

CHAPTER TWO - ACTION RESEARCH

My first experience of action research was more of a project than an enquiry. It was in 1984, as part of a Diploma in Professional Studies in Education, and was set up to monitor and evaluate the innovation of mixed Physical Education lessons with year 8 in a Comprehensive School. I was Head of Girls' PE and Deputy Head of Year 9. During the project, I did things I had never thought of doing before:

- *I taught with a male member of the PE department*
- *I made 'field notes' of lessons*
- *I audio-recorded some of the lessons and evaluated them later on*
- *I photographed the actions of pupils in the lessons*
- *I triangulated my evidence with the support of an outsider researcher*
- *I devised questionnaires for the children to complete*
- *I set up small group discussions which I audio-recorded*
- *I analysed the data I collected*
- *I discussed the action with members of the department*

I came to understand about action research from a study of the literature - Stenhouse 1970, 1971a, 1971b, 1975; Hamilton, 1973; Elliott and Adelman 1973; Walker and Adelman 1975; Elliott 1978, 1980, 1981; Kemmis and McTaggart 1981; Nixon 1981; Carr and Kemmis 1983; Burgess 1984; Kemmis and Henry 1984; Hopkins 1985.

By the summer of 1985, I had collected a wealth of data. The emphasis in the project was on pupil interactions, which were largely determined by the attitudes, values and beliefs which pupils brought to their lessons, by how I had structured the course, and by how consistently the ethos and values of the school matched those of the innovation which was being introduced. I had adapted the course to accommodate what I found out from the pupils, and I structured the lessons so that both boys and girls could experience equity in the opportunities to participate, and that both could address their stereotypical ideas about boys' and girls' performance.

Early Writers on Action Research

Most texts on action research agree that the term originated with Lewin, who applied it to experimental interventions in institutions and communities, designed to improve production through encouraging democratic participation (Lewin 1946, Marrow, 1969). These interventions were initiated by external experts, and formed cycles of reconnaissance, planning, action and observation. Lewin thought that, if workers were involved in decisions about improvements in production, they would be motivated to work harder and 'through discussion, decision, action, evaluation and revision in participatory democratic research, work became more meaningful and alienation was reduced.' (Adelman, 1993:15). Lewin was criticised by Landsberger (1958) amongst others, for failing to acknowledge the manipulation of the workers involved in the studies, a criticism applied recently to action research used as a possible management tool (Griffiths 1990:50).

Corey (1953), a student of Lewin, is reputed to be the first person to write of action research as a means of improving school practices. Until that time, researchers had been outsiders to the setting of the research, and were seen as experts. Corey thought research should be carried out by the practitioners themselves through studying their problems scientifically, and that the research should be 'a co-operative activity' which would support democratic values (Whitehead, 1993:116).

This idea was developed in the UK by Stenhouse who advocated an active role for teachers in the field of research. 'It is not enough that teachers' work should be studied,' he said, 'they need to study it themselves.' (Stenhouse, 1975:143). In his chapter 'Towards a Research Model' (1975), he described the Humanities Curriculum Project (Stenhouse 1970, 1971a, 1971b) which 'concentrated its research on the technical problems of operating a discussion-based form of teaching in which a group critically examined evidence as it discussed issues under the chairmanship of a teacher who submitted his work to the criterion of neutrality' (1975:93). One of the themes under scrutiny was 'race relations' and forty schools and 150 teachers participated in the research study. The teachers tape-recorded their lessons, and were then able to study the tapes, 'monitoring and reflecting on their own work' (Stenhouse 1975:134) with the help of the researchers. The following conditions for teachers participating in the research (op.cit.:132) were outlined by one of the project organisers:-

- 1) Research should be located in the reality of the particular school and the particular classroom.
- 2) The research roles of the teacher and of the project team member should complement each other.
- 3) The development and maintenance of a common language is a prerequisite.
- 4) The role of the teacher as a researcher must relate closely to the role of the teacher as teacher.

Teachers worked under the guidance of the researchers; they did not select their own topics for research. In developing his idea of the teachers as researchers, Stenhouse talked about teachers 'bettering' their teaching by studying their classrooms, to increase understanding of their own work. But they could not do this on their own; they needed the advice and guidance of full time research teams to help them by interpreting classroom observations, and to plan improvements.

Elliott, however, writing in 1978 claimed that 'action research might be described as 'reflection related to diagnosis' and was happy for teachers to carry out action research themselves, or to commission 'someone to carry it out for them.' (p355). Elliott said that action research was about an increasing understanding of the social situation in which the participant finds himself (sic); it was reported as case study rather than propositional theory; it was subjective, in that it was concerned with a problem and the actors within the problem; it would be written up in the language of the teachers so that it could be authenticated by them; it involved participants in self-reflection; and it facilitated 'unconstrained dialogue' between researcher and participants - 'there must be a free information flow between them.' (1978:356).

In his 1981 paper advising teacher researchers how to proceed, Elliott said that, in action research, 'theories are not validated independently and then applied to practice. They are validated through practice.' So, for instance, Elliott advised teachers to look carefully at the facts of a practical situation, and generate hypotheses or explanations which they could explore further, and which could lead to a 'general plan' being constructed to enable intervention to take place with the intention of improving the practice. The action researcher would have in mind

- a revised view of 'the general idea'
- what he was going to do about it
- what negotiations he has had and with whom, to obtain the necessary permission
- what resources he would need
- the ethical framework to which he would adhere.

The action researcher was then ready to implement the 'action steps' and could use monitoring techniques such as, analytic memos, a research diary, profiles, document analysis, photographic evidence, tape/video recordings and transcripts, outside observer, interviewing, checklists, questionnaires, triangulation, case studies (Elliott, 1981). Elliott advocated 'reconnaissance' to make sense of the monitoring, before implementing a further action step.

Adelman, (1993:17), in comparing the Elliott model of action research with that of the originator, Kurt Lewin, has pointed out that for Lewin, action research was 'a group commitment', whereas Elliott's version could be accomplished without the support of colleagues. Both models, however, were based on a cyclical process, and included reconnaissance, planning, acting, observing, reflecting and re-planning as a result of reflection. This sequence has remained central, although it is sometimes represented as a cycle (Kemmis and McTaggart 1981), and sometimes as a flow chart (Elliott 1981).

During 1983, Kemmis and Carr published their influential work 'Becoming Critical' which stressed reflexivity in action research by bringing the 'self' of the researcher into the action and developing the idea of a 'self-reflective action research cycle'. This work summarised a lot of the ideas of Kemmis and his colleagues at Deakin University (Kemmis and McTaggart 1981, Kemmis and Henry, 1984). Kemmis and Carr's much quoted definition of action research has become the standard in many accounts of action research. They described action research as follows:

a form of self-reflective enquiry undertaken by participants in social situations in order to improve the rationality and justice of their practices, their understanding of these practices and the situations in which these practices are carried out (op.cit.:162).

Two essential aims of action research were to 'improve and involve' (op.cit:165). In the self-reflective cycle, practitioners identified the area they wished to improve, investigated what was happening at the time, suggested ways in which improvements could be made, drew up strategies for monitoring what happened as a result, and reflected on this data to plan a revised course of action. By using a self-reflective cycle to describe action research, Kemmis and Carr emphasised the practitioner-research aspect. The action researcher would be investigating his or her own practice, not commissioning someone else to do so, and would also make the action both participatory and collaborative. Kemmis and Carr talked about action research as being a 'social process' (p182) and that the researcher widened 'participation in the project gradually to include others affected by the practice' whilst maintaining collaborative control of the process (p166). They argued that 'this double dialectic of theory and practice, on the one hand, and individual and society, on the other, is at the heart of action research as a participatory and collaborative process of self-reflection' and that this dialectic could be resolved 'in the

notion of the self-critical community of action researchers who are committed to the improvement of education, who are researchers for education' (p184).

Kemmis and Carr, whose epistemology was grounded in critical theory, (1983:129-211) saw it as important that participants should be able 'to influence, if not determine, the conditions of their own lives and work, and collaboratively to develop critiques of social conditions which sustain dependence, inequality or exploitation.' Action research should not be seen as a 'recipe or technique for bringing about democracy, but rather as an embodiment of democratic principles in research' (p164). Elliott (1988:163) developed this point further. He referred to Aristotle's view that 'through deliberative reflection the practitioner not only clarifies the wise course of action in the situation, but deepens his understanding of the values they should realise.....Values cannot be grasped in abstract terms. They are embodied in the concrete actions practitioners select to realise their values.' Elliott related this to Stenhouse's process model of curriculum development which he said, depended on the reflective practice of teachers. But he raised the interesting question of how could teachers escape from their own biases which are historically and culturally embedded? Gadamer thought that 'the natural understanding of insiders has the power to critique its own ideologically distorted elements' (Elliott 1988:164), but Elliott suggested, instead, that the solution was for 'teacher educators' to act as facilitators in helping teachers to interrogate their biases in the reflective process. He said that the facilitator would help develop objectivity in 'the insider's openness to data in a context of dialogue with others.....'

I think this begs the question, why should facilitators be better able than teacher action researchers to stand outside their own biases, given the patriarchal domination of education processes (Weiner 1989:48), and the institutionalism of sexism and racism within society? Is there an implication that teacher educators have already confronted and resolved their biases, and so are in a position to enable teachers to open their minds when they had previously been closed to injustice in the world? Does this fall in line with the Aristotelian view of knowledge, in which the theoretical 'pursuit of truth through contemplation' (Elliott 1988:32) in Higher Education, is superior and practised by academic theorists, whilst the practical wisdom of school teachers is relegated to second place? Does this facilitating role of the 'outsider', maybe unwittingly, confer a different, and lower, status on teachers, and does it

underestimate the professionalism of the practitioner? Do teachers need facilitators from Higher Education in order to do action research? Could an equal partnership model take the place of this rather paternalistic model of support for teachers?

