has changed and developed over time and track the experiences that have been formative in my thinking over the last seven or more years, I can also reflect on that writing in order to better understand my learning process (Winter 1999:16).

I have accessed these accounts for use in my inquiry in two ways. Firstly I have read them over in preparation for writing so that I am aware of what is available to me and secondly I have been reminded of something I have formulated in the course of writing my thesis. I often find that it provides illustrative evidence of a development of my thinking. In many ways this is like going back and finding part of a process frozen in time. Occasionally I come across a piece of writing in a serendipitous way such as finding a piece that I wrote just before the start of my inquiry as I was writing the Conclusion (see page 287).

I often find that several 'turns' of the cycle of action and reflection can be present when working with these texts as follows:

1. My writing puts me in mind of a diary entry or previous piece of material. (This may or may not be one that has been read in

preparation for this piece.) It may illustrate or shed light on my theme or show how my process has developed over time.

2. I find the piece of writing and reflect on the meaning that it contains. I may, as on page 55, analyse the text to show how my inquiry is contained within it.
3. I include my reflections by writing a part of the thesis and, having shaped the new piece, I reflect on that for some time and either clarify what I have written or add a further response which contributes to another cycle of action on that reflection. This process is repeated until I am satisfied with the writing.

Reflective writing has been an important part of my inquiry and working on the draft of this thesis has provided one of the arenas in which I have undertaken this process. It has provided a reflective space in which I can respond to previous written reflections.

Dialogue as an underlying methodology

In all three of these methodologies, dialogue is their vital heart. The quality of the dialogue is all important in determining the usefulness and validity of these methods (see below). Dialogue is itself valid if those in dialogue are sincere in their desire to be open to the other (see Bohm (1980) and Buber(2004) below). It follows therefore that the possibility that my conclusions are valid rests on the openness of the dialogue which generates information and insight. Furthermore, I regard the way I carry our psychotherapy to be imbued with a sense of dialogue (Hycner and Jacobs 1995) so it is within dialogue as an underlying methodology that my research and my psychotherapy practice converge. It is also very applicable in working across difference in culture as, in dialogue, there is a genuine attempt to meet and understand those differences and stresses the equal participation of both partners. (Gustavsen 2002:17). Because of the importance of dialogue I have discussed it in detail below.

Dialogue is a methodology that is vital to action research as it is a form of conversation in which participants listen to themselves as well as to the other. In fact it is hard for me to imagine good action research in which the researcher is not always dialogic as an action researcher is interested in hearing others whilst also being self-reflective (Marshall 2002:433). Dialogue involves us in listening and understanding, it involves us in really hearing what is being communicated even if we think we disagree, even if we think the speaker represents something we thoroughly disapprove of or seems inexplicably different to us.

Particularly if there is a power difference between us, we are only truly in dialogue if we are listening without forming a riposte or even a reply. We will be listening in order to understand thoroughly and in order to really do this we may need to check out that we have understood as deeply and as correctly as we can.

Having listened we respond and when we respond we do so by giving our thoughts and feelings to the speaker, thoughts that have been sparked by what has been said. We are prepared to be hesitant or wrong or foolish because we are more interested in our questions than in being right. We may be able to think: 'can my question be deepened by hearing what this person has to say?' And 'can my understanding be deepened?' These are important considerations if we are to remain dialogic and ones that I bear in mind as a psychotherapist. They are equally important for action researchers.

Because dialogue is so important in all my methodologies I have decided to explore in some depth three theorists – Bohm, Buber and Habermas. I have particularly chosen Bohm’s ideas about dialogue (Bohm 1996) because he explores the way in which dialogue can be brought to bear on the culture and help to bring about change. I include Habermas (1984) because he describes validity tests for true communication and this has a bearing on dialogue. He also draws attention to ethical issues when there is a difference in power between

the parties. Buber (2004) stresses the importance of mutuality in a way I consider to be very profound.

