

Chapter Two

Methodology

This chapter is divided into two sections. In the first section I put forward an explanation of my understanding of action research and reflection, and a justification for using them. I discuss the methodology used in this study. Further I reflect on the concept of a teacher-researcher and why I believe it is important for teachers to research their professional practice.

In the second section, I discuss the methods used in this research. My intentions are to describe methods of collecting data and data analysis and discuss their advantages and disadvantages. The most telling developments in my study can be perceived through my experience and reflections as well as those of my students while learning life skills in a drama classroom. It embraced varied perspectives that required a special form of writing. In this section I have also presented the argument for the style of writing my thesis.

Section 1

Starting with Action Research

I drew on a methodology that ‘worked’ for me; this proposal is equivalent to Altrichter and Posch’s (1989) suggestion, ‘*what’s good for the practice is good for research*’ (p.29).

‘ Built into action research is the proviso that, if as a teacher I am dissatisfied with what is already going on, I will have the confidence and resolution to attempt to change it. I will not be content with the status quo...’

(McNiff, 1988: p.50)

A commonsense view of action research provided by McNiff (2002) is that we:

- *review our current practice,*
- *identify an aspect we want to improve,*
- *imagine a way forward,*
- *try it out, and*
- *take stock of what happens.*

- *modify our plan in the light of what we have found, and continue with the 'action',*
- *monitor what we do,*
- *evaluate the modified action,*
- [continue] *until we are satisfied with that aspect of our work. (p. 7)*

The process that the researcher goes through to achieve understanding is a spiral of action research cycles consisting of four major phrases: '*planning, acting, observing and reflecting*' (Zuber-Skerrit, 1991: p 2). The initial cycles of these four activities lead to a second cycle in which the reflections of the previous cycle inform the plan of the next cycle. The cyclic process alternates between action and critical reflection (Dick, 2002). As the cycles progress a greater understanding is developed through the continuous refining of methods, data and interpretation (Dick, 2002).

The action research framework suggests Hopkins (1993), is most appropriate for participants who recognize the existence of the shortcomings in their educational activities and who would like to adopt some initial stance in regard to the problem, formulate a plan, carry out an intervention, evaluate the outcomes and develop further strategies in an iterative fashion. The essentials of action research design (Elliott in Hopkins, 1993) I considered followed this characteristic cycle:

- In the first stage understanding of a problem is developed and plans are made for intervention. This is the reconnaissance phase.
- Then the intervention or action is carried out.
- During and after intervention, observations are collected in various forms.
- Data is reflected on and revisions are made on the initial plan.
- The new interventional strategies are carried out, and the cyclic process is repeated, continuing until a sufficient understanding of the problem is achieved.

I began by questioning myself and grouped my concerns under the following headings:

- I was concerned about the way I taught.
- I was interested in identifying the potential of drama as an innovative method to teach children with SpLD life skills.

Following the lead given by Ghaye (1999), some of the important steps of action research I incorporated were to:

- Define my professional concern.
- Set my values in relation with my ‘concern’.
- Remember that action research is a learning process.
- Organize my work in series of spirals of action and reflection.
- Undertake my research rigorously and systematically.
- Show evidence that there has been an improvement in the quality of education in my context.
- Make it a visible process.

A rationale for using a qualitative methodology

Goodson and Walker (1991) reveal that ‘*the task of research is to make sense of what we know*’ (p.107) and the sense we make is determined by the selection and politics of our approach.

My contention is that both quantitative and qualitative research approaches are appropriate for a study in educational research (Strauss and Corbin, 1990; Patton, 2002), which deals with life skills. Both quantitative and qualitative methods are concerned with studying phenomena (Libarkin and Kurdziel, 2002). However, qualitative research is primarily concerned with gaining direct experience with a setting and is intrinsically an exploratory endeavour (Mann, 2003). Thus it has the potential for generating new theories and ideas and is therefore particularly applicable to my study.

I have collected qualitative data in the form of transcripts and descriptions while at the same time I have also collected data that can be measured and represented in numbers. However all the quantifiable data has been interpreted qualitatively. For example, the Creativity Rating Scale (Appendix 15,p.58) used to chart the progress made by the students, are technically quantitative measures and so are the emotional learning measures (see Chapter 6, p.176) framed on the quantitative works of Mayer and Salovey (1993), and Greenberg and Kusche (1998). Such data have been interpreted qualitatively. This is because I believe a positivistic scientific approach does not allow dynamic, lived

experience such as in drama education to be captured and interpreted faithfully for a number of reasons.

Firstly, consider the assumption that behaviour can be observed and measured in numbers. Objectivity, rightly or wrongly, is valued more than subjectivity (Kincheloe, 1991) as it is suggested that *'what cannot be scientifically articulated has no truth'* (in Taylor, 1996: p.8). Thus a difficulty manifested itself in that how would one measure a lived experience, like for example, the understanding of emotions (Chapter 6) or understanding of 'self' (Chapter 7) or learning in process drama (Chapter 5)?

While teaching the children and then measuring emotional understanding in the children, I made some note-worthy observations (see Chapter 6, p.176-7):

- Teachers are not trained to use quantitative checklists used by psychologists.
- Statistics are extraneous to drama-in-education.
- The children I was teaching were weak in English.
- 9/10 children had slow speech and language development.

Additionally, there were incidents when a child tried to inflate his/her learning score by copying a fellow student. In cases such as this, scientific control and statistical measurements, which are supposed to be more objective, become erroneous. I believe teachers can be objective in their observation of their students learning. Moreover, in such cases the use of thick descriptions (Geertz, 1973) of events in a classroom can be more trustworthy and credible than statistics and scales of 1(low) to 5 (high).

Thick descriptions are a rich and extensive set of details concerning methodology and context provided in a research report. They aim to describe and explain the implication and significance of actions and behaviour as they occur *'in a cultural network saturated with meanings'* (Eisner, 1985: p.112). By inserting *'history into experience'* (Denzin, 1989: p. 83), thick descriptions ascertain *'the significance of an experience, or the sequence of events, for the person or persons in question. In thick description[s], the voices, feelings, actions, and meanings of interacting individuals are heard'* (p. 83).

The rating scale, employed to record the change in understanding and the progress made by the students, operate as reference points (Chapter 9, p.252). However, scores are inadequate as they do not resolve the question of how the children learnt and why their creative thinking skill increased or conversely why it did not increase. My aim is to offer an

explanation of the process of learning rather than just display scores. Presentation of qualitative data and analysis in this fashion enhance the richness of the data.

Secondly, purposeful sampling (Patton, 1990), which is the dominant strategy in qualitative research, was used. Typical case sampling used by me, is one of the sixteen types of purposeful sampling identified by Patton (1990), which seeks information-rich cases, and can be studied in depth. A large-scale research was not appropriate for my study, which is based in a mainstream school in Mumbai for a number of reasons:

- In Indian schools if a child is diagnosed with a specific learning difficulty (SpLD) they are usually referred to special schools (Srivastav, 2004, 2004a; see Chapter 3, p.64-5) and have to leave the mainstream school they are studying in.
- A very small number of schools in India have special educational needs centres (see p.46), thus limiting my choice of schools, and consequently reducing the number of children I could teach.

At the same time a certain amount of assessment and evaluation has to be carried out in life skill enhancement. To demonstrate and describe a change and reveal the effectiveness or failure of a teaching tool there has to be an initial level and a subsequent level where I examined whether the enhancement programme was successful or not. A quantitative approach of pre-test and post-test was useful in this situation. In my study the pre-test and post-test level are identified as the pre-learning level and the post-learning level.

I have laid less emphasis on numbers and more on in-depth descriptions, which enabled me to present a '*human centred account*' (Taylor, 1996: p. 14) of my students and my learning process. I think a drama teacher cannot claim that if 'this' happens then 'that' will follow. Besides, a dramatic act suggests O'Toole (1996) exists '*most validly in the moment of happening*' (p.150). I think a dramatic act, therefore cannot be exactly repeated as; it is '*a craft which at the moment of its fulfilment, vanishes*' (Barba, 1995: p. 8). Taylor (1996) makes the point well when he conveys, his doctoral supervisor, Ely's remark to him:

'Surely your background in drama...will tell you that human activity is multi-dimensional and complex. How could you ever hope to study an aesthetic moment by drawing on a conventional scientific instrument? (p.26)

Thus, I engaged in a naturalistic inquiry as I tried to make sense of my teachings as I collected data and interpreted it.

Teacher researcher

Before I continue I would like to repeat my research questions: how can I use drama as a tool to enhance life skills in children with SpLD? And how can I improve my practice? Both these questions firmly establish the classroom as the research site and the teacher as the researcher.

The idea of classroom action research was introduced by Stenhouse (1975) and promoted by Elliott (1991) and others who recognized the concept of a 'teacher as researcher'. They suggested that research in educational practice should be carried out by the practitioner themselves and not by outsiders or external agents. They advocated a research that does not aim to replace '*the practitioners' thinking with expert knowledge but on the contrary intends to build on it and support it*' (Altrichter, 1993: p.48).

On the other hand Hammersley (1993) contended '*that while teacher research can be useful, it does not substitute for educational research of a more conventional kind*' (p.441). This argument made me apprehensive because I believe innovation resides within a professional domain and that schools and teachers have a part to play in drawing up an effective improvement agenda (Nixon, 1989). However, writers such as Carr and Kemmis (1986) who recommend that teachers must be researchers and McNiff (1988) who observes that, '*action research presents an opportunity for teachers to become uniquely involved in their own practice*' (p. xiii), refute Hammersley's views. Researching teaching should be accessible and useful for teachers and should be done with them or by them.

Stenhouse (1975) advocated the teacher-researcher concept and supported teacher's reflective action research. While Stenhouse (1975) suggested that the role of the researcher must be linked to the role of the teacher, he maintained that full-time researcher teams should work with the teacher to help them by interpreting classroom observations and to plan improvements. Further, working with a full-time researcher the teacher did not select his/her own topics for research.

I disagree with this stance as I believe that if teachers are to be the end-users of the research then they have to be at the heart of the enterprise. This is important as I believe

teachers are *'the 'developers' and the 'evaluators' as well as the 'facilitators' of their pupils 'learning''* (D'Arcy, 1994: p. 293). A teacher's research could inform how they act in relation to their own and their students' learning (Cochran-Smith and Lytle, 1993). To faithfully capture information about the breadth, multiplicity, richness and uniqueness of teacher craft, the teachers must carry on an *'internally persuasive discourse'*, a way of thinking *'that engage[s them] from within, rather than impose[s] itself from without'* (Bakhtin, 1981: p.342). It is a pre-requisite that teachers should embrace new scenarios and become active learners themselves if they wish to be empowered teachers (Cochran-Smith and Lytle, 1993; Rodgers, 2002) to make sense of *'the complexity of their world and their work of teaching'* (Smyth, 1999: p. 70).