In looking back over the early writings about action research, I am puzzled as to why it is seen in terms of people thinking, doing, participating in social contexts, and becoming critical, without even a passing reference to the affective domain? Are action researchers' feelings about themselves, each other, and the situation, taken for granted, or just not important in the move towards rationality and justice? Kemmis and Carr (1986:44) concluded a section on teachers' knowledge, by emphasising reflexivity, knowing by doing, thinking critically, and being aware of the historical location and social context of educational acts; teachers are advised to problematise their practice from a cerebral perspective, but the recognition of the part played in that practice by the emotions is completely ignored.

In 1984, when I was first introduced to action research, it was at a relatively early stage of its development in schools in the United Kingdom. The early writers about action research had made an enormous contribution to developing a way of working that had the potential to transform schooling and society. Despite this, in looking back over the early action research literature, I am disappointed in myself to notice that, despite my commitment to equality of opportunity, I didn't realise that much of what I had studied up till 1987 had been androcentric. Stenhouse, meticulous in promoting the democratic principles of negotiation with co-researchers, participants, pupils, headteachers; the accessibility of the data to all participants; and the commonality of language used by participants, apparently didn't recognise that he had excluded women through the use of the generic 'he', and through the apparent absence of women from the scene of action. Kemmis and Carr's 1986 book is full of men's thoughts - the bibliography is long, but hardly a woman amongst it.

Why had I failed to notice this at the time? Why had I not cited women's work? Had I failed to read what they had written? Or didn't women write about action research? Were they busy doing it and not writing about it? Didn't they do it? Was their work not published in the same form as the action research studies that I had read?

A Different Perspective

In this section, I intend to question the gender politics of action research, not in the sense that gender as a substantive classroom issue has been largely ignored in the texts of 'mainstream researchers' although this is the case (Weiner 1989:47), but in terms of those sexist arguments that are used to rationalise women's exclusion from the academic elites of action research. I will then explain the genesis of my own theory and practice of action research, which I will argue is based on the ways in which I know

things as a woman, and as such, is premised on different assumptions from those I see underpinning the views I have associated with the early action research writers.

Before 1987, most published accounts of action research were written by men and most of the action researchers cited were men. For example, in her 1988 book on action research, in a chapter on 'Some Current Trends in Action Research Thinking', McNiff included sections on Lewin, Stenhouse, Kemmis, Elliott and Ebbutt and Whitehead. She also included a section on 'an individual teacher as a maker of theory grounded in practice' (op.cit:42-46) which was an account of her own work in which she cited five authors, all male. In 1989:45, Weiner identified the mainstream action researchers and theorists as Stenhouse, Elliott, Adelman, Kemmis, Nixon and the Classroom Action Network. In her 1990 discussion of action research, Chisholm (p251) cited the work of Elliott and Ebbutt, Freeman, Hopkins, Hustler et al, Kemmis and Carr, Nixon, Stenhouse, Skilbeck.

One possible explanation for this was that it reflected the gendered state of publishing at the time. For example in the 20 issues of the Educational Management and Administration Journal published between 1981-1986, 88% of the papers were written by men, 2% were written jointly and 10% were written by women (Hough, 1986). Weiner (1989:48) quoted Spender (1981) who said that what is perceived to be 'problematic', is that which is problematic to men. Spender reported that because men further their own research they were in a position to 'flood' the literature, to define the central foci as the problems of men, to perpetuate their own practices and to exclude women from the construction of knowledge. Could these be reasons why women experienced difficulties in getting their work published? The Academy was dominated by men, with University appointments over many years having been filled by men; there were very few women professors or members of Senate (Acker, 1993:146-166). These same men had executive control over the publication policy in many journals. Lomax (1994:18) re-affirmed this in her narrative of her own educational journey, suggesting that discrimination against women in academia was masked by a 'paternalism that is so subtle that those discriminated against have difficulty in seeing it in operation.' On the basis of this argument, it seems likely that men have acted as the quality control 'gate-keepers' for publications such as CARN, a journal established to bring action researchers together and to publicise their work. Certainly there was

opportunity; in 1980, for instance, of a 17 strong steering group editing the journal, only four were women.

It is possible that women did not play a leading role in action research before the mid-1980s; and that decisions to publish were based on the merit of a paper or book proposal and this was determined by peer review (Eggleston, 1986). But is this still the case? Elliott and Sarland (1995:380) reporting the results of a peer nomination of people involved in action research, wrote that 'amongst the top runners were Wilfred Carr, Stephen Kemmis, Donald Schön, Lawrence Stenhouse, Jack Whitehead and one of the joint authors of this article, John Elliott. Other influential figures included Marion Dadds, Dave Ebbutt, David Hopkins, Pamela Lomax, Jean McNiff, Helen Simon, Bridget Somekh, Rob Walker, Rosemary Webb and Richard Winter.' This prompted me to investigate a little further and I was surprised to find just how many women had identified themselves with teacher research and action research and had published extensively (Lomax and Evans 1995). Rudduck, who has been involved extensively in teacher research, had published work about teachers and schools in most years since 1973, usually more than one publication each year. Somekh, who convened CARN for many years, first published in 1985 and she also published in every year since that date, usually several publications each year. O'Hanlon, who edited the recent special edition of BERJ about teacher research, first published in 1984 and has over sixty publications, in books, journals and conference reports since then. Lomax, my supervisor, published her first paper in 1977, her first paper to do with action research in 1980 and her first paper on action research in 1986. Since then she has published twenty two papers and books, all about action research. Yet if one looks for the citation of these women in the key action research texts by men and women, it is sporadic or absent. Thus despite their close professional association, Elliott's 1991 book only refers to one of Somekh's publications, and none by Rudduck, Lomax or O'Hanlon. Whitehead's 1993 book cites two of Rudduck's papers and none by Somekh or O'Hanlon, although he does cite some by Lomax. Dadds' 1995 book cites Lomax and Rudduck but not Somekh or O'Hanlon. These four women represent only a small number of women who are publishing in the area of action research and teacher research. Others I might have included, whose work is cited elsewhere in this thesis are Chisholm, Griffiths, Kelly, McNiff, Nias, Simons, Weiner and prominent women from overseas, such as Hollingsworth and Zuber Skerritt.

It seems likely that if women's work is not cited it will be written out of the history of action research, just as it has been written out of the history of Art. Why is the work so seldom and so sporadically cited? Is it different from that of the 'malestream' researchers referred to earlier (Weiner 1989:44-45)? If so, what is the nature of the difference?

I have heard it argued that women focus on practice and methodology in their writing to the exclusion of fundamental questions of epistemology and therefore their work does not contribute to the great debates and consequently is less significant and therefore less publishable and less frequently cited. The great debates are presumably about theoretical knowledge, which was the highest of Aristotle's threefold classification of knowledge, a schema which has been adapted by Kemmis and Carr (1986:31-40) into a typology of action research that they called critical (or emancipatory), practical and technical. Although they said this did not constitute a hierarchy, there is little doubt from their writing that they viewed critical action research as far superior to practical action research, which in its turn, is superior to technical action research. A similar artificial hierarchy has been constructed to distinguish between theory, practice and methodology; where theory is viewed as having epistemological and generalisable significance, where practice is seen to have a situated significance and where methodology is reduced to a technical means to an end.

Lomax recounts an interesting example of how one of her papers was rejected because it lacked a 'hermeneutical perspective' despite its purpose being to describe some practical examples of action research (Lomax, 1986:5-6) A more recent example of this from my own experience is the rejection of a paper by the Journal of Teaching in Higher Education. The paper described a collaborative action research project in which a tutor from a University and a Deputy Head from a Comprehensive School worked together to support the development of a learning community within a school. The paper put forward a collaborative model of teaching in higher education that was in line with recent developments in teacher education. The paper was rejected because 'it is difficult to see how it could be used by HE teachers whose work is in other fields'. The point I am making is that the paper was about

teaching in Higher Education, but it presented a model of teaching that emphasised methodological and practical issues to do with the experience of teaching rather than the theory of teaching.

Is men's work more theoretical and therefore more obviously contributing to epistemology? Is women's work more practical and methodological? Are these distinctions ones of style? Or do they indicate real differences in the way in which men and women view the world? Some writers like Hough (1986) have argued the latter view. He wrote of the androcentrism of much of the writing about education - that educational research was seen only in terms of men's experience and that knowledge generated was arrived at and viewed through male eyes. It was assumed, if it was thought about at all, that women's experience was the same as men's and that they saw things in the same ways.

Weiner (1989:47) argued that there were significant differences between 'mainstream' teacher-researchers and feminist researchers; that mainstream teacher-researchers were concerned for 'neutrality' and 'critical enquiry' in which the personal does not play a part, whilst the feminist researcher values women's experiences and specifically aims to improve their situation within a patriarchal society. Recent debates have suggested that women's ways of writing about their experiences, (Plummer, Newman and Winter 1993, Oakley 1981, Scott 1985) include feelings, dilemmas, ambiguity, experiences and 'the personal' within their accounts but the dominant form in the Academy has been theoretical and propositional and contained little ambiguity or 'feeling'. It is suggested that women value relational and dialectical ways of knowing, and seem to have a capacity for both tolerating and writing about ambiguity and uncertainty. My impression is that in the past, the Academy has rejected relational knowing as a legitimate form of knowledge, and has tended not to validate accounts written in this mode. One exception to this was the work of Belenky et al (1986) which demonstrated women's ways of knowing and included a relational dimension. It is worth reflecting that this book included an epistemological reference in its title, and it could be argued that it was an example of women playing a man's game!