Bohm

Bohm has been an important influence on me, not so much because he provides a methodology for working across difference but because he sees dialogue as essential in changing cultural patterns of thought (Bohm 1996:28). His ideas help me as, if I am to challenge the assumptions of white people, then Bohm offers an approach to dialogue which engages with how we might go about this. Bohm developed the notion of 'dialogue' in response to what he sees as the intractable problem of 'incoherent cultural assumptions' in our society today (Bohm 1996:28 and 29). He sees these problems as potentially leading to society's falling apart as the cultural 'cement' of shared meanings is largely absent. Bohm points out that in our society 'everybody has different assumptions and opinions' (Bohm 1996:8). He seems to be suggesting that it would be healthier to work towards us being able to encompass mutual assumptions in order that we have a stronger sense of shared meanings. In order to be able to do this he explicates that it is important to *understand* our assumptions. On this basis we would understand each other better (Bohm 1996:9). Maybe he is saying that it is better to be aware of our own and others' assumptions than to share them.

In his book *Wholeness and the Implicate Order,* Bohm (1980) describes a way of understanding the world as an 'unbroken wholeness of the totality of existence as an undivided flowing movement without borders.' (1980:172). Within white, western culture we are far from understanding existence in this way. He seems to be hoping that dialogue will expose what Bateson calls the 'epistemological error' of western society (Bateson 1982:454) when he talks of the way that dialogue will uncover our assumptions. As I previously discussed, the thinking in current western culture holds an implicit belief in the

analytical mind that divides the world into dualistic opposites including the agency of our own individuality.

Bohm suggests that mistaken epistemology is embedded in our culture and that culture is expressed within our habits of thought and ways of thinking. I have already discussed his useful distinction between ‘thought’ and ‘thinking’ in Chapter 1. He shows how dialogue in which we *really* listen to ourselves and to others, does allow the assumptions embedded within our thinking to be consciously experienced:

> ‘The point is that dialogue has to go into all the pressures that are behind our assumptions. It goes into all the process of thought *behind* the assumptions, not just the assumptions themselves.’ (Bohm 1996:9)[2]

He says we are largely unaware of this process and suggests we could develop a way of being ‘proprioceptive’ in our thinking (aware as it happens) so that we can really experience the tie-up between intellectual activity, feeling and bodily responses. This is reflected in the four features of valid dialogue that he puts forward as he says that in dialogue we must:

- bring a quality of awareness to our own responses,
- listen to the other whilst, at the same time, noticing our own responses,
- suspend assumptions – notice but neither believe nor disbelieve what we assume to be true,
- attempt to make thought ‘proprioceptive’.

Bohms views on dialogue and particularly these features of valid dialogue have been very useful to me in my research as they provide a

[2] Maybe Bohm is drawing on a similar distinction to my own here when I say that assumptions are structured by organising principles.

touchstone for deciding whether or not my own dialogue in pursuance of my inquiry is valid.

Buber

Although Buber tends not to use the term 'dialogue' himself he has been an important influence on me and on other psychotherapists who do use them (Hycner and Jacobs 1995). Buber's use of dialogue is particularly important in connection with what he calls the *I-Thou* (Buber 1958). Buber considers that there are two 'primary words': *I-it* and *I-thou*. He says:

> Primary words do not signify things, but they intimate relationships. Primary words do not describe something that might exist independently of them, but being spoken they bring about existence……………If *thou* is said, the *I* of the combination *I-thou* is said along with it. If *it* is said the *I* of the combination *I-it* is said along with it. The primary word *I-thou* can only be spoken with the whole being. The primary word *I-it* can never be spoken with the whole being (Buber 2004:11).

For Buber, then, the *I-thou* relationship involves the whole being. (Buber 2004:52) Dialogic Gestalt therapists turn to Buber as he shows that when we relate from *I-it* we are doing so from the world of separation. There is a similarity here to Stern's verbal sense of self described above. *I-it* belongs to the world of things whereas in the *I-thou* relationship we are connected to the other. *Thou* automatically includes the *I*. He says:

> If I face a human being as my *Thou*, and say the primary word *I-thou* to him, he is not a thing among things, and does not consist of things. Thus human being is not *He* or *She*, bounded from every other *He* and *She*, a specific point in space and time within the net of the world; nor is he by nature able to be experienced and described, a loose bundle of named qualities.

> But with no neighbour, and whole in himself, he is *Thou* and fills the heavens. (Buber 2004:15)

From this passage we can see that Buber has a non-dualistic epistemology, similar to that which I have described in Chapter 1.

