

Chapter Two

The Research Methodology

Self is narrative configuration, a telling, an unfolding and developing story. (Bullough Jr. 1998)

This chapter presents the research questions, the research methodology, data used in the inquiry, the criteria used to ensure quality of knowledge and the process of compiling this dissertation.

The Research Questions

The retrospective inquiry aims to present a living educational theory of my professional self (Whitehead 1999). In this approach to action research the focus is on individual development in the process of improving his practice. One way to describe this kind of action research is that it is an autobiography, writing about one's own story of continuous learning from professional life, which is becoming, a participatory and a living process. To construct my living educational theories in several roles and contexts I have explored the answers to the following three related questions.

- **Who am I?**
- **How did I become that?**
- **Why did I become that?**

The first question seeks to construct an image of my professional role including my knowledge, skills, attitudes, beliefs and philosophy of life. The second question seeks to explore the process of becoming i.e. the curriculum vitae (the course of life) of my integrated self. The third question aims to tease out the values and the philosophy of life embedded in the making of the self.

Research Method

To create my own methodology (Dads and Hart 2001) and to validate my use of autobiography I have drawn on Green 1991, Whitehead 1999, Connelly and Clandinin, (1999); Bruner, (1990); Clements, (2001); Sikes, 2001; Maclure, (2001); Ghaye and Ghaye, (1998); Maslow, (1973); Crotty, (1998); Harre' (1998) and Collingwood (1938). I have drawn heavily on the work of Connelly and Clandinin (1999) on narrative inquiry and the

work of Bruner (1990) presenting a cultural psychology perspective on autobiography and self. Ghaye and Ghaye (1998) provided a useful guide for critical reflections on practice.

Bruner (1990) presents the nature of self, the use of story and other requirements for the study of self. According to him self is defined by the individual and by the culture in various actions of participation. He states: “*self, then, is not a static thing or a substance, but a configuring of personal events into an historical unity which includes not only what one has been but also anticipations of what one will be*” (p. 116). His requirement for a study is to attend to the practices in which the meaning of self is achieved and put to use. For Bruner (1990) life is an art and story telling provides a good fit for its expression.

For Connelly and Clandinin (1990), “story is both the phenomenon and the method”. It is a holistic process integrating the process and product. Maclure (2001) explained identity/self as a form of argument as follows.

Identity should not be seen as a stable identity-something people have-but as something they use to justify, explain and make sense of themselves in relation to other people, and to the context in which they operate. In other words identity is a form of argument. As such, it is both practical and theoretical. It is also inescapably moral: identity claims are inevitably bound up with justification of conduct and beliefs (p. 168).

Maslow (1973) and Crotty (1998) are particularly pertinent to justify my use of particular type of data and self study. According to them:

In learning to be and become a human being, a particular human being it is the learning that accompanies the profound personal experiences in our lives... the unique instances, not the result of drill and repetition...(educational) moments..... very poignant combinations of the emotional and cognitive which have insights that remain forever. In such experiences we discover who we are, what we are, and what we might become (Maslow 1973, p. 159).

Learning through research is a first person exercise. Each one of us must explore our own experience, not the experience of others, for no one can take that step back to the things themselves on our behalf (Crotty 1998 p. 85).

Critical incidents are particularly pertinent to construct an autobiography of the self. For instance, according to Sikes et al (2001):

Critical incidents occur during the period of strain. The account involves a set of claims about the self...critical incident involves a challenge to this identity. By examining such incidents, we gain an insight into the processes by which identities are built by individuals at particular points in their life cycle (p. 114).

By looking back and by remembering the past, I have attempted to bind my past experiences as a professional educator in several countries and roles to create patterns of my professional development in the stream of my consciousness (Green 1991). Whitehead (1989) provided me with the living educational theory approach to action research. In this form of action research, educators produce their own accounts of their professional learning during their professional work.

The Data Used in the Inquiry and Its Interpretation

To create this retrospective study I had to use the data available to me at present. The data used in this inquiry is mostly in the form of documentary evidence from others and myself. Generally I am the data and its interpreter in the light of my experience, professional literature and professional colleagues as critical friends. The evidence is further supported with genuine cases, critical incidents, stories and my living standards of professional judgement in interaction with others. In my view this data is sufficient to find answers for my questions.

In a planned research and with the use of multi-media this inquiry might have become more interesting and appropriate to capture some of my embodied values and to provide glimpses of my character. **Appendices 18, 19, 20 and 21** provide additional information to support the narrative in the main text of this dissertation. Generally the analytic accounts seem congruent with embodied image of my present professional self.

