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Exploring the experiences of black professionals in welfare agencies and black students in social work education

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EXPLORING THE EXPERIENCES OF BLACK PROFESSIONALS IN WELFARE AGENCIES AND BLACK STUDENTS IN SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION

Submitted by Agnes Bryan

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Abstract

The thesis is a study of black professionals' and black students' experiences in white welfare organisations and higher education institutions. The focus of the research is on the interaction between macro and micro problems, with a stress on the micro issues and an approach that fits well within a person-in-environment perspective.

Drawing on action research methods it explores the following questions:

1. *How do we as black professionals and black students construct our experiences as we interact with and in white welfare agencies and academia?*

2. *As black professionals and black students what are some of the ways in which our experiences contribute to our perception and interaction with each other?*

3. *As a black lecturer what contributions do I make to black students' experiences? Is my practice experienced as empowering?*

The underlying principle running through the research and the writing in this thesis is that it was not a study done *on* or *about* black people but research that was done *with* black people, writing stories that emanated *from* our experiences. It was important that the research methodology chosen challenged oppression rather than perpetuated it and, within this frame, there were a few inquiry cycles used to obtain information and a variety of ways in which the information was generated; I

- Inquired into my personal history and work experience to show how my values as an educator and a change agent had been constructed.
- Collaborated with black professionals and black students using co-operative inquiry to generate stories of our experiences in welfare agencies and higher education.
- Tested information gathered from the co-operative inquiry with a group of co-researchers, who participated in that inquiry, and generated dialogues about issues from the research and about issues of validity.
- Used action inquiry into my practice as a social work lecturer. I explored whether I live out my values of empowerment in practice with black students and discovered ways in which I could improve my practice.

- Inquired into my experiences of writing for the academic world and held dialogues with students about their experiences of writing academic assignments.

The theoretical basis of the literature chosen for making sense of the material gathered supported the values of equality, anti-oppression, empowerment, wholeness, transformation and social change. I drew, therefore, on theories of liberation, particularly critical theory, black feminist perspectives and a black perspective framework; theories on personal development and change; Gestalt theory and systemic thinking.

Black professionals' and black students' voices have been absent from mainstream debate. I have, therefore, included in the thesis some voices of black professionals and black students, which are represented in stories of personal and professional experiences. The societal and organisational realities of racism provide the life experiences of black professionals and black students that results in us having multiple external and internal stressors which create complex interactions and sometimes fragile relationships. Some of the stories in the thesis provide details of such interactions and relationships.

Revealed in the thesis are areas of black experience, which involved other participants and myself in a process of "self-disclosure" and self-reflection. This led to disclosures and reflections upon the place of the self in the development of ideas and to setting up and doing research, which included the building of research relationships, the process of sensemaking and writing of the research text. It also offers ideas for a liberated pedagogy for black students.

Contents

Introduction to the Thesis

The accounts related in this thesis are representations of a research journey which provided opportunities for black (Afro-Caribbean and Asian) professionals and black students, myself included, to share experiences and acquire new experiences that became the basis for discovery, the production of identity, change and transformation. Some of the accounts represent occasions when people produced the meaning and value of experiences that take place and are revealed through narratives and stories.

My Reasons for doing the research

Part of the legitimisation for conducting my research and for writing this thesis is my commitment to improving practice in organisations and bringing about political change to improve the lives of black people in a racist society. That means not only highlighting good practice, but also striving for a positive impact on policy and practice both within the field and in higher educational institutions.

As a black Afro-Caribbean woman living in Britain, I am particularly interested in exploring the lives and experiences of marginalised and oppressed black groups in society. I have made our experiences – micro issues - the focus of my study because, since the 1960's, a wide range of empirical studies have focused on the macro issues. Insufficient attention has been paid to issues associated with the social relations between black people, or to how they construct their reality or to meanings associated with experiences. It is crucial, in my view, to conceptualise black peoples' experiences as mediated by race, gender and class. But how are such links to be theorised? The task is made even more complex when we note a general tendency in the literature to conceptualise the macro and micro levels of analysis as separate, almost independent levels. My own interest resides in trying to understand how the macro and the micro interrelate.

I want to suggest that there should not be a binary divide between the macro and the micro. The micro here is conceptualised as a process, a terrain, in which social meanings are produced, appropriated, disrupted and contested. Experiences remain important but they are construed as fluid modalities, as shifting boundaries that mediate structures and relations of power. Hence structure and experiences, macro and micro are enmeshing formations. The one is not privileged over the other and, for this reason, I have been concerned with the place of the personal in the research. Here I have conceived personal in a number of ways as a mode of self-description; as part of the

process of theorizing; as part of a methodology. I implicitly challenge objectivism and instead look to my own world and knowledge as a black woman, as well as our own world and our own knowledge as black people, to throw light on what I am doing. I want to go beyond tacit personal knowledge with this thesis and explore how it is implicated in the research processes and academic discourse, but I want to do this is in a way that is not exclusive and excluding. I am uneasy about options of absolute truth and believe that knowledge is always questionable.

I also place value on the variety of subjective experience and on theorising from personal experience because, like hooks (1989), I feel that it is important to acknowledge the need to examine the self from a critical standpoint. Therefore, both individually and collectively, I, as author, and we, as participants in the research, engaged in the personal and complex task of looking back on, and making sense of, not only the research endeavours but also our own lives.

I have taken a stance in the thesis that is reflective and biographical and have included autobiographical accounts of myself, as researcher and writer, and accounts from the people whose views were sought and whose stories I documented. This thesis is, therefore, in part about the use of self in research and writing and, at the same time, is a reflection on the use of self and personal experience in a joint search for truths and co-production of knowledge. It is a circular process (Steier, 1991). The self, the "I" is part of writing and research, and interacts with ideas and people, but "I" can also stand back and reflect critically on that process. This process necessitates skills in self-awareness and the capacity to be introspective and reflective and I drew on my previous and current personal/interactive/communication or other human and professional skills (as a gestalt psychotherapist, a community activist, teacher/trainer/facilitator) in my conscious use of self. My increased awareness of self emerged from my parallel journey of research and therapy, which produced learning from self as therapist and self in therapy. The skills as a gestalt therapist contributed to my development, containing me to work with the research process.

Working with the use of self in this way inevitably involved a process of self-disclosure. Evidence of this is seen, in different ways; in the sense of the accounts in the thesis and in particular the biographical and reflective accounts. An autobiographical account is, by its nature, a disclosure of some personal aspects of one's own life. But self-disclosure is also consciously needed here in the research inquiries as a means of breaking down the hierarchy between researchers and participants, and to enable participants to share more

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openly and honestly aspects of their own life experiences. The accounts of mistakes, misunderstandings and doubts that abound in the pages in this thesis are in themselves a very real form of self-disclosure.

I approached my work in a spirit of openness, even uncertainty, about its likely course and direction. Part of the research process, as I see it, is the need to negotiate meanings with participants and allow frameworks for understanding to evolve through time. Reality is neither entirely fixed nor given for all time. The use of self- the influence/impact of self – plays an important part in the unfolding of realities. In developing self-awareness an awareness of the influence of and use of self in a research situation has meant acknowledging my responsibility for the overall quality and integrity of the research and for safeguarding the anonymity, confidentiality and general welfare of the participants in this research.

The legitimation of my research is through the values I hold, and which underpin my work. The notion of reciprocity is important in this context and I describe reciprocal interaction and shared endeavours (in putting on a conference, for example). I have a commitment to reducing the power differential in research settings through involving people as participants and – where possible – as active and equal partners. A participative approach to research means not only challenging the social divisions of race, gender, and class but also challenging the traditional professional – client differentiation in welfare settings. I also seek to 'give a voice' to people otherwise rarely heard through documenting their previously neglected or misrepresented lives and experience. Further legitimation of my research lies in its potential to empower the people about whom I write and with whom I research, unlike other research in this field (Rex, 1973, 1979, 1987; Rex & Moore 1967; Patterson 1969). These studies say very little on the subject of exactly how their research was harnessed to political engagements and struggles, and give little account of the actual nature of the fieldwork and how the research was conducted.

In my research and in the writing of my thesis It was not my intention to take such a powerful position of superiority but rather to take a position that is derived from the researcher's and writer's process and its inherent biases and value judgments. I do not see myself as being outside the political domain, nor do I hold to some notion of value - free research. I did not want to end up speaking from the perspective of a privileged narrative, neither did I want to take a stance that was tantamount to saying that the researcher/writer can become a kind of representative or spokesperson for black groups.

I am uncertain about the value of reducing all the voices of oppressed groups' to a single voice.

So how did the research begin? I shall outline below the background of the research project and elucidate its aims.

Background to the research

A few years ago Cathy Aymer and I, who are two black social work lecturers at Brunel University College, formerly West London Institute of Higher education (WLIHE), embarked on a research project to explore the experiences of black students in higher education and black professionals in welfare organisations. The idea for the project came out of a conversation between Cathy and me in the corridor at work, which led to some of our thinking and analysis being set out in a paper which we wrote entitled 'Black Students' Experience on Social Work Courses: Accentuating the Positives'. Our main inquiry question, which resulted in this paper, was "Why is it that when we read about the experiences of black students on social work courses they are always negative?

We took as our starting point our own experiences as two black lecturers with our social work students in a big department of a large higher education institution with a high proportion of black students. Our analysis stemmed from the experiences that we have had, between us, over twenty-five years of teaching on social work courses, talking to black students and in discussions with black managers and practitioners. We saw a trend developing in which what was told, in public, by black students were all the negatives whilst the students' positive stories were kept to the domain of the private. There was a deafening silence resulting from this trend about the positive achievements and successes on social work courses. We were concerned about how black communities would know of their successes. We wanted to ensure that other black people would be encouraged to enter higher education and the professional world.

Out of our concern for what we perceived as a trend developing of an "aint it awful "culture in social work education we set out, in this paper to challenge the myth that black social work students experiences are all negative. We felt that the positives that were told to us in private should be asserted. We wrote:

"It is important that black students' positive experiences are made public for several reasons. They serve to challenge mythologies that describe black intelligence as inferior. We need to celebrate our triumphs and

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successes and make public the skills that are in the black community, so that our communities can be valued for their achievements...This is not to deny the reality of the negative experiences that have been so clearly documented, but rather we wish to resist the possibility of a self-fulfilling prophecy that cannot benefit black social work students, the social work profession, or the black communities. We believe that an 'ain't it all awful' culture creates and perpetuates the notion of black people as victims who are, by definition unable to achieve" (Aymer and Bryan 1996, p.3).

In discussions with black managers and practitioners in social services departments and other welfare agencies, we had discovered that some of these negative perceptions of experiences and thinking were observed in the work place. Black practitioners tended also constructi their experiences in the negative rather than in the positive. We observed that some of the dynamics among black students as they interacted with each other in the educational setting were similar to those in the work setting. We were, therefore, interested to explore further our experiences at a micro level, the level at which black people interact with each other in white institutions, and to discover whether racism had served to define those interactions.

The research project was based on an assumption that black people experience racism on an institutional, cultural and individual level and through personal experiences on an every day basis. It is experienced in multi-dimensional ways in personal encounters; therefore black people's perceptions of racism are an important contribution to our understanding of racism. These perceptions, we believe, should be accepted and valued as important knowledge. We were interested to know how these perceptions contributed to our construction of our experiences and what this would mean for organisations and for us in terms of revision and change. Those interests contributed to the aims of the research

Aims of the Research

Our aim, therefore, was to undertake an examination and analysis of the micro issues - the dynamics and processes that are involved when black people interact with each other on an interpersonal level in white institutions and with white institutions. Through the process of examination we hoped to:

- Provide opportunities for the development of new ideas and knowledge for reframing the experiences of black students in higher education and professionals in work

Organisations. It would also be our aim ultimately to extend the development of these ideas into the black community.

- Generate new knowledge about identity politics, to offer strategies of politicisation that would develop our concept of 'blackness' and intensify our sense of self.
- Raise awareness and enlarge our conception of who we are and promote individual self-development, professional development and collective change.
- Add to the existing body of knowledge about the impact of structural racism, and develop strategies for organisational change.

The point of the work was not just to gain knowledge, but to modify what is done as a result of what is learned. This kind of research, I believe, is central to good professional practice.

We took the position that the reconstruction of knowledge from a black standpoint necessitates studying the world from the perspective of black people because traditionally sociological studies of race have often been distorted by having been centered in the perspectives and experiences of dominant group members. Ladner (1973), among others argues:

"Blacks have always been measured against an alien set of norms. As a result they have been considered to be a deviation from ambiguous white middle -class model, which itself has not always been clearly defined. This inability or refusal to deal with blacks as a part and parcel of the varying historical and cultural contributions to the American scene has perhaps, been the reason sociology has excluded the black perspective from its widely accepted mainstream theories (p.23).

This statement reflected my desire, as a black intellectual, to develop our own ways of thinking rather than to rely on adopting concepts from the dominant western meta narratives which are shaped by western pre-occupations and assumptions. These issues informed our decision to conduct what we call a "black on black" study.

Black on Black Study

The research inquiry takes the form of a black on black study. By this we mean black researchers working alongside other participants, who were black students and black professionals, to examine, reflect on and analyse our experiences. We had three main reasons for making this a black study solely. Firstly, there is little or no literature on race issues that focuses its attention in this area. Secondly, we would not wish to make

comparisons between black students experiences and white students' experiences, as such comparisons inevitably define the white experience as the norm and the black experience as "other". Thirdly, we wanted to take our experiences out from under the gaze of white researchers who constantly seek to define who we are. We wanted to construct our own reality. We were working on an assumption that we as black people are better able to understand the nuances of racial oppression. However, we were aware that doing research in black communities poses unique methodological problems. Blauner and Wellman (1973) states:

"There are certain aspects of racial phenomena, however, that are particularly difficult, if not impossible, for a member of the oppressing group to grasp empirically and formulate conceptually. These barriers are existential and methodological as well as political and ethical. We refer here to the nuances of culture and group ethos, to the meaning of oppression and especially psychic relations; to what is called the Black…and the Indian experience"(p.329).

Blauner and Wellman's argument underscores the point that research occurs in the context of power relationships both between the researcher and the research participants and in the society at large. As they pointed out:

"Scientific research does not exist in a vacuum. Its theory and practice reflect the structure and values of society. In capitalist America, where massive inequalities in wealth and power exist between classes and racial groups, the processes of social research express both race and class oppression. The control, exploitation, and privilege that are generic components of social oppression exist in the relation of researchers to researched, even though their manifestations may be subtle and masked by professional ideologies" (pp314-315).

I accept that research participants are never equal and they cannot alter the wider political context in which the research takes place. Also, the accountability and commitment of black researchers to the communities they study pose unique problems for their research practice. However, black researchers are also less likely to experience distrust, hostility, and exclusion within some black communities.

Furthermore, Patricia Hill Collins (1986) argues, black researchers may generate questions that are different from those asked by white researchers. The marginality of black feminist researchers and scholars gives them distinctive analyses of race, class and gender. She sees black feminist scholars as best generating black feminist theory, but also suggests that all intellectuals can learn to read their personal and cultural biographies as significant sources of knowledge. As "outsiders within", black feminist

scholars use the tension in their cultural identities to generate new, inclusive ways of seeing. Building more inclusive ways of seeing requires researchers to take multiple views of their subjects, abandoning the idea that there is a singular reality that social science can discover. It also requires that we see ourselves as "situated in the action of research" (Rapp, 1983), examining our own social location, not just that of those we study. This is a fundamentally different posture from that advocated by the norms of "unbiased, objective, scientific research in which one typically denies the influence of one's own status, be it race, gender, class or other social status, in the shaping of knowledge.

There is agreement among many social researchers that knowledge is socially and culturally constructed (Ravn 1991; Steier 1991, hooks 1994, Bhavani 1997). This means that the researcher and the researcher's actions are part of that process and should therefore be subject to self-reflection. Knowledge is co-produced, underlining the researcher and the "researched" (Reason and Rowan 1981; Reason 1994; Gergen and Gergen 1991), where possible as co-researchers (Heron 1981, 1996). Research projects, which involve people who are part of a sub-ordinate social group and oppressed or otherwise vulnerable, raise ethical, personal and political issues about the justification for doing research. This has implications for how we carry out our work in practice (Bell 1990; Bhavani 1997; Oakly 1981; Patai 1991; Stacey 1991,).

We took these concerns into the research project. Concerns about the nature of subjects and objects in research, how we relate as participants and sought for participative and collaborative research methods that question the relationship of the researcher and "researched". This leads to the question of the ability of the black researcher to be a "knower" (a role traditionally denied to black people and women) without its attendant implications of power over research participants.

There are other broader concerns that formed an implicit context for the research and writing of the thesis. These concerns can all be placed in the context of debates on post modernism and black perspectives discourse, which I will discuss fully in Chapter 3 on the theoretical foundation of the thesis. However, here I want to outline briefly concerns such as the representation of black voices in a research context (my own voice as well as the voices of the participants). The voices of black people, especially black professionals, are virtually absent in the social sciences. In this research study we attempt to rediscover the voices of black students and black professionals through the method of qualitative

research. This work can be considered a step towards providing arenas or fora where such voices are generated, heard, and ultimately transformed into a political form.

Telling our stories would entail finding our own voice. I am not only seeking to find my own voice in the research, I am also committed to hearing the voices of others, rooted in their experiences and understandings, about their lives. I want these voices to be heard within the public domain, to contribute to the empowerment of black people in their own lives as well as to contribute to the bodies of knowledge. Doubtless, the two quests (personal and academic) are connected. I am not seeking to hear an authentic voice in others or myself but to shift the balance of power, away from a moral self-monitoring and towards a greater sense of agency and personal control over the definition of our feelings. I am referring here to the power dimension of feelings and their voice/expression. Not only does it require much attention and care to hear my own voice, but also it requires even more attentiveness to hear and represent the voices of others. So I was faced with these questions from the outset: Can we, as researchers, provide a space to enable others to bring their 'authentic' voice to language? Can the research process foster empowerment, via the articulation and wider communication of people" own understandings of their lives?

How are the answers to these and other questions presented in the thesis? I shall go on to outline the structure of the thesis and give the reader an idea of what is included.

The Structure of the Thesis

The order of the thesis is roughly the chronological order of the research project, which also represents the phases of the research journey. The phases of the research produced a substantial amount of data not all of which could have been included in the thesis. I will note in the outline below the chapters that had to be excluded. Despite these exclusions the thesis is still very lengthy. That is because I wanted to present to the reader the multi-dimensional nature and depth of the inquiry as my life journey and to show how I have engaged in recurrent patterns of inquiry relating to analysis and sensemaking, for example, in order to tell the full story generated. I included quotes from the participants, some lengthy, which added to the length, because I was not willing to take out or be too limiting with the other voices which contributed to the richness of the research text. I also wanted to honour my process and the depth and breath of my work.

The phases

There were two main phases to the journey. The first phase consisted of collaboration with other black professionals and black students about their experiences and phase two consisted of an action inquiry into my own practice as a lecturer, which included some collaboration with black students. I shall outline below some of what the reader might expect in some sections of the thesis and at the same time offer a flavour of the process of my journey.

Phase One

The writings from Phase One of the research are to be found mainly in Section Two of the thesis which accounts for the methodology adopted and the range of methods used. I go on to discuss the co-operative inquiry with black professionals and students and to evaluate the outcomes, paying attention to some of the issues involved in researching in that way with black people, and advocate ideas for a research perspective. I also reveal my truth through my stories about my process, for example, my engagement with the process of co-operative inquiry and the story of Cathy's and my collaboration.

Also included is my writing process of the generated information, data that required representation. I faced dilemmas about how I would represent what happened in and with the inquiry groups and the knowledge generated by the groups. I asked a series of questions about how this should be done. Questions about interpretations and dilemmas, about how this may or may not conflict with my ideological positions, about authenticity and not silencing the voices of participants. I engaged in questions about interpretation, analysis and sensemaking. The results of my exploration can be found in Chapter 6.

Engaging with the data led to my discovering that there were common themes emerging that I had always been interested in and wanted to explore, which I found myself theorising about. I, personally, became more interested in what we were sharing about the way we interact with each other and less interested in representations of our successes. I was still interested in the notion of accentuating our positives but more in the context of black on black interactions. So the material in the thesis from this phase of the research focuses on themes emanating from that topic. These are revealed in Chapters 7 and 8. Making myself accountable for my sensemaking and the validation of my representations of participants' stories, I gave some participants my accounts of the co-operative inquiry, including drafts of chapters, which are included in the thesis as

feedback. In one instance I gained group feedback which revealed interesting issues about validity. Some of those issues are revealed in Chapter 9.

Phase two

The questions that I set out to ask had a personal as well as an academic flavour. As an academic, researching within an academic institution into a topic that is about what goes on in such institutions, I was seduced, at the start, into thinking about the research theoretically. Following in the deep current of my research life, I had images which had much to do with the way the experience of my journey through the research was being constructed over time. My research journey was beginning to influence how I was integrating its meaning into my practice and into my whole life.

As time went on, I noticed my energy shifting and my life was changing. In the context of continual questioning I became less driven with achieving my particular goal for the research. The goals remained but were subordinated to wider concerns. I began to become more aware about my yearnings, motives, intentions, and the changes I wanted to make in my personal and professional life that would contribute towards positive experiences for black students.

I was curious about my teaching/facilitation of learning, which was triggered by my awareness of how I facilitated the research and by the stories told by students of their experiences of teaching. I was particularly interested in how I used my power as an educator/teacher and I wanted to know whether I lived out my values in my practice. I was interested in knowing the contributions I made to students' lives and ways in which I could improve my practice. Although the experiences of other black professionals and students were my top priority, I did not want to write about these experiences without exploring my own, so I shifted my focus to looking at my own practice. I wanted to make changes to my practice so that learners would get a better deal from me, so that I could make a contribution to their lives and a change to their experiences of learning in a university.

I asked questions about the role I played in black students' development. What contribution did I make to their learning by virtue of being a black lecturer? How did I help or hinder their learning? What were their experiences of me as a teacher and in what way did I contribute to their experiences of higher education? These accounts are stories of self-performance showing how I was at work, creatively making meaning, situating myself

in relation to public scrutiny. I encountered myself as other and perceived myself through other eyes and ears, thus stepping outside myself, moving elsewhere, to gauge my relation to truth. By placing myself in the position of the other I returned to the truth of myself and the truth about my practice. I found truths in the feedback that was given to me by participants in my inquiries.

However, the details of what I did in the inquiry and how I made sense of the feedback are reported in a very limited way because, having written the first draft of the thesis, I discovered that the thesis was too long. I had to make difficult and sad choices about what to include and what to leave out and I chose not to include in substantive detail the full account of this inquiry.

I also asked questions about my facilitation of learning, my use of power and authority and whether or not I effected change. I took these questions to students and participants whom I had worked with and asked for feedback on my practice and, in particular my facilitation. In the first draft of the thesis, I revealed my inquiry into my facilitation as a researcher and teacher, but, sadly, this chapter could not be included in the final version of the thesis because of the limitation on length.

Whilst these narratives specifically centred on my practice, they offered comments that often took much broader strokes at the meaning of learning and I wondered amidst multiple possible ways of arriving at answers to questions about teaching and learning. My intent was to draw from the answers to these questions to make some contribution as to what lecturers could do to aid black students' learning. Chapter11 offers some useful suggestions on education for liberation.

More discoveries on route

As I participated, began to write and draft material developed, some of which was personal revelation of my values and dilemmas, it became clear that my personal autobiography is in some sense an important component of what I have to say. This is evitable in looking at my ideas, values and dilemmas at myself.

Every attempt I made to write the thesis presented me with problems of representation and personal problems about writing, which resulted in me taking a long time to write. I became interested in what was involved in the writing of the stories that were told in the inquiries. So, although what was said was important and I found it very interesting, my

energy was in inquiring into what was happening with my relationship with the data and the writing of the thesis. Was I scared to write up what I heard? Was I afraid to put those issues to a white audience? These were important questions, some of which got answered in chapter on writing and making knowledge, which was another sad omission from the final version of the thesis.

My energy was directed into how I was living with and through my research and I inquired into how I created a balance between thoughts, feelings, and actions. I focused more on the effects the research was having on my life and on the relationship between the internal and external world, between the personal and political. A condensed impression of my exploration can be found in the concluding chapter of the thesis Chapter 14. The material in this chapter represents the exploration of some experiences occurring not only in space but also in another dimension, inner or spiritual. It offers learning about self and a journey of my transformation. Moments of recollection also gave structure to parts of the journey that endowed it with meaning and became a form of self-knowledge which, unfortunately, does not appear in its full form in the thesis.

Parts of the journey provided the opportunity for me to acquire experiences that became the basis for the production of my identity. My journey made sense to me as a coming to consciousness and my story consolidated around an identity, – my identity as a black academic, educator/teacher and black woman therapist/researcher. These identities are revealed throughout the thesis but in particular in chapter13, where I show the meaning I made of my experiences and offer an understanding of the role of black academics as change agents in academic institutions and welfare organisations.

I ended my journey with chapter 11 that acts as a bridge between the two phases of the research, in which I advocate an approach to working with black professionals and black students. This is followed by the two advocating chapters (Chapters 12 and 13) I referred to earlier, and a further chapter on self-learning (Chapter 14).

Although I have omitted the chapter on writing that included my inquiry into writing the thesis, I want to include here some comments about the way that I have chosen to write 'from' and 'about' the experiences in this research.

Writing 'from' and 'about' our experiences

The ordering of the thesis is overlaid by the fact that I have found my own way of writing 'from' and 'about' other participants' experiences and about my own. Styles of writing are not neutral but reflect shifts in history and the domination of a particular school or particular paradigms. The process which is unfolded in the thesis is not a seamless web because the process of writing the thesis has been a further story for me in unearthing the hidden processes of research and writing and connecting my own experience to that of other participants in the research.

I have tried to write accessibly. I want to be a knower, but what I know must be accessible to others, particularly to those who provided me with the opportunity to develop my research text. It is a long step from theorising and writing for an academic audience to grounding my research and its findings in a medium accessible to a wide audience, particularly a black audience.

I am not indifferent to theory or content but in this thesis I push for a different way of understanding theory by looking at what is conventionally ignored: the process or richness in the textual aspects of such work. In some sections of the thesis I write through the narration of a most concrete set of events, more focused and controlled.

Style of Writing

I would describe my style of writing as an 'essay'. I am influenced by Karl Weick's work, which is described by Van Maanen (1995) as an essay style. The essay is seen as a literary format linked more to art than science. According to Van Maanen:

"The essay is anything but an overtly systematic presentation of an author's views. This stylistic feature is sometimes treated as a bothersome defect by some readers, a defect than can be overcome only when others extract or cull the analytic jewels out of a messy piece of work, the jewels being the detachable theoretical contributions to be found in the work...Yet, it is altogether possible that the lack of a system and the appearance of a tidy order in his writing is downright central to the point, purpose and value of his work" (p.136).

In Weickian work, theory and style are closely linked; one carries the other. The style becomes the theory where doubts and contradictions are injected in the accounts. There is a tentative, anti-essentialist and moving position presented here; one that I believe may be attractive to the readers and consistent with my message, making writing accessible.

I therefore would like to invite the reader to increase their tolerance for unorthodox approaches as some of the pieces in the various sections of the thesis take pride in the non-linear possibilities of the essay form. Meanderings, detours, distractions maybe commonly found in a few chapters. A personalised author is also presented as is characteristic of the essay style. The use of 'I' is well used as I refuse to cloak my writing in anonymity. I believe that when theory becomes anonymous, it loses style and slides into forms like a research report or a textbook where standard formats, topics, terminology and methods play large roles.

In some of my work the reader may find no ordinary introduction, no generic section titles, no obvious summary or conclusion sections and no recommendations for further research. In some cases, beginnings may well be endings and vice versa. The reader may find this unsettling and difficult to categorise as to its intentions.

Nevertheless there is a shape and pattern to this work; it is not one or two big blobs, but it stands some distance from conventional writing style of Ph.D. academic thesis. Large parts of the thesis read as something of a personal reflection, a meditation on a theme and are put forward in qualified and personal prose. My interest in the thesis is not presented as ideas with which the reader must agree or disagree; instead I have tossed ideas to stimulate thinking about current issues in theory about teaching and learning among black students, for example, or organisational theory about black professionals.

My intent, in my essay style, is to allow the reader to sense me as the writer struggling with an idea or thought or process and trying to use the idea to come to terms with some concrete event or experience that serves as the narrative center for the writing. In some other instances, I have tried to use the concrete experience to arrive at ideas for explorations, meanings or sensemaking.

Van Maanen (1995) stated an elementary principle of the successful essay when he said:

"An essay works to the extent that readers identify with the writer. And when they do, the essay will carry greater persuasive appeal than writings that force on a reader a systematic barrage of concepts, definitions, truth claims and roll call of famous names all serving to express certitude... It may well be that the most persuasive style in the late 20th century is on that is informal, a little self-conscious perhaps but basically genial and pitched at creating a conversation or dialogue between equals" (136).

Although my words do not fit neatly into this description, it was my intent to be persuasive with a partly informal style that is people-centered. By that I mean that people could identify with what I am saying, particularly about notions of equality and social justice.

To write in an essayist style requires a domination of the personal, a thinking that is not about black or white but shades of grey. I have tried not to over-interpret and have matters settled and closed. Claims are put forward rather hesitantly, and in some cases, in hypothetical mode, of expression in words such as 'if' 'maybe' 'possibly'. It means writing in a tentative, open, one –step- forward, one- step –back manner in which things could always be otherwise. I wanted to explore a variety of perspectives before arriving at final judgment. I was mindful not to use language that was about 'pinning everything down'.

In writing honestly, personally, and I hope accessibly, I intend to demystify research and writing. In so doing, I aim to engage a range of people who may have an interest in research. This includes black people who are merely curious and interested in research ideas and practice, as well as those who are, or have been, involved as or participants.

Concluding Remarks

I began this research wanting to write 'about' the experiences of black people in their encounters, generating material that could be theorised about and conceptualised in a format that would be in keeping with traditiona, academic style. I intended to present a balance that would be a representation of the content of what was generated by the work with comments on the process. I have ended up writing a thesis with a focus on generating knowledge from and on the process of doing the research, and about how my inquiry transformed itself over time. From the outset, my inquiry was less about macro issues to do with black peoples experiences; it was more to do with inquiring at a micro level, by inquiring into our processes and behaviour patterns as we engage with each other and how that shapes our experiences of the world which we inhabit at any point in time.

The thesis forms part of a developing literature of reflective research accounts and draws on the works of black feminist writers (see, for example hooks 1994, Patricia Hill-Collins, 1990, Lorde, 1984, Bhavani 1997,). Their scholarship and discourse helped to frame the problems and the inquiry questions. I have also cited individual sociologists, psychologists, and psychotherapists, action research theorists and educationalists.

However, I have been severely disadvantaged by not being able to draw on a range of literature from a black perspective in the field on which I was researching and writing. I found little or no literature on collaborative inquiry either with black people or on the micro politics of black people's interaction when we encounter each other. As a result, I have had to draw on the work of a few black psychologists and academics who have written generally in their field of race, culture and race relations politics.

The impact of this omission has meant a lot of worry on my part about the validity and credibility of what I was saying. I frequently questioned the value of what I had to say. I had the problem of not only wrestling with my own critical judges but with the added burden of not being able to refer to relevant theoretical sources to a sparse body of knowledge on the experiences of black professionals.

Many of the accounts in this thesis suggest that the value of experience ambiguously moves between resistance to a structured world produced by traditional research and a reconfiguration of the conventional values of research. Such accounts suggest that research allows people an experience of self that is usually absent from the traditional view of research and on a personal level, the daily work of the researchers.

I implicitly challenged objectivism and instead look to my own world and knowledge as a black woman, as well as our own world and our own knowledge as black people, to throw light on our experiences. It seems to me, however, that there are broader and implicit contexts in which my work can be placed. Firstly, my focus on black, marginalised and oppressed groups relates to issues about empowerment, to the political implications of research and, ultimately, to questions about autonomy, justice and equity and in particular how these notions can be construed in research.

Secondly, my focus on participative and collaborative research is related to the feminist debate and to the ideas of some action research theorists about the relationship of the researcher and "researched". This led me to the question of the ability of the black researcher to be a "knower" (a role traditionally denied to black people and women) without its attendant implications of power over research participants.

A Third focus is the concern with self and other, subject and object as well as with subject and subject of research, and the questions about the status of the "voices" in the research. I try to deal with the notion of representing black voices in a research context (my own voice as well as the voices of the participants) together with an emphasis on

uncertainties and dissonance within the research role. I also place value on the variety of subjective experience, and on theorising from personal experience. These concerns reflect a wider context in current social science debates, debate on post modernism and black perspectives discourse.

The material in the thesis is meant to influence beginning black researchers, writers and teachers of adult learners who can benefit directly from reading and taking heed of other people's personal accounts. However, I wanted to go beyond tacit, personal knowledge with this thesis and not use personal in a way that is exclusive and excluding. I am uneasy about options of absolute truth and believe that knowledge is always questionable.

I hope to appeal to people interested and involved in collaborative and participatory research at all levels but in particular, in research with black people. I would like to appeal to black practitioners who are interested in research and writing but are too frightened to take the risk. I intend to encourage practitioners to be reflective about their own practice and to think how to research. But my thesis is also intended for white researchers and practitioners who can identify with some of the issues and dilemmas.

I shall begin the presentation of accounts in this thesis with my own personal account of myself as the inquirer, in the next chapter, in order to give the reader a sense of who I am as the researcher.

Chapter 1

Locating myself as the Inquirer

Introduction

I shall begin with an introduction of myself to give the reader a sense of who I am, my values and how they inform my inquiries and my self development as a researcher. During the course of undertaking this research I have become aware of ways in which my values about education have been shaped by my early childhood experiences. I have witnessed how my educational and work experiences have shaped my political values. Education has been and still is very important to me and I have always seen myself as a political person seeking to bring about change where necessary. During my research I became curious about how as an agent in history the social, cultural and political context in which I lived informed my values and influenced my thoughts and actions. I do not believe that it is by accident that I have chosen to do my research with a group of people who have been given little power in welfare organisations, educational institutions and in society and have actively sought a methodology which allows for some sharing of power.

I have, therefore, inquired into the ways in which I have gained access to prior and present learning and experiences in order to derive insights which have assisted me in coming to terms with my own approach to learning, researching and facilitating change. Consequently, the writings in this chapter are a representation of my personal, biographical explorations. The biographical explorations are about what influenced me as a researcher to make sense of the world in the way that I do; what is behind the theories, explanations, the analysis and the concepts that I use in my research.

In the process of constructing my biography, I recaptured past educational, work and political experiences without too much interpretation and looked for ideas of development and connections with my current intellectual and research interests. I presented a description of current interests and feelings about them. The aim was to illuminate the present and future rather than just events of the past. There I sought to tell my stories about myself, the world I inhabited and show how these were social constructions that have influenced my perspectives and shaped my meanings and values.

There is a strong argument, which says that it is important to acknowledge personal experience, in terms of your location in society, as a lens through which you make sense

of the world and reshape existing knowledge. Also, looking at the personal within a wider context reveals some of the strengths and weaknesses, which any individual may bring to negotiations within the research process. I, therefore, asked myself what I was bringing to my research. How did my experiences influence my research interests? Is there a professional power behind which the individual researcher can hide? As I considered my professional power I became interested in the relationship between knowledge and power, how my knowledge became constructed, what type of knowledge did I value? How do I use my knowledge to empower black people to change? As a black social scientist I am often forced to recognise sociological knowledge to make it work for my experience. For me, it is black peoples' direct experience of the everyday world that is the necessary starting point for developing an alternative knowledge. The same argument could be applied to other oppressed or marginalised groups. So what was my direct experiencing of my everyday world?

I believe that the inclusion of autobiographies in the research text is one way in which the researcher cannot hide and their direct experiences can be revealed, as autobiographical writing offers the researcher an opportunity to write the whole context of her research life. Molloy (1991) notes that autobiography "is always a representation, that is, a retelling, since the life to which it is supposedly refers is already a kind of narrative construct. Life is always, necessarily, a tale" (p.5). The retelling of a life through autobiographical writing is another method of creating field texts that capture "a tension between self and others, of generating a reflection on the fluctuating place of the subject within its community"(p.9). I was, therefore, interested in constructing my autobiography as a way of fleshing out the research and as an aid to understanding the range of experiences, which contribute to my development. My aim is to reveal, describe, and interpret my past experience in order to illuminate the present and make manifest the potentials of the future.

Like many people, especially black people and women, I can't represent my life in a linear way, but more as a mosaic or patchwork of experiences and understandings picked up and added to or picked up and dropped, or picked up later, with certain themes running through. Also, it is possible to make sense of this patchwork in different ways. I can make sense as a black woman, as an activist, as an academic, as a researcher/writer, as a learner, as a member of a particular generation, as a mother. I will use some, not all, of these identities here. One obvious place to begin is with my education. In particular, I asked

How has my schooling shaped my ideology about teaching, learning, writing, knowledge and education?

I was born in the beautiful, Caribbean Island of Grenada, in a working class family. I lived in Grenada until the age of twelve, going on thirteen, so that all of my primary education and the first year of my secondary education took place there. I went to school at a very early age. From age seven upwards was a significant time in my life. I remember being selected by the headmaster to be tutored and groomed for taking the island scholarship examinations. This was equivalent to the 11+ exam and he started the process early with children like me, whom he considered to be bright enough. As a result I felt privileged, special and fortunate, and those feelings have run through various aspects of my life. I remember, as a child, enjoying the attention and the specialness that being selected brought with it. It also brought with it high visibility, being in the public view and having a high profile in the school. These certainly have continued to be themes in my life.

My tutoring was very formal and traditionally english. Knowledge was shared in ways that reinscribed colonialism and domination (hooks, 1994). Like most colonial countries the stress was on what Heron (1992) refers to as "propositional knowledge". Heron describes this as knowing in conceptual terms; we learn to master concepts and knowledge by descriptions of an entity, place, process or thing. This type of knowledge is expressed in statements, theories and formulas. That was the valued form of knowing in my school. As pupils, we were recipients of packaged knowledge, transferred to us by our teachers. The teacher stood at the front of the class with a long stick, pointing to the blackboard whilst he imparted the knowledge. We did not have the economic means to purchase books in abundance so as pupils we had to share. Therefore, there was a heavy reliance on getting the information from the blackboard. This process Freire (1978) argues reduces us to "mere "incidents" of the "educational" action of the educators" (p.43).

Vaill (1996) calls the model of teaching and learning I was subjected to *institutional learning*. I was 'other directed' in the sense that my attention was directed to issues and subjects, which were outside of myself, that were defined by authority figures, particularly the headmaster. I was encouraged to expect that the teacher would provide clear relevance of the material to be learned. This was particularly encouraged among scholarship pupils, as the grooming had to relate to the material needed for passing. In that way, learning was goal orientated (Vaill,1996). There was an assumption that the learner would value the reward, and I did.

I valued the potential of the publicity and, in turn, 'specialness' that attaining an island scholarship brought. Consequently, I wanted to please those in control by working extra hard to possess new knowledge in volume in order to get the right answers. This process Freire (1978) refers to as the "banking system" of education, in which I engaged in an acceleration of the process of learning that was about "transferring " of knowledge because "there was no time to lose". I read books, which presented knowledge which was finished, already concluded. Nearing the time for scholarship examinations the teachers would also accelerate the process and engaged in transferring knowledge as if the school was a market place. They became specialists who sold knowledge to learners who purchased and "consumed" the knowledge (Freire, 1978). They did not engage in the dynamic nature of knowledge and they did not encourage dialogue. Whatever was taught had to be comprehended and processed very quickly. There was little attention paid to lengthy explanations to ensure understanding. There was an assumption that if you were bright then you should be able to grasp information at a fast rate and be able to retrieve it when needed at the same rate.

What did it cost me to learn in those ways?

I found the experience a lonely and painful one. There was a price to pay for wanting to be a high achiever. I became nervous and stressed because my thinking was dominated by the standards of the system and became fearful and obsessive about my performance in the learning situation. The fear led to feats of intense studying. I suffered a lonely life of learning that was a relatively private process. The loneliness was compounded by the competition that was introduced in the classroom by the headmaster, who instigated competition between another boy and myself. In our normal class, at examination or assessment time, we competed for first or second place. It was on the basis of these results that we would be selected to join the 'special' group which was groomed for their scholarship and what were considered to be common entrance examinations into high schools, the equivalent of grammar schools. My real worth was tested during these highly competitive years.

Vaill argues that institutional learning assumes that competition among learners is good for learning. This produces feelings of inferiority in the learner. I remembered feeling disempowered at times, that I was not bright enough, certainly not as clever as the others were in that scholarship group. Some of us internalised such oppression which resulted in self-depreciation so that we believed we knew nothing, were good for nothing, were incapable of learning and became convinced that we were not good enough. We called ourselves ignorant and said that the teacher was the only one who had the knowledge

and to whom we should listen. I found it difficult to stay with knowing that I too "knew things" I had learned in my relationship with the world and with others. I distrusted myself and lacked confidence in my knowing. This particular experience may have some connections with a present theme in my life of feeling 'not good enough' when I write for academic purposes.

As a consequence of these feelings of disempowerment and lack of confidence, I behaved tentatively, and with caution and became more and more dependent on those in authority. I suppressed the here-and-now feelings in anticipation of future successes. Vaill (1996) describes these characteristics as "a person who is not yet an authentic being but is going to try to learn as the means to becoming an authentic being, a real person (p.39). Striving for authenticity has certainly been a theme in my life and I work hard as a teacher to facilitate others to also strive for integrity and authenticity, for authentic representations of their culture. My colonial system of education has contributed to such values.

This colonial system of education could not help but re-produce in children colonial ideology namely that of feeling inferior beings, lacking in all ability and our only solution was to become "white" by learning from "white" books with "white" learning methods and, some of us, becoming "black with white souls". The system was not concerned with authentic representation of the peoples' nationality – our history, culture or language; culture belonged only to the colonisers and this was transmitted through the banking system of education.

Within the banking system of education I was transformed into a 'receiving object', with my thinking and actions controlled and my creativity inhibited. Consequently, until the last five years, I was highly developed in and valued propositional knowledge, paying little attention to the value of presentational knowledge - imagery, stories and other creative ways of presenting knowledge (Heron, 1992). My power was in my ability to theorise. This has in-built contradictions, given that I grew up in a culture that values presentational ways of knowing; the telling of stories and parables. In my personal experience, stories were told at home while propositional learning was the domain of the school. Here was the evidence of white supremacy prevailing in a colonial education system in which a particularly rigid and traditional version of the British educational system dominated in Caribbean schools. The two different forms of knowing were kept separate.

How did that educational and colonial ideology prevailed in my secondary education and how did I cope?

A significant time in my early education was when I migrated to Britain at the age of twelve to live with two parents and my experiences of racism in the British education system. My first real encounter of racism was at my interview for secondary school. I was given a spelling and mental arithmetic test by the headmistress as a means of allocating me to a stream. I answered all the questions correctly, but was later told that she would try me out in the 'B' stream to see how I coped. I remembered feeling unhappy about it but my parents did not question the decision. I suppose my parents were grateful that I was accepted in a school. Like most Caribbean parents at the time, they were unfamiliar with the education system. They were also coming from an experience in the Caribbean where the teachers were always considered to be right. Teachers, there, were given the greatest amount of respect for their professional status; they were believed and trusted. My parents, like many other Caribbean parents at the time, extended that same unquestionable trust to this headmistress and this system.

I settled in the secondary modern school, after that day of extreme disappointment. There I was, having always been told I was a clever child and having been treated with respect (selected for one of the top schools on the Island), a big fish in a small pond, having to accept that here in Britain I was a small fish in a big pond. I was being told that I was not bright enough for the 'A' stream. I was very hurt. I suppressed my tears that day and began to believe that I was not good enough. I worked hard for two years in the 'B" stream and did well both in class work and in examinations. My performance and achievement pattern remained the same as before coming to Britain. I worked hard believing that at the end of the second year my abilities would become evident and I would be moved up to the 'A' stream. But that was not to be. Instead, I was subjected to further experiences of racism.

Halfway through the second year, my performance in examinations was outstanding in many of the subjects, so I went to the form mistress and asked whether I was going to move to the higher stream. She told me (and I shall always remember those words) that I needed to stay in the 'B' stream to set an example and pace for others less able, for others to aspire to and feel motivated by. I was further disappointed. Yet again my true abilities were not acknowledged or recognised.

These experiences were set against a culture in the school which was influenced by the headmistress, who was renowned for being racist and treating black girls less favourably. Black children were not encouraged to take GCE merely the lower level CSE, and were not allocated senior positions in the school such as those of head girl or prefect. Our way of coping and staying motivated in the face of what was a racist regime, was to form informal friendship networks which were based on some similarities and to form a support group in which we asserted our black identity and raised our awareness on black issues. Most of us had similar backgrounds, having come from the Caribbean to join hardworking parents who had a goal, purpose and function. For some their intentions were economic, making money and returning to their country of origin. Some of us had had similar schooling experiences in the Caribbean, where the emphasis was on the ability to store and retrieve information when needed. Others had had primary school experiences in Britain. Nevertheless, we all shared in common the importance of education and schooling and we all wanted to do well and were encouraged in this by our families.

The strategy of forming a black group and asserting our identity was supported by global events, coupled with a change in leadership in the school. Both the head and deputy head changed and these gave us opportunities for learning that we did not experience before including taking 'O' and 'A' levels. This was all happening during the time of the Civil rights Movement when black people in America and, to some extent, in Britain as well, were asserting their black identity. I remembered the English teacher introducing into her English lesson tape recordings of Malcolm X and speeches by George Jackson and the class having political discussions. A range of books and pamphlets pertaining to oppression was introduced. The teacher exposed us to a new experience, a new way of learning and, more importantly, she acknowledged and valued our experiences as black girls and allowed these experiences to be expressed in the classroom. Our presence was felt and we were engaged in consciousness raising and the development of a self-definition, which encompassed a positive black identity.

This was an important time in my education in terms of confidence in my abilities and my interest in world issues and oppression. It began with my introduction to 'O' level sociology and continued with the 'A' level and, more importantly, with what I was learning about the history of the British Empire. Here, my understanding of colonialism and slavery developed. The history teacher and sociology teachers were women who were deeply interested in what they were teaching as well as being good teachers. They brought the subjects alive in the room and they acknowledged that we were a part of the events and experiences that were being talked about. The subjects were taught from a

socio-political standpoint and with passion. I was fully engaged in this teaching with my mind, body and spirit. I learnt then, in the words of bell hooks, that "no education is politically neutral".

What part did my experiences of higher education play in furthering this ideology?

Unfortunately, during my first-degree studies I was subjected to a traditional form of higher education in which the prevailing pedagogical model was authoritarian and hierarchical. The voice of the lecturers was the transmitter of knowledge. The four years were spent in lectures and seminars and little attention was paid to experiential and holistic learning. Personal experiences were devalued; there was no room for them in seminar discussions. There were strict rules about the inclusion of the "personal" in essay writing. I began then to distance myself from my writing.

My most significant experience was my introduction to a Marxist perspective. I was exposed to some good thinkers and lecturers and to the rich and developing ideas in the early 70's. I was intellectually eager and thirsty for new ideas. I learned about the class struggle and I had to make sense of the debate as part of a world I experienced on that level but not on the level of race. Race linked to class was missing.

These were formative and important years. First of all Marxism was the first theory that I learned in an academic way. I later went on to learn about it in a non-academic way, through my political activities. I learned it not as a set of abstract ideas but as a theory which applied both to history and to the everyday events around me; not only the political events but the social, cultural and creative events too. It seemed to allow me to make sense of so much for which, up till then, I had only discrete and partially absorbed understandings. It also gave me the conceptual tools to evaluate much (though not all) as I came to realise, of life.

Like some of that generation of immigrant children I was the first in my family to experience higher education. I felt I had to be a role model for the others in my family to follow. I was also grateful for the investment that my family had made in my education so far, making huge sacrifices. Looking around me, and witnessing the poverty and oppression black people were subjected to, I decided that education was my way out. I chose to further my knowledge in order to equip myself at a theoretical and academic level to be more effective in bringing about change. I elected to do a part-time Masters degree course in Organisational Behaviour at Birkbeck College. I was the only black

person and it was here that I developed, further, my interest in feminism and its relevance to black women. I did this with the support of my tutor who was a white feminist. Practically, personally and politically, feminism reached parts that other theories couldn't. Feminist writings and activities also sharpened my understanding of social welfare issues, social justice, oppression of women and of other marginalised groups in society.

My tutor took an interest in my work and supported me in bringing my voice into a large room full of white, male managers, businessmen and a handful of white, female personnel officers. In my written work, she encouraged me to integrate my experiences as a black woman of working with the black women. It was also about that time that I developed an interest in becoming a teacher and trainer in my own right.

Reflecting on my experiences of secondary and higher education, I recognised themes that emerged and became developed in my later life. One such theme is valuing black support groups and consciousness raising groups as a useful strategy for coping with racism and valuing my ongoing involvement in them, either as a direct participant or as a group consultant, helping to make them work. My secondary education and higher education have also been of great significance in my later life because of the self-development, which took place then and my abiding interest in teaching and learning across traditional boundaries. Teachers, who had the courage to integrate politics in their teaching, transform their classroom and not confine me to my place in an academic assembly line, have inspired me. These teachers responded to the uniqueness of the students and so affirmed my value as a unique human being and that has contributed to my valuing of other forms of knowledge, subjective knowledge, knowledge that is gained from critical subjectivity. It has informed my interest in the politics of learning, which involves working with experiences, which may emerge as a result of our identity, and position in society.

What other influences shaped my thinking about oppression emanating from racism and sexism?

Here, I turn to some of my work and my experiences as a community/political activist. I took jobs which afforded me the opportunity to develop further my political interest in attempting to change structural inequalities. My first job was with Hackney Council for Racial Equality as a Community Relations Officer, where my campaigning activities and community action programmes began in, what was considered, a highly deprived inner city borough.

I continued to work with the Community Relations Council, as it was about the only organisation that was actively campaigning against the atrocities against black people. It was also seen to be trying to meet our needs and make a change. I wanted to continue to contribute to bring about some change and I took a job in Lambeth, a densely populated inner city borough, with a large black population. This job provided me with knowledge and experience of women's' issues and, in particular, black women's issues. It was then that my interest in feminism deepened and I initiated, set up and ran a project for black, single parents. This exposed to me the lack of public provision to meet the needs of black, single parents who were my main clients. I found, as well, that the poverty, isolation and poor housing conditions that some of their children were subjected to was shocking, intolerable and affecting their mental health. They were seeing themselves as victims and in some ways they were victims.

I wanted to help them to see themselves as agents in their lives and not victims. So, together, we mounted campaigns against the then Department of Health and Social Security and the Housing Department. This resulted in the Health Department and Housing Department injecting resources into a housing project, which I set up for young, single parents and teenage, pregnant girls as a semi-independent home and support service.

Political Activist: Campaigning

During that time and for most of the1980's, I, along with many other black women, was involved in revolutionary politics. Our lives were a seamless web of intensely dedicated activities and duties for 'the cause'- the fight against racism. Our work, our politics, our leisure all overlapped to become scarcely distinguishable from each other. The routines of working late, preparing radical pamphlets and leaflets on race issues - education, housing, immigration laws - for distribution on council estates, giving seminars, running workshops, organising rallies and protest marches all merged into one. We were driven by certainty that we were contributing towards socially transforming history. We may not have been the central agents of this, for these were the organised black groups, but we were prepared to put all our intellectual and organisational skills (which were considerable) to, as we believed, their benefit.

My involvement in feminist and black politics helped me to help black women to transform their lives. I became aware not only of the centrality of welfare provision in black women's lives but also of how we needed to take seriously peoples' experiences of the way the state and welfare agencies treated us as black women.

Feminist analysis and anti-racist campaigns threw new light on how I understood the welfare state because they revealed some of the sexist and racist underpinnings of provisions. They also exposed the hidden contribution women and black people were making to the welfare state through caring and caring work.

There were also significant differences in the way women experienced their oppression and I was part of the challenge to the so-called 'false universalism' of sisterhood. It was clear that the nature of the contradictions of welfare were different for different groups of women and these needed spelling out.

I was also one of the radical thinkers, who took the essentialist standpoint in terms of black or ethnic or cultural arguments about separate education and welfare provisions. One of the intellectual responses to this has been to develop social construction theories; this applies to other areas like age, disability and sexual orientation. The danger here is that you can end up actually failing to acknowledge biological/physical/cultural differences when they do have significance. Later, my position shifted from essentialism; I felt it was important not to deny differences but rather to emphasise that their significance is conditional upon the social and material conditions in which they exist. Also, once you begin to explore questions of 'race' and racism in relation to welfare development, you get into a different analytical ball-game, because you need to understand welfare in terms of the changing nature of imperialism and the international movement of migrant labour.

Building Alternative Structures:
Another important influence on me in the 1980's was my involvement in a training centre (Charlton Training Centre) where I was a Training Manager. This was a centre with a difference, which made a difference. This large skill centre was set up to provide manual and other skills training for groups who were experiencing structural oppression. We brought under one umbrella, groups representing black people, women, the disabled, older people and gay and lesbian people. We were a mixed group of both black and white people. This was a fascinating experience which increased my desire to contribute towards political change.

In the course of trying to get new forms of provision established, I became more committed to the idea that relationships between users and providers or working structures did not have to be hierarchical and bureaucratic. I, therefore, set about the search for alternative structures of working that would allow for more equal opportunities. I designed a quasi-co-operative structure. Being part of the voluntary sector I was

afforded the flexibility to experiment. This was definitely the biggest challenge of my work life, because here I really understood the complexities of how power operated. We were challenging all the 'isms', and that came with its problems.

Thompson (1993) looks at three different levels when analysing power and oppression: the 'P' level, which stands for personal, the 'C' for cultural and the 'S' for structural. At the Centre, we took on the responsibility of being aware of inequality, discrimination and oppression at all three levels. On the personal level, we paid attention to the potential for prejudice; on the cultural level, we had to be aware of shared ways of seeing, thinking and doing, and of the differences between these; on the structural level we had to become aware of the impact of broader social forces and policies on oppression. This was a tough responsibility and resulted in problems, at times, which centred on naming and managing differences.

For some, it was difficult to name differences in their identity groups. On an inter-group level they were able to be aware of differences but on an intra-group level it proved more difficult. What makes it difficult to name differences? The tendency for people to search for commonalties is very strong and there is a desire to feel connected. But this desire can have adverse consequences if it leads to a 'colour blind' approach, where differences are ignored. In these circumstances, people who are seen as members of an out–group are assimilated, but the cost of such assimilation is dear and includes the loss of social identities. It is, therefore, important that differences are named and that the power differentials are recognised.

Placing emphasis on oppression is not without its dangers. Perhaps the most significant of these is the risk of heightening weaknesses at the expense of strengths. This, in itself, can be oppressive and feel patronizing. We needed to guard against naming and valuing differences in a sentimental way.

During our struggles, we also became inward looking and became engaged in what I would describe as hierarchies of oppression. Each identity group had personal and social biographies that were unique to them. Yet there were characteristics of their biographies that made them feel similar to some people and different from others. There were characteristics, which were relatively visible, and ones which were invisible. Some people felt that the groups with the more visible characteristics were the more powerful ones. Members of that group felt they were most oppressed, and it became a competitive game of "which is the most oppressed, the straight black man or the gay white woman?

the older white woman or the young black youth?" Some groups felt that their needs were greater than those of other groups, and at times of scarce resources, competition and anger reigned. In our attempts to provide a safe space for groups who experience multiple oppression we inadvertently created an unsafe space.

Other issues centred on needs, rights and availability of scarce resources. As more and more of these groups gained their voice, developed their skills and confidence, the more they demanded. Some of the demands were unrealistic, others were outside the realm of the project. They felt they had the right to make their demands and they were right. Here was a project that was offering them something they had not had before, something precious "their voice", and they used it. We had to help them to channel that voice into the community. I left thinking you could be, indeed was important to be, an 'ist' with all your heart and soul, but you shouldn't let 'ism' rule you. It might provide the guidelines but it should not rule you.

Coming out of the cold

Towards the mid 80's I came in from the margins, in from the cold, and into mainstream. Mainstream, in this context, meant going into the social fabric of the organisation of society itself and risking being assimilated. I took a job as a Training Officer in a large social services department in an inner city borough, whose population consisted of a fair number of black communities. This local authority was taking initiatives to give black people equal opportunities in their organisation and had a positive action progamme in operation. I ran the programme for secondment into professional training, which was part of the positive action initiative. I gave opportunities to mature, unqualified social workers, who were mainly women, and to black staff to get professional training as social workers. I had opportunities, with this work, to interact with universities and colleges of higher education.

These experiences, as it turned out, were my passport to my present job. Armed with training, and teaching skills and knowledge gained from direct practice as a trainer, manager and community social worker and an academic background in Organisations and Management I went deeper into mainstream in 1987 moving into the social fabric of higher education. I began my life as a social work lecturer with West London Institute of Higher Education - WLIHE (now called Brunel University College). This resulted in me struggling with an assimilative process and I am still engaged with the struggle twelve years later.

I chose WLIHE because it was seen to be making efforts to challenge racism. It had an 'access' course, which gave opportunities to black people who were previously disadvantaged by the education system, to develop educational skills to gain entry to our social work course. I liked its ideology, which supported and gave opportunities to mature, women and black students. That complemented my ideology and I felt it would give me an opportunity to further my work as a political change agent. It was no accident that I chose to teach on a social work course with a large black student population, and my political commitment to challenging oppression and discrimination, to bringing about opportunities for change on that course continues.

What sense can I make of my experiences of education and work and political activities in relation to my personal and professional identity and my research?

On reflection, I can see that I have chosen jobs which have been diverse and have involved me in progressive politics. I stayed close to the margin by concentrating on work with people whom society kept in the margin. I realized the limitations and constraints of being in the margin and the jobs in Lambeth Social Services and WLIHE brought me into mainstream. They also offered opportunities for experiencing working with diversity in mainstream settings.

I have always been a change agent engaged in political change at all levels. I sought to empower at the level of activity, concentrating on structural, political action. In my later years, and presently, I am engaged in teaching and learning that views the personal as political - the integration of self, consciousness raising/self-knowledge/self-definition as well as change at the macro level. This, integration is evident from the fact that I have since trained as a psychotherapist. This in some ways, is a change in direction, but complementary to the skills and experience I already possess to enable the integration of the inner and outer world. My research interest, in exploring the experiences of black students and professionals in welfare organisations, also seeks to do so. My own sense of my personal power has come via these routes and I believe that it is essential that change occur at all levels for true empowerment.

My hope is to share my ways of coping, knowing, thriving and surviving with those black students and professionals I come in contact with. It is evident to me, from my biography and experiences of teaching black students, that there are some similarities in experiences between a number of black students and myself in terms of our relationship to education. I, too, look for safety, look for my presence to be acknowledged, have

issues about being told I am not good enough. Nevertheless, I have gone on to take up opportunities where they existed, to recognise support from a variety of quarters when it was offered, and to transform some of my negative experiences into positives. Part of that transformation came about as a consequence of personal work on an intrapsychic level to help heal the damage done to my psyche (hooks 1994).

As an intellectual, I operate from a political base of struggle gained through my experiences of schooling in Britain and my political activity in the black community, work with black single parents, the black elderly, black students and professionals in welfare organisations. The range of experiences have sought to inform my relationship, according to bell hooks "to those black people who have not had access to ways of knowing shared in locations of privilege" (hooks 1994).

My relationship to my research has been informed by these experiences. My position, in epistemological terms, reveals that my early education valued 'facts' and 'proofs' and was laced with positivist views of life and the world. I emerged into adulthood with an element of naïve certainty, arising from a combination of youthful enthusiasm and some political learning, gained at secondary school. As I began working and relating as an adult, immutable, context-free absolutes and notions of 'truth' looked increasingly suspect. The positivism that underpinned much of my early life experience no longer explained how I subsequently perceived things to be.

Disavowing empiricism in favour of socially constructed, relative realities was given further impetus as a direct result of my work experience, which only served to demonstrate the complex and political contextuality of people's lives. In terms of paradigm, the constructivist/critical theorists' and feminists' position more closely matches my current view of how the world might be. The emphasis those positions place on values and ethics in the research process felt especially appropriate to researching work with black people, about our lives.

Denzin and Lincoln (1994) exhort novice inquirers who intend rooting their work in this paradigm to "understand the social, political, cultural, economic, ethnic and gender history and structure that serve as the surround for their inquiries, and to incorporate the values of altruism and empowerment in their work" (p115)

This advice points to the structural inequalities extant in our society which result in oppression and discrimination and presents the researcher with a challenge to

acknowledge and deal with the power issues that inevitably arise in the research process. It seemed to me, then, that the research approach I wished to take was not one of searching for objective, immutable truth. But rather an approach that seeks some understanding of human experience in a manner that acknowledges my part in that process and that recognises the relative and constructed nature of reality.

