Action Research: 'How do I improve what I am doing?'

In what is not intended to be an exhaustive account, I summarise below some of what I've learnt about the historical roots of action research. In the account I also offer my understanding of my form of action research as it evolved in answer to my enquiry question, *"How do I come to know my spirituality, as I create my own living educational theory?"*

Stephen Corey

Stephen Corey (1953) first spoke of action research as being a means for improving practice in school. He urged teachers to research their own practice in order to improve it. Prior to that the only researchers were the 'expert' outsiders who 'objectively' researched social situations. But Corey wanted teachers to research their own practices scientifically so that they could evaluate their decisions and actions, modify and reformulate their plans. And so the cycle would proceed. Corey insisted on teachers' research being a cooperative activity which would support democratic values.

Kurt Lewin

Kurt Lewin (1946) is reputed to have been the first to use the term 'action research', as a way of describing professional development in social situations. It was only later applied to what teacher-researchers were actually doing. Lewin's conception of action research is different, however, to how many teacher researchers would see it today. Hopkins explains (1985: 54) the difference thus:

> *.... Lewin's conception of action research is very different from what goes on in the name of teacher research. Lewin's concept of action research was (i) as an externally initiated intervention designed to assist a client system, (ii) functionalist in orientation, and (iii) prescriptive in practice. None of these features apply to what I assume to be the nature of classroom research by teachers which is characterized by its practitioner, problem solving, and eclectic orientation.*

Hopkins (ibid) also points to the fact that the functionalist values appearing in Lewin's writing contrast with his commitment to democracy and communitarian values.

Lewin's form of action research was externally initiated and so differed from our current conception of the personally initiated form of action research by teachers. However, the cycle of reconnaissance, planning, action and observation favoured by Lewin forms the essential basis of current action research.

Lawrence Stenhouse

Lawrence Stenhouse (1975: 144) was the first researcher in Britain to advocate and work towards enabling teachers to take an active role in teacher research. Rather than implementing outsider researcher's ideas in their teaching, he wanted teachers to research their own practice. As he said, *"It is not enough that teachers' work should be studied, they need to study it themselves."* Furthermore, he advocated,

> *The commitment to systematic questioning of one's own teaching as a basis for development;*
> *The commitment and the skills to study one's own teaching;*
> *The concern to question and to test theory in practice by the use of those skills.*

Stenhouse (1983:163) also wanted the student, the teacher and the school to experience emancipation:

> *My theme is an old-fashioned one - emancipation .... The essence of emancipation as I conceive it is intellectual, moral and spiritual autonomy which we recognise when we eschew paternalism and the role of authority and hold ourselves obliged to appeal to judgment.*

The intellectual, moral and spiritual autonomy involved in emancipation could enable teachers and others to be self-determining, to be self-authoring. They could take at least some responsibility for themselves and their actions.

Stenhouse (1983: 163) wanted the student to be able to stand outside the teacher's authority and to be able to discover and own knowledge for him/herself. He wanted teachers, by adopting a research stance, to escape from the control situation they so

often found themselves in. He wanted teachers to critically assess their situation. By so doing they would be engaged in meaningful professional development and become more autonomous in their judgments on their own practice.

Stenhouse was interested in the school, as institution, also experiencing emancipation. The 'autonomous' and 'creative' school could adapt external changes for internal purposes. It need not be a slave to external pressures. Successful internal change would involve the teacher in successful internal learning.

In Stenhouse's conception of action research, however, external observers still monitored the practice of the teacher. Teachers didn't have the responsibility to explain their own practice unaided for themselves. Full-time researchers still supported teachers' work (1975: 162), and the supporters were still the 'experts'.

John Elliott and Clem Adelman

John Elliott, another prominent action researcher, is also the preeminent curricularist (McKernan, 1991: 22-23). It was in and through the concept of curriculum that Elliott's (1978a) first complete analysis of action research took place, it is entitled, *"What is action research in schools?"* In this analysis Elliott insists *"that teaching is inescapably a theoretical activity."* The task of the teacher is to interpret their everyday practice in the pursuit of reflective self-development. Elliott wanted the teacher to reunify theory and practice. The curriculum development movement spearheaded by Stenhouse, and afterwards by Elliott, helped to revivify action research. Elliott (1991a: 69), in defining what he meant by action research, said it was an attempt to improve the quality of life in a social situation, thus,

> Action-research might be defined as *"the study of a social situation with a view to improving the quality of action within it."* It aims to feed practical judgment in concrete situations, and the validity of the 'theories' or hypotheses it generates depends not so much on 'scientific' tests of truth, as on their usefulness in helping people to act more intelligently and skilfully. In action-research 'theories' are not validated independently and then applied to practice. They are validated through practice.

Central to Elliott's (1987: 157) analysis is the idea that the action researcher develops a personal interpretive understanding from working on practical problems, and that practical action and discourse constitutes the theoretical understanding to be obtained. For Elliott, educational action research is a moral endeavour because it

seeks to realise values in practice. It seeks to have teacher-researchers, rather than the academic disciplines, declared to be the main contributors to educational research.

Working with Adelman, Elliott (1973) wanted teachers to be collaborators rather than observers in order

> *To help teachers already attempting to implement Inquiry/Discovery methods, but aware of a gap between attempt and achievement, to narrow this gap in their situation; to help teachers by fostering an action-research orientation towards classroom practice.*

Elliott and Adelman (1976) supported a small group of teachers to research their practice in implementing and developing a pedagogy of enquiry learning. It was during this project that both Elliott and Adelman described the procedure of 'triangulation' as follows:

> *Triangulation involves gathering accounts of a teaching situation from three different points of view; namely, those of the teachers, his pupils, and a participant observer .... By comparing his own account with accounts from the other two standpoints a person at one point of the triangle has an opportunity to test and perhaps revise it on the basis of more sufficient data.*

Elliott considered curriculum and teaching to be theoretical enterprises and research itself to be a self-reflective process in which teachers examined their own theoretical world of practice.

The hermeneutic/Interpretive tradition

Let me recall again Elliott's strongly articulated view about his research interest, which is *"the idea that the action researcher develops a personal interpretive understanding"*. It is with the interpretive tradition, and with Elliott's notion of *"a personal interpretive understanding"* that I now want to deal.

For Hitchcock and Hughes, (1989: 29) a major characteristics of interpretive research is to do with taking seriously

> *the question of language and meaning and giving priority to first unravelling actors' description of events and activities ....*

The dictionary (Chambers Dictionary, 1979: 686) explanation of interpretation echoes that characteristic when it says:

> *To interpret means to explain the meaning of, to elucidate, to unfold, show the purpose of: to translate into intelligible terms.*

Linked with interpretation is hermeneutics, which is described by the dictionary as the *"science of interpretation"* (p. 609).

According to Hitchcock and Hughes (1989: 29), the researcher becomes involved and develops a *"relationship with the subjects of the research."* This relationship leads to choosing a more directly participant form of observation, where the researcher observes individuals in their ordinary, everyday, natural social settings and records their accounts of what it was the individuals were doing (p. 32).