I prefer to see Belenky's work as an example of how things are changing and as one of an increasing literature by men and women that includes more relational forms of representation. Lomax and Parker

(1995) have addressed the issue of representation of action research, responding to Eisner's 1993 presidential address to AERA, in which he called for new ways of representing research. He claimed that 'the act of representation is an act of invention' and that to use different ways of reporting research were 'not alternative means for displaying what is known, but ways of representing unique forms of understanding' (1993:7-9). Lomax and Parker discussed different ways of representing action research which could accommodate dilemmas, ambiguities, contradictions and 'the personal' within them, such as through stories, cycles and spirals, drawings and charts. In their paper, they draw examples from practitioner accounts written by both men and women.

I agree with Lomax and Parker (1995) that we need models of action research that transcend those based on the Popperian model of scientific enquiry, which is still embedded in the old social scientific approach rather than an educational approach. I would also like to challenge those critical theory approaches which hold feeling and emotion to be less important than a cognitive approach to knowing, and support the notion that action research needs to be a passionate enquiry (Dadds, 1995). As a teacher action researcher, I would like to free myself from the paternalism of those top down models of action research which see the university academic as a facilitator of my research and instead develop new ways that enable us to be partners and collaborators (Rudduck 1991:326-331). Most importantly, I would like to challenge the validity of exclusive models of action research that dismiss the practical and technical concerns of my work as being less important than the theorising of outsider academics. I believe that the practical and technical concerns of my work lead me to my own theory - to the living educational theory espoused by Whitehead (1993).

In considering this perspective on action research which is different from the paternalistic, rational, intellectual models of the early writers, I would acknowledge that Lomax, Whitehead and Winter have been particularly significant to me.

Lomax has been influential in helping me to understand and develop my action research practices. My first contact with her was when she was my tutor on the M Ed Course at Kingston University in 1987. She talked about making 'disciplined enquiries into our own practices to identify areas of contradiction.

We reflect on what we find and make judgements that result in plans of action which we can implement and evaluate. We use the discipline of the action research cycle.' (Lomax, 1990:13). Lomax stressed the need to ask questions, about our teaching or management practice - the need to make the ordinary problematic - to break the mould of the 'technical expert' (Schon, 1983:69) - and as a consequence to reflect on the situation and to talk about it to 'each other in order that we can make sense of each others' meanings.' (Lomax, 1990:9). She pointed to the centrality of our value positions (op.cit.:10-13), and to the importance of participation and collaboration (see also, Lomax 1991), which, she said, 'demand great sensitivity and interpersonal skill' and contribute to the personal and institutional change which action research should bring about. Through bringing together the problematic situation, talking about it with colleagues, planning, collecting evidence, and evaluating, Lomax incorporated elements of action research originated by Lewin, but moved these ideas further in arguing for an epistemology of practice that could distinguish action research as a method of educational research based on values, rather than as a method of social science (Lomax, 1990, 1994). Lomax showed how to do action research through giving action researchers a voice; telling their stories in books she edited (1989, 1990, 1991) so that others could get to grips with the practicalities of the action, without ignoring both the opportunities for 'self study' and theorising about what has been learnt.

Whitehead has been another influence for me, my first contact with him being as the external examiner to my M Ed dissertation. He has developed the idea of a living educational theory, which is the basis of an epistemology of practice (Whitehead 1993:67-77). His idea was that we are all living contradictions where we espouse educational values that are not fully realised in our educational practices. It is the constant search for the means by which these values can be reflected in practice, and the continuing experimentation to reach the desired outcome, that gave Whitehead's brand of action research its particular emphasis on personal renewal as a means of promoting a good social order (McNiff, Whitehead, and Laidlaw, 1992). Whitehead recognised the centrality of the 'I' of the researcher in relation to her practice, to other participants, and to the context of the research.

My own perspective has been influenced by both Lomax and Whitehead because I believe that we should start from the value positions of the practitioner-researcher. This is different from the

mainstream researchers' view of action research, where the values issue is not necessarily signalled explicitly. I believe that the asking of questions about our practice - the unsettling of the 'knowledge-in-practice' (Schön 1983:62), is crucial to the process of action research. I agree with Whitehead who moves the context of the action from 'what is happening in the classroom that I wish to change?' to 'why should this be a problem for me?' In asking and answering this question, I take responsibility for the problem because I see that a certain educational principle which is particularly important to me, is being resisted in my practice. In other words, I am denying my educational values in practice, and I feel uncomfortable with this, so I need to act in order to overcome this discomfort.

Whilst agreeing with Whitehead that when one's values are not lived out in practice, psychological and emotional discomfort occurs, I would want to explore further how one comes to get in touch with one's values. I agree with Adelman (1993:18) that the starting point of action research is the most problematic part of the process and, like Adelman, I have seen teachers struggle for some weeks or months to 'move from felt 'troubles' and anxieties' to a statement of an issue' (op. cit.:18). I have also experienced this in my own research. Whitehead recommended the use of video-tapes for teachers to 'show the places where their values are negated' in practice (1993:71); I have explored the use of story for this purpose and have explained this later in this chapter.

In asking teachers to examine their own value systems in relation to their teaching practices, Whitehead set action research in the context of the professional development of the teacher whose action research it was. This might be similar to Stenhouse's contention that the enquiring teacher would become critical about his/her own practice, and so the action research process would be educative for the participants, and contribute to their professional development. Whitehead takes this further in claiming that the process would be educative in the sense of leading to the generation of living theory from the practice of the participant.

Winter is another action researcher who has contributed to my own approach. He stressed the importance of the practitioner learning from experience (1989). His work on fictional-critical-writing led me to use story to help make reflecting in action more rigorous, and this took me even further away

from the early emphasis on rationality. I developed ways of reflecting on experience through using story and this highlighted feelings and relationships within the researched situation. Through story, I came to know as a researcher, the importance of my own, and of other people's feelings. Through story, I experienced dialectical critique - asking of questions, exploring contradictions, dialogical relationships which encouraged me to empathise with the 'other', to draw out their experiences, thoughts and feelings which were relevant to the enquiry. This particular interest in the 'other' is characteristic of the connected teacher (Belenky et al: 1986) and is a further strand of women's ways of knowing. To me, action research was no longer only an intellectual and methodological activity, but integrated the affective dimension of people as well.

Winter constructed 'six principles' to help action researchers to be economical in the collection of data and their use of time, and to be specific and rigorous in their enquiries. He suggested that his first two principles, 'reflexive and dialectical critique' offered an approach to action research which is accessible - 'i.e., not requiring a body of specialist theoretical knowledge' (p38), and followed this up with the next three principles - 'Collaborative Resource, Risk, and Plural Structure'. His sixth principle linked all the previous ones together, and was entitled, 'Theory, Practice and Transformation'. A similar concern about learning from experience has been expressed by Smyth (1991) who argued that for teachers to develop reflective teaching, they need to be concerned with four processes; describing; informing; confronting; reconstructing (Smyth, 1991:106).

I have adapted these processes as questions, as follows:-

- what do I do in my classroom or in my management role?
- how does this fit into my social and institutional circumstances?
- why am I doing it like this?
- how might I do things differently?

These are close to my own action research questions, leading me to dialectic analysis, in that the question 'why am I doing this?' challenges the thinker to analyse her situation and 'how might I do things differently?' synthesises these reflections and makes possible committed action. Day (1993:140)

argued that reflection should be analytic and 'involve dialogue with others over time', and he criticised Schön for not recognising the importance of dialogue in the processes of deconstruction and synthesis.

I agree with Day (1993:87) that there is a continuum between non-reflective and reflective teachers, and that these groups of practitioners 'are not two irreconcilable groups,' but are teachers at 'different stages in their development.' There are also teachers, as Schön (1983:69) said, who, 'locked into a view of themselves as technical experts, find nothing in the world of practice to occasion reflection'. Reflection will only begin when the teacher is asked a question of her practice, so that she is able to break out of the mould of 'technical expert'. She may, however, ask the question herself if she comes across situations of 'puzzlement or confusion which (she) finds uncertain or unique' (Schön 1983:68).

Winter (1989:40) stressed the importance of language in reflection. He pointed out that language is not a 'private act, whereby an individual represents what he or she perceives,' but that words have meanings which are interdependent on other words, and dependent on the individual understanding of these by speaker and hearer, or writer and reader. The understanding and use of words which give voice to reflections are socially constructed, which is why it is so important to talk through our understanding with others, who will make sense of it through their own 'personal interpretive systems'.

'We therefore establish that the basis of the account is *not* simply factual (and thus indisputable) *nor* a universal law derived from an agreed body of knowledge (and thus necessarily true). This in turn establishes that, concerning the situation of which the account has been given, a number of alternative accounts *could* be relevant and important. Reflexive critique in this way *open up* lines of argument and discussion.' (Winter 1989:44).

I strongly agree with Winter's emphasis on the importance of critical reflection and find his six principles to support reflection very useful. However, I am drawn to the point made by Somekh in her opening address to the CARN conference of 1988, that by some perverse process we seem to have built an ivory tower around action research and turned it into something exclusive (Somekh, 1989:1). This is quoted by Winter (1989:8) who sympathised with the spirit of the words, but recommended that

teachers approached action research from his six principles. My experience of working with teachers is that Winter's text is not easily accessible because of his highly academic language.

The accessibility of educational research and theory to teachers has been of practical concern to me as I have worked with teachers at Roseacre to develop our critical community. Stenhouse, in talking about ownership of research said that 'ideas expressed in books are not easily taken into possession by teachers' because the learning is too passive (1975:142). McNiff in her first guide to action research stressed her intention to write in an accessible language but also warned that readers needed to be alert to new concepts which might appear as jargon. She said they should develop 'an appropriate and efficient language as a currency for the exchange of those concepts (1988:xviii). This is an idea developed by Carr (1989) who advocated that teachers use his language, but was criticised by Lomax (1990:8) as patronising.