In the last five years, since I have been engaged with my research, I have realised how conscious I have become of the ways in which I use my power as a teacher and facilitator. I have also developed personally, as a black woman, in relation to my ownership and use of power. Working with the inquiry groups in my research has brought into sharp focus my struggle to give up power. I have asked questions, which has resulted in inquiries into my practice in the classroom and a summary of the result is revealed in Chapter 11 of this thesis.

Conclusion

So what does all this information tell us? As I stand back and look at it, the basic material is that of a black woman doing a Ph.D., who was married and is now a single parent with one teenage daughter; a practitioner, who acquired new skills and expertise and developed some confidence, goes from working on the margins as a political activist into the mainstream as a lecturer in a university. What power does this researcher have, this person who, on the whole, is very powerful? While I may not feel powerful at times, I do recognise that power is relative and that in different situations I am perceived in different ways.

At a personal level, those aspects of diversity with which I am familiar, age, sex, class, race and ethnicity and education, all have a part to play, especially when it comes to the relationship between status, skills and expertise. For my own part, as it has been my education, my political activities as a change agent, the importance attached to working in a university and the development of expertise which have been powerful tools.

Remembering this past, I am struck by my passionate commitment to a vision of social transformation, rooted in a fundamental belief in social justice. My notion of social change was not fancy. There was no post-modern, political theory shaping my actions. I was trying to assist people to change their everyday lives so that their values and habits of being would reflect a commitment to freedom. My major concerns then and now is ending racism and sexism.

In retrospect, I see that in the last few years I have been committed to freedom and justice for all, even though the way I lived out some of my values may have maintained the culture of domination. Therefore I had to re-examine my values and try to promote a vision of freedom. I also had to look at ways in which I use my strength to dominate rather than to empower and to see strength in vulnerability. I had to broaden my perspective in order to live differently and assist others to live differently.

The broadening of my perspective now includes theoretical ideas that have informed my worldview, my practice and my research. In the next chapter I shall present some of the ideas that shaped my thinking in the research.

Chapter 2

Choosing Theoretical and Conceptual Frameworks for Understanding Black Professionals' and Black Students' Experiences

Introduction

My aim in this chapter is to offer the foundations on which I base my analysis, plans and actions. The discussion of theory is not a theoretical exercise in itself but rather a means of clarifying theoretical issues with a view to guiding and informing practice. I outline a framework that highlights the interconnectedness of the macro and micro in explicating the racialised experiences of black social work professionals and students. In this regard, the chapter covers a range of important issues and introduces a number of theoretical concepts relating to human service work from which I actively chose. I use existing and emerging theoretical and conceptual frameworks which provided me with a more appropriate base for my analysis and sensemaking. Before outlining the ideas I have chosen to present fully below, I want to give the reader a flavour of the number of other influences that may be traced in the work in this thesis such as a gestalt perspective, hermeneutics perspective a feminist perspective and structuration theory.

Gestalt perspective

The reader will note traces of gestalt theory and its influences of field theory and phenomenological method of investigation in my work. One of the most important themes of gestalt theory is that the whole is greater than, and different from, the sum of the component parts. A Gestalt wholistic approach affirms the complexity of persons and events within a 'whole making' universe. Therefore, the insistence in gestalt theory, upon the fact that the individual cannot be understood in isolation, but only as part of a whole, means that in theory we have the capacity to take into account and attend to black professionals and black students historical - historical background and social context and social perspectives and cultural differences.

The gestalt approach is a form of phenomenological field theory in that gestalt shares the concerns of phenomenology, which are to study the multiple possibilities of a given field or situation as it is experienced subjectively by the people co-creating it at any moment in time. It shares the phenomenological promise that it is not possible to establish a single objective or absolute truth but only to be open to a multiplicity of subjective interpretations

of reality, for each of us experiences a uniquely interpreted reality, because people form highly individual impressions of situations and endow events with subjective meaning.

This gestalt approach stresses that we try to avoid unwarily projecting our perspectives on to others and instead hold an exploratory dialogue in which we investigate or enter into their world, in order to uncover their unique sense of the meaning of the events in their life. That idea influenced my way of working with the participants in this research. The phenomenological method offered me a practical way of setting aside my own inevitably limited perspectives and opened me up to a wide range of alternative perspectives of the research field. To use the phenomenological method, we bracket previous assumptions, track and describe immediate experience, equalise or treat all aspects of the field as initially equally significant and we inquire. With such an influence I adopted an attitude of sustained inquiry throughout the whole of my research and the writing of the thesis. I was able to allow myself to explore all aspects of the research field, paying as much attention to what is in the background of the field as to what is currently in focus of figure – to what is missing as well as to what is present. It also helped me to assist participants to also explore all aspects of their functions and interactions, including the ways in which they interpret their life circumstances, as our experiences are grounded in our history, which is influenced by our culture and our place in it. These factors need to be considered in our interpretations, as is also suggested modern hermeneutics.

Hermeneutics perspective

The standpoint of modern hermeneutics is that all understanding is hermeneutical, taking place in time, history and culture. Therefore, our understanding is a historical process which is influenced by our culture and our place in it. So, as black professionals and black students, we cannot just transcend the experiences, viewpoints and prejudgments that we bring to our understanding, as these are grounded and determined by culture. Therefore, if we cannot transcend our historical position or get rid of our prejudgments then the problem for our understanding is how we distinguish between 'legitimate' prejudgments, and those which get in the way of our understanding (Rowan, 1991).

Access to our past offers opportunities for opening up to new possibilities and for interpreting our positions in the light of present understanding of our positions as black students and professionals. By re-interpreting these positions it offers possibilities for different relationships. This might mean a shift from an 'objective' understanding of

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interpretation, which is unattainable and meaningless, to an interpretation that is intersubjectively valid for all who share the same world.

Feminists, for example, are reinterpreting the position of women in history and culture in the light of their present understanding of the position of women to gain new possibilities. Black feminists, such as bell hooks who have been influenced by the work of Paulo Freire, have suggested ways in which black people could re-interpret history and gain new meanings.

Feminist perspective

The development of my thinking has been greatly influenced by the work of bell hooks and Paulo Freire. I was particularly influenced by their ways of thinking about social justice, liberation and the role of education in the struggle for liberation. I have been interested in their ideas about oppressed/marginalised groups, the way they question deeply and profoundly the politics of domination, the impact of white, male supremacy, class exploitation and domestic colonialisation that hooks so often challenge.

Other feminists, like hooks, have attempted to develop feminist thinking by building on Freire's work. Both Freirean and Feminist pedagogy rest on visions of transformation; they share common assumptions concerning oppression, consciousness and historical change. Both "assert the existence of oppression in people's material conditions of existence and as a part of consciousness...(which contains within it a critical capacity)....and both see human beings as subjects and actors in history" (Weiler 1991, p.450).

Feminists have been critical of the abstract quality of Freire's use of terms such as 'humanisation', ignoring particular meanings imbued by women and men, and black and white people, for example. He leaves unaddressed the forms of oppression experienced by different actors, by his use of universal categories, without considering the varying experiences and definitions of different groups. Also the tensions and complexities of oppression across and within race, gender, sexuality, are not taken into account.

Nevertheless, both the works of Freire's and of feminists' offered me a way of thinking and a political language to articulate the experiences of black professionals and, black students. Particularly black feminists such as Lorde (1984) Hill Collins (1990) and already mentioned, hooks (1984, 1989) who have insisted on the interconnectednes of gender, race, class and sexuality for understanding and researching women's

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oppression. Hill Collins has attempted to describe Afrocentric feminist epistemology, emphasising the "ongoing interplay between black women's oppression and black women's activism (p.237). Although she is critical of standpoint feminism, she nevertheless emphasises black women's experience as central to an understanding of women's oppression. hooks offers a global vision connecting feminist struggle with struggle against all domination. A unique contribution of feminist thinking has been the exposing of the power and centrality of masculinity in the social construction of legitimated knowledge. I have used this thought to challenge the assumption of the 'male' and 'white' as norm in research language for example, and raise questions about the use of language in the subordination of black professionals and black students.

Freirean and black feminist work have also offered me a way of articulating my own experience and life process as an educator and social activist. I have been challenged to think deeply about the construction of identity in resistance, for example. Working with the concept of identity I have been influenced by the work of post modernists and, in particular, the work of a black post modernist, Stuart Hall, whose work I shall later mention. Identity is a social construct, owing much to the interaction between structure and agency according to structuration theorists.

Structuration Theory

Giddens (1991) suggests that identity is continually forged in and by social interactions rather than predetermined by biological or other factors. In this respect, the micro-level process of identity formation and maintenance closely parallels the macro-level processes involved in the reproduction of social structures and relations. In this way, structuration theory is an attempt to bring the two sets of factors - individual and social – together, to understand individual and social factors in relation to each other. Giddens (1984) argues that:

"The basic domain of study of the social sciences, according to the theory of structuration, is neither the experience of the individual actor, nor the existence of any form of societal totality, but social practices ordered across space and time" (p. 2).

Social practices ordered across space and time refer to the actions of individuals and groups understood in their social, cultural and historical context. A key element of this theory, therefore, is the attempt to understand reality in terms of *structure* —the significance of social divisions and other aspects of social organisation – and *agency* –

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the exercise of choice. While many forms of social theory address either structure or agency, structuration theory is characterised by a focus on structure and agency and the ways in which they are intertwined.

In understanding the experiences of black professionals and black students what is needed then is an appreciation of both structure and agency. It is not a matter of *either or*, nor is it an *underemphasising* of the role of agency by concentrating on the social structures to the almost total exclusion of issues of choices, intentions, wishes, fears and aspirations, or an *overemphasising* of the role of agency, failing to recognise the power role of social structure in shaping, enabling and constraining the actions of individuals and groups. Our agency is rooted in the complexities of social systems but is not determined by them. Racism, discrimination and oppression are also imbedded in those social systems.

Therefore, I have also used emerging theories of racism, discrimination and oppression, theories relating to a black perspective, which are still at a relatively early stage in their development, particularly as they apply to the human services. A consideration of critical social theory and narrative theory also helped me to develop an understanding of my research. These are important areas of study as they relate to personal issues and broader socio-political issues. These theories provide a broad conceptual foundation for selecting specific explanations and concepts and I will examine how these theories can be used to guide our understanding of the complexities of black professionals and students experiences.

Critical social Theory

One of the important contributions of critical social theory is that it contextualises the meaning of our lived experience, by locating that experience within a specific historical, economic, and political context. Critical social theory assumes that oppressive social structures are maintained through the influence of political and economic power and legitimated through ideology. These structures have their relevance in historically specific processes, which provide a context for an examination of race or gender or class exploitation. Through a systematic questioning of how ideology or history conceals processes of control, critical social research aims to reveal the nature of exploitative relationships and as a result of this process knowledge is produced which gives insight into structures of oppression. Such knowledge facilitates strategic planning towards emancipation of oppressed groups. Fundamental to the epistemological basis of this

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approach is the belief that knowledge has no (literal) objective status, but attention must be paid to the production of knowledge – the *processural* nature of knowledge.

An important concept in this regard is that of the dialectic of subjectivity and objectivity. This refers to the interaction of the internal world of subjective experience with the external world of nature, social structure and other people. The point to emphasise is that the social reality of black professionals and black students needs to be understood not in abstract terms, as either subjective or objective, but rather in concrete terms, as a perpetual interaction of subjective and objective factors, each influencing the other. At the same time, however, critical approaches claim that critically informed knowledge is more 'true' or more objective than prevailing knowledge systems because it uncovers the hidden aspects of reality around which other kinds of knowledge collude in order to conceal it.

To say that the "personal experience" is the "political experience" underscores one of the basic assumptions of critical theory. Any understanding of our personal narratives would need to include an inquiry into our socio-political and economic position within the social order. Our narratives would need to be viewed with a critical eye to uncover the extent to which the unique reality of our lived experience is shaped by the dominant social and political ideology. So, as well as being interested in the particular narratives and stories of black professionals and black students, the sociocultural and socio-political narratives that construct the contextual realm of possibility from which black professionals and students can select the material and focus for their own narratives is also important.

In critical theory, to understand the meaning of personal narratives is to analyse how the dominant social, political and economic structure facilitates, constrains or oppresses ones sense of identity. Identities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within the past. Our Identities, therefore, are constructed through the relationship of political, social, cultural and historical contingency (Hall 1992). Cultural identities come from somewhere, and have histories. Woodward (1997) states:

"Identity offers much more than an obvious, commonsense way of talking about individuality and community. Principally it provides a way of understanding the interplay between our subjective experience of the world and the cultural and historical settings in which that fragile setting is formed" (p.301).

Some 'post modernists' have been concerned with challenging the objectification of identities by revealing the social forces that attribute fixed identities to others, and by exposing the fragility and complexity of identity. Post modernists argue that identity is not an already accomplished fact, neither is it fixed and unchanging. It should be thought of

as a 'production', which is never complete and always in process of being formed (Hall, 1990). Hall further argues that the interactive nature of racial or gender categories should be recognised as a complex process and a set of factors through which identity is formulated and contested. Constructions of 'race' as of class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity interact, fuse with or displace each other in an ongoing process of confrontation and negotiation (Hall, 1992).

hooks (1991) supports the critique of essentialism by postmodernists, which challenges the notions of universality and static over-determined identity within mass consciousness, because she argues that it can open up new possibilities for the construction of self and the assertion of agency. hooks strongly urges that in the struggle of oppressed and exploited people we make ourselves subjects and assert agency.

In such struggle liberation is attained by first developing a state of "critical consciousness", that is, achieving an awareness of how the social, political and economic ideology constrain our sense of agency and identity (Friere, 1972). Freire stresses the importance of education and social action as two important pillars. Freire's notion of critical pedagogy identifies ways in which traditional education has been 'domesticated' by the dominant order and does not address inequalities. It asserts that marginalised and oppressed groups need 'education for liberation', that is, an opportunity to develop a dynamic understanding informed by critical thought and action, towards the goal of 'critical consciousness', where the person is empowered to "think and act on the conditions around her or him, and relate these conditions to the larger contexts of power in society (Shor 1993, p.32).

How does the social, political and economic ideology constrain black professionals and black students' sense of agency and identity and constrain them from being empowered? In part answer to this question we need to consider: a) the Position and location of black people in British society and their social representation. We would need to consider to what extent and in what ways these social representations construct the experiences of black people and might serve to structure the position of black professionals; and b) the nature of race and racism, its impact and struggles to resist, so we would need to consider concepts such as power and oppression, anti-racism, anti-oppression, adaptation, stress and coping, and empowerment.

Position and Location

Black people in Britain have been consistently portrayed as outside the realm of national culture and outside the national community, moreover, incompatible with it. In Britain's

history, the positioning of black communities is one of exclusion, migrant, 'otherness', not belonging. The implication of this is the exclusion of those who do not belong defines those who do. Amongst those who do are white, male eurocentric subjects who occupies the centres of power. The casting of people different from oneself in a subordinate status is central to the process of 'othering' them (de Beauvoir, 1974, Rutherford, 1992). The 'othering' of individuals or groups withdraws them from the circle of humanity and facilitates the denial of their human, social and political rights (Dominelli, 1998).

The 'Other' is shown to lack any redeeming community traditions or collective voice of historical weight and is reduced to the imagery of the coloniser. Consequently, a politics of difference has emerged which is founded on the exclusion of black communities in Britain from citizenship status and the attribution of fixed identities. This difference marks off the identities of those who are included within a particular belief system from the 'outsiders'. Social control is exercised through producing categories whereby individuals who transgress are relegated to 'outsider' status according to the social system in operation. The identity of the 'outsider' is produced in relation to the 'insider'. One identity is created in relation to another. So, the marking out of this and other differences produces and maintains social order (Woodward, 1997).

Social order is maintained through binary oppositions in the creation of 'insiders' and 'outsiders' as well as through the construction of different categories within the social structure where it is symbolic systems and culture which mediate this classification (Hall, 1997). Therefore, the marking of difference is crucial to the construction of identity positions. Identity, then, is not the opposite of, but depends on, difference (Woodward, 1997).

Hall (1997) argues for a politics of difference which is about an uprooting of traditional approaches to identity formation and allows for freedom and control within communities and social structures. He calls for recognition of difference, but not one which is fixed in the rigidity of binary opposition. Hall suggest that difference can be construed negatively as the exclusion and marginalisation of those who are defined as 'other' or as outsiders. On the other hand difference can be celebrated as a source of diversity, heterogeneity and hybridity, where the recognition of change and difference is seen as enriching. However, we should take heed that in celebrating difference we might be in danger of obscuring the shared economic oppression in which groups are deeply imbedded. That celebration of difference has to take place in a nurturing and enabling environment.

A person's social position, class location and economic status within the overall social structure further determine the sustaining and nurturing resources within ones environment. An enabling environment is one that offers a person the rights of equal opportunity to economic and educational resources (Kilpatrick and Holland, 1995, Taylor, 1997). There are, however, black individuals who are entrapped by power and oppression in environments which are not congruent with fulfilling their human needs and their well being (Kilpatrick and Holland, 1995, Taylor, 1997).

Within an enabling environment are supports that affirm a person's sense of personal power, competence, and self-esteem. Furthermore, an enabling environment can represent a position from which a person can express and affirm social power. An oppressive environment, however, contains elements that rob a person of that self-affirming power. An oppressive environment further blocks a person from those resources needed to acquire that power. Thus people in oppressive environments are people with a vulnerable status – a status of powerlessness. In order to understand such a status of powerlessness, the pervasive nature of power and oppression has to be considered.

Power Discrimination and Oppression

Power is a central feature of the struggle to promote social justice and equality. The very term 'struggle' is a significant one, as it indicates that there are established structures and vested interests that are likely to stand in the way of progress. Power, according to Foucault (1980), is not an absolute entity that people have or do not have. Rather it is the property of the interactions between individuals, groups and institutions. It, therefore, needs to be understood as a relatively fluid entity that is open to constant change and influence.

Promoting equality inevitably involves entering into conflict with the 'powers that be', the dominant social arrangements that help to maintain existing power relations. Foucault (1980) states:

"...there are no relations of power without resistances; the latter are all the more real and effective because they are formed right at the point where relations of power are exercised; resistance to power does not have to come from elsewhere to be real, nor is it inexorably frustrated through being the compatriot of power; hence, like power, resistance is multiple and can be integrated in global strategies (p.142).

Power withheld and abused by dominant groups becomes oppressive power. Therefore, we need to recognise that an understanding of the workings of power is an essential part of challenging injustices, inequality discrimination and oppression.

The concepts of discrimination and oppression denote relationships that are negative and that create a differential power imbalance. Taylor and Baldwin (1991) have conceptualised discrimination in terms of the systematic use of power by some groups, which devalue other less powerful groups on the basis of perceived difference. Such differences can be conceptualised in terms of 'race', ethnic or national origin, religion, age, gender, class, sexuality, or disability. One of the main outcomes of discrimination is oppression. Richie (1996) defines oppression as follows:

"Oppression results from domination and marginalisation, and is both a process and an outcome. Oppression is also discrimination systematically enforced through use of social/economic/political power in such a way that the status quo is maintained and inequality is legitimised in domination". (P.20).

The relationship between discrimination and oppression can, therefore, be seen as largely a causal one: discrimination gives rise to oppression. Consequently, in order to challenge oppression, it is necessary to tackle discrimination. Some of the processes via which discrimination and oppression manifest themselves are through: a) stereotyping, which is not simply a personal prejudice but part of the culture which is 'transmitted' from one generation to the next, thereby proving instrumental in maintaining existing power relations; b) marginalisation, which refers to the ways in which certain groups of people are pushed to the margins of society, and thus excluded from mainstream; c) invisiblisation, which is a process that has much in common with marginalisation but refers specifically to how groups are represented, for example, in language and imagery. The basic idea is that dominant groups are presented to us as being strongly associated with positions of power, status, prestige, and influence, while other groups as rarely, if ever, seen in this light – it is as if they have been rendered invisible; d) infantalisation- that is, ascribing child-like status to an adult, which can be seen as a form of disempowerment, a denial of rights and citizenship; e) dehumanisation – that is, treating people as things. In this way it reinforces power relations by undermining self-esteem and discouraging acts of personal initiatives. The act of dehumanisation reflects and constructs powerlessness. This is by no means an exhaustive list, not that these acts are mutually exclusive; indeed; there is a strong tendency for these processes to interact, combine and reinforce one another.

Black people in British society experience discrimination and oppression in these ways because of their race, which manifests itself in acts of racism. Race, racism, internalised racism and internalised oppression are issues that are central to contemporary discussions of oppression and equality and in this thesis they are central to the discussions, arguments, experiences and body of knowledge presented. These issues are core to some of the reasons for this research and therefore warrant a presentation of the ideas and debates surrounding them. Some of these debates have been amply explored elsewhere (for example, Miles 1989, Mason, 1992). Here, I merely indicate how I have used these concepts in this thesis. I have drawn particularly on the usage proposed by Floya Anthias and Nina Yuval-Davis, whose approach seems to me analytically coherent and practically useful.

Race:

It is impossible to embark on any discussion of 'race' without first drawing attention to the problematic nature of the term, along with others associated with it. Disputes on the topic are legion.

Some commentators, such as Miles, have suggested that 'race' should be dispensed with as an analytic category (Miles, 1982). This is partly because the very use of the term reproduces and gives legitimacy to a distinction that has no status or validity. Thus, an analytic category helps to perpetuate the notion that 'race' is not a meaningful term. Although this may be the case at one level, to deny the significance of 'race' like this also obscures the ways in which it has 'real' effects both in material and representational terms (Anthias, 1990).

'Race' has specific origins and a specific trajectory depending on its geographical and historical meanings. 'Race' does not have a biological validity, for all human beings are members of the same race, *Homosapiens.* However, it is clear that 'race' does have a social power, for it is on the basis of assumed racial differences that human beings are categorised as being of colour or white in Britain.

'Race', as a commonsense usage and understanding, has concentrated on such variables as skin colour, country of origin, religion, nationality and language. It also refers to the idea that human beings can be divided into subgroups which have different origins and are distinguished by biological differences. Such differences can be seen as 'phenotypical' (relating to physical appearances such as skin colour or hair type) or

'genotypical' (relating to underlying genetic differences). So 'race' is a way of constructing differences

"....on the basis of an immutable biological or physiogramic difference which may or may not be seen to be expressed mainly in culture and lifestyle but is always grounded on the separation of human populations by some notion of stock or collective heredity of traits" (Anthias and Yuval-Davis, 1993, p.2).

Within sociology, 'race' is considered a non-scientific category and, for this reason, Miles has consistently argued (1982, 1989) that we should reject the concept altogether. He states that it is an ideological construct; its use only serves to give respectability to discredited racist ideas. But other sociologists have pointed out that all forms of social category (such as class and gender) are constructs; since such constructs inform the way people think and act in relation to others, the effects of 'race' are very real (Cashmore and Troyna 1983, Gilroy, 1987). 'Race' can be viewed as a form of social relationship to which racial meanings are attached by the participants (Mason, 1992). 'Race' is a social category used in reference to divisions within a particular society. Cashmore and Troyna, suggest that 'race' should be seen as a stigmatized identity forced on other people. Similarly, Modood (1988) proposes that 'race' relates to 'mode of oppression', how a group is categorised and subordinated. Omi and Winant (1986) see 'race' as an "unstable and "decentered" complex of social meanings constantly being transformed by political struggle" (p.68).

Bhavnani (1997) argues that the development of 'race' as a spurious 'scientific' category is a consequence of imperialism and colonization. It is this 'scientificism' which informed, (and still informs), prevailing ideologies of biological superiority and inferiority among human beings on the basis of 'race', meaning that there are power inequalities embedded within these categories which thus become historically specific systems of domination. In Bhavnani's words:

"Human beings are located within relationships of subordination and domination and these relationships simultaneously shape, and are shaped by racialised, economic and gendered inequalities. That is ...capitalism is not only a form of class based inequality, but is also patriarchal, sexualised and racially structured"(p31).

She also argues that racialised structuring of capitalism along with analyses of imperialism and colonialism is central to discussions of black people's exploitation and oppression.

Racism

Racism and other discriminatory systems are popularly understood as an individual attitude or belief in the superiority of one class over another. The problem with this definition is that it seats 'racism' in the individual's psychology. The definition becomes problematic in attempts to change 'racists' because the obvious is that "you can't change peoples' attitudes". This way of defining racism stalls debate because of disagreements on how to legislate or punish an "attitude". Psychological definitions and attitudinal descriptions of racism have failed to yield much in the way of 'eliminating' racism. Racism, as individual psychology, fails to achieve resolutions and becomes more puzzling and frustrating for the people trying.

In order to overcome this psychological definition of racism, the classic marxist approach is to see it as an ideology; that is, as a set of ideas which is slanted by the interest of particular groups in society. Dominant forms of ideology are used to justify the status quo and legitimate the power of socially dominant groups. Crucial in this approach is a conception of racism as a form of group dominance. According to Van Dijke (1993), ethnic dominance is understood as power abuse by white groups, that is, as self-interested control over black groups and as a limitation of access to socially valued resources (residence, citizenship, housing, jobs, wealth, education, respect etc.). Such dominance may be defined and described at the macro level of groups and institutions, where it contributes to social inequality, as well as the micro level of everyday (inter) actions, where it manifests itself as "everyday racism" (Essed, 1991). At both levels such relations of dominance also involve socio-cognitive dimensions such as ethnic ideologies and attitudes shared by a group at the macro level, and specific ethnic beliefs of social group members at the micro level. Miles (1989), for example, views racism as a set of ideas, which helps to obscure the reality of class relations. This usage follows one of the key principles of marxian analysis, which is to make a sharp distinction between material reality and ideas.

Using this ideological approach to racism Porter and Catt (1993) defined it and other forms of discrimination as: "ideological systems sustaining communicative acts that intentionally or unintentionally derogate a class of people because of their shared convictions, ancestry, ethnicity, race, origin, gender, and the like". Ideology, for example, builds racial and sexual differences into language and thus influences how our society organises itself to account for such differences. Racism, then, is not an individual logic; rather, it is a socially shared logic that works to promote one group above another.

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Racism as ideology calls one to recognise that racism is socially bound in the fabric of a culture's grammar (Porter and Catt 1993). It becomes, as Habermas (1970, 1984) suggests, a "systematic distortion" in communicative acts. The problem with identifying racism as ideology is that some believe it to be an "excuse" for an individual's discriminatory acts. Certainly, psychological definitions are appealing because they ascribe far more individual free will, that is, one can choose to be or not be a racist, according to the dominant narrative.

Writers such as Anthias and Yuval-Davis (1993) use racism in a wider sense to refer not just to ideas or ideologies but also to behaviour and practices. This is in line with the post-structuralist position which refuses such a sharp distinction between 'words' and things. Miles, however, describes this broader usage of racism as 'conceptual inflation' (1989, p.41). He contends that this usage of the term becomes so comprehensive as to lose its analytic utility and clarity. Almost anything can be described as 'racism'. Perhaps one way to get around this difficulty is simply to specify in each case whether racist ideas, attitudes, or practices are under consideration.

Another debate concerns historical change in the operation of racism. Martin Barker (1981) offered an influential account, which suggested that older forms of scientific racism were being replaced by what he terms 'the new racism'. Scientific racism is the view described earlier that distinct races could be isolated on the basis of biological and genetic differences. However, since the scientific backing for this has been questioned, a new sort of racism has emerged which focuses not on innate differences but on the notion of culture.

The new cultural racism points to the urgency of comprehending racism and notions of race as changing and historically situated. As David Goldberg has pointed out, it is necessary to define race conceptually by looking at what this term signifies at different times (Goldberg, 1992). From this perspective the question of whether 'race' is an ontologically valid concept or otherwise is sidestepped in favour of an interrogation of the ideological quality of racialised subjectivities. The writing on new racism shows how contemporary manifestations of race are coded in a language that aims to circumvent accusations of racism. In the case of new racism race is coded as culture. However, the central feature of these processes is that the qualities of social groups are fixed, made natural, confined within psuedo-biologically defined culturalism (Barker, 1981). What is clear from these writings is that there is a metonymic relationship to racism.

The notion of power is useful to help with the understanding of the integration of the macro and micro dimensions of racism. Power helps to understand racism in terms of the relations between white and black individuals and between some white groups with relatively more and some black groups with relatively less power. From the macro point of view racism only exists as a variant of group power. From the micro point of view racism as group power only exists because it was created and maintained through individuals.

Racism can be an economic, a political, an ideological and a social expression; in other words, 'race' is not a social category, which is empirically defined; rather it is created, reproduced and challenged through economic, political and ideological institutions. So, rather than talking of a shift from one type of racism to another, we need to grasp that many forms of racism coexist; we should be speaking of racisms, rather than racism.

Institutional Racism

Racism is a complex system of power, which shapes the ways in which social relations and practices are actually experienced by black people; institutional racism describes a web of discriminatory policies, practices and procedures which are used systematically to discriminate against black people. Institutional racism is experienced in the routine practices, customs and procedures of British society's institutions with the consequence that black people have poorer jobs, health, housing, education and life-chances than do the white majority, and less influence on the political and economic decisions which affect their lives. Relations and structures of power from which black people have been 'excluded' maintain these practices and customs and black people's interests are not dealt with or acted on with equity. Institutional racism, therefore, is evident when white values and norms are combined with racist procedures, regulations, policies and habits that deny and exclude black people from positions of power and influence in the major institutions of British society. Those beliefs and practices impact on the lives of black professionals and black students.

The impact on black professionals and black students:

The societal and organisational realities of racism and oppression pervade the life experiences of black professionals and black students in social work. For example, in relation to black social work students, structural inequalities in the wider society are maintained and reproduced through the dominant professional discourse in education. Power is inextricably bound up with the relations between skills, knowledge and education which, in turn, is part of and influenced by the wider ideological and political

context of society (Foucault, 1977, 1988). Both structural and historical forces influence the distribution of power in social work education, and the inequalities of the power relationships in the wider world is likely to be reproduced within social work education (Humphries, 1988). Therefore, these structural issues inevitably disadvantage some black students. They have to survive both personal and institutional racism, which also permeates social work courses (Pink, 1991' de Gale, 1991; de Souza, 1991).

For these reasons, strategies for adapting and coping in organisations and in society which black professionals and black students employ are an appropriate concern from an ecological perspective and needs commentary. For many black people the experience of powerlessness becomes a primary theme in their transactions with the environment and it is therefore safe to assume that for some black professionals and some black students the experiences are similar.

Adaptation Stress and Coping

How do black professionals and black students adapt to and cope with life issues and environmental demands? In responding to that question there has to be a recognition that both the self and the environment, are constantly changing at every level (biological, psychological, social, and cultural) and that some people cope by adapting. Adaptation is defined as the capacity to adjust to change. Adaptation is not a static or a reactive state. It is a dynamic process that calls for an ongoing effort to fit the ever-changing condition of environmental demands with a person's needs and aspirations.

Although stress may be debilitating, stressors may call forth hidden capabilities that can be mobilised to ameliorate their impact, that is, the capacity to cope with stress. Coping responses can reduce, eliminate or accelerate stress and successful coping draws on particular personality attributes and untapped resources within the environment. Furthermore, successful coping can enhance self-esteem, competence, autonomy, and problem-solving capacities.

A key to understanding the experiences of black professional and black student is recognising how community, organisations, the interplay of various systems within organisations and the prevailing sociopolitical and economic structures are intricately linked to black professionals' and black students' sense of self, their life opportunities and their overall functioning. How black professionals and black students adapt to complex networks of these multiple systems is crucial.

Black professionals and black students can be perceived as living in a bicultural world (one culture black, the other white) and as a result, they may feel a constant 'push and pull' between the different cultural contexts in which they function. This leads to high stress levels particularly linked to role conflict stressors. Denton's (1990) review also emphasises the importance of these bicultural role stressors and the combined effects of racism and sexism which enhance the "stresses endemic to today's cadre of black professional women" (p447).

The bicultural model (Bell 1990) can be used to explain the pressures and stresses on black professionals and black students generally, as we participate in minority and majority group culture. As black workers, for example, we live in a bicultural world that requires us to pursue and develop our careers in the white world and maintain our personal life within the black community. We are sometimes forced to make choices both by the black community and by white organisations about how we organise our lives culturally. For example, organisations may want us to be integrated or assimilated into the dominant white, male culture in which we are sometimes forced to suppress our racial and ethnic identity so that our positions are very often on the margins.

On the margins we experience isolation, feelings of invisibility and some of us feel we have to deny or abandon our racial identity. The black community on the other hand asks us to stay rooted to its norms, traditions and values and to stay committed to our culture. We are faced, as a result of having to remain emotionally committed to different components of our lives which are sometimes incompatible, with having to manage tensions and possible identity conflicts between these two worlds which is very stressful (Baumeister 1986).

I remain curious as to the range of factors that make black students, who feel oppressed by certain teaching and learning practices, accommodate to and remain subject to such oppression? Perhaps profound anxiety, created by threats from the environment such as are experienced in oppressive relationships and structures, and the impact of felt powerlessness may create resignation, acceptance of the unacceptable and a belief in the futility of action. The more powerlessness is reinforced by teaching, which denies felt experience and choice, and the more teachers expect co-operation or partnership, without addressing the impact of powerlessness, the less students will be empowered. A necessary preliminary process should be engaged in to recognise internalised racism and internalised oppression and address the attributional belief system which supports it.

Internalised Racism/Internalised Oppression:

People who have been oppressed might, consciously or unconsciously, absorb the values and beliefs of their oppressors. This may lead to internalised oppression, whereby members of oppressed groups may come to believe that the stereotypes and misinformation being spread about their group are true (or partly true), so that they may develop low self-esteem or behave in ways that are essentially consistent with their social stereotypes.

Lipsky (1987) argues that "Internalised racism has been the primary means by which we have been forced to perpetuate and "agree" to our own oppression. It has been a major factor preventing us, as black people, from realising and putting into action the tremendous intelligence and powers which in reality we possess". (p.1). She further argues that the distress patterns that are created by oppression and racism from the outside have been played out in two places in which it has seemed "safe" to do so; firstly upon those over whom we have some degree of power or control and secondly upon ourselves through all manner of self invalidation, self-doubt, isolation, fear, feelings of powerlessness and despair. So we turn upon ourselves, upon our families, and upon our own people the distress patterns that result from the racism and oppression of the majority society. Consequently, each of us is potentially both oppressor and oppressed, in that we may have both attributes that carry power and privilege as well as attributes which render us oppressed. A concept of the oppressor within ourselves ("internalised oppressor", as distinct from "internalised oppression" relates closely to Lorde's ideas:

"...we have, built into all of us, old blue prints of expectation and response, old structures of oppression, and these must be altered at the same time as we alter the living conditions which are a result of those structures. For the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house" (Lorde, 1984, p.115).

I agree with Lorde that the living conditions resulting from oppressive and racist structures, as well as our responses, have to be altered. Therefore, the need for anti-racist/anti-oppressive practice and empowerment has to be considered within an oppressive structural and practice context. The practice context in this thesis is social work and is my particular focus here.

Anti-racist/Anti-oppressive Practice

During the 1980's the need to challenge institutional racism in for example, the personal social services and social work education was to some extent recognised by social work

employing authorities and The Central Council for Education and Training in Social Work (CCETSW). In its policy paper 30, CCETSW required that all qualifying social workers should demonstrate 'An awareness of the interrelationship of the processes of structural oppression, race, class and gender' (CCETSW 1991, p.16). Although this statement referred to 'awareness' rather than any particular form of action, it acknowledged the structural and oppressive base of racism. In 1991, CCETSW also set out the *Rules and Requirements for the Diploma in Social Work* which appeared to herald an emphasis on anti-racism and anti-discriminatory practice issues and social workers were expected to demonstrate an awareness of both individual and institutional racism in all aspects of qualifying training.

Anti-racism rests upon a critique of the liberal, pluralist assumption which developed in the 1960's and 1970's and which located racism as the underlying cause of discrimination. Anti-racism invoked a form of social work practice which marked a break from the liberal notion of equal opportunities, and developed an agenda for change which challenged dominant power relations (Denney, 1998). Those who advocate an anti-racist position emphasise black persons' lack of access to powerful white-dominated institutions.

However, some theorists have argued that anti-racism, based as it is in the notion of structural oppressions, presents the 'victims' of exclusion as lacking the capacity to change their own destiny. Ballard (1992) calls for a more relativistic position in order that the nature of racial and ethnic diversity can be best understood. Differing cultures can be effective in the resistance to oppression. Thus, hegemonic ideologies which oppress can be challenged through establishing alternative conceptualisations of reality based on what Ballard refers to as 'mental, 'spiritual', and 'cultural' resistance.

The forces which constrain it do not wholly determine behaviour, according to Ballard. The anti-racist preoccupation with urban proletarianisation does not take sufficient cognisance of the part that differing cultures have played in the 'extraordinary effectiveness' of the resistance to hegemony demonstrated by the 'migrant minorities'. Creative human energy can be effectively utilised to circumvent or resist oppression, thus allowing for emphasis to be placed on anti-oppressive practices.

Anti-oppressive practice is strongly influenced by Marxist sociology and political theory, and by feminist and black social and artistic perspectives (Payne, 1998). Anti-oppressive practice has been debated by a number of writers whose works are informed by differing

perspectives (Thompson, 1993; Clifford, 1994; Braye and Preston-Shoot, 1995; Dalrymple and Burke, 1995; Featherstone and Fawcett, 1995; Dominelli, 1996). Anti-oppressive practice is a dynamic process based on the changing complex patterns of social relations. It is a radical notion in the sense that it seeks a fundamental change in power structures and exploitative relationships which maintain inequality and oppression (Philipson, 1992). Clifford, (1995) informed by the writings of black feminist and other 'non-dominant perspectives', has formulated the following anti-oppressive principles that are empowering:

Social *difference* – social differences arise because of disparities of power between the dominant and dominated groups. *Linking personal and political* – personal biographies are placed within a wider social context and the individual's life situation is viewed in relation to social systems, such as the family, community and organisations. *Power* – power should be taken into account in any analysis of how individuals or groups gain differential access to resources and positions. *Historical and geographical location* – individual life experiences and events are placed within a specific time and place, so that these experiences are given meaning within the context of prevailing ideas, social facts and cultural differences. Reflexivity/mutual involvement – reflexivity is the continual consideration of how values, social difference and power affect the interactions between individuals. These principles relate to each other, interconnecting and overlapping at all times. Working from a perspective which is informed by anti-oppressive principles provides an approach, on a practice level, that will enable the identification of how power is exercised and experienced. Such an approach would address exclusion and powerlessness; address the personal and interpersonal impact of structural inequalities and social constructions that determine the lives of black professionals and black students, for example.

Other writers mirror the concern that anti-racism has become an absolutist form of discourse. Gilroy, in a withering attack on anti-racism, has argued that it fails to locate racism as being at the core of British politics. The 'coat of paint approach' to anti-racism essentially sees racism as being outside social and political life and has dominated local government policies. Gilroy acknowledges that anti-racism is to some extent, intrinsic in the equal opportunity approach. He comments that the anti-racist, 'coat of paint approach' is doubly mistaken in that it fails to recognise, as equal opportunities policies do, that issues relating to social justice and democracy are important weapons in the battle against racism. Anti-racism as currently expressed also reduces and trivialises the rich experience of black life to 'nothing more than a response to racism'. This then leads

towards a reductionist conception of black people as victims. Like Ballard, Gilroy argues that anti-racism mistakenly conflates racial divisions with class divisions. Anti-racism is not redundant but needs to be reconstituted in order to take account of both the criticisms and the complexities of defining racism itself.

Black writers who have emerged during the 1980's have, according to Williams, "a common intellectual concern, which may be summarised as an attempt to give full recognition to the material and ideological ways in which 'race' and racism are experienced and struggled over by people both black and white and as members of a particular class and gender"(Williams 1989, p.100). These writers do not fall into a reductionist trap, in which all inequalities are based upon ramifications of capitalism which ultimately leads to the conflating of race with class. A number of black writers have warned against the dangers of anti-racism becoming such monolithic concept (Singh1992). Black identities are dynamic and constantly changing. 'Solutions' to the problem of racism in social work have been criticised from a black perspective.

Articulating a Black Perspective

Articulating a black perspective presents me with dilemmas, as I do not want to suggest an essentialist or homogeneous notion in terms of a unified perspective or only one perspective. Indeed, the debate on such a perspective is current among black academics and practitioners and the jury is still out on whether there are one or more perspective, whether there is 'a' perspective or 'the' perspective. I have chosen to use 'a' black perspective in this thesis as a strategic essentialism, as emerging sets of ideas, and I have referred to other black writers to help with a definition.

Bandana (1990) made an interesting response to a request to define a black perspective which is relevant to the start of this section. She argues that the same question is rarely directed to white academics; there is no expectation of them to define a white perspective; yet they must have a perspective which relates to them being white. She stated:

"White writers have not had to define a White perspective, as 'White' is accepted as the 'norm'. Definition of Black perspective needs to address this anomaly first...The factors that prescribe a Black perspective have a long history of subjugation and subordination. The circumstances that shape a Black perspective stem from the experience of racism and powerlessness, both past and present. The motivation that energises a Black perspective is rooted to the principle of racial equality and justice (p3).

Other black writers such as Sinclair (1991) in a course/conference paper entitled 'Facilitating Black Self-Development' describes what he refers to as 'the' black perspective as:

The black perspective is an attempt to develop in a collaborative manner, using participative processes to a philosophical base for the black communities, groups and individuals to take action. The black perspective is a shared approach in that its foundation can only exist and be meaningful if it is rooted in the concrete experiences (historical, cultural, political and social) of the people comprising black communities...The black perspective is the collective capacity for black people to define, develop, defend and advance their own political, economic, social education and cultural interests" (p.10, 12).

In both sets of descriptions this perspective represents a set of beliefs, and assumptions and a philosophical orientation, that reflect basic values of black communities as expressed within a British sociocultural and political context. The first premise of this perspective is that a black person's life experiences provide the starting point for building an analytical framework to view, understand, analyse and take action in the real world. An individual's perspective is formulated from the totality of her/his life experiences, informed by history, (personal and societal), culture, politics, sexuality and gender. It is the means through which individuals make sense of their experience, formulate opinions and the base which helps to determine their reactions and behaviour. A black perspective in this context means that the types of issue raised, the priorities selected, the emphasis given, the action taken, the questions asked and the specific angle from which they all arise are determined by a black experience.

A black perspective consists of two inter-related concepts – black and perspective. 'Black' is a term in common usage and I shall present my meaning within this context and within the context of the thesis as a whole. In Britain, Afro-Caribbean and Asian activists adapted the term 'black' as a chosen political identity. The term 'of colour' was used in the same way in America. It has recently been claimed that such umbrella terms conceal the distinct situations of the different groups involved (Modood, 1992). The specific experience of British Asian groups is subsumed into 'black' writings which chiefly express the viewpoint of those of African origin. The usage of the term 'black' has been criticised for its denial of the existence and needs of other cultural groups, and for assigning the label to those who do not necessarily define themselves in this way (Brah, 1992). Although some members of the Afro-Caribbean community, for example, are beginning to acknowledge these difficulties, there is still a tendency to use the term in an homogenising way.

In the context of a black perspective and in this thesis I am using the term 'black' to mean people from the Caribbean, Africa and Asia (Indian sub-continent) who are subjected to and experience racism in Britain. I am using it as a term that embraces people from diverse cultures and geographical locations who have a shared history of colonialism, imperialism and racism. Black is also used as a concept that encompasses the unity of people who have survived a history of exploitation, racist discrimination and are politically committed towards the common goal of struggling against white, supremacist power.

The challenge for any theorist from a black perspective is to correct the (mis) application of theories of human behaviour which are based on a positivistic and eurocentric world view and which are inappropriate for explaining the behaviour of black people in Britain. As a perspective for theory, practice and research, Schiele (1996) views the black perspective as making the following contributions:- a) It promotes an alternative social science paradigm that is reflective of the cultural and political reality of black people; b) it dispels the negative distortions about black people by legitimising and disseminating a historical worldview that resides in the collective memories of black people; and c) it seeks to promote a worldview that facilitates human and societal transformation toward spiritual and humanistic ends.

Schiele, (1994, 1996) Swigonski, (1996) offer these assumptions that underpin a worldview and value system which is believed to reflect, in an archetypal manner, black people's existential mode of "being in the world". These are a few of the assumptions suggested: Human identity is a collective identity rather than an individual identity (i.e., "I am because we are"); the spiritual or nonmaterial component of human beings is just as important and the material components; the "affective" approach to knowledge is epistemologically valid; there is an interconnection of mind, body and spirit; there is a pervasive, experiential and participatory spirituality; there is a phenomenological time (i.e., present oriented) tied to events.

A black perspective and the black professionals/ black students:

A black perspective provides an interpretive frame for understanding the experiences of black professionals and black students'. It provides a cultural space for black professionals and students to speak their voice, to create their own text, and to "make" their own events and history. This effort, on the part of black professionals and students, becomes political when they challenge the dominant metanarratives that valorize the experiences of white professionals and white students' experiences whilst marginalising black professionals' and students' voices.

A black perspective serves a dual purpose in that it provides a template for understanding the unique cultural frame of reference of black professional and black students. This perspective can address the psychological, attitudinal, and expressive patterns unique to black professionals and students that represent their adaptive bahaviour. Of equal importance, a black perspective articulates a value system which should inform theory, practice and research with black people. It is possible for a black perspective to provide a cultural holding environment to protect black professionals and black students from a further deterioration of self-esteem and from a further psychocultural onslaught on the black psyche.

Integration of critical social theory and a black perspective for understanding black professionals and black students

Although there is no singular set of conceptual constructs that can render, in a meaningful manner, the experiences of black professionals and black students, it is possible to say that black professionals and students as a group encounter common social and cultural representations of black people in British society. These frequently negative representations or images give shape and contour to the lived experiences of the black professionals and students. A critical perspective acknowledges that reality is constructed; socially constructed representations of black people can define and constrain them in problematic ways. This perspective therefore, enables us to understand the significance and complexities of the socially constructed identities of black professionals. Together with a black perspective, a critical perspective can also offer a framework for developing intervention strategies that can empower and transform black professionals and students.

Empowerment

Thomas and Pierson (1995) describe empowerment as:

"being concerned with how people may gain collective control over their lives so as to achieve their interests as a group and a method by which to enhance the power of people who lack it" (p.134).

Robert Adams defines empowerment similarly as:

"The process by which individuals, groups and/or communities become able to take control of their circumstances and achieve their goals, thereby being able to work towards maximising the quality of their lives"(Adams, 1990, p.43).

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Central to the notion of empowerment is the potential for social amelioration, a belief in the possibility and value of people working towards a more just and equal society. Fiske (1996) captures this in the following comment, where he identifies a core element of empowerment:

"The people are neither cultural dupes nor silenced victims, but are vital, resilient, varied, contradictory, and, as a constant source of contestation of dominance, are a vital social resource, the only one that can fuel social change" (p.220)

My empowerment approach like Lee (1994) makes connections between social and economic injustice and individual pain and suffering. Using empowerment theory as a unifying framework it presents an integrative, holistic approach to meeting the needs of members of oppressed groups. I believe that people/ clients/students themselves actively work to change the oppressive environment and mitigate the effects of internalised oppression. A side by side stance of teacher and student, worker and client, researcher and participants is needed to release potentialities. Potentialities are the power bases that are developed in all of us when there is 'goodness of fit' between people and environments. By definition, oppressed groups seldom have this 'fit' as injustice stifles human potential.

To change this unfavourable equation, people should examine the forces of oppression, name them, confront them and join together to challenge them as they have been internalised and encountered in external power structures. The greatest potentiality to tap is the power of collectivity, people joining together to act, reflect and act again in the process of praxis fuelled by mutual caring and support.

The assumption about people in this approach is that they are fully capable of solving immediate problems and moving beyond them to analyse institutionalised oppression and the structures that maintain it as well as its effects upon themselves. They are able to strengthen internal resources, work collaboratively in their families, groups and communities to change and empower themselves in order to challenge the very conditions that oppress.

However the concept of empowerment in the context of professional education (and practice), for example, needs to be regarded as problematic. The relation between teacher and student is problematic and warrants attention in the context of empowerment. Empowerment is blunted when it is viewed by professionals as merely

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another form of enabling (Adams 1990), when it is used on students' behalf effectively overlooking professionals' own power struggles. Professional colonisation acts as though empowerment was solely a good professional idea, and denies and discounts students' part in any empowerment process. Anger at such exploitation has been expressed by black writers (REU 1990), exposing how white, social care professionals' draw on the knowledge and experience of black people, which is then presented as 'radical and progressive white thinking'.

Therefore, it is important to be aware of some of the issues involved and that it might be difficult to 'empower' black professionals and students without closely examining the diversity of meaning the term may have and a few points are worth noting here. The first is that black professionals' and black students' own needs to be empowered may not be as strong as the other's need to empower them. Secondly, there is diversity within any professional or student group, which can lead to conflicting needs, to different views of empowerment strategies and solutions. Thirdly, the experience of being empowered and its effects may not be felt until sometime after the actual 'empowering intervention' has taken place.

The ultimate aim of empowerment work goes beyond meeting individual needs for growth and power to empowering communities and developing a strong people. The basic principle of this approach is that 'people empower themselves' through individual empowerment work, group work, research, community action and political knowledge and skills. This approach sees people as capable of praxis: action-reflection-and action, action-in-reflection and dialogue.

Agency

We should not ignore the role of agency in reproducing social structure. Bailey and Hall (1992) recognising the importance of this suggest that black peoples should "...struggle not simply to recover ourselves in past histories but to produce ourselves as new subjects...(black people) are just as much the agents and subjects of (post) modernity as those in the West who try and colonise the modern for themselves" (p.7).

It is through our attempts to empower ourselves that real change will come not in an attempt to soften the power of the oppressor. So, assisting black people to take greater control over their lives can have a significant positive impact on the personal level,

thereby making a contribution on the cultural level and can in turn play at least a small part in undermining discrimination on a structural level.

Our concern as black professionals and black students should be to learn to conceive ourselves as active agents who can make choices so that we can take action to ensure that we have control over what happens to us even within the context of a racist society. We are not objects which are simply acted upon, but subjects who are engaged in an interactive process. So, for example, when we take on the telling of only the negative stories we are perpetuating the mythology of black people as passive objects with no success stories to tell.

Recognising voices

A critical perspective offers us the opportunity to recognise black professionals and black students' voices. Informed by new awareness, black professionals and students can take action against those oppressive structures and articulate in their own "voice" a narrative of self that represents their unique lived experience. hooks (1989) stresses that we should not deny the importance of naming and giving voice to our experience; this is part of the process of politicisation which, she suggests, should be linked to education for critical consciousness and learning about structures that dominate.

Black professionals' and students' voices could be liberated to speak their own reality and need not be constrained to the *metanarrative* for the entire black professionals' and students' group. This perspective also gives clear recognition of how the social realities of racism and oppression can influence the language of black professionals' and students' narratives.

Conclusion

The theoretical perspectives outlined and discussed in this chapter share important points of integration and convergence. Theories of racism, power, discrimination and oppression sets the stage for addressing how the multiple environments, in which black professionals and black students interact and transact, can be supportive or debilitative to their well-being. The black perspective gives attention to an articulation of a culturally sensitive narrative which supports an ethnic and communaly based identity, value and worldview. Finally, the critical constructivist perspective instructs us how to challenge

those dominant narratives that impact on black professionals and black students' well-being.

This chapter has considered some of the broader issues, which have emerged, and have affected black professionals and black students including problems of definition, developments of and challenges to anti-oppressive practices. The impact of these developments has been influential in shaping my research from the standpoint of understanding the context in which black social work professionals and students were operating and what was shaping our experiences.

Some of these theoretical ideas and issues also informed the methodological approach chosen for the research and the range of methods I used, which I shall discuss in the next chapter.

Chapter 3

Choosing Research Approaches

Introduction

In this chapter I discuss my methodological approaches to the research presented in this thesis and give a brief overview of the various cycles of inquiry I engaged in whilst researching, analysing and writing about the experiences of black professionals and black students. In approaching the writing of this chapter I was challenged to find an appropriate form which would reveal the various stages through which the research study passed and which would honour my research activities. I also experienced a struggle to articulate the complexities, concerns, principles and values that underpin the exploration of choosing research approaches. Choosing and arriving at approaches was an emerging process and I chose different methods for different phases of the research.

I shall therefore, present:

- My choice of school for locating the study
- My reasons for rejecting quantitative methods and for choosing qualitative methods
- My choice of methods, action research
- My struggle to conceptualise co-operative inquiry
- My understanding of research epistemology

I have divided the chapter into four parts in order to accommodate these. In **Part 1** I outline a theoretical framework for understanding the research inquiries I engaged in. In **Part 2** I outline the philosophical and ideological bases for the methods used and comment on the usefulness of some of these methods. **Part 3** presents the research methods used. **Part 4** consists of inquiry methods used for making sense of the research.

Part 1
Framework for understanding the research inquiries

The research inquiries I adopted can be understood within a framework presented by Reason and Torbert (1999) who offer an epistemological basis for integrating quantitative, qualitative and action research. I offer a thumbnail sketch of their arguments. They present an argument for integrating what they refer to as first, second and third

person dimensions of inquiry which would generate quantitative, qualitative and action research that 'supports full human flourishing'.

They describe first person research/practice skills and methods as the researcher inquiring into her or his life with awareness and being choiceful in their actions. They use the terms "upstream" and "downstream" in reference to first person research. By upstream they mean that as researchers we move towards paying attention to how our habits and thoughts help and or hinder us from knowing experientially or widening our attention.

First person inquiry "upstream" helps us to clarify the purposes of our inquiry for others and for ourselves and identity "where we are coming from" (Reason and Marshall, 1987). This would suggest that researchers develop an awareness of life issues that they bring into the research, unresolved issues from their childhood, for example, that may interfere with the conduct of their inquiry (Heron, 1988). Methodologies of first person inquiry "upstream" include autobiographical writing, psychotherapy, meditation and other disciplines that develop mindfulness.

First person inquiry "downstream" refers to our need to pay attention to our actions as researcher, to see whether there are providing us with the outcomes we desire and by looking back "upstream" endeavouring to see if these actions are congruent with our purposes. First person "downstream" research/practice can take the form of examination of day to day behaviour drawing on self-awareness, moment to moment mindfulness and reflection in action. First person inquiry is told in our own first-person voices in contrast to second person inquiry which represents intersubjective voices of co-participants in our research practice.

Second person research practice refers to mutual inquiry that requires researchers to be engaging and consulting with others in conversations and dialogue. One approach to second person research is co-operative inquiry (Heron, 1996). I shall describe this approach in more detail below, but basically it is an inquiry strategy that involves all participants in the research as co-researchers participating in all activities of the research.

Third person research practice refers to the third-person objective voice and would involve people in a more impersonal way as opposed to first and second person inquiry. However, one of its aims is to empower participants to create their knowing-in-action whilst collaborating with others. The participants involved do not necessarily know one

another personally or have direct access to one another interpersonally. Third person research may use quantitative methods such as questionnaires, for example, but whatever the method, it is used in a participative way to illuminate issues of concern to those involved. Amongst its aims are those of reaching a wider audience either with new theory or through reflective texts, of transforming popular opinions and policies and creating institutions and practices which have lasting value.

The thesis spans all three forms of inquiry although there is more of an emphasis on first and second person inquiry. There is a connection between first and second person inquiry in the co-operative inquiry that Cathy and I initiated which involved group planning, collaboration and reflection with other black professionals and black students. During the process of inquiry members of the group, including myself, returned to our separate lives and practices and engaged in first person research with the support of the inquiry group. For example included in the thesis is one of my experiments which I took into my work setting to inquire into my practice as a teacher with black students. Other examples of action others took and the outcome of participating in the inquiry will be reported later. Also included in the thesis is my engagement in first person "upstream" practices, where I focused on issues to do with what Reason (1988) refers to as critical subjectivity, which is my primary subjective experience as a researcher as I lived through my inquiry.

There were some attempts at third person inquiry attached to the project that Cathy and I initiated in which questionnaires were used to ascertain information from past students about their experiences of the Brunel social Work Course, in particular. However, lack of space in this thesis does not allow me to include some of this information. Furthermore, a research assistant conducted a large part of this work. Some of what is reported in this thesis can be considered as third party in the sense that, at various times, groups of black people were brought together for collaboration, some of whom did not know each other personally. One of the aims was to generate a body of knowledge which would reach a wider audience and to influence institutions and create practices which would be long lasting. A couple of the chapters in the thesis represent reflective texts and are aimed at a wider audience in order to influence practices and policies.

I shall discuss those research practices later, but I want first to present the philosophical and ideological underpinnings of the research practices and the theoretical influences on the choice of methodology.

Part 2
Philosophical Assumptions:

My research concerns have focused on the interplay between quantitative and qualitative research, the relationship between intellectual traditions and personal scholarship and the nature of subjects and objects in research and how we relate as participants.

Quantitative research

In choosing research approaches I was not attracted to quantitative research because of some of its philosophical assumptions as outlined by Hammersley (1995).

- that what is taken to be the method of the natural science is the only rational source of knowledge;

- that this method should be applied in social research irrespective of any supposedly destructive features of social reality;

- that quantitative measurement and experiment and statistical manipulation of variables are essential, at least ideal, features of scientific research;

- that research can and should be concerned with producing accounts which correspond to an independent reality;

- that scientific knowledge consists of unusual laws;

- that research must be objective, with subjective biases being overcome through commitment to the principle of value neutrality.

This neo-positivist methodology, adapted from the natural sciences treated people as objects about whom knowledge was to be collected dispassionately. The processes of collecting data, analysing and writing it, whilst depending on social interaction and professional authority, were presented as simple and transparent. "What was considered 'value free' research is now seen as an obfuscation of the power relationships involved" (Scrijvers1993, p33-41). Firstly, the agenda for research was set by professional social scientist, in a way that was later revealed to be ethno-and euro-centric (Rohrlich-Leavitt et al 1975; Schrijvers, 1979). Secondly, 'the researched' had no input in defining relevant topics of research. Third, they were objectified and disempowered during the research process; and fourthly, it tried to deny or nullify the influence of the research process on 'the researched' by making the researcher invisible in the results. Far from the results being useful for their liberation 'from oppression', they were produced primarily for the academic community and secondarily for use by governments.

However, there are lessons that can be learnt from positivism. There is little doubt that the positivists were dramatically wrong about many things, for example about the verifiability principle and about the theory of neutrality of observation and little doubt also that their views have had some negative consequences of social research. However, this does not render their work of no value. Indeed, they still have much to teach us. However useful the promise such a reality may be in the physical sciences, it is not always appropriate or effective in the arena of human inquiry. In that arena, there is no tangible reality; everything that social inquirers study depends on how it was socially constructed and the meaning and interpretations we give to this. Thus the usual distinction between ontology (the nature of reality) and epistemology (how one comes to know that reality) collapses. Inquirers do not discover knowledge by watching from behind thick lenses or a one-way mirror; rather, it is created by the interaction of inquirers with whatever is being inquired into.

Qualitative Research

As a consequence to these challenges to positivism, alternative ways of researching and developments in thought related to naturalistic, interpretive and qualitative inquiry have opened the door to a much broader array of research, some of which is credited with an holistic approach. These paradigms have pursued an interpretive task which seeks to describe the historical, cultural and interactional complexity of social life as is shown in the work of Lincoln and Guba 's (1985) "naturalistic paradigm.

Researchers with such approaches refuse to dissect the situation into measurable variables, and afford the kind of attention to naturalism (studying the situation as it really occurs, not as it seems when modified by the research procedures) which would rule out 'treatments' or control groups. Qualitative researchers work from a different philosophical tradition, one which looks for meaning behind social action. This involves more than observing the social world; it requires interaction with the social world. As a researcher(s) you must be part of the process and you need to understand the symbolic nature of social action in the search for meaning. Interpretation or making sense/meaning is involved not only at the final stages of a research study, it is also involved at the collection of the field text stage. These paradigms endeavour to develop accounts that more fully represent people's lived experiences. Explanations are derived from the ordinary understandings at work in any cultural context and from the everyday behaviours of social process that surround and shape people's lives. However, even these explanations have their limitations, because they fail to provide any essential link between theory and practice.

More recently, therefore, we have witnessed the re-emergence of a tradition that carries this process some steps further, a tradition that does not embrace values of objectivity and elimination of bias, but which has an explicit concern with ending inequality and with taking the side of oppressed and marginalised groups. These research approaches have variously been described as 'action research', 'collaborative inquiry', co-operative inquiry', 'participatory research', 'emancipatory research', 'empowerment research'. Cameron et al (1992) characterise research in three ways: ethical research (research on); advocacy research (research on and for) and empowering research (research on, for and with). The additional 'with' implies the use of interactive or dialogic methods as opposed to the distancing and objectifying strategies associated with positivism which these approaches have adapted. The central aim of these approaches is the empowerment of research subjects, which may include the sharing of decisions about the aims, methods, and conclusions as aspects of any study.