Moreover, data that are collected by professional researchers or 'outsiders' and subsequently analysed by them would tell an uneven story as there is a separation of roles. This could create an inconsistency between the thoughts, motives and loyalties of the practitioner and the researcher (Carr and Kemmis, 1986; Altrichter, Posch, and Somekh, 1993; Hopkins, 1993).

An outsider researching in a classroom would not be as perceptive as the teacher who is researching from 'inside'. My argument is related to the view that to see educational research as a different form of work as compared to classroom teaching narrows teacher research to an *'educational commando raid'* (Eisner, 1985: p.143) of collecting data. The researcher enters the classroom *'to collect data and to leave'* (Eisner, 1985: p.143). The subsequent data analysis and the conclusions drawn from the analysis may not be helpful or relevant to the classroom practice.

I see the learning needs of an adult as comparable, to a large extent, to that of children. I believe education is *'an initiation into new ways of seeing, hearing, feeling, moving [and that] it signifies the nurture of a special kind of reflectiveness and expressiveness, a reaching out for meanings'* (Greene, 1999: p.7). Just as we need to empower students to take control of their learning, teachers too need to be empowered. Action research undertaken by a teacher can be especially valuable as it can generate pedagogic knowledge (Pikes, 2002). It enables a teacher-researcher to engage intellectually with learning; knowledge is not 'handed over'. It can elucidate the process of how decisions were made and why they were made in a teaching situation. Moreover, it can

explicate how these decisions affected the learners, in this case both the student and me, the teacher-researcher.

In my research situation, an ‘outside’ researcher collaborating with me while I taught in my drama class was not feasible. This is seeing that I have observed from my experience in teaching drama that everybody in a drama class except the students and the class teacher are ‘others’. To make my argument clearer, anybody taking active part in the classroom routine are not ‘others’ however, a person purely observing the classroom activities is an ‘other’. Unlike actors and teachers who have ‘*made a contract to allow people to stare*’ (Heathcote, 1984: p. 162), children have not made such an agreement. An ‘outsider’s’ presence in the drama class may have put the class on the defensive. Consequently, as a teacher, I would have had to spend much precious time in wearing down their discomfiture, which happens when students feel when they are stared at.

Moreover, my students were children with SpLD. Such children usually have low self-esteem and the presence of ‘others’ could act as a stressor. Thus it would be self-defeating to have an ‘outsider’ in class who may induce stress in the class.

The primary aim of this research was to explain and theorise about a new teaching method hence linking practice and research. If teachers are to bring about change in education they need to actively participate in the culture and politics of their teaching (Nunan, 1993). Since action research entails ‘*action towards improvement*’ (Lomax, 1994: p.4), it not only facilitates better classroom practice (McNiff, 1993) but also supports the creation of ‘*personal theories of practice*’ (McNiff with Whitehead: 2002, p. 20).

Action research leads to the generation of what McNiff (1993) term as the ‘*I-theory of knowledge*’ (McNiff with Whitehead, 2002: p.22). Contrasting I-theory to E-theory, she elucidates that E-theory is externally generated, focusing on others and I-theory is one ‘*that is located [internally] with the practitioners’ tacit form of knowing, and which emerge in practice as personal forms of acting and knowing.*’ ‘Outsiders’ are not ‘*in and of*’ the classroom (Bryant, 1996: p.114) therefore they do not possess the situated knowledge of the classroom or the I-theory of the practitioner. Given that, I believe that the ‘outsider’ is not naturally positioned to understand or change the classroom situation.

I argue that teacher-research is a way for practitioners to voice their concerns in education (Baumann and Duffy, 2001). It is ‘a real world research’ because when teachers

research their practice they gain knowledge on how effective teachers teach and about how children learn better (Mortimore, 1999).

As a teacher, I see myself working upwards out of the swampy lowlands of Schon's (1983) topography. Not because I am in awe of the high hard grounds, but because I see the need to bridge the gap and reach a ground, more solid than the swamp, where teaching is subject to systematic investigations (Cross and Steadman, 1996). I think action research enables practitioners to learn steadily, in a 'self reflective spiral' (McNiff with Whitehead, 2002) of acting and observing, reflecting and by making mistakes and subsequently re-planning. By doing so not only improving one's practice but additionally creating a 'personal' living theory (Ghaye and Ghaye, 1998).

As an artist, I try to find a place on the platform with researchers like Taylor (1995, 1996) and O'Toole (1996). My views echo their concerns that artists and teachers have avoided research and equally academics have avoided researching in the arts, each with the arrogance of not really understanding the other. Drama practitioners suggest that too much analysis harms the art forms and researchers suggest that the ephemeral quality of drama denies rigorous analysis (Somers, 1996). At the same time teachers and artists are often suspicious of theorists and are often at discord. This '*unproductive cacophony*' (Somers, 1996: p. 7) has harmed the unique contribution drama can make to children's lives. Acknowledging the rigour and artistry in art and research permits exciting possibilities for simultaneous researching our art form and the art in our teaching as we practice them (Heikkinen, 1996; Taylor, 2000; Henry, 2000).

It appears to me that the crux of the problem is not whether a teacher's research is a valid form of research or not, because I do believe that educational action research potentially can make a significant contribution to a teacher's knowledge base. I agree with Bigger (personal communication) that '*we no longer have a battle of paradigms, but we do have increasing demand for rigour*' and '*that teachers should underpin persuasive research with evidence/data that stand up to external scrutiny*'.

I have carried out an action research project to change my practice and at the same time to persuade the wider community to change their behaviour by showing that life skills education is an important feature in enhancing children's mental health, which can be done by using drama as a method. I have systematically collected data reflected on it and

critiqued it and subsequently recorded my interpretation of my professional learning, my students' enhanced life skills and my educational theory in this thesis. However, to persuade the wider community I believe it is essential to present some form of evidence to support my claim: that I have worked systematically, I have followed a disciplined approach in my action research, that my practice has indeed improved and by what criteria I am making the claims (McNiff with Whitehead, 2002). Without academic rigour and validated evidence to support, it a claim could rightly be challenged as personal opinion or hearsay.

Ely (in Taylor, 1996) rejects the concept of truth, validity and falsification and embraces the struggle of a reflective practitioners' ambiguous and contradictory journey. I too struggled with uncertainty and conflicts. The question of proving the validity of my research was not as important to me as demonstrating the integrity and soundness of my work. Self-validation, which meant that I had to be '*my own stringent critic*' (McNiff with Whitehead, 2002: p.104) was and continues to be important to me.

However, in a work that is carried out towards a research degree that is not sufficient. I maintained transparency in my work from the beginning to avoid pitfalls such as self-delusion, factual errors or misinterpretations of my methods while teaching and collecting data.

Secondly, '*understanding*,' suggests Whitehead (in Newman, 1999: p.9), may not require validation. However, '*ways of knowing*' and '*knowledge*' (p.9) which is central to research, draw attention to the importance of 'validity' in the sense of testing the validity of a claim to knowledge. The idea of validity is important to action researchers who seek to make significant and original contributions to knowledge (Whitehead in Newman, 1999: p.3).

I did not wish to abandon 'validity' therefore my validation group and critical friends played an important role in my research. They evaluated the efficiency of my research methods and report during the planning stage, through data collection and also in retrospect. For a solo researcher, '*peer debriefing*' is an important process. Peer debriefing (Lincoln and Guba, 1985) is:

‘...the process of exposing oneself to a disinterested peer in a manner paralleling an analytic session and for the purpose of exploring aspects of the inquiry that might remain implicit within the inquirers mind.’ (p.308)

Enhancing life skills shifts slightly from the teaching profession to that of the field of socio-psychology. Therefore I had to maintain what Hitchcock and Hughes (1995) termed as ‘instrument or technique validity’, which justifies the appropriateness of the data collection techniques and instruments suited to the type of data required. In this research my validation group comprise: two psychiatrists and a senior professor in the Psychology Department of Shreemati Nathibai Damodar Thackersey (SNDT) Women's University. As my professional superiors they reviewed the ‘instrument or technique validity’.

‘*Outcome validity*’ (Anderson and Herr, 1999) which is concerned with whether the descriptions given in fact do describe what the research sets out to do was similarly checked. In the case of ‘*instrument or technique validity*’ and ‘*outcome validity*’ I had extensive and exhaustive arguments with members of my validation group. Even though my research was the meeting of two streams, education and socio-psychology I had to be careful not to over step my role of a teacher and assume the role of a psychologist. One of the members of my validation group was also working for a UNESCO project of integrated education in India, which was an action research project.

‘*External validity refers to generalizability*’ suggest Saldana and Wright (1996) referring to the applicability of ones work to other groups besides the participants of one’s research. Conversely, a traditional educational action research does not yield ‘*neat generalisations*’, as each classroom is unique (Yin, 1994). My opinion is that it does not mean my research cannot be effectively applied beyond the context of my work. As:

‘it is the understandings of the complexities of the particular situation and the recognition of the different ways in which the familiar can be interpreted that is the aspect that is so readily transferable to other situations.’

(Green, 1999: p. 107)

Cohen and Manion (1994) suggest that the small-scale, restricted, qualitative action research rules out the possibility of generalisations. I disagree with this assumption as I think it devalues and marginalizes the knowledge a teacher generates by asserting that it is only locally applicable (Pike, 2002). This also implies that the research a teacher does with

one class enlightens us about that particular class and those pupils, but not about the teaching, learning and education.

Teachers '*generalise from past to present experience*' in classrooms, similarly '*other professionals*' studies '*can provide vicarious experiences which are generalisable to their own situations, and vice versa*' (Elliott, 1991: p. 65). Teachers learn and gain knowledge from other teachers' experiences and are able to transfer elements of others' experiences to their own situation.

Similarly, this research has scope for generalisations. In my thesis I desire to communicate the way I have taught in my class and my experience and thus demonstrate how it is possible for other teachers and schools to have similar modules in their schools to enhance life skills.

A researcher cannot specify the transferability of findings; he/she can only provide sufficient information that can then be used by the reader to determine whether the findings are applicable to the new situation (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Keeping in mind that it is essential for a teacher researcher to '*check whether the research strategy and the specific research instruments are pragmatically compatible with classrooms and teachers' work conditions*' (Altrichter, 1992: p. 45), I took factors such as time-limit of the class, methods of teaching, evaluation and assessments into consideration from the beginning of my research. I am of the view that in doing so my research module ensured transferability.

Time limit is always an important factor in a school-teaching situation (Lomax, 1994 a; Dadds, 1995), and therefore my classes were planned for just an hour each. This was done so that if the module used in this research is transferred to another school it can be easily fitted into the curriculum timetable. In many schools in India the last period of the day is a free period where the students participate in activities like hobby classes, moral science lessons and occasionally they even do their home-work during that time. Thus if my research module had to be transferable I had to set a time limit that would be acceptable in the school routine.

As this is a teacher's action research, even though I am a trained counsellor, I was careful to design all the evaluations from a teacher's viewpoint. All through the research I was careful to use tests and measures which a teacher could use (e.g. Creativity tests, p.249-250).