Limitations of the Methodology

Like other research methodologies, an autobiography of the self has limitations. One needs to be cognisant of these limitations and take appropriate steps to mitigate their influence. Self as a story is not a historical truth but something one chooses to call the narrative truth. It is due to two characteristics of the human mind. The first is human reflexivity, human capacity

to turn around on the past and alter the present in its light or to alter the past in the light of the present. Secondly we have the intellectual capacity to conceive of other ways of being, of acting and striving. Therefore, in retrospective autobiography “*our interest, rather, is only in what the person thought he did, what he thought he was doing it for. What kind of plight he thought he was in*” (Bruner 1990, p. 120). Clements (2001) coined the phrase ‘Fictive Voice’ for what we believe to be true memories, which in fact can be false or recreated purely through own perspectives or interpretation of them with the deployment of hindsight.

To mitigate the limitations of my narrative inquiry I have used a variety of data from a variety of contexts to observe patterns. Insights from profound experiences, unique instances, educational moments make up the content of this inquiry. Other literature has been used to validate my interpretations, wherever possible.

However, I am aware of the limitations of my methodology and my accounts presented in this dissertation. First of all these accounts do not include my personal life, all sources and sites of learning and all positive and negative influences on my work. Secondly, these accounts are retrospective. Thirdly, there are always other stories within a story which have not been explored (Schon, 1991). Fourth, first-hand experience cannot be captured in words and repeated. That is why Fullan (1999) wrote that there would never be a theory of change, a dynamic process difficult to capture and communicate fully. To learn to change is to experience change. Furthermore, it might be argued that this inquiry is not a full self-study, as I had to rely on other literature and critical friends to validate my experience. First-hand experience without naming and framing remains incomplete. This inquiry aims to generate new knowledge from my first-hand experiences.

Criteria used for Quality Control in my Accounts in this Dissertation.

This dissertation presents my personal perspective on my professional self. My self is the product of my international life. As such I am both the particular and the general. In this context this work has the potential for a degree of generalisation. Furthermore, I validated my interpretations in the work of other scholars in **appendix 20**, critical friends and other professional literature.

There are several ways of understanding generalisability, which is a contested concept. In social science research findings cannot be generalised. Each moment of life is moving and it is essentially unique in time and place. Whitehead (1985), Elliott (1990) and Robinson and

Norris, (2001) provided me with some guidelines to deal with the criteria that might be applicable in my inquiry.

Elliott (1990, p.59) writes: “ *I would certainly want to argue that experiential case studies, employing a symbolic and holistic mode of description, can be externally valid. And I claim that here validity rests on their usefulness as project models for others in exploring their own unique situations*”. Whitehead (1989) suggests that generalisability of knowledge is embedded in its value for practice, use of a systematic approach to inquiry and in a shared form of life including peer and stakeholder reviews. In my view the terms like reliability, validity and generalisability used in empirical research are inappropriate for this type of inquiry. Each inquirer must search for criteria for his work. To ensure the quality and adequacy of my accounts I used the following checklist from Whitehead (1989).

- Is use of methodology justified? .
- Are values shown and justified?
- Are propositional contributions from other disciplines critically accommodated?
- Are assertions made in the claim clearly justified?
- Is there an inquiring and critical approach to educational problem?

Based on personal experience and the above literature I have used the following criteria to evaluate my work.

- I prefer to use the term **transferability** to replace **generalisability**. The large part of the content of this inquiry has possibility for application in other contexts. A systematic approach to this inquiry and a peer review of this knowledge allows easy transfer of knowledge. However, application of knowledge from one context to another is a matter of judgement and faith (Robinson and Norris, 2001) and it is a creative process.
- I have attempted to ensure a degree of **reliability/credibility** through comprehensiveness and coherence of accounts. Patterns in a variety of voices, roles, contexts over a long time indicate some reliability of these accounts. Several peer reviews have been used to validate the accounts in this dissertation. However, limitations of words to capture reality, which is a living and a holistic entity and use of selected data are serious limitations of this type of inquiry.