When choosing methods of researching the experiences of black professionals and black students, I was attracted to those methodological approaches that advocated the notion of empowerment because I wanted to develop accounts that more fully represented their lived experiences. I wanted to bring into my work a model of empowerment that was a strongly value-based attempt to build on strengths and to research with people to enable them to understand their experiences and take control of their lives. It is unusual amongst research methods in that it contains these specific elements of previously disempowered people taking control and taking action.

Research about black people gets caught within systems of top down, authoritative knowledge with researchers and professionals judging the outcome of their work from a position of knowing what is best so that they end up with keeping people in a position of supposed inferiority. They prescribe recommendations which are about expecting individuals to adjust to that which they cannot control, including pathologising natural responses to injustice and inequality (Anderson, 1996).

I wanted, therefore, to use research methods that recognised unjust social structures, that had a practice-based parallel in empowerment, in the recognition that the problems oppressed groups face can never be fully understood if they are solely seen as the result of personal inadequacies. I saw and the need to base intervention on a wider questioning of the causes (Mullender and Ward, 1991).

Furthermore, I did not want my research to be too tightly bound by the framework of scientific methodology, which would result in my missing much of the texture and nuance in social relationship because like Marshall and Reason (1993) I believe "research is a social process negotiated and pursued in relationships with others"(p.2). I was interested in methodological practices that supported the need for rapport in establishing good research relations. I sought from the outset a methodology that would not be advocating a "value free stance". I also believe that research is not something separate from the researcher's life, especially when the research is in an area which matters to the researcher(s) and in which they already have a role to play. These beliefs played a part in my search for appropriate methodologies. The search took me towards looking for paradigms of research that would reflect these views. Consequently, the research approaches presented in this thesis take seriously the critiques of traditional research methodologies, approaches that are based primarily on humanistic psychology and critical theory. In the previous chapter I outlined the principle notions of critical theory so here I shall present briefly the principal notion of research approaches based on humanistic psychology.

Approaches based on Humanistic Psychology

This approach validates experiential knowledge. The subject is conceived as an autonomous and self-directing agent. Through co-operation, collaboration and dialogue, s/he is able, by reflection on her/his experiences, to come to a consciousness of her/his need for emancipation and to enter into co-operative research with others in order to achieve this end. The collection of works based on these ideas are to be found in Reason and Rowan (1981), Reason, (1998) and Reason, (1994). A contributor to these collections, John Heron, in setting out the philosophical basis for what has become known as 'new paradigm' or 'participatory' research, does not reject the empiricist concept of the application of social research of causal laws in nature, but he posits a thesis of 'relative determinism', in that "there are creative acts of self-directing agents within that order" (Heron 1981, p.21). He suggests that the basic explanatory model for research behaviour (in both researcher and researched), is that of intelligent self-direction – commitment to purposes in the light of principles- combined with relative determinism. Subjects become co-researchers, since if they are not privy to the research thinking, they will not be functioning as intelligent agents. A central idea here is the notion of intentionality, in action, people are conscious of their purpose in doing what they are doing and their meaning in acting. In collaborative research such intentions are available mutually to the researcher and research subjects. The general explanation of human behaviour which is drawn from this is that human beings are "symbolising beings, who find meaning in and give meaning to their world through symbolising their experience in a variety of

constructs and actions" (p23). To fully understand this, one has to participate in it through overt dialogue and communication with those who are engaging in it. These are ideas taken from phenomenology, but a model of participatory research takes this further in research practice, in an attempt to share power and to aim for equality at every stage of the research process.

Within this scheme, language is viewed as the original archetypal form of human inquiry which enables people to state propositions about their experiences in terms of general concepts. In other words, agreement about the meaning of language is what gives it its symbolising power. So long as the rules governing a language are generally accepted, language is a channel for direct and clear communication.

Another assumption is that empirical research on persons "involves a subtle, developing interdependence between propositional knowledge, practical knowledge and experiential knowledge" (Heron 1981, p.31). The researcher's experiential knowledge of the subject is most adequate when researcher and subject are fully present to each other in a relationship of reciprocal and open inquiry, and when each is open to construe how the other manifests as a presence in space and time. In that space, knowing emerges that can be expressed through stories or images, for example, which is presentational knowledge. In terms of the 'truths' which emerge from this process, it is accepted that the hope of effective research is to generate true propositions, ideas and theories and is expressed in statements which sometimes uses language like 'about'. So the expressions are more *about* rather than from. The truth-value of a proposition is partly a function of its correspondence with extra-propositional dimensions of the world as encountered. Where 'truth' purports to be about persons other than the researcher it has indeterminate validity, no secure status as truth, until s/he knows whether those other persons assent to, and regard as their own, the norms and values of the researcher:

"For an authentic science of persons, true statements about persons rest on a value system explicitly shared by researchers and subjects, and on procedural research norms explicitly agreed by researchers and subjects on the basis of that value system. Here again, the model of co-operative inquiry" (Heron 1981, p.33).

All these assumptions raise a number of questions about, for example, the feasibility of power sharing and a goal of equality in the research process, of dialogue (and implicit consensus); about the failure to acknowledge a wider social political context and about commitment to the ideal of participation. Theorists in drawing into the idea of 'emancipatory' research other knowledge bases to inform and expand its potential, have

tackled some of these problems. The main contributions have come from Critical and Feminist theories. I am not afforded space in this thesis to present these ideas although they have informed my work. The research approach, emanating from humanistic psychology which dominates the work in this thesis, is action research.

Action Research Approaches

Action research re-emerged in the 1980's as a significant form of research into practice. Action research can take on a variety of forms and can be individual or collaborative. Action research means different things to different people and it is broad ranging. I have chosen a path, within the range of action research which has an explicit set of social values surrounding the notion of emancipation of research subjects and which is enacted through processes of critical inquiry that have the following characteristics:

- *Democratic*, enabling the participation of all people
- *Equitable,* acknowledging people's equality of worth.
- *Liberating*, providing freedom from oppressive, debilitating conditions.
- *Life enhancing*, enabling the expression of people's full human potential

Action research is movement away from efforts to uncover generalisable truths towards a new emphasis on local context and practical action. Local context action research provides a model for enacting action-oriented approaches to inquiry, applying small-scale theorising to specific problems in specific situations (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994).

Action research works on the assumption that all participants - those whose lives are affected by the problem under study – should be engaged in the processes of investigation. Participants engage in a process of rigorous inquiry-in-action, acquiring information, (collecting data) and reflecting on that information, (analysing) in order to transform their understanding about the nature of the problem under investigation (theorising). This new set of understandings is then applied to plans for resolution of the problem (action), which, in turn, provide the context for testing hypotheses derived from group theorising (evaluation). Knowledge acquisition/production proceeds as a collective process, engaging people who have previously been the "subjects" of research. The researchers are co-subjects, self-reflective participants, reflective observers of interactions, analysers of data, and author/s of the resulting narrative.

Action research methodologies aim to integrate action and reflection. Collaborative exploration helps participants to develop increasingly sophisticated understandings of the

problems and issues that confront them. It challenges research practitioners to develop reflective skills. As participants and researchers rigorously explore and reflect on their situation together, they can repudiate social myths, misconceptions and misrepresentations and formulate more constructive analyses of their situation. By sharing their diverse knowledge and experience participants can create solutions to their problems and in the process improve their lives. Such knowledge is gained only through action. According to Torbert (1981), "the model of collaborative inquiry begins from the assumption that research and action, even though analytically distinguishable, are inextricably intertwined in practice. Knowledge is always gained through action and for action" (p.145).

The role of the researcher facilitator, in this context, becomes more facilitative and less directive. The ultimate validity and usefulness of a study rest on the awareness and integrity of the researcher as she or he observes and interacts both with those people who are participators in the study and with the data during the course of the analysis.

One criticism levelled at action research is that because of its focus on the local context it can become consumed with local facts and local theory and the validity and legitimacy of its results and reports becomes open to question in that they address a narrow local audience. It is important, Therefore, to integrate more than one research practice approach in generating knowledge from research.

Part 3
Research Methods used

Although more than one method was used in the research, the model of co-operative inquiry in generating dialogue, based on an action research format, in particular informed Cathy's and my choice. I used action inquiry in education, as it relates to the classroom, to inquiry into my practice as a teacher. I shall present full explanations of co-operative inquiry methods below. However I have chosen to present my discussions of the action inquiry methods in education in the chapter in which I discuss my inquiry into my practice as an educator so as to place it where it relates to the material it generated.

I shall present the second person inquiry approaches that Cathy and I employed the cooperative inquiry method and then lead into dialogue as inquiry.

Co-operative inquiry

Cathy and I chose co-operative inquiry as a method because we liked its philosophical assumptions and arguments. Co-operative inquiry is a radical way of doing research. It is a form of action research which is a way of helping people with similar interests and concerns to come together, in collaboration, to examine their experiences, make sense of their lives and to develop ideas that may change their world and work practices. In that way, it has a political element which is about taking action towards change and 'transformation'. (Reason, 1998). This element was particularly attractive to us in working with a group of people who have been oppressed in society.

Heron (1996) defines co-operative inquiry as an inquiry strategy which:

"involves two or more people researching a topic through their own experience of it, using a series of cycles in which they move between this experience and reflecting together on it. Each person is a co-subject in the experience phases and co-researcher in the reflection phase. It is a vision of persons in reciprocal relation using the full range of their sensibilities to inquire together into any aspect of the human condition with which the transparent body-mind can engage" (p.1).

As a method it presents as being very accessible to ordinary people who are seeking to engage in research that involves change. It is a way of doing research with and for people rather than on people (Reason, 1988). Its philosophical assumptions are as outlined by Heron, (1994,1996) and Reason (1988,1994,1998):

- *Self –Determination and Choice*

People are self-determining; they have the potential for making choices and for taking responsibility for their actions. This idea complements the ideas we set out in our initial paper, which were that we believe that black people should view themselves as having choice, should work with the concept of agency and take responsibility for how they construct their experiences.

- *Co-researchers and co-subjects participating in the activity*

A Co-operative approach to research breaks down the boundaries between researcher and subject. This means that all those involved in the research are co-researchers and co-subjects, generating ideas, focusing, designing, managing and drawing conclusions together. In traditional research, the roles between researchers and subjects are mutually exclusive. The researchers contribute most of the thinking that goes into the project; they

conceive, design and execute the project. They also take all the responsibility for drawing conclusions from it. The subjects only provide the actions and data to be studied. We were attracted to the notion of equality implied in the co-operative principle, especially as black people have been the 'other' in research in the past and were 'researched' on rather than 'researched' with. Critiques from black women, for example, Bhavnani (1991), Mohanty (1991), expose the eurocentric and oppressive underpinnings which marginalise "Others" and raise questions as to whether such research can be claimed as emancipatory and if so, for whom.

- *Authentic Collaboration*

In Co-operative Inquiry, this relationship between researcher and researched is replaced by what is described as 'collaboration'. This method requires the researchers and the subjects to be working co-operatively in an active relationship with each other, with the result that what is being researched is self-generated by everyone involved.

- *"Extended Epistemology" (theory of how to know)*

The primary source of knowing and the primary instrument for research, is the self-directing person or persons who are engaged in their experiences, expressed thorough their stories and images and which are understood through theories which make sense to them and expressed in actions in their lives. Knowing, in this way, will produce deeper analysis, deeper insights or a resolution of issues. The experience of exploring together in this way could lead to our own personal growth and development. This process involves four different kinds of ways of knowing referred to earlier; experiential, presentational, propositional and practical. This emphasis on different ways of knowing is particularly attractive because it offers possibilities for opportunities to be provided in which black people's experiences could become central to an understanding of their oppression. It also implies an insistence on black people as 'knowers' of the world and that their political literacy will emerge from their reading of the world, that is, from their experience, leading to collective knowledge and action.

These are some of the reasons why Cathy and I became attracted to Co-operative Inquiry when we set out to find a methodology that would fit with our ideology and philosophical assumptions. We believed Co-operative Inquiry to be commensurate with a black ideology that expouses equality, self-determination, empowerment and working within a democratic process.

Ways of working in a Co-operative Inquiry Group

All of this is done within what is called a "community of inquiry", which can take place over a short period of time or extended over a year or more. Depending on the kinds of questions to be explored, it can take the form of a short workshop or big event of several groups of people. Whatever form is chosen, all parties are seen as inquirers, co-researchers, co-subjects working in a cyclical fashion between phases of action and reflection, reflection as co-researchers and action as co-subjects, and knowledge is derived via this process (Heron, 1981 Reason, 1988). These cycles between action and reflection is repeated several times, and such a process can produce rich experiences gained through discussions, storytelling, fantasy, movement, and psycho-drama and has the potential for experimenting with new forms of behaviour and producing new ways of knowing. Peter Reason sums the process up in his statement:

"The essence of co-operative experiential inquiry is an aware self-critical movement between experience and reflection which goes through several cycles as ideas, practice and experience are systematically honed and refined"(Reason, 1988 p.6).

Phases of the Inquiry Cycle

This cycling process includes four phases of action and reflection:

1. People coming together with shared interest to plan

In the first phase, a group of researchers comes together to identify the problem or the activity to inquire into. The question or questions for exploration are agreed. Action to be taken is agreed upon and procedures for recording their own and others experiences are established. Formulation of the topic is a lengthy process, which engages the researchers in propositional knowing.

2. Engagement in Action

Secondly, the researchers become co-subjects and engage in the action agreed, recording their process and its outcomes. They test out in practice whether there is a mismatch between their ideas and what happens in reality. This process involves noticing, self-awareness, and observation of what is happening to them in order to develop better understanding of their experience. This phase engages the inquirers in practical knowing

3. Full engagement, fully immersed

Thirdly, the co-researchers fully engage in their experiences with deeper engagement in reflection and action. At this stage, contradictions are highlighted, connections made,

experiences and understanding are deepened as the co-researchers engage in creative explorations, undertaking experiments in practice. Such processes can produce rich experience and data gained through discussions, storytelling, fantasy and movement which has the potential for producing new ways of knowing. This involves the inquirers in experiential knowing.

Inquirers are challenged to stay open to their experiences, as there is a temptation to simplify what is heard, seen and learnt. This might come about because they might experience difficulties in dealing with contradictions, simplifying the data to make it understandable, in one way, and making more and more connections to make it more meaningful and understandable in another. This is a deeply involved phase where inquirers are challenged to stay focused and cope with practical and emotional crisises so that creative insights can be gained and can be expressed in presentational knowing.

4. Feedback and evaluation- Co-researchers re-assemble

In the fourth phase, the co-researchers get together to focus on the overall inquiry and reconsider the original questions in light of their experience. At this stage, the questions may be modified, reframed or rejected. The group may choose to re-engage in a second cycle of action and reflection and focus on the same or different aspects of the overall inquiry. Propositional knowing is usually experienced in this phase.

Setting up the group – practical considerations

- **Initiation**

Any group of people could initiate an inquiry group but, more often than not, one or two people with an idea they wish to explore may initiate it. At this stage, those involved require enthusiasm, motivation and a passionate interest.

- **Group getting started**

This process begins with bringing together a group of people who might be interested in joining in the project. The invitation maybe formally initiated with a circular letter or informally done because the group is self-evident. The size of the group may vary and the variety of experience and quality of facilitation experience required would be determined by the size

- **Negotiating a contract for working**

At this stage the agenda for establishing the process of the inquiry group is discussed. Initiators may present proposals for discussing the formation of a group. The process of

the co-operative inquiry is discussed and people offer ideas, suggestions, questions and challenges. Practical issues like time, dates and commitments are also discussed. Decisions are made for joining the group

- *The Research Plan*

The group devises a programme of meetings paying attention to the amount of time required to engage in the cycles of action and reflection. Ground rules maybe established at this stage and roles discussed and distributed. Leadership roles and facilitation roles are considered and a decision may be made as to whether leadership is rotated or whether one or two people facilitate on behalf of the group

- *Writing*

The research audience should be discussed and arrangements made for written feedback and for how texts will be approved. Decisions will need to be made about who will be scribes and whether one or more people will take responsibility for writing up the group experience

Outcomes from co-operative inquiries

Co-operative inquiry groups can generate different ways of knowing and can produce the kind of knowledge that extends beyond the theoretical knowledge of academia. Communicating the outcome can move beyond the tradition of writing articles, books or theses. Writing is but one means of speaking from the study, and data may be given which is very difficult, or even undesirable to write about. This way of inquiring produces four sorts of outcomes which correspond to the forms of knowing: experiential, presentational, propositional, and practical. Heron (1996) describes these thus:

1. "Experiential outcomes are to do with transformations of being, which come out of the engagement with the process of the inquiry.

2. Presentational outcomes disclose this subjective-objective reality in terms of non-discursive symbolism, sound, song, music, movement, line, colour, shape, composition, and also in terms of metaphor and analogy via poetry, story-telling dramaturgy.

3. Propositional outcomes are to do with 'knowing that'; they report aspects of the research domain in terms of descriptive and theoretical statements, the traditional version of research findings.

4. Practical outcomes are to do with 'knowing how'; they are evident in the range of skills and competencies which inquirers have developed within the research domain.

5. Co-operative inquiry incorporates a notion of self development and self actualisation which says that a person can become more whole as a result of education and a greater awareness of self (Heron 1992, Reason 1994). This involves learning to integrate a sense of self with a deeper way of communicating and interacting with others in the world (Heron 1992, Reason 1994). This principle in particular spoke, to one of our concerns and has informed the approach we have taken to the inquiry.

Validity

The validity of the outcome is tested by the extent to which there is:

- *Coherence between the different ways of knowing.*

This is where we experience congruence between practical, experiential, presentational and propositional knowledge.

- *whether there was authentic collaboration*

The inquiry will not be fully authentic until, and unless, all participants are in full collaboration, contributing at every stage of the process. Attention has to be paid to leadership and to the relationship within the group and between the group members and the initiators of the research. The collaboration will be inauthentic if the group members are "rubber stamps" rather than fully contributing to decision making. All voices should be heard rather than there being one person or subgroups dominating the process.

- *how the co-researchers dealt with the stress, distress*

Co-operative inquiry can bring with it emotional distress. Unexpected things may be discovered in the process, as members engage deeply in life issues and examine their experiences. Therefore, the group will have to pay attention to possible projections and disturbances in the group and space will need to be provided to manage any distress.

- *the balance between chaos and order*

Co-operative inquiry processes can throw members into chaos and disorder, especially in the early stages, when leadership and decision-making processes are being established. This is also the case in phase three when the group takes more risks and become adventurous. This sometimes leads to confusion and uncertainty and members run the risk of managing the anxiety with premature order and overcontrol. There is no guarantee that chaos will emerge but, if and when it does, managing this process requires adequate preparation, patience and tolerance.

- *the balance in the cycling process between convergence and divergence and between action and reflection*

Depending on the topic being explored, the cycling process can be convergent, which means that the co-researchers look at the same issue more than once or in more detail, or the cycling may be divergent, in that the co-researchers look at different issues on successive cycles. The group needs to decide, but attention needs to be paid to the balance between how much time is spent reflecting to gather experience and how much time is spent in action, trying out actions.

- *Rooting the research questions in politics*

Validity of the material produced is further assured by rooting the research questions in the personal and social political experiences of those who pose them. It is argued that the questions have emerged as a result of a large investment of time, creative energy, and concern. The questions also have meaning in the lives of the researchers and this ensure that they are unlikely to cut corners or want to arrive at quick, easy answers (Salmon, 1992).

In the next chapter I shall discuss how we used this method of inquiry with black professionals and black students to explore our experiences. I shall also evaluate the co-operative method in Chapter 5

Dialogue as Inquiry

Dialogue was a feature of the research in the Co-operative Inquiry and in later stages of my research. In the Co-operative Inquiry it was used to help identify problems in order to solve them. I also engaged in dialogue with students in the inquiry into my practice as a teacher and engaged them in discussion of issues to do with their experiences of teaching, learning and writing, for example. In both inquiries, I engaged in dialogue with participants retrospectively to gain feedback on my writing of texts emanating from the inquiries.

Dialogue can be a powerful method of integrating inquiry and intervention and it can contribute to the intermingled process of knowing and changing (Tandon, 1988). Inquiring dialogically with participants in the Co-operative Inquiry (see chapter 4), and also engaging with groups of students and professionals around the writing of the text for this thesis (see chapter 6), has lead to enhanced understanding and significant changes

in my practice and in the personal and professional lives of other participants, as will be reported later in the thesis.

There is evidence in the research literature which supports the notion of change emanating from dialogue. Practitioners of participatory research in communities-sometimes referred to the "southern tradition of PAR" (Fals-Borda & Rahman, (1991); Hall, (1993), Selener, (1997), base their work in part on Paulo Freire's practice of dialogue. Freire (1972) states that dialogue become the vehicle for critical consciousness and praxis. Action and reflection together can generate understanding and bring about changes. Buber (1988) stresses the importance of dialogical relationships in bringing about change. He states that healing and development evolve from the intersubjective realms of the dialogue. He suggests that the term dialogic does not refer to speech, in the ordinary sense, but to the fact that human beings are inherently relational. Dialogic relating provides the medium for the growth of awareness, learning, problem-solving and self-development.

Working with dialogue as inquiry and action has some implications. For example:

- *Mutual impact* - In dialogue as inquiry both the researcher and participants learn from each other; they also learn together from the very situation that they are a part of and are engaged in analysis of. The interests of all parties are mutually inclusive and supportive in dialogue. Dialogically relating in that way emphasises joint phenomenological exploration of what is, so that we need to speak the same language of present-centered experiencing as participants and give equal value to each person's perspectives. The use of common language is central to the 'I-thou' dialogue.

- *Validity* – In dialogue, validity implies an authentic representation of reality. The data-collection and information gathering process which is most relevant to all parties involved in the inquiry determines its validity. The process, via which the data is collected, cannot be disconnected from the context and content of dialogues. This challenges researchers to be inventive about their methods of data -collection.

- *Impact on people's lives* - Such a process of inquiry can have substantial impact on people and their lives. To that extent the notion of the value neutrality of the researcher is a myth. Dialogue, as inquiry becomes a political and ideological process. For this reason researchers need to state their value positions and in most

cases not only state it but behave according to those values. Their values have to be authentically displayed. Dialogue can result in increased empowerment of oppressed groups as healing and development evolves from their intersubjectivity.

- *Understanding and change* – when the processes of knowing and changing occur at the same time the researchers face dilemmas if the situation under study undergoes changes through the process of the study so that what is finally studied is something different from what was originally intended. Dialogue as inquiry presents this dilemma.

So dialogue can be hard or, indeed, impossible to achieve, even where the intentions of all parties are good, because the individuals or groups have differing interests. It can appear possible but turn out, in the event, not to be so. Becoming part of a dialogue process, being involved, committed, interested and concerned with others at the social level could lead to dialogue at another level, with self, and in the pursuance of making sense of and generating knowledge from process as well as from content. It certainly brought into focus for me the notion of 'process'.

Part 4
Making sense as processes of inquiry

Bringing process in focus as inquiry practice affirms both how important it was in my work and the role it played whilst I was engaging in depth in sensemaking. Sensemaking became an important inquiry activity and my sensemaking activities involved *analysis* and *making visible subjective processes*. I engaged in cycles of inquiry in the process of making sense, which involved first person inquiry into my subjectivity. Whilst engaging in these inquiry activities I had to apply certain research disciplines in order to establish quality. Such disciplines involved engaging in a process of introspection, reflexivity/reflective practice, consciousness and awareness in order to generate subjective knowledge. Also, whilst inquiring into the analysis of the data and the process of writing, I engaged in the discipline of writing and journalling as first person "downstream" inquiry. I shall discuss these sensemaking activities below.

Analysis

In terms of analysis, I have used Weick's (1995) notion of sensemaking, which he applied to making sense in organisations, to help with making sense of my research and the way

in which I created my thesis. According to Weick, the concept of sensemanking literally means the making of sense. It is about making something sensible. It is also about how we choose to make sense of our situations. Sometimes, sensemaking is used to mean "putting something within a frame of reference", meaning a generalised point of view that directs interpretations. For me, sensemaking is also a thinking process which I use retrospectively to account for, or explain, events. It is how I attribute meaning to events. It is constructing events so that I engage in an interpretative process so as to understand and share understandings about events, although, according to Weick, interpretations should be viewed differently from sensemaking. Weick (1995) differentiates between interpretations and sensemaking thus:

"Sensemaking is clearly about an activity or a process, whereas interpretation can be a process but is just as likely to describe a product. A focus on sensemaking induces a mindset to focus on process, whereas this is less true with interpretation. To engage in sensemaking is to construct, filter, frame, create...and render the subjectivity into something more tangible...And sensemaking suggests the construction of that which then becomes sensible.... it highlights the invention that precedes interpretation" (p.13-14).

Weick went on to describe seven characteristics that distinguish sensemaking from other explanatory processes such as interpretation and understanding, for example. These seven characteristics are *identity, retrospect, enactment, social contact, ongoing events, cues,* and *plausibility* and I will now explore them briefly.

Identity
In terms of an individual activity, sensemaking begins with a sensemaker and the sensemaker herself is an ongoing puzzle, undergoing continual redefinition. Sensemaking begins with a self-conscious sensemaker. A researcher's sensemaking process could derive from her/his need to have a sense of identity. By that I mean, her/his general orientation to situations that maintained her/his self-esteem and are consistent with her/his self-concept. What a particular situation will mean to a researcher is dictated by the identity s/he adopts in dealing with it, and that choice, in turn, is affected by what s/he thinks is occurring. Discovery by how and what s/he thinks indicates who the researcher is. So for example, throughout the research, my multiple identities as a black woman, teacher/educator, student, political activist and researcher played a significant role in what I noticed, the choices I made and sense I made of what I encountered. Also important was interpreting what I saw, heard and experienced within a context of the identity that a white, British, racist society has constructed for black people.

Retrospect

Sensemaking is also done retrospectively. To learn what I think, I look over what I said earlier. I make meaning of my lived experience. People may well, through retrospective reflection, develop insight and awareness of an enhanced sense of self and, perhaps, some useful skills and strategies for change. Research may thus bring about changes in practice. Involvement in the research could give participants opportunities to recount their lives and experiences. Recounting is, necessarily, a self-reflective process and may lead to important changes and, for some, could led to active participation outside the research. In the inquiries participants were offered opportunities and encouraged to dialogue in a way that enabled them to reflect critically on their lived experiences retrospectively and to take on making changes. Engaging in dialogue with participants in the research, to reflect in retrospect on the text generated from my inquiries, allowed for changes to be made to the text that was finally included in this thesis.

Enactment

Enactment is about action *in* the world rather than conceptual pictures *of* the world. Action is a precondition for sensemaking as, for example, when the act of speaking or verbalising makes it possible for people to see what they think and what they know. In research it is possible for participants to construct reality through action and create new features of their environment which did not exist before. People are part of their environment and in their action create materials that become the constraints and opportunities they face. The idea of enactment invites close attention to interdependent activities, processes and continuous change. Engaging in action research into my practice as an educator was one way of me finding out what I knew and did not know about the way I teach and whether or not I empowered students.

Social

Sensemaking is a social process in which intersubjectively shared meanings, shared language and social interaction take place through talk, discourse and conversation in order to maintain and sustain social contact. It is important to talk in terms of shared meaning and how meaning is socially constructed, as shared meaning is important for collective action. Moreover, the experience of the collective action is shared. In terms of social activity, sensemaking is not a solitary act because what a person does internally is contingent on others. Participating in a co-operative inquiry, for example, with black professionals and black students collaborating in dialogue, offers the possibilities for sharing and new meanings to be generated. The meanings that are made and the conclusions arrived at are determined by our socialisation, who socialises us and how we

are socialised. So, as researchers, what we say, single out and conclude is determined by how we are socialised as well as by the audience which we anticipate will audit our conclusions.

Ongoing

"To talk about sensemaking is to talk about reality as an ongoing accomplishment that takes from when people make retrospective sense of the situations in which they find themselves and their creations. There is a strong reflexive quality to this process. People make sense of things by seeing a world on which they already imposed what they believe" (Weick, 1995, p.15).

This process is captured in Pirsig's statement cited in Winohur, (1990):

"Any intellectually conceived object is always in the past and therefore unreal. Reality is always the moment of vision before intellectualisation takes place. There is no other reality""(p.82).

In research terms, sensemaking is always ongoing and very often I found myself in the middle of complex situations where there were no self-contained certainties on which I could build. Working with the notion of sensemaking, I have been able to make sense of some uncertain situations, that initially made no sense, especially complex and ill-defined situations, in which political issues were all mixed up together. I was repeatedly trying to disentangle these situations by creating, then revising, and then making provisional assumptions about them.

Cues

This means paying attention to the way we notice, extract cues and work with what is extracted, as cues are crucial for their capacity to evoke action. Extracted cues are seeds from which we develop a larger sense of what is occurring. The process of noticing, by which cues are extracted for sensemaking can be distinguished as noticing refers to activities of filtering, classifying and comparing whereas sensemaking refers more to interpretation and the activity of determining what the noticed cues mean. The importance of this, in research is that researchers pay attention to what they notice and how they respond to events, since if events are noticed people make sense of them and if events are not noticed they are not available for sensemaking.

The social context of the research could affect what is noticed and our sensemaking, as in some cases the context incorporates politics. How people are located in the context, in terms of levels of hierarchy, may provide norms and expectations that constrain

explanations. So what researchers single out to focus on as content for explanations is only a small portion of what is actually happening because of context and personal dispositions. This meant that I had to pay close attention to the research process as well as the content and the politics of choosing and selecting from the research data for interpretation. This included the theoretical frameworks chosen and the explanations given in my analysis.

Plausibility

Sensemaking implies that there is something 'out there' that needs to be agreed on and constructed plausibly. However it might not always be possible to make sense of what is out there, and in addition it may not be necessary to be accurate in trying to make sense. In terms of making sense of research data researchers need not focus too much on accuracy in their analysis but on plausibility, pragmatics, creation, invention and reasonableness. To avoid becoming overwhelmed with data researchers need to filter, separate, discriminate and, in some case, categorise. So as the researcher I needed be more concerned with knowing enough about what I thought and felt and be open to possibilities in order to get on with my research project, which meant that plausibility, took precedence over accuracy. I also gave precedence to the possibilities that arose out of processes.

Making visible subjective processes

Making space for speaking about the subjective processes in research, which involved the working of the 'self' (self-the-sensemaker and sensemaker-of-self), was important in selecting what I would report. A major part of who I have been as the researcher and how I have informed the research requires engagement in reflection. The researcher's values and practices are deeply implicated, both in the directions and outcomes of the study (Crawford, 1995). Usher and Edward (1994) write about the need for reflexivity as a resource, within a research study as a foreground to the research construction and in order to reveal the values, politics and epistemology, or subtext of the research project. Indeed, Usher et al (1997) describe research as "the practice of writing and rewriting selves and the world" (p.212). They highlighted processes of personal and social change occurring through engagement in inquiry and asserted the importance of the self in the research practice. They state "How the self is disposed as an engaged inquirer is a neglected dimension of reflective research practice" (p.213). In order to re-engage with the neglected dimension in research we need to engage in states of consciousness and awareness.

Similarly, Rowan (1981) argues that the researcher needs to have the ability to be engaged in free-floating attention, listening with the third ear, intuitive sensing, mindfulness, consciousness and awareness when making sense of research during *encounter and making sense* moments in the research cycle. It requires a kind of contemplation "the ability to 'unfocus' from the person or group or data we are studying and to allow a kind of communion to emerge, such that we are at one and the same time in touch with our own process and with the other"(p122).

Reason (1988) also stressed the need for researchers to engage in a process of sensemaking that focuses on their subjective experiences which he termed critical subjectivity. Critical subjectivity he describes as state of consciousness which involves self-reflexive attention to the context in which we are operating. Critical subjectivity invites us to pay attention to our primary subjective experiences and not suppress them but instead be aware that there might be biases in accepting this perspective as a way of knowing.

Consciousness/Awareness

In addressing the question on consciousness and awareness I draw on phenomenology as a basic perspective and on Gestalt therapy, which has absorbed key elements of this perspective. To position my argument I find it useful to begin with the ascent of introspection as a psychological concept which I worked with. It is an approach I have taken in making sense in the research. The focus on introspection is the observation and analysis of one's own thoughts and feelings, placing a value on subjective experience as a legitimate mode of research inquiry.

Introspection/consciousness theorists, such as Wilhelm Wundt, William James, Sigmund Freud and Edmund Husserl (who developed his theory of phenomenology) concerned themselves with the study of awareness and with the notion that reality is known only through personal experience. For Husserl consciousness means to choose among possible things that might be noticed. From this perspective, consciousness may be looked at in terms of intentionality and as a manifestation of choice from among many possibilities that exist as potential experience rather than simply viewing awareness as 'what is'. I believe that by just focusing on "what is" we are depriving consciousness of the possibilities of "what could be", "what should be", "was", "could have been". These dimensions are important in the generation of personal knowledge.

Torbert (1981) argues that " an acting system requires sensual (or operational) awareness and suppleness if it is to succeed in effectively enacting new knowledge rather than in behaving either habitually or awarkdly. Without sensual or operational awareness and suppleness, new social theories cannot really be tested in action because persons will continue to behave habitually no matter what their rhetorical commitments" (p146).

As a researcher, I saw the goal of my work as not simply to support experience but to help people to notice, become aware of understand, draw meaning from, and assimilate experiences into an enriched ground. I believed that this rich ground would provide the basis for knowledge and recovery of personal power.

Also addressing consciousness Rowan (1981) suggests that a Hegelian position might be helpful in enabling us to understand what is going on in terms of making sense. He says that Hegel (1971) offered three levels of consciousness which are available to people in everyday life and Rowan rechristened them as "the primary level", "the social ", and "the realised level". The primary level, he says, is where we all start and by using our subjective process, we jump to conclusions that suit our wishes. He called this stage "naïve inquiry" because, although we want to make sense of the world in rational ways, we do it very narrowly, personally and in limited ways. However, in this stage, we produce rich and important material which we sometimes ignore. We are sometimes vulnerable and distressed and at the mercy of our feelings and at the mercy of more dominant people. Our tendency is to engage in denial and to move to a place where we have more control. We move to the 'Social Level' and become one-sidedly objective, becoming more interested in the facts, in what is true and what is false in what is real and what is illusion, what we can prove and what we can disprove. We move towards using logic in the scientific way and control people in the same way that we control things. We do this to ourselves too. We build tight structures around ourselves and give precedence to our masterful social part, which society demands, and push down our primitive, feeling part. When this is played out in society we witness top-down relationships. In order to release ourselves, we jump into the Realised Level, which Rowan described as objectively subjective. At this level, we refuse to suppress our subjective experience and find ways of entering deeper into it to rescue material which is raised to consciousness. When this material is brought up through the Social Level it is better informed and educated, much stronger and less vulnerable. At the Realised Level we are able to choose and own our feelings; we are also able to use creative ways of doing things for our research purposes and when making sense of the research experiences we encounter. In sections of this thesis I have shown how I have made sense by working

with that level of consciousness by carrying out research in my own situation as the researcher.

The use of 'Self'

Action research requires the researcher's own attitudes, beliefs, perceptions and values to be brought into question. Griffiths (1990) argues that, as individuals research their situations, they bring their own selves into the research process and I have been concerned with the place of the personal in the research process. I conceived "personal" as a mode of self-description, as part of a process of theorising as well as part of a methodology.

As a researcher and educator I was providing a new discourse and frame with which participants could talk about and actually change their experiences. I too was embarking on a similar process. I, too, was in the process of becoming 'known' and learning to understand more deeply my investment in the continuing research project. I was struck by the importance of my personal biography in relation to my research and was forced to look back and attempt to trace the origins of some of my current beliefs.

Time and time again issues that I was dealing with in the context of my research made me uncover and examine some of the earlier and major influences on my development as a person. I was struck by the parallel I found in my work with students, as they struggled to understand themselves, and in looking at this aspect of my work I had to engage with some of the central ideas in autobiographical work: – How do I come to understand myself? What is significant in my life events? How do I select events and what informs my choice? How do I pick out significant events? My attempt to understand my biography is through gaining a fuller understanding of the extent to which I have been socially constructed. However my deeper understanding came out of a process of critical reflection and conceptualising my experiences in a way that integrated gender, class and race. Griffiths (1994) argues that it is a mistake to think of autobiographical work as subjective or descriptive as compared to the research methods. She suggests that, like other methods, autobiographical work can be done well. In order for it to be rigorous and to meet the criteria for a reliable method of gaining knowledge it has to be critical.

In the biographical work in the thesis, I illustrate the power of self-reflection and the promise of action inquiry approach for the development of reflection. My argument here is that reflection is action-oriented and is social and political. Its 'product' is informed, committed action.

The use of Reflection

Reflection is an activity involving individualised interpretations and understanding. (Ixer, 1999). The concept has provided me with an accessible way into linking thinking and doing in order to improve practice and to draw positively on my subjective engagements. It involved using and enhancing my capacity for individual reflexivity, through which I looked at myself as researcher or as practitioner, in terms of what I know and what I do in order to change my actions. Reflective practice involves practitioners becoming systematic about their reflexivity, seeking to collectivise their personal experience, making links with wider professional and political issues that impact on practice, thus transcending limited reflection 'premised on individualism' (Thompson, 1995, p.78).

Reflection had an important role in my action research in the classroom, in the sense that I was a reflective practitioner. However, I was aware that not all reflection on practice could be considered action research. Griffiths and Tann (1992) have isolated five levels of reflective practice. These reflective practice levels comprise two levels of reflection in action, as follows: 'act and react' and react-monitor-react/rework-plan-act. The other three levels are reflection on action and include a review process of 'act-observe systematically – analyse rigorously-evaluate-retheorise-plan-act'. These authors argue that all five levels may need to be brought into play at different times if reflection on practice is to be effective. I used these levels to reflect on my 'self' and my practice.

My reflections on self were a process of transformation. When I paused to reflect, I raised the possibility of transforming the social world through my thought and action. By critically reflecting on how my history shaped my ideology and vice versa I was able to develop a deeper analysis of the historical and social situations which framed my actions. I have found reflection very powerful as an exercise in the analysis and transformation of the situations in which I found myself. It assisted me to express my agency as the maker of history as well as my awareness that I have been made by it. So reflection is not a purely 'internal', psychological process. It integrates thought and action which are sometimes historically embedded. In no case is reflection 'apolitical'. It reveals a self-consciously critical analysis of the kind described by Friere as conscientization:

"....the process in which people, not as recipients, but as knowing subjects, achieve a deepening awareness both of the socio-historical reality which shapes their lives and of their capacity to transform that reality(Freire1972, p.27).

In such works (see Chapter 14), I stopped to think and to reflect in order to take stock of events that had happened and in order to prepare myself for action. The reflection process involved me looking at my thoughts and thought processes, and looking outward at the situation in which I found myself. I engaged in that process by considering the interaction of the internal and the external, using my reflection to orient me for further thought and action. In that sense reflection is thus 'meta-thinking' (thinking about thinking) in which I considered the relationship between my thoughts and action in particular contexts.

I paused to reflect and take stock of the issues confronting me as I engaged in and with my research in order to consider my action. I became aware of myself as a researcher and aware that how I acted would influence the course of events, both least for myself and for others too. I also reflected on how my stories influenced the purpose of my research.

In engaging in the process of critical reflection I used writing and journalling in a disciplined way as part of my action research practice

Writing and journalling

Writing

Most researchers are trained to write tidily and only when they are clear about what they have to say, and when their arguments are clear, organised and coherent. That way of writing can be static and mechanical. That way of thinking belongs to a relatively closed intellectual system. That way of writing ignores the role of writing as a dynamic creative process; it undermines the confidence of novice writers especially beginning researchers. That static model only contributes to silencing voices. Also that mechanistic mode of writing research text shuts down the creativity of the researcher and supports the exclusion of the researcher's 'self' from writing. By writing in an inquiry way the researcher may be challenged to move away from the mechanistic model, of leaving 'self' out but putting 'self' in the text. The challenge to the researcher is how does s/he lay claim to "knowing" something and at the same time nurture his/her own individuality.

Writing can play a crucial role in learning for researchers, and can be used as an aid to reflection on the research. Writing can improve traditional text because writers relate more deeply and in a complex way to their material making it possible for the writer to

understand the material in different ways. The deepened understanding of 'self' gives greater depth to the text and the text will be more present to self and to others. These are philosophical as well as practical problems which action researchers need to confront.

Action researchers may also have to face their own doubts and distrust in their "knowing". In order to do this writing can be used to "write what we know rather than to state what we know". (Ely et. al, 1997, p.10). Ely et, al further argue that we can reshape meaning through writing and this helps us clarify our understanding. They claim that as researchers "We write primarily because writing is at the heart of our endeavours to reflect, to be thoughtful, to tame and to shape the compost heap of data that is filled with disparate, confusing and overwhelming raw impressions. Writing helps us to consider, reconsider, plan, re-plan, make order, check with ourselves and others, and to tell the story of the research in precisely the ways that we feel do justice to it". (Ely et al 1997, p.15). Journalling, as a process of inquiry can be one way of helping researchers to do that.

Journalling

I have used journals, diaries, and record (note) books as writing tools in the service of reflection and of my learning. The use of journals to promote reflection has its origin in the use of diaries as a form of self-expression (Lowenstein, 1987). Progoff (1975) extended the process of journal writing beyond the mere recording of events. He developed the intensive journal as a tool for connecting thought, feeling and action. Ranier (1978) provided many resources to give journal writers the flexibility to make the process their own. Fulwiler (1987) offered a collection of articles oriented to the use of journal writing in education and which stress that writing enhances learning. He noted the increasing favour with which journals are looked upon in a variety of educational settings. Through the use of journal writing the reflective processes of the individual become apparent and an opportunity exists for shaping understanding and metacognitive processes (Glaser, 1991).

Individuals also use journal writing as an introspective tool for personal professional growth. For example, Marsick (1990) outlined ways of facilitating reflection in the workplace and identified journal writing as a useful tool for helping people become aware of their own practical reasoning and theory building, and to helping them make explicit their tacit knowing. Daudelin (1996) developed the 'reflection workbook', which provided guidelines for the use of a learning journal in order to record and explore the random thoughts and summary learning statements that occur throughout a work experience.

During research, personal journals can help to tap valuable inner resources. By listening for and valuing feelings the researcher is able to reflect calmly upon knowledge that has come from within. In research, the use of record books can provide a permanent record of a personal journey as a basis for continuing reflection. Reflection is defined by Mezirow as the "process of critically assessing the content, process, or premise(s) of our efforts to interpret and give meaning to an experience" (Mezirow, 1991, p.105).

The keeping of journals and record books could make it possible to step back and gain a wider perspective and to generalise and theorise from that perspective. It could enable the researcher to keep track of what was happening in his/her development, and give her/him ongoing access to it. It could actually help the researcher to appreciate life and learning as a journey. Journalling could take researchers out of their deductive mode and bring them face to face with the metaphorical and more creative sides of themselves (Mezirow, 1990 and 1991).

I think the use of journals has the advantage of helping with the facilitation of an interaction between researchers and the personal growth and change taking place within them. If researchers work well with journals, record books and diaries they can generate creative action. They might be able to communicate better because they have found a language for writing down their experiences in their own words. They could be helped by the fact that their personal concerns have been given objectivity which, to a certain extent, separates them from themselves. This could mean that they might be able to talk about their concerns more easily.

However, a disadvantage of using such tools, is that to do so is very time consuming and some people may find that they may not have enough time to record all that they want to. Also journalling could be a messy activity. Journalling encourages exploration of thoughts and feelings in a non-linear way. It is a circular, reflective process. An experience is lived, it is recorded and explored as it is journalled and then, at a later point, re-experienced through re-reading. Sometimes, a great deal of material surfaces and this can be overwhelming.

Another disadvantage of journalling and record keeping is that it can be seen as a job to be done, a chore, so it may loose the aspect of creativity that is an important part of it. It makes a great call on the personal discipline of the researcher/writer. It may make demands that many researchers may not be accustomed to meeting.

How I have used writing and journalling in my research

I used my journals and notebooks to help me articulate my thoughts and feelings more concretely and, especially, in my own words. Writing down my experiences, I became more conscious of what I was feeling and doing and "being" – I found words to describe myself and my multiple identities and I found words to describe my research and my practice so that it was much easier to speak about myself and my research to others. It enabled me to identify and own feelings associated with my research and to appreciate them the more once I had used them in a way that was personally meaningful to me.

Writing down what had happened in the research, or how I had been affected by happenings in the research, helped me to identify feelings, keep things in perspective and indicated the direction of my thoughts. My motivation as a facilitator, for example, became clear as I wrote. I was helped to remember and recall later many aspects of various experiences that I would otherwise have forgotten. Many smaller issues would not have been "looked at" as fully and a characteristic pattern of feelings/behaviour would have been less likely to have been identified or, if already recognised, would not have been effectively changed.

The self-expression involved in keeping the journals brought with it self-knowledge, so that the journal and record books were important instruments of self-knowledge for me. I used journals and record books as a means of creative self-expression. This ability to express 'self' and embody 'thoughts' and 'feelings' meant that many feelings and insights were captured that might otherwise have been lost. Not only were they captured, but they were also embodied in a way that enabled me to work more constructively and effectively with them.

Any deep thinking that I needed to do, I found more beneficial if I wrote it into my notebook or journal. This helped to raise my level of awareness, so that I came to be more observant in recognising situations in the research which might lead me to deeper insights. By providing an objective avenue, journalling helped me directly reflect on the most personally meaningful and important events of the research journey.

It enabled me to reflect, without inhibition, on my inward journey and opened me to questions I had formerly been afraid to know like, for example, my fears and blocks about writing and who I made my critical judges. There was information that was important for me to learn, but the learning was always seen in terms of a personal integration of that material with a view to growth and later application.

Journalling enabled me to see areas of learning, of knowing and not knowing, of growth and lack of growth, and to observe growth actually taking place. Changes in attitudes, values and behaviour were apparent over the years. My journal provided a useful means of monitoring growth and evaluating it at various stages. My notebook recording of my research provided for me an objectivity which helped me deal more effectively and constructively with experiences in my life and in the life of the research. Journalling was important for me in my development as a researcher and although journal extracts do not appear in a substantial way in the completed thesis more of it appeared in earlier drafts.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have tried to display my energy for thinking about processes of inquiry and how I have drawn from others to affirm and articulate my own research methods. In the chapters that follow I shall demonstrate how I have used these methods and processes of inquiry.

Chapter 4

The Co-operative Inquiry

Introduction

In this chapter I tell the story of the co-operative inquiry that spanned four phases which I have used to structure the material presented. I include notes of general themes that emanated from the work and I also include my story of Cathy's and my collaboration. Although the main focus of this chapter is to explore what we did it is difficult to not include how we did it. Therefore, there is some overlap between content and process and, in outlining the details of how we conducted the inquiry, I offer some reflective comments by way of my own sensemaking of the process. I try to speak in my own voice and not for Cathy, by making a clear distinction between 'I' and 'we' to separate out my thinking and my actions from what Cathy and I did together. Any data used in this chapter is taken from my notes, my journal and from listening to the tape-recording.

Research Participants

Our experiences as educators and social work practitioners have allowed Cathy and me the opportunity to develop a network of contacts in social welfare agencies, both statutory and voluntary, which consist of black social work practitioners, some of whom are ex-students of WLIHE and are managers in middle and senior positions. Our network also consisted of black lecturers, practice teachers of social work and other educationalists. We used this London based network and invited people to share our ideas. We also invited students who were in the middle of their training as social workers. We chose this select group because we did not want the project to be too big and unwieldy. We also wanted to set boundaries and parameters to enable us to organise and manage the project effectively.

Fifty people came together, from this group of black managers, students, social work practitioners and other professionals in social work education, on a very hot day in July 1994 and we began a process of collaboration about our experiences which continued over a two-year period, using the method of co-operative inquiry. The whole event was tape-recorded.

Phases of the inquiry

Phase One

Germination of Ideas

At the beginning, through our professional networks we sought the interest of a small group of black professionals whom Cathy and I had known as colleagues and as friends whom we used as critical friends. The group of six consisted of educationalists, management consultants, managers in welfare organizations, educationalists/lecturers, and interested professionals. Having established their interest, we invited them to meet as a small group to explore further our ideas for research design. We used them for support and challenge, to test reactions and responses to our proposed project. In preparation for the first meeting with this group, Cathy and I were aware that we had to pay attention to developing a collaborative relationship in terms of establishing confidence and trust in our ideas and in us as researchers. We drew up a list of what we wanted to explore with the group. We listed the concepts we were working with and themes we were interested in and took them into the meeting. We saw its purpose as:

- Getting to know each other

- Bringing the group members up to date with our journey

- Developing teamwork

- Sharing the basic views of the methodology

- Stressing the principles of collaboration and the importance of negotiating ownership

- Stressing emphasis on storytelling

The group met for four meetings exchanging ideas, telling our own stories of survival and how we had transcended some difficulties, identifying research questions, exploring the notion of a black perspective in research and familiarizing ourselves with the research methodology. Only one member of the group, Carlis, had practical experience of action research methodology. I had experience of being a participant in Carlis's action research but had no experience of conducting an action research project, so we relied heavily on Carlis for support. The group's interest in the research project deepened and there was energy and enthusiasm for it. Group members felt sufficiently involved and we discovered our connectedness; they became fully engaged with us in assisting to set up the inquiry, and together we formed the group which:

- planned our approach to getting others involved

- Identified with and assisted in carrying out, related administrative tasks

- Planned and ran the introductory seminar

- Shared the facilitation role in workshops

The group met once more in that configuration after the first seminar for debriefing, feedback, and further planning. Some of the members of this group continued as participants in the inquiry and engaged in the cycles of inquiry as ordinary participants. Others stayed involved by acting as 'think tanks' for Cathy and me because they were not able to meet the time demanded for the meetings. They assisted with the organisation and planning of meetings.

Interested Parties Coming Together (Introductory One Day Seminar)

I was concerned that everyone might be coming to the day with his or her own set of assumptions and expectations as to what the meeting will be like. Ours might differ from theirs. They were likely to have particular and different strengths, in terms of relevant personal experiences and knowledge. Becoming sensitive to and aware of these starting points (including my own) was a crucial task. Unless a group has met only to socialize, there has to be an agenda of some kind, however informal. We agreed on one from the outset, in the sense that we suggested one and they agreed. This included our purpose, aims, objectives, ideas and research questions.

Presenting the research Ideas – Morning Session

The presentation of ideas about the project was done through a presentation of papers from Cathy and me. We outlined the main areas of the research and some of our thinking so far. We also said why we were proposing an Inquiry Group. The research assistant also presented some of the findings and outcomes of the questionnaire conducted with ex-students, sharing the emergent themes, and we declared an intention of wanting to explore these ideas in depth. Carlis, another member of the facilitator's group presented a paper on the methodology, explaining action research methodology and, in particular the co-operative inquiry method in simple terms and explained how we might use this methodological approach.

Working in small groups

As research is not an everyday feature of the lives of the people we were hoping to work with, we thought it was important that people had time to familiarize themselves with the

ideas of the research. Loftland and Loftland (1994) suggest that even when people know that they are being studied they probably have only a tenuous idea about what the researcher is doing, what the research is about and why it is being undertaken. It was a time of testing. Would people understand? Would they want to help? In view of these concerns we allocated plenty of time in small groups for people to have an opportunity to react and respond to what they had heard so far about the ideas of the research and the proposed methodology.

With the help of facilitators we explored these ideas and issues and our concerns. The facilitators had some questions which acted as prompts to assist with thinking, such as:

- How is it we do not talk of our success?

- How can we get ourselves out of the blaming, victim role?

- How can we reduce the mistrust and suspicion that sometimes gets in the way of our communicating effectively?

- How can we return to our authentic selves?

Participants brought back their questions, reactions, responses and concerns to the whole group and shared what had emerged from the small groups in a morning plenary. We structured the feedback, in an effort to manage time and to offer opportunity for each group's voice to be heard, by asking each to present at least three questions. Some of the questions and comments from the morning session were:

- Individual's psychology versus the political and structural experience. How do we allow ourselves to examine our psychological processes?

- How would we enable ourselves to build new psychological strategies?

- How do we encourage support and difference?

- How responsible are we for the rest of the black community?

- Is the oppressor always white? Sometimes we are our own worst enemies and do a good job on the business ourselves, as black people. Victims sometimes become oppressors.

- Should colleges and universities be responsible for preparing black students to enter the work arena?

From the morning feedback session it became evident that some participants took an active, inquiring, reflective approach and wanted more time in small groups so we returned to working in small groups. This time we structured the small groups so that we worked in 'identity' groups. These were as educationalists, managers, social work students and practitioners. In these groups we explored our experiences and fed back in a large group plenary.

Listening to the feedback it became apparent to me that we struck a vein of enthusiasm and found an echoing chord. It was evident that some people appeared excited by the prospect of the project; they seemed to have enjoyed the process in some of the groups and this was noticeable in their lively discussions. Some people stayed back at the end of the day to talk with us or huddled together in pockets talking. The project meant something to others and as a result the sharing of stories began. An overwhelming generosity of giving of self and experiences was manifest and people present stated their interest both verbally and in writing. We regarded the relationship we had begun to develop as more important than explanation.

Questions we, as initiators, were left with after the first meeting:

1.What was the nature of the connection that helped to generate a sense of community at the meeting?

2. Was the connection real, genuine?

3. Were there points of disconnection with each other and or with our ideas?

4. The concept of Community - how can we test this notion in action - is it a romantic idea?

5. The role of facilitators - do we need them?

6. How will people be helped/taught through the notion of an action-reflection cycle?

Questions 1,2,3,and 4 have always been questions for me through out the research and I have continued asking them and inquiring into them. The issue of connectedness has only been partially explored and I will discuss it further in Chapter 8.

As mentioned earlier, after the meeting the planning group met again to reflect on the event. We agreed that the role of the facilitators was no longer needed because it might set up a hierarchy and get in the way of authentic collaboration. So we decided to

disperse the facilitators' group leaving responsibility with Cathy and me for holding the project. We thought that having people in such positions disturbed the balance in the inquiry.

Phase Two

People coming together with shared interest to plan

Contracting

We wrote to the list of people who had signed up at the end of the first seminar inviting them to another meeting. The aim of the meeting was to develop interest and to engage participants and to decide on procedures and process for action. We also invited people who had expressed interest in the project but had not attended the seminar and ensured that they received a written hand out of the events from the first meeting, especially the principles of the methodology. All those who expressed their interest in participating in the project attended a second meeting for the purpose of negotiation and contracting and so the second phase began in September 1994.

Preparation, planning and negotiating

Planning for the contracting meeting proved to be crucial. In some ways all the hard work was done then. In co-operative inquiry, planning takes longer because of the need to tap into the experience of so many people before firming up purpose, let alone a plan, and that process involved careful negotiation. Preparing to negotiate our contract provoked questions for Cathy and me relating to our position as initiators of the project. One question which we had to consider was how powerful we were as research initiators. We were aware of our power in the formal and informal setting, our power within the informal network of black social work lecturers and the status of the organisation from which the project emanated, the social work department in Brunel University and what it stood for were a definite plus in negotiation. Some people had a great deal of respect for the Department of Social Work because it employed black lecturers and actively sought to attract black students. It was also known for its ideological position regarding anti-discriminatory practice, which proved attractive for some black people.

I considered other questions, such as, if power exists, how does it change within the context of different relationships? How is this power used? The researcher's position of power, or powerlessness within negotiations is important to consider. One consideration

is the role of the other participants and their position in terms of ownership of the project. The fundamental idea of Co-operative Inquiry is that people work together as co-researchers in exploration in order to bring about some change. In planning for the achievement of that notion we thought it would be best to use the term frequently and to make it explicit from the beginning in order to assist people to understand its meaning and their role fully and to begin the process of accepting ownership of the project.

We wanted to do three things, which were:

1. To make constant reference to the term co-researchers to help people to become familiar with the term.

2. To recap and review the project's development and progress so that everyone would get the opportunity to be at a roughly similar stage.

3. To do an exercise to help people to take their thinking at a deeper level, as a process of clarity and inclusion, and to check out how committed they were to the research. We posed the question, who is the research for? ME, for US, for THEM.(Marshall and Reason 1987) We hoped that, with this exercise, people would begin to explore deeper their involvement in the research and hopefully integration would begin.

One other reason for working with this question was because I did the exercise and found it helpful in assisting me to find out why I was doing this research and what its purpose was. I discovered that the research was very much part of my life. Drawing on my own experiences and that of some other members of that first meeting, I felt it was useful for the group members to begin their process of awareness and identification so that their personal questions about their relationship to the research could begin to emerge.

We also thought about finding ways to make the inquiry manageable and productive by considering ways of enabling full, effective and rewarding participation. Prior to this meeting I was aware that group trust can initially be low (Jaques, 1984) and there is a need to set up a contract about the research agenda with the group (Kent and Maggs, 1992). We therefore planned and structured the first part of this session hierarchically (Heron1989) and set out a framework for developing the research.

We thought structure was important at this stage and devised a complex structure along the lines of professional identity. We suggested that three long-term inquiry groups be set up, which were composed of managers, practitioners and educationalist/lecturers as

these represented the bulk of the participants. We thought about our role and how we would make it explicit to the group, also making explicit how we saw the three groups functioning and their relationship to one another. I was concerned with how much we presented as having a ready -made package and how much space we should allow for new and different suggestions to emerge from the group.

Our suggestions for the functions of the groups were:

Manager's group:

- Offer data on the interactions between black managers and black workers
- Examine how managers develop an identity as black managers – what impact does this have on black workers
- Name what do they see in the workplace vis-à-vis the interactions between black workers? Are there similarities and/or differences between what happens at college and in the workplace?

Practitioners i.e. social workers Group

- This group is seen as the core/nucleus for the community of inquiry
- It should generate rich material in terms of testing – negative and positive experiences of being a student and/or practitioner – public and private voices – black on black interactions.
- It should provide data on successes – help with career trajectories

Educationalist/Lecturers Group

- Discovery of how we are seen by: black students, white students, black colleagues, white colleagues, the educational institutions
- Contextualising, analysing the state of social work education from a black perspective
- Telling the black lecturers stories

Process of contracting

The issue of inclusion was very important for us, at this early stage of forming and our concern was about integrating new people into the process so there was a need to reiterate the methodology. We did this in two ways. First, I gave a verbal recap of the main ideas and perspectives in the project and stated our purpose and proposed method of inquiry. I also fed back the themes arising from the first meeting and outlined our plans for this current meeting. We spent some time engaging in a question and answer

process. We allowed space between recapping on methodology and time for peoples' comments and questions, but I was left feeling that the participants had not sufficiently integrated what it meant to be able to comment from an informed position, or to ask challenging questions. Secondly, we all did the exercise research FOR ME, US, THEM. We did it individually, then shared in small groups of three with Cathy and myself participating in the exercise.

The sense I made of the feedback was that people tended to focus more on the 'US' and began to make general statements about our experiences as black people. I sensed that they wanted to get on with the telling of their stories and to begin to explore the pressing issues for black people. My thought then was that people were so keen to engage in something positive, to find another way of constructing their experiences and to seek emotional sustenance that they just wanted to immerse themselves in the process. I also sensed that they were experiencing the forum as safe and were open in their expression. I was interested in the way people were sharing so openly and willingly. I wondered if it was because they were hearing something new and wanted to engage with that newness.

There were one or two concerns expressed about the length of time the research would take and less concern with the idea of sharing and inquiring together. It may have been that people were experiencing themselves as another group of black people coming together just to talk about experiences of living in a racist society. It was not possible to say, at this point, that we were all professionals because some people were experiencing difficulties in defining themselves as a 'professional'. This is an issue which I have noted is of wider concern in the black community. Nor was it possible to refer to us as co-researchers at this stage. What then are the qualities that would make this a community of inquirers?

Groups Forming:
Some people readily accepted the idea of researching collaboratively. They also accepted our ideas for having three groups' -Lecturer/Educationalist, Managers, and Practitioners, but not so readily. Participants were invited to self-select, according to their defined professional identity, for allocation to groups. Some people wanted to meet with more than one group. Some had defined themselves as practitioner and manager, practitioner and educationalist, manager and educationalist, others defined themselves as all three - practitioner, manager and educationalist and were faced with the challenge

of where to place themselves and how much time they had to commit. Some difficulties were encountered because of the narrow definitions of the groups as named.

The title of the groups presumed that you could only define yourself as one thing or the other. In reality, a practitioner could also be a manager and indeed some people wanted to find a way of representing this. My concern was that we, as initiators of the research, had defined the group and had done so narrowly. I was concerned that some people found the choices limiting. Yet some people welcomed it because the definition meant that they could economise on time and use their resources in a more focused and effective way. We resolved the problem by allowing space for the group to explore their issues and concerns and to challenge our decision for structured groups. After a lengthy discussion, people made their choices based on self-definition in terms of professional identity and time commitment. They then physically moved towards forming themselves into inquiry groups. At this point we met in those groups to organise and plan for future meetings

Groups Organising:

In our thinking, Cathy and I saw the Practitioners Group as consisting mainly of WLIHE ex-students /present students and questioned what we were implying by this. Were we really viewing the ex-students as practitioners or were we still seeing them as students and, more importantly, 'our students'? What was significant was that all those people who had attended, or were attending, WLIHE chose to be together in a group despite the fact that some were managers. They chose to become the practitioner Group. I do not think that the title of the group meant a great deal to them; what was more important was that they were together. In some ways they were already a defined group and had some degree of cohesion because they had some similarities and a common bond - WLIHE. This was evident in the way they behaved in the process of group formation and the selection of venues for future meetings. They gravitated towards each other, around Cathy, with great speed and decided they would meet at WLIHE. They took control of their own situation and determined where they would meet. I imagined that they saw WLIHE as a place of safety, a past home.