There are a number of questions at issue here. Is there an accepted 'academic' language? Does it contain important concepts necessary to extending understanding? Is it an exclusive jargon with a strong gatekeeping function? Do teachers need to use this language to communicate their research?

Teachers as Researchers

The debate about the language of action research and its accessibility to teachers is perhaps less important than the argument about whether teachers should get on with teaching and leave research to trained researchers (Hammersley 1993, Lomax 1994, D'Arcy 1994, Hammersley 1995). Many teachers do not see research as part of their job, although that is not to say that they do not reflect on their practice, and try to improve it. Stenhouse and others have argued that teachers should research their practice. I believe that through the support of action research methodology, particularly, the support of the community of action researchers and the dialogue these communities promote, teachers can become effective researchers of their practice and contribute to both educational research methodology and epistemology, not in the form of 'critical theory' but in the sense of 'living educational theory'. The case studies in this thesis present considerable evidence to support this point. Hammersley (1993), while agreeing that reflection may help teachers improve their practice, questioned whether teachers should

be seen to make a contribution to research. He dismissed teacher research as TR, distinguishing it from educational research, to which he does not refer as 'ER'. What does that say about teacher research? Is it *not* educational? Is educational research not done by teachers? Hammersley, on the one hand dismissed as untrue the criticism that 'the voices of educational researchers are heard at the expense of those of teachers' (p433), and on the other hand, seemed to be so impervious to the message he was sending in his text: the message that educational research is different from and has greater validity than teacher research! Hammersley's paper is an example of academic gatekeeping at its most destructive. His statement that 'while it is not always clear whether the latter (practitioner research) is intended to replace the former (educational research), this often seems to be implied by the arguments employed' (p429), is a good example of paranoia.

At the end of this thesis I claim that action research has enabled me and other teachers in my school to bring about improvements in our practice that have led to improvements in the quality of education for our students. Could such a claim be made as a result of our learning from research done by outsiders? Could a researcher such as Hammersley have visited our school, observed our work, reflected on our practice, come to conclusions and advised us about how to change our practice, and had an effect similar to that which we have produced, as teachers researching our own practice? Hammersley could have researched someone else's classroom, who had similar concerns to ours and he could have generalised from his observations to help us. He would have reported his findings in his language. Would we have read his report, published in an educational journal? And if we had, would we have been able to extrapolate from it to apply his knowledge to our classrooms?

I support Pat Darcy's response (1994) to Hammersley when she invoked the Bullock report, quoting 'What is known must be brought to life afresh within every knower'. This implies a criticism of propositional knowledge, which seems static and summative rather than formative. On the other hand, dialectic knowledge depends on intervention and action. It is dynamic. Teachers' access to dialectic knowledge can come from their own confrontation of contradiction in their practice.

Dialectics and Reflection

Whitehead's question (1986, 1993) 'how do I improve this process of education?' is an incentive to active learning and dialectical knowledge. Dialectics involve contradiction - dialogue - conversation - discussion - but with the specific characteristic that the discussion should be challenged by critical enquiry - by the asking of questions. According to the Fontana Dictionary of Modern Thought, dialectic logic 'sees contradictions as fruitful collisions of ideas from which a higher truth may be reached by way of synthesis.'

Lomax, in dialogue with Whitehead and others (Whitehead and Lomax, 1987:180-181) said

'In publishing this account of his educational development through action research (thesis), Jack has opened it up to the criticism of others (antithesis) in order to move his understanding forward (synthesis). This is what I mean by dialectic.'

In the same paper, Whitehead acknowledged the significance of the term from the writings of Plato, 'when he points out, through a speech by Socrates in 'Phaedrus', that we use two methods in coming to know. We break down the phenomena into separate compartments and we synthesise different components under a general idea. It is the art of the dialectician to show how one's powers of analysis and synthesis occur together in the process of an educational enquiry or as Plato puts it, to show how the 'One and Many' occur together.' (Plato, 1931).

Dialectics in an action research enquiry can be seen in the practice of breaking down the phenomena by asking questions, by writing stories, by challenging our own or others' interpretations of the answers or stories, and by engaging in dialogue with oneself, or with others. Winter (1989:49) said that it was because of the 'fundamental contradiction within each phenomenon between its unity and its diversity that we know it is currently undergoing a process of change.' So the phenomenon of 'Eloise' (see Chapter 4) - the 'difficult' teacher - can be broken down into many parts - her more distant experiences of teaching, her training, her own education, her beliefs, her values, her home circumstances, her ability to form relationships, her response to the help which was given at Roseacre, her personality and so on! Looking through this list, it can be seen that these things are not static, some of them are changing as each day goes by. So as Winter said, within the unity of a phenomenon, there is the potential for

change as the diverse parts interact with each other, and dialectic analysis enables the researcher to explore the significance of the contradiction between the parts and the unity.

Through dialectic analysis, we can identify contradictions or dilemmas in practice and in discussion with others we can begin to order our thoughts - to synthesise our thoughts into what we eventually 'come to know'. Winter (1989:55), thought that dialectical critique 'works towards the exploration of strategies for change'. Without analysing situations dialectically, 'we can only take the situation as it immediately appears and seek improved techniques for manipulating or enforcing our control of it.' In other words, I could have changed the INSET we offered to new staff by improving techniques for delivering it, and thus controlling it from a management standpoint. Through dialectic analysis, however, I have become aware of other significant aspects of teachers' learning and the need to consider much more radical changes in the way it is provided. For example in Gadamer's view (1975:326), the asking of questions is more challenging than finding the answers - that 'dialectic proceedsby way of development of all knowledge through the question.' So it would seem that the quality of the knowledge generated - its depth and originality relevant to the situation - is dependent upon ownership of the questioning. Gadamer claimed that 'to ask a question is to bring into the open. The openness of what is in question consists in the fact that the answer is not settled.' The more radical approach to INSET that I adopted at the end of this study recognised that teachers need to ask their own questions if they are to be empowered by their research.

I have found that the drawing together of data into the form of a story facilitates this process of asking questions, either in dialogue with myself, or through offering the story to others for them to help me to analyse the situation. Lomax and Parker (1995) have explored this idea in their discussion of the double dialectic of 'accounting for oneself' and 'giving an account'. Their interest is in the way in which action researchers make their work public and the transformational implications of this. They argue that 'accounting for oneself' involves an intra-subjective dialect in which the researcher transforms her understanding of her own practice as she attempts to represent it in a public form. The stories that I have written as a basis of the case studies in chapters 3-7 are such representations. In a paper I presented with Lomax (Lomax and Evans 1995), I tried to make this idea explicit through a story of a

conversation with myself (see chapter 7). 'Giving an account' is the other side of this coin. Lomax and Parker called it an inter-subjective dialectic because it is an invitation to others to critique the account, leading to the possibility of transformed understanding through dialogue with others. I have explored this idea in some detail in the case study presented in chapter 4.

Accounting for oneself emphasises the importance of values and critical reflection, both of which are important dimensions of a practical ethic that some writers have seen to underpin teaching. For example, Adelman said that 'practical reasoning' takes into account 'envisaged ends' and 'practical means', and also that there is an ethical dimension to it. Whilst agreeing that there are ethical questions implicit in decisions about teaching, I would query that teacher researchers necessarily have clear cut goals in mind. Much teacher research begins with a hunch that something is wrong and a great deal of the enquiry involves clarifying what this might be. Indeed, the question 'How can I improve this process of education?' suggests strongly that there is a quest for knowledge that cannot be anticipated. Adelman argued that the 'practical ethic' (coined by Schwab, 1969) should not be sacrificed on the altar of the methodology of action research, and that quality, relevance and integrity should characterise teachers' published work. On the other hand, he argued, many accounts of teacher action research were uncritical of the conditions in which teachers worked. Rather than presenting a 'means to reconstruction' of educational policy, they presented rhetoric (Adelman 1989:179) Classroom action research was inward looking and had fragmented into categories of reflective practice, small Lewinian discussion and decision making groups and larger Freirian communities (1993:21).

Adelman's view that teacher action research should be more 'critical' reflects the position of a number of writers whose work is influenced by a 'critical theory' perspective. For example Kemmis said that reflection should be

'action oriented, social and political. Its 'product' is praxis (informed, committed action), the most eloquent and socially significant form of human action. (1985: 141)'

Other researchers, like Lawn, (1989), have criticised the narrow view taken by teachers of their action research instead of looking towards how they could effect more wide ranging institutional change.

Teachers, they said, need to do 'schoolwork research' - action research on the institutional structures which define their work and cause its dilemmas and contradictions. Zeichner (1993:207) has further cautioned that, although action research can be a powerful and enhancing 'tool' for teachers, enabling them to do what they want to do better, 'what they want to do covers a wide range of alternatives, including those outside the world of constructivism.' (Zeichner, op.cit.:206). I am tempted to argue that these are androcentric views which locate change in a public arena, whereas a 'woman's way of knowing' might locate change more relationally and intrasubjectively and its 'product' might be a form of knowing that is not immediately evident in political or social action. In looking back over my experiences I think there is a real possibility that reflection can be internal, and may not lead to action - in fact - may be allowed to drift into the subconscious mind, possibly contributing to the teacher's tacit knowledge, which might - or might not - surface and be used at a later date.