There is some controversy about whether therapists can ever relate to clients as *I-Thou*, and therefore be in real dialogue in Buber's terms, as, he says, the therapeutic relationship can never really be mutual in that the therapist is in a different role to the client. Buber sees mutuality as a necessary condition for *I-Thou* relating (Buber 2004:94). That therapists and clients can never meet in the mutuality of the *I-thou* was famously contested by Rogers in a public dialogue with Buber (Kirschenbaum and Land Henderson 1989:48) in which Buber refused to accept that there could ever be equality within the therapy relationship. In fact in a postscript to the 2004 edition of *I and Thou* (Buber 2004) Buber again questions that psychotherapy can ever be completely an *I-thou* relationship and finishes by saying:

> Every *I–thou* relationship, within a relation which is specified as a purposive working of one part upon the other, persists in virtue of a mutuality which is forbidden to be full (Buber 2004:99).

My own thought is that the fullness of knowing and experiencing *I-thou* is impeded by the lack of equality in the psychotherapy relationship but at some level a knowledge of connectedness (awareness of non-dualism) is always present and, because of that, we may dip into experiencing this level with our clients from time to time. This is made more likely by the intimacy that grows up between two people who are engaged in a task of revealing and discovering greater and greater levels of experiencing within their encounter. In less individualistically

orientated societies our connectedness is perhaps more easily known[3].

Habermas

Habermas's contributuion to my reflection on dialogue is particularly important since he discusse the way power differences distort communication. Because of how power differences are institutionally built into meetings between those of white, European origin and those of other origins, his ideas are particularly important for my thesis.

Habermas is a critical theorist who asserts that theory cannot be dislocated from practice and that human activity is always motivated by self interest. He asks us to find meaning through true communication.

I will explore two aspects of his work which have particular relevance to my thesis

1. His validity claims for 'true communication' (Habermas 1984:2)
2. Blocks to true communication that arise when there are power differences between those in communication. (Carr and Kemmis 1986)

Habermas contributed importantly to ideas about dialogue by advocating some 'validity claims' (Habermas 1984:2) in order to understand more clearly that which must be in place for a 'speech action' (Habermas 1984:2) to be truly communicative. They are as follows:

1. Uttering something understandably
2. Giving the hearer something to understand

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[3] The African notion of *ubuntu* which can be translated as 'I am because you are', seems a pertinent example as the word implies a knowledge of our interconnectedness

3. Making himself thereby understandable; and
4. Coming to an understanding with another person.

(Habermas 1984:2)

These validity claims ensure that something is truly communicated. This communication may be made at a cognitive or at an intersubjective[4] level (Habermas 1984:42). At the cognitive level or level of 'propositional contents', the focus is on what is being said. At the level of intersubjectivity we are more interested in how the communication lets us know more about our interpersonal relationship with the speaker.

Habermas imagined a 'base line' of 'undistorted' communication (Ritzer 1992:290) and was influenced by psychoanalysis in its attempts to help people free communication from distortion. He does not understand this distortion as emanating from repressed libidinal desires, as a psychoanalyst does, so much as by repressed oppressive societal pressures.

As we saw above, Habermas has been particularly influential in pointing out that power differences can 'systematically distort communication' (Habermas 1984:120) thereby affecting the validity claim of any particular piece of communication. Habermas influenced the intersubjective psychotherapists, Stolorow, Atwood and Orange (Stolorow 2002:115) with this idea. It is also at the heart of my study as I explore my own communicaton as a white person with those who are not white. As white people are institutionally the more powerful group I need to be aware of the way in which power difference may distort the dialogue. This power differences is compounded in psychotherapy as the psychotherapist is also in a more powerful position. I explore these issues in more detail below. For the purpose of this thesis, Habermas's 'true communication' and 'dialogue' seem to be interchangeable as

‘dialogue’ and ‘true communication’ *depend* on mutuality. Buber has said that *I-thou* (and therefore conditions for dialogue) do not occur where there is no mutuality (Buber 2004:98).