A great deal of time was spent working through an understanding on how the action-reflection cycle would be carried out and considering how we would deal with some of the potentially sensitive issues. We also spent some time alleviating fear and suspicions provoked about taking action in organisations, and what it would mean for us and the organisations.

In our planning, Cathy and I decided that, between us, we would attend all the group meetings, but for this initial coming together to form groups it was only possible for us to attend one group each. I chose to work with the Managers' Group because of my interest and my experience of having been a manager. I also felt closer to that group. I shared similar values about management. I could have chosen to work with any one of the groups because of my experiences as a trainer and as a teacher/educationalist, but I made assumptions about educationalists group facilitating skills, as some of the members of that group were teachers. So Cathy chose to go with the Practitioners' group and I went with the Managers' Group.

The educationalist/Lecturers Group was left to work on its own. We arranged this because that group had in it one person who had been part of the original planning group and had acted as facilitator in the July seminar, so that we felt confident that the group would get the help it needed. On reflection, I saw that we gave that person more power in the educationalists group. This action went against the notion of equity and did not assist with group members finding a similar starting point. There might have been a hidden message about power and control on our part, a message which said ' make sure you keep them focused', although on the surface we displayed a trust in that group to 'get on with the business'.

I was interested to note that the feedback from some members of Educationalist/Lecturer group to me was that they wished that one of us had attended their group because they felt that they lost sight of their purpose. They also wanted the functions of the groups made more explicit by Cathy and myself in writing. We deliberately chose not to do give out a piece of paper with the functions in print, as if in tablets of stone, at such early stage but offered it at the end of the contracting phase. We wanted the groups to consider purpose and function in more depth so that they could own the process and define how they wanted to work. What was also evident was that when Educationalist/Lecturer group returned to the large group plenary theirs was the only group which felt that it could not meet without one of us present, yet made dates without reference to Cathy and myself. I thought that a conflicting and ambivalent message was being communicated "we need you but we don't want you". This I found difficult to hear and, when Cathy and I discussed this afterwards, we both felt uncomfortable about this group meeting without one of us present. This group was testing the boundaries around dependence and independence but more importantly, challenged our power as facilitators.

I experienced the Managers' Group on the other hand, as feeling comfortable with the process of negotiation. The members quickly dealt with the practical things and moved on to begin discussions and suggestions for items for the first meeting. I noted that they treated the process in a very business- like manner, organising dates and forming an agenda. One of the things they wanted to explore was new ways of 'being' with other black staff, particularly staff whom they supervised. They agreed to explore this issue at their next meeting.

The three groups devised plans for future meetings - dates, venues, time and a cycle of meetings were planned. Finding dates took a long time and provided an opportunity for individuals to think through their commitments, whether they wanted to come again, and when they would manage to do so. Each group planned to meet at least four times initially, and most agreed to meeting six times, paying attention to the length of time between each meeting so that people could engage in action before the next meeting. At the end of the contracting process we set the boundary for when we would next meet as a whole community. We decided on six months. We thought that this was long enough for the groups to engage in the reflection-action process. I also had some concerns that these groups would become independent subgroups with lives of their own and lose sight of the wider community. Would they really feel part of a wider group if they were left to work independently for too long? I thought that Cathy and I would be vital in keeping the link by constantly reminding each group of the existence of the others, by making connections and identifying shared themes, and by ensuring that what was personal to the individual group stayed personal, whilst the themes were shared.

We took responsibility for the initial administration of the inquiry sub-groups and agreed to send out dates, times and venues to each participant, ensuring that each person knew when their group was meeting. We ensured that each person had the dates for all the meetings so that anyone wishing to attend the meetings of any of the other groups could do so. We had not envisaged the groups as being fixed or closed, but we were concerned that we may have given that message. I was aware that we may have closed the boundaries in the sub-groups inquiries and I was concerned that the groups opened their boundaries during the inquiries to include interaction amongst ourselves, as part of the action phase, as well as interaction with the outside world (Heron, 1996).

Cathy and I also agreed to put in writing our ideas for the functions of the sub-groups. We were concerned to ensure that the sub-groups experienced themselves as mini communities with a uniqueness of their own, but feeding into the whole community (all

three groups). We suggested that they use our suggestions for functioning as broad headings for focusing their discussions. We stressed that it was not our intention to restrict them but that they might find the suggestions useful for making their meetings more effective. We also wrote reminding them of the importance of the action reflection cycle.

Reflecting on the contracting meeting, I noticed that I experienced tensions between myself, as initiator, and some of the participants with regard to their expectations. It was evident that people brought different expectations. One obvious tension was between those people who wanted more direction and those who wanted to stay with the flow of the process; between those who wanted me and Cathy to take lead roles, others who were listening but with some suspicion, and others who challenged our power. I was concerned that some people might have wanted to participate in the research because of their relationship with us and might be less committed to the methodology.

At the end of the contracting meeting I was left with major questions about my facilitation and some notes on the tension I experienced as a co-researcher. My questions were, did I have the skills to work in genuine collaboration on such complex issues with a group of very skilled, powerful, competent black people? Would I be able to manage the anxieties that it would bring?

Phase Three
Engagement in action

Working as co-researchers, creating and maintaining collaboration
Phase three consisted of the groups meeting to engage fully with each other and deepen their experience. The three groups met for six months in total; they met for no less than two to three hours each time. Every meeting was tape-recorded. I attended meetings of all three groups and Cathy attended the Practitioners' and Educationalist/lecturer groups. I acted as a bridge, a link and carrier transporting themes and questions to and from groups. When I observed groups expressing similar and/or different themes or issues, I introduced content from other groups as a means of keeping the groups connected.

What Happened In the Groups?

During the meetings people were encouraged to tell stories of their experiences as practitioners, managers, tutors and educationalists, men and women. The main activity

was the sharing of experiences and reflections on those experiences. Sharing cannot happen quickly and relaxed group meetings seemed the best format, so it was important to create a friendly, relaxed environment in which ideas could be shared and inquiry questions could emerge.

Our experiences were not just what we communicated verbally but, also, what we did and where we chose to hold the meetings, for example, which represented a recognition that different ways of approaching such a task will encourage and or discourage possibilities of experience and action. We held meetings in various venues, some representing our identity as students and social work professionals. Some meetings were held at the University and these were primarily the Practitioners' Group meetings; the Managers Group rotated their venues and met in each others agencies and in their homes; the Lecturers/Educationalist Group met at the Headquarters of CCETSW, the Central Council for Education and Training of Social workers.

We were interested in finding ways and means of enabling each other to talk freely, and openly, about our experiences. In particular, I was interested in our narrative accounts of our experiences in white institutions and how we related to these experiences and to each other. I wanted to explore this 'from below'. There was a very real dilemma, however, about how to work together in the group to explore these experiences.

I noticed that the structures of the venues impacted on the way some of us behaved and what we chose to speak about in the telling of our stories. In the informal setting of the home we told stories about our families and of a personal nature. In addition we met out of work time and the meetings appeared less structured and controlled and went on for longer. Less negative issues were discussed with more open inquiry questions emerging. The meetings in work settings focused on work issues, for example, on complaints, and on the struggles, dilemmas and contradictions of being a black manager. Meetings at CCETSW appeared more constraining; they were formally organised, focused and goal oriented with more questioning both about what we were doing in and with the research and about global concerns. Meetings at the University appeared to have taken some people back into the experience of being a student and they focused on their experiences of teaching and learning, engaging with ideas but attended by lots of complaints and focus on the negatives, wanting solutions and actions. This was also balanced with lots of laughter and fun. We were telling of life in different settings as we

sat in those settings. We were telling stories of how we coped in and with those settings which made demands and, at the same time, offered some possibilities.

Telling our stories

Participants narrated their stories in a form not recognised in the social sciences. People had interesting stories to tell which seemed tangential, at times, and unexpected contributions seemed to form part of the negotiation over what we really might be talking about. Somehow, in the end, the way we told our stories played a key part in helping the group to develop a sense of identity. We began with general discussions that were at times loose and unfocused but later developed ideas and strategies for change. As we spoke to, and of, what was real to us we told stories and fragments of stories. We were concerned with listening to and probing the stories we told. We paid attention to the person telling the story and to the coherence of personal statements even when s/he went off on a tangent or changed the subject. Questioning and probing into the meaning and messages that made up the stories was important in order to open our story and show its hidden complexities, blind spots, contradictions and alternative meanings. We were articulating our experiences in ways that were not easy, and this perspective was a challenge to many of us who did not have such a probing style. Another challenge was that at times in some groups, the sharing process took over from the purpose of the group and developed its own impetus, becoming like an end in itself.

Our words did not carry impassive and neutral meanings; some words, however, were substantial and powerful. Sometimes the words told their own tales and created realities of their own. They carried a variety of different meanings to the listener and teller depending on the values the teller and listeners held, the context in which the listening was taking place and what might have been projected from personal experiences into the listening. Our words were created in relationship, which led some people into places they would not otherwise have gone. In that way our acts of telling were at times, acts of inquiry.

An awareness of the interpersonal dynamic of the inquiry situation including the recognition that this was an 'emotionally charged' situation for some participants (Patai, 1991) was therefore very important. I was aware this in that process of inquiry it was possible that some people would engage all too readily in a process of disclosure and, in the course of it, carry baggage from other places. They might get in touch with past memories and thereby release long-hidden feelings of frustration and anger, and then

what? So my agenda, at times, was to stop some people in an attempt to protect them from painful memories. I did it because I was concerned that we would run out of time and people would be left raw. After all, this was not a therapeutic group. I found it a difficult balancing act trying not to disturb the process of 'telling' out and at the same time feeling the need to 'take care'. I was uncertain about setting limits on the sharing as a way of keeping to purpose. I was also aware that researching with such an inquiry approach can incorporate not only the therapeutic effects of remembering but also opportunities to reflect on a personal past, and that this can lead to a stronger sense of self in the present (Thompson, 1988). So I was continually being challenged to stay open to the process and work with the present.

I was thrown into confusion, uncertainty and chaos and I spent much of my time feeling completely bewildered with slippery, messy boundaries. At times I felt swamped by the enormity of the task and I was scared that I would not be able to make sense of it all. I tried desperately to take action to stay with the process. I had doubts about what was happening and whether I was doing anything useful or even sensible. I resorted frequently to the comforting thought that letting go of control involves risk and uncertainty, and feelings of confusion must therefore be expected. I was then able to allow more things to emerge. Part of what I let emerge was to share my story of my experience in the 'here and now', and so I also told my story of my own involvement in this research process. How people saw me and how I presented myself, were important factors in determining how we related to one another; it was, therefore important to include that story. As initiator, I was already framing little stories about how we would want things to go and what we would want to see happen. I saw how, as I told my story, it began to link with others' stories of their involvement and these links created another story out of which other sets of anticipation occurred and alternatives were played with. Together, we were constructing a new story of the research so, as I was telling my stories, I was in the process of living out a new story by rethinking and by rewriting the story of how I wanted to see the inquiry undertaken by raising new questions.

We did not stay close to the rigid conventions that co-operative inquiry suggested we should in terms of the action-reflection cycle. We told personal biographies, stories that represented the world of personhood; we listened, questioned and told stories that made or broke us, stories that sustained us in times of trouble and encouraged us towards ends we would not otherwise managed. Some stories were about activism, and fighting back. Some of our questions directed us towards telling of our ways of creating and sustaining

our world, of ways of functioning in racist organisations and society rather than the given research topic or given ways of research inquiry. We were engaged in narratives that recognised that we were in the midst of telling and listening, assisting and asking, confirming and disconfirming. We were engaged in conversations and our stories emerged from those conversations.

The nature of our collaborative conversations

The open-ended and complex verbal analyses that made up the collaborative conversations were focused on experiences of each other as black people, our experiences of being valued and devalued by each other and the effects of racism on that experience. We told each other brief stories of practice and about our identity as professionals, our achievements and non-achievements, and our lack of validation by organisations. Some of these will be related in Chapter7

Our conversations were more than inter-exchange discourse or talk because they had certain characteristics. Conversations occurred between and among us in the form of dialogue that consisted of connected remarks, speaking, listening, reflecting and speaking again. It was a co-operative venture in that it was a joint activity, pursuing relevant contributions. The content of our conversation was related to something other than itself. There was a direction to our conversations and new understanding arose through our conversation (Feldman, 1999). In that sense, our conversation could have been seen as a dialectical process as we shared knowledge, views, understanding and feelings, while relating to the context of our personal and political histories; it ranged over many subjects and included a variety of voices; it also led in directions not thought of, left unanswered questions and answered questions not asked.

Generating Knowledge

We became aware of a range of perspectives that informed our experiences and was able to contextualise our behaviour. This process led to some valuing of our lived experiences and emotions as knowledge and understanding were being generated. In the appropriation of such knowledge, something else occurred, some participants came to understand or construct meanings. We were engaged in acts of making meaning in situations through a dialogic and dialectic process (Feldman, 1999). Dialogic because, in response to the spoken words, understanding arose for some participants as was evident

in their answers. And it was a dialectic process because, through the discourse that occurred in the conversation, the new understanding that arose transcended what was said and felt before.

We were engaged in what Hollingsworth (1994) calls "relational knowing", knowing in relationship to each other and to the relationship between personal and professional. Knowing about our personal and professional experiences grew and was shared in conversations. Connelly and Clandinin (1994) argue that a mutual construction of stories arises from collaborative inquiry which provides possibilities for change in practice and in the way we live out our stories. Some participants took issues, questions and experiments into their practice and engaged in practical knowing (Heron 1993). For one participant the suggestion was that she would inquire into her behaviour as she approache groups of black students, in formal and informal situations like the canteen; it was suggested that she notice how she felt, monitor her internal processes, and the choices she made about joining or not joining them. For another participant the action was about her noticing her behaviour in respect of her successes and achievements. She was soon to attend a graduation ceremony and she decided to pay attention to her behaviour in terms of actions and interactions with her family, in particular, and how she accepted praise or not. These participants then returned to the group and told new stories and experiences about how these ideas were enacted. As individuals fed back on actions they had taken and their outcomes, I noted how confident some members became about inquiring.

Some of us were not always conscious that we were engaging in creating knowledge or experienced our acts of 'telling' as being liberating. For others, the stories had a liberating effect which produced positive action. This came about as a result of some engagement in reflective learning. Reflection is in itself a complex process as can be seen from Boyd and Fales's (1983) statement; it is "The process of creating and clarifying the meaning of experience (present and past) in terms of self (self in relation to self and self in relation to the world). The outcome of the process is changed conceptual perspective. The experience that is explored and examined to create meaning focuses around or embodies a concern of central importance to self"(p...)

When viewed in this way the concept of reflection, as a process leading to changed perceptual perspective, echoes the process of personal change, leading to reinterpretation of personal, social and occupational roles (Brookfield, 1986). Brookfield

argues that a significant aspect of reflective learning is the ability to question one's self-image and that this is linked to the notion of self-concept. This is something which participants spoke about as happening to them. As individuals, they 'reinterpreted their current and past behaviours from a new perspective' something Mezirow (1990) calls 'perspective transformation'. Our collaborative conversations went beyond pleasant and informative chats to become a place for research in which transformative processes occurred.

Looking back over the meetings, important aspects of the forum we created together seemed to include things like time, trust, comfort, enjoyment, and tolerance of uncertainties. The emphasis had been on enhancing the informality of the contact, for example, through getting to know people outside the research project or adopting a naturalistic approach and spending time relaxing with participants socially.

At the end of Phase 3, we did not come away with hard conclusions but the experience of being in a group dialoging, debating, having conversations and breaking silences. This was the first opportunity for many of us to engage in this way in research, so there had to be an 'emptying out' of the negatives, relating the bad experiences. Consequently, at times, there was more focus on the negative experiences than on the positive ones. If the inquiry had continued for longer we would perhaps have arrived at a place where more of the positives would have been shared.

Phase Four

<u>**Feedback and evaluation – co-researchers re-assemble**</u>

In the fourth phase the whole community came together, in April 1995, and explored recurring themes. This was also an exercise in accountability, validity and feedback. The group was coming to an end and communication about the research project as a whole was an important priority for Cathy and me. So, at this meeting, participants who had taken part in the interviews and the questionnaire conducted by the research assistant were also invited to attend. This was a way of reminding the Inquiry Group that there was a wider community and that the research project went beyond the inquiry groups.

Listening to the tape recordings from the inquiry sub-groups, and reading notes from the sub-group meetings and jottings from flipcharts, Cathy and I tried to make sense of some

of our stories. We focused on themes; some of the themes were: 'how we offer support and receive support', ' our successes and achievements' 'the role of the black community' 'our expectations of each other'.

I have included text, in the form of notes taken from flipcharts and plenary feedback, from the inquiry groups and from the first large seminar, which was held to launch the research project. I have included this so that the reader might be exposed to the breadth of issues and the kind of inquiry questions we were faced with. I have chosen to present themes arising out of the meeting at the start of the research project and some inquiry questions within each theme from sub-groups to show how some of the particular questions have continued to feature throughout the group meetings.

General Themes

1. The theme of *SUCCESS* was paramount, because, as initiators, we introduced it into the discussions. It appeared in each group's verbal feedback and flip chart notes, either in the form of questions or of issues for further exploration. The following are some of the questions and issues which were highlighted under this heading: -

- How do we measure our success?

- Is the measuring tool standard, is it defined by the black community or society generally?

- What is a success story and what are our success stories?

- Can we use our own perspective to tell our success stories? - it is important to tell that story in our own voices;

- Can we afford to talk about our successes given the level of resentment we endure? Being successful can act as a constraint given that successful people often feel responsible; what responsibility do we have as successful people to enable, empower and support people to navigate their way to success?

The issue of responsibility has been a crucial point throughout the groups' discussions. I am reminded here of the words of Edwards and Polite in 'Children of a Dream':

"Among successful blacks, taking responsibility is so reflexive, so much a part of their lives, that it rarely occurs to them to articulate it, it is an essential ingredient that has been key to their achievements - it just is"(Edwards and Polite, 1992).

2. Another theme which, as research initiators, we took into the discussion was *ACCENTUATING THE POSITIVES*: Some of these questions emanated from the discussions

- How do we ground ourselves in the positives? To arrive at this point a process of deconstruction and reconstruction is necessary.

- What is the difference between the students who feed into the victimology syndrome, by focusing on the negatives and failures, and the students who talk about their negative experiences and learn from them?

- What are the negative experiences black students' face both generally and in black on black interaction.

- How does the negative experiences students' face on social work courses get transported into the workplace? In this regard, universities should take some responsibility for preparing black students for the outside world.

- How is it that black people are excluded from other professions? The journey and the mission of white welfare organisations seemed to have been to allow us entry in a big way to social work as a profession but not to include us in the full operation of the organisation. Nevertheless, we need not perpetuate ourselves as minorities. We need not become judgmental of all black people.

3. A third general theme was *CHOOSING OUR OWN VOICES, HAVING OUR OWN PERSPECTIVES AND TELLING OUR OWN STORIES*. Under this heading some of the following statements were made:

It is important to hear all the voices - internal, external, self, community, individual, us, the profession. It is important to tell our stories in our own voices. It is important to work from our strengths. We need to set our own agenda rather than having the agenda set for us and there is a fear of opening up the debate, fear that we won't get to the heart of the issue.

In this regard there were some concerns expressed about the appropriateness of co-operative inquiry as a method for voicing our stories, and the methodology was questioned. For example:

- Is research the right way to build up our body of knowledge?

- Is this methodology the right way?

4. *DIFFERENCES/COMMONALITIES/FAMILIARITIES* was another theme. The statement was made, that we needed to celebrate our commonalties and differences and that lead to a number of inquiry questions, for example:

- What are the issues around difference?

- What do we do to accommodate difference?

- What do we do to prevent us from coming together? Trust is a big issue.

- What criteria do we use to judge whether we can trust each other or not? We need to be explicit about the criteria.

- Is there a difference between people coming into the welfare profession now from ten years ago? Is there a difference between black people who were born in England, and those born in the Caribbean, in Africa, and the Indian sub-continent in their attitude towards education and their relationship to racism and resistance? Are people starting from a point of familiarity as black people? If so, what is that familiarity? We need to look at the relationship between 'me' and 'us', need to put back the 'me' in the discourse.

5. *NOTION OF A COMMUNITY*: Who are and where is the black community? What are the messages it gives? The notion of the black community should be at the heart of the research.

6. *OUR NEEDS AS BLACK PROFESSIONALS* was another big theme.

- Where do we get our support?

- Who do we, as a people, look to for that support?

- Should we be complacent that the issue of race that it is being dealt with because we see black practitioners/professionals and managers?

This list gives a flavour of the sorts of issues and questions we were confronted with as researchers. I do not intend to address all these issues or questions, but I have tried to address some of these questions in the analysis that follows in chapters 7 and 8, some explicitly and others implicitly.

Cathy and I chose an overarching theme of 'success' to write up and present, at the final phase, as it was a theme that we set out to explore at the outset of the project. It was also in keeping with our idea of accentuating the positives in our experiences. However, I was left with a concern that the ideas Cathy and I chose to present might have appeared more important than the ideas other group members generated and become too focused a reference point. Another concern was that we did not circulate our write up before hand. On reflection I regret this, because it was not helpful for some participants as it placed them at an unfair disadvantage. This act was not in the spirit of collaboration and indeed, some participants confirmed that it would have been helpful if they had the paper ahead of the meeting in their feedback at the end of the meeting. I agreed to send my paper on after the meeting. I also sent all the other papers I wrote from the data for this thesis to some group members. I received feedback in writing and from a small group of participant who came together and explored the contents of these papers (see Chapter 9).

At the final meeting, although Cathy and I made a formal presentation, other group members were invited to make informal presentations and some did in the course of the discussion. The presentation stimulated a rich discussion and the group raised more questions. We were continuing to explore and develop the issues we had identified. Opportunities for review and strategies for ways forward were also explored. My main regret was that the group ran out of time at what I thought was an important breakthrough in our thinking about the successes of black professionals.

Closing the Inquiry

How this process is completed when researchers find the inquiry personally, politically and emotionally significant is no doubt complicated. How does one's rapport with people lessen once it is established? How did the participants react to Cathy and me saying it was our end? Some reactions were totally unexpected. It was a very emotional ending with heartfelt gestures of gratitude. Participants fed back on their personal experiences and offered accounts of what changes they made in their personal and professional practice. Some of this feedback was given to me privately rather than in the large forum. Some of the participants in the inquiry had different responses but there was an overwhelming need to continue; if it were not possible to continue the question asked was "where do we go next?"

At such times I imagine research initiators may feel compelled to promise future contacts, to establish friendships and so on, as I did. Naturally, I felt obligated to reciprocate to the participants the valuable material gained and, ultimately, the personal goals I had met. I had to deal with the reality of conducting research that asks for so much and gives relatively little in return.

It is possible to rationalise and intellectualise these feelings by convincing ourselves that our work contributes to the political struggles of our community and takes issue with ideologies of the academy, yet there is an emotional aspect to the research that is difficult to accept on an intellectual level. Consequently, as with entry into the community of inquirers, departure must be honest and ethical. We did have a closure of the inquiry groups and we ended the present contract.

However, we did not have a final cut off as some of our relationships are still continuing in different ways, for example, seminars for black professionals and discussions about the possibility of a centre for black professional studies which Cathy and I have initiated. It is, evident that one relationship that has continued, throughout the research inquiry and beyond, is the relationship of Cathy and me as friends and as researchers. The quality of Cathy's and my contact and collaboration was an important aspect, in terms of the contribution our relationship made to the space we created and that which we continue to create. Our story of our collaboration is worth commenting on here.

Cathy and Agnes story of collaborating

Among the stories was Cathy and my story, our story of co-operation and collaboration. I agree with Witherell and Noddings, (1991) when they say that "the stories we hear and the stories we tell shape the meaning and texture of our lives at every stage and juncture"(p1). Cathy's and my story did shape the meaning and texture of the inquiry and in capturing the story of our relationship and collaboration on paper I was faced with a number of inquiry questions. For example, how do I capture in written word the identity we formed, our collaborative identity, our partnership, and our relationship? How do I capture in the written word the process of sitting together and writing? In the writing of the inquiry story how and when do I use 'we', 'I' or both? In what follows I shall not necessarily answer these questions but during the process of the telling I shall pay attention to our identity

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and our process of working and of writing together. I have paid attention to the 'I', 'we' or both in terms of ownership of my own process using 'I' and only including in this story what Cathy has agreed.

Our story was constructed around our coming together with a commitment to understand issues related to education, teaching and learning and students and social workers experiences for social work education. Our partnership would not have happened without our individual commitment to collaboration. I recognised that our sense of inquiry was stimulated through the action research in which we had engaged. We questioned, listened and shared viewpoints and we also respected each other's academic credentials, professional identity and experiences as black women. But our success as collaborators depended on more than that. It was based on trust. Through our stories and conversations we developed the trust and understanding that were vital to us in working together. Through our conversations we questioned who we were. This was not asked explicitly or consciously but in our stories and conversations, which became our vehicles of communication, there were answers to this question.

The university had provided us with the opportunities for collaboration but we created the bonds that could make it happen. Our jointly written papers represent one form of our interaction, but words were written in these published documents which were not shared until our relationship had reached the level of trust and mutual understanding which could only be developed collaboratively over time. Although we did not consciously structure our time to get to know each other, in retrospect, I realised that we deliberately did make time for each other. Although we were colleagues and friends working in the same institution our friendship only deepened through our collaboration around the research.

The sharing of our stories emerged as threads, which became women connecting. Our first attempt to develop our joint connection was through the writing of the paper that led to the initiation of this research project. We spent many hours in conversation, discussions, dialogues and discourse in preparation for the writing of that paper. We were both excited about the idea of researching and writing together, but did nor really know each other. There were questions that I asked at the beginning such as: Could we take risks and be honest? Would we be too critical of one another? Could we relate to each other as black women? Would we have problems with competition? What were

some of our differences and would we feel comfortable with each other's differences? Would we be able to speak of them?

These questions were based on the need to develop a deeper level of trust than that which had existed prior to our collaborative work. According to Darling-Hammond (1994), "development of trust, identification of individual interests and objective – can become the basis for common goals and mutual interest, creation of ways of talking and ways of working together that bridge cultural and communication differences" (p21). Establishing trust is just one of the many obstacle which needs to be negotiated in the development of a collaborative relationship.

Many of these questions I believe were negotiated through the sharing of our professional and personal stories. I believe that our thoughts and actions were part of a strong desire to build a collaborative identity. I also believe that the strongest connection between us was established through emotional experiences of jointly touring the Caribbean islands, each taking responsibility for getting to know one or other and preparing ourselves for embarking on our research journey. The more time we spent together the more stories we told. Through these stories we gave birth to the research project and, over the course of the seven years of our partnership, we also shared narratives of life events, events that were both common and uncommon to the two of us. Events such as the frustration and joys of leaving the Caribbean as children and migrating to a strange land, of the differences we experienced in the school system and our experiences of being schooled in Britain.

Our stories were a conduit for developing trust because they promoted understanding and extended parameters between us in a non-threatening manner. It was wonderful to have someone to talk to about my students, our students, my practice, personal concerns, someone who acted as a critical friend. At the time I experienced feelings of sisterhood.

Throughout the years, our separate identities remained intact, but by creating stories through collaboration and by developing trust through our stories, a composite identity formed that better enabled us to work together in more substantive and meaningful ways. We were developing an intuitive way of knowing. It took time, energy and commitment to build the kind of relationship, which was necessary to recognise and bring to fruition our journey into the collaborative research.

Through our discussions with each other we questioned the way we were acting in the research, our facilitation of the inquiry groups and how we were transferring what we had been learning from our own experiences of collaboration – the value of trust. We discussed how we would write up the work and what aspects we would choose to focus on for presentation to the whole community of inquirers. We also discussed what aspects of the work we would personally focus on in the writing of our individual theses. Even when our paths on the research journey diverted and I began to focused on inquiring into my practice as a teacher, our partnership and commitment to each other remained intact, with Cathy participating in my inquiry in the role of critical friend and observer of my practice. We continued to collaborate on ideas about teaching black students in the process of her feeding back on my practice.

Our years of collaboration in this research project resulted in practical outcomes, which have meant our continued relationship and collaboration. Cathy and I in addition to other participants from the research project, have been developing ways of making our experiences public and have ideas for setting up a centre for black professional practice. However, since the co-operative inquiry have ended, Cathy and I have collaborated over another action research project, this time with both black and white social work students from our Department and with Dutch social work students, exploring issues of intercultural communication. Another outcome has been the staging of seminars and a conference for black students and professionals at which the knowledge gained from the research was shared.

Conclusion

In the chapter that follows I shall evaluate the inquiry in terms of its validity and outcomes.

Chapter 5

Evaluating the Co-operative Inquiry

Introduction

In this chapter I shall evaluate the co-operative inquiry reflecting retrospectively on the outcomes, learning gained and the validity of the method. In relation to outcomes, I present some of the participants' comments regarding the benefits, in terms of changes to their personal lives and practice, and their learning from engaging in the research. I shall also offer my learning. In terms of validity I will reflect on our effectiveness in conducting a co-operative inquiry and consider whether or not we were working with this method in its 'pure' sense.

What did this inquiry achieve?

In my opinion the experience of exploring together did lead to personal growth and development. I, personally, experienced growth and development as a researcher and as a lecturer/trainer and I was curious to know whether this was so for other participants and if so how. About eighteen months after the inquiry ended I sent an evaluation form with some questions to participants from the sub-groups (20) for retrospective feedback to check that they had experienced changes. I asked questions about the following:

1. Their motivation for taking part in the research
2. If they felt they were able to participate fully
3. How they experienced my role
4. Their experience of the whole research process
5. What they had found helpful
6. What they had learnt about themselves and the experiences of black professionals,
7. How they have had made use of their learning,
8. Any changes to their life and/or practice as a result of their participation and learning.

I received ten forms back and I shall use the comments from these forms in the section that follows and in subsequent chapters.

Participants reflections and Learning – feedback from the evaluation form

Some participants reported a growth in confidence and an ability to be more assertive. One participant from the practitioner group wrote:

"I have become more comfortable, assertive and confident about who I am, the way I speak and how I present my views. I can "boldly" offer a view about something knowing that it might not be the popular view and yet feel ok about this. Also I no longer look to others for affirmation as much, I look to myself more".

A Manager commented on her change thus:

"It was a liberating experience as it helped me feel more confident about me as a black manager. It was a place to share challenges and triumphs with other black managers. It helped me to stop pathologising myself and focus on the dynamics of the relationship between me and those I manage".

Another manager commented on changes she made that would support her in her organisation:

"I have chosen to make use of a mentor to offer support, develop strategies to survive some of the difficulties I experience as a black manager, as well as getting positive strokes for achievement, finding positive ways of working with other black colleagues".

And one educationalist made changes to her life and expressed her gratitude in the following way:

"I have taken up psychotherapy training since first being involved with the research. I am sure the inquiry contributed to the process of me feeling able to start this new course in my life, Thanks and keep it up".

There were insights gained, which we may not have set out to achieve in our aims or purpose. The following are insights noted on the evaluation forms about participants learning, with their personal and professional development:

A manager said:

"It was useful learning to be able to reflect upon different stages of my personal development. I recognised my development when I listened to students and social workers in practice, I knew their stories. I knew them because they were also my stories when I was a social work student and in social work practice on the front-line. I also realised how much I have moved away from some of those negative stories. I feel more positive and I am pleased".

A Practitioner stated:

"I have learnt about the limits and barriers we put on ourselves as black professionals. Personally I am learning to value what I can do and recognise what I can't do".

And this social work tutor stated:

"I have become more aware of myself and it has helped me as a trainer to raise issues with black people in terms of black consciousness and assist black students to raise issues about their personal experiences in my class. As a new tutor, I am sometimes unsure about what I am doing, but now I feel more confident so that when I am challenged by a black student about my assessment of their written work, I can re-evaluate my assessment and my attitude towards the student's challenge. I feel more able to examine what I have done, how it's done and what would a different outcome have been? I think the research reminded me that I am still a life student, and that there is so much more that I don't know and I am happy to be open to new learning situations. Thank you for providing this opportunity and for being such an inspiration".

My own Learning

I have appreciated the fact that what we have done has been taken seriously and has made a difference to the quality of life of many of those who have participated. Also that I have contributed to making learning possible which would not have been routinely available to us, black people, if we had been doing more conventional, orthodox research. I have developed a conviction that in research all that is said is important and worthy of noting; including views that on the face of it, may appear incompatible. Such views are, nevertheless, of the group's experience and should be valued.

I have greatly appreciated the value of working in partnership with Cathy who acted as support and confidant. We spent hours planning and reflecting so that careful attention was paid to group development, power, authority and ownership. I learnt the value of co-facilitation as we shared the ups and downs as we went along. I have learnt that this type of research cannot be undertaken without effective personal support structures. In this regard, the support I received and still receive from members of the Facilitators Group has been invaluable.

I have learnt the value of integrating social work, groupwork, therapeutic work and research skills, learning when to apply them appropriately in collaborative research. I have appreciated the value of working collaboratively and evolving structures that would

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increase the body of shared information amongst people occupying different roles, gender, status and class positions in organisations and in society. I have appreciated the importance of the need to spend more time for building and nurturing inquiry groups, paying attention to boundaries and open communication.

I learnt that in having several roles at my disposal, I may have picked up a lot more information. The juxtaposition of my roles as person, co-researcher, initiator/holder and confidante produced a very rich source of data. At the same time, it left me with concerns about the ethical and political dilemmas of conducting a co-operative inquiry in the race field where the issue of power is important. For example, the power of researchers in relation to participants, a set of power relationships, that is bounded by the imperatives of resource availability, can define the parameters of the theoretical framework; it can also control the design of the study, and can inform how the study is conducted, analysed and written up. That is, researchers, in our case initiators of the research, are positioned in particular relationships of power in relation to the participants or other researchers despite attempts to operate with democratic principles. These micro politics of the research situation need to be noted and also analysed (Bahavani, 1990). For example, relationships within this research flowed from the socially ascribed characteristics, of the research participants such as 'race', gender and class. These socially ascribed characteristics carry hierarchical loading of their own and need analysis.

This unevenness is not necessarily regulated by ensuring matching; for example, that women should research the lives of other women; that black researchers research with and alongside black participants as was the case in this project. Matching and taking note of the hierarchical loading is not enough. It can take the attention of the researcher and analyst away from the micro politics of the research encounter. This is because matching and noting cannot explicitly take account of the power relationship between researchers and participants and yet both processes imply that unevenness between the parties in a research study has been dealt with.

I have learnt that fieldwork is not an idealized method in which the research process is neat, tidy and unproblematic. 'Good' researchers need to go through the process of self-examination, openness to the experiences of others, constant vigilance, constant questioning of what seems to be occurring, and constant willingness to be proved wrong. Additionally, the researcher's social and emotional involvement in the research setting constitutes an important source of data. In other words, personal experiences provide information that can be useful in the analysis of the data and can help the researcher

understand and appreciate the data more thoroughly. Also, beginnings and endings, confidence and distrust, elation, enthusiasm, motivation and despondency, friendship and desertion are as fundamental to fieldwork as are academic discussions on techniques, methods, making notes, making sense of and writing the data.

The process of our research led me to begin to think more carefully about the words 'co-operative', 'authenticity' and 'qualitative'. I had always seen "qualitative" in terms of being a contrast to "quantitative". I had not really understood at a deep level of 'knowing' the notion of it as being about peoples lives, which they live and which have qualities. Being able to capture the quality of my interactions with people in a research context is something for which I feel I have responsibility.

I was left with questions and concerns as to whether or not Co-operative Inquiry could be applied in exact ways; whether, it might not be unrealistic and possibly idealistic to expect groups of researchers to work with all the principles of Co-operative Inquiry; how, as novice action researchers, we could both utilise prescribed principles of co-operative methods but also give ourselves permission to break free from perceived structures to develop certain processes or parts of the process; would the method lend itself to working with particular types of the groups and not others; would the nature of the inquiry matter for this method to work successfully; was there a relationship between the activity selected for inquiry and the effectiveness of this method?

I do not intend to attempt answers to all these questions. However, I want to go on to consider our inquiry approach and evaluate it in relation to the principles of co-operative inquiry methods, in order to check for validity.

Our Co-operative Inquiry approach - questions of validity

In evaluating our approach, I feel that I need to return to some of the criteria offered by Heron (1996) about validity which I presented when discussing methodology in Chapter 3: *authentic collaboration, dealing with stress, distress, chaos and order, cycling process between convergence and divergence and action reflection, coherence between different ways of knowing.* To what extent did we adhere to these criteria of co-operative inquiry? I offer some evaluative comments in terms both of what we did well and our criticisms and concerns.

Authenticity and collaboration

According to Heron (1996) there are two aspects of authentic collaboration, the relationship between the initiators and group members and the relationships among group members themselves.

<u>Relationship between research initiators and group</u>

In retrospect, what we did well was that we paid attention to issues of power and control in the structures we set up and the ways in which we worked with processes which would generate collaboration with some sense of equity.

Power and control

I believe we modelled co-operative working in that we shared power, were open to negotiation and allowed for ideas to be initiated from others. So, for example, although the facilitators planned large community meetings the plans were open to amendment and the processes in the group could have been changed or stopped. Participants chose the issues they wanted to explore and identified the learning needs they wanted to meet. However, I wondered whether or not some participants did always did experience themselves as engaging in a research process, with some ownership of it, or whether they still saw the research as belonging to Cathy and myself.

The group was ambivalent at times about how much control they wanted to take and how much they would give to us, as facilitators. This was evident throughout the contracting stage when, at the end of the meeting, various people stayed on to continue the dialogue, asking for direction from us and discussing the need for more focus. They said that they were keen that *"we got what we wanted"*. Some clearly wanted us to take a more explicit leadership role.

In the early stages, Cathy and I took some control and were directive in giving handouts about the principles of action research. We also took control in designing the structure of the sub-groups and in offering guiding principles for them. However, we engaged in the co-operative mode by offering space for discussion and negotiation in operationalising them. I believe that, in such early stages of group development, a group would feel supported by helpful guidance and support in their struggle. Too many painful struggles, without some intervention from a facilitator, could lead to loss of interest and commitment. On the other hand, too little struggle and frequent intervention from the facilitator, could lead to group members not taking responsibility in and for the group. Striking the right

balance in this situation was important. I believe that, at times, we did succeed in striking a balance. At other times, I thought that my sense of responsibility led me to be over-controlling. For example, In the initial sub group meetings, for example, I noticed myself controlling the group's agenda. Clearly, the tensions and dilemmas about power and authority in relation to sustaining equal relationships in co-operative inquiries did not disappear. I struggled with the tension between holding the power as a facilitator/ initiator and allowing the group to stay with their experiences of learning whether it was creating discomfort or not.

I am of the view that all inequality in power and authority should be rejected and eliminated. This may not be an achievable goal as some people still end up making decisions on behalf of others and, in some cases, act as their democratic representatives. Nevertheless, these issues should be struggled with by researchers and continual discussions held about issues of power and control in the research process.

Working with Trust

The support network and trust which is built up among the members of the group in a forum that encourages sharing, critical reflection, trust becomes the foundation, a vital part of co-operative inquiry design. The role of the researcher/facilitator is critical in establishing this trust among group members. As initiators of the project, Cathy and I played a crucial role in establishing that trust. In so doing we were directive in initiating structures at the beginning stages but negotiated with the group a contract that would create a safe space. Our presence also engendered trust and acted as a stepping stone for helping take the stories out of the private into the public domain. In some cases, we were seen as keepers/protectors of the stories. Another helpful factor was the fact that both Cathy and I were known to many of the participants. This participant stated how helpful her knowledge of us was in enabling her to participate openly:

"It was helpful on a personal note to have some prior knowledge of the main researchers, Cathy and Agnes. This helped to establish a level of trust. Without this I would have been far more guarded and would have questioned things much more if I got involved with people I didn't know".

As research initiators, we paid particular attention to sustaining authentic collaboration in the way in which we structured meetings to encourage active participation and 'envoiced' participants. To assist with this we experimented with different structures like small working in pairs, for example. We also kept the sub-groups small (six-eight people excluding ourselves) for the sake of manageability. Although these structures were not

original or particularly imaginative it worked for us in that it provided space for individuals to pursue their own learning. I struggled, at times, to find the balance between offering structure for support and guidance and offering structure as a way of directing the situation. I thought it was important to have some structure but I found it a struggle to strike a balance between direction and delegation.

Attention was paid to contribution rates in the open discussions so that collaboration did not get restricted to dominant or the most articulate individuals. However, I found occasions where I became carried away with directing discussion towards the themes we had set out at the beginning of the research, with the questions I asked. At times, I felt I might have been contributing too much and might wipe out what others had to say. It highlighted a conflict for me in the researcher/facilitator role between getting 'good' data and being co-operative with other people. At the same time, my role as conversational participant/co-researcher dictated a certain amount of collaboration in keeping the conversation going.

Ways of communicating

In terms of communication we offered space for speaking another language and encouraged the adaptation of languages that located people in their personal values. I was mindful that language imposed on black participants could be seen by them as a historical manifestation of colonialism in which a foreign language is powerfully imposed with the intention of eliminating the natural language of the people. I was aware that this could possibly create cultural dislocation and disorientation. We assisted the groups to develop ways of communicating and evolved our own conversation rules that befitted the private-public-political space for discourse. We had our own ways of understanding each other in dialects, slang and jokes and in our artistic and cultural expressions. This participant's comment might be expressing the benefits of this:

"I was able to engage fully in the discussion essentially because I felt at ease. We all spoke the same language, we listened to one another and although we may have come from different places, that is, in terms of our professional development there was respect shown to the views expressed by everyone, and also acceptance of one another".

In our interactional relationship Cathy and I sought to develop conversational systems based on mutual concern, reciprocal caring and comforting and not render the other participants as 'exploited victims' or at least 'passive recipients'. Instead, we tried to create a healthy environment for those who participated which meant paying attention to

getting the balance between being controlling and being active participants in order to allow for empowerment. We allowed the expression of the views of this particular black group in society which had not been given the opportunity to contribute to research findings. Of itself, however, raising voices, does not necessarily constitute empowerment unless the analysis then produced takes full account of the power context in which the views have been expressed.

Relationships among group members

What worked well was that some people already knew each other personally, socially and or professionally which both contributed to the fast pace of the relationship building and assisted communication. There were acts of unspoken communication which included gestures and facial expressions and which produced a state of mind in one another so that at times a collective state of mind emerged. Such communicative actions depended on a host of background assumptions, based on shared knowledge. We co-created a mode of communication through language. We took the opportunity to develop our own systems of meaning. These systems of meaning included meanings attached to words and sentences and also ways of understanding the power of language. Though drawing on them a discourse counter to the dominant discourses was created and this helped with our discovery of experiences.

We encouraged sharing by working with a model that was not about information exchange or taking turns to speak or listen, as this would have distorted the descriptions or interrupted the stories. However, certain rules were necessary for successful conversation. For instance, that all participants observe a 'co-operative principle'; a co-operative principle, which required that all parties gave as much information as was needed to be truthful and authentic. We also co-opted the principle of 'sharing of' and 'caring for' feelings, amusement and having fun. These were equally valued as thoughts and ideas as confirmed in this participant's statement: **"It was uplifting being able to share common experiences with other colleagues that were stimulating debates which I experienced as supportive".**

Considering the idea that hierarchy should be eliminated from the research process because there is an ethical requirement that researchers always treat other participants as equals requires critical attention. Hierarchy probably cannot be eliminated from the research process by simply having black researchers researching with black people. We were not all equal in power. We were positioned as male, female, according to social structures and organisational systems and our power position within them (managers,

lecturers, senior practitioners, past and present students), which had implications for our interpersonal relationships. These positions were not always fixed. At times we recognised that we were all black people and there were different conversations going on about our experiences, with different rules, and different individual and collective meanings.

Reporting

There was full and authentic participation in all stages of the inquiry except in the writing up of the inquiry, and I regret not offering more feedback in written form to the participants from the structured groups. This was unhelpful, certainly to this participant who wrote, **"What I found unhelpful was not being able to have regular reminders /write-ups of different parts of the process particularly the small groups I was involved in".**

Ideally there should be co-operative reporting (Heron, 1996; Reason, 1994). However, Cathy and I, as initiators, did the writing although I checked out the content of the texts in this thesis with some members of the inquiry. I suppose it could also be argued that as I shaped the final account of the inquiry I therefore deviated from the idea of full participation and collaboration. We may also have colluded with the group in accepting the roles of scribe thereby accepting their investment of expertise.

Furthermore, any claim to have set in motion a shared exploration of agendas and potential research questions could be challenged, because of the extent to which the original ideas of the research were already predetermined, and instigated by Cathy and myself. This raises the question of whether our inquiry could be viewed as a full collaborative venture:

Dealing with stress and distress, chaos and order

In the last chapter I referred to the fact that we did work on containing the emotional interplay in the research field. I believe we succeeded in managing the research process from the point of view of setting and monitoring procedures for engagement. This contributed to our participating in a shared experience with excitement and passion was probably swept along by the process. At times I struggled to allow the muddle and chaos to stay in a place of "not knowing", trusting that we would find out together and find our way through to our meaning making. As facilitators, we were constantly working with unconscious processes in the groups and I noticed how I was sometimes tempted to fall

back on rational reasoning or rational problem solving as a way of coping with such processes. This could have been another way of using structure and control to deny anxiety and possibly to constrain some of the learning that could have taken place. In the heart of the inquiry, with groups so fully committed to reflection, group anxieties may not have been sufficiently explored in sessions. I have realised how control can be used to maintain the status quo and prevent any new destabilising dynamics from happening. I am left questioning how effective we were at managing unconscious projections.

The cycling process – convergence and divergence, reflection and action

The groups were not always focused on the co-operative inquiry methods and were more involved in 'finding out' and developing insights to aid personal development and improve practice. The participants attended much more to reflection, sharing, exploring and making sense of experiences, which made it difficult for the cycling process of experience, reflection and action to be fully engaged with. I am left questioning whether we did achieve a balance between action and reflection.

Some people actively decided to identify specific things to put into action in their work practice or life but, in general, it was difficult to get the process to be consistent and continuous. Others did not do what they took on to do but came to the meeting and shared how their thinking or attitude had changed and their consciousness been raised. We did not engage fully in the divergence and convergence process between action phases (Heron 1996). In that sense we did not get the principle 'right'. "If the inquirers reflect a great deal about a few brief episodes of minimal action...The inquiry suffers from intellectual excess: its findings have inadequate experiential support" (p.141). This warning by Heron (1996) leaves me questioning this aspect of our inquiry in terms of validity.

However, I felt more positive about the validity of our work when I read this statement:

"What constitutes a good ratio between reflection and action, one that enhances validity through positive and negative feedback loops, is surely inquiry-specific depending upon the sort of experience involved. There is no general formula...It may need a lot of consideration to get clear what was going on in a brief but elliptical conversation. And only a little thought may illuminate a lengthy period of straightforward co-operative action. It is also true that as well as the sort of experience involved, there is the quality and intensity of the reflection to take into account" (Heron 1996, p. 141).

So for our inquiry it could be argued that we needed deeper engagement, reflecting with others who might understand and reflecting-in action. For some participants the period of time was not long enough to immerse themselves fully in the process and to experience fully the cycling process. This had to be lived with for much longer. Heron, (1985) reinforces for me the process we had to strive to achieve and what we had to guard against:

"If each inquirer on every cycle explores a different aspect, then no one aspect is ever taken round the research cycle more than once, so your final reflection may generate a widely holistic view although each of the conceptual bits are shaky. Hence the case, in later stages of going round the cycle of experience and reflection, for being more convergent; that is, for all or several members taking certain aspects of the inquiry area through two or more cycles, in order to refine and improve reflection on those aspects" (p. 130).

We did however engaged in collective research cycling (Heron 1996) in the sense that as inquirers we functioned as a sub-group at every phase and as a whole group in the final phase. We always reflected together and experienced together, either interacting as a group or engaged in individual activities side by side in the same space and location. This was a group-based inquiry where as individuals we were exploring similar experiences, which resulted in the empowerment of some individuals. This was enhanced by the interactive experience among the inquirers. We also engaged in collective reflection and each person had some say and was fully involved. This participant confirmed this by saying, **"What was most helpful and insightful for me was the reflections and small group sessions with others who were prepared to grapple truthfully with some quite difficult issues. We heard each other but remained respectful of differing perspectives".**

Knowledge and action

It was very difficult to know whether new skills and abilities had been achieved generally. However, we did get a great deal of information which manifested itself in the form of propositional knowledge. Explanations were used as a form of theorising. This manifested itself in our different ways of thinking, the sort of thinking that Heron (1996) refers to as *Holistic thinking, Bipolar thinking, Hermeneutic thinking Aperspectival thinking, and Subtle thinking.* I shall refer to a few of these below.

I tried to encourage holistic participation, in the way in which we were connecting interactively, by ensuring that we paid attention to our internal process as well as looking at external factors, making meaning and looking for patterns in our experiences. This

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was in order to create the idea of well being. We were engaged in experiential knowing and presentational knowing with the rich stories we told. We engaged not only in sameness but also focused on difference. We also focused on positive and negative experiences and in these ways, we were engaged in bipolar thinking, taking account of opposites. We also guarded against explanations from a reductionist perspective. In this way we were ensuring that no view was seen as final or 'the truth', but rather we were interested in pursuing multiple perspectives. We wanted to ensure that explanations were placed in appropriate contexts and in relevant, wider contexts like institutional racism, for example, thus engaging in aperspectival thinking. We also examined the subtle influences on our experiences, such as, for example, covert racism or how internalised racism impacted on our perceptions of others and ourselves.

Cathy and I also used propositional form as well as experiential form to feedback to the groups our sense making. We rarely used presentational and practical forms, although what could be considered as practical here, for Cathy and me, was that working from our domain as lecturers and theorisers we were naming gaps in our experiences as black people and offering ways of theorizing our experiences.

If a principle of co-operative inquiry is that knowledge is formed in and for action, then that principle has been only partly lived out. Our major challenge, therefore, was the one of achieving practical knowledge as an outcome of the inquiry although, from what was noted earlier in this chapter about the changes and learning for some participants, it was evident that there were some practical outcomes for them.

As co -inquirers we were not intentionally making choices about forms in a conscious and logical way. We chose statements about our experiences rather than practical skills as our primary outcome. We needed more evidence of personal transformation or personal and social transformation. Nevertheless we have gained Increased knowledge of:

- consciousness raising leading to increased knowledge of personal and political issues to do with racism and internalised racism
- our interrelations in white organisations
- our interactive process, as black people in groups
- how we perceive each other and our expectations of each other as black professionals
- practitioner research

Our research was not merely concerned with 'data' to be gathered, but was concerned with what was derived from the stuff of peoples' lives. I am more prepared to treat aspects of process as 'data' rather than as research management issues. I have also come to the conclusion that the inquiry group does not have to work 'correctly' and whatever we did in our groups was relevant and needed to receive proper attention, and to be respected and valued. I do not purport to extend our 'findings' to the wider population as 'facts' since the pool from which we chose was limited. However, I question whether the exclusion of some would invalidate the information which was provided by those whom we did choose to contact? The information comprises the experiences of a group of professionals selected from specialised fields. Its relevance, therefore, is as an approach in which uniqueness and particularity are the aims rather than absolute representation, or representative sampling.

What we did was systematic, with a sense of integrity and authenticity exposed in the process, and in that way it can confer rigour. Its achievements should be judged on the outcomes namely, the experiences of some of the participants who have had changed lives. One important outcome for me was that my engagement with our inquiry led me to want to examine further the research methods we chose and evaluate some of their principles in relation to working with black people. I claim therefore, that research with black people is political and any research done with black people should be transformative and done from a black perspective. I have chosen to close this chapter by providing a brief overview of a few of the underlying principles of such a perspective.

Researching from a black perspective

When researching from a black perspective an overall principle for any researcher whose main agent is a black person/persons, is that they should not reproduce the participants in ways in which they are represented within dominant society - that is, the analysis should not be complicit with dominant representations that re-inscribe inequality. In other words, the accountability of the research is not only to specific individuals, but also to the overall project of anti-racism.

The other principles should be a) *an emphasis on race and racism,* b) that *attention should be paid to power relations and values of empowerment* and c) that *there should be an emphasis on working with experience.* This should follow a process of seeking to develop critical consciousness, improve participants' lives and transform relationships and social structures. Most of all it should involve people in practice and taking actions to

develop their own lives. It should also be about attempting to bring knowledge and action within the reach of ordinary black people who have hitherto been silenced. Owing to lack of space I shall note briefly some key points relating to the features of these principles, for further thinking. Some of these features share some commonality with some of the features of co-operative methods.

The importance of race and racism

Race and racism are crucial issues in all areas of social life and should be taken into account in any research with black people as it can be argued that race and racism structure their personal experiences and beliefs. However, we need to be careful that the primacy of race does not exclude other variables or relegate them to a position of little importance in research. The whole process of research will need to reflect a commitment to anti-racism and anti-oppression. From this point of view research from a black perspective is a process of "conscientization" for all research participants and should be judged in terms of its success in this respect. In order for this to happen, the theoretical and methodological rules, including the nature of power relations, which have excluded a black perspective from research, have to change.

Power relations and values of empowerment

The power relations of orthodox research processes have acted in the same direction as those in the wider society, that is, in the construction of black persons as 'the other'. Researching from a black perspective requires repositioning black people, repositioning them as 'knowers' and not silent, ignorant people. We have to struggle to make the agency of black people visible, while not representing the 'agency' as deviant (Essed, 1991). The question, which flows from this, is does this work define the participants into prevailing representation?

It is as important therefore, to reject hierarchies in a black perspective methodology as it is in co-operative methods. There are at least three arguments underlying this rejection of hierarchies. One is ethical: that only non-hierarchical relationships are legitimate among black people and, therefore, in research by black people dealing with black people. The relationship between researcher and 'researched' should be a reciprocal one and "hierarchical" distinctions between researcher and 'researched' should be broken down. If dialogues form the main communication process the 'objects' of research become 'subjects' as well. All participants are then conceptualised as social actors who actively participate in the research and, therefore co-determine the outcome. Everyone will then have some opportunity to contribute to constructing knowledge and interpreting

reality. This is a position black people rarely find themselves occupying in research. There will not be one 'reality' or 'truth'. The different interpretations could be seen as constructs created by many participants, leading to different, situated knowledge.

A second is methodological: that the truth will only be discovered via "authentic" relations. Hierarchy results in a distortion of data, so as researchers we should be interested only in information derived from authentic relations from relationships where all parties experience genuineness.

Finally, there is a practical recognition that if research is to be effective in raising consciousness raising, then it may be essential to involve the researcher in the research process. This leads to an argument for the equal participation of the people studied in the research process. But equality in relationships between researchers is not something that could be achieved simply and important issues about the nature of empowerment require attention. For example, we cannot ignore the need for negotiating power and the need for agency within the research process. Such concerns need to be addressed through an approach which understands the negotiation of power. This entails paying attention to interactive, negotiated distribution and use of power, which is then placed in a wider social structural context. Patterns of racism and anti racism should be part of this wider context for researchers researching from a black perspective.

Emphasis on working with experience
It is also essential that the field should continue to better understand better the unique methodological issues in researching with black peoples' experiences and should continue to embrace newer and emergent conceptual and theoretical frameworks for research which do not reinforce stereotypes of black people based on decontextualised data.

If people belong to a socially or economically vulnerable group (as often pertains to black people in comparison with white people of the same background), there is a good chance that more powerful people will deny the 'truth' of the interpretations they adopt. Therefore it is crucial that we are aware of the importance of building on our own experiences as black. A black perspective methodology affirms the validity of direct experience.

To address black people's lives and experience in their own terms and to create theory that is grounded in the actual experiences and language of black people should be the

key agenda for black researchers and scholars. We need to be able to see what is there, not what we have been taught is there, not even what we might wish to find, but what is. Thus, in black perspectives research, black people's personal experience comes to be taken as a 'significant indicator' of the "reality" against which research questions are explored. The argument about the validity of black people's experience may be formulated as an appeal to black people's double consciousness - to their knowledge of the dominant culture and their own perceptions and experiences.

As a result it can be argued that only black people can do research from a black perspective and that only black people can truly understand other black people and their situation; indeed, that only black people should study other black people from a black perspective.

However, we need to take note that an over-reliance on 'experience' can be problematic. When experience is used as a truth it is possible that it silences and ends the right to argue with it. So it is important to drop the idea of parading experience as the claim to truth. It can be argued that we have no direct access to the truth, even to the truth about our own perceptions and feelings. There are times when we can not 'see what is there' because we might be deluded by cultural assumptions which would then be false. What we see is always a product of physiology and culture, as well as of what is there.

It is also true, of course, that, whatever the method used, the data collected and the findings produced will be shaped to some degree, not just by the personal biography of the researcher but also by the social and political relations of the context in which he or she works. In other words, as researchers, we are part of the social situation we are studying.

There is, however, a point to the emphasis on experience. It may serve a useful purpose in underlining the importance of experience as being open to what there is to be learned through collaboration from observation, from listening to or reading the accounts of others, and from examining one's own experience. Also black people's experience should not be regarded as homogeneous. Differences between black people need to be recognised.

Arguments about the importance of experience may serve a useful function in countering the rigidity of methodological ideas. However, they carry the danger that they may encourage treatment of some of the researchers' or participants ' own experiences and

assumptions as beyond question when these actually require scrutiny. Adapting a standpoint which ascertains privileged insight to black groups and claims, for example, that only a black person can understand other black people, can be problematic. A standpoint which stresses that people's experience and knowledge is treated as valid or invalid by dint of their membership to a black group needs to be treated with caution. We should ask on what grounds we can decide that one group has superior insight into reality. It cannot be simply because the group declares that it has this insight since otherwise everyone could make the same claims with the some legitimacy. This applies to traditional research which is white and patriarchal, as well as to feminist and black perspective research. There is no doubt that those in different social locations will be able to draw on different experiences and on different cultural assumptions and that this diversity can be extremely fruitful for inquiry; both in producing novel theoretical ideas and in generating criticism of established ideas. However, we must beware of claims that one group or category of people necessarily has more valid insights. Since all experience is a construction, it always carries the capacity for error as well as for truth. There is no such thing as raw experience. In becoming conscious of anything we process information about it through social and cultural lenses. While we must recognise that black people may have divergent perspectives, giving us distinctive insights, we should be mindful of a claim that we have privileged access to knowledge.

So, research from a black perspective and action-oriented research methods, such as co-operative inquiries are in somewhat different ways, all seeking perspectives which attempt to alter the previously existing power of 'establishment' researchers and research perspectives. The effectiveness of such strategies is a subject for debate, particularly as regardsthe extent to which they can create new kinds of power relationships, which have new kinds of detrimental effects.

There clearly can be no detailed prescription of a research process which will empower and dis-empower in all the right places to the right degree. The experience of our co-operative inquiry, outlined in the previous chapter, illustrates the complexities of power relationships in such a project and exposes, unsurprisingly, the need for these to be consciously examined by participants in the research process.

Concluding Comments

The unspoken rule I derived from the experience of our inquiry is that only actions which contribute in some way to the welfare of others (particularly oppressed others) are

legitimate. This eliminated a lot of possibilities. Approaches which do offer a way of acknowledging such concerns now have a high profile for me, especially approaches that recognise the inevitable political nature of social research.

Our co-operative inquiry has been grounded in politics, in the politics of race and racism. I brought to the inquiry values and presuppositions, some of which have not been subjected to testing and challenges. My prejudices and biases about methods and methodology, for example, have influenced the ways in which we undertook the inquiry. My values informed the way in which I participated in the process and the actions I took. I make no claim therefore to be value-free. What is more I do want to make a claim that any research done with black people is not value free.

I do not want to leave the reader with an impression that it was easy to achieve what we achieved in our co-operative inquiry, that any group of black people could come together and inquire. When researching socially invisible relationships with a socially invisible group in society a number of difficulties surface for a number of reasons. Their absence from public institutions and the research literature, and the tensions between voicing and silencing personal and private experiences in the semi-public space of the inquiry group are among those reasons. Participants may feel reluctant and vulnerable to exposing emotional aspects of black peoples' relationships, maybe because of the subordinated position our private lives hold in the wider public institutional sphere.

Therefore sensitivity is required in the selection of a research method by any group of researchers wanting to use collaborative methods with black people. It is important that a range of methods is explored and that the researchers devise their own form which is suitable and can be adapted creatively to the research issues.