Engaging the 'self' in change

Griffiths (1993:151) argued that for change to be effective the part played by individuals in constructing that change is significant. She referred to the literature on 'the relation of individuals to knowledge and their understanding of themselves', (Elbaz, 1983, Lyons 1990, and Walkerdine 1990), and to 'empirical studies of teachers and schools' (Ball and Goodson 1985, Acker 1989, Calderhead 1988, Day et al 1990, Goodson and Walker 1991). Griffiths (1993:152) was concerned that using action research to support change in management practice could be manipulative; that if the beliefs and values of the individuals involved were not made central, then the change could be seen as imposed and superficial. She argued that meaningful change engaged the 'self' of the participants. Griffiths' (1995) theory of self holds that the individual and the community interact on each other, the self has to be discovered, through the active involvement of other people, and this is a long term process. Change can only take place effectively when the self is engaged because change is part of a rolling programme, which is always being remade by the selves who are making it. Action research is very appropriate for managing change because it can cope with the instability caused, which it does by incorporating the unstable events into itself. Griffiths called attention to the importance of recognising one's own values, rather than being expected to take over someone else's, and, like Eisner (1993), called for a widening of ways in which we interpret human activity and meaning.

An important aspect of our success in developing action research to bring about change at Roseacre school has been the acknowledgement of the centrality of self to the enquiry - the 'I' as the subject and object of the research and the gradual emergence of this 'I' through story, video and discussion. We have recognised

- that this takes time, but it is time well spent
- that there is a key input of support, interest and empathy of fellow action researchers
- that we must develop an understanding of our values and work to express them consistently in our practice
- that there is value in expressing feelings and talking through problems until a potential solution arises from our discussions.

Bolam (1993) writing for the General Teaching Council Initiative about the continuing professional development of teachers, criticised INSET in which teachers were passive learners and suggested that it was difficult to evaluate how much children's learning improved as a result. We were able to make radical changes in the way we provided INSET at Roseacre because we came to understand the importance of teachers posing their own questions. At Roseacre teachers search for the evidence which shows that children's learning has improved, and they validate this in front of a panel whose responsibility it is to probe the evidence to see if it is convincing. They are in charge of their own professional development, and so they own the process and are committed to it. Their enquiries fall within the School Development Plan as each begins from the question 'how can I improve this process of education here?' and although the School Development Plan is, in some cases, very specific, it can also accommodate any enquiry directed at such improvements.

Adelman (1989:179) criticised the introspective element in action research, yet other researchers, like Rudduck (1988:208), suggest that the practitioners' 'own sense of self is deeply embedded in their teaching'. The model I developed to support research at Roseacre emphasised the relational and intra-subjective aspects of knowledge generated through story although it was also rigorous and self-critical and I would claim (to be justified later) that it has led to effective institutional change and better

education. Is this kind of knowledge akin to Belenky's description of women's ways of knowing? How will my case studies of school based staff development be judged by those academics who value critical theory above practical change? How will they be judged by those who see action and method as a 'means' to a more superior 'epistemological' end?

Will my work be assigned to the category of teacher research that Zeichner (1993:209) described as co-existing with research that attempts to change the 'social and institutional context in which change occurs'? There are dangers in making such distinctions as they suggest the separation between TR and educational research made by Hammersley, to the detriment of the former.

Rudduck also distinguished two forms of research which she called 'vintage' action research, which embraced the social and political dimensions of change in addition to the improvement of classrooms; and reflective research, which excluded the more proactive political role in favour of classroom research (Rudduck 1992:16). It seems to me that this might be another continuum such as the one referred to by Day (1993:87), but reflecting teachers' accommodation of a more political stance in their work.

Zeichner also raised the issue of the control of knowledge, agreeing with Noffke (1991, 1994) and Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1990) who deplored that teachers' voices were absent from 'the literature of research on teaching' (Cochran-Smith and Lytle 1990:83). Noffke (1994, p17), whilst supporting the call for action research to effect systemic change, questioned the position of the academic hegemony, asking 'how can links be formed to social movements which inherently challenge academic privilege?' As she pointed out, the academic validation of knowledge has traditionally excluded certain groups of 'others', amongst whom could be included 'teachers'. Zeichner (1993:210) commended the American Educational Research Association for establishing both 'teacher research' and 'action research' interest groups, but noted that only 'a few classroom teachers are among the 8000 or so researchers at the annual conference who come and present papers.'

In reviewing Adelman's 1989 paper I see gate-keeping which preserves the status quo of educational research. His criticism that 'some academics have hijacked action research, and in an effort to

demonstrate direct relevance to classroom practice and efficiency, unwittingly promoted the positivistic and normative stance that is clearly antithetical to furthering understanding of teaching as a practical ethic' left unclear exactly who was being criticised. My own experience of the academics who have supported my research was that they were keen to demonstrate 'direct relevance' of teacher learning to pupils' improvements; that their preferred 'style' was self-reflective - or, according to Adelman (p179) 'inward-looking'; and that - hijackers or not - I was encouraged to be one of the few teachers at AERA in San Francisco in April 1995, to present a paper of my own. As to whether teacher action research can contribute to social reconstruction - this depends on many factors, including the depth and range of the study, the determination of the action researcher, the support of the institution in which the action researcher works, and the support of the academic community - which, after all, controls the publication of high status teacher action research in the refereed journals.

Engaging 'others' in the pursuit of change

At the start of this chapter I quoted the definition of action research by Kemmis and Carr which emphasised social reconstruction through principles of rationality and justice. My criticism of this definition is of the notion of rationality implied, which seems to exclude what I have called women's ways of knowing. I take no issue with its focus on justice, and have used an ethical criterion to judge my own research. A more eclectic definition of action research, which allows for a different epistemological position from that of critical theory was produced at the International Symposium on Action Research, Brisbane 1989, (Altrichter et al, 1990:19) It affirmed that action research was a process of intervention; it was not about setting objectives, nor about hypothesising and proving one's hypothesis. The definition was divided into two parts, the axiomatic, and the empirical, the latter to be explored, and changed in the process of the action research.

It was axiomatic that if the situation was one in which people reflected and improved (or developed) their own work and their own situations, by tightly interlinking their reflection and action, and also making their experience public not only to other participants but also to other persons interested in and concerned about the work and the situation.

It was empirical if the situation was one in which there was increasingly data gathering by participants themselves (or with the help of others) in relation to their own questions; participation (in problem-posing and in answering questions) in decision making; power sharing and the relative suspension of hierarchical ways of working towards industrial democracy; and collaboration among members of the group as a 'critical community'.

Included in this definition of action research is the idea that teachers will raise their own questions, that they will be part of the decision making process, and that power will be shared amongst participants. There does not seem to be a dominant partner, but all participants are recognised as knowledgeable and knowing people in their own right (Clandinin, 1992:124-137). The definition also suggests the importance of collaboration and members of the group acting as a critical community. This is similar to Lomax's model of action research which is essentially collaborative. She stresses the importance of strategies for bringing about the participation of others who will play a number of different roles. Outsiders to the research, acting as support groups or critical friends can bring an 'outsider' perspective to the work that reduces the chance of what Reason and Rowan (1981) called consensus collusion. As critical friends, outsiders may be able to empathise with an action researcher's intentions in a way not possible for insiders, such as when a headteacher embarks on action research. Insiders, both as support groups and critical friends bring their understanding of events as part of the community, yet are still able to offer another point of view. The point Lomax argues most strongly is the need always to be alert to the 'quality' of others' participation, particularly if the intention is to bring about change from the perspective of a manager (Lomax, 1991:102-113).

The critical friends whom I identified were the Headteacher, and my two deputy head colleagues. My wish was to engage in reflexive critique (Winter, 1989:43), through which my critical friends would describe to me how they saw 'the situation', reflecting what they saw as in a mirror image, so that I was able to see things from a different perspective. Through this I hoped to explore my assumptions and consider alternative courses of action.

The group of teachers with whom I worked at Roseacre School acted within the framework provided by Lomax's notions of peer support and critical community. As the research progressed, I became clearer about the meaning of participation. By the time we had set up a self selecting action research community, one of the teachers could comment that we had a further dimension, that of continuous support as the critical, professional community was built within the institution (Giles, 1994).

Somekh (1994), in discussing group support within an action research framework, referred to the 'constraints of institutional power structures' (p13). She suggested that Kemmis and Carr (1983) viewed group collaboration as a means of challenging, and through discussion, freeing, individuals from their uncritical acceptance of the existing power structures. Somekh was critical of this view and suggested that action researchers did not need to reject their micro-political assumptions about power in their organisation, until they came to understand the need for change through 'dialogue, based on principles of honesty and equity.....within an ethical framework underpinned by democratic values' (p15).

This acknowledges that collaborators need to address the meaning of democratic values gradually. Initially individuals are more concerned with the practicalities of getting started than with exploring power structures within the school. In my case study, 'My Eyes Have Become Different' (Chapter 7) the democratic values only became important when the participants began to open up their thoughts and feelings, and I responded to this by writing the story, 'From Under A Wide Brim', which explored some of the dilemmas associated with an action research group existing in a hierarchically run school (Chapter 6). The writing of the story enabled me to think through some of the relevant issues, and the dialogue which followed in the group enabled the participants to explore their feelings of trust towards me and each other. Thoughts about principles of honesty and equity may have been there before, but until I had raised them and encouraged them to be shared amongst the group, they had not been voiced.

The introduction of micropolitics into the debate brings action research out of the text book and into a more practical mode. I have seen action research enabling people to effect change in their lives and consequently bringing about change in the institution as our pupils are given greater opportunities to

take control of their learning. I worry less about the issues of power - for instance, whether action research enquiries are manipulated by those in power (Griffiths 1990:50), as I can see clearly where the self comes in, and how it integrates with others to form a powerful group. As the leader I have no wish to direct participants in their choice of project, as I have seen the power of ownership of the action research enquiries for the teachers who have selected them themselves.