My own view is that power dynamics are always present at some level and in some degree in any relationship and so always need to be attended to if dialogue is to be attempted. If we insist that no power dynamics be present for dialogue to be possible and we take the view that power dynamics are always present, we are in danger of asserting that dialogue is never possible. My contention is that *the extent to which power dynamics are present, is the extent to which the potential to be in dialogue is endangered.* The validity claims that Habermas sees as essential become problematic, particularly the fourth one: ‘Coming to an understanding with another person’ (Habermas 1984:2), as that understanding could be distorted because of a pressure on either side to be coercive, compliant or rebellious. I have found in my practice that the only way of mitigating this situation is for the person who is in the more powerful position to name and acknowledge their position of power and its influence on the dialogue (see below for an example). This will allow a ‘validity claim’ for the communication as trust and credibility will have been increased (Habermas 1984:200). It is Habermas’s contention that truth and justice can only be served if communication is freed from distortion in an ‘ideal speech situation’ (Ritzer 1992:292) in which his validity claims are met. I am not sure if Habermas ever expected this ideal situation to actually occur. My own sense is that we can only approach such a situation but rarely completely achieve it. Achieving his validity claims is a complex matter as the nuances of non-verbal communication and the myriad of ways in which communication can be very subtly distorted are always present.

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[4] My understanding of Habermas’s use of the word intersubjective here means that the focus of the communication is on the relationship between the two engaged in the communication rather than on the content of it.

Having acknowledged that, the validity of a dialogue is strengthened if the power dynamics of those in dialogue are thoroughly explored, thought about and *taken into account*. The outcome of the dialogue will be affected, but not necessarily in a straightforward way. If, for example, I have a conversation with someone who is in a powerful position in relation to me and they ask me to go for a walk I might agree although I have no wish to do so. If the power position is first well explored between us I could then choose not to go or to go in any case but not because I feel coerced into it.

An example of this occurred in my practice when I saw a refugee client who was a man of great means and importance in his country of origin. I have commented on his change of circumstances and on the recently occurring relative power difference between us. (He is not western European, like me, but he was a man of wealth and substance.) He comes to me for help and feels his change of circumstances: he used to be the one who helped others. I let him know that I recognise the powerful and influential man within him and want to understand how it feels for him to have lost his authority in coming to this country. Sometimes he shows me his utter despair and hopelessness and sometimes takes delight in telling me about his previous life. My sense is that it is important to him that I try my best, however imperfectly, to really see and understand him as a powerful human being if he is to really show me his despair. Within our communication we gradually work our way towards meeting Habermas's validity claims as we gradually understand each other more fully through the process of dialogue.

Comparing Bohm, Habermas and Buber

Although Bohm, Habermas and Buber all are very different they all help me to understand dialogic communication. Bohm helps me to rigorously understand what it is to be self-reflective, Habermas to think about what makes dialogue valid and to understand power dynamics

within the field and Buber deepens my feeling for spiritual connectedness.

If we add Bohm's to Habermas's ideas about communication we can see that they both look for ways in which dialogue or communication can make stronger validity claims so that true communication can be said to have occurred. It seems to me that it is not a simple matter as to whether or not 'true communication' has happened. As I said at the beginning of the previous chapter, I understand 'truth' to be emergent and contingent on the context. However, Habermas is more concerned to tease out the conditions in which communication actually occurs whereas Bohm is concerned about a type of reflective listening to the self he calls 'proprioception' in order that the outcome of the dialogue is one in which a rigorous questioning of assumptions can occur.

Methodologically these ideas are helpful as they provide benchmarks with which to assess how dialogic we are being. Buber then reminds us that real communication comes as if by grace if we are open to receive it like an empty vessel waiting to be filled.

Dialogue when working as a white psychotherapist across difference in culture

So how is this relevant to action research when working as a white psychotherapist across difference in culture? After all, when Bohm talks of making changes in the culture (Bohm 1996:16), he is talking of the predominant global culture of the west, not about dialoguing *between* cultures. He shows how, in western culture, analytic thinking (Bohm 1996:49) has taken precedence over intuitive, creative, lateral thinking. He hopes that, through the use of dialogue, we will lay bear the assumptions held within the culture so that they are not held without question.

It is my contention that dialogue is useful when trying to communicate across cultures as well as within them, as we will see below, and when

we do, power difference needs to be taken into account. After all, if we talk to someone who is very different to ourselves, then remembering to move towards dialogue rather than to argue can be an important way towards understanding and being understood.