The co-operative inquiry enabled me to evolve questions and answers in a shared experience with a group of black professionals. It helped some participants to find a better and more effective way of relating and practicing. The co-operative method offered a discipline, which encourages the development of collaborative participation, reflection, consciousness and a community of inquiry.

The memorable aspects of the experience for me were the processes involved which felt much more obvious, and more preoccupying than the overt purpose. They were:
- Opening up channels of communication- learning how better to be understood
- Developing relationships and group identity

- Discovering ways of sharing meanings and feelings
- Undertaking a shared enterprise

We found a way of starting out together and that was what seemed to matter most. I thought that it was a move towards making sense together within a common life and a common world. It provided legitimisation for further research.

In the next four chapters I shall present my struggles to write the data from the inquiry, offer an analysis of the data generated and discuss the feedback from some participants on the quality and validity of the data.

Chapter 6

Writing the Research Text

Introduction

This chapter arises from my discovery of analysis as a practical, interpretive and sensemaking activity. When writing up their research, many researchers often deal in generalities rather than discussing in detail concrete issues of interpretation. However there are a number of key elements to 'accountability' within action research, all of them 'methodological'. They involve:

- The provision of retrievable field text;
- The detailed specification of the analytic procedures involved; and
- The in-depth discussion of the interpretive acts that produce the research text.

This might seem to many of us, at least theoretically, to be commonsensical awareness. However, by making this awareness an open and possibly exaggerated - at least explicit - issue this chapter hopes to question our assumptions regarding the epistemological status of the practice of writing the research text and analysis of the field text. It is my intention to raise issues regarding the nature of analysis and what finally gets produced and in so doing, to question the validity of claims regarding such practices and their results. I hope to do so by making explicit and exposing my process as the researcher/author of research text generated from the co-operative inquiry through my story of the analytical stage. I hope to reveal how my story of my sensemaking enabled me to bring my construction of the research world into text, to build a bridge between the research inquiry and my representation of it.

The issues raised here are by no means new or unique as other researchers using an action research approach and feminist methodology have addressed similar issues for themselves (Reason 1988; Marshall, 1981; weick, 1995; Ely et al, 1997; Bhavani, 1997). However, traditional analyses and research done from a positivist paradigm and some from a qualitative paradigm has yet to address in any satisfactory way the problems raised; they have been treated in the main, as merely the nuisance of analysis - an inevitable but ignorable evil. The traditional domain for consideration of and solutions to these issues is ethnomethodology; however, even here, there is neglect and a way of reporting that implies the authority of the author's account. The issues I raise should be

of importance to all involved in research as well as to those encouraging reflective practice and considering methods for facilitating such activity.

Instead of talking about findings and data I want to talk about methodology, field text and research text. In this context I have borrowed from CLandinin & Connelly (1994) their definition of field text and research texts. For them 'field texts' are:

"Texts created by participants and researchers to represent aspects of field experience..... The field text created may be more or less collaboratively constructed, may be more or less researcher influenced". (p.419).

They went on to show the relationship between field text and research text by stating:

Field texts may consist of uniting, captivating family stories, conversations, and even dream texts. But researchers cannot stop things because the task is to discover and construct meaning in those texts. Field texts need to be reconstructed as research texts. Field texts are not in general constructed with a reflective intent; rather, they are close to experience, tend to be descriptive, and are shaped around particular events... Research texts are at a distance from field texts and grow out of the repeated asking of questions concerning meaning and significance" (p426).

My Struggles to Write the Research Text

Making Sense of the Field Text

I want to highlight, using my story, the problems I encountered as I attempted to make sense of the information collected so far, as I looked for patterns of significant meanings and as I tried to create form by making retrospective sense of the situations in which I have found myself. There was a strong, reflexive quality to this process.

At that point I was reminded of Weick's book "Sensemaking In Organisations" and found helpful his definition of sensemaking and the distinction he makes between interpretation and sensemaking. For Weick sensemaking is about a process, it is "making the subjective into something more tangible" whereas "The act of interpreting implies that something is there, a text in the world, waiting to be discovered or approximated "(Weick, 1995,p.13 &14).

I deliberately did not want to be engaged in interpreting the field text at thia stage as there were still lots of questions to be explored and I was left puzzled. I agree with Weick when he says that "To talk about sensemaking is to talk about reality as an ongoing accomplishment that takes

form when people make retrospective sense of the situations in which they find themselves and their creations"(Weick 1995, p.15).

In what follows, I also reveal my external and internal processes as I navigated my way through the field text. I highlight the issues that emerged as I attempted to construct meanings from the stories that had been captured on tapes whilst collaborating with participants in the co-operative inquiry groups, and from my notes and flip charts produced by black students whilst we were engaged in teaching and learning.

Working with the material on the tapes

As I entered the listening stage, that is, listening to the tape recordings of the field text I was purposeful and had an inquiry approach. I asked myself what would be the best way to inquire to make sense of what I was listening to? How would I capture on paper what was dialogue, conversation and debate from tape-recordings, which contained material that was generated from a process that took on its own life? How would I create structure? How would I represent on paper: what we had done, how we had done it, offer my reflections and justify the way I wanted to structure all of that? The tapes contained debates, stories, experiences, and no one tape was similar to the next so where and how would I begin?

How I listened to the tapes

When I sat down with the audio -tapes, I was nervous and excited. I realised that I did not know how to listen so I began by listening according to the structure of the event. I followed a chronological order according to dates and times, beginning with our first meeting. I listened to each group's tapes of all the sessions separately. I chose to work with the Manager's Group first because it held my initial interest and I had contracted to be with this group on my own without Cathy, and chose to write that text separately. I listened to the tape containing our first set of questions, which included what our expectations were of workers. As I gained confidence in listening I later approached listening to the rest of the tapes of the other groups.

I selected the Practitioners' Group next, because I wanted to listen for some of their experiences and expectations of black managers and senior workers. As I listened I heard ways in which the Practitioner Group approached their dialogue. They did explore their expectations but they grounded their explorations in experiences of their social work training, their work and life. I noted that they had a more holistic, integrated approach to their stories than the managers did; they were less concerned with debates and more

with conversations in an open fashion.   They were able to focus on their experiences of black people meeting and engaging with other black people and that gave me the idea for of focusing on what later became a chapter on the Black on Black Encounter (see Chapter 7).

I then proceeded to listen to the lecturers/educationalist tapes. I was aware that I was taking into that process the themes and patterns that had already emerged from the other groups. I noticed that this group's tapes had a different quality. They were less engaged in conversations and more in debates. As I listened, I noticed a competitive edge to their discussions; the educationalists were less personal and more in facilitative mode.   On reflection, I wonder if it was difficult for some of us to get out of teacher role. I noticed that we talked 'about' rather than 'from'.

As I became familiar with the material again I was transported back into the whole experience. It was as if it was happening in the moment. It felt lived and I became alive. I saw vivid faces and got in touch with the emotions, warmth and excitement I felt during the inquiry as we engaged in conversations. I was pulled into the content of the stories, as a black professional woman and student, as someone who had also been through some of what was being said.

As I listened, I listened for connections, looked for patterns, did a map for every tape and made a note of questions I was left with as I listened to all the tapes of each group. There were too many issues coming at me and I realised that transcribing the tapes would prove very difficult because of the ways in which the stories and conversations went.   In the event, the tapes of the group sessions were not fully transcribed although I attempted to transcribe the Managers' Group sessions. Too much field text was generated for the scope of this inquiry.   As I made attempts to transcribe, it proved difficult to follow one theme, idea or story.   Discussions took a nonlinear form with detours, meandering into hills and valleys, with sharp intakes of breath interspersed with laughter, stories, challenges and questions.   Complex connections were being made as people shared their experiences, debated issues, expressed concerns and asked questions.   These became group stories which, I believe, represented our connections.   I asked inquiry questions like, "What made me think that I could make sense or write something so complex?" "What made me think that I could create something whole out of something so fragmented?" When we came together as researchers to inquire we could neither find a way that was whole nor could we create one whole story. So how would it be possible to create something whole? Was this possible? The process was fragmented and I was

feeling fragmented. I therefore focused on listening for central themes and for the groups' stories in some of the themes.

Practical considerations

In seeking to assemble resources with which to carry out an analysis for the research text, I cast my net as wide as possible and used the technique of brainstorming. I began in the practical sense with pen and paper, lots of different colours and large pieces of flipchart paper. I began with a process of brainstorming through to mappings in the shape of spider webs. Having completed that task of hours of listening and attentiveness I was faced with a huge amount of information. I was left with pages and pages of mappings from which I had to find some way of making meaning. I felt proud as I looked at the words on the paper and anxious about how I was going to deal with all those words. I experienced information overload which was a complex mixture of quantity, ambiguity and variety, and which I was forced to process.

With the information overload I felt myself falling back on old patterns of wanting to control. My first response was a rational and logical one of looking at assumptions and drawing some conclusions on the basis of the assumptions. I discovered that the logic of the situation was not overt, known, visible or predictable. The first challenge to my logic was that there was simply more information and more uncertainty than I could handle rationally. The increase in complexity increased my uncertainty because a number of diverse elements were interacting and were interdependent. Complexity also affected what I noticed and what I ignored. I noticed that the greater the complexity the more I searched for cues. I worked and reworked the maps using different colours until I started to see connections. One approach that I took was to focus on any significant statements, opinions, and ideas, which were common to all the groups or to more than one group. I was also interested in any attitudes or experiences *within* each group, which appeared to be in contradiction with one another. I grouped questions and statements and looked for similarities, differences and opposites in the stories and debates. I focused on conflicting attitudes and conflicting actions. I strung together ideas or propositions without connections, at first. There were no logical patterns and I was too challenged to figure out how these things might go together or what they might mean. Interpretations were left open. The words, 'perhaps', 'possibly', 'maybe' played a major part in my thinking. I was engaged in an intense, interactive process and I was forced to recognise the implications of what I was doing with the material.

Chaos and confusion

With the amount of rich material, confusion reigned in me. My confusion stemmed from the multiple meanings that could be derived from the text. I needed more cues and varied cues. I felt I needed a mechanism that would enable me to converse, debate and seek clarification with the material. I was tempted to reduce my confusion with formal information processing which was not rich enough and which would have probably lost the richness. I was in chaos; I felt I was in turbulent territory as I engaged in comprehensive but time-consuming information processing. I felt confined and anxious and my defense was distraction. I felt de-skilled and was lacking in experience. The combination of complexity and limited expertise made the process of writing and the events of the inquiry incomprehensible.

However, I noticed that I was moving away from my old fascination, my old pattern of producing a tidy piece of work which was relatively closed and that I was beginning to take a less defensive approach to my work. I was taking an inquiry approach into what I was doing with the field text, cycling through the text, trying to be faithful to the process and authentic with the material. I tried to get clarity with the aid of inquiry questions and feedback from peers, friends, research participants and my supervisors. I noticed a change when I relied more, on my intuition and less on processes of comprehending. I felt more contained. I guess the turbulence threw me back on my intuitions and on noticing how I learn and how I know best. By paying attention not only to the content but to staying with the process and working with my passion and emotionality, I was able to move on. On reflection, I know that when I stayed with structure and content, asking questions of 'how to do' I kept getting stuck and I was left with the messy text. It was messy in the sense that there was no pretence of objectivity. The text was messy because it was not tight and clean.

Representational dilemmas

I began to worry that I was claiming, for myself at least, that my mappings and sensemaking were intending to unpack or reveal our methods, orientations, stories, and narratives. Whilst I was at this early stage, nowhere near to saying any such things; merely asking some basic questions and displaying patterns. My assumption was that I was beginning a description of the ways in which we had produced this scene and produced it sensibly.

I began to wonder if my analysis, my sense making was indeed what I was hoping it would be. Was I creating order, making sense? My reason for this query was that I

began to think that making sense of these materials was different from the activity of the participants who produced/created them. There were differences in terms of the resources available to the other participants doing what they did, and me doing what I did (namely "analysis" "sense making"). Participants or co-researchers, for example make sense moment-by-moment, second-by-second, employing perhaps a "wait-and-see" orientation in their sensemaking. An analyst on the other hand, has the scene as a whole (as it were) in front of him/her. The analyst has plenty of time to make sense of the materials; where as other participants have a few goes if not "one-go". Utterances are heard "just one time", by participants; whereas analysts hear them as often (or not) as they want to if they have access to tape recordings.

One question then is; can an analyst show other co-researchers productive (that is, moment-by-moment) work, with just the resources employed, in just that time, with just those persons present? My feeling was that in doing the analysis I was constructing the scene anew. The scene is not the scene that it was for my co-researchers. I employed assumptions about "analyzability", "describability", and "reflexivity" in getting sense making - analysis underway. I would reflect and refer to the conventions of academic presentation - in my case, PhD. - ability and so forth in reporting analysis - as well as having available those other organisational resources afforded by "doing analysis", "what comes -next" and "repeatability".

Resources available to and employed by other co-researchers, contribute to the unique unfolding of events as *just those* events. The issue of how to capture the sentiments, emotions and feelings that the participants contributed to these events was my concern.

Coming through the struggles and finding form

Patterns and Themes

How in practical terms could I then make use of this material, except by categorising and using themes? I needed to think, for example, about whether I would develop themes and arguments through a narrow treatment of the field text or by using our field text to engage with much broader, more general themes. I approached my work in relation to themes with a belief that the themes did not 'reside' in the field text, and if we just look hard enough they will 'emerge'. I then began to look for the patterns, narrative threads, tensions and themes either within individuals' personal accounts, individual group account and or across all the inquiry groups. The sorting through the material for these patterns, narrative threads, tensions, and themes, which constituted the inquiry that

shaped the field text into research text was created by my internal experience as well as my relationship to the inquiry and participants.

During the initial analysis of the field text, I found it very hard to get away from the impact of the stories. Each story was unique, and some had been painful and had had a major effect on some co-researchers' lives. As I wrote I felt responsible, obligated and experienced a sense of commitment to ensuring that I reflected their 'truth'. I certainly had an emotional and ethical relationship to the participants and to the inquiry and that continued to be evoked as I listened to audio tapes and wrote.

I was both angry at and hurt by what I heard and it was difficult to see beyond this to any patterns or groupings in the text. I related earlier, my experience in trying to move beyond the bits and pieces of statements to a more holistic statement of the essence of the field text. I spent many hours there and many more with notebooks and tape recordings. I had lots of thoughts, lots of ideas and still lots more questions and not many answers, which left me feeling frustrated. I read and reread my notes and summaries until the anger and pain began to subside and I began to see some patterns emerging. The attempt to identify and then find appropriate words for what I considered the essence, the theme of our findings was difficult. I made many different attempts at grouping before settling on broad groupings like, 'support', 'connections', and 'identity', 'Myth of the super black manager'.

Building categories was important to subsequent thematic analysis. My thematic analysis by its nature developed over time. I discovered that whilst teasing out themes was essential, the way I wrote about them was not set in stone. I, therefore, found different ways to present and illustrate the themes, which also included not writing theme statements directly. I was hit with multiple themes to chose from but I was concerned with statements of what were, to me, important meanings, essential to understanding what was perceived as at the heart of the culture or experience we studied. I arrived at my analysis through a process of 'sorting' and 'sifting'. Practically speaking I listed many themes, went through processes of refining and combining them. I sorted through the whole for my understanding of patterns that ran throughout and lifted them out to make a general statement about them or selected those that seemed most salient, or most relevant, to the story I have chosen to tell. As I engaged with themes and 'metathemes' I was involved in a 'metatwist' of reflecting back on the research process as well as on the field text.

Subjectivity in choosing themes

I am aware that I may have chosen themes because they might have seemed 'interesting' since (for example) they were familiar or confirmed my prejudices. I believed that some themes resided in my head from my thinking about the research purpose and the field text, creating links, as I understood them. The crucial factor was my growing awareness that I was looking more for explanations and processes. I came to realise that if my real interest was in explanations and perceptions, then it was greater depth rather than breadth that was required in the research text and that I had to listen to the tape recordings several times for what the participants were saying.

I began to readdress some of the concepts and notions I had brought with me into the research, such as how we construct our experiences into 'positive' and 'negative', notions of success. This necessitated shedding my own ideas and preconceptions of wanting to accentuate the positives. This was because I noticed that more of the 'negatives' of our experiences were being told. Participants did not conceptualise what was going on in terms of positives or successes as such but asked questions about how we could be more positive and more supportive to each other.

It seemed that I had an almost constant struggle between trying to hold on to security with the ideas I brought to the research arena, and the uncertainty of negotiating uncharted territory. My original concepts of "agency" negatives" "positives', 'success', 'empowerment' gave me at least a working structure compared with the insecurity of putting these ideas on one side to broaden my framework.

Analysing, Theorising and Writing

Theorising

My theorising involved thinking with the field text. That meant "going beyond" the field text to develop ideas. I am referring here to the processes of generalising and theorising which entails expressing ideas more formally. I thought about theory as having and using ideas. In thinking about the research process, Dey (1993, p.51) described theory "simply as an idea about how other ideas can be related".

Use of Ideas and Theories

The interweaving of analysis with the use of ideas can occur at different levels and at different stages of the research. During the early stages of my sensemaking I was also

reading for ideas from literature on feminist methodology, where the emphasis is on understanding the social and cultural context of events as well as the events themselves.

I felt it important to be able to go beyond the local setting of the research and to engage with the formal ideas at a more general level. In that sense I went beyond the field text and beyond the original setting of the research. I thought I needed to engage with ideas that are derived from and related to social settings of many kinds. I was prepared to engage in creative intellectual work and to speculate about the field text in order to have ideas. I was also prepared to try out a number of different ideas; to link my ideas with those of others, and so to move conceptually from my own research setting to a more general level of analytic thought. I was mindful about the timing of this, and that I should honour the process and length of time required in staying in the local research setting and with my ideas from the research.

Having ideas is part of every aspect of the research process. My analysis of the text was informed by my own ideas about what was going on and was informed by some participants' views of what they thought was going on. The kinds of ideas I used or drew from were influenced by my understanding, sympathy and curiosity in relation to particular "schools" of ideas - for example black feminist thought, feminist ideas, post modernist thought, phenomenology, psychology, gestalt theory, groupwork theory.

These ideas were used to guide my exploration and sensemaking of the text in the context of the social world. I was mindful not to follow previous scholarship slavishly but to adapt and transform it in the sensemaking of my own ideas. Theories were drawn on repeatedly as ideas were formulated, tried out, modified, rejected, or polished. Ideas came from multiple sources. I was actively engaged with published literature for available ideas. The work of others was inspected for how their ideas could inform my sensemaking. I looked to fictional, biographical, autobiographical and journalistic writing to furnish my ideas, as academic writing in my narrow specialty was limited. So I was engaged in wide and eclectic reading, borrowing concepts.

As ideas grew out of the field text I noted something about the information at hand. I speculated about possible interpretative frameworks - drawn from my general knowledge and from my specialised reading in the social sciences and black literature - that might help to account for what I was observing, seeing and noticing. These, in turn, helped to throw light on other aspects of the field text, which in turn helped me to extend the

framework of general ideas and concepts. In this manner, I believe my interaction with the field text grew, in an organic fashion, towards a broad, encompassing analysis.

I had no option about the generation and use of theoretical ideas for my analysis. As Silverman (1993, p.46) notes, theorising cannot easily be divorced from analysis: "We only come to look at things in certain ways because we have adapted, either tacitly or explicitly, certain ways of seeing. This means that, in observational research, data collection, hypotheses - construction and theory building are not three separate things but are interwoven with one another". Reflective research practice also asks for a similar process of integration of theorising and analysis.

Analysing and Writing

Writing actually deepened my level of analytical endeavour. How I wrote was effectively, an analytic issue. I reflected upon and made strategic decisions about the level and direction of my texts and other kinds of writing. Writing was a positive act of sensemaking and finding the 'right' language to write the text was a struggle for me. I was challenged to find an appropriate language to capture our struggles to find our language in the private and public space we hadcreated in the inquiry groups. I struggled with efforts to communicate what sometimes went beyond standard uses of language. Some experiences were impossible to render into English. So what did I take myself to be doing when I tried to communicate our experiences in English, in acceptable language for an academic audience? I found that I had to nurture my voice and value my writing as a method of knowing and it freed me from trying to write a single text in which everything was said to everyone.

My analytical ideas were developed and tried out in the process of writing. In my analysis, I traced the causes of certain phenomena backwards and outwards by providing arguments from a socio historical perspective to explain certain phenomena. I needed an approach, which went beyond the real contradiction between the needs of individual students and professionals and the needs of the economic and political order. In 'going beyond' I did not want to remove the contradictions or negative experiences, or explain these away. I wanted, instead, to address the problem or issue as I perceived it.

Analysis is not simply a matter of classifying, categorising, coding or collating field text. It is not simply a question of identifying forms of speech or regularities of action. 'Analysis is about the representation or reconstruction of social phenomena' (Coffey and Atkinson1996, p.108). We do not simply "collect" field texts; we fashion them out of our transaction with others. Likewise we do not merely report what we find. We create accounts of social life and in

doing so we construct versions of the social worlds and the social actors which we interact with. It is, therefore, inescapable that analysis implies representation. Thinking about how to represent our field text also forced me to think about the meanings and understandings, voices and experiences presented in the field text.

Representation of voice in the Research Text

Representation – Multiple Voices

I became stuck when I felt over responsible for putting out in public multiple voices. I felt that I was too close to the material and I required some level of distance to be able to see clearly. I did not want to be conceived of as holding all the power in this regard, but I was constantly plagued with the thought, will I capture and represent the voices in a truly authentic way?

As I wrote the research text there were issues around voice which I was aware that I had not considered. I reminded myself that I had to consider the voice that is heard and how it is heard. I later became aware that I had included extracts in such a way that they appeared negative and I had not included enough positive stories. This was as result of feedback on a draft of the research text from some co-researchers. I realised that I had included the voices in such a way as to obscure/omit or silence important parts of our collaborative inquiry. I was then left with more questions and dilemmas about voices, both about my voice as author/co-researcher and the voices of other co-researchers. I continued to struggle to speak the research text in multiple voices. My silence, both those I chose, those of which I was unaware and those I became aware of are also issues of voice in the research text.

Finding my Voice

Having written the first draft of the research text I realised that my voice was missing from the extracts I chose to include. I noticed that I did not account for my own experiences and I was disappearing from the text. Did I fail to record my own private thoughts, problems and anxieties simply in order to remain 'objective'? What were the events and themes which I left out? I had begun very clearly, in my research, with the idea that I was not taking an objective or 'scientific' approach to the research. Why then, through taking a public research role, did I allow my own perspective to be drowned out? In the act of checking for validity (see Chapter 9) I received feedback on my writing of drafts from friends, academic colleagues and research participants who have, in fact, suggested that I must have 'suppressed' certain things in order to present the research text in the way

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that I did. Some aspects of their appraisal dismayed me, as it was so close to what had happened. Were my private omissions so obvious to outsiders?

I realised that in taking the approach of writing 'about' rather than 'from' I had depersonalised the research text and made it easier not to include myself. This was not intentional, so I had to take the text from what I 'talked about' to something that 'is' talking 'from' the event of the inquiry. I returned to the field text and made another attempt to transcribe some of the taped group sessions. I wanted to represent dialogue, this time, but I still found it too difficult and time consuming to transcribe. So I gave up.

By excluding my voice I was giving the impression that I had nothing to say or that the bulk of what I had to say was as the author of the text and in the creation of the research text. I felt I was inadvertently taking on a more powerful role as author, having expert knowledge and ability to give meaning.

I was so preoccupied with accuracy, representations, authenticity and integrity, responsibility to 'others' that I was producing more of the work of other co-researchers. I did not show clearly, explicitly, evidently the part I played in enabling the discussions and conversations to develop nor indeed, did I assist other participants to make meaning as we went along.

When the veil of silence was lifted and I realised that I had something to say and felt the power of my voice, I still struggled with finding a way of saying what I wanted to speak. I had the dilemma of sorting out how to be in the text. Geertz (1988) captures my sentiment in this statement: "being there in the text is even more difficult than being there in the field".

My reading of the first full write up of the research text revealed to me that the balance of my sensemaking and analysis of the field text was overpowering – too much interpretation and not enough field text. I ran the risk of obscuring subjectivity. Also, I noticed in one of the chapters of the research text that other writers and other theories were dominating parts of the text. I struggled to put my own stamp on the work. I experienced my struggle for a research voice as living on a knife-edge. I struggled to express my own voice in the midst of the text in the same way that I struggled to assert my more personal and intimate voice in the midst of the inquiry. I was, at all times, attempting to create a research text that would speak to and reflect on the participants'

voices. I was also aware that I was exposing myself, to legitimate criticism from participants and from readers.

How, as Malinowski (1994) notes do you cope with presenting what he glosses as 'my subjective reaction', when this includes anxieties and concerns. What price, then, should you be prepared to pay for setting full 'reflexivity' on the page? I am still not sure. Nevertheless in writing this chapter, I am taking this opportunity to give voice to my silence now as well as in the whole thesis. I think of this process as the development of my voice after silence

Audiences and Readers

I care very much about the ongoing relationship with the participants as well as with the ways in which and for what purpose the research text would be read, so that made a big difference to the way I wanted to write the text and to how it was finally written. I had to keep in mind my audience and think about the kind of written work desired. I was also faced with the political challenge of presenting in public to a white, academic audience the experiences that were shared in an all black setting. Further concerns were: that the material might be dismissed or devalued; might not be seen as original, might not be seen as good enough; might be misunderstood; or that the material may provoke anger or might be too challenging. Writing for a multiple and diverse audience therefore created for me a problem for me. This was mixed with an excitement at the thought that this might be breaking new ground. I was also holding myself back by the statement, which I had internalised as a child that "black people should not wash their linen in public". I feared highlighting too much difference or not presenting the difference well enough.

I was mindful of my audience and readers, at all times, and wanted to establish a relationship with them. This concern for readers, as further collaborators in the process of the work, raises the question: who are the readers? I realised that I could not determine precisely how the text would be read as reading is an active process, and no text can have a completely fixed meaning. On the other hand, I had an implied audience of readers in mind as I wrote. It was clear from the beginning that I was writing for various audiences: (1) those with whom I had co-researched; black students, social work managers and trainers, colleagues, and other black professionals. (2) Colleagues with whom I would be working on making changes to our social work course. (3) Wider audiences of black people in the community, who might be able to relate my account to

their own experiences. I also had another audience in mind; academic social scientists that I wished to convince of the rigour and richness of this method of work.

My immediate practical question concerned the first three of my audiences: how would the research text have to be presented, such that these three audiences could simultaneously feel that their differing purposes and concerns were taken into consideration? The existence of these complex audiences was, at times, a constraint and, at other times, acted as a discipline for selecting a small proportion of the field text. A sense of audience was crucial in my approach to both form and content. Different texts inscribed different analyse - different viewpoints, different emphases and different subject matter - and thus constructed the research text itself in different ways.

Writing as a doctoral student restricted my focus to academic readership but I did not let this restrict my analysis to one and only one perspective, or my style to a single mode. Deciding whom I was writing for still implied decisions about what I was writing *about*, for *what* reasons, and from what *perspectives*. I was aware that I could design and produce different texts from the same research, but such decisions were part of the process of analysis. Analysis, therefore, and the ways in which I chose to represent the field text could not be separated, so analysis cannot be divorced from representation.

The implied readership had a bearing not only on how I crafted the work - in terms of style, for example - but also on how I conceptualised it. An audience of readers implied shared knowledge and assumptions about what was relevant to what. I wrote this text in the light of styles that are characteristics of disciplines, schools of thought and are characterised by particular conventions - of organisation and language - that are of direct relevance to major analytic perspectives.

I wanted the research text to be material that could be used by black people and recognised that it was up to me to represent that material in order to meet that aim and reach that audience as well as read academic readers. I was therefore faced with the challenge of a diversity of representations and a variety of genres. How I chose to represent the field texts and wrote the research text was not obvious and unproblematic. It was clear, however, when reading through my notes from the tapes and the first draft of my research text that I was presenting an account which contained a 'voice' directed to an audience outside the text, relating personal to wider public meanings. This suggested to me that my accounts were incomplete. This was further confirmed by the feedback given to me by some of the research participants who read drafts. The way in which I

was writing the research text seemed to have meant that I maintained a 'public' voice (which I felt would be acceptable academically).

Conclusion

In this chapter I have tried to show that creating research texts calls for a creative as well as a disciplined interaction with field texts. Field texts, analysed with close attention to detail, understood in terms of their internal patterns and forms, are one possible use in developing theoretical ideas about social processes and cultural forms which has relevance beyond those field texts themselves.

I have also tried to show that modes of writing and other forms of representation are fundamental to the work of the research text. Inevitably, I feel this chapter has probably raised more questions than answers. There seemed to be so many obstacles to producing a truly 'reflexive' account. How personal and 'truthful' does that personal account have to be, or is the search for private truth a fruitless way of approaching 'objectivity' by the back door? Which of the private and public voices that emerged through the research should I have listened to and written up? One cannot deny the power of the author in selecting, organising and presenting the field text, regardless of the approach taken. Whosoever voice is heard, it cannot be wholly the co-researchers' but with an open and relatively unstructured approach, the filter is likely to be larger than with a close, structured, positivist framework. I eventually produced an account, which I thought would satisfy the examiners of my Ph.D. thesis. Yet I am not satisfied. The hidden voices are still occupying my thoughts.

Chapter 7

Black on Black Encounter

Introduction

In this chapter I will attempt to summarise, or restate, some of the issues and main themes from the co-operative inquiry. The chapter illuminates, clarifies, and examines black professionals' and black students' issues in welfare organisations and in higher education as we interact with each other as black people. I offer my own theoretical analysis of the themes and sub-themes which emerged. I make clear my voice as the sensemaker by using a different typeface.

The field texts for this chapter have been taken from the audio tape recordings made during the cycles of inquiries. I paid particular attention to the Practitioners'/Students' recordings as well as to those of the Lecturers/Academics. Material from the Managers' tapes have been analysed in the next chapter as they focused on some specific needs and issues. However, the analysis in this chapter will be inclusive of the issues the managers and workers explored which connected with the other group's issues. This is by no means a comprehensive account of all that happened of all that we produced. The inquiry produced a wealth of material and I selected particular areas to focus on. In particular, the analysis will focus on the responses to inquiry questions that were asked within the co-operative inquiry; questions such as: "what do we look for in a black person or a group of black people when we meet them for the first time?" "What factors contribute to the ways in which we interrelate as groups of black people in white welfare organisations?" These were crucial questions, given the orientation of the research project, which emphasised that this was a black on black study. It, therefore, meant paying attention to the black on black interaction at all levels which, in the context of this research, can best be identified as black lecturers/black students; black managers/ black workers.

Listening to the tape recordings of the meetings and reflecting on the inquiry questions, I noticed that there were some similarities and some consistency in the questions asked. There were also some similar issues which emerged from all the groups which related to our experiences of interacting with other black people. There were some key words and phrases emerging from the discussions which were associated with that interaction and I

have brought together what was said about our experiences under the themes of the research.

In my attempt to make some sense of what had been said I chose to return to some of the inquiry questions (reported in Chapter 5) which emerged consistently and were of particular interest to me. These derived from the following themes: our needs as black professionals, our differences and commonalties, and accentuating the positives.

Our needs as black professionals:

- Where do we get our support?

- Whom do we as a people look to for that support?

Differences and commonalties:

- What are the issues around difference?

- What do we do to accommodate difference?

- What do we do to prevent us from coming together? Trust is a big issue. What criteria do we use to judge whether we can trust each other or not? We need to be explicit about the criteria.

Accentuating our positives:

- How do we ground ourselves in the positives? To arrive at this point a process of deconstruction and reconstruction is necessary, one that also looks at the negatives in terms of what blocks us from focusing on the positives. So what are the negative experiences black students and black professionals face both generally and in black on black interaction. In an attempt to explore this major question, which featured highly in relation to 'accentuating the positives', some other inquiry questions were asked such as:

1. Why is it we start off with being suspicious when we meet another black person rather than giving them the benefit of the doubt?
2. What is it that generates that suspicion?
3. What happens to us as we try to work together?
4. What are the good things about working with each other?
5. What are the things that are not so good?
6. What behaviour do we look for that tells us that a black person is ok?

The themes and sub-themes that I chose to focus on were chosen because they were of major concerns and interest to participants. We focused more on how we related to each other, how we lived with those processes and how we coped in organisations. These were foundational elements for looking at other things like our achievements and successes. My choice also reflected my own interest and own story as a manager, of coping as a student and my story as an educator interested in understanding black students' needs. I chose to highlight these themes and questions, not because I believed that I could answer the questions nor because there were answers given in the inquiry sub groups for each question, but because I wanted to use the themes and questions to assist me to reflect on what was said and to offer a more inclusive analysis and theoretical understanding of the issues raised through the exploration.

Issues explored - Themes and Patterns:

I have selected for analysis those patterns, themes, and sub-themes that were common to our stories, which were taken from the mappings I made on flip charts and notes made whilst listening to the tape recordings of all the subgroup meetings. I have referred to in Chapter 7 the process via which I arrived at these themes and patterns. I have included in my analysis how we think about these stories and I have suggested ways in which we could think about them differently.

I have selected the following sub-themes under the general themes. Under the theme 'Our Needs as Black Professionals and Students':

- **need of support,**
- **need for black support groups and support networks,**
- **dealing with alienation and isolation,**
- **struggle and survival,**
- **need for connectedness,**
- **sense of community identity and self - identity,**

And under the themes 'Accentuating our Positives' and 'our Commonalties and Differences':

- **Suspicions, lack of trust, fear of getting close,**
- **lack of support amongst ourselves,**
- **making negative judgements about other black people,**
- **stuck in complaint culture -fighting/complaining, competing in black groups,**
- **we oppress ourselves by engaging in negative stereotypes of each other**

- **too many expectations of each other,**
- **fear of challenging self and other.**

The above list and some of what is to follow may present as being imbalanced with more of an accent on the negatives. It is worth noting here some possible explanations for this. One possible explanation is that the process in the group was about engaging in the understanding of the factors at play that push us into the negatives so consequently we spoke a great deal about our negative experiences.

Another explanation stems from my understanding of Gestalt theory. In Gestalt theory opposites demand each other. There is a mutually interdependent relationship, so that where there are negatives, positives will be found and vice versa (Mackewn, 1997). Opposites can also be found within themselves. So there are some positives in negatives and negatives in positives. If we take an opposite to its very ultimate extreme, if we make it absolute, it turns into its opposite so if we just focused on the positives we could be blinded by our positives and if we focus on the negatives our negatives could blind us. Dialectically if we see our experience in a one-sided way we may be living a life of illusion. So opposition has to be included rather than kept out, the opposite of our negative experiences as well as the opposite of our positives. This process could result in conflict – conflict with the self and with 'other'. Hearing all the negatives, for example, did not make some of us feel good, but it was a necessary time of introspection.

A further explanation is that although our experiences may have pushed us into a position to see things differently, our lack of control over the ideological apparatuses of organisations and society may have made expressing some of the positives more difficult. According to Patricia Hill-Collins (1990) groups' unequal in power are correspondingly unequal in their ability to make their standpoint known to themselves and others. In our case, some of these standpoints could have included our inability to state our positives and, in particular, our successes. As a consequence, the focus in this analysis is more on the themes of our needs and our experiences of trying to get those needs met.

As a group we may have had experiences that provided us with a unique sense of vision but expressing a collective, self-defined black professional and student consciousness proved at times problematic. Nevertheless, some of us were having a positive experience whilst engaging in what was sometimes problematic and, in the experience of the positive, we spoke of the negatives. In order to get to the stage of focusing on the

positives we had to engage in the content of the negatives, so we went into the negatives in order to focus on our success in surviving and coping. We had to reflect on the obstacles that were in our path and in doing so some of us realised that we had had successes. There had to be synthesis of the opposites, which included contradictions, so that growth and change could take place and for some it was a regenerative, transformative experience.

I shall present extracts from our discussions and stories told in the inquiry group with an analysis of the themes and sub-themes. The analysis will not be presented in a strict linear way, or in the order listed above, but in a circular fashion with discussion and analysis going back and forth between the sub-themes. However, I shall use some of the sub-themes as discussion headings. There will be positive and negative experiences interwoven under the headings.

Need for support

We expressed the need for a more positive experience when we interact with other black people and the themes that emerged were the need for support and having and needing a sense of connectedness. As black professionals and black students our experiences in organisations and grounding in our own culture suggest that as a group we experience a world differently from those who are not black. These concrete experiences can stimulate a distinctive black professional consciousness concerning that material reality. Being black and a professional practitioner or black and a student may expose us in organisations to certain common experiences. These experiences may predispose us to a distinctive group consciousness, but they in no way guarantee that such a consciousness will develop amongst all black professionals or that it will be articulated as such, by the group. However, I was interested to note that the Practitioners' Group, and in particularl the students focused a great deal on their experiences of 'support groups' either as workers or as students. The Manager's Group also focused on black worker's groups and, interestingly enough, the Lecturers/Academics paid more attention to the theme of connectedness.

I was not surprised to note the theme, 'connectedness and the need for connection', as there is an absence of an identifiable tradition uniting black social work professionals and students. There are connections amongst us as black professionals that are to do with concrete experiences with oppression, developing a self- defined position concerning those experiences, and the acts of resistance that can follow. Our concrete experiences

as members of specific race, class, profession and gender groups, as well as our concrete historical situations, necessarily play significant roles in our perspectives on the world. The sharing of these perspectives contributes to our knowledge of ourselves and our identity, knowledge gained by black professionals and students as socially constituted members of a group. Within that group, connection and support are central as our support systems can underpin our actions in the world.

From a gestalt perspective support is the background from which awareness takes place, connections are made and growth arises. Black professionals and black students are likely to be looking for some extra environmental support from other black people in an organised form, either formally or informally, because we may be lacking environmental support in our daily life or work life.

We inquired into our experiences of support and asked where do we look for support and how do we get support? It was felt that some of us might feel unable to support ourselves effectively in respect of the key problems we face as black professionals in white organisations, and black support groups were looked to by many of the participants as offering specialised forms of support.

Black support groups

Our explorations revealed that our need for black support groups was paramount as they acted as a strategy for dealing with the isolation that black people feel in white institutions. It also filled the gap that some white institutions leave by not providing adequate support structures.

Some people felt that they had to 'dig deep' to find support in organisations, especially structured support. Some said that they feared asking for support from public forums such as support groups for fear that such action could be viewed negatively by some white organisations. They feared the organisation might view them as not capable of coping with difficult situations. Also, in a climate of fear, some of us are likely to be more concerned with watching our backs than with supporting each other.

Nevertheless, there was a unanimous expression that **"Support is key"**. Some said that they felt reassured when there was a support group for black people. Some were surprised to find black students' support groups existed and that some organisations had black workers' groups. Some students experienced black students support groups as

places where they could go to when they were experiencing difficulties. This they found to be necessary and helpful as their general experience of support during their training was that it came but it was very fragmented and inconsistent. Some students said that they needed the group support because their training had caused a great deal of change in their lives which, at times, they found frightening and they needed a place in which they could makes sense of it. The experience of the change was so frightening that they constructed it as a negative experience. They, therefore, felt reassured when there was a support group.

Black professional groups, student groups and general support groups can be lifelines and there were some general comments in support of the need for meeting in groups for support. One participant said these were places where **" I am asked what do I really want for myself, a place where I am willing to give and I have to be willing to share".** Some of us felt that we needed opportunities to talk to each other so that we could be influenced by each other and grow together, otherwise we ran the risk of oppressing ourselves. Support groups could provide such opportunities.

The notion of safety in numbers was also spoken of in relation to the experience of being in black support groups. One participant's positive comment on support groups was that these were **"Established networks and forums for other black professionals to meet other black people".** Becoming active in groups gives many black professionals a safe space to talk about job related pressures and stresses that might not be able to be discussed in the workplace. In the words of one participant, **"It's a place to meet to explore our journeys".** In the comfort of a 'safe' meeting space within the organisation, through serious conversations and sometimes through humour, black workers and/or student have the opportunity to affirm each other's humanity and specialness, to validate each others experiences and take the right to speak those experiences. The valuing of our experiences comes from a shared recognition of who we all are in the world and how we survive in white organisations. **"We have a universal strength and it can act as a reminder of how we can survive and handle difficult situations"** said one participant. This shared recognition operates among black people who do not necessarily know one another but recognise the need for valuing of each other.

These feelings were experienced by some as empowering because expressing them allowed them to be 'more themselves'. Being able to do so offered some people a sense of family. One participant said:

"I expect support from family and friends and I feel the same about black support groups. I am surprised we do not offer love and nurturing to each other especially when we want to be a family again".

Another said:

"That is why support groups are so important for me, because I view a support group as a family. We do not see each other often but when we do we fall into place again".

In talking with each other, many of us discover we have similar experiences and recognise the need to really listen to one another, to support each other to speak, use our voices and tell our stories. But, in the creation of the space for the telling of our stories and 'envoicing' ourselves, we discover that there are many issues and difficulties to do with negotiation; negotiating how to get to a space, self-revelation or the transformation of silence into language. These issues are experienced negatively by some.

There were other positive reasons why black support groups were necessary. It was suggested that they could act as vehicles for increasing our body of knowledge, a place where we could share our ideas, a place where creativity could flourish. However, some of us felt that we did not take up the opportunities and behaved, instead in contradictory ways that did not allow for support. One participant said:

"Instead of sharing our ideas with each other openly we do it in our pigeon holes at work - in hospitals and social services canteens, but we have to develop what we know and do it in public. We also have to pat ourselves on the back and say in public 'I have done well and feel good about ourselves, about our achievements".

Some of us experience difficulty in admitting that we have done well, or sharing with others what we have done well, although we pressure others and ourselves to do well. One male participant said that he felt that **"We give ourselves and each other a hard time about the pressure to do well and the pressure to make black groups or black teams work. The pressure is sometimes too great to bear".** He told a story of his football team's match when they won the game, and said that he noticed that **"If we lose we argue, we win and we still argue about how we could have done better. We cannot see the positives in ourselves".**

Some of the same people who found black support groups to be positive had also contradictory, ambivalent and mixed feelings about them because they felt that some black groups came together to offer support only when there were problems or difficulties. Indeed some people used them for problem solving or when they were having difficulties.

One participant said:

"For five and a half years as the only black worker in my team I was ringing up ex-students/colleagues, family and friends, open-minded white colleagues for support. I believed that I had to have a problem before asking for support".

Complaint culture – complaining, fighting and competing

The question was posed whether these groups had become too problem focused. Some thought that issues were made more problematic than was in fact the case so that it was difficult to find solutions or strategies for moving forward. There were times when the people with problems were stigmitised, stereotyped and seen negatively. Some people appreciated being in a black group, for support, but did not want to take on some of the values of the group, especially if these were negative. They felt that they would become identified with the negative identity which is ascribed to some black groups when they are not functioning effectively. Some defined black groups as not functioning effectively when they became stuck and when individuals were not able to help one another. One participant stated, **"we seem to be stuck in complaining"**. Some individuals became quite destructive by engaging in unsupportive challenge, quarrels, name calling, infighting, competing and silencing which sometimes resulted in unresolvable conflicts. **"There is a battle between black students when we are altogether, we become highly competitive",** stated one participant.

Some participants thought a possible explanation could be that some black people were reluctant to examine their internalised racism and that this was the source of many disagreements and conflicts. In my view, another possible explanation of this situation could be that when we meet we are at different stages of development in terms of politicisation of ourselves. When we meet each other we are sometimes meeting as *subjects* and *objects* or *objects* and *objects* and we interact in these ways because for some of us have not decolonised our minds (Fanon, 1967), so we may have decolonised and colonised minds meeting.

We might have people in a group who are experiencing feeling victimised by organisations and society and are taking up victim positions interacting with others, who are feeling less victimised and are working through a political process of freeing themselves. Those feeling victimised may also be interacting with others who have worked through rage and freed themselves towards empowerment, and who, having decolonised their minds, are able to see things more clearly. Black rage is released as

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our different minds interact to make sense of our experiences and we may not always allow room for difference. In such situations, we might experience negative behaviours such as arguing, complaining and fighting.

Consequently, we are not experiencing a subject-to-subject encounter, mutuality between individuals who have decolonised their minds. Lack of mutuality in subject-to-subject encounters makes it difficult for back rage to be used constructively (hooks, 1995). It becomes represented negatively since we are always fighting rather than seeing its necessity for transformation and change. Rage instead is constructed as always and only negative and destructive. As a result, some black support groups become places to avoid, owing to the dynamics and processes that are experienced between them and because of the ways in which some people experience themselves behaving. One participant said:

"I can become very negative in all black groups. I use up much personal energy anticipating and worrying that something will go wrong. My antenna goes up. I have a lack of trust generally for all groups, but more with black groups it's my internalised stuff".

Another said:

I have a resistance to meeting in an all black group. We don't really engage in genuine dialogue. We compete for space".

Some also find it difficult to appreciate the complex dynamics of groups. They have high expectations of each other and become impatient with the group process. One participant said **we don't allow each other to have our voices heard in these groups and we speak for each other as if we are all the same. We don't want to hear different voices".**

Reflecting on this last statement I wonder if one explanation for this is that some of us do not operate with the awareness that the voice which a person seeks is their own voice, not the one we have made for them. We cannot see that using our voice for them only perpetuates their bondage rather than offering freedom.

hooks (1994) spoke of her concern that when black people are not allowed to challenge critically that their voices are silenced by self appointed groups which she called the 'secret police'. In our inquiry groups people spoke of their fear of speaking out in public and of being challenged or challenging other black people, because reprisals from other

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black people might further isolate them. One participant said, **"We have a fear of being challenged, we do not want to challenge ourselves and others. I have been taught to 'keep it in the family', to not wash my dirty linen in public".** And another said, **"I fear bringing half-formed ideas into the group for fear "I" will be attacked instead of what I "say" being challenged".**

hooks describes an act of censorship, which is a troubling issue for black people. Everyone is taught to value discretion and secrets keeping. Even in so-called 'safe' spaces, where groups come together to share ideas and experiences, there is a fear of silencing by rigorous challenge and fantasies are constructed that it is easier to challenge in white groups or with white workers. This was reflected in these participants' statements:

"It's easier to confront white people, and more difficult to confront black people".

"Black and white workers are interacting better than black workers with each other. I find that sometimes white workers are more welcoming to black workers than black workers are to each other".

hooks argues that groups sometimes disintegrate when the speaking of diverse opinions leads to contestations, challenge, confrontation, and out and out conflict. It is sometimes common for individual dissenting voices to be silenced by the collective demand for harmony. In some cases we impose sanctions in the form of censorship. Exclusion and ostracisation are sometimes used to punish those voices.

My Reflections and Sensemaking

It is important to understand that intergroup relations in some of these groups are complex and that the dynamics are no different from those of 'ordinary' group life. Adapting a theoretical perspective from field theory could help our understanding. Field theory has a set of principles that emphasises the interconnectednes of events and settings in which those events take place. Field theory looks at the total situation, affirming and respecting wholeness and complexity, rather than reducing that situation by piecemeal, item by item analysis (Mackewn 1997). We cannot understand ourselves in isolation but as interactive wholes within the complex systems of our environment.

When a group of black professionals or black students meets we jointly create a relational field which consists of all the interconnected aspects of our environment and ourselves. These multiple aspects include the ecological, cultural and economic environment, each individual's current functioning, or backgrounds and past experiences which include such factors as age, gender, class, race, economic and social circumstances as well as the character structure of the individuals. As the cultural fields of the many individuals in these groups come together to co-create the field of the group, the situation becomes more complex.

Understanding black professionals and students in context involves paying attention to what lies in the background of our lives. That is, the person's whole life experiences which consist of their race, culture, gender or social values, as well as to what is uppermost in our attention or in the foreground of the group session. Many black support groups meet within institutions - work settings, university settings. The fields in which these groups operate are complex organisations and social systems with multiple possibilities and complexities. Within the groups we have complex phenomena which are interconnected and we cannot separate them without destroying or changing the meaning of the whole. All aspects of the field are potentially significant and interconnected (Yontef, 1993). Therefore the process in some black support groups cannot therefore, be understood in isolation, but only in relationship to all aspects of the field. Addressing issues of racism, cultural and ethnic diversity is a matter not only of content but also of process (Kareem and Littlewood, 1992). It means trying to understand the intercultural and interracial dimension to any encounter between people.

It also means having an understanding of intergroup relations in organisations. We also need an analysis that helps us to understand how members relate within their groups and how expectations placed on them by others can be highly dependent on the nature of intergroup forces. In order to understand our process in groups, from the perspective of intergroup relations, we also need to understand the relationship in groups and between groups of member to non member, white and black and also our relationship to other groups in the organisation. An intergroup perspective on group dynamics could help us to understand how race and cultural dynamics determine black on black dynamics in oganisations. We need to understand that groups are embedded in social systems, organisations or society. Therefore, it is important to consider wider

political and social groupings, in terms of the social relationships we make as well as in terms of one to one relationships. Our experiences of these relationships have an impact on black professionals and black students and we bring these experiences to black support groups.

The power dynamics within black on black interactions in groups are vastly different in some significant ways. The difference in power dynamics and in their underlying issues might be due to the cumulative effects of racism and sexism, the scarcity of black men in the social work profession and the common socio-economic class differences between black males and black females. Consequently, some black groups might take on a more potent life that brings with it its own difficulties. Such difficulties often lead us to behave in ways that can be unproductive and ineffective in terms of support. One participant expressed it as follows, **"We have a fear of getting too close to each other so we have problems when we are together in large numbers, we get into conflict".** Some black people cannot cope with their need for support being met by other black people. This may provoke intolerable feelings. They may fear that their needs may not be met and that they may be rejected with resulting feelings of abandonment. They may instead construct the individual or group as worthless, yet, they continue to seek out those individuals or groups as a necessary part of their need to belong and an important part of their racial identity.

When black people meet and truly engage in an interactive process an unconscious process may be present in the support group whereby vulnerable, hostile or otherwise difficult feelings may be disowned by an individual and attributed to another, who may then (as a result of the interaction) actually experience the feelings as his or her own. This process is referred to as projective identification. "Identification by projection implies a combination of splitting off parts of the self and projecting them on to (or rather into) another person"(Klein 1975, p.143). There are two purposes to projective identification; the first is simply to get rid of difficult feelings which cannot at that time be tolerated, by expelling them into another. The second is to communicate the importance of these feelings by getting another person to experience them, in the inarticulate hope that this person will be better able to tolerate, struggle with and give meaning to the feeling in the interaction between the people involved (Hughes and Pengelly 1997). So, for example, in undertaking this research, some of us were mindful that a similar process could happen in the inquiry groups. What was most marked was the need for safety; the need for a

supportive environment, as fear was present in the form of anxiety about the potential for hostility, rejection and challenge. At times we facilitated the groups to enable these feelings to surface, and made explicit.

Highly intense feelings were evoked. The process stimulated untapped anger, repressed anxiety and a great deal of fear, including fear of murderous rage, which needed containing. There was some outlet for these feelings but I wonder if the process would have been different if white people had been present. Some people might have perceived them as the persecutor for the anger to be unleashed and projected on. In their absence, the anger was either internalised or projected out onto each other.

Projectors at times get rid of their destructive, attacking parts in some black support groups. Hence, some experiences are those of conflict rather than support. Some black people may experience powerful rage as a result of their experiences of racism, which can result in built-up, unreleased tension in the body. In some black groups or with some black individuals such interactions could provoke feelings of identification with and awareness of experiences of powerlessness and lack of control in aspects of their lives. Group members may use the opportunities that an all-black group offers to release some of these tensions and experience some degree of power in what is perceived by some as a safe environment. The need for some is to feel safe and get support and, for others, it is to get rid of bad parts, feelings of violence, rage, anger and negative experiences. What is released in the room is disagreement, mistrust, anger, argument and competition (as stated by some participants) all of which can invite retaliatory anger, mistrust, and lack of safety; negativity takes over and controls the dynamics of the group.

What can be particularly confusing and misleading about the power dynamics and other aspects of black professionals' relations in these groups is that, on the surface, these dynamics can appear to be no different from the power dynamics found within white groups. Black professionals and black students exhibit the full range of group behaviours and dynamics as exhibited in other ethnocultural groups. There are distinct and unique differences, however, which are also in part due to black professionals' unique socio-political position. This

is not to imply a homogeneity or lack of acculturative or assimilative difference existing within black groups.

Specifically black professionals and students may prioritise their black identity as having more importance than their work, student or professional identity and, in some organisations, reflect that prioritisation of identity in highly visible ways. This occurs sometimes as a result of the boundaries which some black groups erect. The boundaries are both physical and psychological depending on group membership and the transactions among groups are regulated by variations in boundary permeability, that is, the ease with which boundaries can be crossed.

Our experiences of our social relationships in the dominant group and in organisations might be reflected in our social relationships in our identity groups. There is more than one kind of group with which we have to interact in organisations. Some of those we belong to are accepted by some people and rejected by others. According to Zagier Roberts (1994) organisations comprise of identity groups which have common experiences and shared experiences, and organisational groups which have common organisational positions and shared work experience. These groups overlap and interrelate because individuals have multiple membership. Group membership and group relations shape how an individual perceives others and how others react to him/her. If the group which the individual belongs to is rejected, this could affect her/his self-esteem. Whether a black person was accepted or not by the organisation would affect her/his evaluation of 'self' and interaction with others. Being valued, validated, devalued or rejected would affect how the person feels about her/himself. In organisations black groups, whether worker's, students or support groups, are highly visible and their identity is recognised both by their members and by their non-members. White non-members especially, feel threatened by all black groups and sometimes feelings get polarised with positive feelings being attached to identity groups and negative feelings attached to other groups.

Requesting Mentors

This situation was confirmed by many participants who expressed their concerns and anger at white colleagues who display negative behaviours and make disparaging comments to them when they return to their teams from black workers meetings. What they thought would be helpful was for the organisation to invest in acquiring external

resources in the form of: a) black consultants to assist these black identity groups to manage their group dynamics and assist white identity groups to appreciate the need for black only groups; and b) the use of mentors for black staff. Mentor schemes were viewed as a way of dealing with our development. Participants believed that having these external personnel would be helpful in knowing what other people were doing and might offer opportunities for finding out how other black people were coping in other organisations. One participant supported the idea of having mentors as **"A way of ending isolation, we need to talk to someone, to get tips on survival strategies"**.

Some participants commented that organisations were now operating mentor schemes, albeit as part of their positive action programmes, and they welcomed the initiative as a positive support strategy. This, they felt, was one way organisations could give something positive to black staff. They thought that many organisations and higher education establishments rarely had enough black senior staff or faculty members to call on for support and help. Those of us who were mentors spoke of feeling so stressed by the demands of our job (and by having to prove ourselves as well) that we did not have much left to give as extras to students or workers. Those of us who tried to be available were sometimes overwhelmed by the needs of some black students and workers who relied on us. Nevertheless, participants still felt that to be a mentor for another black person was a way of giving something back to the black community. As one woman said, **"I want to give something back but I don't know how to give it. I have a lot to give and more, so for me, support groups are necessary as well as mentoring schemes"**.

Some participants thought that when black people collectively experienced racism and racist oppression in similar ways, there was greater group solidarity. It is possible to argue that racial integration has altered in fundamental ways some of the common ground that once was a foundation for us in our struggle for freedom and that having black support groups and mentors offers some solidarity and connectedness as forms of support in this changed context.

Need for Connectedness

It is difficult for black professionals and black students to survive in organisations and white institutions without connectedness to each other and to black communities (Wimberly, 1997). Maintaining a connection to each other and to the community is an important vehicle for black professionals in that this relationship enables us to stay in touch with cultural values, a vital source of comfort and strength for black professionals

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and students. Hence, being relationally connected to the cultural heritage through each other and in black communities can make the difference between surviving and not surviving in a racist and hostile environment. As a result many of our conversations, stories and the complicated relationships which we spoke about in the co-operative inquiry groups were related to the theme of connectedness. A few questions were asked and explored which generated this theme. These were:- What are the good things about working with each other? What happens to us when we try to work together? What does being black and the notion of blackness mean to us? What behaviour do we look for in order to make contact?

Skin colour was used as a point of connection. It was said that it allowed for immediate recognition of each other. One participant said, **"White people notice our skin colour in a particular way but black people notice it for contact".** Contact, attachment and solidarity were also words used to associate with being connected. There was an expectation by some who strongly stated, **"black is black"**, that if someone were black then they would know what it was like to be black. An underlying assumption in that statement is that in some way one could be an expert on blackness by virtue of being black or that there is only one black experience.

We need to be careful that we do not narrow and constrain our concept of black or our notion of black experience. It is important not to assume, as some participants did, that a black person coming from a background which is not predominately black, would have an experience based on their mixed racial and cultural identity, that is assimilationist and not 'truly' black. We could acknowledge their experience as being a different black experience; an experience that might mean that they may not have had access to life experiences that were common to those of us raised in racially segregated worlds. It is not productive to dismiss these people by labelling them 'not black enough'. Some of these people may not have chosen the context of their upbringing and, if they had chosen it, it would still have been a valid experience. Our experiences are multi-layered and complex. We need to challenge the idea that there is only "one" legitimate black experience. Facing the reality of multiple black experiences offers more opportunities for unification and for taking into account our diversity (hooks, 1991). It is important that we value all black experiences and share knowledge with one another so as to begin to build anew, black communal feelings.

Some of us did not subscribe to a 'one black experience' model and thought that differences in culture created opportunities for varied and creative experiences. It would

also have an impact on our relationship in terms of identification. One participant questioned, for example, how well someone of Caribbean descent identified with someone of West African descent. There might be identification based on skin colour but not on culture. The point was made that identification offered security and that some black people found different ways of identifying whether it is skin-colour or gender. The following was said about criteria for identification.

"I look for someone who will be interesting, interested in black issues. I will be checking out what they say and how they are communicating, if it is like a black person and if I am interested in what they are saying I respond positively".

"When I meet another black person I will have a cool response whilst looking for mutual interest and to see if they are OK".

Identity – The meaning of 'black' and 'blackness'

The practitioner's group asked the question: how was it that some people were seen as 'OK' and others as not 'OK'? In response to that question some said that they looked to see whether a person behaved as if they were 'black'. When asked what "black" or "blackness" meant when used in that context, some said it was about the way a black person behaved. However, when we tried defining what was meant by black behaviour it proved difficult.

In its significance for some of us, blackness is above all, a relation between people. A way of thinking about this is to reflect on how we define and embody our blackness. A sense of blackness may offer ways of knowing and habits of being that can help sustain us as groups of black people. "We can value and cherish the "meaning" of this experience without essentialising it"(hooks, 1991 p. 38). For others, we find that we have a greater success if our images are altered to affirm or equate with "whiteness" by seeking to take on the characteristic look of "whiteness". This is seen as enhancing class mobility in public arenas, in educational systems and in the work organisations.

Some participants said that they would look at language, non-verbal behaviours, clothes and lifestyle as bases for connection. This led to our asking the question 'what is a black lifestyle'? After several attempts that question was not fully answered. Clothing may provide us with some information about a person; it also tends to block input of other information by causing us to perceive selectively on the basis of our stereotypes of

clothing patterns and personality type. The following are examples of what was said in terms of the importance of language.

"When I meet another black person I lapse into a different language; my Standard English goes. I use that as a way of connecting and identifying" said one participant.

And another participant said, " To be heard using your own language is an outward sign that you were still black, you still valued your culture".

Some black people often feel the need to switch between their own cultural language code and that of the more dominant white society. Speech which marks out the individual as a member of the group can be important for in-group acceptance. Accents and dialect carry with them stereotypes of the speakers employing them and these stereotypes can affect the impressions black people form when interacting. What is of importance to this discussion is not the linguistic aspect of language usage, but its symbolic import. Here the use of black language promotes identity and may be reinforced by group members.

It can be argued that our history has put pressure on us to conform, to speak white, and each one of us has responded in different ways, at different levels and to different degrees. Some 'speak white', which is speaking Standard English with a polished English accent, when at work and differently when at home. Others are consistent in when, where and how they speak. Others actively decide to challenge overtly and move to what some students described as 'black talk', that is to speak in ways that would separate them out from white people.

There is an assumption, in racist society, that if black people are to be heard by white people they must speak white, constructing themselves in the same manner in which they have been constructed thereby loosing their own particularity, specificity, identity and becoming less authentic. Black people, in such circumstances, are then called derogatory names and treated in a derogatory manner by some black people. They are people to be pitied, hated, scapegoated and projected onto. When this happens many black people seize the opportunity to denigrate, alienate and reject, not want to be part of.

Suspicion and mistrust

The core of this rejection stems from mistrust, suspicion and fear. If they are seen with a person who is seen to be all those things then they fear being tarred with the same brush

and being themselves alienated and rejected by other blacks. Some of this mistrust and suspicion is reflected in the following statements:

"There is a black syndrome that is for us to be highly suspicious about each other".

I believe we have a fear of being open, honest and trusting of each other".