In 'Women's Ways of Knowing', Belenky et al (1986) talked of the 'connected teacher'. They said that 'instead of the teacher thinking about the object privately and talking about it publicly so that the students may store it, both teachers and students engage in the process of thinking, and they talk out what they are thinking in public dialogue.' (p219) Belenky et al. talked of the need for the teacher to create groups 'in which members can nurture each other's thoughts to maturity.' (p221). The group shares feelings, and encourages each other to grow in understanding through working together for the common, but individual, good, rather than working competitively on their own. The teacher is in a relationship towards the group which explores meaning through dialogue, and does not present knowledge as fixed and given.

There are other people who were important in offering support to me. These are my supervisors, my support set at Kingston University, and all the groups of colleagues I have been working with at Roseacre School. My support set consists of a group of peers who meet regularly together, usually at Kingston University, and challenge each other's claims, thinking and actions. I feel that my support set acts as a formative review group, challenging me, every time I talk to them, to be rigorous in my reflections - I hope I also ask questions which open other people's thinking within their own projects - so that the support set acts as a collaborative part of the process of enquiry, providing opportunity for the dialectic approach.

Kemmis and Carr (1986:40) suggested that action researchers help to

'establish critical communities of enquirers into teaching, the curriculum and school organisation.....This critical self reflection, undertaken in a self-critical community, uses communication as a means to develop a sense of comparative experience.....and by

converting experience into discourse, uses language as an aid to analysis and the development of a critical vocabulary which provides the terms for reconstructing practice.'

Lomax (1991:108-10) talked of how critical communities might develop in schools, in some cases through being aware of an action researcher's activities, and wishing to look at their own practice as a result. Whitehead (1993) preferred to call these groups educative communities, disliking the 'critical' connotation; and I think I prefer to call them 'learning groups', perhaps because this term seems to be more in keeping with school language.

Over ten years have passed since my first action research project. Now, at Roseacre School, I am building a learning community of teachers who are becoming action researchers themselves, in many cases using 'story' to make sense of their experiences.

I also have been writing stories. I have recorded my first memories of Roseacre in 'The Gerbil and Other Stories' and I have presented data wrapped up in fictional form. I am committed to developing my ideas further.

Jack Whitehead tried to understand what I was doing. How was he to know what was truth and what was fiction?

'It's the interjection of the fictional parts that I have a problem with,' he said in a puzzled way. I began to explain how I had constructed the story.

'As you talk to me, I start to understand how this was constructed, but when I just read it.....'

'You don't!' I interrupted.

'No!' he said.

'Does it matter?' I asked. 'And if it matters, it is possible to put footnotes to it, to point to the fact that all of this for instance, came from a meeting on a particular date.'

'I'm not sure how much what I am saying is grounded in my own limitations, so I could be failing to see an important development. So when you ask me, does it matter, I'm answering in relation to my own view of what counts as a valid account, and I lose my sense of empirical reality as I'm moving between fiction and accounts in which teachers are telling truthful stories about their life, which is grounded in the evidence.....'

'Well, if you look at chapter two of 'My Eyes Have become Different', I said, 'It's actually validated by Nicole's piece of research. She is saying in her own account the sort of process she went through, the things she did and thought, so in a way, the account she's written validates my story. My idea was to put together my account and the teachers' accounts, so in the reading of them, you get the two points of view.'

Developing a Model of Action Research

The model of action research that I have developed is represented in *figure 2.1. (overleaf)*. The model is divided into three steps. *Step one* allows the entry to the enquiry, with reconnaissance about the likely field of action, and an exploration of the context in which the research is set. *Step two* is the 'plan, act, observe, gather data, and then reflect' part of the action. It leads to a *third step*, which draws on

Whitehead and Lomax (1987:178-89 and 102-13) for their work on dialectics; Winter (1986, 1987:139-45, and 1989:38-68, and 161-85) for his discussion of the 'six principles for action research' and his exposition of 'fictional-critical-writing'; Carter (1992) for her interest in 'creating cases for the development of teacher knowledge'; and Lomax (1989b, 1991) for her discussion of support sets and critical friends in action research projects.

This *third step* consists of personal reflection followed by dialogue with either groups of interested people - participants, support set, critical friends - or with oneself. If the dialogue was with other people, the step continued as a fairly standard action research cycle; if the dialogue was with oneself, the continuing cycle could be either talking to one's diary or writing a story to expose one's thoughts.

Once the story was written, I would ask others to read it and I would listen to the issues raised. I then think about their comments, and think about my thinking - meta-thinking - which triggered the story in the first place. I might alter the story as a result, or I might keep it as it is, having assimilated into my thoughts the discussion which had taken place. If I altered the story, I would probably want to offer it again for discussion, and follow through the cycle again; if I did not alter it, I would continue to consider the questions it raised in the wider context of my life and the process of education with which I was concerned.

Flow chart to show the cyclical nature of my action research enquiry

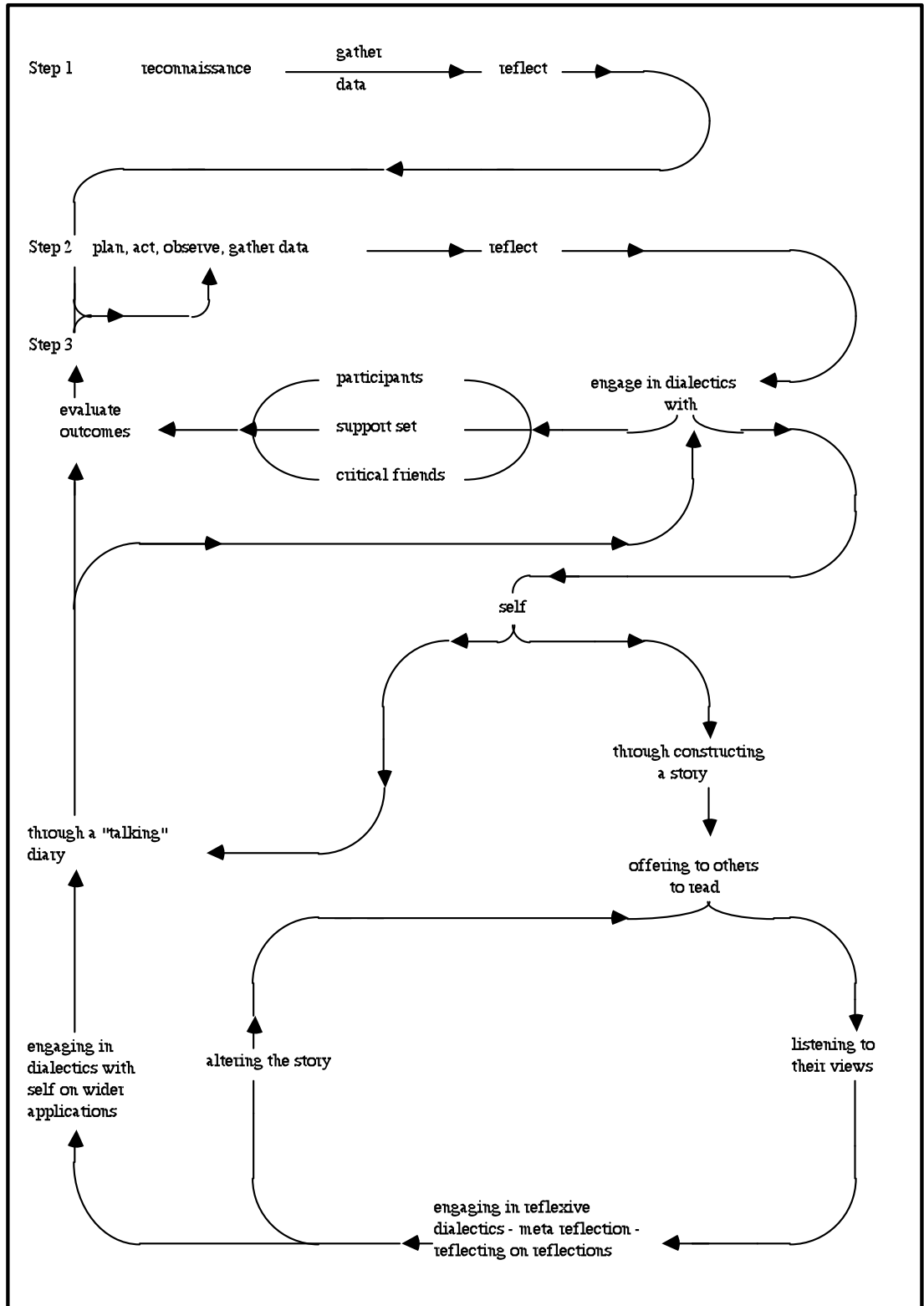


Figure 2.1

Finally, I would evaluate the outcomes of my thinking, and return to *step two*, to plan a further course of action as a result. I think that it is very difficult to find an exit from an action research enquiry, because the whole process drives the enquirer onwards, raising different questions which upset the equilibrium until they are answered, and in answering them, new questions are raised. This propensity towards change of phenomena or situations has been discussed as an important part of 'dialectical critique' by Winter (1989:46-55), in his second principle of action research.