If we are able to remain dialogic, we will notice what is going on in ourselves while the process is happening. If we find that we have a judgement about that, we notice that too. We bring a sense of witness to what is said so we have no expectations of a particular outcome. We want to learn more. We don't mind if our point of view doesn't 'win'. It is my contention that conversations of this sort are more likely to lead to a deepening of understanding where there is a difference rather than insisting on one's own view which is based upon one's own culturally mediated understanding. This is an important guiding principle for my inquiry and one that is constantly with me when working as a psychotherapist. Below is an example from my work:

> I work with a man who is sunk into a depression following his flight to England after having been very severely tortured in his country of origin. His experiences seem to have all but broken his spirit. He has no energy, he has a constant severe headache as well as other pains inflicted by the torture. Images and memories are constantly with him that he finds degrading, disturbing and shameful. If I am to really understand him I must allow my own feelings in response to him to emerge. These are not necessarily feelings I would like to have. I find in myself a desire to escape the room myself. I feel sleepy and look at the clock. Still half an hour to go. Then I am overcome by a feeling of sadness and despair into which I momentarily sink. I then come back to myself and feel helpless. How can I help such a wounded man? I think: he is wounded in his body and in his soul. I want to reach out to him. I try to put into words what I have felt and how I imagine he must feel.
>
> He explains to me that he was a rich and important person in his community at home. He often helped members of his family with

> money and jobs as well as young people in the wider community whose education he ensured. I try to imagine what it is like for him in this country where his status is very low and where he has lost his ability to concentrate and cannot act from a position of strength. His wife, who would normally defer to him, makes all the decisions. My own thoughts about gender roles seem unimportant in the face of his shame at loosing his power in this way.
>
> Constantly maintaining an inquiring attitude helps to ensure that I am present for him and that my understanding of his experience is constantly addressed and never taken for granted. When I go into the waiting room to collect the client who comes before him I often see him waiting already. However hard it is for him to find the energy and motivation for other activities, he always remembers to come to see me.

The use of dialogue is an important underlying methodology which informs the use of all my approaches to my research. My conversations with most of those with whom I have met in this inquiry, whether they be my supervisor, colleagues, friends or acquaintances have been imbued with a spirit of dialogue. Most people with whom I have engaged have been thoughtful and inquiring in the way they have responded to me. This is even true of people I have not met personally like theorists whose work I have read in books and papers or speakers on the radio. When I have strayed from this then the validity of that aspect of my research is called into question. When I stray from it I am no longer interested in inquiry but in confirming my own assumptions as I start trying to 'prove a point' rather than staying open to fresh possibilities. I try to remain reflective in all my endeavours by cycling back and checking what I have experienced against previously held assumptions.

I also have various settings in which I more formally reflect on my experience. These include the supervision of my work as a therapist (two supervisors and two supervision groups), the white co-operative

inquiry group and the PhD supervision group when they were current, my PhD supervision with Donna Ladkin, a women's group, BCPC staff group meetings, discussions with friends and family and the reflection I undertake when I am engaged in writing this thesis. All these situations invite me to reflect on my inquiry. I will be challenged if I cease to be thoughtful and dialogic.

Validity in action research

Having discussed my methodology, I will look more closely at validity in action research and psychotherapy and in my own methodology within this thesis. For research to be valid, what it tells us will have strength and conviction so that it conveys something that is useful and reliable.

One of the most basic premises of action research is that we cannot stand aside from the field of inquiry (Gustavsen 2001) and comment on it as if we are not part of that field. We are participant in it (Reason and Bradbury 2001:6). This lays the ground for validity in action research. Most matters concerning validity flow from that statement and what follows from it is that:

- All involved in the research are co-researchers (Reason 1994:41) – we cannot observe the behaviour of others and comment on it legitimately. They have to speak for themselves. If any sense is to be made of their experience, they must do that making sense by inquiring into it although this could be done in dialogue with others. *It is not valid therefore to make a claim based on someone else's experience unless they concur with it.*
- Valid action research is about being in the 'real' world in a 'real' way and then reflecting on our experience so that we can understand it and potentially change. This leads to further action and reflection. *Valid action research must include cycles of action and reflection. In doing so we make a difference in the world.*
- We are actors within the field of inquiry, not just minds. Our inquiry needs to include action in its widest sense. It needs to include our