Great care is taken to faithfully reconstruct the *"actor's"* perspective and detailed description comes before explanation. The focus is placed upon the individual's or actor's accounts and experiences rather than on *"an objective view through the eyes of an outside observer"* (ibid). There isn't a concern with generalisation but with *"locating the subjects of the research in their own cultural and interactional context emphasising the need to understand the situation"* (ibid).

Interpretive research assumes that all human action is meaningful and therefore has to be interpreted and understood within the context of social practices. In fact, interpretive researchers stress the principle of intentionality. They stress that human action is for the most part deliberate; that people do not just react to situations and stimuli but reflect on their situation and act on this reflection, in a reflective way (Hitchcock and Hughes, 1989: 28).

According to Scott and Usher (1996: 18),

> *we need to understand the meanings that construct and are constructed by interactive human behaviour.*

They go on to say that: *"Human action is given meaning by interpretive schemes or frameworks"* (pp. 18-19),

and that

both the subject (the researcher) and the object (other people) of research
have the same characteristic of being interpreters or sense-seekers (ibid.

Knowledge, in the interpretive framework, is relative to that framework, is not cumulative but perspective-bound and partial. Interpretation is in itself circular. The interpretation of part of something depends on interpreting the whole, but interpreting the whole depends on an interpretation of the parts (Elliott, 1993: 18). And an important characteristic of the circularity of interpretation is that it always takes place against a background of assumptions and presuppositions, beliefs and practices (Scott and Usher: 1996: 19). This, Gadamer (1975: 173) calls 'tradition.' As with interpretation, so too with the researchers who make interpretations. They can't be separated from the historical and cultural context that defines the interpretive framework (Scott and Usher: 1996: 19). Their interpretations will always takes place against a background of assumptions and presuppositions, beliefs and practices, of which the subjects and objects of research are never fully aware and which can never be fully specified.

Because the researcher and researchee in interpretive understanding are both part of a background or 'tradition', this raises the question of whether the researcher as interpreter, as meaning producer, can be objective about the meanings produced by the researchee. Although continuing to recognise their situatedness, researchers 'bracket', that is, temporarily set aside, their own meanings, suspend their subjectivity, and assume the attitude of disinterested observers (pp. 21-22). Of course Gadamer argues (1975) that this isn't entirely satisfactory because it's impossible to escape our 'pre- understandings' even temporarily.

Instead, it is useful for researchers to hold on to their interpretive frameworks or pre-understandings and to allow interplay between this and the actions that they are trying to understand. It is in this way that knowledge is developed. So, in fact, researchers' pre-understandings, far from being biases, actually make them more open-minded because as they are interpreting and understanding, their pre-understandings are being put at risk, tested and modified through the interface between the pre-understandings and the actions that they are trying to understand. So rather than bracketing their 'pre-understandings', researchers should use them as the essential starting point for acquiring knowledge (Scott and Usher, 1996: 22).

But what do researchers do about their perspective arising from their situatedness when they are connecting with the situatedness of the researched? According to Gadamer (in Scott and Usher, 1996: 22), there is a fusion or enlargement of the

understanding of both researcher and researchee which functions as an alternative to objectivity. The fusion is the outcome of intersubjective agreement where different and conflicting interpretations are harmonised. This happens not because of 'right' methods, but because of what Scott and Usher (1996: 24) call 'right' arguments, that is, propositional arguments. These 'right' arguments are subjected to the scrutiny of critical dialogue. Gadamer (ibid) believes that by comparing and contrasting various interpretations, a consensus can be achieved despite differences - indeed because of differences. The consensus, which is to be arrived at is subject to the social validation claims set down by Habermas (1976), according to which the form of communication of the researcher must be 'undistorted' in that it is accepted as being meaningful, true, justified and sincere by the validation group to whom the research is being presented.

How best may I critique the hermeneutic/interpretive tradition?

I wish to make some observations from the perspective of the form of action research I have created in my thesis - my own living educational theory. For the sake of fairness and justice, however, I believe I should try and embody here - even if I fail - Marshall's (1981: 399) heartfelt declaration that: *"I appreciate other positions, and I feel that each has its own integrity and its own validity."* Dadds (1993a: 231), too, views *"theoretical contributions"* as valuable, and this obviously includes the interpretive tradition. But how can I hold this tradition as being valuable and at the same time try to critique it respectfully? Let me see can I do so, as I follow Dadds' lead *"to seek to raise .... additional and complementary"* ideas that *"need not be adversarial, combative or hostile",* as Marshall puts it (1995: 331). In an attempt then to be both respectful and inclusive, let me say that, for me, the interpretive tradition, critical theory too, and other research theories are on a continuum in which living educational theory (Whitehead, 1993) is the latest and newest action research idea that specifically claims to be educational.

Action research and my discussion about it is educational when I keep my "I" at the centre of both my action research enquiry and my discussion about it. Following McNiff (1988: 37), I believe that my "I" is my unassailable and inalienable integrity, and is a living, pro-active entity. Indeed, I acknowledged clearly in my thesis the force of my individual consciousness in my interpersonal relationships with teachers and others. It was a force that helped me to embody my values, especially those of freedom and love, as I both formed and encouraged one-to-one interpersonal and

professional relationships with teachers and others in my action enquiries, as I created my own living educational theory as a form of improvisatory self-realisation. But let me show how I had to differ from the interpretive tradition, as I was creating my own living educational theory.

The 'truth' claims I presented in my thesis (see Abstract) and at intervals to my Bath University validation group weren't only to do with a process of argumentation, weren't only to do with showing *"that the propositional content of what is being said is true"* (Habermas, 1976). My educational claims were never only about *"rational agreement reached through critical discussion"* (Scott and Usher, 1996: 23). Rather, I communicated my claims to educational knowledge through *"a dialectical and dialogical form which is not amenable to systematic representation in a purely propositional form"* (Whitehead, 1993: 114). 'Right' argument, *"taking seriously the question of language and meaning"* (Hitchcock and Hughes, 1989: 29), conceptual explanation and elucidation are all tools of propositional discourse, which by themselves couldn't and didn't help me to explain my own living educational theory. I explained my living educational theory within the form of intra-and inter-dialectical dialogues. The 'intra', meaning within, helped me to explain my meanings to myself, and the 'inter' meaning with others, helped me to explain my meanings to others.