Importantly, the action research paradigm requires its own quality criteria. Action research should not be judged by the criteria of positivist science, but rather within the criteria of its own terms (Reason and Bradbury, 2001). Rigour in my action research enquiry was carried out in accordance with Winter's (1989: p. 43-65) 'six principles'. He suggests that the author of an action research project offer a reflective and dialectic critique, substantiate collaboration, risk and a plural structure and finally show the transformation and the harmonious relationship between theory and practice.

I have accommodated Winter's six principles into my research and they have been important criteria in the shaping of my research. They refer to how data are generated, gathered, explored and evaluated, how events are questioned and interpreted through multiple action research cycles.

'Reflexive critique... open[s] up lines of argument and discussion' (Winter 1989: p.44). A reflective process is inherent in the cycles of action research accordingly there is a reflective process in my research project, which I have discussed below in 'Reflection' (p.27). Reflection has played an important part in my research and I have discussed this in a greater detail in Chapter 5, p.99, 112. The dialectic critique is discussed in the text below (p.32).

Collaboration gives the opportunity for participants in an action research to challenge each other's thinking (Kemmis and McTaggart, 1988). I did not work in partnership with another researcher or a teacher. However, in view of the fact that I consider participants in an action research project are co-researchers (Winter, 1998), I understand collaboration as:

'...everyone's point of view will be taken as a contribution to resources for understanding; no-one's point of view will be taken as the final understanding as to what all the other points of view really mean.' (p. 56)

Additionally, I maintained '*plurality of perspectives*' by involving 'significant others' in the research. The initial interviews and questionnaires administered to the parents, teachers and the special educational needs co-ordinator (SENCO) enabled me to learn more about my students' behaviour at home and in school (also see p. 49,53-6). The subsequent interviews with the significant others enabled me to chart the progress the

children made out of my classroom and validate my claims to the children's progress in life skills learning or lack of it.

The plural structure of my inquiry is represented by the multiplicity of views of the students, significant others and mine, the interpretation of the views and opinions and critiques of it. This means that within my work there are a variety of accounts made explicit, with commentaries on their contradictions. This plural structure of inquiry required a plural text for reporting, which I have done by creating narratives and a patchwork text (p.59).

As regards 'risk', as an educational action researcher I claim to be exposed to 'risk' in the improvisatory exploratory nature of my enquiry, which I accepted and took on the challenges head on. This can be seen in the way I revised my teaching module in Cycle 2 (Chapter 5, p.129). The change process made me extremely vulnerable as this was the first time I broke away from preset formulas, took the risk of asking students to suggest what forms of art should be incorporated into the drama class (Chapter 5, p.147) and how they envisioned their drama class. I found directing dance-drama for the annual programme a nerve-wracking experience and I believe I took a great risk when I agreed to do a presentation given their lack of exposure to drama, the irregular attendance of some of my students and their unpredictable nature. Most importantly, I believe I took the maximum risk when I developed the lessons from the students' ideas and then built the curriculum needs around it in the process of 'teaching at risk' (Chapter 5, p.159).

As regards his sixth principle, 'Theory, Practice and Transformation', this links all the previous ones together. I have elucidated the theoretical justifications for my actions and theoretical understanding and transformation, in the ensuing section 'Living educational theory' and 'The emergent paradigm of my research'.

Reflection

The most important element in action research is reflection; it lies at the core of action research (Somekh, 1995: p.347). Elliot (1991) suggests that the process of reflection is representative of the action research process. It is a dialectic process (Kemmis, 1985):

'It looks inward at our thoughts and thought process and outward at the situation in which we find ourselves; when we consider the interaction of the

internal and external, our reflection orients us for further thought and action. Reflection is thus meta-thinking (thinking about thinking) in which we consider the relationship between our thoughts and action in a particular context. ' (p.141)

The spiral of action research cycles follows a process of action, observation and reflection to achieve greater understanding, followed by further action and reflection. Reflection is intentional and grounded in the situation (Bryant, 1996).

I see the role played by reflection as fundamental to professional development. Reflection is a way of attending to problems of practice. Encouraging the puzzlements during the process of attending to an experience to open new possibilities, then giving shape to those problems in order to discover new ways of both acknowledging one's responses as well as seeing and implementing solutions is the art of reflection (Schon, 1983).

Reflection-on-action (Schon, 1991) is retrospective reflection and occurs after the event. It is an important process of planning for new action. Reflection-on-action worked on three levels in my research. Firstly, reflecting on my actions enabled me, the teacher-researcher, to revisit my previous actions in the drama class and transform them through deliberate and critical self-examination. Secondly, reflecting on the students' actions facilitated thorough interpretation of the children's behaviour enabling me to move beyond mere fact and surface appearances to deep, authentic understanding. Thirdly, reflection on an experience in a learning situation, especially in drama, leads to a change of understanding more so than the experience itself (Bolton, 1993). Thus, reflection-on-action, by the students and me at the end of the class, during reflection time led to changed perspectives and greater self-understanding (e.g. Chapter 5: p.112-7).

Reflection-in-action is contemporaneous reflection. It enables the practitioner to examine changes, which occur during the moment of intense professional action (Brause and Mayher, 1991). It is a process of thinking about something while doing it (Schon, 1983). Reflection-in-action (Schon, 1987):

'is tacit and spontaneous...it involves making new sense of surprise, turning thoughts back on itself to think in new ways about phenomena and about how we think about those phenomena' (p. 3).

I reason reflection-in-action has received little research attention because of its ephemeral quality. Decisions are taken on the spot by the practitioner to change the situation for the better and may be done impulsively and automatically and may not be intellectual activities. It is internalised or intrinsic knowledge (McNiff with Whitehead, 2002).

A large amount of our knowing in drama is in action. Knowing-in-action refers to the spontaneous process involved in for example, how to handle an awkward pause during a performance when a fellow actor has forgotten his/her lines. An experienced practitioner is knowledgeable about the theory involved and is skilled in the task. There are no micro-processes involved in the action – an actor just does it.

The artistry of drama and teaching is in relation to knowing-in-action. Knowing-in-action is tacit knowledge and is implicit in our actions and the way we deal with the situation of surprise (Schon, 1983). With experience knowing becomes more tacit, automatic, spontaneous and intuitive.

In drama, intuition is like divination (Sudakov, 1955), the basis of the material of experience. Bergman, the great Swedish director talks about intuition being his strongest card and how he never argues with it (William Jones, 1983). However, he goes on to say that after one has decided something intuitively, it is necessary to follow it up intellectually. *'Intuition reaches far out into the dark but afterwards one must try to go on foot to the spot where intuition's javelin has landed...'* (Bergman in Bjorkman, Manns and Sima, 1973: p.104/5). I consider the act of going *'on foot to the spot where intuition's javelin has landed'* changes knowing-in-action to reflection-on-action.

It is *'reflection-ON-reflection-in-action'* (Schon, 1987: p. 4) that is an intellectual act. When artists and teachers understand a situation by knowing-in-action and theorise about it, they acquire knowledge-in-action. This enables the individual to understand their world; moreover it also empowers them to use that knowledge in their professional lives, thus uniting doing and thinking, practice and theory.

Reflective practice is akin to action research seeing that like an action researcher:

'a [reflective] practitioner is interested in transforming the situation from what it is to something he[sic] likes better. He also has an interest in

understanding the situation, but it is in service of his interest in understanding the change'. (Schon, 1983: p.14)

This means that a practitioner is interested in understanding the situation. The reflective practitioner's interest in understanding has a specific interest in transformation and the change leads to understanding reminiscent of action researchers who systematically study their actions and attempt to change and improve educational practice (Ebbutt, 1985).

Reflective practice enables the researcher to enhance the understanding of the process value of action research (Elliott, 1991). Action research when pursued as a reflective practice enables the researcher to move beyond improving his/her practice and become a producer of knowledge (Elliott, 1991). Schon (1983) claims that '*when someone reflects-in-action, he [sic] immediately becomes a researcher in the practice context*' (p. 68-9). He adds that by constructing theories that are applicable to her/his practice; a practitioner is empowered to break free from established theories. As a reflective practitioner is not bound by set theories she/he can proceed to research unique situations even when she/he is uncertain of the way her/his inquiry will ensue. Through the transformation of our experience in a learning situation we can initiate the creation of knowledge (Kolb, 1984). Reflecting critically on our experiences facilitates this process.

The strength, rigour, the emergent and trial and error quality of reflective practice (Taylor, 1996) augurs well for my action research in drama education. Reflecting, reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action permitted me to be surprised at situations that arose in my class and during my research, making the ordinary extraordinary and thus facilitating new perspectives in familiar everyday situations.

Critical Incidents

Even though reflection is recognised as a powerful tool for exploring our learning, and as a process by which we can reframe our understanding of our practice (Tripp, 1993; Brookfield, 1995), it is difficult to know where to begin. All teachers think about their work and how to improve their teaching and the students' learning whether purposefully or casually (Schon, 1983; Van Manen, 1994). However, reflecting deliberately and critically requires a disciplined approach. The crucial aspect of reflective practice is that it requires commitment to learning from experience (Ashcroft and Foreman-Peck, 1994). Tripp (1993)

suggests that an inquiry into our practice and its augmentation can be done through identification and analysis of episodes or critical incidents.

The term critical incident (Tripp, 1993) '*refers to some event or situation which marked a significant turning-point or change in the life of a person...*' (p. 24). However, critical incidents are not all dramatic; they are mostly commonplace events that occur in routine professional practice. Nevertheless, they compel us to look at our practice with a new eye as they reveal gaps in our espoused beliefs (Newman, 1987). Woods (1993) suggests that:

'They are flashpoints that illuminate in an electrifying instant some key problematic aspect or aspects of the teacher's role and which contain, in the same instant the solution' (p.1).

Critical incidents can be triggered in the midst of teaching (Newman, 1991); they can also arise through reading, or in a conversation. Sometimes a critical incident can also confirm the belief held by a teacher. '*The most exciting moment occurs when some theoretical insight clarifies a knotty problem in practice, or when the obscurity of theory is illuminated by memory of a significant dramatic event in the classroom or on stage'* (O'Neill, 1996: p.136).

It is exciting as the critical incident may not be big or special events but are at the same time '*highly charged moments or episodes that have enormous consequences'* (Sikes, Measor and Wood, 1985: p.230) as they facilitate teacher development. In this manner they perform not only a confirmatory function but also permit the teacher to maintain their self-efficacy (Woods, 1993).

McConaghy (1986) recommends we keep a journal in which to record these incidents and our professional judgements and thoughts of those episodes. Focusing our attention on critical incidents and the subsequent analysis can help teachers to develop their own grounded theory. Understanding and reflecting on a critical incident could be used to gain awareness about a particular aspect of one's practice.