> thoughts, feelings and reflections on what we *do*. *Action research that does not at least attempt to make a difference in the world and deal with 'matters of emergence and enduring consequence' (Reason and Bradbury 2001:12) is not valid.*

In order to inquire it follows that a question must be asked. An assertion made without an inquiry and therefore a question is not valid research. In fact, in my view, a piece of research is not valid if it does not ask at least 2 questions so that the initial question leads to at least one more arising from a transformational moment in the inquiry. I show an example of this above when I explore a 'moment' in the White Co-operative Inquiry group. Tentative 'answers' may be arrived at but it is important to arrive at a new place through the inquiry where a new question can be asked to carry the inquiry forward. In order to set out from one question and arrive at another and make a claim, however tentative, we need to go through at least two cycles of action and reflection. For this reason when my inquiry has led me to a new question I have followed it up with a further inquiry. For instance, when a respondent to my questionnaire used the term 'negro' I followed it up by further dialogue, both with her and with a black colleague. In this instance it led me to a better understanding of why the term 'negro' was used in the first place *and* why it is offensive.

Validity of action research in the area of psychotherapy

As this action research thesis is carried out in the context of my professional work as a psychotherapist, I need to ensure that my practice is also valid in an action research context. As I have already pointed out, psychotherapy as I practice it is similar to action research in various regards. It is an inquiry within a relational setting and goes through cycles of action and reflection. We experience something, reflect upon it and see if something different happens. Whatever happens is then reflected upon. Just as in action research, some of the 'action' takes place in the here-and-now relating of those

concerned and some is 'out there' in the world. Furthermore the different 'ways of knowing' (Reason and Bradbury 2001:9), *experiential*, *presentational, propositional* and *practical*, are engaged with in psychotherapy. It is *experiential* in that there is a 'direct face-to-face encounter'; *presentational* in that images, art work etc are often used as part of the encounter; *propositional* in that therapist and client will come to an agreement about how things are and *practical* in that change is affected in the outside world and then reflected upon. (Reason and Bradbury 2001:9)

What makes psychotherapist and action researcher different to each other is not, in itself, a question of validity. It is nevertheless tricky to carry out action research in psychotherapy in a way in which action research considers to be valid because the same validity checks cannot be used. This comes down to the difficulty with enlisting a client as a co-researcher. A co-researcher will not only experience the field of inquiry on an equal basis but will share in putting the research over to the wider world. There is no problem in psychotherapy with a client sharing the field of inquiry. What is difficult is expecting a client to engage in putting this over to the academy in a systematic way.

This aspect of validity in psychotherapy is different in that the project goes in to the world is through the clients 'being' in it. I believe that if the therapy has been thoroughly engaged in, it will affect the therapist and change their 'being-in-the-world' too. If the therapy is 'written up', particularly as a project of the therapist to which the client contributes (as they must if it is to be action research), then this 'writing up' becomes an intrusion into the therapy as it is no longer an undertaking in the service of the client who did not approach the therapist with this in mind. However sensitively and carefully it is undertaken, the client's therapy has been hijacked for research purposes. The 'cauldron' of the therapy is breached and the ingredients can run out.

I have in the past, with this research dilemma in mind, discussed with a long standing client the possibility of writing up our work together as she mentioned that she would like to understand the process better. On reflection the client felt that this would change the nature of the therapy and turn it into something else, less useful to herself.

It is interesting to see that psychotherapy and action research are extremely similar in some ways, as I have shown above, but in regard to how it can be written up, are mutually exclusive. Put at its most bald, that which makes one valid makes the other invalid. Valid psychotherapy must involve a difference in role between psychotherapist and client in order that it be in the service of the client. Valid action research must clearly involve all as co-researchers at all stages including putting the research into the public domain.

Maybe the real difference between the two is their *purpose*. The purpose of action research is to understand the world we live in and the purpose of psychotherapy is to provide professional help to people in distress. Along the way both may provide something of the other. The exploration carried out by action research may well help an individual understand and come to terms with something distressing and the reflection that happens in psychotherapy may well help us understand the world better. It is the process that is similar – the intention and the purpose are different.