In creating my own living educational theory I don't believe I treated educational knowledge as a controlled commodity (McNiff, 1988: 17-19). By that I mean that I never wished to control the teacher researchers I was supporting in a deterministic way by persuading them to fit themselves and their practices into pre-defined frameworks. Neither did I ever wish to be a participant observer and observe the teacher researchers I was supporting at work in their classrooms. If I did, I believe I would have had difficulty in maintaining an egalitarian stance, which is part of what I take the 'participant' in 'participant observer' to mean. I wanted the teacher researchers I supported to feel free to use their own tacit knowledge, trust their own judgments and create their own living educational theories. I wanted them to be able to understand the world from their own point of view (Polanyi, 1958: 327). I was available, however, to help them in whatever way they felt was helpful. Below, for example, is how I considered my role early in my educative relationship with John (chapter 3):

> *I would have to wait to see what role would emerge for me in our educative relationship. Waiting and being willing to wait is a part of what I am now calling loving affirmation, albeit silent.*

That didn't mean, of course, that I never offered ideas to teacher researchers about how to move forward. I did, but I also wished to accept their right to accept or refuse. The value of freedom which I wished to embody in my relationship with them would be inauthentic unless the teacher researchers had choices between alternatives! So, even if I wanted to - and I didn't - I believe there was no way in which my work with others could be classified as predictive. I worked at trying to keep open the various options a teacher researcher might take up. Neither did I want to limit the teacher researchers options by references to 'pre-understandings', 'situatedness', or 'tradition.' If I had done so, the teacher researchers I was supporting mightn't have had sufficient freedom - in my view - to ask questions of the kind, *"How can I account for my educational development?"*

I was hoping of course that, in the process of my educative relationship with teacher researchers, they would consider the power of their "I" in questions of the kind, *"How do I improve my practice?"* In such questions they would discover, I believed, that their "I" existed as a living contradiction in holding values but experiencing their denial. Discovering their "I" to be a living contradiction, I felt, would motivate them to want to improve what they were doing. I believed also that the descriptions and explanations the teacher researchers created for their own learning, would constitute their own living educational theories (Whitehead, 1993).

While I noticed in much of the literature that other teacher researcher supporters wrote up research on behalf of, or about, the work of the teacher researchers they were supporting, I have never wished to do so. If I wrote on behalf of others I would worry about whether I was being democratic and whether I was helping them to become, in my terms, *"as free from fears as is humanly possible"*? (section one, chapter 2) so that they could create their own living educational theories, as I was attempting to do for myself. I have to seriously ask myself, however, if that isn't what I did - wrote up my research about others?

I don't believe I did so because I was not primarily interested in describing or observing the work of others *"in their ordinary, everyday, natural settings,"* and *"recording"* what they were doing (Hitchcock and Hughes, 1989: 29). Neither was I primarily interested in needing to *"understand the situation"* (ibid) in which the teacher researchers found themselves. I wasn't primarily interested in giving meaning to *"interactive human behaviour"* (Scott and Usher, 1996: 18) by means of

"interpretive frameworks" (ibid). Neither did I primarily need linguistic meanings to what teacher researchers were doing. No, it was none of these!

What I was primarily interested in was the encounter in my relationship with others. I considered the encounter, rather than educational intentions, to be educational in the sense that it offered me the opportunity to accept, affirm and confirm others so that they could feel free and become more confidently able to answer questions of the kind, *"How do I improve what I am doing?"* and *"How do I live out my values in my practice?"* (Whitehead, 1993). But was that the reality as I wrote up my various chapters in my thesis? I have to consider that now.

I spoke at great length about my educative relationships with Marion, Valerie and Rose in chapter 2, later in this Appendix. I made reference also later in this Appendix to my 'conflict' in chapter 5, and spoke about the notions of 'marginality' and 'inclusion' (chapter 6) in terms of the future job I intended taking up. I spoke at length later in this Appendix about the actual job I intended taking up and how well it fitted in with my values (chapter 7). I aim to speak below about my educative relationships with John in chapter 3 and David in chapter 4 and the values that I tried to embody in those relationships.

In my educative relationship with John (chapter 3), I found he was very independent and tended to tell me what he was doing in his classroom to improve his practice. But I wanted to know what educative influence, if any, I was having with him. If my influence wasn't curricular, what was it? Gradually, and in an improvisatory way, two videos John had given me at different times helped me to conclude that John's pupils were passive and inert. I intuited that if I challenged the passivity of John's pupils in order to bring about curricular change, perhaps I would also be helping John to alleviate what I also knew was present: John's fears. My challenge to John was part of the dialectic of care I wanted to show towards him that tried also to be sensitive to difference. In the event my challenge proved to be cathartic. John began to accept, I believe, that he could now rid himself of some of his fears - even though he didn't accept my assessment of passivity on the part of his pupils.

However, there was another challenge - to myself - though I connected it with John also. The challenge was this: *"What do I mean by my authentic engagement with my God and with John?"* It took me a very long time - some four years - before I understood and could explain this challenge.

In researching my relationship with my God I was surprised to find it was a displaced but angry one. I discovered that my anger was really against my church and my religious congregation who, in using propositional language to describe God, and a liturgy that replaced Him, had masked the 'real' God from me, the God of relationship (chapter 6). My experience of 'conflict' (chapter 5) helped me to become properly 'suspicious' of any bureaucracy and hierarchy that would attempt to so prescribe and predict, order and organise the 'world' without reference to those on whose behalf they were allegedly doing it. While my present description and explanation of my relationship with God may appear to be rational and logical (chapter 3) it was not like that for me interiorly. During the period in which I was adjusting to my new self-constructed reality about God, I was interiorly full of fears: am I judging justly the bureaucracies and hierarchies I have experienced? Am I really free to believe in a God of my own understanding?

The freedom born of my struggle to find a God of my own understanding helped me, I believe, to author my own life by helping me to slough off at least some of my fears of being independent. It was this freedom from fear, based on my new-found relationship with God that I claimed to be able to bring to my relationship with John. It was the source of my claim to influence him.

My relationship with John wasn't smooth. It was enduring, but not smooth. It withstood John's complaints that I misunderstood him, that I projected my fears on to him, that I occasionally 'theorised' him into a 'weaker' position vis-a-vis myself, that maybe I was contradicting the values of care and freedom in his regard. In the end what most concerned me was the extent to which John understood and accepted himself. If he had been more open to my challenges I theorised that perhaps his self-understanding and self-acceptance would have grown more. But who can say that with certainty? Not me.

But at the end John was still able to say of me: *"you are caring towards others and towards me!"* I, too, was able to say: *"... I am glad that I had John's help in learning about my educational development."* These two sentences distil for me my idea that the educative encounter itself is educational; that it enables me to accept, affirm and confirm the other in what they are doing. I am accepted, affirmed and confirmed, as I try to interweave my values in my educative relationship with John and others in the the creation of my own living educational theory as a form of improvisatory self-realisation.

Let me now move to how I connected the personal with the professional in my relationship encounter with David in chapter 4.

At my suggestion, David, a teacher researcher, succeeded in implementing to his satisfaction the values of democracy and freedom within his various classes. But my use of challenging questions, using the action research cycle, didn't enable him to become creative in overcoming his anxieties and fears concerning 'discipline'. However, my fortuitous sharing of my leadership 'problems' with him (chapter 5) caught his imagination. It brought him to a new realisation about the importance of reflection. I didn't then realise what I was learning: that David was apparently influenced by what was personal, emotional and imaginative.