Alternatively, a series of incidents could be collected and analysed together to see if patterns emerge, in order to find a focus for action research. The approach relies on the individual's commitment especially if it moves beyond a mere descriptive level. It is a powerful technique to develop increased understanding and control over professional

judgements, particularly if the processes of action research reinforce it. The challenge is how to encourage in-depth analysis. Newman (1987) suggests that we reflect on the questions:

- Why was the incident exceptional?
- What made it noteworthy?
- What did we learn from it?
- How could we have dealt with the situation differently?

Critical incidents are created like data and are not independent of the observer, awaiting discovery (Tripp, 1993). They are produced by the way we look at a situation; a critical incident is an interpretation of the significance of an event.

Dialogue

Reflective practice is energized by dialogue. Practitioners must enter into reflective conversations about practice problems in which they make their reasoning explicit. Reflective practitioners explore their thinking through dialogue (Schon, 1983). This dialogue happens through a process of question answers. When a reflective practitioner contemplates on an event to seek answers to the question ‘what is this?’ it enables them to ‘*see the taken-for-granted with new eyes.*’ (Schon, 1987: p.28).

‘*True knowledge*’ is dialectical and ‘*is based on interplay of question and answers*’ (Collingwood, 1924: p. 77-79). This is the contrary to the traditional form of philosophy of education which suggests that true knowledge is propositional (cf. Hirst, 1974; Best, 1991). The propositional form of knowledge is that of a proposal. That is propositional logic uses true statements to form or prove other true statements. It endorses the view that is prescriptive and explanatory. However, it lacks the form of exploratory propensity of action research and reflective practice.

Central to action research is the questioning of data which enables the practitioner to go beyond expert understanding (Winter, 1998). Action research is a process that is essentially a reflective process in the search for change – both in practice and in understanding. The reflective process inherent in action research produces a search for the contradictions and discrepancies, which bring alternatives into view (Winter, 1998).

I had instinctively followed the dialectical form of educational knowledge, which I classify as knowing-in-action. I call it knowing-in-action because it is a part of my tacit knowledge and was implicit in my actions as teacher and researcher. I say instinctively because the values I hold were in sync with the notion of dialogue:

- Freire (1970) suggests that dialogue requires hope in order to exist. *'Hopelessness is a form of silence, of denying the world and fleeing from it'* (p.72). I believe that creating a good society involves committed action by everyone in the society. I hold a vision that enables teachers to make the schoolroom a better and safer place for the children that come to it. I see teaching as a caring profession and that if as teachers we abandon this vision we will be pretenders. A teacher is a *'pretender'* (Lindsey 2000: p. 272) when he/she fails to recognize the role teachers plays in supporting unjust social structures in schools. My values in education and my principles as a member of a *'caring profession'* (Nodding, 1992), restrain me from turning a blind eye to the chaos created by the present system of education in India. I believe I have to make a personal commitment to assist in creating a good social order.
- I am deeply critical of *'anti-dialogical banking education'* (Freire, 1970: p.74), which is rampant in the educational setting in India. According to the traditional Indian model of education, knowledge is dispensed in a vertical and authoritative way (*'banking style'*). In such a system, the teachers are the only agents of legitimate knowledge and they impose it on their pupils. Indian classrooms are filled to the brim with students who listen to the teacher talk, are preoccupied with copying the teacher's words verbatim and repeating the lesson in a parrot like fashion. Banking education attempts to control thinking and action and inhibits the students' creative power.
I value education that is dialogical. In which the teacher is open, tolerant, forthright, yet challenging, respects the students and acknowledges that learning is not transmission of knowledge and teaches so that students can learn to learn.
- *'Without dialogue there is no communication and without communication, there can be no true education'* (Freire, 1970: p.73). Significantly, in a dialogue one does not impose ideas. This is because dialogue is sharing, a give and take of ideas. I endorse the concept of negotiated learning, which I believe can only foster with dialogue between the teacher and the learner.

The concept of a dialogue in education is comparable to the practice of democracy. I have high regard for the concept of democracy and the values it suggests favouring social equality and freedom of thought. These values are linked to the previous idea of communication and the next, which suggests that dialogue cannot subsist in a despotic situation. One cannot dialogue if you place yourself above another because a dialogue is essentially a conversation between equals (Bohm, Factor and Garrett, 1991). Freire (1970) states *'through dialogue, the teacher-of-the-students and the students-of-the-teacher cease to exist and a new term emerges: teacher-student with students-teachers'* (p.67).

- *'Dialogue cannot exist unless the dialoguer engage[s] in critical thinking'* (Freire, 1970: p.73), which links me to action research and the philosophy of reflective practice. Freire suggests that words without action is verbalism. Transformation cannot happen without action. At the same time transformation is also impossible with empty action without reflection. Only action and reflection (praxis) enables transformation.

My *'educational values provide the blueprint for [my] professional action'* (Lomax, 1994 a: p. 116) and that is why I see the reason for making my tacit understanding of values explicit. Action research is a value driven research. Lomax (1994: p.1) suggests that action research moves beyond:

'...mere technical change in favour of change that is demonstrably the outcome of critical examination of the values and beliefs about the practice in question. It is not just what one does is important, but why one does it.'

My values motivated me to start this research project and I maintain I have not only been truthful to them while teaching during the research but that they inform my behaviour in my professional and personal life. However, notably the process of researching-reading of literature, critically reflecting on the literature and my work, has refined my values to a greater extent.

Living educational theory

Practitioners in drama have conventionally preferred to discuss techniques used in the classroom and the progress made, rather than worry about theoretical and ideological

perspectives (Hornbrook, 1989: p. 3). The power of theory to inform drama practice has been ignored by drama educators (Hornbrook, 1989; Taylor, 1996; Bolton, 1996).

Drama practitioners need to develop a partnership between teaching and research, practice and theory. However, because of its ephemeral and dynamic nature, drama is difficult to research vis-à-vis theory. Drama education is not positioned naturally with conventional boundaries of research and is divided between disciplines of pedagogy, psychology and sociology. Thus 'outside' theories, made in stable intuitional contexts put forward by academic researchers can be misleading for a number of reasons. Firstly, teaching is a dynamic task, particularly drama education, making knowledge acquisition in a classroom a constantly changing and shifting process.

Secondly, theories propounded outside the classroom situation lacked the practicality of classroom application. My research takes place in a 'real' classroom of 'real' children. The realities of my classroom practice cannot be answered by '*educational theories made outside my classroom as sometimes the theories are not specific enough, or the propositions they contain are not easily generalisable to [my] teaching situations*' (Hopkins, 1993: p.72).

Importantly, I believe the needs of my 'real' students cannot be resolved purely by theories implied by the academic theorist. They have to be resolved by my practice and me through constantly developing and re-developing actions. In doing so my action research brings together theory and practice, in the search of practical solutions (Reason and Bradbury, 2001). This means that as an action researcher, I am interested in knowledge that is derived from practice and practice that is reflected upon and theorised (McBride and Schostak, 1995; O'Brien, 2001). Theory and practice are interrelated in action research. Action researchers are interested in theories that are grounded in their practice, which is reflected upon and theorised about.

My research is positioned in the school but at the same time does not deal with a conventional curriculum subject like geography, history or language. It is unique in the sense that although it is set in the school situation, it is a research dealing with a subject - life skills, which is not a traditional subject in schools. Moreover, in India drama is not used as a method to teach any subject. If the situation is newborn, how is a researcher to understand it and ultimately evaluate it? Understanding situations and the changes brought

about by unique methods, which are developed in an individualistic style call for a unique technique of understanding. Controlled, scientific logic is clearly not applicable to this study.

Thus arose the ‘epistemological crisis’ of my professional knowledge. Decisions made by me, while following the process of teaching and researching drama and life skills, empowering my students and at the same time empowering my practice did not adhere to simple rules set by drama education, set in the field of study of psychology or in fact set by a particular research methodology. My concerns echo Greene’s (1978) apprehensions; I did not want to become a stranger in my research.

Winter (1997) suggests that ‘*theory in action research is a form of improvisatory self-realisation, where theoretical resources are not predefined in advance, but are drawn in by the process of the inquiry*’. I understand this as: action researchers create theories as they reflect critically on their practice. Theories do not precede practice, they are grounded in practice that is reflected upon and theorised. Thus ‘*our educational theories are forms of improvisatory self-realisation in which we create descriptions and explanations for our own educational development.*’ (Whitehead, 1997: p.4)

My theories then should emerge from a set of beliefs grounded in my practice and my own understandings about my world through my experience of it. Teacher-researchers should not be constrained by theories outside the classroom but should generate their own theories (Lomax, 1986: p. 43). Through this standpoint, I unite my perspectives to the larger body of established literature developed by those who explore similar questions about their understanding providing me with a framework for linking theory with practice. This larger body of literature to which I refer is the ‘living educational theory’ (Whitehead, 1989).

Living educational theories are formulated when practitioners explore questions of the type, “How do I improve my practice?” It is an account of the ‘*description and explanation*’ of the researcher's professional practice and educational development (Whitehead, 1989: p. 5). Importantly, a living educational theory is created when an action researcher carries out a systematic enquiry made public (Whitehead, 1993).

A living theory approach is a dynamic process. In this approach the theories come from practice that is reflected upon and critiqued. This in turn feeds into practice and into

an ever-continuous loop of theory and practice. Reflecting and subsequently critiquing my experience in the drama class enabled me give an explanation of my professional learning. This is what makes the living theory both dynamic and personal. Eames (1995) suggests that:

'The contribution should be personal rather than impersonal. They should try to root claims to knowledge in the writer's own experiences, to show how the writer has been 'educated', has changed as a result of the action and experiences described. They should involve some element of narrative as well as reflection; the personal growth of the writer - how she/he came to his/her present understanding is central.' (Chapter 9, p. 44).

Living educational theories use the process of getting to know through question and answer and are dialectical in nature. It is a process theory that offers a moving perspective on educational events, where the meanings emerge through practice (Whitehead and Lomax, 1987: p. 177).

When the researcher asks questions: How do I improve my practice? How do I improve this process of education here? How do I live my values more fully in my practice? and at the same time keeps the living 'I' at the centre of the enquiry they support their action research and prevent it from becoming a mere academic exercise (Whitehead, 1998). This enables the context of the action to move from 'what is happening here' to 'why should it be a problem for me?' During the process of asking this question and answering it I take the responsibility for the actions taken by me in the classroom as I see certain educational principles that are negated in my practice.

Whitehead (2000) outlines the process as follows.

'I experience a concern when my values are negated in practice.

I imagine a way forward.

I act.

I evaluate.

I modify my concerns, ideas and actions in the light of my evaluations.' (p. 93)

The contradiction is seen from the point of view of; who am I, what do I believe in and what am I doing and represents the tension between '*espoused theory*' and '*theory-in-use*'. Espoused theory is '*the theory of action to which [a researcher] gives allegiance*' (Argyris

and Schon, 1974: p. 7) and theory-in-use are evident in the actions of the researcher. The contradictions derived from the inclusion of the 'I' in a living theory are an important part of the explanation of the development of the practitioner's professional learning. What this means is that the practitioner has the ability to hold together particular values and their negation. Developing and applying a living theory is a process in which the practitioner tries to work through these contradictions.