In the light of these considerations I have embarked upon this study without making claims for my clients. I have tried to concentrate on my own experience rather than theirs. I do mention matters that have been raised by them but only claim what *I* have received from that or felt about it. I have asked my clients for their permission to mention them in my thesis if it involves part of their story and told them that they can see what I have written if they wish. None have asked to see it and all gave their permission. Although this is well recognised ethical practice it is not without complication as it can also be an

intrusion into the therapy. The only other ethical possibility is not to write about clients at all. However, writing about clients and putting this within the professional domain helps the thinking of the profession to develop. It can become part of the professional holding of the therapist through the development of theory and good practice. I make some recommendations below regarding this.

Psychotherapists constantly reflect on their work in supervision as this is part and parcel of their professional practice but they need, in order to have a healthy 'airing' of their work, to discuss it in a wider context than one supervisor or supervision group. It helps them to broaden and deepen their work. In carrying out my research this is what I am engaged in doing. By doing so I am extending the range of my ability to respond to clients. I have found that I do not need to make claims for my clients in order to do this. Other professions are, after all, in a similar position. Teachers reflect on their work without involving their pupils for instance. Some of the issues may be the same here but my impression is that psychotherapy and counselling are in a particularly difficult position if they wanted to include their clients in action research projects because the work is so personally sensitive and often involves feelings of vulnerability.

It also has to be remembered that any 'claim' we make arises from an intersubjective field, one in which both therapist and client participate. We cannot claim to 'know' anything in an absolute way. Anything that seems 'true' to us in the therapy arises in the space between ourselves and our clients, albeit seen through the lens of our own 'organising principles' (Stolorow and Atwood 1992:see chapter 6).

In order not to have to say that psychotherapists should never engage in action research projects, I have drawn up some guidelines for insuring validity in both disciplines. They are:

- Claims cannot be made for clients by their psychotherapists but can be made about the psychotherapist's own experience if they are tentative and acknowledge the intersubjective context in which it has arisen.
- Claims can be made by supervisors about their own experience with the same proviso.
- Client's stories can be mentioned if claims are only made for the psychotherapist/researcher's response to these stories or if the client's experience is tentatively wondered about. The client's permission should be sought and their identity effectively disguised.
- Cycles of action and reflection should be described on the part of the psychotherapist and may include that of collaborating supervisors and colleagues.

Within this thesis I have used these guidelines to help me ensure that my thesis is valid and follows ethical principles from the point of view of psychotherapy and action research.

Conclusion

I have been aware in writing this chapter how hard it is to use Bateson's 'analytic scissors' in a meaningful way. What I study is hard to separate from the way that I study it. This approach involves a rigorous espousal of unfamiliar non-dualistic epistemology and ontology and discovering methodologies which are reflected on with clarity and integrity and are valid as research.

I have therefore looked for methods that ensure systematic and rigorous self-reflective inquiry, methods that are valid for action research. Several of these involve work with others to help me extend my thinking beyond 'the circles of my own mind' (Scott 2004). The methods that involve others are both first and second person inquiry processes. Second person inquiry processes emerge where others

have clearly joined me as co-researchers. My use of questionnaires, which involve asking others to assist me with my own first person inquiry, I have called an 'extended first person inquiry' process. I have also engaged in third person research in the larger world where the general culture can be more directly influenced.

Particularly because my research concerns myself as a white person, I have been careful to find methods which are based on epistemologies that take, or can take, the hegemonic dominance of the white, western world into account. This may sometimes mean that I have to ensure that I take this into account myself rather than that it is necessarily inherent in the methods themselves. Not all who use dialogue, for instance, are sensitive to power difference when employing it as a method. In so far that power differences of some sort are always present, I have shown that it is necessary at all times to be very clear about these differences when they are present, particularly if you are the one who is in the more powerful position.

This is also true for how psychotherapists work since power within the therapeutic relationship is largely ignored, particularly cultural power differences. When working across difference in culture it is particularly important to be aware of this factor. I have shown how psychotherapy and action research are very similar in various ways, particularly in their need for this sort of sensitivity. But they are incompatible in the domain of collaborating with clients to write up their work together as a research project.

All these factors are explored further within the research I have undertaken. In the next section this inquiry is mostly about my personal learning as a white western woman and the following section is about how this learning applies to my work as a psychotherapist both with my clients and in the profession.