Using my imagination, I had previously constructed a poetic interior monologue. I apposed it in this chapter with my educative relationship with David. In the monologue I had a searing experience imprinted on my consciousness of remembering neglect and hurt when I was young. I mused, thus, on its source: *"far distant memories of 'put-down' experiences"* - more recent ones too (chapter 5). I found myself listening *"with mounting fury,"* to Ray who was attacking Sue because *"I am not hearing you telling us what you've learned and how you've learned it. I feel my time is being wasted."*

I remembered various values I would have liked others to practise towards me - trust, respect, uniqueness, assurance, care. Remembering them enabled me to make a commitment to helping Sue. I desired to say something *"significant"* to Sue, something *"important"* that would connect with her and *"tell her that she is worthwhile."* In terms of questions to help Sue move forward, the best I could manage at the time was this: *"What question, Sue, would you like us to ask you that would enable you to move forward?"* It didn't matter that Sue's answer didn't answer my question. She offered an answer that obviously answered her own interior question: *"I am going to write a story."*

In the interior monologue I believe I had connected my imagination with love and care, enabling me to see Sue with love. A love that now helped me to want to exercise a more gentle dialectic of care and challenge than I believe I had exercised in David's regard. Retrospectively, then, I would have wanted to accept David as he is, rather than as I wanted him to be. But I finally found myself at ease in declaring in Levinas's words (Kearney, 1984) of David, that he was different from me, that *"two can have a better time than one."*

I realised that my use of the the linear, rational, logical form of the action research cycle with teacher researchers wasn't always sufficient. Maybe it didn't always offer sufficient freedom to others to be creative in their response to creating their own living educational theory. Perhaps it inhibited me, too, in my educative relationship with David! My use of my imagination would complement and not necessarily replace the action research cycle. Perhaps I could help teacher researchers in the future to make more use of their imagination, and other gifts, in their action research enquiries.

My action research questions of the kind, *"How do I live more fully my values of freedom and love?"* is not predicated on interpretive research, nor on critical theory (see below). I recognise, however, that other educational researchers may wish to adopt an interpretive and/or critical stance as their way forward in action research. For me, I need more freedom than I believe either the interpretive tradition or critical theory could offer me. I needed the freedom to evolve my own living educational theory as a form of improvisatory self-realisation. I had a compelling necessity to show in my thesis how I embodied the values of freedom and love in my personal and professional relationships with John, with David and others. I believe that it was only by creating my own living educational theory that I could do that.

The 'Deakin' school of action research

The 'Deakin' school of action research (located at Deakin University, Australia) which includes Stephen Kemmis and others, have put forward a model of critical educational research (McTaggart *et al.*, 1982; Kemmis, 1983; Carr and Kemmis, 1986; Kemmis and McTaggart, 1988). Their model rejects the positivist belief in the instrumental role of knowledge in problem-solving, arguing that critical enquiry enables teacher researchers to search for the meanings that educational action has for them and to organise action to bring about a resolution to their classroom concerns. It criticises both positivist and interpretive theories on the grounds of passivity, and that they are exclusive of human action.

Carr and Kemmis's (1986) definition of action research is useful, widely used, and is as follows:

> *Action research is a form of self-reflective enquiry undertaken by participants in social (including educational) situations in order to improve the rationality*

and justice of (a) their own social or educational practices, (b) their understanding of these practices, and (c) the situations in which the practices are carried out. It is most rationally empowering when undertaken by participants collaboratively, though it is often undertaken by individuals, and sometimes in cooperation with 'outsiders'. In education, action research has been employed in school-based curriculum development, professional development, school improvement programs, and systems planning and policy development.

Carr and Kemmis (1986) view the action research process as a series of reflective spirals in which a general plan, action, observation of action, and reflection on action is developed and then moved to a new and revised plan with action, observation and further reflection. They draw this trading off between retrospective understanding and future action directly from Lewin's theory of action research. Carr and Kemmis (1986) are concerned with focusing the practitioners' classroom problems thus: What is happening now? In what sense is it problematic? What can I do about it?

The critical theory of the 'Deakin School' of educational research prioritises teachers' critiques of their own practice rather than rational goal achievement. It stresses equipping teacher researchers with discursive, analytical and conceptual skills so that they may remain free of the control of positivism and interpretive theory. And this is to happen in communities of self-reflective group understanding. Thus the 'Deakin School' of action research is emancipatory after the 'Frankfurt School' of critical theory, built upon the theories of Marx, Freud and particularly Habermas. Emancipation for them and for Carr and Kemmis, too, means the enabling of teachers and others to take control and direction over their own lives, as they use a pre-defined theory, critical theory.

Gibson (1986: 5-6) explains critical theory thus:

Critical theory acknowledges the sense of frustration and powerlessness that many feel as they see their personal destinies out of their control, and in the hands of (often unknown) others .... Critical theory attempts to reveal those factors which prevent groups and individuals taking control of, or even influencing, those decisions which crucially affect their lives .... In the exploration of the nature and limits of power, authority and freedom, critical theory claims to afford insight into how greater degrees of autonomy could be available.

This characteristic marks out critical theory's true distinctiveness: its claim to be emancipatory. Not only does it provide enlightenment (deeper awareness of your true interests); more than that (indeed, because of that), it

can set you free. Unlike scientific theory, it claims to provide guidance as to what to do.

The term 'critical' in critical theory refers to the detecting and unmasking of beliefs and practices that limit human freedom, justice and democracy. And the knowledge interest involved in critical theory is *emancipatory*. This emancipatory knowledge interest is about the unmasking of ideologies that maintain the status quo. Ideologies do so by restricting the access of groups to the means of gaining knowledge and the raising of consciousness or awareness about the conditions that oppress or restrict them (Scott and Usher, 1996: 22).

The emancipatory knowledge interest of critical theory is not about individual freedom as self-assertion, for example, nor is it about helping the individual to feel powerful and self-realised. Rather, critical theory's approach to emancipation is about understanding the cause of powerlessness and acting individually and collectively to change the conditions that cause it.

Gibson (ibid) issues a warning about critical theory:

> *There are clearly immense problems attaching to a theory which not only argues that it reveals the world more clearly, but also asserts that it can be used to change the world, to liberate from inequalities and unfair restrictions.*

Critical theory, Gibson feels, is not a panacea for all the world's ills. But he feels that knowing how it may be applied may provide a rationale, and method, for teachers who wish to take more control of their professional and personal lives. However, there is at least one other serious problem with critical theory and its self-proclaimed commitment to an emancipatory project as a universal value. Gore (1993: 61) deploys Foucault's notion of a 'regime of truth' to argue that critical theory has its own

> *power-nexus which, in particular contexts and in particular historical moments, will operate in ways that are oppressive and repressive to people within and/or outside.*

The claim of critical theory does not convince me!