- **Creativity** is a contested concept (Ashcroft and James 1999). To explain creativity I offer a few examples of personal creative experiences. During my first-hand experiences of professional work I experienced creativity in the form of insights from intense observations and an inquiring mind. The translation of these tacit insights into discursive knowledge has been another form of the creative process. This dissertation has resulted from such a process. Creativity also meant the ability to apply theory into practice to acquire technical knowledge in **chapter 3**. Integration of the new knowledge with the known knowledge is another example of creativity.
- **Originality** in human knowledge is also a contested concept. Life consists of complex interactions. I am the world and the world is me. Originality of my mind in this dissertation might be located in lifelong learning from owning and contextualising learning opportunities from international living. This dissertation presents epistemology of international living of an educator who emerges as a model of international mindedness. Furthermore, I would wish to be remembered for having walked my talk, being open to listen, learn and love other beings. Of course there is nothing original or new about it. There are other educators who share my values and character.
- **Reflexivity** includes self-criticism including strengths and weaknesses of the accounts and suggestions for improvements (Mingers 2001). Reflexivity is a higher form of learning. However, self-reflection is an essential but not a sufficient condition for learning. Reflection needs external support and control. The EdD programme has provided me with this support to generate these accounts. However, I tend to have an inquiring mind, which tends to be aware in the present to generate insight. At the end of this dissertation I became aware of the limitations of the framework used in this inquiry. In the last chapter I have attempted to suggest an alternative perspective to understand my 'self' more fully.

This dissertation provides many types of knowledge and ways of knowing. For instance, it includes examples of experiential, presentational, propositional and practical ways of knowing and knowledge (Reason 1999, Krough, et al 1998). It also includes functional, interpretative, relational and reflective knowledge identified in Park (1999). *“For relational knowledge, the more important values are caring, sincerity and trust; for the reflective, autonomy and responsibility and values of science include fruitfulness, accuracy, consistency, simplicity and scope (Park 1999-p.152).* I like to think that this dissertation

offers a seamless epistemology of, creating, recreating, extracting and uncovering all forms of knowledge used by an international educator to create an epistemology of working and living together in the global context.

This dissertation offers new knowledge to a variety of audiences, including academics, practitioners and myself as the inquirer. It offers useful mental models and new possibilities for research for the academics. Successful solutions to educational problems might be useful for practitioners engaged in tackling similar problems elsewhere. I am the greatest beneficiary of this inquiry, which has extended my professional knowledge significantly and transformed my outlook on my professional life as a whole. This work might also serve as a mirror for other international educators like myself to examine their professional lives.

The Dissertation Development Process: An Outline

I began this dissertation without any knowledge of conducting such an inquiry. I had to devise my own research methodology, conceptual framework and presentational style. I consulted a vast literature and many people in the department of education of the University of Bath. Under the guidance of my supervisor I worked hard and learnt much but very slowly.

There were three main stages in the construction of this dissertation. During the first stage of development I gathered the available data and produced the narrative of my professional learning. It was an expanded CV with necessary evidence. The title was *My CV is my curriculum: The making of an international educator*. This dissertation explored the question: how and why did I use my professional life for personal and social good? I interpreted the data in the light of my theoretical studies at the University of Bath and my personal knowledge. I validated my interpretations of the narrative with other academics. According to a critical friend this dissertation provided enough evidence to support the following conclusions.

- (1) I had learnt a great deal in rising from a senior instructor to a consultant in the process of teaching and learning.
- (2) I had made considerable contributions towards the development of technical and vocational education in the international context including improvements from classroom teaching to improvements in national teaching/learning systems.
- (3) I had valued technical and vocational education as a moral craft, not a commodity to buy and sell.

Thus, I seemed to have lived a worthwhile academic life with a spiritual/ethical perspective on life. My professional life was my professional message. My first problem was to capture my lifelong learning in 40,000 words. My first draft finished with 60,000 words. I had to transfer three chapters into the appendices.

After working for one year on this work I was not sure of the value of this work to satisfy the requirements for the award of an EdD and the value of this work beyond personal satisfaction. This dissertation had a little to share with the academics. So I decided to extend this work further in stage two to change the dissertation from telling a story into a living educational theory of my lifelong learning. I learnt the difference between telling a story (He, 2002) and finding meanings in the narrative. I had to consult vast literature to give meaning to my personal experiences over 40 years. It was a difficult and an ongoing task.

In the second stage I began with the development of a conceptual framework with specific questions to capture my present and past professional selves, roles and contexts. In this format each chapter became independent and a part of the whole. I began to see my dissertation made of my living educational theories in a variety of roles. In this context the various chapters provide professional knowledge in the making of a student, lecturer, teacher trainers, consultants, doctors of education, transformative educator and so on. The term ‘making’ means learning. This strategy extended the value of this work towards professional knowledge base in education. The dissertation began to speak to the academics in the universities. It explains what, how and why of my present professional self and many other selves embedded in the present self.

According to my supervisor, I had produced a writerly text to present my dissertation, which was not clear in its presentation. I had to change the Writerly text into a Readerly text with a clear message to the reader. **The third stage** involved guiding the reader in understanding my message in the main text of my dissertation. Much work had to be done to improve the clarity of the text. Enhancing the quality of this type of dissertation is a continuous process. I have decided to finish the process at this point.