"We do not want to associate with each other for fear of 'ghettoisation'"

"When we see each other we believe that we would automatically not 'get on'. So we give off negative 'vibes'".

Other participants said that when they met a black person in an organisation they looked to see if that person was 'part of the establishment' and, if they were, then they might become suspicious of them. One participant said, **"When I am amongst a group of black professionals I question their identity. Who are they? Are they black? Are they middle class? Are they professional?**

If the person were perceived to be middle class with a professional status then they would be viewed with suspicion and mistrust, they would be subjected to a great deal of scrutiny and to being 'checked out'. In the words of one participant, **"We are always looking at each other suspiciously when we meet each other, 'checking' each other out until we prove ourselves".**

If those people were seen to have taken on the establishment or institution's values then they would not be seen as black. Their "blackness" was questioned due to their other intellectual interests and their comfort in being in a predominately white work or learning environment. If people in that category in particular were seen to be **"mixing with too many white people"**, as some practitioners put it or had a white partner they were stereotyped as being a 'coconut', a 'bounty', or an 'oreo'. These are terms given to someone who is seen as being black on the 'outside', in skin colour, and white on the 'inside', in views and attitudes. It was sometimes expressed in strong statements as:

"They love white people too much".

"The closer we see black people are to white people the more suspicious we become of them and we make negative judgements about them".

Signs that was looked for in a back person in order to attach this label to a person was speaking English with a middle or upper class accent which some people considered to be making them "**more English than the English people**". Other signs were the number of white friends a black person had as compared to, the number of black friends they had. Some looked to see if "**they spoke to black people in the organisation**". If a person had what was considered to be **"too many white friends, did not speak to black people in the organisation and spoke 'white English' too well"** or if they **"created a niche for themselves and feared that it would be disrupted by another black person"**. Such person was not considered to be black and was seen as having 'sold out'. Such a person would be rejected and they would not be chosen to work with or to speak to.

More Reflections and sensemaking

History plays a part in determining our behaviour in black on black encounters. The notion of mistrust, which figured largely in the inquiry group discussions, and has been developed into a stereotype in the black community, has some of its base in the historical context of slavery. During that period black people were believed to be bad people and thieves who were not to be trusted. Slaves were set up by their masters to tell on each other, to 'sell each other out'. The house slaves who enjoyed more privileges than the field slaves, were encouraged to report on the field slaves. As a consequence, suspicion and fear were engendered and have travelled through the passage of time. This has affected some of the ways in which black people have learnt to interact with each other. The 'mulattos', who were biracial and whose skin colour was lighter, were the most privileged blacks who acted as mediators between the white world and the disadvantaged mass of black folks with dark skin. They were valued more by whites than darker skinned blacks. They, too, were viewed with suspicion and mistrust because of their privileged status. Hence, the belief that some people carry into their interactions with other black people, that if a black person is seen to be mixing with 'too many white people' or, has a white partner or, 'resembles' white in any way they are not to be trusted.

In one way not only do some of us need people to be clearly either black or white, male or female; their maleness or femaleness, blackness or whiteness seems to represent the fundamental ground for things as they are. Sometimes we project negative bad parts onto each other. Our history has taught us not to think well of each other. The way we see whiteness has had an impact on how we perceive one another. We are

silent about any representation of whiteness in our psyche (hooks, 1995). The thought of having whiteness in our imagination might fill us with horror. One consequence is that some of us, in our denial, pretend to be comfortable faced with whiteness. Others are uncomfortable and cope with this discomfort by evoking an essentialist ˮus and themˮ dichotomy. Such a dichotomy suggest that some black people invert stereotypical racist interpretations so that black is synonymous with goodness and white with evil so that any black person seen to be imbued with ˈwhiteˈ ways of behaving will be part of that dichotomy (hooks, 1995). Some of those people will be met with disapproval.

In disapproving of each other we are also disapproving of ourselves. What we sometimes see in other black people can be what we unconsciously project. For example, our fear of becoming 'too white' gets projected onto others who are seen to be taking on a lifestyle that represents whiteness. We also want to repel the thought that we may have taken on white parts and white values. Therefore, we put it in others whose skin colour is closest to white or whose language and behaviour is closest to a white person. We see each other in fixed ways and do not see all the parts that make up the whole. What stops us from seeing the whole? To help answer this question the notion of projective identification described previously can help our understanding of what takes place.

Some of the black students in the practitioner group spoke of their fears of becoming a professional and, by that token, middle class. They feared these parts would take over and they would lose their black identity. One of the ways in which they seemed to have coped was to empty those parts of themselves into other black students or professionals whom they perceived as being comfortable with their role and identity. They did this to black people in senior positions, black lecturers, managers and Practice teachers. They were then freed up to think and believe that they were O.K blacks. They also used the defence of ˮdistancingˮ to separate themselves from what they saw as 'not O k' blacks, or indeed blacks whom they felt were 'too black. Both of these images are stereotypes which, according to hooks (1995), some of us maintain and they are representations of whiteness in the black imagination. hooks went on to say that stereotypes are one form of representation that is created to serve as substitution, standing in for what is real. A stereotype is a fantasy, a projection onto the other which makes her/him less threatening. "Stereotypes are an invention, a pretence that one

knows when the steps that would make real knowing possible cannot be taken or are not allowed"(hooks, 1995).

When we call black people derogatory names such as 'coconut', 'bounty' or 'oreo', or challenge their identity, we are basing this on some lack of knowledge or acceptance rather than on a challenge to social categories, divisions and definition as objects. We are instead treating them as 'givens' of the world, for example, categories like 'black' and 'white'. This implies that there are sets of behaviours that go with 'being white' or 'being black'. We continue to participate in a political act that helps affirm current formulations by never examining how they have become current and whose interests they serve. Who one is and what one is like is established through discursive acts.

When a black person calls a black person "white" or a 'coconut' they are implicitly making a comparison with white people and granting privilege to the implicit but absent standard represented by whiteness. The standard remains unexamined and becomes the evaluative frame or ground within which compromises are made but it does not come under scrutiny. We judge the black person as an inferior representation of the superior qualities contained in whiteness and a white person. The absent standard is the white heterosexual male of western origins and of the dominant social class. All others are defined in terms of this standard. This judgement is the outcome of a process yet it appears as a statement of pure, impartial description.

Self appointed groups or individuals emerge and mete out punishment to those whom they perceive to be representing a form of blackness, which they deem to be unacceptable. What is not struggled with enough is the fact that all parties are the same and are different at the same time; they are the same in terms of being subjected to racism and a process of internalised racism, and are different in terms of how those experiences are lived out. What is not struggled with either is that another consequence of the representation of whiteness in the black imagination emerges as a response to traumatic pain and anguish, from racism. Such pain and anguish informs and shapes the way in which some black people see 'whiteness' and, in turn, 'blackness'. Rejection, isolation, abandonment, punishment are all destructive actions that do not assist dialogue or improve the political discourse.

In black interactions our self-perception and levels of self-esteem could be one set of factors influencing how we view one another. If our self-esteem is low, it is likely that our self-acceptance is low too. If we have problems accepting ourselves the chances are that we will wonder how others would accept us. Sometimes this wondering can turn into a fear of rejection and this fear can be projected outwards and manifest itself in behaviour which can be perceived as rejecting others. In other words, "I will reject you for fear that I will be rejected". This process sometimes takes the form of attributing negative judgements to others on first encounter.

If some of us perceive ourselves as O K and others as not we have little chance of clearly seeing the other for who they really are as a whole person in their totality. We begin to see people in parts. This can also mean that some of us have grown to be excessively other-directed. By that I mean that when people lack self-approval, it usually means that their self-doubts outweigh their self-esteem. These people learn to seek self-acceptance indirectly. They will be more concerned with trying to figure out what others want them to do and very much less concerned with trying to figure out what it is that they want to do. In other words they may end up living an 'other directed life'. So 'other' becomes very important in meeting their needs. Therefore the need to know whether the person is a 'good type' of black or a 'bad type' of black person - a 'black-black' or a 'white-black' becomes the focus of attention. We set up a kind of hierarchy and in the process of operationalising hierarchies of blackness, by ascribing value to attributes; it is not simply a case of prejudice (or the lack of prejudice). It is a case of whether we (as black professional or student) are aware of the effects that our behaviour or activity may have on others. So the act of defining another black person as 'good', bad or 'not black enough' will deprive some people of the opportunity of forming relationships in whatever way they might choose. The assumption underlying the notion of not black enough might mean that some people are allowed only a limited range of social environments with limited choices and rights (McDonald, 1996).

Fundamental to the notion of most hierarchies is the concept of the 'ideal human being' where each attribute a person may have is given a relative value. The notion that personal attributes have a value means that it becomes theoretically possible to judge how close each person or group comes to matching the 'mythical norm', the artificially created

notion of human perfection. A black person's skin colour, language, status, lifestyle, having white friends, assimilation into the English culture or integrating into the white establishments is being used, in this research inquiry, consciously or unconsciously in an attempt to define a person's position within this given hierarchy of 'blackness'.

Hierarchies of blackness therefore have many negative effects. They encourage the notion that is both possible and desirable to create hierarchies of humanity and to measure human beings accordingly. Those hierarchies are ultimately inconsistent, creating social divisions and stimulating social conflict among us as black professionals and students. We might compete with other black professionals and students over which of us is most oppressed, and which is least oppressed, which of us is more black and which of us is not, creating yet another hierarchy while fighting for the morale high ground. So we need to see each part of a person and not just a fixed totality. We need to see the parts that make up the whole so that we don't make judgements from a polarised way of thinking in terms of positive or negative, for example, this is a 'real' black person and this is not.

Indeed, some participants in the inquiry did not take such a restricted view in relation to attributes of blackness and said that clothes and language were not as important for them, emphasising that they made connections on the basis of a shared experience. They would look to see if there were some shared things in common. So that whilst the point of contact might be skin colour, interests in black issues, similarities and differences of experiences of racism in Britain were also important. They were aware that there might be cultural differences, so that just relying on skin colour, language, dress, status or lifestyle, as a way of making meaningful connections, could be a fallacy.

Disagreements, strain, tension and even neglect can mar interactions between black people but we share in common an experience and identity. These identities are riddled with problems and complexities which are not necessarily features imposed by individuals but are historically, socially and politically constructed. This means that we have to maintain an awareness and connectedness with the broader but complex socio-cultural experience of being black. Without such critical reflections on the impact of socio-cultural and socio-political

realities we will not be able to attend to the salient impact of these important factors.

Concluding Comments

As a group of researchers we examined how to live with these tensions and disagreements. We discussed the meaning of being a black professional or black student and the impact this has on the psyche. This discussion integrated a critical reflection on how the experiences of being a black professional or black student reflected dimensions of class, gender and race. Furthermore, these reflections revealed how monolithic views of a black professional or black student blackness contributed to our experiences. We also examined how to contest the limiting representation or negative multiple meanings of a black professional or a black student rather than deny or ignore the fact that there are multiple ways of being a black professional or black student. One of the most important issues left to be addressed here is how we liberate or differentiate a sense of intact 'self' from 'other' - black professional or student - while maintaining a healthy emotional connection with each other. We need also to consider how to affirm liberating representations both internally and externally, how liberating action is about challenging the internalised cognitive and essentialistic representations of blackness that cause us to question our own identity.

I want to advocate some strategies as a way of moving forward. I believe that the "Field" perspective, which I referred to in earlier discussions, encourages us occasionally to stand outside the current situation, whatever it is, and see alternative ways of understanding it. For example, our experiences of complaining, competing, fighting, and raging during some of our encounters have a multi-dimensional nature to it and require a more sophisticated understanding. We need to be able to understand the psychological displacement of grief and pain into rage and fight. So when we create forums and political spaces for sharing our experiences, grief, pain and rage about racism and internalised racism would be released or deposited. We need to understand that strong emotions like rage erupt because we have spent so much time acquiescing to white power structures in order to assimilate and, in so doing, some of us have subordinated our integrity, suppressed ourselves and our true feelings. According to hooks (1995) at times our anger and rage may express themselves pathologically. However, they can also be expressed itself in ways that lead to constructive empowerment. So we need not be too frightened by our strong emotions; we should allow ourselves the space to acknowledge and release strong emotions, including rage, so that we do not end up, with

mental disorder, but instead allow our psychological wounds to become unmasked and attended to (hooks 1995).

Adapting a "field" standpoint, that is, looking at the whole could allow us to lose any sense of certainty about the right way to be. People organise their field psychologically and emotionally sometimes in self-limiting or fixed ways. Maybe some black people enter an encounter looking at life through the lens of a fixed attitude, or experience life through a whole network of fixed beliefs or gestalts. These beliefs may have been formed in earlier life and continue to be applied unconsciously to present circumstances even though the attitudes are now out of date or not working. The fact that we actively organise and give meaning to our field has important implications for the way we as black professionals and students interact and interrelate to each other, especially in black groups.

There are difficulties inherent in affirming each other within white organisations and in a society which denigrates black people as 'other', so, at times, the dynamics that ensue are mirroring 'otherness' and further objectifying the 'other'. We also, at times, do not allow the full range of our voices to create safe spaces. We, therefore, run the risk of reproducing the position of oppressor and oppressed and re-creating relationships that control and repress rather than support and renew.

We need, therefore, to create a space and an atmosphere in which analysis can take place. The atmosphere can also be personal and individualistic. Reflecting back on our experiences in the Co-operative Inquiry Groups, I noticed that we spoke intensely of personal and intellectual matters individually but, in the process of our 'telling' 'discussing' and 'sharing', we were also simultaneously expressing our collective experiences. In the process of engaging in dialogue with one another we were able to explore subjects that helped some people to discover and acknowledge how they were interpreting their reality.

Exploration can help us become aware that we are currently organising and interpreting our personal space in personal or subjective ways. Some of us do believe that our interpretation of reality is the only possible one, especially if this interpretation is born out of a fixed gestalt or web of interconnected fixed gestalts. Exploration in dialogue may enable people to loosen fixed ways of experiencing the field, to reshuffle the way they organise their field, to choose to interpret their experience differently as well as possibly changing their circumstances. It can enable people to realise how they are active and selective in most of the ways they chose to tell their stories both to themselves and

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others. Those aspects of their stories which they choose to focus on and to repeat have a profound effect upon how they configure themselves and feel their circumstances. If we genuinely learn to tell our story differently, we may change our subjectively experienced reality. Alternatively when we change our subjectively experienced reality, we change our story. Reconsidering and loosening fixed ways of perceiving ourselves and others can precipitate internal conflict and we need to be prepared to explore the complex internal processes which support fixed perceptions.

So exploration and discussion within a dialogic framework is what is needed; a framework that allows for conversation between black people. It is important human action which could lead to social action.

Chapter 8

The Relationship between Black Managers and Black Workers

Introduction

In this chapter I shall present the material generated, with my reflective comments, from the Managers' meetings and some Practitioners' Group meetings in the Co-operative Inquiry. I have also included material from final-year social work students who were in practice placements and had experience of being managed. Some of these students had black managers as their practice teachers in work placements; others had previous experiences of working in teams which had black managers. This student group was an all black group whom I taught; they were undertaking a module called Black Workers in White Welfare Organisations. (Further details of the nature of this teaching module will be given in Chapter 10 when I discuss my practice as a teacher). In a few of the teaching sessions the group explored their ideas, expectations and experiences of black managers, which I found interesting and insightful.

In including some of the material from student groups I had a boundary issue. I questioned whether I should open the boundaries of the Co-operative Inquiry so wide to include material from students who were not part of the inquiry. I resolved my dilemma by referring back to the overall aim of the research project and considered the material in relation to that aim. I concluded that this group provided a valuable source of information and feedback which could not be ignored in respect of the research inquiry, so I have chosen to include their views in this analysis about the relationship between black managers and black workers. However, the managers' voices predominate in the text and they appear more in the 'first' person and the workers' voices in the 'third' person.

I have chosen to focus more on the material from the Managers'' Inquiries for two reasons. One is that I worked without Cathy with the Black Managers Group as part of the research inquiry so I held stories about some black managers' experiences that were exclusive to that group and myself and which need to be told. I undertook to work with this group as I had a particular interest having been a manager in similar settings. I therefore felt that I had a lot to share and would be able to empathise with a their experiences on the basis of a genuine and lived understanding. The second reason for the primary focus on the managers' material is that the theme of the relationship between black managers and black workers was more pertinent to this group than to the other

inquiry groups. So what is presented in this chapter are thoughts ideas and inquiry questions in an attempt to tell the stories of our experiences as black managers relating to black workers in white welfare organisations. I shall attempt to present some of the meanings we generated from our stories and my own sense making of what I have heard by way of theorising. I have selected more field text for this chapter to give the reader a sense of the flavour of the discussions and stories which emerged.

The Manager's group met five times in all following the contracting and original meeting. Ten managers, eight women and two men, began to meet as a group. We were of Afro-Caribbean and Asian descent. We were not a homogeneous group. We had differences in terms of gender culture, region, status, class and in terms of our experiences in statutory and voluntary organisations. Three people worked as Service Managers in large London Social Services Departments, one as a Centre Manager with NSPCC, one as an Assistant Regional Director with NCH and one as a Family Centre Manager with Barnados. Only six people, five women and one man including myself continued to the end and met on a regular basis.

At the outset one primary inquiry question was "How do I interact with black social workers?" "Do I treat white social workers differently?" The second part to this question still remains to be developed but the first part has formed the basis for other inquiry questions such as:- "What are managers expecting and wanting from black workers and what do black workers expect from black managers" How are our expectations met if at all?" "What happens when they are not met?" "How do we react and respond and how do organisations react and respond?" The question of what black workers expect from black managers was explored in greater depth by the Practitioners' Group of the research and also by black social work students; however the black managers also discussed it.

Some of these questions will form the basis of future inquiries but, in the analysis that follows, I shall present some themes that emanated from the Managers' and Practitioners' Inquiry Groups and from student group explorations. By taking an intergroup theoretical approach, a systems approach and using a bicultural model I hope to offer some explanations of what happens to black managers and workers when we interact in the context of our expectations in white organisations.

THEMES

As we explored further and deeper three major themes emanated from our perceptions and expectations. Firstly, **Cultural loyalties**; subsumed under this theme is a sub-theme:- familial relationship between managers and workers. There are also some minor themes under this sub-theme which are *the implicit parent-child relationship of nurturing/ dependence/independence, respect from workers, developing workers potential, lack of gratitude betrayal/rejection, workers operating as victims, workers having high expectations and making too many demands on managers, workers pushing boundaries and asking for allowances and exceptions*; secondly, **the myth of the super black manager** and thirdly, the **need for support** for and from black workers as a way of dealing with managers' isolation.

Cultural Loyalties

A bicultural perspective that is looking at what it means to live in two cultures simultaneously is essential to understanding and explaining such issues as cultural loyalties and behaviours between black managers and black workers. In assuming a bicultural perspective I am examining the ecological context and impact on our behaviour, which may be adaptive or dysfunctional depending on the contextual variables at different points in time. A bicultural perspective can be used to explain the pressures and stresses on black workers, in general, as we participate in minority and majority group cultures.

As black workers we live in a bicultural world which requires us to pursue and develop our careers in the white world and maintain our personal life within the black community. We are sometimes forced by the black community and by white organisations to make choices about how we organise our lives culturally. We are expected to split our allegiances between the organisation, the black community and ourselves as black workers. For example, organisations may want us to be integrated into the dominant white, male culture where we are sometimes forced to suppress our racial and ethnic identity and where our positions are very often on the margins. On the margins we experience isolation, feelings of invisibility and in some cases feel we have to deny or abandon our racial identity.

The black community, on the other hand, asks us to stay rooted to its norms, traditions and values and remain committed to our culture. So, for some black workers, there is a sense of having our own cultural identity, taking on the work identity of the organisation

and striving for a sense of integration of the two. Striving for that sense of integration however leads to our having to behave in certain ways that cause conflict and lead to stress since each context has its own expectations and role demands. Bell (1990), who has specifically investigated the experiences and problems faced by black women managers and professionals in America, reveals that as black women we perceive ourselves as living in a bicultural world (one culture black, the other white). Consequently, we feel a constant 'push and pull' between the different cultural contexts in our lives, which results in high stress levels particularly linked to role conflict stressors. Denton's (1990) review also emphasises the importance of these bicultural role stressors and the combined effects of racism and sexism which enhance the "stresses endemic to today's cadre of black professional women" (p447).

As black managers, some of us feel an obligation to contribute to the alleviation of racism for other black workers on behalf of the black community. We are therefore, faced with having to manage tensions between these two worlds and with possible identity conflicts as a result of having to remain emotionally committed to different components of our lives which are sometimes incompatible (Baumeister, 1986). Having the proper balance between our own cultural identity and assimilation into the organisational culture is essential for healthy psychological functioning. However, uncritical assimilation into the organisation cultural values can cause a great deal of stress and strain on relationships between black managers and black workers (Wimberly, 1997).

The extent to which one group of workers may have achieved a higher level of assimilation and acculturation into the organisation compared to other workers is another important consideration. Very disparate levels of acculturation and assimilation can be especially problematic for black managers and black workers alike and can have a significant impact on the power dynamics and create conflict over issues of loyalty, identification, role model and support, for example.

Our research inquiry revealed that for some black workers emotional cut off from black managers may result as workers begin to feel "too different" from black managers and distance themselves from these managers. They distanced themselves and did not offer support when they felt that managers were not displaying loyalty to the black community, loyalty to them as black workers, or to the fight against racism. One group expressed their reasons for distancing based on disloyalty by stating strongly:

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"They should be united with us in terms of purpose and sharing in the plight of black people. They should have an understanding of our shared experience, of the experience of racism; an understanding of the race issues, factors affecting black professionals and workers in general".

Other workers had clear expectations of managers in regard to race and cultural loyalty. There was an expectation that black managers should have a high level of awareness of racism and they should be proactive in challenging racist practices and promoting equal opportunities. They should be proactive in seeking strategies for change. The following statements from black workers reveal some of these expectations of black managers:

"To have knowledge of racism and be proactive regarding race issues".

"To be self-aware and clear about their identity".

"To be black conscious and have a black perspective".

"To work with an anti-discriminatory practice model".

There was an implicit assumption that somehow, by virtue of managers' position in the organisation, their knowledge, awareness and experience of racism would automatically be more developed. It was assumed that a high level of race awareness should be a pre-requisite for black seniority. Black workers attributed to senior staff a wealth of knowledge, a high level of race awareness and magical powers to make changes. This was expressed in statements like, **"I expect black managers to be knowledgeable, they need to know more than me about racism and how to challenge it at work".** One group went as far as to say that they expected black managers to be the ones to ensure, if not initiate, black workers support groups. They went on to say that it was black managers' obligation to create changes that could promote communication between black workers. They looked to black managers to be role models and positive ones at that. They also expected them to **"play the part and be the part".** This meant that black managers should be **"More direct and assertive about creating change".**

Some black workers identified with black managers at the level of being black in an all white setting and they expected black managers to identify with them at that level. In that regard, they saw themselves as being in partnership with the managers by virtue of the fact that they were in the minority in white organisations. Collectively as black workers they had similar experiences with regard to unfair treatment and lack of opportunities. Identification contributed to black workers expecting to feel comfortable and safe with black managers and expecting honesty and openness from them. One group of students

noted that they expected managers "**To be supportive, offer unlimited support and fair treatment, to be open, honest and understanding.** Another group noted that they expected black managers "**To empathise with black workers".**

They expected that black managers should be able to understand them because they would be aware of their likely experiences as black workers. There was also an implicit expectation that managers should understand their life experiences and should, therefore, be able to make allowances for their behavior or requests. Without a doubt there was an expectation that managers should make exceptions for black workers, exceptions in respect of child care needs, the need to have to leave work early at times, the need to arrive late at work sometimes so that expectations over time keeping and punctuality were cited as a particular 'bug bear'.

Discussions about time are sometimes fraught with tension as managers take a position that punctuality is a minimum requirement of a professional. However some workers have a different view. They take the view that black managers should understand their position in a racist society and should be familiar with their domestic circumstances. Allowances and exceptions should, therefore, be made even when, the request and basis for it is deemed unreasonable in the eyes of the manager.

Some black managers, however, feel that black workers are being unreasonable in this regard seeing them as sometimes pushing the boundaries too far, and as making demands and having expectations of them which they did not have of white managers. A male manager stated his belief:

"I believe that black staff push our relationship to its limits to see if there are boundaries imposed, they feel comfortable to ask for things that they would not ask of a white manager".

On this matter this manager related a story of one of his black members of staff asking for an exception to be made for her that she wold not have asked of a white manager and how he confronted her:

"Speaking as somebody who in the last two jobs has worked with a majority black staff, one of the things that has always interested me is how black staff feel about testing out the limits of the interaction between yourself and them. By that I mean that they often push the relationship to its limits to see whether there are going to be any boundaries. For example, one of my female centre workers asked me to allow her

to leave work early to get her car fixed. So I said to her, "well, you have not got any time off in lieu because you have not worked any extra time and you have a group room full of children downstairs. You and your colleague are supposed to be working with them, why are you asking me a question like that". You only work part-time. You should be able to do it on Monday or Tuesday. Why are you asking me that and she said, "*well I would not be telling you these things, I would not be asking you these things if you were white*". She actually said that. I said stop, stop right there. Listen to yourself. Listen to what you are saying. You are saying that it is all right to take liberties, to ask for things that you would not ask for because, I am black. Is that what you are saying to me? And she said " Oh yeah because I feel comfortable with you, that's why I feel able to do that." I said no that's not what it's about. It's about you feeling that if you give me that sob story, as a black man, I must understand and I must let you go because I am a black man and we all got to struggle in this world. But what are you doing? What is that doing for you? What does that mean for you? Does that mean then that you are going to take that experience into other organisations and use it with other black managers? Does that mean then that you are only going to work in all black establishments, so therefore you will be asking these questions of all black managers"?

One manager picked up on the fact that the worker said she was feeling comfortable because he was a black manager and reflected on the meaning of that for some black workers. She reflected:

"But I am now thinking, well, one thing she also said is because I feel comfortable and that is the bit that I picked up on. In the past, if workers came to me with such request I thought, "Oh you are taking liberties, you are taking advantage, you would not do this to a white manager, why are you asking me more than you would ask a white manager". And may be not pay enough attention to the fact that there might be something that this person is experiencing from me as a black person, that I also have to respond to. It was the word "comfortable" that triggered that for me........ I am hearing that word "comfortable" again slightly differently. That word has really struck me because that comfort might be also about, 'here is somebody who I can share that responsibility or unburden that responsibility on, whatever they choose to do'. So I imagine that they won't feel the same way with a white manager, you know. They might be thinking, "You will understand so I can share or burden that responsibility on you"."

"Their demands should not necessarily be viewed in the negative or seen as taking liberties" as one manager put it. It could possibly be constructed as workers being more comfortable and confident when relating to black managers than to white managers, that

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there is a bond, based on shared experience as black people, which results in testing limits and pushing boundaries.

Another manager concurred with the story and added that some black workers have a sense of having a right to special consideration. She reported how one member of her staff expressed such a right, based on her expectation that the manager should know and understand her situation as a black person. She said, **"I can remember one of my female staff saying to me "you know the runnings". Because you know 'the runnings', why are you not making allowances for me".**

There was an expectation that the managers should know and understand and should be able to negotiate with the organisation for these needs to be met because of their power positions. Workers should not be forced to be in a position to negotiate around such need. The message and assumptions were that the organisation should be expected to make changes to accommodate the needs of black workers since the organisation was part of the system which made their lives difficult and the managers were now part of that system or represented that system. Therefore, they should be the ones to make allowances as they were "in the know" about black life. Aligned with this was the expectation that black managers should be actively seeking to promote the interests of black workers, in the organisation.

Those workers who did not experience empathy or support, in the form of making exceptions or allowances, for their plight from black managers viewed these managers as not having a high level of race awareness or black consciousness or loyalty to their culture. The sense of having a right to special consideration never left some black workers. Some of these workers thought of their history and their condition as a wound, which made them different, and special, so that they should be exempted from certain responsibilities. When black managers complained about their behavior and attitudes towards work performance and time keeping, for example, or their apparently lack of a sense of responsibility they were baffled and hurt.

Black managers said that they were cognizant of black workers' organisational position – on the bottom rung of the socio-economic ladder- and hence realised that some of the workers were victims of white, male, institutional oppression and questioned whether workers did experience their support. **"They come to us as victims, how supportive are we? How much am I helping? Do we perpetuate the victim position in black workers?**

How do we help them to own their responsibility and not put it on black managers? There is an expectation that black managers should make allowances".

Another manager added:

"I believe that black workers are not feeling listened to by us and white workers feel black workers are listened to more. Each have their fantasies that the other is getting support".

Victim role

On another level this expectation, of making exceptions, could be construed as workers using their race and gender to manipulate managers and of attributing a great deal of responsibility to managers to make things better for them. Some workers may even go so far as to present themselves as victims who have no choice in order to have this expectation met.

One manager stated that he thought that some workers often took the victim role, and he found this difficult to cope with at times. He related his struggles to support them and questioned whether he was really being helpful, particularly when they:

"have a way of operating which includes crying, presenting themselves as victims in all situations and allowing you to.... Pulling you over to that side, in order to get their own way and not looking at what is actually going on for them and face up to some quite complex problems that they've got.

So often I would take them on face value and if they ask me for something, more often than not I would say yes. But I have got to the stage where I am beginning to think that I am not actually helping them. I am actually allowing them to manipulate me and they would just carry that behavior on to other black people, other managers, to the point where I am worried they would then become abusive if they were not getting their own way. So I said to myself "you know, this has got to stop. I am not actually doing them any favours".

I am trying to build up a certain kind of relationship here particularly as it is mainly all black staff, and I try to look after staff as much as possible. But then you have to come to the point where you say to yourself, "well how much am I actually helping this person really and truly. Am I just skimming over the surface with them and allowing them to do things, which are comfortable for them at the moment, so they

can get through the next day or week, what about the future? What happens to them after I have gone or after they have gone from here?"

He wanted to find a way to help workers to feel empowered rather than to be victims. He questioned:

"How de we help workers to make some sense of their behavior, to get out of that victim role? Interpretations does not always help, ownership of their behavior and responsibility for their behavior is what would help".

Stories were told during the research inquiries of experiences between black managers and black workers where managers created a nurturing or even emotionally dependent and co-dependent relationship with some black workers which may have contributed to some workers not taking responsibility.

Nurturing - dependent/co-dependent relationship

Some black managers said explicitly that they experienced their relationship with black workers as being that of parent and child. Some women managers experienced being in a maternal role so that at times they felt they had to nurture, protect and contain workers. This was captured in one managers attempt to brainstorm words and phrases associated with her experiences. She said:

" I have some words and phrases associated with my experiences of being a black manager, they are maternal, too much high expectations, boundaries blurred, protection, can't contain them because they are too unruly, delinquent behavior, issue of punishment".

One manager summed up that experience in relation to herself in this statement:

"I believe there is an expectation by black workers of us taking on a mothering role, and this might be cultural because I don't see them displaying such an expectation in the same way with white female managers. For me there is a relationship between being a black woman manager and mothering. The type of nurturing we give as black mothers are entangled with the way we are, as managers. It is difficult to separate our culture from the way we manage. The way we relate to mothering in our culture is the same way we relate to being a black woman manager. We expect to be treated with the kind of respect that our own parents taught us to give to older people and people in senior positions. I treat black workers with the kind of respect I was taught to give to my brothers and sisters".

This is a complex dynamic, which sometimes creates role confusion for managers and workers alike. This dynamic is related to the role of caregiver that many women are socialised into accepting and which sometimes brings with it problems with letting go and separation. Some mothers continue to treat their children as dependants. By the same token black women managers run the risk of not letting the workers grow and continue to treat them as dependants.

One manager explored the notion of mothering and the possible confusion and projections to do with expectations of role:

"I feel that I've got boundaries but the boundaries get mixed up trying to be 'me' and being a manager. There is also the feeling of wanting to protect, you know, and that links with having a maternal role towards black staff... I am confused too because I do not think I have the blueprint about how I should be as a black manager. So I think the confusion is for all of us and maybe we can't contain that confusion. If all of us are in the confusion and yet workers expectation of managers is that we should get it all clear, for me its another burden. I deal with that burden by putting it back on them saying 'it is not just my problem' but I'm thinking isn't it. Somehow it just doesn't become 'not' my problem any more. It is about redefining for me what then becomes my problem and what is not my problem".

Some often experienced workers as adolescents for whom they were challenged to provide boundaries and containment. One manager said:

"Sometimes I find some of the black staff that I work with presenting like adolescents with delinquent behaviour. Sometimes I can't contain them. They are all over the place... Trying to contain them is so difficult for me".

Some black workers may unconsciously fall into the role of adolescent in their demands to be treated differently in terms of allowances being made for their attitudes, behavior, and requests for privileges for their situation. One manager related an example of how one of her workers had expectations that she should be looked after, as one would look after a family member, and was surprised at the way she chose to present herself:

"She was expressing herself like an adolescent saying 'I want my bit of it and you're supposed to sort it out for me because you are the manager, so I am telling you what I want and you are supposed to do something about it'".

Respect

Some managers had expectations of respect from workers that bore a resemblance to familial relationships. They also spoke of implicitly treating workers as they would treat their bothers and sisters or their children. This is reflected in the following dialogue with one manager speaking about his expectations of respect from black staff in his organisation:

"Well, I think, here I expect people to have a certain amount of respect for each other as black people and when that does not happen, a centre worker or any worker is disrespectful to another colleague or especially to a family, it makes my blood boil. It really does. That is one thing that is guaranteed to make me really angry".

"What do we mean by disrespect"? Asked another manager.

He replied:
"Treating them as if they were nobody instead of treating them as if they were your brother and sister. Treating them as another black person. Its
kind of crazy I know because brothers and sisters have arguments. Brothers and sisters don't always like each other. Brothers and sisters have different points of view".

Another manager challenged and tried to make sense by saying:
"But does that not come from the kind of stereotype, if you like, that all black people are alike and we are the same. We do not recognise our differences. But we are different. We have different needs and we have different wants and show them differently and I think that it is that bit that gets missed out. Because we expect the other person, the other black brother to behave like we behave and when they don't, then we become angry".

This statement triggered further reflections and sensemaking and this manager continued: .
"I get angry when I experience disrespect. Respect for our elders and people in authority are very important to us in any black family. So that is the value we carry in there, in organisations. Well it may be that the other generation of black workers doesn't hold that value as highly as we do".

This manager also thought that maybe as managers we were having unrealistic expectations with regard to respect, by expecting 'unconditional respect'. She reflected:

"... Once upon a time as soon as I saw a black visitor or black staff coming into my centre, I expected a certain type of respect and I did not have that similar expectation

of a white visitor or white staff. So when I didn't get it from black staff, then what went on for me? How did I perceive this? How did I respond then? I expected them to respect me unconditionally. So look at the load black staff has to carry or the load we are putting on them. The white staff can walk more freely because they are not carrying it. We are not putting it on them".

Reflecting on this complex dynamic psychotherapeutically, projections, issues of dependence and independence, separation and loss would be present in the relationship and would need to be managed as the familial dynamics are played out. Some of our encounters are the professional parallels of common human experiences, as is the case with projections, which refer to the unconscious processes whereby vulnerable, hostile or otherwise difficult feelings, may be disowned by an individual and attributed to another. The other person may then, as a result of the interaction, actually experience the feelings as his or her own. What are likely to be projected are core fears and self-protective defenses against relating and intimacy.

The notion of care taking, being a positive role model and assuming responsibility for ensuring that there are successes in the black community motivated some managers to seek out potential in workers for coaching and to ascertain workers views of wanting to be helped to grow and develop. Generally, some managers felt responsible for ensuring that more black workers went up the hierarchy in an attempt to close the black managers' isolation gap. There was also a sense of responsibility for creating more black professionals. Some felt responsible at an unconscious level, for providing opportunities in education and employment that had been previously denied to black people. Some of us felt that we were more conscientious about equal opportunities issues than our white counterparts. This created tremendous pressures on managers for preparing workers to become the next generation of managers. It also created pressure on the workers to succeed, to be grateful and to become good role models. The opposite position sometimes arose in which some workers felt that they did not want so much responsibility and rejected managers' offers. Some accepted the offers and developed a close relationship with the manager and then found it difficult to separate so that a co-dependent relationship emerged. Some workers, however, felt that black managers did not help them to climb the career ladder. They experienced some managers as doing the opposite; as actively seeking ways to prevent workers from achieving similar positions to managers. Both managers and workers operate with contradictions in regard to this issue.

Potential

Some managers felt that they had a responsibility to coach workers into being better at their jobs. They took responsibility for identifying workers potential and helping them to develop in appropriate ways. Some workers also wanted managers to take an interest in them as workers, in their development, growth and progress. They specifically said that they did not want their progress to be hindered and instead wanted encouragement. Managers, however, expected that workers would be aware of their own potential, would want to nurture that potential and take an interest in their own development. Some of us spoke of the frustration we felt when we saw what we considered to be good talent going to waste. Some managers were sometimes impatient with workers for not moving as fast as they wanted them to. At one level they knew that the workers lacked the self-confidence to push themselves and that generally people did not move until they were fully ready to, but nevertheless the impatience remained. Part of the impatience with black workers was also because some black managers felt over-responsible for the development of black staff. A manager questioned the implications of her responsibility as she saw it:

"Black managers need to do extra coaching with black workers, do we raise workers expectations and are we being unrealistic when we help them too much? Am I being honest with the worker"?

Another responded:

"Why do black workers need more coaching? We never find it easy to recruit black staff so when I find ones with potential I coach and nurture them. Sometimes there is a cost to us, I feel".

One manager said:

"When we spot potential we invest a lot to enable them to grow then we feel let down if they don't meet our expectations. There is a cost to us around being perceived as making exceptions. What is the outside world going to think about our standards? Are they going to see us as having lower standards".

Other managers spoke of emotional cost to 'self'. Some said that they expected workers to feel grateful for their offers of help and support and felt hurt and pain when they thought they were bending over backwards to help workers and workers were seemingly ungrateful.

Lack of gratitude betrayal and rejection

Some managers shared stories of bitter disappointment. One manager spoke of the help she gave to a secretary who, she felt, had potential for taking on a senior position and professional training. She actively sought help for her by taking an interest in the work she was doing, giving her more challenging work, speaking on her behalf and praising her work in relevant senior managers meetings so that her skills and abilities could be recognised. She sought and secured money from the organisation for her to undertake further training. The worker accepted all the help gratefully and during her period of training, growth and development and her relationship with the manager was a good one. However on completion of the training their relationship deteriorated. They came into conflict when both parties had to renegotiate their relationship. With the worker's new found self esteem and skills she began to relate differently to the organisation and to the white staff in the organisation in a way that displeased the black manager, who said:

" I had an expectation that she would use the talents and the skills that she had within the team and develop but clearly, she thought she was right, it's work that she thought she had done and she did not want to do it again. So she had a different view of it from me.

The manager felt that this worker's work standard had dropped and she took to coaching her again. The worker resented what she now perceived as interference and the manager's jealousy. The manager felt that their relationship became distant and estranged as the worker demonstrated that she was no longer in need of her help. They eventually got into conflict as the manager began to challenge her on the standard of her work and the worker took out a grievance against the manager for harassment and unfair treatment. It was a long, protracted and painful process with both parties in hurt and pain, but with the worker feeling the brunt of the outcome.

The manager continued with her story:

"Through all of that, all that has been thrown at you as a manager, you begin to feel totally isolated. And then on another level you understand and feel glad you were there to be able to help. I'm glad I was there and it is good to see a black person there but then I get confused with all the other bits. I'm talking about the trust, the boundaries. Last month I got accused by one black worker of actually 'playing' with her career, messing up her career. I gave her opportunities to make choices. But still she could not see that she had choices and she's still not talking to me...... She thinks

I've blighted her future and "how dare I" she said, and went on to tell me how much I'm a 'coconut' and she thinks that she has the right to do that, to call me names".

This manager looked pained as she recounted the story and said:

"If I appoint a black member of staff and that person fails then I feel I have failed. If a white manager appoints them then it does not matter so much".

Many of the other managers identified with her and recounted similar experiences of their own. We also spoke of how sometimes black managers' good intentions are misunderstood by workers. One manager recounted:

"With two of my workers both a black worker and a white worker within the space of half an hour in one morning, they said things to me that I thought 'that was below the belt'. I was not hearing what they were telling me and I thought they were not hearing me either. So what was happening in our communication was so distorted that we all thought we were listening but we weren't hearing what each other was saying. You start off by being a caring manager with good intentions, wanting to do something to ensure that black people get represented in a fair way but yet still it is received by a black worker as not fair. So what is happening then in terms of our intentions is we set off with something that is very good... things happen and you know somebody gets the wrong message. They then get locked into that sort of argument about "you were not thinking about me, you were not really trying to protect me". "You sold me out".

These stories reveal that some workers accepted the managers' offers to develop themselves but, sometimes, later reject the managers. This is sometimes done with an attitude, which says " I have arrived, I am just as good or better than you so I no longer need your help". With this attitude goes a feeling that managers do not want them to be empowered or to be better than them. There are also those workers who reject help and guidance from managers believing that the managers do not have their interest at heart because they are jealous and do not want them to be in the same position as them. This is especially so when managers give them feedback which they perceive as negative. In this case the manager is seen as the oppressor.

Another reason why some black workers reject black managers and why managers feel betrayed, is that some black workers view the black manager as part of the organisation, as belonging more than they do. Some workers compete and become more demanding and rivalrous when they see black managers as belonging. They struggle with the managers over whether they should strive to achieve promotion and join this group or

whether they should leave the organisation. Some workers interpret "belonging as managers" as being assimilated into the organisation/family group and loosing their allegiance to their identity group. Many workers, expressing concerns about losing their black identity, struggle not to integrate for fear of loss of 'self' and reject those who do integrate. In not wanting to integrate into this family (organisation/group), workers may reject help from black managers and fail to learn from them how to move towards management positions or how to become bona fide family member.

Many black workers, whether managers or non-mangers, are ambivalent about becoming integrated into the family (organisation/group). Pressures to integrate or not come from other sources other than the individual. The values of the organisation, the black community and society, also play their part in the dynamics and contribute to the levels of expectation we have and to the demands we make of one another.

High expectations- too demanding

Black workers felt that they were under more pressure than their white peers from some black managers to perform in the organisation. Some workers believed that black managers wanted them to play a subservient role or expected them to perform better. In this regard they felt that the black managers' standards were too high, that they held an expectation that as workers they should be exceptional in what they did and be "professional" at all times. They said that black managers expected "more than a hundred percent" from them. One group cited "a hundred and twenty percent" and another "a hundred and fifty percent" as the efforts required of them from black managers. They described them as hard 'taskmasters' and mistresses.

The men particularly made the point, that in their experience in welfare organisations, it was the black women managers who were the hardest and whom they believed, to have higher expectations. Nevertheless, they respected the managers for wanting the best from them. They also had a general respect for black managers' positions in the organisation and for the fact that they were there. Some said that they had a high regard for those managers, invested a great deal of confidence in them and had a strong belief in their abilities. They also had a lot invested in seeing successful black people in power. These people acted as role models, motivators and provided encouragement for them to aspire to success. However, they did not want role models who were reinforcing the dominant value system. In return, they expected respect from managers; they expected

managers to respect difference, to understand individualism, to appreciate that they were black but at the same time individuals.

Black managers and workers alike may mirror what is going on in the organisation. The processes in the workplace between black managers and the organisation are often reflected in black workers'/black managers' relationships. The core idea being that the dynamic interactions which belong to and originate in one area of relationship are acted out in an adjacent area as though they belong there, being carried from one area to the other by a 'player' common to both. For example, black managers who feel badly treated by their organisations may speak in a general way of this 'abuse' mirroring the abuse from the black workers with whom they work – though this may merely mean that there are experiences of ill-treatment in both areas.

There are additional forces which operate to compound this difficult situation. For example, experiences of racism tend to harden the emotional side of some black workers and managers alike and in order to cope, they may opt to insulate themselves emotionally. In essence some become less affectionate towards each other, thus making it more difficult to continue being largely on the giving end of the relationship. Others continue to give support as part of their loyalty to the black community.

The notion of black mangers being here to serve and nurture in the interests of development in the black community can be a burdensome one and at the same time it has helped our survival. Our extended family tradition has helped us survive so far. This has been heavily criticised by researchers and members of the black community, but we know that our willingness to extend ourselves for family and community has been one of our greatest strengths. It comes from the idea that 'if we don't look after ourselves who will?'

For some black managers and workers alike this willingness to help members of our community who are in need gets translated into a sense of responsibility to others which can be self-destructive. Such managers or workers feel that they must take care of other workers and neglect to take care of themselves. This manager offers some caution in this statement:

"Whether you are a student, a basic grade worker, a manager or a higher education professional, our expectations of each other have remained consistently high which is good in some ways. But in other ways, it signals for me, that partly racism and a white system, which constantly expects us to fail, trigger these high expectations. So

we should constantly strive to challenge this because it is too stressful. Our individual 'selves' appear to be left a little way behind in this process, at a cost to many of us in terms of our physical and sometimes mental health".

Implied in this statement is that we should guard against offering time and energy to anyone who needs it, thereby giving an image of being super human.

The myth of the 'super black manager'

The notion of taking responsibility for each other can act as a hindrance or burden for all parties concerned and the more so for black managers. Some managers said that they no longer wanted the burden of responsibility for creating change for black workers in organisations as a way of improving the lot of their race. They still cared for the black race and wanted good things for the black community but did not want the pressure and the guilt the responsibility sometimes carried. Some felt that they took action to remedy the situation in the black community of needing more black professionals in senior positions, by pursuing advanced education and a higher salary, in order to become a professional. These managers are now working in a transformed world where the black person is in a position of power; at the same time they scorn that liberated position because it is nothing more than a responsibility, a responsibility for setting the tone of one's own position in the organisation and standing by it.

Black managers are placed in a difficult position, almost in a double bind. This is reflected in this manager's statement:
"As a black male manager I represent something good - skills, merits, achievements, and pride in being black and achieving. I don't want to leave the grassroots and I want to empower black people. I want black people to have direct access to me, but I wonder if by doing that we are not setting up ourselves as super managers, by making ourselves available to black staff under the guise of empowerment. Are we setting too high a standard for ourselves"?

On one hand we want to accept and take responsibility for helping other black people to grow, to assist in bringing about change that will challenge institutional norms, and to put success in the community as a way of strengthening the black community. On the other hand we do not want the pressure of the responsibility; we want to be like any other employee doing a job and want to be given the necessary gratification. Black workers contribute to us staying in this bind by having unrealistic expectations of us and making

implicit demands. One manager reflected on her dilemma as she struggled to come out of this bind. She said:

"How then, can we get what we want without compromising our integrity, our ability and competence. I feel a tension between appearing vulnerable and appearing too competent. I need to find the balance. We are late in coming into the management role in this country and a lot of this is new to us. We need help too".

The organisation also contributes to holding us in the position of 'super black manager'. People at the top of hierarchies carry the burden of responsibility for large segments of the organisation because, in theory, they have more access to resources and maintain a larger network of relationships with key people outside the organisation. They also have more potential power than black workers who are lower down the hierarchy. Black workers see black managers as possessing more power than they experience themselves as being able to use effectively. They see them as occupying favourable positions in the organisation. They, therefore, have high expectations of them using that legitimate authority favourably and at times forget or do not understand that managers may hold favourable positions in organisations but are rendered mute by the relative disadvantage in the larger system. The world confronting black managers and senior workers is very complex and the untoward effect of inappropriately using their power is often much clearer to managers than to workers lower down in the system, who face less complicated environments.

This manager's statement reflects, yet again, the dilemmas and moral and ethical struggles which most black managers have in terms of the balance of responsibilities between the individual, the organisation and the community. She stated:

"We need to be clear that we are not responsible for every other black person in the organisation under the guise of building the black community or taking responsibility for the black race. We can't deliver if we carry this responsibility for community to be together at any cost. In some ways the notion of community is humbug. How much do we take on as individuals and what do we push back to the organisation".

This notion of a super black manager is fed by the belief that as long as white society is willing to blame the misdeeds of one black person on an entire race, black people feel that they cannot stand alone, as do some white people (Wallace 1979). It becomes important, therefore, that black people, as individuals, become as publicly successful as possible because this reflects on the race as a whole. If black people are to prosper as a

group in the British workplace, those who are successful could help by passing on their learning to the new black members of the professions.

This does mean, however, that young black people entering the workplace and professions must be willing to learn from the experiences of seasoned veterans and pioneers (Wallace, 1979). They need to learn organisational politics from senior black members. If they do not, valuable time will be revisiting the same learning experiences that senior blacks have already had. It is for these reasons that some black managers actively seek to empower black staff and they take on what is sometimes seen as another job, that of coaching them, in their own time. However, they are mindful that the objective is to empower their staff not to create an unhealthy dependency. One manager cautioned, **"There is a real relationship between coaching, empowering and fostering dependency and we need to have some clarity between them".**

This job brings with it its own personal cost and some black managers face tremendous conflicts as they cope with making themselves vulnerable to other black workers. One manager said:

"Will black workers cope with our vulnerabilities? We give off mixed messages around our expectations relating to vulnerability. We need to identify our feelings and then ask for help from the appropriate people. We don't have to present ourselves as competent at any cost".

Some managers feel that they have a lot to live up to and do not then want to show their vulnerabilities to black workers and to the organisation as a whole, for fear it would lower their image. This was conveyed in this statement:

"We believe that if we show vulnerability we won't appear powerful or competent and black workers will become concerned. Whose perception is that anyway? I think that we feel we have to present as able and competent so that the black workers' perceptions of us are not lowered. We are feeding that myth of the 'super black person', the myth of the 'super black manager'".

Some believe that they cannot allow white people to see that they do not understand, or that they can make mistakes, nor can they allow other black people to see this either. They might be concerned that white people would think that black people are stupid and inefficient which will reinforce the stereotypes about black people. These managers are very concerned about self-image in their need to appear super competent. They have a great deal invested in the "all powerful and competent" image. There is a fear of bringing the personal into the work.

Black people have been late in coming into managerial and power positions in British organisations. Our own history of having to prove ourselves at all times has been embedded in our unconscious. Therefore some of us feel that we cannot afford to show what we probably perceive as weakness because we need to command respect and preserve our status in the organisation. In not showing some vulnerability, we perpetuate the belief some black workers have of us as 'all strong'. Is it any surprise to hear a black worker stating clearly that she wanted her black manager **"to be confident, I want them to have integrity and able to work in empowering ways so that I can feel supported, cared for and at the same time challenged"?**

Some of us are also wanting to hold on to the super black manager image to demonstrate that we are competent and are not holding our positions because we came in 'through the back door', on the equal opportunity band wagon. We are holding and continuing to hold our position on merit. Some managers expressed fear that if they want to show their vulnerabilities black workers would not be able to cope with them; but by their not showing their vulnerabilities some workers might possibly continue to hold on to the image of "super black manager" and not be in a position to offer support to managers in very isolated positions. The pain and isolation that comes with the position was recognised by many managers.

One aspect of the myth of the "super black manager" that continues to inform our self concept is the assumption that we are mother earth who has built-in capacities to deal with all hardship (Wallace, 1979). Many managers accept that myth and perpetuate it. It provides them with a convenient mask to hide all vulnerabilities. This mask could attract negative projections from other workers. This need to be indispensable to others and to the organisation might be related to feelings of low self worth. Some of us find meaning in making ourselves indispensable. For black women managers, in particular, there is a relationship between the way we have been socialised and our role as managers. Black women are socialised to assume the role of omnipotent caregiver and our passive acceptance of the role is a block to our self-development and general health. Because we take pride in our ability to be strong and supportive we find it difficult to admit that we can't always bear up. As black women some of us find it hard to admit we are overworked, overwhelmed, stressed and in pain.

The "super black manager" image is dangerous because it might convey that we could take anything anyone throws our way, that we need little nurturing or support.

The need for support:

Black managers felt that they had worked hard, long and well yet did not get the recognition they deserved. They also felt they did not get the right kind of support from other black workers and from the organisation. They said that they expected black workers to know how difficult it was for them as managers. They expected them to know and understand what it felt like to be isolated and to appreciate their need to talk to black people and to be part of their network in the organisation. They did not want workers to see them as part of the system but people. **"A telephone call to acknowledge our difficulties with making hard decisions would be appreciated. We want them to recognise we have feelings. We want reassurances that we are doing the right thing by them"** said one manager.

There are so few managers that the network is very small and some managers therefore have to seek support from the general network of black workers, many of whom are not their peers. Black workers support groups were identified as a forum for support, but some managers did not feel that their needs were fully met in this forum. Instead, we sometimes experienced role conflict, collusion and confusion in these groups. There would be some confusion about how some of us wanted to be supported as a black people and in the professional role. The two are difficult to disentangle and there is very little choice of places in the organisation where the black manager can get this support aside from black workers groups. Some of us have used these groups as a way of empowering ourselves; we use them (the group) as a way of staying connected to the grassroots and of feeling grounded.

Many managers spoke of the difficulties encountered in these groups. We experienced finding ourselves in compromising positions. One manager reported his contradictions: **"It's not easy to tell them about the difficulties we face as black managers. It's like getting the support from the very people we have to manage, and we have to do it because our isolation means that we have to talk to other black staff who are not on our level who are not our peers. That sometimes causes issues of blurred boundaries. This situation is unique to black managers".**

This statement also describes blurring of boundaries, and highlights a complex dynamic in which we sometimes want to be seen as black people needing support and at the same time we are not trusted by some workers because of our power position. This impacts on our interactions and on how black workers view us. Sometimes there is collusion between managers and workers to keep each other informed about news.

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Middle managers are in touch with concrete day to day events of workers below them, with their deprivations and struggles, and with the pressures of workers above. They also have to exercise control over and mete out punishment to black workers and retain their position, especially when workers react to their alienation by passive and aggressive means. Some black workers, also make demands of black middle managers to promote them (to make them visible) and help them feel less anonymous.

Managers often sat with confidential information in black workers' groups and some workers had an expectation that managers would divulge this information. This situation would create further difficulties where workers were sitting in the same room as managers, voicing their grievances, and managers felt placed in a position in which they were sitting with information that they could not divulge. Furthermore, the manager might, for example, be one of the actors in the grievance matter being discussed, either as one of the persons hearing the case or as the person who was the object of the grievance.

Managers were also expected to take on powerful roles, such as chairperson and secretary, and to be active in working groups or sub-committees thereby giving them more power in the group. Some workers ascribed to managers' expert power by virtue of their skills, knowledge and position in the organisation. It was therefore very difficult for managers to 'be themselves' and they spoke of their struggles to convey such difficulties and have their limitations heard.

One manager spoke of an experience in her organisation where such circumstances forced the few black managers to form their own group. The workers there were angry because they viewed this action as creating a split and depleting the strength of the black workers in the organisation. They felt resentful and saw this as elitism. As far as they were concerned racism transcended everything and any discussion pertaining to back people's positions in the organisation should be done openly in one forum. They felt that they were losing out by not getting the full benefit of the managers' experiences and expertise.

Black managers and workers strived to communicate within these webs of complexity and had many blocks to overcome. This manager left us with many questions including this important one:

"How does the communication get blocked between us and black workers? We need to recognise our differences, we expect them to know and understand comradeship, to know how difficult it is for us as black managers, but we don't tell them".

Another challenging question still facing black practitioners was that of how managers and workers could converse across positions and boundaries.

Reflective Summary

One of the ways in which I have chosen to summarise what I have presented so far has been to look for similarities and differences. I shall reflect on how expectations between black managers and black workers converge and diverge.

Similarities and Differences

Reflecting on both sets of field text I have noticed some similarities, in the sense that what the black managers have perceived black workers as wanting, has been confirmed by the workers in some of their statements about expectations. I was interested to note that there were few differences in our expectations of each other. In some cases both parties wanted the same things and some of these things reflected fixed expectations and huge and sometimes unrealistic demands. One manager expressed the view:

"There is an element of us having fixed expectations and unsaid expectations. Sometimes we verbalise it with white colleagues but we would not necessarily do it with the blacks".

Both managers and workers wanted a great deal from each other as a way of defending and protecting ourselves from the racist stereotypes of black people being perceived as inferior, with inferior abilities. Both groups made demands on the other to perform to a high standard and to support each other in doing so; both had a need to be understood in their professional role and had an expectation that each group would know what the other's needs were as black people; both groups had expectations that each would be efficient and good at their jobs, and moreover, that each would perform better than their white peers.

Black workers wanted black managers to look after their interests to encourage and to develop them. Black managers had taken on and accepted a responsibility to seek out black workers with potential and support their career development, assisting them by

seeking out and offering opportunities that they would otherwise be denied black people in a white institution.

Black workers clearly had an expectation that black managers would have a high level of race awareness and considered that they, should be interested in race and equal opportunities issues, and, more importantly, should fight racism and should seek strategies for change. Black managers also believed that they had some responsibility for challenging racism and for challenging the myths and stereotypes about black workers.

The negative impact of racism on our community makes many black workers feel obligated to work for its eradication. Black managers and senior workers, in particular, are expected by other members of our community to retain allegiance to our own culture whilst participating in the host culture, whether this be in its organisations or in society as a whole. Our community makes it difficult for us not to be responsible and feel obligated (Bell, 1990).

This value was clearly reflected in our expectations. Workers expected support and managers expected to offer support to black workers. Black workers behaved towards black managers, in ways which implied that they expected them to be superhuman. Some of us as black managers, behaved as though we were super black managers in not showing our vulnerabilities, expecting to work twice as hard as our white peers, and in taking on the black struggle in terms of responsibility for the black community. In black workers' perceptions we were also expected to be super black workers.

Conclusion

We are caught in a conflicting web of expectations, which are more complex than simply being a black manager or a black worker. Some of the complexities are related to invisible community loyalties, invisible cultural loyalties, acculturative tensions and negative organisational introjects. They are also related to the fact that we are often the first of our kind to occupy a place in teams or organisations and certainly the first to hold a middle or upper management job. There are few role models for us to turn to. Many of us have been pioneers in unknown territories. All these factors contribute to pressure on the individual. Aside from organisational pressures, we are faced with pressures from black communities, communities with norms and values about how a black professional should behave (Bell, 1990). All these pressures heighten our anxieties and contribute to the way we interact with each other in organisations.

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Chapter 9

Validation and Representation – working with feedback

Introduction

The text in this chapter is a representation of feedback from co-researchers of the Co-operative inquiry on the drafts of my research text, which I presented in chapters 7 and 8. It is primarily an exploration of what happened during feedback in a small group, my reflections on the feedback process and some theoretical ideas on the outcome of that exploration.

The purpose of the consultation was to check the validity and representation of some of the field text which was produced by the Co-operative Inquiry. I needed to be aware of factors which that may have determined the nature of the research text – the presence of other co-researchers and the use I made of theoretical concepts in making sense of the field text. I needed to reflect on my own sensemaking of the field text I selected, what shaped my thinking, and the ideas I employed to represent our experience. I was aware that I needed to be in a state of 'alternative theory availability', not unduly wedded to any one set of ideas, as a way of making sense of the experience so I created space and opportunities to consult with individuals.

I selected 8 people, representing each inquiry subgroup, (practitioner, manager and educationalist to send the research text and sought feedback from these individuals on two drafts of the text. I selected people on both an objective and subjective basis, objective because they were original members of the inquiry groups and subjective because I still had contact with them both formally and informally. In addition, a couple of them were close friends and were prepared to help. I believed that it was important that feedback as a research inquiry method should be used among research collaborators/co-researchers in this type of action research. So I also brought together some of the same individuals in a small group to discuss their feedback and to further explore my ideas on the draft text. Four people attended. I tape-recorded the small group session and the quotations in this chapter were taken from this recording.

As a way of presenting the outcome of this inquiry I have taken a thematic approach and incorporated some methodological issues such as 'representation', 'validation', and 'ownership and control' audience, censorship that emerged from our exploration. These will be analysed under the following headings: Subjectivity; Reactions and Responses to

the Research Text; Representation and Validation; Private/Public; Protection and Confidentiality.

Subjectivity - reactions and responses to the research text

Throughout the Group Inquiry I felt that group members were not only giving me feed back on my work but were also reacting and responding to what was triggered and stimulated in them by the paper. It was like a continuation of the Inquiry Groups. In fact, people referred back to the Inquiry Groups and to their experiences of the process. In some cases they were stimulated to recall and reflect on earlier meetings as far back as the very first meeting. I felt as though we were engaged in producing what can be described as 'collective memories' and as a result I felt that they were also getting something from the meeting.

They were then able to enter into the discussion of the document and made some interesting comments about needing to see themselves represented or at least have their own inquiry sub-group's discussions and issues made more explicit on the page. One person said that she had lost sight of what happened in the other inquiry groups like the Practitioners' and the Manager' Groups she only knew what had happened in her group, Education group so was looking for comments from this group. She said, **"I didn't actually feel connected with this in many ways because I feel that whatever group I was talking in I couldn't see my stuff. Not just my stuff, but the discussion. I did not recognise it from reading this so I kinda decided to leave that alone and just read this like this and comment on it that way. If I had been trying to put myself into this I wouldn't have found myself there at all I don't think, so that's how I decided to approach it".** She challenged me to make more explicit my process in selecting the themes and writing the research text more explicit.