The emergent paradigm of my research

Here I give an explanation and description of my learning as I tried to improve my practice. I define and describe the emergent nature of my research as my understanding developed.

The process of understanding, learning, and teaching educational drama cannot be encapsulated by one particular proposition or theory. I believe there is a necessity of using a wide variety of appropriate theories to solve the problems being researched (Griffiths, 1995: p. 302) to answer my research questions:

- How can I use drama as a tool to enhance life skills in children with specific learning disabilities?
- How can I improve my practice?

Moreover, as action research is an emergent process the focus of the inquiry shift as the inquiry develops and new theoretical angles emerge (Winter, 1997). Action researchers must then, strive to be flexible and creative and improvises the relevance of different types of theory at different stages in the work.

'Living educational theories are not characterised solely by asset of interconnected propositions' (Whitehead, 1998: p. 2, his emphasis) because the validity of a living educational theory cannot be reduced to propositions given its dialectical nature. Living theories contain 'I' as the living contradiction (Whitehead, 1998) while propositional logic rejects such an understanding as it suggests that two mutually exclusive statements cannot be true simultaneously. Instead, Whitehead (1989) makes a case for creation of educational theory as a living form of question and answer, which includes propositional contributions from the traditional disciplines of education. In a living educational theory the propositional

logic whilst existing in the explanation do not characterise the explanation. The explanation is embodied in the exploration of questions of the form, ‘How do I improve my practice?’ (Whitehead, 1989).

My theories about my practice are grounded in my lived experiences as I research and teach life skills in my drama class. I elicit my theories of my practice not from propositional knowledge directly but from my actual experiences of teaching in my class. It is the description and explanation of my educational development and it documents the changes I, the teacher- researcher, brought about in my practice.

I have created a ‘living educational theory’, in which I have drawn on propositional theories to help to explain my experiences. Rather than adjusting my practice to fit into a particular theory I have critiqued a dynamic form of theory as it clarifies my practice. It is my belief that insights from ‘*theories about education*’ can be integrated into my own ‘educational theory’, ‘*but without the latter being reduced solely to any one of the former*’ (Whitehead, 1993: p. 57). In doing so I believe I have used theoretical knowledge to explain my work as I answer the question ‘How do I improve my practice?’ My living educational theory shows not only how I tried to achieve proficiency as a drama teacher but also shows how I constructed an effective life skills enhancement module for children with SpLD and at the same time it also illustrates how drama played a valuable role in life skills management.

I began this research operating purely on interpretivist paradigm, which suggested that knowledge is socially created.

‘The purpose of doing interpretivist research is to provide information that will allow the investigator to ‘make sense’ of the world from the perspectives of participants; ...the researcher must be involved in the activity as an insider and able to reflect upon it as an outsider.’ (Eisenhart, 1988: p. 103)

My task was to interpret and understand the meanings that were operating within the group of students being researched. I, the researcher, was outside the process I was observing and held an omniscient position in relation to the students. The key characteristics of this view of research are to interpret, understand and describe. As the researcher, I held the power position and the control of the learning process was out of the hands of the students. I

played the role of the outside assessor and critic as I made them play drama games and assessed their performance and life skills.

Simultaneously, my lesson plans included the concept of dialogue, which can be seen in the way the rules the class would follow were negotiated (Chapter 5, p.103) and with the incorporation of reflection time in the curriculum (Chapter, 5, p.112). The sense of dialogue, however, was only included after the basic classroom activity when the students and I reflected on the classroom proceedings and behaviour. The dialectic relationship I held with my teaching methods and research at this stage in Cycle 1 was yet undeveloped and elementary. This is because I as the teacher held the power position as I taught with a tightly structured lesson plan leaving no room for the students to improvise without the lesson plan.

When I analysed and wrote the account of my work at the end of Cycle 1 (Chapter 5, p.124-5), I realised that my teaching methods were too simplistic. Through my class instructions I strived to answer my research question by explaining how meaning and experience be made sense of through drama games. I had as yet not explored different drama techniques like role-play, ‘stopping to consider’ and teacher-in-role and was still outside the drama process, functioning as an assessor. Researching through a theoretical lens of interpretivism it was not surprising that my approach was limited to testing whether drama could facilitate life skills enhancement in children.

Reflecting on the analysis of teaching methods used in Cycle 1, I realised that my work did not focus on the complexities of life skills and the intricacy of drama education. ‘*A reflective conversation with a unique and changing situation*’ (Schon, 1987: p.83) added a new dimension to my teaching methods. This was the first step towards a change in research perspective. My inquiry changed from an E-inquiry (externalised inquiry, focusing on others) to an I-inquiry (internalised inquiry focusing on self) as can be seen in Chapter 5, p.139-40. As a researcher it involved the recognition of what Whitehead (1989) calls ‘the living contradiction of the I’ or what McNiff (1993) sees as the conflict between ‘value’ and ‘actions’. What emerged from my new understanding was a different theoretical template.

The change in focus of my lessons and the impact of an additional theoretical lens primed my actions to develop into a more complex and critical endeavour. Living

educational theory of action research enabled me to exercise ‘*methodological inventiveness*’ (Dadds and Hart, 2001: p. 166) that was vital to my work as I theorised it. It enabled me to critique and improve my methodology. Beyond that, it gave me an opportunity to examine the assumptions about knowledge that inform my research design.

In Cycle 2, following a critical incident (Chapter 5, p.124), my teaching plans underwent a change. There was a change in understanding towards my perception of life skills and drama methods used by me in my lessons in Cycle 1. Firstly, I redeveloped what I believe was an effective life skills education programme. Secondly, my drama lessons moved beyond theatre games and I started using improvisation in a small grouping in pairs and trios and a method called ‘stopping to consider’ (see Chapter 5, p.131, 133). Now the dialectical relationship entered into the classroom activities in addition to previously used dialogue during reflection time.

Consequently, I could not follow an exclusively interpretive paradigm. I had to use a more appropriate approach that would support my developing epistemology. With the addition of a more educational oriented lens with attention to transformative theory and dialogic theory to my approach, my study gained a new dimension.

The transformative and dialogic elements required me to be engaged in the process of attitude change, emancipation and collaboration. This form of research enabled me not only to attempt to understand but also change social reality (Lather, 1992) and fitted well into the idea of transformation that is at the heart of my research in drama education and life skills enhancement. My aim was not to correct misperceptions on the part of the students. Rather, it was to empower the children with critical faculties, so they could understand the social reality they are embedded in, and become capable of transforming that reality. The modification of the research paradigm endorsed my views that drama is centrally concerned with transformation and is uniquely positioned to deal with life skills learning (Chapter 4, p.82).

Crucially, transformational learning should not be regarded as the province of adulthood or adult education alone. The transformative element in my research worked on two levels; one in the children’s learning and at the second level in my learning.

The use of interpersonal power of dialectics enabled the students to take control of the class situation through their dramatic enactments and during reflection time. It enabled

the power structure, of the position of the teacher and students that operates within the class to be negotiated. The collaborative, conversational nature of drama that facilitates learning and inquiry and allows personal transformation to take place through the medium of art came into the forefront. In Cycle 2, the students began to construct dramatic narrations from their personal experience and imagination; this was the first shift towards a more dialectical research paradigm. The students did not merely voice their thoughts but were in a speaking position through the narrative mode. Simultaneously, the research project entered a transformatory mode as they began to learn about emotions and progressed to understanding 'self' and empathy.

Transformative elements of my research enabled me to understand that reality is neither objective as asserted by positivism nor subjective as maintained by interpretivism, but a complex combination of both perspectives. The transformative mode in my practice occurred through objective and subjective reframing. Objective reframing emerged as I critically reflected on the ideas and beliefs of the students as we experienced problem-solving task, during narrations and role play; subjective reframing occurred as I critically reflected on my own assumptions.

Transformations may be sudden and dramatic, which Mezirow (2000) calls epochal. Critical incidents and critical events the children and I experienced during the research are examples of sudden and dramatic transformation. Gradual or incremental transformation occurred throughout the research in slow steps as the life skills education progressed from understanding emotions to understanding 'self'.

However, both kinds of transformation are neither a simple nor a smooth process of self-actualisation but are ridden with elements of conflict, self-doubt and anxiety. This is because genuine transformational learning is not merely a change in behavioural repertoire or an increase in the fund of knowledge (Kegan, 2000) but is always to some extent an epistemological change. Transformational theory reveals it is not so much what happens to people but how they interpret and explain what happens that determines their actions, their hopes, their contentment, emotional well being and their performance (Mezirow, 1991: p. xiii). I understand '*an act of learning can be called transformative only if it involves a fundamental questioning or reordering of how one thinks or acts....*' (Brookfield, 2000: p. 139), this was at the heart of my life skills educational programme (Chapter 4, p.83-4) by

which I hoped to enable the students to reflect on complex life situations and human intricacies and thereby facilitate the augmentation of pro-social behaviour.

Post Script

Writing my methodology about my ontological and epistemological positions helped me gain clarity. Solitary reflection, suggests Wells (1994), definitely leads to a growth of understanding, however, writing one's thoughts makes it possible to '*re-visit and review them. When writing is undertaken to communicate one's understanding to others, even more benefit accrues*' (p.31). For, when one is writing to communicate ideas one has to make a special effort to be very clear. Consequently, one is often forced to '*rethink and revise*' (p. 31).

At the same time, new knowledge can be generated through dialogue with others, who are equally interested in the process of learning (McNiff, 2002). Here in lays the important role played by the 'outsider within the research', which include my supervisors, critical friends and validation group. The dialogic relationship I maintained with them enabled me to look critically at research and problematise it. My supervisors and critical friends objectively observed me in action and introduced an insider-outsider dialogue (Bigger, personal communication) and thus enabled me to refine my work.

Through reflective conversations with my supervisors I was able to achieve what I believe was sophistication of understanding of the process of action research. Although my entry into research was to inform practice and not theory, I am now ready to make my intuitive and tacit knowledge explicit and explain the theoretical aspect of my research.

Action research is about process, attitudes, quality, expression, context, intrinsic, extrinsic and aesthetic learning. I now understand that action research is a form of research wherein the researcher actively takes part in the actions and is a form of practitioner research. Even so, action research requires a comprehensive amount of pre-understanding of the practice that is being researched. It encompasses looking intently to our experiences, relating to our feelings and attending to our theories in use (Smith, 2001).