Now that I have come to the end of my project and am at the stage of writing it up, I think I could express my action research model more simply, and this would be to the benefit of those teachers who might like to go away and try it out. I see it now as a series of steps, leading from one to another:

- 1) I feel uncomfortable with some aspect(s) of my practice
- 2) I explore my feelings, talking to supportive friends, and reflecting on my own
- 3) I plan to act in order to clarify my thoughts further - I might plan to write a story, or to video some part of my practice, or to audiotape a meeting, or to write a diary.....
- 4) I act - I put my plan into operation
- 5) I collect data from what I did (I might now have a story; a video; an audiotape; a diary)
- 6) I share my data with my 'learning community'
- 7) We engage in dialectical and reflexive critique about the data
- 8) I reflect on my own; I interact with my thoughts and draw up my theories of learning by writing
- 9) I share my writing with the wider learning community, and engage in dialogue about it, maybe reconstructing my knowledge still further
- 10) then I plan the next stage of my enquiry

This series of steps maintains the thread of relationships, dialogue, support and self which is in keeping with the action research principles I drew up with the group of teachers at Roseacre (Chapter 7). It highlights the process of writing as being part of reflection, and as such, writing has the power to transform my thinking, rather than just being an end product of my action research practice. It is through writing that I come to theorise about what I have done.

Using story in my action research methodology

I have argued for action researchers to be reflective, and that the beginning of action research can be the most difficult part as the researcher struggles to articulate the focus of concern. Winter, writing in 1987:139-45, 1989:161-185 and 1991:251-262, talked of the use of fictional-critical-writing in enabling students to come to a focus for their action research enquiries. Students wrote a story from their concerns about a particular topic, then offered it to other people for their comments. As a result, the students were able to focus more clearly on an aspect of their enquiry (1989:161-185). Alternatively, Winter has used story to order qualitative data, as in 'the interviews project' (1991:252-262). He constructed a story - selectively including some of the data collected, and then gave his story to others to read, concluding the process by reflecting on the themes which these readers raised. Winter stressed the importance of 'theorising', saying that 'the term is used to emphasise that 'theory' cannot simply be derived from data, but is always the outcome of a process in which researchers must explore, organise, and integrate their own and other's theoretical resources as an interpretive response to data.' (op.cit.:261)

Carter, in her AERA address, April 1992, said that story was established as a legitimate method of research in teaching and teacher education, having overcome resistance from those who questioned its validity. Carter has used student teachers' 'well remembered events' as stories told in order to make sense of their experiences. She said that experienced teachers have 'a rich store of situated or storied knowledge' from which to draw when deciding on a course of action, and that expertise in teaching is dependent on acquiring 'event-structured knowledge' (Carter 1993:7; also see Carter 1990, Carter and Doyle 1987; Carter and Gonzales, 1990). This knowledge gradually builds up through the sharing of stories of teaching experiences, enabling the student teacher to shift her understanding of her professional world, reframing her pedagogical beliefs and values as she does so.

Carter's ideas moved me away from the fictional story form to other possibilities. If 'well remembered events' for student teachers were to be told as stories, was there an opportunity to create stories which could be shared with experienced colleagues, and which would include aspects of 'theory' that teachers

find so arid? Could stories explore my own living educational theories and could these act as an exciting way of challenging colleagues in school to reframe their thinking? Could these stories include events set in the familiar context of our own school and so incorporating the values, attitudes and culture which were so important to us? If they could, how would I resolve some of the ethical issues, such as the recognisability of the characters by themselves or others? How could I incorporate story into an action research cycle? And, if I overcame these difficulties, how could I resolve the action research principle of giving back the data to the participants, of sharing the process in a democratic way?

My excitement at the possibility of using story in a creative way was related to my strong feeling that I would like teacher knowledge to be more widely shared in schools, to be accessible in its language, and to be captivating for its audience. If it didn't do these things, then where is the motivation for teachers to read, to understand their experiences better and to explore their pedagogic skills? In legitimising story as a form of research, Carter said that 'stories became a way.....of capturing the complexity, specificity, and interconnectedness of the phenomenon with which we deal and, thus, redressed the deficiencies of the traditional atomistic and positivistic approaches in which teaching was decomposed into discrete variables and indicators of effectiveness'. (1993:6).

Stories as narrative also concentrated on teachers' lives - their personal stories (Connelly and Clandinin 1990; Elbaz, 1983; Witherell and Noddings, 1991) - 'having more to do with feelings, purposes, images, aspirations and personal meanings than with teaching method or curriculum structures in isolation from personal experience or biography.' Clandinin (1992:124-137) talked of the storied nature of our lives, and the sense we make of them through reflection on the stories; she pointed to the collaborative nature of narrative as we tell our stories to other people, and the personal growth of all who are involved in the process. It is not just the story teller who learns from the experience - 'this change and growth occurs for all participants for no-one emerges unchanged from this process.' (Connelly and Clandinin, 1988:129).

My ideas of writing stories developed alongside my wish to share my stories with other people. I do not write stories just for myself - the excitement comes from sharing them, so I am keen to hear other people's views on what I have written. This can be quite threatening on the first occasions, and I found the first few experiences unsettling, especially as several ethical issues were raised and remained unresolved, (see Chapter 5). When the group of action researchers at school became involved in writing stories to explore their thoughts, the group gelled around the collaborative processes of exploring the stories, and the teachers became very skilled at talking them through. All participants enjoyed the process, and as Clandinin said, 'reading and hearing others' stories became ways to help us hear our own stories and to understand the ways our stories are embedded in social and cultural stories.' (Clandinin, 1992:131). I had originally worried that unless participants were discussing their own story they would quickly become bored at poring over someone else's. But this was never the case, and the anthropologist, Catherine Mary Bateson, pointed to similar experiences when she wrote,

'Women today read and write biographies to gain perspective on their own lives. Each reading provokes a dialogue of comparison and recognition, a process of memory and articulation that makes one's own experience available as a lens of empathy. We gain even more from comparing notes and trying to understand the choices of our friends.' (Bateson, 1989:4).

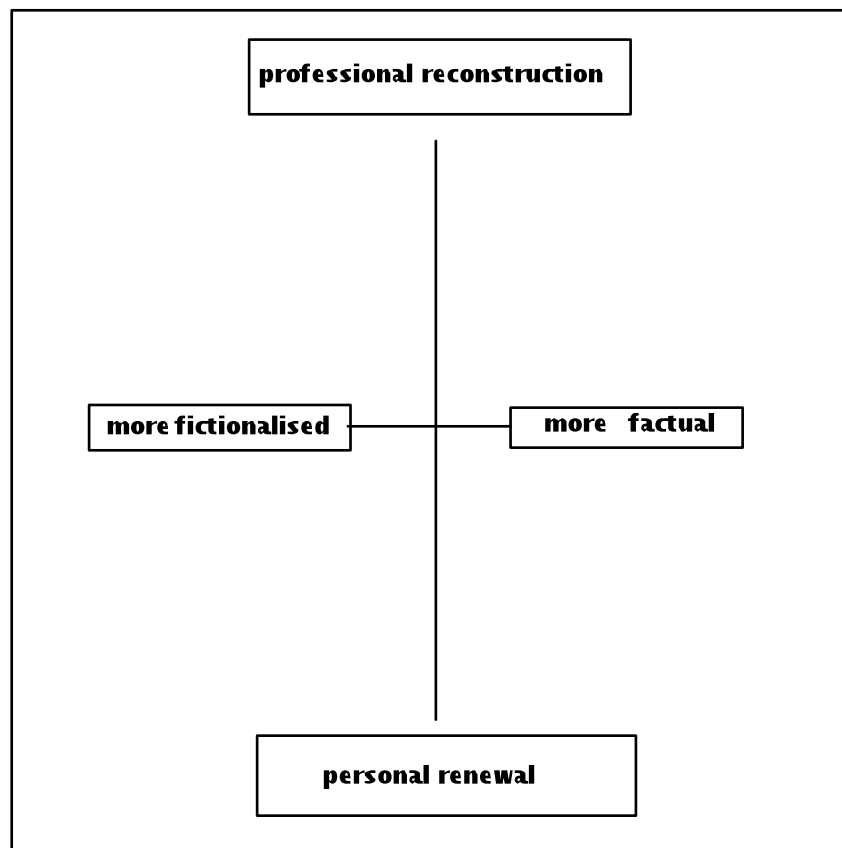
Writing stories became a tremendously exciting part of my life. The first story was constructed around the voluminous data I had collected (after Winter, 1991) from working with Department A for a year. I wrote it as a fictional-critical-account and called it 'The Canterbury Tales'. You can read it, and the dialogue which arose around it, in Chapter 4.

I went on to use story writing to explore my thoughts, using 'well remembered events' (after Carter, 1993; and Clandinin, 1992) as a basis. But here I set my stories within a fiction, and entered into a dialogue between many manifestations of 'myself!' 'Just tell me what to do' (Chapter 6), and 'Darren', (archived), were written in this way, and I see them as a development of the rather more straightforward 'narrative of events' referred to by Connelly and Clandinin. These stories of mine were not pure biography; they were a combination of fact and fiction. Their purpose was to explore

thoughts, not to give a true account, so in my view the merge of fact and fiction is irrelevant to the story.

One of the greatest excitements in my writing has been in recording my experiences with the Heads of Year Team in 'The Square Table' (and other stories), and with the group of action researchers in the story, 'My Eyes Have Become Different', in which I told the story of our development over time. I have overcome some of the ethical issues through careful negotiation with the participating teachers, but my method has thrown up a new problem, in that some teachers have not wanted to read their own story! What I wanted to do was to write - as in a novel - telling a story of teacher-action-researchers, but based on the data I had collected on audiotapes. I wanted to capture my thoughts and feelings and record them at the time they happened, as the story went along, rather than, as in a usual action research cycle account, putting my reflections after the action. I wanted to show how an action researcher integrates theory, planning, reflecting on observations, and actions in a story which projects what was going on in my mind at the time.