I am not convinced by the claim of critical theory that *"it can reveal the world more clearly and that its critical analysis can be used to change that world"* (ibid). Is that not an utopian-like claim? Isn't it purporting to persuade me to embrace its theory so that various 'wrongs' can be righted in my practice? I find it difficult to believe that the application of critical theory, even if including emancipatory ideas with which I agree, is a panacea for the ills of society, or indeed for 'ills' in my practice. If I adopted it I believe I would be admitting that I am incapable of using my own personal knowledge to deal with my own concerns. In adopting it, I would be saying that I want, as Eames (in Whitehead, 1999: 12) put it, to *"decide beforehand."* In adopting a pre-defined theory such as critical theory, I believe I would be unnecessarily limiting my own freedom of thought, reflection and action. I would be adopting a prescriptive and, perhaps, a predictive approach to my concerns. I would perhaps be admitting that there is no reason to think that I could evolve my own theory from my own practice, as I believe I did in my thesis each time I tried to 'resolve' my concerns in my practice, including emancipatory ones, in order to bring about improvement. Polanyi (1958: 327), helpfully, offers me his ideas about intellectual freedom which is part of the value of freedom to which I have pledged myself, when he says that:

> *I must understand the world from my own point of view, as a person claiming originality and exercising his personal judgment responsibly with universal intent.*

I'm not sure to what extent I could claim to understand the world from my own point of view, could claim originality, could fully exercise my personal judgment, if I persuaded myself to suspend my own personal knowledge in favour of the pre-defined theories of others in order to understand and resolve my concerns in my life and work. I have observed that such pre-defined theories don't offer ostensive examples of how they are actually embodied in the lives and actions of those who created them.

Such theories of knowledge, as critical theory, are, for me, 'objective' or 'propositional'. By being 'objective, or 'propositional', I mean that they are more or less reified or fixed; they consist of explicitly formulated ideas and statements that are 'out there,' and are considered to be 'true'. They are independent of me as a 'knower' (McNiff, 1993: 22-23). I wish to listen respectfully to whatever objective or propositional theories of knowledge can tell me, but within a framework of a dialectical form of knowledge in which I am creating my own living educational theory.

In my thesis I have used a dialectical form of knowledge, a knowledge that is based on the kind of enquiry that incorporates *"the interplay of question and answer"* (Collingwood in Eames, 1993: 4). Such a process of question and answer is, for me, a living and developmental form of knowledge in which I take responsibility for my own concerns, ideas and actions. It has the power to transform my practice, or at least my understanding of my practice.

In my thesis, then, I was less preoccupied with objective or propositional theories, such as critical theory, and more preoccupied with the processes of action research, which involved individuals, including myself, in asking in our individual practices how we were improving something, however small. I was interested, also, in how this improvement was 'relatable' to others. I wanted it to *"stimulate worthwhile thinking"* (Bassey, 1995:111) as, for example (in chapter 2), when I showed how Marion, Valerie, Rose (and other pupils), and I, myself, managed to alleviate *"frustration"*, *"powerlessness"* and *"unfair restriction"* (Gibson, 1986: 5-6) in our individual and interrelated practices. I initially experienced *"frustration."* (ibid) for example, in my attempt to understand my educative relationship with Valerie, but by assiduously 'worrying' my data, I gradually came to an appreciation of it. There was Rose, also. She was one of Valerie's pupils who put her experience of *"powerlessness"* (ibid) thus:

> *In R.E. class there is no accommodation of different views especially on moral issues.*

Valerie, at my instigation, encouraged Rose to write about her own concerns. And at the end Rose was able to say that:

> *I think R.E. was a lot more relevant this year .... because we dealt with real problems.*

I felt that in her life as a pupil, Rose had, with Valerie's encouragement, overcome a particular instance of feeling frustrated and powerless. In order to enable her R.E. class to be more 'relevant' and to enable pupils to think for themselves, Valerie herself decided to consult her pupils on their 'concerns.' She, too, was anxious to overcome her own feelings of *"frustration"* and *"powerlessness"* (Gibson, 1986: 5-6). Gradually, as she said, her class moved away from being teacher centred to being pupil-centred.

Valerie then began, as she said, to

enjoy how articulate and opinionated the class were .... I felt at this point I had a relationship with the class.

She was also adamant that

if I believe that education is about offering a person the ability to find meaningful life for themselves, well then I had better rethink my approach.

Section two in chapter 2 shows that Valerie did *"rethink* (her) *approach"* in a series of measures, checking with her pupils as she moved along. On the basis of Valerie's arguments, I concluded that she had succeeded in changing the climate for learning and the quality of the learning itself in her classroom. I felt that whatever *"unfair restrictions"* (Gibson, 1986: 5-6) once might have existed in her classroom were now gone.

It seemed to me that Valerie didn't need to use any pre-defined theories to help her to improve her practice. She didn't, therefore, need to *"decide beforehand"* (Eames in Whitehead, 1999: 12). Rather, she embodied her values in her practice in order to help her theorise and make her decisions based on those values. Rather than use propositional or objective theory say, critical theory, to help her to embody her values in her practice, she used the dialectical logic of question and answer. This helped her, I believe, to be more open towards her students and led to *"changed understanding"* (ibid) on her part and on the part of her students.

I offer an alternative way of thinking and acting

Listening again to the emancipatory ideas of Carr and Kemmis, as derived from critical theory (1986), I want to offer an alternative way of thinking and acting. But, first, let me listen again to Carr and Kemmis (p.198) as they explain their emancipatory theory:

Action research not only creates conditions under which practitioners can identify aspects of institutional life which frustrate rational change; it also offers a theoretical account of why these constraints on rational change should be overcome, by offering and enacting an emancipatory theory in the form of the theory of how the constraints of ideology can be overcome.

When I originally read the emancipatory vision of Carr and Kemmis I felt excited and wished to rush into identifying those *"aspects of institutional life which frustrate rational change."* I came to know, however, from my own experience in my enquiry (chapter 5), that each instance of institutional life is different from another instance, each is populated with different people, all of whom are different from each other.

In my action research enquiry each of the people I worked with was an individual different from any other individual. And because of my awareness of the vast differences between the people I encountered in power positions (chapter 5), and otherwise too, I came to believe that using an undifferentiated pre-defined theory, say, critical theory, or pre-defined leadership theories, for example, in order to resolve the power relations conflicts I experienced, would not work for me.

I didn't want or need, prior to my own action research reflection and action, a theoretical critique, such as an *"exploration of the nature and limits of power, authority and freedom"* (Gibson, 1986: 5-6). Critical theory claims to offer such a critique in order to help me to gain *"insight into how greater degrees of autonomy could be available"* (ibid). I want and need to be personally responsible for valuing my own personal freedom and personal integrity. My conscience constantly pleads with me to do so, as I try to understand the world from my own point of view, use my own originality, exercise my own personal judgment (Polanyi, 1958: 327) and evolve my own theory from my own practice, as a form of improvisatory self-realisation. By so doing, I am offering my own alternative to the emancipatory ideas of critical theory.