'The practitioner allows himself to experience surprise, puzzlement, or confusion in a situation which he finds uncertain or unique. He reflects on the phenomenon before him, and on the prior understandings, which have

been implicit in his behaviour. He carries out an experiment which serves to generate both a new understanding of the phenomenon and a change in the situation'. (Schon, 1983: p.68)

The procedure usually associated with action research is a cyclical process of stages as follows: action, observation and reflection on action, evaluation, planning for further action and back to action and observation (Kemmis and McTaggart, 1988). Action research is fundamentally about change and is grounded in development and innovation to improve professional practice. In this thesis I desire to show how I involved myself in a qualitative action research project to enhance life skills in children with SpLD and improve my practice. The improvement initiative has a wider meaning than just one teacher improving her teaching, a wider meaning than ten children with enhanced life skills. It has a wider meaning than an improved method of teaching life skills using drama as a method. I believe my thesis goes further than all this. I have carried out an *'inquiry that characterises good teaching, [it] is an instrument for better practice, rather than an end in itself'* (Schwab, 1969: p. 24). By that I mean that I have researched the process of teaching and learning and at the same time by doing so I can try to persuade the larger community to change. Action research is one way to encourage social change (McNiff, 2002).

An action research process consists of two interlinked cycles because it has dual aims (O'Brien, 2001): improvement in practice and contribution to theory to the body of knowledge. Thus in an action research project there are two action research cycles operating concurrently. One is the cycle of planning, taking action and evaluating in relation to the project or the 'core' action research cycle (Zuber-Skerritt and Perry, 2002). The second is a reflection cycle, which is an action research cycle about the action research cycle or the 'thesis' action research cycle (Zuber-Skerritt and Perry, 2002). This is learning about learning, meta-learning. It is the dynamic of this reflection on reflection that enables action research to be more than everyday problem solving as it aims to generate new knowledge and insights according to the research question. This supports Elliott's (1991) claim that action research theories generated are 'validated through practice' enabling a holistic understanding of the practice. It also establishes the importance of the role played by reflection in action research.

It is an interactive and democratic form of research done by maintaining a dialogic relationship with the participants who collaborate in the research process. Further, critical reflection enabled me to maintain a dialogic relationship with literature, critical friends and the validation group.

Concurrently, action research requires an understanding of the ethical framework and values. The purpose of action research '*...is not simply to describe, interpret, analyse and theorise - the stuff of traditional research - but to act in and on a situation to make things better than they were*' (Altrichter, Posch and Somekh, 1993: p.4). Seeing the values I hold being negated in my practice and my attempt to change the situation and try to improve it is the reason for my taking up this research project.

Action research resists closure; each ending is a new beginning (McNiff, 2002). Being a process of acting, observing, interpreting, planning, one is never sure of the outcome suggests the emergent nature of action research (Patton, 1990; Taylor, 1996). It is not possible to finalise research strategies before data collection has begun, thus action research can include all types of data gathering methods. In action research one should be cautious of facts and the illusion that all is stated (Bryant, 1996), as most importantly in action research '*there is always more to be said*' (p.118).

*'We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time...'*
(Quartet No. 4: Little Gidding, Eliot, 1968)

Section 2

Selection of the research site

The selection of the research site was tricky as there are only a handful of mainstream schools in Mumbai with special need centres. There are 1400 schools in Mumbai including municipal schools and private schools, however less than 1% has counsellors and special educators attached to the institutes (Dastur, 2005).

I searched for a school that would appreciate the framework of drama for life skill enhancement and a school principal who would empathise with my research endeavour. I had to find a '*gatekeeper*' who was friendly and co-operative. I believe that a '*friendly and co-operative gatekeeper*' can help shape the development of research (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1983: p.73).

After telephoning the Maharashtra Dyslexia Association and a few educational psychologists I selected a school which seemed like a potential research site. This school had a human resource development (HRD) department. I contacted them via the telephone and was immediately given an appointment to meet the resource co-ordinator and the Principal.

The Principal of this school shared my vision of the importance of life skill education for the school going children and could relate to my research perspective. I was excited, as not only was the school keen to include me as a teacher in their school but they also promised to extend their full co-operation to see the research to the end.

Organisation of data collection: time and length of the drama class

As a drama teacher I taught ten children who were studying in the fourth standard (n=5) and fifth standard (n=5) for twenty-two months. The drama sessions were generally an hour long and held on Saturday. However, I had to maintain a flexible schedule given that during the examination time, sports days and school trips the students could not attend the drama classes. To make up for the lost time, I designed some of the classes in a workshop format during the Diwali, and summer holidays and met the children

consecutively for three or four days. These particular classes were held for three hours each, a longer period compared to the normal format of one-hour classes.

Ethical issues in data collection

From the inception of this research I was extremely particular to carry out an ethical inquiry and therefore gave serious thought to all ethical aspects this study would entail. As teacher-researchers, my primary responsibility was to my students. All the activities in this research fall within the everyday decision-making of a drama teacher and belonged to the process of good teaching. At no times were the students at any psychological or physical risk.

'An action research is considered 'ethical' if research design, interpretation and practical development produced by it have been negotiated with all parties directly concerned with the situation under research'

(Altrichter, 1992: p. 48)

At the onset I discussed my research, ethical issues and the principles guiding my work with the Principal and the resource co-ordinator of the HRD department of the school and gained their approval.

I hold the view that the participants and subsequent others in a research should be enlightened with the way the observations are going to be recorded, the methods of data collection and analyses and the way it is going to be presented (Winter, 1996). I therefore explained each aspect of my research in detail to the parents and class teachers in a meeting, which was also attended by the Principal, the Resource Coordinator and the SENCO.

I suspected that most of the parents would be unaware of drama-in-education and teacher-research. Therefore I explained my methods of teaching and researching and the importance of life-skills to them. I additionally discussed issues concerning confidentiality and protection of anonymity of students, teachers and parents.

Before I met the children, I met the parents of each child individually. In the second meeting with the parents I reiterated my discussion on ethical issues such as anonymity and assured them of confidentiality. As participation in the class and research was voluntary the parents were given an opportunity to withdraw. Additionally, I confirmed autonomy by

allowing them to decline to answer any questions they felt were intrusive, violated their privacy or were sensitive in nature (David, Edwards and Alldred, 2001). Since all the students were legally under-aged, I obtained formal consent from their parents.

Concerning the most important actors in the research – the students, I discussed the concept of researching and life skills education in the first class (Chapter 5, p161-2.). My educational values corroborate ‘*negotiated learning*’ and ‘*dialogic education*’ (Freire, 1970: p.74) thus the children were given as much choice as possible about how and in what way they chose to participate personally in the classes (Thomas and O’Kane, 1998; e.g. Chapter 5, p.106). Gaining their consent was not a single event but a continual process at each stage of their involvement (e.g. Chapter 7, p.222) Thus I believe their choices were free from any kind of coercion of parent, school or me.

Names

All the children in the study have been given pseudonyms (Appendix 1). From the beginning of the research to protect their anonymity, I had worked with codes; Child-1, Child-2, which, with the passage of time became C-1, C-2. However, every time I read my transcripts, journal or analytical notes, I experienced a sense of distance and of contradiction. This was because I had used codes like C-1, C-2 to name children who were ‘real’. I reflected on the idea that if as a teacher and the writer of this text, I could not ‘see’ the children in my writing how would my readers ‘see’ them?

I went back to my journal and re-read the initial description I had sketched of them. I had to think of a way to name the children and at the same time protect their anonymity, besides that I did not want to name the children just on a whim.

In a journal entry (Appendix 2, p.2) I had described Child-2 like the wind. Thus I named Child-2 Samir, which means wind in Hindi. Following the description of Child-9 from a journal entry of Class 4 -2.2.2002 (Appendix 3,p. 12-3) I named Child-9 Sarla, which means uncomplicated. By naming the children from my vignettes, I believe I have retained their identity and at the same time I have maintained confidentiality.

Data Collection

The following data collection techniques have been used in this research I name them in order of their appearance not importance: tape-recording of interviews and lessons, photographs, journal entries, questionnaires and interviews.

Tape recording

All the recording methods used for data collections like audio taping and photographing were highly visible and became a part of my classroom routine. The students were aware that I taped the class and often asked me to rewind so they could hear what they said.

The tape recorder proved to be important tool in my research (Patton, 1990). During the semi-structured interviews with the parents, class teachers and SENCO, it allowed me the luxury of taking in volumes of information, while fully participating in the discussion. I even taped all my drama classes, which facilitated gathering of accurate data and offered an effective starting point for further investigation (Hopkins, 1985).

One of the limitations of audiotaping is that it does not record non-verbal cues, such as facial expressions and body language. However, I overcame that difficulty by writing my impressions in the journal and in the margin of transcripts. As far as possible, I transcribed the tapes immediately so as to not forget anything. Moreover I transcribed the original grammar, vocal pattern, broken phrases repeated words, pauses and responses to facilitate effective analysis (Saldana with Wright, 1996).

As a general rule, after transcribing the recordings I always rechecked by listening to the tape again to make sure I had made a correct transcription. This was a strategy adopted to overcome transcription errors and to maintain a high degree of accuracy in the transcription process (Patton, 1990; Easton, McComish and Greenberg, 2000).

The use of recording the children served another purpose besides being an aide-memoir. The children enjoyed listening to their own voice and consequently the tape-recorder served the purpose of a teaching tool. Often during the class I taped their speech and replayed it to enable them to hear themselves. This is particularly useful when concepts and ideas are difficult to understand. My students were not experienced 'listeners' and could not 'hear' their own speech. When they heard the recordings they realised that they

mumbled while speaking and their speech was sometimes unclear. Thus they learnt to speak clearer and vocalize with more confidence after hearing themselves.

Photographs

Photographs substitute as illustrations suggests Walker (1994). However, the power of photographs to engage thought and extend imagination is often neglected. Through the use of photographs we can demonstrate and discover relationships (Prosser, 1998). The tangible details presented by photographs can also communicate feelings and emotions that occur during our teaching and during our interaction with the students and the interaction between the students themselves.

Researcher generated images are widely used as '*visual records*' or as '*a visual diary*' (Prosser, 1998, p. 116). However, I wanted to move beyond that, as I believe photographs had the ability to perform a more multifaceted role in my research.

Photographs have been used in this research to provide complex information about the students and about my teaching, as evidence to validate my research data, to stimulate discussions, to encourage participation in reflective thinking and as an aide-memoir.

As events in the class would be ambiguous to someone outside the field of teaching or researching I photographed my class activities myself, except when the students themselves photographed the class. Firstly, a photograph taken by an 'outsider' may or may not have anything to do with the original meaning of the event in class. Secondly, an 'outsider' may or may not be attuned to the comfort level displayed by the subjects. Thirdly, the children's behaviour may alter in the presence of an outsider.

The third point was validated in the fourth class (2.2.2002) when I had invited the SENCO to tea with the class, the children stopped working. This pattern was often repeated when their school teachers at different times walked into the class to watch the proceedings. The children often just stopped whatever they were doing and only continued when the person in question had left the room.

I have used, what I think is a conservative approach to photography, in that I used a simple, flashlight camera with fixed lens allowing only wide angle and close-up shots. There are two reasons for using such a simple approach.