Finally, I have experimented with autobiography as a second text in writing this story of my professional life as a means of 'locating the author's ideas in a specific historical and cultural frame' (Weiner 1994:12). I have found it helpful to draw a model of my use of story in action research, as follows:



Model for using story in action research

Figure 2.2

The four quadrants are drawn from continua of 'more fictionalised' to 'more factual' and 'personal renewal' to 'professional reconstruction'. There were no purely fictional or factual stories: all were based on elements of 'fact', which were either edited selectively, interpreted from a particular perspective, or embellished through the imagination. I selected the second continuum because whilst on the one hand, my use of story in action research has led to my increased personal understanding and renewal, on the other, it has led to what I have called 'professional reconstruction' within the school. Through sharing the stories with teachers, I was able to empower them to become more reflective, developing their practice as a result, and learning to take a more proactive role in the school. I have adapted the terms 'personal renewal' and 'professional reconstruction' from Zeichner (1993: 205-208; 1994:73-78; 1995:13) who wrote about action research and professional development, and action research and school change whilst working towards the concept of 'social reconstruction'. Zeichner's view of social reconstruction was that social injustices such as racism, sexism, poverty, violence, war

and greed should be fought against and overcome in a world's eye view of life; that action researchers in schools should, through emancipatory action research (Kemmis and Carr 1986:129-154) 'examine the social and political implications of our own actions and act in ways that promote the realisation of democratic values' (Zeichner, 1993:213). My view is that there are inequities and injustices within schools, being microcosms of society, and some of these can be addressed by the processes and outcomes of action research. Issues like violence, war and greed may be addressed through teachers recognising the reality of students' feelings, that their experiences of life are important, and that the way they are treated makes a huge impact on their self esteem and consequently on the ways in which they behave towards each other. Do they express value and respect for their peers and adults, or do they slip into violence when they fail to get their own way? Likewise there are issues of sexual and racial injustice which need first to be recognised before anyone can do anything about them, and these could be areas that individual teachers may wish to address. Yet other injustices, such as teachers feeling that their views are not valued in the decision making process in schools can be the subject of other action research enquiries. If these have significant outcomes in the way the school organises itself or values its staff and pupils, then that is part of reconstructing a more just society within the school.

In some of my stories, 'personal renewal' meant that the intra-subjective dialectic of writing, and the inter-subjective dialectic of sharing the story with others (Lomax and Parker, 1995), followed by my own analysis and reflections, resulted in a greatly increased personal understanding and excitement about my learning. I have adapted the term 'social reconstruction' and used 'professional reconstruction' instead, as this locates the changes which were generated through sharing my stories more firmly in the context of teachers' development as they move towards a fairer society in which children grow up and are educated. But 'personal renewal' should be linked to action; excitement in learning without change in practice is a luxury schools can ill afford. So whilst 'personal renewal' referred to the development of the author of the stories, 'professional reconstruction' referred to the development of the teachers who read the stories, but this could include the author as well. Action research at Roseacre is not an esoteric adventure for individual teachers; it is about making changes which would benefit children's learning.

In some cases, the stories fell into two quadrants as they contributed both to my renewal and to that of the readers. I would place stories which were quite fictionalised and have facilitated the development of my understanding of my professional practices in the bottom left quadrant; in the bottom right would be stories which were more factual in origin, but also contributed to personal knowledge; the top right quadrant would contain stories which were more factual but were written to give colleagues an opportunity to see themselves as professionals who were developing their pedagogical or management skills, and the top left would show fictionalised stories which, when given to colleagues, enable them to 'reconstruct' their practice. I shall place the stories in the appropriate quadrant when I come to chapter 8, once I have explained the significance of each of them in earlier chapters.

In terms of the literature, I can place the writers in particular parts of my model, but as far as I am aware, no-one has used story in the four different ways that the model represents, apart from myself. I would place Winter in the left lower and upper quadrants as his fictionalised use of story enabled the author to reflect on what had happened and maybe to change as a result, but also for the story to be a catalyst for changed practices within the organisation. Carter, however, with her emphasis on building for new teachers their 'event-structured knowledge' could fall into the upper right quadrant; 'true' stories, with the intention of developing professional knowledge. Clandinin, Elbaz, Witherell and Noddings all talked of making sense of experience through reflection, sharing and collaboration, stressing that learning happens for everyone as a consequence; they would therefore be best placed on the right hand lower and upper quadrants - factual stories with the intention of both personal reflection and professional reconstruction.

To summarise: the use of 'story' in my action research cycles was

- to order and make sense of data within my own interpretive framework thereby providing opportunity for reflexive critique and dialectic analysis
- to explore personal meaning in throwing light on ambiguous and problematic situations, and professional or personal dilemmas and concerns
- to distance the self from situations, and enable them to be discussed without embarrassment, dishonesty or loss of face, particularly if they are difficult or painful

- to express feelings about our professional situations
- to explore values in a fictional setting
- to enable groups of professionals to consider pedagogical strategies in order to improve school practices
- to record professional development over time, enabling other teachers to share our experiences
- to locate professional experiences within a personal biographical frame in order to make greater sense of them

Group Support in Action Research

I found that using story was an important facilitator enabling me and the teachers I worked with to study 'the self', but our self study was always supported by the group. Kemmis and Carr (1983); Kemmis and McTaggart (1988:5) talked about collaboration which gives the opportunity for participants to report their work and to challenge each others' thinking. McNiff, (1988:68) saw it as important that colleagues were involved in the process - as participants, observers, validators, readers of study findings, and as line, or senior, managers in the school.

I believe that the group of action researchers established at Roseacre School worked together in this manner relating positively to each other through the exploration of the self in their stories. I have not come across accounts in the action research literature of teachers working together in schools for whom the group culture has been as important as it has been for us, and we have from time to time engaged in discussions about what makes it so special for us. I am moving towards the view that the fact that the group comprises mostly women could be significant. Case (1994:149), in reviewing the literature on communication and women's speech, said that 'women's speech tends to display identifiable features that foster support, closeness and understanding'. She cited several research reports to support this statement, including De Francisco 1991, Tannen, 1990, and Dindia and Allen 1991.

In thinking through the interactions within the groups of teachers discussing their practice at Roseacre, I find that much of what Case has written is consistent with our experiences. For instance, our conversations have included 'maintenance work' (Fishman,1978), which involves attempts to invite

others into the conversation and encourage them to relate their experiences. She said that women also encourage discussion of feelings and see the relationships between communicators as important (Tannen, 1990); they try to prevent other participants from losing face in discussion, and they actively seek to show support for each other in the conversations. There is often a tentativeness about women's contributions to conversations which can be misread as lack of confidence, but, instead, could be seen as a means to open out the discussions. Case (1994:151) talked of 'responsiveness' as a quality in women's talk, claiming that it 'reflects learned tendencies to care about others and to make them feel valued and included' (Lakoff, 1975). I think there is strong evidence of these conversational patterns in my case study, 'My Eyes Have Become Different' (Ch 7).

All this does not, of course, preclude men from being valued members of such a group, and from contributing through 'supportiveness, attentiveness and collaboration to enhance morale and productivity' (Helgesen, 1990). Case (1993a) referred to such men as 'wide-verbal-repertoire males', and I would expect to see the kinds of behaviours exhibited by them which contribute to the support of group participants, such as careful listening; questioning, commenting or exploring a topic under discussion rather than changing its direction; using collaborative means to enable others to feel empowered to express feelings and to make plans to achieve their own goals.

Chisholm (1990:253), in pointing to the human relationships aspects of action research, said that 'the collision between theory and praxis is as emotionally significant as it is intellectually interesting' and that integrating emotionality enriches the action research study. She rejected the traditional, rational approach in favour of 'a passionate scholarship' (du Bois, 1983). I agree with Dadds (1993:230) who criticised both Kemmis and McTaggart (1988) and Elliott (1981) for presenting action research as 'systematic, linear, cerebral and behaviouristic' and pointed to the fact that in her experience of working with teachers, the thrust of the action has always been to improve children's experiences of learning, and that this has engaged the teacher researcher in exploring her own values as a teacher, and also, importantly, her feelings about herself and what she is doing. She is emotionally committed to improving her practice - she is not just driven by an academic goal, as in gaining a diploma, or in fulfilling her own educational strivings. There is a holistic nature to action research, in that the

activities of thinking, planning and observing, do not exist independently of the action researcher, and as Dadds has said, 'it is a misconceived enterprise to try to separate teachers' thinking in action research from their feelings, beliefs, attitudes, their being and their sense of self.' (1993:229). I think it is because of the integration of emotions, beliefs and sense of self with the academic rigour of action research, that the support of 'the group' is so critical - the supportive group enhances individual self esteem and empowers people to move forward with confidence.

I recorded that conversation with Jack on January 8th 1994. It worried me because I could see exactly what the problem was, but I didn't have a solution. To include footnotes every few words would destroy what I had been trying to create, but for the reader to know which were representations of the 'truth' and which parts were fictional seemed to be quite important.

On the other hand, Eisner, in his AERA Presidential address, April 1993, called for a redefinition of representation, claiming that it should be possible to show what the researcher has understood through means other than words, for instance, art, film, poetry or literature.

He suggested that some of the richness of learning could be lost if we adhere to tried and tested ways of representing what we come to know through research, and exhorted us 'to search for seas that take us beyond the comforts of old ports' - a nice metaphor, raising immediate images and opening a wide range of questions.

My intention had been to write a story of the life of action researchers in school, so that other teachers could relate to it - could compare and recognise aspects of their own lives in my account. My hope was that the story would inspire them to try out the action research approach to teaching, and to recognise and seek to develop a dialogical community that we have come to understand as highly motivational and supportive.

My question to Jack, therefore, 'does it matter?' - if truth and fiction merge from time to time - should be seen in the context of what I was trying to do. I will return to this discussion later; at the moment I hold the dialectic in my mind - that I want to represent our experiences in an easily accessible manner, but I also want my work to be understood and validated by researchers maintaining a tradition of academic rigour.