As part of my effort to evolve my own theory from my practice, my thesis showed me working as an individual, identifying individual items of my practice which needed changing and improving. I did so by imagining ways forward, devising action plans, acting, evaluating and modifying my action plans (Whitehead, 1993). For example, in dealing with my leadership 'conflict' (chapter 5), I decided that I would neither pre-define or allow others to pre-define how I should act as leader of the action research project located at the college of education where I then worked (1990-1995). I took up a stance of nonconformity towards the expectations of others. Over time in regard to my leadership, I found I could *"constantly enact it,"* constantly *"accomplish it"* (Sinclair, 1998). I did so by experimenting in an improvisatory way *"with self-revelation, with resistance, with trying to build new paths"* (Sinclair, 1998).

A part of my effort *"to build new paths"* (ibid) consisted, on the one hand, of dealing with the 'conflict' I experienced, but on the other, of working to connect the personal with the professional in my explanation of my educative relationships with teachers (chapters 2, 3 and 4). I exercised my *"ethic of responsibility"* towards these teachers as I worked at enabling them to improve what they were doing at the same time as I was experiencing my leadership 'conflict' (chapter 5).

Despite, or perhaps because of, this 'conflict' I showed how my leadership came into being in my words and actions as I exercised my ethic of responsibility towards others (Abstract). My experience of the denial of my value of freedom as action research project leader (chapter 5) helped me to to answer a radical call to myself of personal freedom, especially freedom from restraint and fear in order to realise my 'true' self. The radical call to myself of personal freedom helped me to work towards exercising a care towards others, born of love, which I explained thus in section one, chapter 2:

> *My care is a legitimate anxiety I hold about ensuring that the person I am*
> *with in the educative relationship is as free from fears as is humanly*
> *possible.*

I believe I succeeded in affecting some change and improvement in my understanding of a negative aspect of institutional life as I experienced it (chapter 5). The change and improvement I experienced as an individual wasn't external. I didn't suddenly experience *"rational change"* (Carr and Kemmis, 1986: 198) in the sense that the attitude of the principal of the college towards me changed from one of disregard to one of acceptance and understanding. No, I found I had to use my personal knowledge by working internally on myself. I felt I had to preserve my sense of my identity and my sense of self-worth. But, simultaneously, I was confident that I had established good quality educative relationships with the teachers I was supporting, as they were improving what they were doing. My efforts to accept, affirm and confirm them not only helped them more confidently to improve what they were doing, but I also received acceptance, affirmation and confirmation from them, in turn. The teachers and I, therefore, reciprocally exercised an *"ethic of responsibility"* towards each other, as I simultaneously showed how my leadership came into being in my words and actions (Abstract knowledge claim).

Still (1993), quoted by Marshall (1995: 320), suggests that the preoccupation of women managers with exploring issues of identity and self is an indulgence. Still's (1993) advice to women, according to Marshall (ibid), is to focus instead, *"on*

achievement, on gaining power in current organizational structures and on identifying common agendas for change." In spite of Still's (ibid) exhortative prescriptions, however, I don't hear *how* women managers are to bring about the changes that Still suggests. Like Marshall's (p. 321) women manager researchers, however, I, too, have *"wanted to feel more authentic and less defined by other people."* I needed to explore issues to do with my identity and integrity, and to do with not allowing others to define me. And so I used my reflection and writing about my action research enquiry to help me create a strong sense of my *"self"* that I *"could validate internally, and which could then provide firm, alive, bases for knowing, and acting"* (ibid, p. 321).

Marshall (1995: 326) suggests that her women manager researchers should choose *"sufficient truths to live by, realizing that things will unravel, managing to avoid undue anxiety and adopting an ever-enquiring attitude to encounter change as it occurs"* (ibid). Following Marshall (ibid), I believe that throughout my action research enquiry, I have acquired *"sufficient truths to live by ...,"* as I both embodied and constructed my values of freedom and love, in my intrapersonal dialogue and in my educative relationship with others, as a form of improvisatory self-realisation.

There is a need, according to Marshall (ibid), to hold *"multiple perspectives,"* rather than *"one dominant, 'right' form"* because the world around me offers *"discordant expectations."* There is a need, she says, for people to be *"aware of the personal, social and power-political processes through which frames are created, maintained and resisted."* As for myself, I acquired my *"multiple perspectives"* (ibid) within, and in terms of, each of my studies of singularity as I analysed my experience of the negation of my values in my practice. I don't think I have sought to transfer automatically the *"multiple perspectives"* that I may have acquired in one situation with one person, to another person in another situation. I have been unable do so because I freely committed myself in one of my claims to educational knowledge to *"show .... a dialectic of both care and challenge that is sensitive to difference ...."* (Abstract). I have to honour *"difference"* within and between people. I would be unable to do that if I held what Marshall (ibid) calls *"one dominant, 'right' form."*

It is not so much the situations in themselves *per se* that are important to me, as the people who are to be found in those situations that are important. In each instance, and with each person I meet, I have to unravel the *"multiple perspectives"* I have gathered and discriminate between them in terms of who others are and in terms of who I am. I believe that such a view is implied, and then shown, in my commitment

in encounters with others to accept, affirm and confirm them so that they may more easily improve what they are doing (Introduction). I don't always succeed, of course, in showing *"a dialectic of care and challenge that is sensitive to difference ...."* (Abstract) because I am also "a living contradiction" (Whitehead, 1993): I hold values and I deny them in my practice (chapter 5).

Criticism of the "individual focus" of action research enquiries

I now want to consider Noffke's (1997: 329) reference to individually oriented action research and that the *"individual focus"* of action research enquiries such as mine, doesn't sufficiently *"address the social basis of personal belief systems."* She says that:

> *As vital as such a process of self-awareness is to identifying the contradictions between one's espoused theories and one's practices, perhaps because of its focus on individual learning, it only begins to address the social basis of personal belief systems.*

Noffke (1991; 1997) believes that such a process of self-awareness, while it can help to bring about *"collective agency"* (McNiff, 1988), built on the ideas of a society *"as a collection of autonomous individuals,"* it is not capable of addressing social issues in terms of the interconnections between personal identity and power and privilege in society. Let me attempt to 'answer' Noffke's concerns, as I consider the direction of my own research.

Noffke's argument doesn't convince me that *"autonomous individuals"* such as I aspire to being, are incapable of bringing about social change. I believe I will not necessarily understand social situations very well unless I first learn to be an autonomous individual. I believe that it was only because I showed myself in my thesis to be growing autonomously in my embodiment of my values in my educative relationships with teachers, that I was able to be societally useful to them. I believe I succeeded in doing so not so much at the 'macro' level, but at the 'micro level' of helping them with their action research enquiries in their schools.