The choice of the types of supplies and equipment can make a difference to the view of the world a photograph can offer (Prosser, 1998). As the direct use of natural light was not always possible in the class I used a flashlight. However the use of any artificial light besides the use of the flashlight would have become cumbersome and unfeasible. More importantly I did not want to alter the images recorded and wanted to view them as they were. To me it was important that my research photographs have a 'ring of truth'. This is the same reason I did not use extra lens, filters or different angles while photographing the children

As a teacher-researcher I did not want complicated instruments to take me away from my teaching. Even though I tried to balance my roles as a teacher and a researcher, the teacher always took the priority and I can honestly say there was never a moment when I held up the class to collect visual data (e.g. Appendix 2, p.3). Although initially the act of photographing did disrupt the class, gradually they accepted the act of photographing as a classroom feature. Subsequently the process of photographing stopped disrupting the class.

Commonly photographs are used to '*provide a record that is necessarily selective but nevertheless objective*' (Walker, 1994, p.79). The implication that photographs can be objective played a critical role in my research. For example, the school had a problem with a student's, Mukul, attendance in the new academic year 2002-03. His attendance in Cycle 1 was regular; it was only in Cycle 2, which took place in the first three months of the new academic year that he had become extremely irregular. The school authority took up the matter of attendance with Mukul's parents. His mother revealed that Mukul avoided attending the class as his peers often teased him as he had been detained in the fifth grade. Mukul probably meant normal school class and not the drama class. However, his mother used it as an excuse for his lack of attendance in the drama class.

Observation of the children's behaviour as a group and their behaviour with others in the class was an important part of my research design. Thus I was surprised by the discrepancy between the parent's explanation for her child's irregularity, his behaviour in class and what he said about his peer's behaviour towards him. After deliberately scrutinising all the photographs of the previous classes I noticed that in all the photographs of Mukul he was usually in a group, smiling happily and cheerfully involved in the class

activity. Using these photographs I could present the school Principal and the parents with concrete evidence that the child was actually enjoying the drama class.

I think unlike journals and diaries that are regarded as personal and private documents and could have subjective views, which are rarely shared with others, visual data like photographs are easy to share (Kanstrup, 2002). After a discussion with the SENCO and the school resource coordinator, the school determined that it was his schoolmates, during regular school time that teased him as he was detained, and that was one of the reasons he avoided school.

Photographs are capable of generating surprise as they are not just about the thing they portray but also about the way in which we make sense of them. The way the camera sees is sometimes different from the way we see. The images formed aid as an instrument for recovery of meaning. They not only offer a richer, '*new way of telling*' (Berger and Mohr, 1982), but also are capable of recording and retaining '*the distinctive posture, expression and demeanour of the people portrayed*' (Wiedel, 1995: p. 89-90). The asset of photographs is in its potential of facilitating re-reading. They '*slow down*' (Fasoli, 2003) activity and provide unchanging moments that are visible for repeated reflection.

Photographs were also used in this research as teaching tools. Just as the children heard their recorded voices, they also saw their images as photographs. These images were especially useful as a stimulus for discussions and reflections. For example when Manni, Chandani and Sarla did a role-play with their backs to the class, they not only whispered all through but also huddled in the corner (Chapter 5, p.135). Their play made no sense to the rest of the students. In the following class when I showed the children the photographs, the three girls could understand what their play looked like from our point of view.

Photographs as data belong to the specific social system, an argument, and a way of explaining words (Berger and Mohr, 1982) as photographs potentially allow for '*multi-level interpretation at a distance*' (Prosser, 1998: p. 11). In this manner the photographs can work with the text to '*enlarge each other*' (Prosser, 2000: p.7) and additionally enhance the trustworthiness of the research findings.

Journal entries

From the beginning I was meticulous in compiling and updating my research journal. There were some days when immediately after a class was over, I sat in my car and wrote my thoughts. I did this to document my thoughts about an incident (reflection-on-action) when they were fresh in my mind. Later, when I gained the children's confidence I even audio-taped my thoughts during class hours. They often saw me talk into the tape and ignored me and continued with the role-play they were involved in.

These acts of immediately recording and writing journal entries proved to be invaluable to my later analysis as these reflections facilitated in transporting me back to the class in question, they helped me to relive my class.

As my research progressed my journal entries became less formal and were not limited to a designated diary but were written on scraps of paper, the book I was reading at that moment and on hotel stationery when on tours. These notes were filed and later incorporated into my journal. I also drew sketches of the children when I could not photograph them.

Additionally the children kept diaries to record their learning (discussed in detail in Chapter 6, p.181). These diaries were eighty page notebooks, which I had bought for them. These diaries where they wrote down names of emotions as they learnt, served as an aide-memoir to the children and later helped me in my assessment.

Questionnaires

I made the use of questionnaires, students' self-assessment sheets and work sheets in my research. Even though they were given different names they serve the same purpose, that of self-administered questionnaires in that they are a formulated series of questions to be filled by the respondent.

Questionnaires and interviews were used in my research to enable problem '*setting*'. '*Problem setting*' suggests Schon (1983, p.40) is a '*process by which we define the decisions to be made, ends to be achieved and the means which may be chosen.*' Setting the problem enabled me to compose my plan of action.

Questionnaires, in their search for 'objectivity' are pre-structured according to an agenda of interests closer to that of the researcher than the researched (Schostak, 2003).

This view is in sync with my first set of questionnaires. My interest was in getting to know the children from the parents' and the teachers' point of view, to learn more about their behaviour at home and in school.

Given that teachers are used to doing worksheets and are able to follow the intricacies of the language without much help I opted to use a multiple-choice questionnaire (Appendix 6). This questionnaire was based on the Bristol Social Adjustment Guide (Stott, 1987).

The teachers opined that the questionnaire was easy to do as it captured a range of responses and therefore gave a fair amount of choices in behaviour patterns. It also facilitated identifying of the exact behaviour in the child. Besides all this, the questionnaire was quick and easy to answer, as they did not have to struggle for words. Additionally, the Principal and the resource room supervisor studied the questionnaire and thought it was effective as it covered a wide range of issues. Since a multiple-choice questionnaire seldom gives more than crude statistics (Cohen, Manion, and Morrison, 2000) and keeping in mind the respondents could interpret these words differently in their own context, I explained the questionnaire thoroughly and gave the teachers an option of writing about behaviour patterns that were not listed in the sheet

The parents' questionnaire (Appendix 7) was designed on the behavioural observation sheets used by the special education school where I studied for my diploma.

I specially designed worksheets for the children to complete (Children's Worksheet Appendix 8). These worksheets initiated the children into the process of self-expression. Five sheets comprised the package: My Friend, My Teacher, My Mother, My Father, and My Brother/ Sister. These worksheets helped me to gain knowledge of their world as they see it.

These worksheets had a space at the bottom for the children to draw. The drawings helped me to gain a better understanding of the children by studying their drawings (Yamamoto, 1972). Thinking and art are closely connected (Vygotsky, 1971) and visual art is a source of visual thinking suggests Arnheim (1969). I think children who are visual learners may be able to express themselves more deeply in drawings (Gardner, 1983).

Interviews

Cannell and Kahn (1968) define a research interview as a conversation between two people for the specific purpose of obtaining research-relevant information. A data collection technique such as interviewing can result in enormous amounts of information being collected by questioning people directly. Interviews are an important part of any action research project as they provide the opportunity for the researcher to investigate further, to solve problems and to gather data which could not have been obtained in other ways (Cunningham, 1993; Patton, 2001).

I have used structured, semi-structured interviews and un-structured interviews throughout my research. A structured interview is highly standardised and formalised (Robson, 2002). The interviewer has a list of questions and is used when the same information is required of each subject. Semi-structured interviews are also called a guided interview (Robson, 2002). Although the interviewer has a list of themes or questions that are to be covered, semi-structured interviews allow the respondents considerable freedom in their responses. The aim of an unstructured interview is for respondents to describe their observation of the situation, without any set questions or interview schedules. The interviewee is allowed to inform, opine and express beliefs he/she wishes with minimal prompting from the interviewer.

Patton (2001) suggests that interviews may have structured and un-structured sections. The first parent-interview had a structured and a semi-structured portion. However, it was more in common with a structured interview in that the same sets of questions are given in the same order to each respondent and the same information was required of each subject

The subsequent interviews with the parents took the form of semi-structured interviews and played a significant role in my research. The reason for this is even though their contents were organised in advance they were open enough to allow freedom of modification as the interview preceded.

The SENCO interview was in the form of an unstructured interview. The aim of the unstructured interview is for respondent to describe his/her perceptions of the world (Patton, 2001; Robson, 2002) The interview itself normally takes the form of a conversation and is often undertaken when the research is in an area where little is known about the

subject as it enables the researcher to develop an overall picture of the subject (Robson, 2002).

To increase the credibility of the interview schedule, questionnaires and children's worksheets, my validation group, who are experts in the field of psychology and psychiatry in India, reviewed them and their suggestions were applied.

The primary advantage of structured interviews is that they are easy to administer and analyse. There are, however, negative aspects to using structured interviews such as important areas can be neglected and/or responses cannot be probed. Even though the second page of the Parents' questionnaire (Appendix 7) had a simple yes/no format I encouraged the interviewees to respond in their own way without being restricted by a yes/no answer. This allowed the parents the opportunity to explain their responses in detail. After I covered all the questions I asked the parents if there were any topics they wanted to discuss besides whatever we had already talked about.

Secondly, if the respondents feel they are being compelled to answer a question they may not respond honestly. Before starting the interview I had informed the parents that they could decline to discuss any issues that were uncomfortable. Additionally, as I felt the act of tape-recording might inhibit the interviewee and spoil the atmosphere or that they may become embarrassed at being tape-recorded (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Edwards, 1994) I did not use the audio tape-recorder to tape the first meeting with the parents.

However, I found listening to them, observing them, taking down notes and filling in the questionnaire simultaneously a difficult task and decided that I would definitely obtain their permission and tape future interviews. Hence all the subsequent interviews, even informal conversations were taped, thus enhancing the effectiveness and accuracy of my data.

What does a researcher do when she is asked to take the seat of the respondent? In Class 45-16.8.2003 (Chapter 5, p.161) my student, Sarla wanted to interview me. I was a bit taken back by her request. I think in situations like this, if the researcher is alert and can use her skill on the spot (reflection-in-action) the direction of the research can change. The '*artistry*' of reflective practice according to Schon (1983, p. 50) refers to the close link between expert action and understanding, which occurs whenever we deal sensitively and effectively with '*situations of uncertainty, instability, uniqueness, and value conflicts*'.

As a piece of data, this interview was extremely illuminating because when I responded to my students' questions I learnt how they saw their drama teacher and their drama class. Moreover, I learnt about how they saw the class as a research and its role in not only 'their learning' but also 'my learning'. Importantly, reflection-in-action during this interview and the analysis of the transcript enabled me to change the focus of my study.