These comments brought me face to face with issues about the kind of choices I had about what material I selected from the tape recordings of the inquiries and how I chose to write about them, including the form of representation. Participants commented that I had not made explicit, for example, how I had arrived at the themes chosen. Neither had I made explicit my struggles with the writing. They needed this to be explicit to help them understand my meanings. As author/researcher I had to accept some responsibility for contributing to the discomfort they were feeling.

I experienced them participating in this feedback exercise as they had in the Inquiry Groups. The written document gave them a focus. Although the purpose of the group was to give me feedback on the writing and to validate the work, I was curious that the meeting took on a life of its own. I noticed that I was not taking the lead as a facilitator. One member took the lead and it seemed to me that she owned the process. It was evident that she had spent a great deal of time reading and commenting on the document. I was pleased and encouraged and I marvelled at the amount of personal time she had devoted to reading and making detailed typed comments on the text as well as giving her time for the meeting, when she had an eight week old baby, whom she brought with her. Her investment in the project and in the meeting was immense. She was keen to get the meeting started and participated as if it was an Inquiry Group, inquiring for herself into her own issues about her blocks to writing and her struggles with the representation of black voices. She told a story of her work, in one London Borough's social services Department, to undertake some research into experiences of black staff in a section of that department. Her story demonstrated how my difficulties with the representations of voices and 'truth telling' resonated with her. I was heartened by the discussion because it yielded more than I had expected. It also confirmed for me that there were others struggling with the same issues. I did not feel so isolated with the material and, as well as giving feedback on the structure, form and content of my paper, other more general issues surfaced such as representation, validation, making our private experience public censorship. I felt as if my load had been lightened as others took ownership of some of the content. I felt validated.

Representation and validation

The discussion opened with the general issue of validating our work and experiences. One person said how she wanted to see our experiences validated and spoke of what she would need to see in my work to be able to validate it as a participant in the research. She stated that she wanted to see **"Our experiences documented in terms of understanding our context and our realities in the organisation or our experiences we have wherever we are. I want to see a beginning, middle and end so that we know where it all came from"**

Continuing to speak on the issue of validation, she later went on to ask some important inquiry questions and challenged me to use more black theorists and to validate my work, our knowledge of our experiences, as creating theory. She commented, **"How do we make our experience valid? How can we use the experiences that we are bringing and**

how does it get validated? Where does it get validated and who validates it? Who validates us? It should be we as black people, black theorists. A lot of the theory I come across is linked to white theorists so what I am looking for is theory coming from black people, us creating our own theory"

The group went on to tackle the issue of representation beginning with questions about representation of their voices in the Paper. Some were concerned that they couldn't recognise their voices and made comments such as, "I was looking to see myself in this piece of writing". One person challenged this comment with a statement which introduced into the discussion a more general issue about representation of other voices. She also brought to our attention, what she recognised us as doing, which reflected what sometimes goes on in other black groups. She said:

"I think in a sense what we are experiencing here is a mirroring effect which is we are actually talking about wanting to hear the voices and yet still at this point what we are saying is we are looking for our particular voice. That means we are excluding other voices and I don't know how one person can get all those voices to be heard in this paper"

The research participants wanted some things to be either taken out or contextualised with an explanation and they did not like the way some of what was written was, as they described it "*hitting them in their faces*". Some commented:

"There were times when I was struggling because I thought, this sounds so negative. These perspectives portray us as not being able to interact with each other at all and it feels, reads (pause) those negatives are represented more starkly. Perhaps it's highlighting the conflicts that we are having that's coming out, but nevertheless it was hitting me".

"Its like a journey really for some of us and for some of us that negative stuff is natural and we are here are going through a natural process, but without the context of what we are having to work and live with every day its hard hitting. We don't want to deny that, the negatives but in a way right, it's not the total picture which hits you in the face, initially".

Their overriding comments were about how the work struck them as they read it, what they felt and, therefore, what they wanted to see included. They were struck by the overwhelming amount of negative comments and felt that they had to search for the

positives which, indeed, was an echo of the initial research call. There was a loud shout: **"where are the positives and the original ideas of celebrating our success".**

They wanted to see more of the positives in our experiences represented and challenged me for not doing what they thought we said we would do originally. One person said, **"I wanted to see our achievements, some of Fanz Fanon's work on how we achieved without having 'sold out' or beat up on one another".**

Another said:
"I thought that where you were coming from, where we were coming from at the very beginning was about those successes, those positives. So I am not saying I don't want to hear the negatives, I am saying somehow in what I have read, its so weighed down by the negatives that some of that other stuff which I thought was your real starting point seems to have got lost".

I felt as if I had let them down. I felt they were saying something to me about my lack of responsibility. I had a great sense of responsibility and felt as if I was charged with a mandate from the community of inquirers to write up the work, these members were acting as a reminder. I felt that I had done it wrong and betrayed them. I too was perpetuating the very thing we had set out to challenge: representations of our experiences in the negative. I felt guilty and became defensive in the earlier part of the discussion. My thoughts were that I wished they knew or could imagine the agony I had gone through, the struggles I had had, the endless mappings, working and reworking I had done, being careful not to be too reductionist, thereby loosing the meanings. I wished they knew the pain I had endured as I tried desperately to find forms of representation of the voices and our experiences. How could I let them know that I had struggled to try to recapture the life energy that was in the room at the times of our meetings, and the positive feelings that some others and I had had. I felt they were not being appreciative of my efforts. I paused and became aware of my feelings, noticing how I was responding, which was defensively. I felt slightly upset, criticised, disappointed with myself, but it was up to me to cope with this disappointment, to put it in perspective, and to respond to the issues and the individuals in an open-minded way. I began to ask questions of myself about purpose: *"Did I lose the focus of my research while I was in there and or did I lose my intention in the writing up?"*

I noticed that some of the group were also engaged in their own personal processed of reflection, examining their reactions to and feelings about what was in the room. A real

life event was emerging and I reminded myself that I did not have to feel totally responsible for it. I started to let go and not be so possessive of the written material. It was my writing and my sensemaking, but the data did not belong to me. I reminded the group that I was reporting it as it was. I then commented on the present process in the room. I said that maybe they did lot like what they read, as I did not always like what I heard when I was listening to the tapes. It made me feel uncomfortable at times. They agreed that they were uncomfortable about what they saw on the pages and some recognised that they might have to let go. Comments such as:

"Some of this was making me feel uneasy. I was also trying to work out for me, What's this about? What is going on?"

"I feel it has to be out there but I know that there is actually going to be a feeling I have to deal with once I see it 'out there'. I am not saying it shouldn't be out there. What I am saying is I have to acknowledge and recognise that I am going to be feeling like this and somebody else might be feeling worse than me and wants to distance themselves from it in that sort of way. So it's recognising this and I don't know whether you have to make that explicit in the paper (pause) that might be it (pause) so that you are giving people permission to either stay with it or distance themselves from it and then come back into it or whatever".

Some of their discomfort was attributed to their fear of a white audience reading the material, believing it to be true and acting on it. One person asked, **"Who is this written for? She also wrote on the paper: "Certain audiences may take some of this the wrong way".** They were anxious that representing too much of our negative experience would add to the body of negative images which were already in the white world.

I was curious about the overwhelming and unanimous reaction from all parties that they were not comfortable with some things being said in public. The meaning that the group was probably conveying was 'we already know this but we don't want it in our face', or' lets keep that part as our secret'. bell hooks expressed my sentiments exactly when she said:

"Then there are always those individuals who remain convinced that black folks must not air our dirty laundry in public. Some of these individuals believe we must never appear to be criticizing blackness in front of white folks. While I can agree that there is always the risk that public disagreement and dissent may reinforce white racist assumptions about black identity there are just too few all black settings for us to

maintain silence waiting for the best 'politically correct' settings to speak freely and openly. Evoking "betrayal of the race" effectively acts to silence dissenting voices"(hooks, 1994 p.70).

This was not the first time that I came up against this with the research data. The pattern emerging so far has been that when I gave the first draft of the research text to participants for comment their responses were: *"you can't write it like that"; "I think you should take that bit out"; "no, you can't put that in, if you are going to then don't say it like that"*. When I first heard such comments on the first write up of some of the field text I accepted them and did leave out parts of my analysis. At that time I was engaged with my initial struggles with representation and form in writing up the experiences in the Inquiry Groups. I was a novice researcher and writer and was not feeling too confident in these roles (as a writer/researcher).

I also felt responsible and felt scared of upsetting other black people. I feared being alienated and loosing the support of participants. I was so full of gratitude for the contributions, commitment, motivation and generosity of the participants in the Inquiry Groups that I allowed this to block me. I felt as if I was betraying the group because they had trusted me with their confidences. I fully believe in the principle that confidences agreed upon between individuals and made in groups, should be honored but some distinction needs to be made between this type of consensual agreement and the sharing of information which is deemed private in the interest of protecting individuals. The discussions of the ideas generated in the research groups were not done in private spaces, although they were less public than a lecture, and people were aware from the outset that what they said would be used publicly. In my view the spaces were not constituted as protected ground. However, I was aware of the need for protection.

Now, a couple of years later, engaging with the text and feeling a little more confident as a black researcher, I challenged the pattern when I met it again. I thought the process in the room was mirroring something that is an issue for many black people. They did not want aired in public what they considered to be their private business. In the words of one participant "**It's our business**".

I named what I noticed. I asked the group to reflect on the process in the room and what had transpired during our conversations. I said that there was an air of caution in the room. I believed that what had been talked about or was being requested was, in fact, a form of censorship and I said so. Some responses were:

"Its not that we are saying don't say that, we are not censoring you, it's just a caution".

"But it's still a form of censorship, although softer".

I also believed that there was, at some level, unconscious denial in operation, on the part of people not wanting to accept that I might possibly be representing some truths but not necessarily my truth.

Some of the participants insisted that the 'literal words' did not actually describe what had taken place in their group. Yes they had said some of those things, but, no, in the context of the meeting, the people present had not interpreted their meaning literally. One person was more forceful in her request for me to be accountable, and reflecting back on what she thought went on in her groups, she said, **"This is not where our discussions were going…I want to see the actual script".**

This led me to ask questions of my work such as, what does 'accountable knowledge' look like? Should 'the real words' override 'the meaning'? And if 'the meaning' prevails, then what would it mean to discount 'the real words' that were spoken?

The group engaged further and more deeply with into the issues of validation, representation, 'relationship between private and public', 'exposure', 'censorship', and 'ownership and control'. There were further questions about readership and the type of audience I was writing for, which were connected to these issues/themes.

Having challenged ourselves, examined our process, identified and explored patterns that we had noticed with other black people, the group went on to conclude that they wanted representation of a more balanced view of both the negatives and positives, that they wanted to celebrate their successes in the text I produced. I felt I was given a mandate to go ahead with putting the work out in public with a proviso that I "explain it properly and reiterate the need for context". This was captured in this participant's forceful statement reflecting what she thought other people might say or expect from me:

"If you are going to put it 'out there', damn well explain it properly… That's the job you are landed with. You are going to have to explain it properly and if you don't they are going to slate you for it"

She went on to endorse the need for documentation of our experiences and the need to tell 'the truth', because if we do not do so some of our achievements may be misrepresented and not acknowledged as being successful. She cited one example of the tremendous amount of work undertaken by black professionals and some white people in the 1980's on Anti-Racist Training. Black people did not document some works and some of what was written in terms of our experiences was neither checked out with us nor validated by us. She said:

"One of the reasons why ART (Anti-racist Training) flopped and it was held up to such ridicule was that there was no documentation of it, nothing valid. If anything was written it wasn't written from our perspective so that people could understand it...But when you are going to use people's experiences and there is no validation at all or no checking out, 'is this your experience'? 'Did you experience it like that'? If there is some truth in it, how are you going to get people to look at the truth if there is no, there has been no dialogue"

Reflections and theorising

Suspicions

I noticed that right from the outset the group members were suspicious and they began to focus on the negatives about the research text. I believe that they had to explore some bad feelings that were being triggered by what they had read in what I had written. I felt there was suspicion of me, of what I had written and, most of all of what was going to happen to the material. There was also suspicion of white readers and how they might misconstrue our meaning. What I had written in the text about suspicion was sitting in the room yet again, and it was mirrored in our process. The suspicion 'out there' in the black community in society was mirrored in this group and focused on me. Some people might argue that it would be natural for us to be suspicious when we come together as black people because of internalised racism.

One person confirmed this **"Suspicion began way before the coming together of our community of inquirers"**. She went on to disclose some of her suspicions while she was in the process of deciding whether to engage with us in the research, She said, **"We all made choices as to whether or not we would get involved in this and clearly we must have thought there is a story to be told but for me I went through a process of trying to work out: 'Well who are those people? What are they going to do? I mean I knew who you (Agnes) were but what were you going to do? What were you really saying'?"**

I believe we were mirroring exactly the same process that was evident in some Inquiry Groups, in which we had to focus on the negative aspects of our experiences before arriving at the positives. I felt that I was on the receiving end of some negative projections and transference and I, too, was engaged in countertransference. I, too, was engaged in a negative process but in a slightly different way. I heard the feedback in negative terms at the beginning, so that we were talking about the negatives and I was hearing that my work was negative and that I had been too negative.

We took ourselves through a process of deconstruction and re-examined what was written, and memories of what had been said in the Inquiry Groups and further explored our experiences as black people in general terms so as to be able to move on. The following was a helpful statement from a participant, which assisted us in moving on.

"I also think that one of the things that we loose sight of as black people is that we are whole human beings and we come with all sorts of problems like everybody else. We have good bits, we have bad bits, we have negatives, and we have positives. And because of the 'shit' that has been thrown at us over the years we have some how wanted – we got to a place now where we don't want to actually acknowledge that we have these negative bits. We want to push them on to somebody else and that is not healthy. I don't think that's healthy for any race or any group of people and we have to acknowledge that, I think".

On one level I believed it was true that some wanted to see a balance, on another I believed that they wanted to see more positive than negative experiences reported. So I too, was suspicious of what was being said and questioned it. Although, as a black woman, I, too, wanted to see the positives highlighted and to celebrate our successes, as a researcher, I felt obliged to present truth, as I experienced it, without betraying confidences. Here lay one of my conflicts as to my responsibility as a researcher and my loyalty to the black community. bell hooks heartens me when she says:

"The evocation of "confidence" has no direct relation to the integrity of one's word or the pursuit of truth...separation between public and private maintains and perpetuates structures of domination"(hooks, 1994 p67& 68).

Private/Public

There was fear in the group that if the work were to be seen in its present form some of what might be considered to be our private affairs would be made public and that that

type of public exposure would make us too vulnerable. When I asked group members what experiences they might have been tapping into which may have contributed to their reactions and responses to the writing. They said that they feared that white people would get the wrong idea about black people, that they might think that they were not good at interacting and might choose to pathologise black people's interrelationship. Their comments were:

"Suspicion, Don't forget our experience to date has been, like I was saying about the era of Anti Racist Training, some white people took it and wrote about how white people have focused on us. So why would we expect them to do any different, the ground for the suspicion is already laid".

"It's the lack of control because don't forget we have always had our secrets and when we expose that..." (pause interruption by another participant, who said) **"fear of a backlash".**

Hence, the request for the negative comments or narratives to be buffered with explanations so that black people did not get offended by them and white people did not use them to continue to oppress us. One person commented, **"In a way Agnes has been given a responsibility. The responsibility is if you are going to tell this story you also have to explain it adequately well so that the other people who read it, particularly white people and some black people, who might object to it, understand what it is you are saying. We don't want them to go away with it ant take it out of context. Again, it is the lack of control".**

I asked in an inquiring way *"Is there a way of talking about the success without talking about the negatives"*. One response was, **"It's about, how do you turn a negative into a positive, because if you are actually telling about success, you have to tell the other side of that too. Successes are not just about I am moving from a, b, c, d, e, and I am moving upward. I will be going in all directions before I actually get back on my route again".**

I felt that they were asking for the comments to be 'sugar coated' because they feared exposure. When I said that I thought that they wanted me to 'sugar coat' the comments. One person replied, **"Agnes, I don't think that it's invalid though - the 'sugaring it up' because the stories haven't been told in quite this way before. It has to be told in a way that enables someone else to come along and be more 'raw' still. But right now if you are just going to push this down my throat there is a lot of people out there, they just going to say well hey! And maybe not bother".**

It would be nice if the social world were no more than a range of uncontested meanings so that, merely by renaming the world, we could change it. Thus, for example, the impression I was left with from the group was that if I re-focused on the positive the negatives would go away. The fact that some people's experiences were expressed in the Co-operative Inquiry groups in terms of the negatives meant that at times the positives were marginalised.

My experience is that the prevailing discursive frameworks relating to black people in society are constructed in the negative and some black groups have, at their centre, the assumption of the negative experience as the norm. The sense is that it would follow that we as black people, were able to rewrite these discourses and relocate ourselves at the centre the balance between the negative and positive experiences would probably alter our understanding and the sense we made of our lives.

While there is no doubt that such a discursive transformation would be beneficial to black people, I would argue that this underestimates the multi-dimensional nature of the power of racism, which has both cultural and material aspects. Why do some discourses stick and others not? Rewriting history from a positive standpoint only may have little effect on the massive exploitation and oppression of black people.

Our everyday engagement with the process of defining the world takes place within relationships of power which involve differential control of and access to a range of material, political, cultural and symbolic resources, including the utilisation of means of force and violence. Power relations put constraints upon our ability to remake the world, even at the level of our own small personal 'life worlds' (Luckmann, 1978). We may, for example, be firmly committed to the idea of bringing back the positives into our experiences of trying to create situations in which we gain positive experiences. However, we may find ourselves quite unable to achieve that because we may not have the control that we think we have in certain areas of our lives. This does not necessarily mean that we have no control in any areas of living but in some areas power relations and external forces dominate us. Class, race/ethnicity, gender and age are all aspects of these power relationships, which are embodied in social inequalities.

We cannot, however, acknowledge the positives by just slipping them in and amongst the negatives as an accompaniment to the 'discursive marginality' which might unite black people. Approaches that seek to prioritise one set of meanings to the exclusion of the other, be it negatives on the one hand or positives on the other are distorting social

reality. We need to consider the fact that both positive and negative meanings are aspects of constraining power relations and we need to explore the processes of power constraints of naming and of renaming.

Some of the participants believed that some of the negatives should remain amongst us, within our communities. They believed that "*IT'S OUR BUSINESS*" as one participant put it. The message in this statement is that some things should remain our business, especially if they are very negative. There was eventually a challenge to the notion of "our business" as the group explored the issue of exposure. One person said:

"It's a journey, its a journey that we are all on and this is the point where we can now begin to open up and show that yes, here we are warts and all and we have positives and negatives. We have good and bad and that's the reality. You know we are also part of the human race".

This statement changed the mood in the room and the tone of the conversation changed to one of resignation or acceptance. There were permission giving comments in the form of:

"If we don't tell it as it is it makes some of what we say or write about our experiences difficult to validate. We will keep being asked by white people where does it come from? And we won't have anything to show. It will leave them more room to doubt our experiences".

"This piece of work is never going to avoid the negatives. It has to be there because we as black people (pause).... This is, I think, a beginning of a process in terms of us experiencing ourselves up there - exposed".

"Maybe some people will begin to read it and connect with it. But because of the pain or the anger or whatever they might put it aside and maybe go back to it. I think there will be a range of feelings around it and I don't think there is going to be only one type of response".

It is not a straightforward task for researchers to decide what to tell, once the research text has been analysed. Social and political forces sometimes shape what is told.

This cultural value of 'our business' has historical and socio-political roots, which can be found reflected in black literature. That value is evidenced in a Jamaican idiom *"ah fe we business"*. It can also be found in the chorus of a traditional Jamaican folksong:

'Nobody's business, business'
'Nobody's business, business'
'Nobody's business but we own'

Sometimes telling the truth when submitting a research text can be a dangerous move. It is, however, impossible for us as researchers to know the extent to which our research or writings are being used, or how much they are affecting other people's thinking or behaviour, as little feedback is given.

However, this issue of controlling what is said in public has been a constant theme among black people, so much so that it has been the subject of black feminist writers such as bell hooks, Audre Lorde, Patricia Hill-Collins. Their works have helped me to make sense of what I experienced during this feedback process. Audre Lorde described the importance of voice in black peoples' lives in terms of self-affirmation. She echoes my concerns and feelings in this statement:

"Of course I am afraid, because the transformation of silence into language and action is an act of self revelation, and that always seem fraught with danger"(1984,p42).

This quote resonates with me now as I engage with this piece of writing. I am aware that I feel more comfortable when I write for a nameless faceless audience. The analytic work of writing implies the establishment of a relationship between the author and her readers/ audience and raises questions such as: Who are the readers? Who is the audience?

Readers/Audience

My concern is that readers should be thought of as further collaborators in the process of the work and our first circle of readers should be the members' of the situation from which the research text derives. My co-researchers who were black were therefore, my primary audience and to hear a participant say, **"This is written - is geared towards academics – I question its accessibility to black people"** disturbed me and made me feel uncomfortable.

I was thrown back to my conflict of having to write for an academic audience as well as speak to the black community. Patricia Hill-Collins, articulated this dilemma clearly when she spoke about the dilemma for black women scholars saying:

"The dilemma facing Black women scholars engaged in creating Black feminist thought is that a knowledge claim that meets the criteria of adequacy for one group and thus is judged to be an acceptable knowledge claim may not be translatable into the terms of a different group"(Hill-Collin, 1990, p.232)

Other black writers such as June Jordan also expressed such difficulties. She went on to illustrate the difficulty of moving among epistemologies:

"You cannot "translate" instances of Standard English preoccupied with abstraction or with nothing/nobody evidently alive into Black English. That would wrap the language into uses antithetical to the guiding perspective of its community of users. Rather you must first change those Standard English sentences, themselves, into ideas consistent with the person-centered assumptions of Black English"(Jordan, 1985, p130).

A sense of audience is crucial in the author's approach to both form and content. Different texts inscribe different analyses, different viewpoints, different emphases, and different subject matter. Deciding who we are writing for still implies decisions about what we are writing about, for what reasons and from what perspective. The basis of these decisions might be informed by the expectations of the audience and reader.

Patricia Hill -Collins outlined the expectations of some black people of the black scholar in order to be credible in the eyes of ordinary black people and the task that stems from such expectations:

"To be credible in the eyes of this group, scholars must be personal advocates for their material, be accountable for the consequences of their work, have lived or experienced their material in some fashion, and be willing to engage in dialogues about their findings with ordinary, every day people"(Hill-Collins, 1991, p.232).

My wish to listen to others is not simply a kind of liberal impulse to listen. Rather, it is to contribute to a creation of a theory, which is not blind to difference. I would also want the listener to be open to listening in an inquiry way, to listen to 'what is'. But the process of listening and trusting one another as black people is sometimes fraught with difficulties, and can be dangerous. Fortunately, I had already established a relationship with this

group who were able to listen and to trust me enough to give me permission, at the end of a long struggle and deep explorations, to write what I felt needed to be written.

I took up the mantle and arrived more confidently in the knowledge that social science research on black people's interrelationships by black researchers remains scarce and I recognised the importance of doing this work. I also recognised that in this work the significant relationships were those which involved confrontations with individuals outside the family and community. However among black professionals, relationships within family and community are treated as complex and significant. For some, such relationships should not be made public, especially if such relationships reveal negativity. Others do not want to keep hearing about the negativity. Metaphorically speaking, 'we must not keep singing the blues' at least not in public. This collective harmonious demand for the positives could be viewed as covert silencing of dissenting voices and opinions. bell hooks said:

"Efforts to censor surface whenever marginalised groups are overly concerned with presenting a positive" image to the dominant group"(hooks, 1994, p.66).

Censorship

In the Co-operative Inquiry sub-groups some of us explored taboo subjects to do with how we interact with each other. In some ways this group was warning me against violating those taboos. In effect this could be viewed as a form of censorship. bell hooks said:

"Censorship is a troubled issue for black folks. Bourgeois class values often shape overall public opinion across class in black life, so that almost everyone is taught to value discretion and secret-keeping...Black support of censorship seems strongest when the issue is public exposure of flaws, wrongdoing, or mistakes by black political figures"(hooks, 1994,p.64).

She continued:

"If we do not address the issue of censorship in a thoughtful and complex manner, then old unproductive, habitual responses will determine the scope of our discourse"(hooks, 1994,p71).

From my experience of some black groups and comments on black support groups from students and workers, groups disintegrated at times when the speaking of diverse opinions led to confrontations and conflict. Those dissenting voices were at times

punished by exclusion and ostracisation. This was echoed by hooks, in her statement about what went on in radical groups in the early years of the feminist movement. She said:

"usually, repression is enforced by powerful members of the group threatening punishment, the most common being ostracization or excommunication. This may take the form of no longer including an individual's thoughts or writing in relevant discussions, especially publication, or excluding individuals from important meetings and conferences. And in some cases it may take the form of a consistent, behind - the-scenes effort to cast doubt verbally on their credibility"(hooks 1994, p.66).

This behaviour may stem from the need to evoke romantic images of unity and solidarity. The notion of solidarity is, therefore, reduced solely to the issue of keeping secrets in the desire to construct and sustain images. To continue in this way would be a denial of opportunities to create communities where respect, mutual commitment and free expression of ideas could flourish.

Although my feedback group was not giving out such strong messages nor saying overtly that they wanted to censor what I wrote, I thought that they were covertly doing so in their request for representation of the voices to be 'masked', as I describe it. I thought they wanted me to speak the truth, but the paradox for me in speaking the truth was that I might be accused of betrayal. The equation of truth telling with betrayal is one of the most powerful ways to silence someone.

Protection and confidentiality

The research text is also written for my doctorate, where it is perhaps necessary both to follow certain conventions and to justify what I do. But how do I cope with the rule of confidentiality in this situation without alienating the research participants? Which version of the truth should I tell? What indeed is the truth and is there ever one version of it?

As researchers we may deliberately omit some part of our field text. We may, for example, conceal aspects of our research in an attempt to protect the research participants by hiding information which could be used against them. I was left wondering whether some of the things the participants revealed, for example, the difficulties they experienced with certain aspects of their role, could harm them professionally if they were exposed or, conversely, whether such exposure could serve to enlighten those in power. I have felt reluctant to talk critically of the people who have participated in the research so

willingly. Omitting information that is likely to offend does affect what is eventually produced, though I think we have a duty to advocate for our participants rather than reveal damaging information about them.

My way forward

I was and still am concerned about the issue of betraying confidences and I want to maintain my credibility. I am aware that some people may bring up the idea of confidentiality as another way of talking of 'secret keeping', as a way of suppressing negative and uncomfortable comment. Nevertheless, I feared negative repercussions from both black and white readers but more particularly from black readers of my work. These fears acted as censors. In exploring my fears I discovered that they were rooted in my self- esteem. My identity was linked to my academic standing in the white community where I was struggling with a self-definition which is connected with external approval. I did not want however, to be alienated from this group of black professionals, some of whom were now my friends. These fears have made me pause for a time but I was determined that they were not going to act as censors. During this pause for reflection, I concluded, as shown in extracts from my notebook:

As a way of moving on, I have accepted some critical comments, which the group offered. I will make careful attempt to contextualise the work so that the relationship between the private and public is viewed from an understanding of its location within the structures of white domination. I will be mindful not to perpetuate negative stereotypes of black people but maintain authenticity of the voices and my integrity around truth telling.

I am constantly checking for self-censoring, by checking my fear of reprisal and asking questions like "what is the worst thing that could happen to me"? Is the threat of negative reprisal imagined or real? I occasionally remind myself of Susan Jeffers' book "Feel the Fear and Do it Anyway" and it helps to remove some my blocks. I also remembered this participant's words:

"...Yes the book or the thesis or whatever it is going to be will hit some people hard but what they then will have to do is to converse with others about it. There has to be a forum for discussion".

I also returned to bell hooks' words of encouragement:

"To maintain the space for constructive contestation and confrontation, we must oppose censorship. We remember the pain of silence and work to sustain our power to speak - freely, openly, provocatively"(hooks 1994, p.72).

I do not claim to report 'facts'. I was aware of my impact on the situation and of my intentions to 'prove something' with the text and I made every effort, therefore, to make it equally possible for the opposite to be proved. This was a major discipline of my 'methodological imagination' – to stand far enough back from my own intentions to allow critics the chance to challenge them, and to provide the evidence with which they might do so.

Concluding comments

Feedback, from this group and others was helpful for me in that it gave me a crucial purpose for my research text, one purpose being to act as a *discussion* document through which the dialectic of theory and practice could move back from the moment of theory (the research text) to the moment of practice (what is to be done with the text). I hoped that my research text would suggest to our collaborators a plurality of possible action strategies and that the choice among these possibilities would be a *collaborative* choice, which I had no need or wish to pre-empt, by representing *one* conclusion or recommendation.

With this chapter I end this phase of my research journey, the Co-operative Inquiry. In the next chapter I shall move on to Phase Two of my journey in which I present my explorations and the analysis of my action inquiry into my practice as a teacher.

Chapter 10

Do I live out my values of empowerment in my practice with students and does my practice need improving?

Introduction

The text in this chapter has derived from action inquiry into my practice as a teacher and educator in response to the inquiry question: "Do I live out my values of empowerment in my practice with students and does my practice need improving?" My inquiry consisted of:- a) Observation and reflections on my teaching over a two-year cycle which spanned a range of classes with mixed groups of both black and with students; b) Observation by an external person of two of my teaching sessions of a module for black students only (Black Workers in White Welfare Agencies) over the same two year cycle, one in each year. And C) My observation of and reflections on my teaching of the same module over the two years.

The need to keep this thesis within manageable proportions has meant that I have had to be more selective about what I present, so I have chosen to present text from my teaching of the module for black students, which is in keeping with the general aims of the research. I have focused more on the sessions which were observed by the external person but I have included material from my teaching of other sessions in that module. I have presented the material in four parts **Part 1** *Reasons for My Inquiry*, **Part 2** *My Methodology;* **Part 3** *First Cycle of Inquiry*, **Part 4** *Second Cycle of Inquiry* and **Part 5** *Overall Evaluation of My Practice.*

Part 1
Reasons for My Inquiry

Rowan (1981), in his description of the research cycle, argues that at certain points the gathering of more and more information is not enough and decisions have to be made as to what to aim for and what the major contradictions are. He argues for the need for action, which may require some daring and some risk-taking. He states, "Action itself is the thing to get into. In action I am fully present, here now...I must be ready to improvise if unexpected reactions occur. I have to be really with the others" (p.99). Inquiring into my practice with black students is where I chose to improvise and take action as I noticed my reactions to what was emerging in the Co-operative Inquiry.

My engagement with the co-operative inquiry led me to be curious about a claim I make that I empower students and, in particular black students in my teaching in ways that would lead to social action. But do I really achieve that? I was interested in knowing whether I lived out my values of empowerment in practice and what my contradictions were. I asked myself, if one of my aims in this research was to inquire into black students' experiences in higher education, how did they experience me as a black lecturer and how did I contribute to their experiences. This led me to ask questions of myself about my practice as a teacher and facilitator. I asked questions like: "What impact has my role as a black teacher had on my students, especially black students?" "Does my practice need improving?"

My claim for the empowerment of students stems from my belief systems and political orientation towards critical thinking and self-actualisation and from the notion of a critical pedagogy. I subscribe to student-centred and self-directed learning. I see students as bringing special knowledge, experience and skills to a course. I wish to encourage the development of knowledgeable and skilled practitioners, who can offer critical questioning of existing structures and services. One principle that I believe underpins my teaching therefore, is that students in my classes should be actively engaged in their learning so that their ideas and thinking are challenged in ways which provoke them to reconsider, and better articulate, their understanding of the subject matter and make new meaning that could lead to action and change. I wanted to know whether I encouraged this, and whether my teaching was interactive and challenging. I wanted to ascertain whether I did provide a safe environment in which students could take risks and face their truth and in which exploration, challenge and change could flourish.

Tensions, dilemmas and contradictions are inherent in empowerment practice and I am aware that although I may subscribe to discourses based on concepts of emancipation, liberation and democracy and aim for students' freedom of choice, unintended consequences may arise. I may impose such frameworks and my model of practice may dominate and unintentionally oppress students. Nevertheless, empowerment is a goal which I want to pursue and I wanted to know what happened in my practice, what actions I took, how I behaved, in the pursuance of such a goal. I was aware that such an inquiry would involve needing to be self-critical and deconstruct my practice for any oppressive behaviours and actions. Therefore, during 1997 and 1998, I chose to embark on a research inquiry into how my practice affected black students and how it contributed to their empowerment, if at all. I shall outline my methodological approach and methods for inquiring.

Part 2

Methodological Approach and methods

The main inquiry question that preoccupied me was whether or not I empowered students and, if I did, how it happened. I looked to action research as a method for answering these questions. This was because, at its best, action research is transformational in that it can challenge teachers to look at their practice and the culture in which they are practicing (Elliotte, 1991). Applied to classrooms, action research is an approach to improving education through change, by encouraging teachers to be aware of their own practice, to be critical of that practice and to be prepared to change it.

Mcniff (1988) proposes action research as the means by which teachers as researchers can reflect on and improve their own practice. Yet one of the challenges to action research is that it is what good teachers are supposed to be doing anyway; that is, being continually aware of their class practice and attempting to improve that practice. Stenhouse (1975) suggests that this type of action research should be a venture which is undertaken deliberately and that the inquiry process should be systematic. He argues that action research is 'a systematic enquiry made public'. It is not the random, *ad hoc* activity which characterises everyday life, although it accommodates within its method those random, surprise elements of predictability and creation.

Action Research especially in the education field, has drawn particular impetus from the work of Schon (1983), who entitled his book, "The Reflective Practitioner". For Schon, the reflective practitioner is one whose practice is accompanied by 'thinking in action', a concept he uses to distinguish the style of thinking deployed by experienced practitioners from that of, say, the academic commentator who takes abstract or theoretical concepts and then applies them to particular situations. Although this account of how professionals think has been qualified or contested by subsequent commentators (Brown and McIntyre, 1993), I am still influenced by this vision of an intimate and interactive relationship between thinking and action.

Granted that the teacher is in control of the action-reflection-cycle, it seems still to be the case that a certain theoretical course of action guides the practical decisions in action of teachers in each and any situation. The nature of research, in this dominant tradition, is that theory forms and informs practice. Researchers propose certain inquiry questions, which are then implemented within practical situations. In the light of these criticisms I

looked to another form of action research in which the practice informed the theory and which was in keeping with my values about the relationship between theory and practice.

The power of action research in the educational context has been presented in the work of Jack Whitehead. Whitehead's (1993) work has been instrumental in promoting the idea of action research as a way of improving personal practice, where practice takes the form of critical 'reflection in action on action' by the individual practitioner. The strength of his contribution, in my view, is that he is offering a form of educational inquiry which empowers practitioners to generate and control their own process of change. It shows in action the conscious development of understanding that leads to an enhanced practice.

I am particularly interested in his idea that I could view my self as a living contradiction of my own educational beliefs. Whitehead is keen to keep the teacher-practitioner at the centre of the inquiry, and introduced the notion of 'The Living I', in which educational inquiries have, as their centre of interest, the individual practitioner who is conducting the inquiry. Unless we keep the living 'I' in our educational discussions, he maintains, action research loses touch with reality.

I took into my inquiry therefore his dominant theme, the notion of the 'self' existing as a living contradiction, that is: when I say I believe in something and then I do the opposite, I exist as a living contradiction. So when I say I am student centred and empowering in my teaching practice with students and then I am not, I am denying my values in my practice. I also aimed for my inquiry initiative to follow Whitehead's pattern of statements based on the action-reflection cycle which he reformulated. These statements act as a general formula for tackling practical educational problems in a systematic way. They are:

1. I experience a problem when some of my educational values are denied in practice.
2. I imagine a solution to the problem.
3. I implement the imagined solution.
4. I evaluate the outcome of my actions.
5. I reformulate my problem in the light of my evaluation.

This action -reflection spiral is a basis for teacher self-improvement. It can be tied in with a set of questions, which act as a starting point for change:

1. What is your concern?
2. Why are you concerned?
3. What do you think you could do about it?

4. What kind of evidence could you collect to help you make some judgement about what is happening?

5. How would you collect such evidence?

6. How could you check that your judgement about what has happened is reasonably fair and accurate?

<u>My Method</u>

In using action research to develop my practice, I was searching for new ways of looking at the familiar. I believed that my practice could have become so routinised and familiar that it would be difficult for me to see it with new eyes. I needed to step outside it, to look, listen and observe from a different angle in order to gain fresh insights. I invited other pairs of eyes, in the form of an external observer and students to help me look. I also wanted to become aware of the process of contradiction, if any, by externalising from my observation what was going on in my classroom.

I set out to achieve this externalisation by engaging in cycles of planning, action, observation and reflection. I planned to have my teaching observed over a cycle of two years in one particular teaching module. The taught module, which was the topic of inquiry, was a module called "Black Workers in White Welfare Organisations" which was intended for black, second year students only. I asked my colleague (Cathy) to sit in on two of my teaching sessions and give me feedback on my actions. As this was an all-black group, it was important that it was a black member of staff doing the observation, so I chose Cathy for that reason. Also, she was familiar with my research and in tune with the purpose of my inquiry. The students knew her, as she was the Course Leader and had taught some of them, so they were likely to feel comfortable with her. I also requested and got written and verbal feedback from the students about my practice over the duration of the module. I kept a journal for recording my thoughts, observations of and reflections on my teaching in this module as well as in other modules across other disciplines over the two-year cycle.

The chosen Module for my main focus of the inquiry

"Black Workers in White Welfare Organisations" is amodule offered as part of a package of modules named "Issues in Social Work" from which students had to choose. Other modules were for example, "Men in Social Work", Women In Social Work" so that people chose an area of study on the basis of identity and interest. An underlying assumption in

having same identity groups is that they can be advantageous for students' learning. In group work literature, for example, there is evidence of the efficacy of same race groups (Davis and Proctor, 1989) showing their advantages, particularly when the group task is associated with issues of personal and racial identity, racism, social oppression and empowerment.

The black workers module aims to assist black students to find their voice, share their racial experiences and help prepare them for their positions as professionals in white organisations. The intention of the course is that students should experience collaborative, mutually supportive, and positive learning, thereby reducing the danger of experiencing failures that may be attributable to racism. Another intent is to ensure that the course should be *intrinsically* valuable and empowering (a process of self-appraisal) as well as *extrinsically* valuable (a means of gaining strategies for challenging racism in the work place, improving their practice).

Student Group

I chose a learning group composed only of black students who happened to be predominately Afro-Caribbean women and who were in the last year of their two-year training. I chose this group to work with for the following reasons:

A) I liked teaching this group in that module and it was the module which provided the basis of the paper, written by Cathy and me which led to the research for this thesis. It was in keeping with the general theme of my research interest in black students' and professionals' experience in organisations. So, as well as inquiring into my practice, I was also satisfying my research aim of exploring with students/professionals their experiences.

B) These students were also at the time, in practice placements, which gave them the opportunity to theorise from live practice. Some were mature students with years of practice experience as unqualified social workers and, in some cases, Social Care Managers.

C) The students were close to becoming professionals and, being in their last year of training, would have had a breadth of experience, skills and knowledge to draw from.

This group offered the diversity I needed. I thought that the diversity of experience and previous study, brought by the students, suggested strongly that a process of collaborative learning would be both possible and desirable.

What kind of evidence did I collect and how did I collect such evidence?

I gathered evidence in the following ways:

1. By having my teaching observed over two cycles of inquiry spanning two years. In this way my inquiry existed on an observational level. I engaged in dialogue with the observer, after the first observed session, and discussed her feedback. I took notes from her verbal feedback. I also used her written feedback.

2. Over the two years I kept a journal in which I captured moments during the observed sessions showing the living reality of how my educational values were being denied. I described how I felt I was not living up to what I believed in. My journal included descriptions of my actions, observations and reflections in other taught modules. In that way my inquiry existed at a descriptive level.

3. I sought students' feedback in the form of a questionnaire at the end of the module teaching. This was not planned as a big programme of evaluation but came about as a result of recognising that I had omitted, in my planning, to invite feedback in a systematic way from the students immediately after the first observed session. However some students voluntarily gave me verbal feedback from that session and made reference to it in writing on their questionnaire form

4. I noted their feedback, attempted to overcome problems stated and took action to improve the situation. For example, from the experience of the first cycle I learnt that a tape-recorder would have been helpful and decided to use one for the second observation. I also noted the reasons for my actions. My inquiry, then, was at an explanatory level.

5. I set up an observation of another session in the same module one year later to show how my values were in the process of realisation. I tape-recorded the observed teaching session.

In this way I was engaging in a process of systematic, critical inquiry to enable me to proceed with the realisation of my educational values in and through my practice. In summary the phases of the inquiry with the external observer present were:

Phase 1- Planning for observed teaching session I reflected on values, beliefs and focus of interest

Phase 2 – Teaching first observed session I reflected on teaching through discussion and a recall process

Phase 3 – Plan for teaching of second observed session I reflected on first observed session, using feedback from students and observer

Phase 4 – Teaching second observed session I reflected on the session, using feedback,

Phase 5 – Post action – reflection, analysis and evaluation.

<u>Presenting my analysis of the inquiry</u>

The basis for the analysis of the reflective conversation documented throughout this section is derived from the sources of evidence stated above. These include feedback from the students, as they progressed through the teaching and learning in this module on the social work course, the observer's verbal and written feedback on the observed sessions, my reflections, including journal extracts (anticipatory, retrospective and reflection -in –action notes taken during classes), and sensemaking of my actions and overall practice.

I have chosen to present a more detailed analysis of my actions and behaviour during the two sessions observed by Cathy, which includes extracts of my interaction with the students, using pseudonyms for the students. I have chosen these two points in time because I want both to offer some richness in the data and to reveal my interventions so as to illustrate the process that was going on in the classroom. This exposes my practice to the reader, so that they may get a flavour of what happened, and see both some of the challenges and difficulties I faced and how my practice improved. Between the first and second account the development in my ability to be self-critical is demonstrate. The data is more detailed in the second observed session because, by then, I was using a tape-recorder with the aim of showing my development over the two cycles. In my analysis of the first observed session, I weave in some feedback both from students and the observer with my reflections on my actions. In the second inquiry, I present my actions and reflection-in-action during the observed sessions and do more commenting on myself and on my own interventions. In my overall evaluation I integrate the observer's feedback and students' feedback.

Part 3
<u>First Cycle of Inquiry –year 1</u>

The observed session
<u>Contracting with the student group</u>
I began by preparing the group just before the start of the Module, by introducing the idea of the inquiry. I wanted to give the students the option of saying 'no', whilst being mindful of the consequences in terms of the impact this might have on the power relation between the students and myself. Had they said "no" then I would have abandoned the exercise. I placed the inquiry within the context of the overall research and the work that Cathy and I were involved in and sought their permission for Cathy to sit in on one of my

teaching sessions. Some students were already familiar with our work and had read some of our writings on the experiences of black students. Some were complimentary about it, saying that they found it useful and supportive and wanted to help in any way they could.

I gave them a couple of weeks to decide. At the end of the two weeks I checked with them again and obtained their agreement. This was a twelve-week module and I chose to have the sixth session observed. I chose that time because I thought that the group would, by then, feel comfortable with each other and with me, that the culture might have been established and that they might feel less anxious about an outsider entering.

Preparation and planning with observer

I discussed with Cathy my teaching plans for the session and worked out with her at what stage in the session it would be relevant for her to sit in. We agreed that she would observe the parts when my facilitation skills would be on display when I was in interaction with the students since the students were going to work in small groups on their own for some of the time, we agreed on where Cathy would sit, bearing in mind she was not part of the group and was concerned to ensure that she was not going to be too conspicuous.

Preparing the group

I started the session, which was to run for one and a half-hour, by reminding the group that Cathy would be doing the observation and told them when she would arrive. I introduced Cathy, when she arrived, reminding the group of her purpose and role, that she would not be taking part in the discussion and that the focus of her attention would be more on me and less on them. I wanted to put them at their ease so that they did not feel they were going to be judged or criticised. I wondered whether the group members were going to be their natural/authentic selves or whether they were going to "play to the audience", so to speak. I was concerned as to whether they might feel constrained by an 'other' presence and whether or not they would co-operate.

Topic for the session

The subject for discussion was 'Black workers working with black clients and black workers working with white clients'. I took an active learning approach with this topic of the "Black Client-Worker Relationship". I used small and large group work and challenging questioning to deepen the group's understanding. Their first task was to work in small groups, identifying and discussing the issues prompted by a set of questions, which were:

1. What are the expectations that a black worker might have of a black client?
2. What are the expectations that a black client might have of a black worker?
3. What would your feelings be if you were rejected by a black client, and what would you do about it?

They then returned to the large group with their feedback for discussion.

I shall go on to discuss my interventions, using as headings and subheadings some of my principles, inquiry questions and value claims, which I referred to at the beginning of this chapter.

My Interventions and reflections

Did I create trust and safety and was I working anti-oppressively?

I noticed that there were particular times when I was not working anti-oppressively. This happened when I became very anxious, which was more evident at the start of the whole group discussion. I chose to stimulate the discussion by asking each group to feed back according to the questions they were asked to consider rather than getting each group to feedback on their whole discussion. The reason for this choice was based on my past experience of teaching this subject and working with this group which had taught me that we would run out of time before having discussed most of the issues. In addition, I wanted everyone's voice to be heard so that I would compromise on the amount of questions we got through rather than leaving a group to miss out on the opportunity to participate fully.

When I began to facilitate the discussion I was very nervous. I was not feeling safe and wondered what impact I was having on the students. I wondered about the safety of the whole group. I noticed that I was engaging in what Heron (1993) refers to as 'clock time'. 'Clock time' is rapid speech time which, Heron says, is the norm for the traditional teaching and learning culture. I was conveying information, evaluating and giving my opinion in fairly long bursts. I was being verbally dense. I was using that approach to displace my anxiety. I did not feel sufficiently grounded.

I became aware that when I was tense I paid less attention to my pacing, I was not fully aware of my presence and my silences were short. I tended to say too much and speak for too long not allowing enough space for student centred learning. My silences were

not entirely free of urgency or tension and at times the purpose for my speaking was, at an unconscious level to relieve anxiety. As the session continued, I became more in touch with my anxiety and used breathing exercises to lessen and to give myself support. As I gradually became less anxious, the pace of my interventions changed and I noticed that some students became more open and participated with the informality and ease which had become the culture of group.

By the end of the session, with the increased informality and my feeling less anxious, some students were able to feel more comfortable with the pace for learning. This was evident in Sandra's feedback:

I found the session fairly easy to follow and understand. Agnes maintained a reasonably effective pace of teaching, to cater for the different individual levels of understanding within the group. Agnes would always keep the group following the planned content for the session and would stop us if we were going off at a "tangent", however she was flexible enough, yet firm in her teaching methods. Agnes would always stop within the sessions to ask if everyone was following her and offered to go over or explain again if something was not clear. I found the session was well structured and planned which helped me to analyse and question areas of my working relationship with clients.

On reflection, I believe my anxiety may have caused me to be more constraining than usual I became more controlling because I wanted the session to go well and in that way, I was being oppressive. at the beginning of the session, for example, I imposed too tight a structure which was too formal and was against the working norms of the group. The observer's presence was impacting on me. I felt that I needed to perform well and I believe that my needs influenced my performance. I was too much in performance mode. A sense of urgency to "get it right" did not allow me to use my voice in an empowering way. That may have contributed to my not listening to the meaning of what some students were saying. "Speaking in clock time" probably left some students feeling impoverished and disempowered.

Can my strategy of working experientially be justified in respect to learning?

I tried to work from the experience that the students brought, paying attention to content, process and feeling. I attempted to explore the emotional effects of learning and, at the same time, assist the students to pay attention to emotional blocks to learning. I used challenging questions to deepen understanding by working in this way I intended to

enhance learning by evoking deeper, inner resources. How successful was I at doing this and what evidence did I have for such a claim to empowerment? I gave the students permission to acknowledge their feelings, especially when they were lost in what they were saying. She said that I tried to encourage full participation, and used inclusive comments to help students to feel included and supported when they got stuck. She also said that I worked in an enabling way, holding together what the students were saying and offering helpful summaries, by voicing out what I thought others were saying, especially when they had difficulty in exposing themselves.

How was I able to work in those ways, what actually happened?

Here, I cite an example. One member, Kyle, told a story of her involvement with a black client to illustrate a point she was making in response to the question about her standards of professionalism with black clients. She told a story about how a male black client who, she thought, was crossing a professional boundary when she allowed him to kiss her hand as a way of saying thank you at the end of her work with him. She shared her discomfort about both of their actions and her dilemma when working with black clients, of needing to work with appropriate professional behaviour codes. She questioned whether there was an over-identification between herself as worker and the client and what this meant for the success of the work. She shared her struggles as she tried to make sense of the meaning of the behaviour and the questions she had about acceptable codes of conduct as a black professional. She asked, **"Was I being too friendly? What was he trying to say to me? And is it different for white professionals"**.

The story and her questions tapped the energy in the room and other students interrupted with challenges, presenting different views, seeking clarification, making interpretations and connections to their own experiences of their practice with black clients. I noticed that this student had not fully completed telling her story. She was struggling to make sense of it and was probably seeking approval for her behaviour with the client. I noticed that some students, who I thought had interrupted prematurely, had misunderstood her. I wondered if she was feeling misunderstood because I noticed that she kept relating the incident in different ways. She kept repeating and explaining. I tried to help her to make her point clearly by encouraging her to reflect on her question of whether she was being too friendly. I asked: " *did it take away from what you were trying to give to him?*" I invited her to notice that she was viewing actions as negative. I asked, *"in what other possible ways could you have viewed your intervention?"* I wanted to assist her to reflect on her own standards and on the effectiveness of her practice. I asked her how she felt about her work, and asked her to comment on how she felt about her relationship with the client.

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Her response did convey to me that she was not any clearer so I tried to help her to clarify what she was saying and asked *"how have you defined professional for yourself? I imagine you have some standards in your head"*. I was trying to encourage her to work with different ways of knowing. I was tapping "the imaginal mode" (Heron 1993). I invited her to engage in fantasy and speak out her ideal standard, ideal way of working with black clients. She responded well to this invitation and I noticed a relief on her face.

I noticed that the rest of the group had also become stuck and I did not feel that I was being particularly empowering in that I was not listening well. I thought that I has given too much attention to one individual so I moved on and tried to move the group on. Here, I was trying to balance the needs of the individual and the needs of the group. I tried to include the whole group by inviting them also to engage in the exercise. This enabled others to join in and they all spoke about their ideal and more questions and issues were generated. In this way of working, reflection was aided by means of a dialectical interplay with imaginal process, using spontaneous and directed imagery and stories. I was encouraging the students to integrate learning from their emotions, perceptions and imagery as well as from ideas. I had a strong focus on their learning grounded in personal experience and emotional awareness.

There were times when I wondered whether my intervention was more challenging and less supportive because I noticed that Kyle was not making her point and was getting frustrated. On reflection, I realised that I could have assisted her more by first acknowledging her feelings and struggles, by naming the fact that I noticed her struggling to make her point, before challenging her to think of other possibilities. I realised that I was focusing more on the content of what she was saying and not paying enough attention to her feelings, and her struggles to express herself. I felt that she probably needed my help to assist her to find the significance and meaning of her story. Her struggles reflected black workers' personal and professional dilemmas when working with black clients and I stated that. This statement helped to free up the energy in the group who made more connections and elaborated on the sense they were making of Kyle's story. It encouraged more students to reflect on and share some of their dilemmas and issues. Some students linked the subject matter and the discussion to other informal experiences in their lives when they had been clients in receipt of a service, or to their practice, when they had been in a power position of giving a service. I worked with the process in the room and with more material generated by inviting the students to reflect on their practice experience with black clients. Their reflections highlighted issues of transference, over-identification and projections in the black worker-client relationship. I

picked up on their sensemaking and worked with these concepts, acknowledging the significance of them, and I made some general statements, which were teaching and learning points. The students were looking at how the knowledge they had gained was helpful to them both personally and in their practice. They were engaged in what Schon (1995) calls" the scholarship of application".

I was engaged in experiential teaching which was grounded in personal experience and in assisting the students to recall direct, experiential knowledge, which Heron (1993) has called "knowledge by acquaintance". This meant that the students tapped personal encounters and inward reactions, which they externalised and tried to make sense of by drawing on the knowledge generated by their peers in the group. The structured experiences which I got them to engage with in the learning situation gave rise to such encounters, reactions and actions which were immediate. The students then reflected on this first-hand experience, and by doing so 'tuned' it into learning. According to David Boud, experiential learning is the process of being sensitively 'tuned' in to that encounter and then reflecting on it (Boud et al, 1985).

I Worked with Process and content to help students to feel validated
I tracked the process and content making links with what had gone on or beensaid previously. The observer confirmed "You referred back to when some of them said that whey were "being harder" on black clients. You made the link between clients and workers by asking them, 'what makes it different if it is a client who does this to you, rejects you, rather than a worker?'"

Working with content I made connections with past and present experiences, with similarities and differences in working with black clients and white clients, picking up on points raised and elaborating on them. I named what I observed in the group process. For example when they became stuck with dilemmas and contradictions, I said *" you seem to be wrestling with a number of professional dilemmas, and there are many for you as black workers for whom the issue of rejection from black clients also seems big".* I also named the issues and offered theoretical concepts to help the group make meaning. For example, I said, *"what seems to be coming out of this discussion is that there are lots of issues for the worker. The agency might define the boundaries, but you need to know how to be yourself with black clients. I can hear that around the issue of friendliness and you wanting to know where to draw the line, your line. If you do 'good' work with a black client and they are grateful you want to leave with something and leave them with something".*

The observer's feedback confirmed that she saw me offering opportunities to make links and connections with ideas generated from the discussion. "You would say things like what we are exploring now is how...". She also said that I found points of connection between the group members and built on these to make them apparent. I helped students develop their understanding by 'pulling out' the salient points in their statements or stories. "You introduced ways in which the issues were not so clear-cut, for example when you asked the group if they had similar struggles with white clients. You also introduced the issue of rejection".

I worked with the skill of reflecting back what I had heard and naming the dynamics I had observed, which seemed to help some group members to feel valued. This seemed to give confidence to the quieter members and to encourage them to find their voice. Some students were not able to name issues so easily and I noticed that, when I did this, the group was more engaged. I wondered whether in this way they were able to gain insight and feel heard, understood and validated. These comments from students confirmed their experience of finding of their voice and feeling validated.

Sule expressed:

"I felt able to get my voice heard. Also your eye contact was given to me which enabled me to speak and people were stopped from dominating discussions. You encouraged me by paying attention to what I was saying...I felt acknowledged after I talked".

And Richard said:

"You listened to what I was saying and you were able to hear and understand what I was saying or trying to say. I felt heard by my contribution being validated by yourself and other members of the group"

Jasmen said:

"You did not allow the things I said to hang in mid air. You worked on what I brought to the group, which helped me to get a better understanding of the issue, myself. It also got other members of the group to hear what I was saying, which might not be very clear at first. You always say, "did you hear what- said"? This helped me to listen and to reflect on what I had heard".

Working in those ways have I met my claims that *a) students should be actively engaged in their learning so that ideas and thinking are challenged and b) students should be*

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challenged and motivated to take steps to make new meaning? I tried to encourage the students to feel free to speak, use their voices, not silence themselves and validate what they had to say, to value it as important, but also tried to challenge their views where necessary. I challenged them and encourage them to challenge themselves and each other in order to deepen their understanding.

I challenged by asking direct and sometimes probing questions during the discussion such as: *"what might you do with a client who is different from you in their level of consciousness about racism?"* I moved backwards and forwards making links with what had gone on earlier in the discussions, sticking with one point as long as possible. I tended to ask students to clarify their opinions or meanings and say how they arrived at these. In this way they could hear themselves aloud, as having something important to say, and others could listen and learn from the sharing of their experience.

I noticed that I felt a temptation to go deeper and deeper and expand on one issue at the expense of the other issues being explored. For example, I got the group to explore the power relations between the client and worker by saying, *"let's hear more about the power issues that may be present between you and the client".* This had the advantage of helping some students to clarify and deepen their understanding. The disadvantage was that other students' issues may have been missed out. Was I taking a very powerful position by following my interest with such tenacity? Was I being too directive or leading too much? I was faced with this challenge of striking a balance between facilitator directing and student directing. I experienced the dilemma of choosing whether to work with breadth versus modelling how to go deeper without becoming too challenging or too critical, and creating too much discomfort for the students. This was a critical learning and teaching issue for me in terms of empowering students to learn. This student reflected, in her comments, her experience of my teaching dilemma:

Sandra said:

"Agnes questioned our ideas, thoughts and feelings, in a challenging way, which at first I felt was very powerful and overwhelming. It felt as though she was confronting every suggestion and comments we made or asked which I felt did scare me a little and put me off from participating within the group to begin with. On reflection I realised that this approach was a method of "pin pointing" and focusing us, as she was making us critically analyse the thought process we were using that brought us to the conclusions and ideas that we had arrived at". This enabled me to

really evaluate and analyse my thinking and understanding of the client and worker relationship".

Going deeper has the advantage of assisting students to expand, open up and develop their understanding, and this can be empowering for some students but I can become too challenging and very disempowering if I make unrealistic demands on them. At times, I believe that I was too demanding and this was confirmed in the observer's feedback. She stated that she thought I had a high expectation of the level of understanding in the group and she wondered whether my standards were unrealistic. I think that I do have to question my expectations of students' level, of understanding to see whether they are too high because I noticed that I became impatient when some students had difficulty in understanding issues pertaining to knowledge that I thought they should have had. This was more evident when I thought we had covered the topic in previous teaching sessions and felt that they should have remembered it. At one point I heard myself telling the students that they should know. The observer noted this and she commented that she thought I took an authoritarian approach, in such instances, and almost reprimanded students for not being able to recall previous teaching. I too noted this example of my behaving in such a disempowering way.

At one point the group was struggling to explore issues of black consciousness. They got stuck when Kyle asked, **"what is black consciousness? Who defines it?"** I asked, *"Why are we struggling with this when at the beginning we defined the term 'black' and discussed some of this. I thought we had a shared understanding".* I thought that we had explored that question in an earlier session and that the group should have moved further than they had done. I failed to hear the reflexivity in the question, the need for the group to return to it and reflect. I also made assumptions about our shared understanding. I was not allowing for the fact that meanings may change over time and that I needed to engage in checking and re-evaluating rather than reprimanding.

I felt that I became very authoritarian and parental, to the point of being punitive, in my attempt to get them to reflect back on past teaching. I noticed when I did this that some students looked as if they felt criticised. Other more confident students said that they felt like they were being *'told off'.* Some challenged by saying that *"it was a long time ago and we forgot".* And, I noticed that one or two student's stopped participating.

Clearly, this is an area for improvement in my practice as silencing students in this way is a disempowering act and I am contravening my values. Indeed, some students

highlighted in their feedback that I should improve the way I challenge because they found my style a hindrance to their learning as it blocked them from taking risks. Richard said that he did not feel assisted to learn sometimes because, **"I occasionally felt that your style of challenging was a little patronising and direct. I feel that you could have been a little more aware of the different levels of knowledge present in the group...I was fearful of being challenged therefore did not always ask questions or comment as I felt I should have done".**

From this and other feedback, it is evident that there were ways in which I lived out my values in practice and there are some clear ways in which I did not. Therefore, there was room for improvement and I needed to reflect on what I could do differently.

What areas of my practice should I be improving?

As I reflected on my teaching and learning and made plans for making changes I found Boud and Walker (1991, 1992) and Baird's (1990) models of reflection helpful. Boud and Walker's idea is that reflection-in-action is part of a wider learning cycle in which there is preparation for the experience before it begins, digestion of it and reflection on it after it is over. Similarly, Baird recognised three kinds of reflection, which he named Anticipatory Reflection (pre-teaching), Contemporaneous Reflection (during teaching) and Retrospective Reflection (post teaching). In part 4, when I discuss the second cycle of inquiry, I shall focus more on anticipatory and contemporaneous reflection and, in part 5, I shall engage in more retrospective reflection. In this section, I shall engage in some retrospective reflection on my actions so as to note my learning, identify gaps and decide on what needs changing or improving.

Retrospective Reflection:
According to Baird, retrospective reflection should encompass learning from the experience regardless of the perceived success of the session. The key to retrospective reflection might well be in the question: Why was the session "good" or "bad"? In retrospect, there were a few areas of my practice that I thought were good and that the students and observer thought were empowering which I want to continue. I want to continue to:

- work experientially and try to be student centred by engaging them in preparation and planning and in sharing the decision making.
- help students to feel more included and more supported.

- In terms of my interventions, work with the strengths and the knowledge in the group and encourage students to share, use their voice and speak from their experiences.

- challenge to promote depth and understanding and assist students to engage in critical reflection on their experience.