These teachers, in turn, are now able to bring about change and improvement incrementally at their own micro level in the classroom. Perhaps by engaging in dialectical debate, maintaining openness to answering questions and challenges set by themselves and others, they will be able to change and improve concerns at the

macro level of the whole school as well. I believe, too, that their willingness to disturb and be disturbed, to question and challenge need not be adversarial, combative or hostile (Marshall, 1995: 331; chapters 2 to 6).

I am also aware, however, that Dadds (ibid) hypothesises that *"Research which arose from the interests of the individual, rather than the group would .... be less likely to serve the needs of the school"* in *"practical developments"* (Dadds, 1995: 4) beyond the classroom. While respecting Dadds' hypothesis, I am committed to individually oriented action research. I am committed to it because of its potential for raising the morale and confidence of individuals, including myself, as we pursue improvements in our individual practices (chapters 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6). I cannot believe that when self-confident individuals come together in order to work at serving *"the needs of the classroom"* beyond the classroom, they won't succeed in doing so, but I agree that it remains to be shown beyond hypothesis at least in my case. In the meantime, I am willing to learn from Dadds and others who, embodying their values in their improvement of practice, have brought about *"collegial involvement and ownership"* (ibid) of action research concerns, and succeeded in bringing about change and improvement at the macro level of the school.

Noffke (1997: 334) lauds *"recent research"* that is articulating *"the historical roots of both individual and collective belief systems that form a basis from which personal awareness emerges."* In my research I do not wish, as in social history, to interpret the past as a base from which to begin researching the present social world (Hitchcock and Hughes, 1989: 28). My form of research is individually oriented dialectical action research, which has helped me to realise that the derivation of my belief system is not of ultimate importance to me. And while not denying the *"historical roots"* of my belief system, I strongly believe that as I grow and develop, helped by continuous reflective enquiry, so do my beliefs and values. What is important to me is to continuously embody my values in my life so that I can continue to improve what I am doing with others in the present and future.

If by *"historical roots,"* Noffke means a system external to myself from which I have accepted an unshakeable and unchangeable belief system, I reject that notion. I know that my beliefs and my values achieved clarity in my thesis and were capable of changing, not through an acceptance of pre-defined beliefs and theories for analytic purposes, but through my embodiment of my values in my educative relationships with others. It was in my practice of my educative relationships with others that I found ostensive meanings that clarified how I held my values, and the notion of

'being a living contradiction' (Whitehead,1993) was fundamental to those ostensive meanings.

My theory is a form of improvisatory self-realisation

Regarding critical theory (Carr and Kemmis's, 1986) and, indeed, other 'outsider' theories, let me say that they are perhaps too prescriptive and predictive for me: my research is neither prescriptive not predictive in intent or practice. It does not offer a panacea for great social ills or evils. It is more like the research Seidman (1991: 136) proposes when he argues *"that we be satisfied with local, pragmatic rationales for our .... approaches."* In accepting a 'local', a 'pragmatic' and personal rationale for my study of singularity, which is my thesis, I base it on Winter's idea (1997; 1998) that:

> *theory in action research is a form of improvisatory self-realisation, where theoretical resources are not pre-defined in advance, but are drawn in by the process of the enquiry.*

I included the propositional form of discourse - Winter's 'theoretical resources' - within the dialectical knowledge I used in my thesis. The dialectical knowledge I used is a form of knowledge based on *"the interplay of question and answer"* (Collingwood [1924] in Eames 1993: 4). The use of this form of knowledge is a process that, for me, is living and developmental. It includes both intrapersonal and interpersonal dialogues in a form of research that is *"systematic, critical and self-critical"* (Bassey, 1995: 7). It is a form of research that doesn't *"predict probabilities, but ....* (can) *be related to other situations."* This form of improvisatory research enabled me to create my own descriptions and explanations for my own self-realisation, my own educational development. My descriptions and explanations offered me an opportunity to evaluate my past practice with an intention to create an improvement which was then not in existence (Whitehead in Lomax, 1999: 14), as I attempted in my research to answer questions of the kind, *"How do I improve what I am doing?"* and *"How do I live out my values in my practice?"*

Regarding pre-defined rules, theories or ideologies, I want to use a North-American slang expression *"dumbing down,"* changing its meaning ever so slightly. While it means *"reducing or adapting to a lower level of understanding"* (Oxford Concise English Dictionary, 1995:420), I'm not advocating that I understand less or be involved in *"a lower level of understanding."* No, it's just that I wish to move from

beautiful, but high-flown rhetoric - perhaps such as in critical theory, in the interpretive tradition and in other theories, too - based perhaps on abstractions derived from generalisations, which include prescription. Rather, I wish to move to my explanation of my research which is small-scale, dealing with myself and with other individuals, all of whom were researching their own individual practices as we enabled local, worthwhile change and improvement to take place, however small.

In exploring the theory practice relationship, Dadds says that: *"Theory has no autonomous existence from the theory user ...."* (1991); *"Theory exists only within people ...."*; and *"Theory alone does not change the world. People do"* (Dadds, 1993a: 231). So, if I understand Dadds correctly, theory is inextricably interwoven with the theory user, is within me as researcher. And it is I, and not theory so much that changes the world - or at least a concern I may have that needs to be worked on. I ask, however, couldn't theory and my "I", who does the improving and changing, be inextricably linked in that my "I" can do the creating of theory? I believe that is what I do when I connect the personal with the professional in my encounters with teachers - I create my own living educational theory.

I embrace Dadds' (1993a: 231) reference to action research being about *"Warm hearts, commitment, altruistic tendencies, and the ability to persuade ...,"* I like to think of this phrase as being part of my two values of freedom and love that I try to embody in my life and actions with teachers and others. In trying to embody these values and experiencing their negation, I am able to describe and explain my living educational theory. I wonder a little, though, about the meaning of the ending of Dadds' sentence that begins with *"warm hearts ...."* and ends with *"may be as equally important as clear ideas ...."* I thinks Dadds could continue to use her phrase *"clear ideas,"* but could perhaps consider it as being synonymous with living theory evolving from practice as she couples it also with *"Warm hearts ...."*

Thinking and feeling go together

Let me now focus on Dadds' (1993a: 230) view that *"aspects of the literature"* present action research *"as a personally problem-free experience"* in which *"There are action research steps to be followed .... in some logical progression that will lead to cognitive enlightenment, and recognition of necessary change"* (Kemmis and McTaggart, 1988 and Elliott, 1981). Action research is therefore *"systematic, linear, cerebral and behaviouristic."* For Dadds, supporters and teacher-researchers, in

exploring their own values as practitioners, are emotionally committed to improving their respective practices. And so, feelings are inextricably interwoven in the action research process. Dadds (1993: 229) explains thus:

> *it is a misconceived enterprise to try and separate teachers' thinking in action research from their feelings, beliefs, attitudes, their being and their sense of self.*

Evans (1995: internet) is also concerned about the lack of reference in the action research literature to *"action researchers' feelings about themselves, each other, and the situation ....."* She puts her concern thus:

> *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?*

Evans (ibid) wonders if, in the move towards Carr and Kemmis's (1986) ideas of 'rationality' and 'justice,' action researchers' feelings are taken for granted, or not considered to be important? Carr and Kemmis (1986: 44), in concluding a section of their book on teachers' knowledge, emphasise reflexivity, knowing by doing, thinking critically, and being aware of the historical location and social context of educational acts. But in advising teachers to problematise their practice, they do so from a cognitive perspective and ignore the part played in that practice by emotions.