Data analysis

Miles and Huberman (1994) point out, '*the strengths of qualitative data rest very centrally on the competence with which their analysis is carried out*' (p.10). In my research data collection and analysis processes was concurrent (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). Seidel's (1998) model explains the basic process of qualitative data analysis. The model consists of 3 parts that are interlinked and cyclical: Noticing, Collecting, and Thinking about interesting things. For example new analytic steps inform the process of additional data collection and new data further inform the analytic processes.

I believe a good qualitative analysis often requires access to a full range of strategies of both inductive and deductive reasoning processes (Schwandt, 1997). Inductive reasoning uses the data to generate ideas, whereas deductive reasoning begins with the idea and uses the data to confirm or negate the idea.

Deductive reasoning can be seen, for example, in the analysis of 'emotional understanding' where I began with a theoretical grounding and took directions from explicit study questions and used a predetermined set of steps to confirm learning or the lack of it. Analysis occurred as an explicit step in conceptually interpreting the data set as a whole, using specific analytic strategies to transform the raw data into a new and coherent picture of the phenomena being studied (Schwandt, 1997).

Thematic or pattern analysis has been a natural and frequently used methodology for organizing raw data of interview contexts in a variety of disciplines such as educational research. My data such as the interviews, questionnaires, self-assessment sheets, and creativity scales were analysed using thematic analysis.

Analysis begins with the identification of the themes emerging from the raw data, a process sometimes referred to as 'open coding' (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). During open coding, the researcher must identify and tentatively name the conceptual categories into

which the phenomena observed would be grouped. These categories, created when a researcher groups or clusters the data, become the basis for the organization and conceptualisation of that data suggests Dey (1993). '*Categorizing is therefore a crucial element in the process of analysis*' (Dey, 1993: p119) but '*how categories are defined ... is an art... Little is written about it*' (Krippendorff, 1980: p.76).

The conceptual categories I was looking for in Cycle 1 were defined by the secondary characteristics of a child with SpLD, as my lesson plans had to be designed to address the social behavioural problems a child with SpLD may face. I studied and re-studied the raw data to develop detailed knowledge of the children. From the list of tentative categories I grouped the data. I selected verbatim narrative to link raw data to categories and wrote theme statements for each participant and integrated findings about each child to make character sketches of the children (Appendix 2-5). The first character sketches also served as an indication of the pre-learning level of the children. Besides knowing each child as a separate entity I had to understand the group as a whole, which I did by evaluating the group as one unit (Table 7, Chapter 5, p.120). I did this by comparing the commonalities and differences in the students from the collected data. I did so as I wished to address the needs of the individual student and at the same time I wished to see the students as a group to design an effective life skills enhancement module.

Drama is about the meaningful experiences of the actors and their reflections on them. Discerning and locating individual voices of the students in the class transcripts, as opposed to linking them, helped maintain differences between the children. Additionally the transcript of all the drama classes cannot always be cut up or aggregated. These processes shift data analysis away from traditional 'coding', which implies fitting a person into a pre-existing set of categories. Importantly, I was interested in explaining how something operates (explanation) and why it operates in the manner that it does (interpretation). As I drew on such data, inductive reasoning enabled me to generate ideas.

Doucet and Mauthner (2001, electronic source without page numbers) suggest that the foremost aim of data analysis is '*to learn from and about the data; to learn something new about a question by listening to other people.*' As I gathered data of my students' experiences in the classroom, I became aware of the 'unexpected'. If we do not listen to our respondents, data analysis risks simply confirming what we already know (Chenail, 1992).

This defeats the point of doing a study in the first place because then in no way has the respondent changed our view or understanding.

Patchwork text

'I believe that the data, which have been painfully collected, should "be the star" in the relationship. By this I mean the main focus in qualitative research is the data itself, in all its richness, breadth, and depth. When all is said and done, the "quality" in a qualitative research project is based upon how well you have done at collecting quality data. So, it only seems natural that when it comes time to present "the fruits of your labour," you should make every effort to feature the data in your presentations.'

(Chenail, 1995, electronic source without page numbers)

The varied perspectives of my data and the multidimensionality of my research required an imaginative form of writing. By '*imagination*' Winter Buck, and Sobiechowska (1999) refer to the creative ability to shape experience into '*artistic*' form (p.1), suggesting that it should play an important role in professional learning and writing.

A patchwork text is the tool I have used to re-present my '*star*' (Chenail, 1995). Each piece of data, analysis of that data and the writing of it and as well each chapter make a point on its own and also contribute to the entire research, which is similar to the concept of a patchwork (Winter, Buck, and Sobiechowska, 1999).

The overall fabric of a '*crazy patchwork*' (Parker, 1991, p.34) is often planned from the beginning and has segments, which usually have a shape and texture of their own. I have used the crazy patchwork method in a similar fashion and incorporated stories, my personal experiences of the past and during the research, dialogues, quotations, transcripts, poems, photographs and also drawings to make up one complete unit.

The plan of constructing a patchwork text lends itself to being built up over a period of time (Winter et al, 1999). This enabled me to draw on the all my writings from the beginning of my research. The circular process of writing my reflections and in turn reflecting on my writing, re-reading and understanding my reflections and re-writing it

again helped me to gain a deeper understanding of my work which ultimately facilitated my growth as a teacher, a writer and a researcher.

In the process of my growth as a teacher and my gain in confidence as a writer I realised my work was centred round my students. The voices of my students reverberated loudly in my mind, sometimes so loudly that I felt the need to express their voices over mine. As patchwork is a ‘multi-voiced’ text (Winter et al, 1999) the stories in this thesis are also stories told by the other participants. I am just a medium through which their stories are produced as text.

The question whether the stories in this research are ‘fictional’ needs to be answered at this point. The term ‘fiction’ is sourced from the Latin word ‘fingere’ (Winter et al, 1999), which means to shape or to mould. Considering this I could look at the word fiction with a different perspective. The emphasis of my writing sifted from ‘*is this narrative true?*’ to, ‘*Is this narrative shaped and moulded in such a way that ... it is trustworthy?*’ (Winter, 2002: p.145). The researcher suggests Whitehead (1989), must have the intention to be truthful and that suggests authenticity.

All the stories in this research are based on ‘fact’ in that they were shaped from experiences and stories told during the class hours or from my experiences. I think that the reliability of my narratives should not be judged by objective criteria but should be judged by the way in which they appear authentic and trustworthy and my motives for using them. Debating about truth and fact Lee (in Rolfe, 2002: p.100) asks ‘*of truth, of fact, often raised about autobiography. If dates are wrong, can the book still be true? If facts err, can feelings be false?*’

Narratives

A decision to ‘cut up’ the transcripts was a difficult moment in my research. After spending so much time and energy with my students and my teaching and thus collecting volumes of data it was becoming impossible to, on one hand use all of it and on the other to discard it. Each tiny bit of ‘lived’ data and data analysis was extremely important to me. I therefore had to find a method of representing as much data as I could in my research.

In the initial stage of writing I proceeded to break off the transcripts, cutting and assembling like film editors do (Winter, 1999) as it came naturally to me considering my

background in performing arts, films and television. Often in the middle of my 'cut' I would see a 'close-up'. It was when I made many 'jump cuts' in the direction of Nihar and when close-ups of Sarla, Nihar, Lali and Chandani begged to be used that I fell back to using narratives.

Van Manen (1977) supported the researcher who wrote his/her report like '*an author who writes from the midst of life experience where meaning resonated and reverberated with reflective being.*' All my stories are not autobiographies, biographies or personal accounts; some are the combination of fact and fiction. Polkinhorne (1997) suggests that '*by changing their voice to storytellers, researchers will also change the way in which the voice of their subjects or participants can be heard*' (p. 3). The ingenuousness of narrative writing helped me provide an insight to my work, which stretches beyond the reach of a scientific account (Tierney, 1997).

Narrative is a device that has been described as a '*think scene*' by Fitzgerald and Noblit (1999, p.175) through which they suggest researchers '*show*', *not tell*' their data. Furthermore narrative could be developed to understand and communicate one's practice and/or reflect upon it (Evans, 1998; Bleakley, 2000).

In narrating both the incidents one on 9.11.2001(Chapter 4, p.73), and the second in Summer 2002 (Chapter 8, p.232) I have experimented with autobiography. They were 'well remembered events' (Clandinin, 1992; Carter, 1993) and had made a tremendous impact on my thinking and development. Writing the memoirs with a documentary approach allowed me to explore my personal history and my values (Connelly and Clandinin, 1988). They were initially written as journal entries as I sought to capture my thoughts and feelings and record them at the time they happened. In addition to the explicit meaning of both the stories, '9.11.2001, New York,' and 'Summer 2002', I have tried to conform the importance of reflection-on-experiences in an action researcher's life.

These narratives are my rendezvous with meta-thinking or 'thinking about thinking', they include not only the description of actions and events but also the actor's reasoning and motives (Sarbin, 1986). Personal writing suggests Chambers (2004) facilitates reflection and learning (also see Johnson, 2001); it helps the writer to understand themselves and others. It is a device that enhances '*qualitative research by opening new*

avenues of thought' (Taggart and Wilson, 1998: p. 164). Clandinin (1992) talked of the storied nature of our lives and the sense we make of them through reflection on the stories.

The stories: 'Two stories and Nihar' (p.253), 'Nihar's story' (p.268), 'A flicker of colour' (p.214) and 'In which Sarla becomes the magician' (p.230) are multi-voiced texts and were constructed around the extensive data I had collected on audiotapes during class hours. In these stories I have tried to show the development of the children over time in a narrative. Ely, Anzul, Friedman, Garner, and Steinmetz (1991) advise:

'...your job is to create a text in which the person or persons you learn about come to life. This means that you have a tremendous responsibility to be true to their meanings. The written presentation is of crucial importance: in a deep sense, what one writes is what happened and what was learned.'
(p.67)

Reflection on practice through the medium of a creative form of writing has been established (Winter et al, 1999; Bolton, 1999a). Creative writing suggests Bleakley (2000) is more compelling than descriptive or functional writing. It offers a way of assessing tacit knowledge and a range of expressions that are excluded in a '*report informed by numerical rendering of human experience*' (Taylor, 1996: p.39). Stories, recommends Carter (1993) are a way:

'...of capturing the complexity, specificity, and interconnectedness of the phenomenon with which we deal and, thus, redress{ed} the deficiencies of the traditional atomistic and positivistic approaches in which teaching was decomposed into discrete variables and indicators of effectiveness' (p. 6).

Through my narratives I have tried to re-create my classroom, my students, my lessons and additionally my learning. I hope the energy of my classroom will reverberate through out my work and the excitement my students and I experienced during the research will also be experienced in the reading of it. All through the research I have tried to write in a language that would be comprehensible to teachers with the hope that they would be able to understand my experience better. At the same time I have tried to strike a balance and not alienate my readers who are researchers or psychologists.