It seems, then, as if earlier action research schemes and models excluded feelings, and not only feelings, but also dilemmas, ambiguities, and experiences of *"the personal"* (Evans, 1995: internet). Following Lomax and Parker (1995), Evans (1995: internet) calls for more relational forms of representation in accounts of action research enquiries. Indeed, Evans (ibid) very strongly declares that:

> *I would .... like to challenge those .... approaches which hold feeling and emotion to be less important than a cognitive approach to knowing.*

Evans (1995: internet) support Dadds' (1995b) notion that action research needs to be passionate enquiry. But what is the nature of the 'passionate enquiry' that Dadds (1995b: 7) speaks about? Dadds (ibid) says:

> *I have .... come to understand that developing theory and practice through action research is not simply a matter for the intellect. There are many forces embedded within our histories and emotional lives that are brought to bear.*

Vicki's action research was a form of passionate enquiry. It was informed as much by her past as her present; as much by her feelings as her thoughts.

Elliott (1993: 11), commenting on Dadds' notion of *"passionate enquiry"* in her chapter in his book (chapter 16: 229-242), has this to say:

The chapter challenges the assumption which underpins the traditional rationalist paradigm of educational research, which assumes that detachment from 'the passions' of the self (biases) is a condition for developing insight and understanding. Dadds' case study .... constitutes a powerful argument for reconstructing educational research as a form of passionate enquiry, in which cognition is inextricably bound up with the quest for self-realization, and none the worst for being so 'biased'.

Marshall (in Reason and Rowan, 1981: 399) seems to me to celebrate 'bias' and, like Dadds, it may even, for her, be a part of 'the passions' of the self when she says that *"My bias is something I appreciate, it's part of me as a researcher."* Furthermore, she says that:

And while it is important for me and for others to recognize my bias, it really is what I can give as a researcher, it is my contribution, and it's coherent and it's felt and it has all these other qualities which make me value it more than a detached attempt to be objective.

But Marshall (ibid) startles me, too, with her reminder that there's a *"dark side to this, the feeling that I've made it all up",* and she wonders *"how can I justify all this?"* As for myself, my *"biases,"* my *"passions of the self"* are invested in how I construct my own theory from my practice. It is a practice that I base on my embodiment of my values in my practice as I relate to myself intrapersonally and with others interpersonally. I realise that in holding values, I negate or contradict them and need, therefore, to improve my practice of the values. It's in the admission of contradiction (and it being pointed out to me, too, as with Zoe in chapter 2) and in my reflexive and retrospective search for improvement, that I believe that I can *"justify all this"* (can justify my explanation of my evidence), can overcome my feeling *"that I've made it all up."*

And as with Dadd's enquiry, and Elliott's depiction of it, my own action research enquiry about my creation of my own living educational theory obviously, too, includes feelings as well as thoughts. I believe that my thesis offers evidence to support Dadds' (p. 241) view that:

> *if we cannot understand the complexities of what it <u>feels</u> like to be a teacher action researcher, we are disabled from providing the most supportive learning climate and the most supportive research relationship that we can offer.*

Perhaps I could also raise what Dadds (1993a: 231) calls *"an additional and complementary,"* rather than a *"competing"* point when I say that my feelings are, for me, at the service of my educative relationships with others in which I tried to embody my values, particularly those of freedom and love. As I said in chapter 7: *"At the heart of my research and thesis is the notion of 'valuing.'"* And valuing is to do with *"giving oneself worth and demanding recognition for it"* (Fukuyama (1992: 189). Every human being needs a *"sense of self-worth,"* declares Fukuyama (1992: 181). A part of my struggle in my thesis has been to represent to the best of my ability, through my experiences, what is seared in my consciousness regarding the need to both possess self-worth and to help others to acquire or strengthen it within themselves in their personal and professional lives. I have also been struggling to become more and more consciously aware that it is not superiority I sought for myself or others, but rather recognition on a basis of equality.

Regarding my embodiment of my own values of freedom and love in my practice, I know I couldn't have done so successfully without experiencing emotion. Following Goleman (1996: xii), I know that emotion has helped me to show concern for myself and for others as persons, which Goleman (ibid) calls 'emotional intelligence'. It is the kind of intelligence that, in my action research, filled me with zeal and persistence and gave me the ability to motivate myself in my encounters with others. Feelings are the moral agents that motivated me in my practice of my values in my educative relationships with others, and helped me to come to understand my thesis question, *"How do I come to know my spirituality, as I create my own living educational theory?"*

'Living educational theory'

Regarding my use of the notion of 'living educational theory', I have of course, been hugely influenced by Whitehead. He developed the idea of living educational theory, which he offers as the basis of an epistemology of practice (Whitehead, 1993: 67-77). His idea is an invitation to us to consider ourselves as living contradictions where we espouse educational values that are not fully realised in our educational practices. It was in constantly searching for the means by which a person could

reflect these values in their practice, and in the continuing improvisatory experimentation that it offered them, that gave Whitehead's notion 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 practice, to other participants, and to the context of the research. Lomax (1998: 10) calls Whitehead's view of action research *"a new discipline of educational enquiry"* and says it is based on his three arguments as follows:

> *The first is that in questions of the kind, "How do I improve my practice?", "I" exists as a living contradiction in holding values and experiencing their denial at the same time as asking the question. The second is that "I" as a living contradiction is motivated to improve what he or she is doing .... The third is that the descriptions and explanations for their own learning which individuals create, constitute their own living educational theories.*

In chapter 7, I more fully answered my thesis question about how I came to create my own living educational theory as a form of *"improvisatory self-realisation"* (Winter, 1997; 1998). I explained that it was a theory that was based on and grew from my disciplined descriptions and explanations of my educative relationships with others. These explanations contained both 'intra' and 'inter'-personal dialogues. The 'intra'-personal dialogues helped me to represent my meanings to myself and the 'inter'-personal dialogues helped me to represent my meanings to others.

My writing of my thesis has been part of my reflective process and, as such, it has had the power to transform my thinking, rather than just being an end product of my action research enquiry practice. My writing of my thesis offered me the opportunity to theorise about what I have done and to come to some tentative conclusions about it.

I believe that my tentative conclusions showed that I was not examining the practice of others, as a 'spectator' would do who was outside of my practice. Rather, my tentative conclusions showed how I connected the personal with the professional as a 'participant' in my explanation of my educative relationships with others. I attempted - and often succeeded - in accepting, affirming and confirming others so that they confidently answered questions to do with improving what they were doing, thus enabling them to live out more fully their values in their respective practices.