For me, retrospective reflection means learning from my experiences. I learnt that one major challenge for me was engaging in the actual act of reflection-in-action. I had to find a way to take time out to do this reflection when the session was in full swing. This notion of time for reflection revolves around an ability to structure teaching so that time is available whilst the students are still 'on task', otherwise, the need to reflect during teaching may persist but be unresolved.

Another major challenge I noted from the first cycle was the need to on my feet or make 'on the spot' suggestions. This required me to have a breadth of experiences to call on from which to make suggestions in response to the situation. One of the ways in which I counteracted this was to tap the students' experiences. In some cases, presenting the problem to the group helped them to take control, especially where the subject taught was not so knowledge reliant. By being involved in their learning the knowledge was imported through them. It required homing in on different sets of skills, skills pertaining to group work and an understanding of adult learning.

Being removed from the situation and having time to reflect after the event, were important in shaping how I might respond in future to students' learning so that I should not 'make the same mistakes twice'. How could the learning from one session shape my thinking about other situations? Recognising a problem, or problems, would be the start of the reflective cycle. The main problems which I began to recognise were that I ran the risk of oppressing some students when I became anxious. I managed my anxiety by becoming over controlling, becoming teacher-centered rather than student-centered. Although I met my claim for challenging students to think, there were times when I did not challenge in a supportive way. My style and method of challenging were at times too provocative. In this way, I contradicted my value of providing a safe and trusting environment. I was also, not as tolerant with the pace and level of understanding/developing a knowledge base as I should have been. I may have been too demanding of them.

On a practical note, I realised, with hindsight, that I should have tape-recorded the session to help me with retrospective reflections. I also made the mistake of not getting

feedback from the students immediately after the observed session. I noticed the contradiction in my values. I value the notion of equality. I believe that research participants should be subjects and not objects, yet I omitted to get their views of how they felt the session had gone. Although I rectified the situation and invited feedback retrospectively, on the session and my teaching during the whole module, it was nevertheless a powerful position to take as a researcher.

Accommodating learning – what changes do I want to make in preparation for the second cycle of Inquiry?

I have learnt that there were ways in which I was a 'living' contradiction in terms of my practice. Reflecting on my interventions, there were times when I did not empower students but some of the feedback from students showed how I may have done better than I had thought. Nevertheless, there was still room for improvement. In terms of what needed to change I began with the cue from the feedback of the observer which pointed me in the direction of paying attention to the way in which I used questions. A significant fact for me was that some students had found my style of challenging a hindrance to their learning and this required my attention. The two major areas I wanted to pay attention to, therefore were developing supportive ways of challenging and developing varied methods to work with more silent members, especially those who are scared to take risks. I wanted to make changes to my style of challenging to make it less autocratic. I wanted to work more holistically and to enter the second cycle of inquiry with a reminder of the different ways in which I thought a teacher could oppress, disempower and hold on to their power. These were by:

- Silencing through style and/ or method
- Disallowing
- Instruction from the front – one dimensional power
- Not tapping knowledge in the group
- Being the expert teacher – all knowing
- Not enough sharing

On a practical note, I decided to tape-record the observed session and to invite feedback from the students immediately after the session to augment validity. I would also invite feedback on my teaching of the whole module to monitor change in my practice.

Part 4

Year 2 – Second cycle of inquiry

Anticipatory Reflection

Before embarking on the second cycle of inquiry I engaged in reflection prior to taking action which Baird (1990) and Van Maanen (1991) refer to as "anticipatory reflection". Anticipatory reflection (reflection for action), for Baird, is a way of apprehending and attending to a situation in anticipation of the experience. For Van Maanen:

"Anticipatory reflection enables us to deliberate about possible alternatives, decide on courses of action, plan the kinds of things we need to do, and anticipate the experiences we and others may have as a result of expected events or of our planned actions. Anticipatory reflection helps us to approach situations and other people in an organised, decision-making, prepared way" (p.101).

In preparation, I reconsidered the feedback I had been given and considered possible ways of dealing with situations differently. I wanted to pay particular attention to the structures I was creating so that people could feel free to tap their personal power and transform their experience. So, within my action inquiry, I wanted to engage deeper in holistic learning and work in a holistic way with the students, seeking to generate a co-operative learning culture.

Holistic learning, according to Heron (1993), means learning how to engage much more of the whole being in the learning process. Heron describes his "whole person model" as consisting of four basic psychological modes – the affective, the imaginable, the conceptual and the practical. The affective functions are feeling and emotion, the imaginable functions are intuition and imaginary (imaginary includes perception, memory and imagination), the conceptual functions are reflection and discrimination, and the practical functions are intention and action.

He postulates that 'whole person' dynamics work as an up-hierarchy in that, what is higher is tacit and latent in what is lower. He explains that in the lowest level is the formative potential of higher levels, the higher levels emerge out of the lower; what is lower grounds supports and nourishes what is higher. So out of the affective mode emerges the imaginable mode. From the imaginable mode proceeds the conceptual mode, the domain of thought and language, and this is the basis for the development of the practical mode. These modes are interdependent. He signifies learning in the imaginable mode as the source of all subsequent conceptualisation.

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Heron also states that working with a model of the whole person would require in the actor a level of consciousness that would involve intentionally functions such as feelings and emotions, intuition and imagery, reflection and discrimination, intention and action. This would mean that I would participate fully with the whole of my 'being' in my teaching so that I would be able to notice and manage my emotional responses to the situation and grasp intuitively the significance of what was going on. Within this model I incorporated Torbert's model of action inquiry (1991) which he refers to as "extended consciousness-in-action". This meant widening my attention to: a) what was going on in the whole of my teaching world, b) staying focused on my goals of improving my style of challenging and engendering more trust, c) the strategies used to achieve my goals, and d) my current actions and their outcomes. It also meant noticing and amending any incongruities between these two components (either through action or internal revision or both). It would also mean that I could reflect on the issues involved and formulate my intentions for future actions. Such action inquiry would involve me in a process of reviewing, reflection and goal setting. I took some ideas from both theoretical models and sought to work with them in an integrated way.

I take as my starting point the planning for teaching the module, then I explore the second session which Cathy observed and, finally, I examine my interventions.

How did I plan for the teaching in this module?

This time I chose to involve the students much earlier in the planning of the whole module. My use of authority and way in which I engaged in decision making were called into question as I was aware that how decisions were made would contribute to the nature of the relationships that were established. I have found Heron's definition of the facilitator's authority (1993), a useful framework. I also found Heron's decision- Modes in Group Facilitation (1989), to be an invaluable working guide which helped me to respond appropriately.

I had to pay attention to the negotiating process in terms of how much I delegated to the students' decisions about the content or learning methods. I was directive with regard to the objectives of the students' learning and assessment of this, whilst negotiating the programme and the methods of learning but I delegated to them the resources for learning. It was important that they were given choice, at the planning stage, and that they made their choices and decisions based on having gained clarity about the course, my intent, and my values. This was vital, both in principle, and particularly in practice, in

a culture in which I was introducing new sets of values about education to be operated alongside old models of education. It was clearly immoral, and not at all empowering, to spring the new educational values on students after the teaching had started: This was all the more so when the ways in which they had been taught so far had lead them to expect the old authoritarian values of unilateral direction by staff or, at best only partial involvement in their learning. So it was better to be directive at this stage, to make clear what my values were and to invite students to join if these values appealed to them.

In planning the teaching content with the students I wanted to make the module more empowering so I tried to empower the students by distributing power between me, as facilitator, and them, as learners. I noticed that I was not being directive about of all the educational decisions. I used my power and authority more subtly. I was choosing the appropriate, decision-making mode, being mindful as to whether I should direct, negotiate or delegate at the contracting stage.

In setting the culture and in preparation for creating a safe learning environment, I was directive about the aims and methods of teaching. However the contract, consisting of the group rules and agenda setting, was negotiated. I did retain some of the control over some of the content. I took their suggested topics and ideas, which came out of a brainstorming exercise for agenda setting, and planned a few of the sessions. My planning was based on the traditional ground of propositional knowledge grounded in experiential knowledge. I did this with the aid of experiential exercises which were interspersed during my input and group's input.

Preparing and planning with the observer
Cathy and I met to plan a few weeks before the module started. We reflected on the feedback from the first cycle and I stated clearly what I wanted her to observe. We also agreed on the use of a tape recorder, to record the session, as it would make it easier for her to focus and widen her attention instead of concentrating on noting the content. We discussed when would be the most appropriate time in the life of the group for her to intervene. We agreed that she would observe the whole session this time. In preparation for the observation of the session, we reflected on her role and task again and agreed when would be the best time for her to observe and that the students should suggest where she should sit.

Preparing the group

I prepared the group in a similar way to the first cycle. I sought their permission to engage in the research before the start of the module. I told them about Cathy and her role. Again, there was no objection. I sought the students' permission to tape-record the session. I asked them when would be the best time for Cathy to attend and they all agreed that it should be nearer the end of the module. On the day of the session, I reminded them of Cathy's role and task and allayed any anxiety that she would be assessing them. I discussed with them where they thought Cathy should sit. I noticed that this time I was working more co-operatively, engaging the students in the decision making process. I was more comfortable to do so this time.

Topic for the session

The topic that was chosen, jointly, for discussion 'The Personal and Professional Development of Black Social Workers' was chosen jointly. The students had asked for this issue to be considered because they wanted the opportunity to explore their strengths and gaps in their practice. They also wanted to take the opportunity to explore and identify the profile they would be taking into organisations. We had jointly agreed the timing of this in the Module. They were coming to the end of their training, so it was the right time to embark on an exercise which would assist them to engage in self-reflection and help with choices about presentation of self to organisations. It was also the right time to engage in an evaluation of their practice as professionals; an exercise that would directly assist them in formulating job statements for employers. This was part of the preparation and planning process of entering as black professionals into white agencies.

Contemporaneous Reflection

If anticipatory reflection is a starting point for a practitioner to develop ways of thinking about approaches to teaching, and retrospective reflection is a vehicle for learning from attempting such approaches, then it is through contemporaneous reflection that a practitioner can learn from and about their practice in action. This is when the complex and dynamic nature of teaching may be developed so that it becomes immediately responsive to learning. However, being able to incorporate this type of reflection in practice is not easy and engaging in reflection-in-action could bring with it many challenges some of which I noted from the first inquiry.

<u>Did I continue to empower the students during my interventions?</u>

I began the session by giving the students a task. Working in pairs they took turns to share their experiences with the use of inquiry questions and then feed back their deliberations for discussion in the whole group. The questions for consideration were:

1. What has the process of education and training done for you so far? Highlight successes and identify gaps that still need developing
2. Reflect on the teaching and learning at Brunel; comment on your positive and negative experiences as well as general experiences

I offered the group some parameters for their explorations. I asked them to pay attention to the personal, as well as the general and structural, to help them to make meaning. So I started the session, paying attention to the affective mode of learning, by asking the pairs to take time to relax to elicit positive emotions. I asked them to take turns to identify positive and negative emotional responses to their experiences. This, I thought, would honour the individual history and experiences which they brought to their learning. I moved on to the imaginal mode by asking them to share their stories in groups of four, so that one pair joined with another pair. In these small groups, stories were built up and connections made which allowed for affirmation and valuing, and a positive emotional climate for learning was created.

I then moved to the conceptual with the whole group, although it was evident from feedback that this process had begun in the pairs and small groups. Questions and answers were offered across groups and discussion held within the whole group.

Facilitating the whole group discussion

Oscar began by recapping what he knew before attending the course and said that the course had validated his knowledge of structural oppression and how it had contributed to the lives of black people. This resonated with the group. I noticed that people were nodding and making acknowledging sounds and I spoke to this saying, *"Is this echoing other people's experiences"?* Peter intervened, elaborating on what had been said, and enlarged upon the way in which the knowledge gained in the Course had helped him. He said that the Course had offered him models for understanding his experience. Working in the imaginal mode he described his experience as being thrown up in the air, everything that came from himself and everything that he thought he held solid was in the air. The course had given him some theoretical models to help him put things back

together. He said,**"The course stripped me of me, it said don't use 'me' use the model. I came here as a square and have been thrown up and I had to catch all the pieces. I had to put it all back together and it is not a square anymore, different shapes, and it just feels like, Who am I in a sense, but gradually you learn to put yourself back in a certain order. And you know that you can use these models but still got to use self as well".**

Peter shared his experience of fragmentation, integration and transformation whilst others in the group listened attentively; there were echoes throughout of "ums", and "yeses", as well as non verbal means of acknowledgements and signs of connections being made at different levels. I asked Peter to identify points at which he felt he had come together. I asked this question to assist him to identify where and when the integration had taken place so that he could hear how he had made his changes and so that others could learn from his experiences. I also wanted the group to hear that it was possible to have such feelings to come through intact. I was aware that I had chosen to talk about his integration because I was feeling anxious, responsible, criticised, and worried that the course might be stripping students of self and causing fragmentation. At that moment I experienced this process as being negative. I was aware that it was the outcome of my need to have him stress the positives of his experience.

Wanita connected with Peter and shared her experiences of loss; her loss of confidence in the first year of her training she stated how the Black Workers Module had helped her to structure her thoughts which had helped her regain confidence. She said,**"The course helped me to structure the way I think and attach reasons and meaning to what I know. It enlightened my awareness and helped me to act on my awareness"**

I tried to bring in more voices by saying, *"It sounds like there were lots of triggers for some people"*. I said this because I wanted the group to explore more deeply the connections they had made for themselves. I wanted them to speak of their positive experiences but I wonder whether I was being too controlling. Remembering my experience from the first cycle of inquiry, I was concerned that I should not lead the agenda too much because of my anxieties. My underlying agenda may have been that I wanted to hear positive feedback about the course and I was also aware that the notion of students constructing their experiences into the positives and successes were themes from my research which I might have imported into the group.

Nevertheless the group entered the space of exploring their successes and validated their experiences. Some said that they felt that their personal values were verified and validated. They thought that their mere presence, as black people, at the University was a success in itself because it would help their friends and others to feel encouraged to do the course and to take on further training or feel confident to enter higher education. June said, **"But a greater success is the success of just being here. I know that just my presence here helps other people who had the same experiences as me and felt that they could not possibly do this. While I was out there I too didn't think that I could possibly do this, but now I am here I could encourage others I know to do this as well".**

That statement encouraged others to share their disbelief that they could 'make it' and it took them a while to appreciate the fact that they had. They went on to explore their experiences of learning and how they had experienced the teaching. They spoke of their difficulties in grasping the new language, the jargon spoken. They thought that some lecturers made unrealistic assumptions about the level of their cognitive development in relation to the subject matter, that they expected them to grasp concepts quickly. Some felt that they were not in a place developmentally or at a point in their training to understand some of the concepts. I became aware of my feelings of guilt on hearing this because I remembered the feedback from the first cycle of inquiry about my expectations of students' knowledge. I worked with my feelings and took the opportunity to behave differently. I wanted to know how I could help and tried to encourage the students to explore the point further. I asked, *"what would have helped"?* I wanted them to explore their ways of knowing and learning as well as obtain feedback, about other ways of teaching and possible changes we could make, which I could share with my colleagues.

The students went on to suggest that lecturers should take time to observe and check for understanding, deliver their material at an appropriate pace, focus on their delivery and presentation and make it lively. They gave an example of how a particular lecturer had brought his lecture to life for them, and I asked, *"How was it brought to life"?* This question provoked interest on the part of a number of students who then went on to give examples of how the teaching could be brought to life. I acknowledged their suggestions and asked *"What's your part in all of this, how can you help yourself and help the person who is doing the delivery in terms of your learning?* I was trying to help them to challenge their possible reliance on the lecturer, on received knowledge. I wondered whether they saw themselves as passive learners. Rosa rose to the challenge and said, **"I have responsibility to question and ask lecturers to break down what they are saying".**

Others said that they went to other students to get help with understanding. Others said they read and I asked, *"How much contribution do you make to talking to other students, talking to lecturers and reading?* From this question the group went on to explore the balance, in terms of time spent gaining knowledge from books, compared with dialogue and discussion, and discovered that they relied heavily on the authority of the printed word. Some acknowledged their need to use other ways of learning and agreed that they needed to make more use of a variety of sources of knowledge. Their understanding about the process of learning and how they learned, was deepened whilst focusing on teaching delivery in terms of pace and level and methods of teaching.

They also made some constructive comments on how knowledge was generated, relating this to their experiences of writing for academic purposes. They felt that they had to write at a particular academic level which did not include their ways of knowing or their use of experience. Peter (referring to his experience of trying to make the link between experiential knowing and propositional knowing) said, **"We don't always remember what we know and we are not making that link that we can use what we know. When I try to transfer what I know to the essay the task seem so big and difficult to grasp".**

I asked, *"what is that academic level?"* This simple question provoked a great deal of discussion of their experiences of the world of academia which included feeling alienated from universities. There were comments about the world of academia being white and some commented on their feelings/experience when they saw black lecturers in the Social Work Department. Maryanne said, **"Before I came to university I had a perception of university, which had nothing to do with reality. It was just in my mind and I thought, well, one, black people don't go there, they have no role in there. I was not expecting to see black lecturers and stuff like that. So I thought it was a white place and out of my remit. So walking through the doors now, seeing you Agnes and other black lecturers has been so empowering because of role modelling, and that. You see other black people and it helps you to aspire".**

The need to see black lecturers and to have them as role models was an important theme for some students. It gave them confidence. Richard said, **"Its about having a role model, coming here and seeing black lecturers, black students, black social workers, I say well, you can do it. Because I actually relate to them, and I think if these people can do it then I can do it and I think that's what made it so accessible".**

The group deepened their understanding of the meaning and the importance of having self-confidence, because some felt that some black people viewed themselves as not

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worthy of having a degree whilst others 'knock' each other for pursuing one. As a way of taking the discussion to an even deeper level I asked the group why they thought that some black people chose to behave in this way. They went on to explore their values with regard to education and the role and influence of their parents in relation to those values. They discussed structural racism in education and the education process. I summarised the discussions at that point, making links between the personal and the political, by reflecting on what had been said, what I had liked about the discussions and the interesting phrases used. I made reference to the way Peter had said he had made sense of his experience and reminded them about the importance of reflection in helping with sensemaking and integration.

I was working at the conceptual mode. I noticed that this year I was paying more attention to working with the notion of different ways of knowing at different levels, so that I facilitated groups in a way that paid more attention to the anxiety in the group and to the defences in operation. I continued to work with a balance of process and content, moving backwards and forwards between the two at the level of the individual, group, practice organisation and society. I wanted the students to experience different ways of knowing and different levels of comprehending, to witness multiple meanings unfolding before them. In this way, I was trying to challenge differently, more holistically, so as to help them integrate the personal and professional and link theory to practice.

I noticed that they presented some of their experiences in binary terms, practical and academic, theory and practice, and I wanted to assist the group to begin to understand the importance of integrating these concepts and not see them as opposites. I assisted them to challenge these ideas by inviting them to consider other possibilities and not view them as being in one category or the other. I noticed that I was being challenging in a different way, that I was less 'full frontal' and did not focus too much on individual statements but more on the whole group, supporting group members to think in different ways about the questions I asked.

Some were able to make the link. Maryanne said, **"I suppose you have to be practical as well as an academic, practical in your academic application".** Others were not able immediately to make the link and continued to share their experiences of how difficult it was for them to use academic terms and shared how this made them feel. A few people, for example, said that they felt ashamed that they did not even know what a "semester" meant when they first entered training. I was aware that semester is very much an American term so was not surprised that some students were not familiar with it. Instead,

I chose to explore the notion of shame, of being ashamed of not being familiar with academic terms, by saying *"Its about shame, are we ashamed that we did not have the kind of education that we hoped for, that we wanted? That we hoped we would get? What are you ashamed of?"* Mary answered, **"If you did not value the experiences that you had then you feel shame"** Richard responded, **Yeah, but for me I think the shame is gone"**.

This issue of shame is a theme I have experienced among many black students in the past and I was aware that being ashamed of not being educated was an issue in the black community. So I wanted to help the group to place their experiences in a wider context of structural racism and help them to make connections between the personal and political.

I wanted to return to the student who spoke of her shame about not knowing what 'semester' meant because I wanted her to explore her feelings of shame since she said that she felt stupid for not knowing such a simple thing. I said, *"So you did not know what the word semester mean, how were you going to find out? What stopped you from asking?* I also wanted to take the discussion into exploring the notion of not knowing and value not knowing. I said, *"So if we imagine that we should know it because other people know it then what? We should not ask? We feel ashamed to ask, to ask because people might think what"?* Collective voices: **"STUPID"**. *So where does this notion of stupid come from?* I asked. I couched my question in a challenging way, challenging the notion that we should know the simple thing.

I wanted the group to question the way knowledge is acquired, to explore the notion of stupidity and the importance it has for black people in the socio-historical and political context of institutional racism. Black people have been perceived as stupid as far back as slavery. I asked the question in a general way, to tap other peoples' feelings, as I assumed that other students might also experience feelings of shame for similar reasons but might have difficulty admitting it. I did not want Josephine to feel further ashamed, by being spotlighted and exposed, because she had taken the risk of sharing her feelings. Working in this way, I invited the students to affirm and develop emotional responses, to try to resolve the negative by cognitive re-framing and emotional discharge. I made the assumption that these negatives were an impediment to learning.

The group went on to share their experiences of institutional racism in education and how they were criticised at school and the lack of opportunities that were available to take on professional training. I felt that I was allowing the students through sharing their

experiences to take control of their learning. I took on the position of 'not being the only knower' in order to encourage new learning. I tried not to occupy the 'expert's' seat and, if I did, it was temporary to demonstrate that I had experience and expertise but was not an expert on 'blackness'. To take on the expert role is to de-emphasise and devalue the experiences and knowledge of the students in a way that is oppressive. I noticed that in this cycle of inquiry I was paying more attention to the power relations and was more concerned to listen. I was more willing to give up power to empower the students so as to be able to identify strengths in them.

As a consequence some students shared more personal experiences and the feelings attached to those experiences. Craig shared some of his fears on entering his training:

" **When I was at school I wanted to be an architect because I was good at technical drawing but I was not encouraged and I was also frightened. I had a fear of the unknown and still did when I came on this course. Before I came on this course I had not studied for over twenty years, I made excuses that I had a family with commitments, debts to pay. But until I made that first step into the unknown by coming here I did not know it was not that difficult. It has not been that difficult after all".**

I acknowledged his feelings, his fears and confirmed the meaning he had made in linking his personal experiences to racism in education, how he had worked with the internal and external. I also reiterated the ways in which he had broke the cycle of fear by going to the general and cited ways in which other black people had broken the cycle of fear so as to be able to achieve. I was encouraging students to speak from 'I', the 'self'. This came from the belief that 'the source of knowledge is located in the self', from 'subjective knowing'. I tried to challenge the notion of the truth of experience as relying on rational consciousness. As students connected with Craig's experience they shared their own experiences of entering training.

I noticed that some of the students were only commented on the similarities in their stories and not on the differences, so I challenged the myth about uniformity of experience by getting them to describe their experiences more fully and in more depth. I also encouraged them to explore feelings emanating from their experiences so that they and others could hear similarities and differences or make connections with different aspects. This provoked further discussion among the students and some shared deeper, more personal feelings of fear and, as they spoke, they became very emotional and tearful. Oscar, looking tearful, reflected, **"Sometimes I look at why I am in social work**

also looking it as a black person in social work and I want to know what I am doing...(pause)".

I was touched, as he appeared very emotional as he asked such deep questions of himself. I noticed that I became very emotional and observed that the room was deadly silent with everyone attentively listening. He took the discussion from the conceptual mode, where the students were trying to make generalisations, operating from the cognitive, to the affective mode of emotions and feelings (Heron 1993), back into the self and the group was fully engaged. I asked Oscar, *"And what has been some of your answers to what you are doing here?"* In response he said, **"Well, (pause) I am just (pause) I know that I am intelligent and I have got a contribution to make and I have got a right to stand up and say things. Also in the future I want to develop myself, develop my skills in public speaking so that eventually I can stand up in front of these directors to get money to develop community programmes. But for a long time I did not see that I can do that".** I continued by asking, *"And now, has the process of education and training helped you to get there?"* I wanted to help him to know how he had gained confidence and to think how he could achieve his goals, and I also wanted to remind the group that this whole discussion was about them making sense of their process of education and training as black professionals.

I brought in other members of the group by linking what Oscar was saying with what had gone on before about feelings of shame. Oscar, I thought, was struggling to speak about his shame especially as he went on to speak about his family background, confidently introducing into the room members of his family who went to university. He thought he was not intelligent enough to enter university to do a degree like other members of his family. I reflected back to him confirming that he was here, now, in a university.

I summarised the discussion, by focusing on the general points made, and asked the group to consider what they would say about black students and learning at this stage of the discussion. At this crucial point I introduced the deeper point of the exercise and I underlined a vital piece of feedback. I wanted to demonstrate an appreciation of what had been said and what had been done. One student, Maryanne, read out something she had written:

"I have learnt from this experience that black student have an aptitude for this type of learning lots of reflective evaluating skills suited to academic learning using both sides of the brain".

This comment provides some evidence that I had achieved at least one of my objectives and that was to engage the students in holistic teaching and learning.

In the section that follows I offer further evidence of developments in my practice under the two central themes, empowerment and disempowerment and end with areas for further development.

Part 5
Reflective Evaluation of my practice

Empowerment

As a starting point I return to one of the questions that I set out at the beginning of this chapter – *"how do I provide a safe and supportive environment for students learning?"*
I tried to create a culture that was safe enough for students to feel that they could risk speaking out their experiences and in which they could feel listened to. Trust, safety, feeling listened to, being able to use your voice, and generating dialogue are some crucial ingredients for empowerment and I was pleased that the general feedback in this area affirmed the fact that I enabled the groups to work because there was trust and safety. Audrey commented on how she had experienced me help the group to feel safe,
"During this module Agnes helped the group to feel 'safe'. All the students had the right to voice their opinion and the right to be heard. Agnes made everyone feel equal. This included herself. She also used the term 'we black people' which helped the group to join and be more willing to talk openly...During this module Agnes made a great effort to encourage all students to be involved in the sessions. If you did not say anything Agnes would ask your opinion. Agnes made it clear that she was also learning and that the module was a learning process for all".

This statement also offers evidence to support one of my principles, which I referred to earlier, *"that students in my class should be actively engaged in their learning and that my teaching is interactive"*.

Richard noted how he was helped by the safety in the group:
"Group feeling safe and knowing that I could talk, be heard and listened to. The group was open and the trust was there".

I noticed that I was listening more attentively during the second cycle and the observer commented specially on the way I was listening in the second year and thought that I modelled this well for the students, who also listened well. She thought that I listened to content as well as process. This student commented on how he felt listened to:

"You listened to what I was saying and you were able to hear and understand what I was saying or trying to say. I felt heard by my contribution being validated by yourself and other members of the group"

My other claim is that "*I subscribe to student centered and self-directed learning*":
Student centered learning can also be empowering and the responsibility for learning was placed on the students, who were at the centre of the experience. I have become much more of a resource and consultant available to be called in to clarify, guide, discuss and support when needed by the self-directed, active learner. I have begun to focus on reflective learning rather than teaching or lecturing and to focus therefore, on a student-centred approach. Consequently, the amount of stand-up teaching I do has become greatly reduced, compared with my old approach. Maryanne confirmed this in her comment, "**Once I got to understand your teaching style after the first session, I recognised that we learnt from our interactions with each other, and that your role enabled us to become aware of and understand our internalised racism, for example, and most importantly it gave me knowledge of 'self'"**.

I have tried, in my teaching, to encourage the habit of reflection and to recognise the importance of learning which emerges from reflection. I have actively involved the students more in the learning and reflection process and encouraged them to reflect critically on practice to help with the integration of theory and practice. I wanted to help them with the dialectic relationship between theory and practice, the personal and the professional and the relationship between the micro and macro in understanding racism, particularly internalised racism. On what basis can I claim that the outcome of this was empowering? My main sources of evidence were my reflections, the feedback from the observer and students' feedback.

I offer a journal extract of my inquiry into how my practice was improving in terms of assisting students to use reflection as a learning tool. I wrote this during the second cycle of inquiry, based on a teaching session in the Black Workers Module, and I used a student's feedback as the basis for my reflection.

Extract (25-4-1998 – students quotes were noted during the session):

Today I experienced the integration of theory, practice and action in the making as I witnessed these black students demonstrating their learning and using their experience. As I write these words I feel full, my eyes filled with tears and I am feeling choked. I don't know what all this means but I imagine it's because I feel elated. I felt good, happy, pleased and excited at the end of the session today. During the session I felt relaxed as the group took control and dialogued, engaged in conversation. I witnessed before me evidence of the kind of teaching that I strive for. Now as I begin to reflect on it I cry the tears of joy. Joy at achieving what I felt I longed for and as students got up and walked out of the classroom one by one expressing their pleasure with the session, with their learning, muttering words of appreciation, I knew I 'got there'. I knew I achieved the kind of transformed classroom that I believe to be helpful to black students. What I saw happening was students engaging in conversation, talking and struggling to stay in dialogue as they tapped powerful feelings, relating their stories with passion.

For years I have wished for the moment when I see a black group spark with passion about their experiences; when they stay in struggle to express those experiences in ways that they could be heard by each other and appreciated for what they are saying and not judged negatively if they said something that was against the status quo. It was good to observe, contribute to and experience being in a group with black students where people listened, challenged themselves, encouraged others with their explorations. I enjoyed watching them give each other permission to get things wrong, not having the 'right' words to express themselves, saying 'tell it as it is', creating space and time for reflection.

I observed them putting into practice some of what I have encouraged and modelled, listening, assisting to articulate, allowing space for stories, going deeper. So when I heard someone say "its not as simple as that, it goes deeper than that" then proceed to explore deeper and inquire more into what they were saying, my heart warmed. So what I witnessed was a group of students empowering themselves. For many of the students it was the first time that they experienced truly dialoguing in an all black group that began with a story, or the relating of an experience and it was allowed to be explored and expanded without interrupting negatively or destructively. This was a different experience from that which has sometimes been reported of some black workers support groups.

There was still the usual competing for space, interruptions, raised voices and passionate expressions of disagreements, but this process was allowed, held and given permission by all not just me as the teacher. I

was not teaching from the front. This was truly self-directed teaching and learning. We came through the session feeling that we arrived somewhere we wanted to be. No one left the room when things got too difficult, too painful or too frustrating.

I witnessed the beginning with a story told by one of the students and the group evolving their story around his. They went through the tumble of the experiences tapping into their knowledge - historical, socio-political and economic- coming full circle back to the original story from the student with new understanding.

During that time I became aware of how much my practice had improved as a teacher and group facilitator. I started the session by offering the group an opportunity to take some control of the rest of the curriculum, turning over a few of the sessions to them. One person took up the offer and tested whether I was really giving them that amount of power and asked "do you mean today's session, when can we start?" I said yes although I had already planned the session. I did not feel tied to the session and knew that it could be done at another time. They had just had a four week break from college teaching, they had been in practice placements and as this was their first teaching session in college I wanted to give them the opportunity to ground themselves and share their experiences from practice.

Patrick began by relaying a story of an experience he had on his practice placement. He started by saying that he had an experience that made him more aware of the power of internalised racism and the impact it has had on him. He shared a story of his recent experience of a social work case conference he attended where he found himself among a group of professionals who happened to be all black except for one white man who was a client. His partner who was also a client was a black woman. This was an unusual situation for him to witness, as often it is the professionals who are all white and the client black. He noticed how uncomfortable he was in that all black setting and kept looking out for more white people to join the group. As he sat waiting for others to join the meeting, one by one as they came in he noticed that they were all black.

The chair of the conference was a black woman. He recalled how he became aware of his need to have more white people present as he noticed his discomfort during the proceedings. He also experienced huge discomfort with the black woman as chair. He said that he kept "looking out for her, for whether or not

she would get it right, whether she would make a mistake. I was anxious for her, anxious that she should do a good job". To his surprise the meeting went well and in his words, "the chair conducted herself competently". He was only able to relax after half way through the meeting when he realised that "she was not going to get it wrong".

He said that when he later reflected on that experience he "felt bad and ashamed, ashamed that I felt I needed more white people in the room". He related how he reflected on the work he did in this module where we explored expectations of black managers and remembered the list his working group arrived at and how unrealistic they were being. He realised that he had unrealistically high expectations of the black woman chair. "I did not want her to let me down, she was not allowed to be herself, but in that position as a black woman she was representing the black community. She had to be the perfect role model".

He reflected that experience in the group, demonstrating in that process his learning, awareness, noticing, reflecting and theorising about internalised racism. He reflected on the fact that he had internalised that black people was not as competent as white people that is why they did not occupy many power positions in social services departments, so these professionals at the case conference could not hold such power and authority. He said he caught himself thinking that they were not competent enough. He knew about internalised racism but experiencing it in that way made him feel that he came to know it again in a different way. He was demonstrating his renewed sense of knowing in his sensemaking. The group, witnessing this took on to do the same by adding their voices to the story, making connections with their own experiences of racism in terms of power and powerlessness.. They reflected on the gender and race issues and the position of men and women in society, the different power positions black women hold in welfare organisations as compared to black men who occupy less powerful positions.

During that exploration I noticed how much I was asking inquiry questions and speaking to the process in the room, in the present. I have noticed that I have done that more this year with this group paying attention to process and content, generating theoretical ideas about, and from the process. I was working at multiple levels, the individual, group and drawing conclusions about issues that black communities and society need to pay attention to.

What is evident from this extract is that this student's (Patrick) learning was gained from practicing reflection-in-action and both he and the other students were engaging in critical

reflection and critical thinking during the discussion. This supported my claim to having a "*political orientation towards critical thinking and self-actualisation*".

Partick's feedback, in the extract, and other students' feedback supported my claim " *I see students as bringing special knowledge, experience and skills to a course and I wish to encourage the development of knowledgeable and skilled practitioners who can also offer critical questioning*".

I helped the students to reflect on their experience, review it and attribute some meaning to it so that they did not necessarily react to life as a series of happenings which passed through their systems undigested. I helped them to conceptualise by asking them to say what sense they made of discussions, the meanings they attached to their statements and the significance for them of incidents or stories asked them to be aware of the mutual influence of these on each other. Whether or not they considered the happenings or events as racism, they needed to appreciate that 'happenings' become experience when they are digested, when they are reflected on and synthesised.

The observer's feedback from both cycles of inquiry also confirmed that I had worked well with the stories from the students, helping them to reflect on the meaning of their stories and, at the same time, helping them to integrate aspects of 'self'. Cathy cited the exploration of the students' experiences of academia and commented: "for example, when you asked good questions: what would have helped? What's your part in all of this? What is your fantasy of academic language? Where are you now with the issues of the practical and academic? Also focusing on how they broke the cycle of fear. Here you were trying to help them to interpret their experiences and different aspects of themselves". This, she thought, was powerful and resulted in empowering others to 'speak out' from 'self'.

From the students feedback there appeared to be evidence of greater self-confidence, which flowed from a better understanding of self as a result of critical reflection on their experience. Kyle said, **"Taking part in this group was challenging because I had to confront the things I really feel and experience as a black female, and how I feel about my own black people...You alerted me to the work I need to do for myself which is about learning to appreciate and validate my experiences, thoughts, beliefs for myself; without relying on external validation consistently".**

And Jennifer commented

" I was beginning to learn about myself as a black individual, and how my ethnicity affected and informed my interventions with other individuals. I feel that I was arriving at some points of discovery concerning myself and myself in relation to others. My involvement within this group left me with some follow-up work for my own personal inquiry, and I am thankful that I have had the opportunity for these personal and professional issues to have been brought to my awareness".

As the students reflected on their own experiences they were take possession of them in new ways and gained, for themselves, knowledge that was true and authentic. Polanyi (1958), states that all knowledge has a tacit dimension through which understanding is possible, but experience alone does not lead to knowledge. Rational reflection upon examination of an experience is necessary to develop one's understanding. Polanyi calls this 'personal knowledge'.

In order to help students learn through reflection on their experiences there was a need to help them make the tacit explicit. In so doing, they were able to re-examine their experiences and learn from them in new ways which might not initially have been apparent. Through deliberately and purposefully reconsidering their experiences and by reviewing their thoughts and actions in the light of this type of rational reflection, they might have gained a deeper understanding of their experiences. That was reflected in Josephine's statement, "I had to think about issues I never gave much thought to before, for example, black professionals and my expectations of them. I understand their role now and about professionalism. It does not mean that because some black professionals appear unapproachable that they have lost their identity. I am looking at things objectively and feeling more positive about myself as a professional".

This comment confirms my belief that it is through developing a critical awareness of their subjective selves that the students would begin to see others as different and not judge each other so negatively. It is through their process of re-examination that they would begin to understand wider social, political and cultural processes which are responsible for producing their individual situations, both their own and each others. It is through new lenses that they would be able to understand the nature of oppression. To acquire these new lenses they would need to confront their internalised racism and I wanted to offer them the tools for doing so.

I took a questioning approach and modelled, I hoped, healthy questioning and challenging, although some of the feedback confirms that I would need to improve this area as my style of challenging was disempowering for some students. This was confirmed in the feedback from both cycles of inquiry.

Disempowerment

Having learnt from the first observation, and in feedback from students, that my style of challenging created a lack of safety in some students or silenced them I worked to improve this. In the second cycle I tried not to challenge their defences 'full frontally' by focusing too much on getting them to think or pressing them too hard to say what they thought. I have noticed a change, which has been confirmed by later feedback from students who said that they felt safe enough to share and to make themselves more vulnerable. However, it appeared from the feedback that I still need to pay attention to my style of questioning and be less direct.

The observer thought that my questions were challenging and had a positive effect in that they focused the discussion, helped the students to explore further and think more deeply. However, there was a double edge to some of my questioning. She cited an example of challenge to a student about her use of terminology. She commented, "You asked, what is that when it's at home? It's double edged because a) it's helping people to keep their feet on the ground, but b) it could make them feel self conscious about their new use of language which is needed for the professional era we are in. You may run the risk of perpetuating their fear of 'not knowing', not knowing how to use the academic language ". She also thought that my questions were incisive, enlightening and got to the heart of the matter, but the way I asked them could sometimes startle some students.

It was obvious that my style of challenging was problematic for some students. Although some students were helped to think with my challenging questions, others found them uncomfortable and were silenced by them. Craig captured the impact on him in this statement, **"Often too much challenging feels threatening and uncomfortable for the individual. It also makes the person feel worried about sharing their views openly for fear of embarrassment, or criticism from you".**

What have I learnt from my inquiring into my practice?

The use of action research approach grounded in reflective practice in the classroom, has been a potent learning experience as well as a satisfying one. I have learnt about the importance of critically evaluating my practice in that I was able to use reflection to value my expertise whilst being open to new ways of working. I have learnt that if we are committed to improving what we do, reflection helps us 'face up' to the situation we are in and, through reflection-in-action undertaken sensitively as we work, we can respond creatively in a way that will make a difference in the here and now. I have also appreciated that sustained improvement of practice relies on what Schon (1992) calls 'reflection on action', looking back and evaluating and learning from what we have done in order to develop 'intelligence in action' when difficult, on-the-spot judgements have to be made.

I have become aware that the problem with reflection-in-action is that the practitioner may not be aware that this is what they are doing at the time. It was only through retrospective reflection, when I analysed what I had done, that I became aware that reflection-in-action had taken place. I have appreciated, above all, that critical reflection can counter inequalities in practice and that reflection is a necessary component of critical practice. Critical reflection requires an awareness and commitment to anti-oppressive practice. To achieve reflective, anti-oppressive practice the practitioner has systematically and 'self' consciously to 'reflect-in-', and 'on-', action. I have learnt the importance of a conscious, reflective process, of 'constantly checking back with the value-base (empowerment) not only on what is being done but 'how' and 'why' it is being done.

The other most significant learning for me has been the consistency in the feedback that I have received about how challenging I am and both the positive and negative impact this has on learners. I have also been given the opportunity to explore further the importance of being an 'educator' and a 'teacher' and the similarities and differences between two.

Consequently, I have become more aware of the way I produce knowledge and I am behaving more self-consciously about it. I work to assist the students to do the same, encouraging them to question the nature of knowledge and how it is produced. On a personal level, I have chosen to make myself more vulnerable in my teaching and to allow the students to see more of 'me'. I speak more from 'I' revealing my passion and exposing my feelings more. I pay attention to my inner reactions, noticing my fear, if I feel

fear and also noticing when I am becoming defensive and blocking my learning. I have begun to notice more how I listen to what is being communicated holistically and not just what is said. This may have resulted in what some of the reports from students revealed regarding their experience of me as their role model. I have ambivalent feelings about this. I am motivated to be and at the same time defensive about being a role model because of some students' feedback of their idealised 'god-like' image of me. It has made me realise that I may also fear the 'god-like' in me and that although I am fascinated by it, I am also fearful of it. I realise also that it is also human to feel that way.

I have become more aware of the skills that are needed for working in an empowering way and have reflected on those I have. Some of these are:

- My therapeutic skills of listening, reflecting back, being specific, questioning, checking for clarity
- My ability to give clear and specific feedback
- My ability to work at a different levels, listening for meanings at a meta level
- Reflective skills – self-reflection
- My ability to work with process and to make tacit knowledge explicit
- Making connections between the micro and the macro – making links between the internal and external, intuitive and cognitive

And when I am working effectively with those skills, I:

- stimulate thinking by assisting students to explore deeper and inquire so that they would develop the skills of reflection and critical evaluation
- take on board different views and work with difference
- am able to think on my feet
- present my 'self' with a sense of a strong, black identity
- command listening and respect with my presence
- enable learners to get their voice heard
- validate students experiences and assist them to value their ways of 'knowing'
- assist students to speak from 'I'
- work to provide clarity

When I reflect back on the second part of my inquiry question as to whether my practice needs improving the answer is that it does because whilst there were a variety of ways in which I tried to empower the students and myself as an educator, there were also ways in

which I was being contradictory. There are areas of my practice that require further development. I need to:

- pay attention to working with appropriate use of my power
- offer more supportive challenge and less 'spotlighting' of learners
- develop further my skills in asking simple questions and inquiry questions
- develop working more holistically
- continue to work with my vulnerability and to value my strength in it
- facilitate in a more caring way, taking care of my feelings as well as those of the students

Concluding comments

Reflecting on Evaluating in Practice

In this research inquiry I have reflected on my knowing-in- practice. During the process of evaluation I have come to understand and value it more and see it both as evaluating *on* practice and evaluating –in- practice. I engaged in evaluating on practice when I recollected or anticipated in relative quiet and calm. When I evaluated-in-practice I was engaged in 'disciplined subjectivity', thinking on my feet and giving accounts of my way of working.

I experienced my inquiry as a social rather than a solitary activity, social in the sense of a collective activity with students with negotiated purposes and consequences, bringing in a collaborative dimension. In this way it had a public dimension. I had a purpose which was to evaluate my practice both for my own learning and the learning of others. As an evaluative practitioner I have generated knowing-in-action. Donald Schon (1983) summarises part of what this means for good professional practice:

"In his everyday practice he makes innumerable judgements of quality for which he cannot state adequate criteria, and he displays skills for which he cannot state the rules and procedures. Even when he makes conscious use of research-based theories and techniques, he is dependent on tacit assumptions, judgements and skilful performances.

For me, there is little doubt that undertaking this action inquiry was an intervention in the normal process of my teaching which has increased my skills in reflection in action. I know that throughout the entire teaching of this module I reflected on my work and did not simply isolate a couple of sessions for attention because of this inquiry. I believe I also modelled an approach to thinking and reflecting about practice and coupled this with

my probing of individual's thoughts and views. Each individual was able to make her or his own mind about how much (if any) of what was happening to her/him needed to be incorporated in her/his own practice.

I do not believe that my way of working is novel or unique and I did not emerge from my inquiry with novel ideas about my practice. Inquiry into my practice has revealed to me ways in which I have not been empowering, and also ways in which I have been.

This chapter is technically a representation of the end of my research journey. However, in the next section of the thesis I continue on my journey with the thesis, to present evidence of the knowledge gained from my inquiries and offer my theoretical ideas.

CLOSING THE THESIS

I emerged after a long and fruitful journey with a great deal of thoughts about our experiences as black professionals and black students and I generated some ideas for development and change. I am, therefore, choosing an unconventional way of concluding the writing in this thesis by using the next four chapters to write about my concluding thoughts and ideas.

The research journey affirmed, for me, a need for approaches and strategies for dealing with the issues pertaining to black professionals and black students' experiences. Therefore, I have identified a need for finding ways to address teaching and learning with black students and working with black professionals that could be empowering. So I began in Chapter 11 by advocating an approach to working with black professionals and black students. I then go on, in Chapter 12, to suggest ways in which these ideas could be applied to education for liberation with black students. I continue, in Chapter 13 with a discussion of the role of black academics and the contribution they could make in contributing to change.

Remaining conscious of the personal journey I have undertaken and the impact it has had on my life, I have chosen to use the final chapter, Chapter 14, to reflect on my development, the changes and transformation that have resulted and to comment on my learning about change.

Chapter 11

Advocating a Critical Educative Approach

Introduction

In this chapter I am advocating an approach for working with black professionals and students which I term a Critical Educative Approach. The knowledge and experience that inform this approach were gained from the co-operative inquiry and from my action inquiry. My experience as a black teacher in a university and my general experience as a community educator and activist also inform the ideas underpinning this approach.

A critical educative approach is informed by assumptions and ongoing analysis of the impact of socio-cultural and socio-political factors on the presenting issues of black professionals and black students. This structuralist perspective is viewed as an integral component of their educative process. It stresses the need for a clear recognition of the social realities of racism and oppression and how they can operate to impact the experiences of black professionals and students. Different forms of oppression need to be understood as component parts of a whole system of domination, thereby incorporating a holistic perspective. This perspective offers a framework for understanding the social and psychological distress black professionals and black students endure as a result of racism and oppression; places an emphasis on identifying and building on the strengths of black professionals and students.

This proposed critical educative approach has the potential to inform and guide those working with black professionals and students, whom I shall refer to in this Chapter as practitioners, (meaning academics), researchers, teachers and other professionals, in bringing cultural and political realities into their work with black professionals and students. It also has the potential to assist black professionals and black students to challenge negative (societal) representations with an increased sense of self-identity and dignity.

I am not advocating the uniqueness of this approach, as it shares many elements of the theoretical models I advocated in Chapter 2. A black perspective and empowerment model together with a coherent critical theoretical framework which adopts both a model which addresses power and oppression, and a model which views identities in multiple

ways are already available in essence in the works of (Friere, 1972; hooks, 1981; Hall, 1992). An integration of these ideas is rooted in a critical educative approach. So the approach I am advocating can be conceptualised as an integrative framework which is not wedded to any specific theoretical or practice model. I have extracted from these, key concepts such as identity, empowerment, structuralist and holistic which I shall go on to discuss.

Identity and empowerment

One of the key goals of a critical, educative approach is to liberate the black professional and student to become the subject of his/her biography rather than a victim or rendered invisible in the "narrative" of others. In this sense, it takes on a perspective of identity and empowerment. Working with the notion of identity it is important to understand that black professionals and students are not uni-dimensional entities. The complexity of modern life requires us to assume different identities which may conflict as identities become diverse and change both in the social contexts in which they are experienced and in the symbolic systems through which we make sense of our positions.

We have 'multiple identities' in that not only are we black but also simultaneously male and female, mother and father, manager and worker, lecturer and student, practitioner and client, disabled – non-disabled, lesbian/gay or heterosexual (Derman-sparks, 1994). We bring these multiple identities to our relationships with one another and with the organisation. In our professional lives we may experience tensions between our different identities, when what is required by one may infringe upon the demands of another. In addition, each of us is potentially both oppressor and oppressed in that we may have attributes which carry power and privilege as well as attributes which render us oppressed. For example, black lecturers and black managers are in positions of both the oppressor and oppressed. We are in positions of privilege and power, by virtue of our status in educational institutions and organisations, as well as being discriminated against structurally as black people who are placed on the margins of these organisations and institutions. We are not marginal in the sense of being completely outside of the organisation. We are also inside the structure which makes us 'beings for others' (Friere, 1972).

We are at the centre, where power resides, and subject to being oppressors. As a consequence of internalised oppression we sometimes replay the fixed categories, fixed identities of oppressor-oppressed. 'The oppressor within' each of us can be said to be

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socially conditioned to 'act out' the oppression perpetrated upon us. Having gained some measure of power this can be power to oppress. Individuals inhabiting a space of dominance sometimes construct a sense of self through the denigration of 'others'. This thinking challenges idealistic notions that the experience of oppression automatically bestows insight, transferability of understanding or compassionate empathy with the suffering of others (Mcdonald and Coleman 1999).

If black professionals and black students are to be liberated to become subjects and to be visible it is important that the relationship between oppressor and oppressed is challenged not only in terms of white oppressor/black victim(s) but also in terms of black oppressor/black victim(s). We need to pay attention to the ways in which we oppress each other in our interactions. One way in which we can make sense of our interactive relationship as black professionals and black students is by working with the notion of *self* and *other*. "Self" in this context could be viewed as the coloniser or oppressor, and the idea of "other" is viewed as the colonised or oppressed.

I agree with Hall (1992) when he states that *self* and *other* are not fixed categories but should be seen as fluid. According to Fine (1994) these categories can be joined by a *hyphen* and we should examine that *hyphen*. If we adapt Fine's idea of *'working the hyphen'* and we examine the hyphen at which *self-other join* in the politics of everyday life, that is the hyphen which both separates and merges personal identities with our inventions of others, we will find blurred boundaries. In the hyphen sit for us many complexities, dilemmas, and contradictions (see appendix1). We need to investigate what is in between. Unearthing the blurred boundaries between is a critical task for us.

By "working the hyphen", I mean to suggest that professionals, practitioners, managers researchers should investigate how they act in relation to students, clients, workers, research participants etc., understanding that we are multiple in these relations and we bring to them multiple identities. We should work the hyphen, both when we interact with one another and when we opt to engage in social struggles with others who have been exploited or are having difficulty in sorting out their identity. The process might reveal far more about our *'selves'*, and far more about the structures of *'othering'* and how, for example, we are prevented from truly meeting one another. Eroding the fixedness of categories allows each one of us to enter and play with the blurred boundaries that proliferate.

Working the hyphen means creating occasions for professionals to examine what is and is not "happening between". So for interventions to be successful with black professionals and black students, practitioners should move towards perspectives which emphasise fostering multiple identities, which include a black identity, within a social, historical and black cultural context. Practitioners need to be attentive to fostering self-identity, dignity, and an integrated gender and racial identity when addressing social, psychological and political issues with black professionals and black students. An empowerment perspective and a culturally and oppression–sensitive approach to work with black professionals and students is also suggested. This may require the formation of relationships so that a discourse partnership can be realised and difference celebrated. We will need to take neither our own view nor the view of the other as being specially privileged but will need to enter into a genuine dialogue in which the various standpoints remain intact. This will require understanding of the experiences of black professionals and black students and an appreciation that anti-oppressive work needs to be placed in a broader context than the personal 'I'.

Structuralist View integrated with a Holistic View

A commitment to diversity, anti-racism and anti-oppression needs to be viewed as part of a larger movement for social change designed to affect societal norms and institutions beyond the individual level. Effective service or intervention would, therefore, need to be about challenging the broader context that people live in, in order to change social structures at a number of levels. This requires us to take a holistic view, which means considering issues from both an interpersonal and structural perspective, whilst emphasising that the two are related. Individuals as well as institutions can perpetuate oppression.

The subtle forms of racism in British society have an accumulative impact on black people. Derman-Sparks (1994) suggests that we grow up in a 'psychologically toxic environment' with the result that, by the time we reach university, we have a lot of uncovering to do. So, for example, by the time some black students enter social work training, having lived in a 'psychologically toxic environment' there is a considerable amount of uncovering which needs to be done. I am referring here to stages of psychological development in terms of a black identity that relates to the position of students in relation to the racism-power issue. Those of us who train black students and black professionals may need to work out how to identify what stages people are at and develop different teaching and learning methods as well as adapting different values in

order to help black students and black professionals at various stages. This might mean helping people to work at a feeling level as well as a cognitive level. It might also mean assisting black professionals and students to manage inter-group relations and processes.

As discussed in Chapter 7 experiences revealed in the Co-operative Inquiry showed that black professionals and students are concerned about the fact that some of the ways in which they interact produces negative experiences. Fighting amongst ourselves or devaluing one another's identity does not serve us well as black professionals and black students and our actions require attention. Engaging in what hooks (1981), and Richie (1996) describe as 'horizontal hostility' powerfully maintains the status quo. Horizontal hostility feeds the blaming of victims of inequality by victims of other injustices. Similarly, at a structural level, infighting between and amongst groups of people at the margin is in the interests of those at 'the centre', who maintain a 'divide and rule' position (Friere, 1972). At the heart of this dynamic lies supremacist belief in one group's 'natural' rights to privilege. The critical educative approach calls for simultaneous intervention at all levels (micro and macro) which targets affective, cognitive and systematic change.

Intervention with a critical educative approach when working with black professionals and black students requires that the following principles should be adopted: -

1. There should be recognition of the systemic and societal context of racism and oppression and that social ideologies are infused with the virulent disease of racism. Such recognition allows practitioners, black professionals and black students to become aware of how their lived experience (or personal narrative) has been impacted by these forces

2. Effective educative intervention should be based on a deliberate effort by both practitioners, black professionals and black students to be aware of how their location or position within the social political order shapes their identities and the content and context of the relevant relationship

3. There should be identification of personal narratives and language that reinforce a sense of empowerment, pejorative classifications of difference, or a truncated sense of self-esteem; identification, for example, of dichotomous or binary thinking, such as superior/inferior or good /bad as exemplified by white people are good, therefore superior, and black people are bad, therefore inferior.

4. There should be support for black professionals and black students in their work toward social change by challenging anti-black racism and other forms of bias encountered within their environment.

5. There should be support of self-assertion and re-affirmation of both racial and gender identity, as well as development of a more integrated identity as black professionals and black students.

A critical educative approach might be able to offer the practitioner the opportunity to recognise the "multiple voices" and "multiple realities" of the heterogeneous population of black professionals and black students. Each voice is liberated to speak its own reality and is not confined to a metanarrative of the entire population of black people in Britain or of all black professionals and black students.

The proposed critical educative approach facilitates a process in which black professionals and black students become aware of being the "creator" and owner of their own destinies. Once empowered by a sense of selfhood, black professionals and black students can take action to change the debilitating social structures around them.

What methodological approach should be adopted when working with a critical educative approach in order that black professionals and black students should gain a sense of empowerment and be liberated?

Methodology

A key element, in using a critical educative approach with black professionals and black students, is developing a critical consciousness which involves a *dialogical approach* to relationship building and engagement. It requires *critical reflection* as a part of the assessment and intervention process, and promotes *readiness toward action* as part of the intervention planning, (Friere, 1972). The phases of engagement are reflective dialogue, assessment as critical reflection, and intervention as liberating action, which I shall discuss below.

Reflective Dialogue

With a critical educative approach the first step is to engage black professionals and black students, through the medium of trust, in a relationship of reflective dialogue. Here, the practitioner listens to the black professional/students' stories and explores their unique life experiences as they relate to personal problems. The practitioner also inquires about broad ethno-cultural factors, such as race, class, culture and gender and

their impact on the persons (self) "narratives" as well as their impact on the problem, issues, and subject.

A working alliance, which includes agreement between all parties on the desired goals and outcomes of the relationship and agreement on the respective tasks to be undertaken by the practitioner and black professional or student so as to accomplish the work of problem solving, is critical. There is a great need to pay attention to the elements that can impact the working alliance. Obvious elements are race and gender. In the broader social context, race and gender have clear power implications and certain members of social groups, on the basis of their race and gender, have more status, privilege, and power than members of other social groups. The working relationship has a potential for replicating these broader social dynamics.

These power and control dynamics may impact negatively on the willingness of black professionals and black students to emotionally invert the relationship and thus have a negative impact on trust. These factors can become particularly salient in cross-racial and cross-gender relationships. One method suggested in the literature which may help to achieve this sense of trust is to allow the professional or student to express a degree of skepticism without the practitioner overly interpreting it (Franklin, 1992). To overly interpret might place the practitioner in a superior position and the dialogical relationship should involve the practitioner in taking a non-hierarchical position in the relationship. She/he should be more of a "cultural consultant" to the black student and black professional. Efforts should be made to describe the professional or student in language that is mutual, culturally sensitive and oppression-sensitive. For example, in research, working towards becoming co-researchers or participants rather than subjects or objects or, in higher education institutions, working towards all parties becoming educators and learners rather than teachers and students. The person becomes a partner with the practitioner in exploring different and more empowering "ways of being" and "ways of being black". The process of becoming a partner is not a simple one since there are always power issues to wrestle with.

As the practitioner assumes this position in the dialogical relationship, he or she should be aware of his or her own social position (i.e. race, gender and class) within the sociocultural and economic milieu. For example, the black teacher would need to look at their status and the power that goes with it in the classroom. The white male manager would need to pay attention to his race, gender and status position in the organisation. The practitioners' social location shapes the social context of these relationships and

significantly impacts upon the dynamics of power. The dynamics of power and control are significant in work with black professionals and black students regardless of the race or gender of the practitioner.

Assessment as Critical Reflection

Understanding and assessing the problems and issues which confront black professionals and black students requires a broad conceptual lens which can embrace multiple levels of assessment. In this co-investigation of the personal, social and ethnocultural realities of black professionals and black students both practitioner and professional/student identify these meaningful themes related to socio political and relational constraints in their personal experiences when reflecting on their life experiences (Korin, 1992). What follows this stage is a process in which problems and contradictions in experience are identified and reflected on, with an emphasis on the contextual issues. As examination of and reflection on the contradictions takes place, changes occur. The problems are redefined and an unfolding "restorying" process is initiated, whilst a new liberating perspective is identified (Laird, 1989).

This liberating perspective is not just intrapersonal or interpersonal. It takes on the quality of understanding how the black professional's and black student's social, cultural, political and economic contexts impact on their sense of personal and social power. This process encourages a reconnection with self and culture. It also allows one to be aware of the ability to reconstruct one's own reality. To arrive at this stage requires one to ask critical reflective questions.

Critical Reflection Questions
Ivey (1995, pp68-69) provided some assessment questions which I found helpful and which I have adapted for the inclusion in a critical educative approach. Such critical reflective questions could include:
1. What is common to our stories? What are the patterns (themes)?
2. How do we think about these stories, and how could we think about them differently?
3. What parts of our stories relate to our conception of self, resulting from family, history, and our cultural background? How do the two relate?
4. What parts of us do internal forces and what parts external forces drive? How can we tell the difference?
5. Standing back, what inconsistencies and contradictions can we identify?

6. What does our family, education, work history say about development and operation of oppression?

7. What shall we do? How should we do it together? What is our objective and how can we work together effectively?

All these questions are not gender or race specific, they can be modified and adapted for use with black professionals and students. These questions have experiential and existential import; that is; they connect the issues with the larger socio-political themes which concern black professionals and black students. These questions also allow for a critical inquiry into the specific social context(s) or social location(s) in which the multiple experiences of a black professional or black student are embedded. What is important is that inquiry does not end with single-issue understanding but progresses instead to 'radically reform our intervention paradigm', to 'analyse experience in a way that looks at the interaction of oppression' (Richie 1996). This inquiry allows both the practitioner and the professional or student to identify the unique impact of their experiences of oppression and the inherent contradictions emerging from their position within *multiple* socio-political locations. Equally important, this critical reflection also allows for an understanding of whether the professional or student has internalised narratives that are supportive, liberating and potentiating or narratives which are constructive or destructive. It allows for the creation of alternative narratives which are potentially liberating.

Intervention as Liberating Action

"Liberation is achieved through the capacity to understand the internalisation of oppression through narratives that prescribe behaviours from the oppressor and to say "No" to those prescriptions" (Rasheed and Rasheed, 1999, p.58).

Liberating action gives birth to a state of critical consciousness. Liberating action then becomes the basis and goal of intervention with black professionals and black students as critical reflection and action become the basis for personal, interpersonal and social change. Franz Fanon (1967) gives direction to the need for liberating action; he states:

"When the Negro makes contact with the white world, a certain sensitizing action takes place. If his psychic structure is weak, one observes a collapse of the ego. The black man stops behaving as an actional person. The goal of his behaviour will be the 'Other' (in guise of a White man). For the 'Other' alone can give his worth...self esteem"(p.154).

Friere (1972) echoes these sentiments when he states,

"One of the base elements of the relationship between the oppressors and oppressed is prescription. Every prescription represents the imposition of one man's choice upon another, transforming the consciousness of the man transcribed to into one that conforms with the prescriber's consciousness. Thus, the behaviour of the oppressed is prescribed behaviour, following as it does the guidelines of the oppressor. The oppressed having internalised the image of the oppressor and adopted his guidelines are fearful of freedom. Freedom would require them to reject this image and replace it with autonomy and responsibility. Freedom is acquired by conquest, not by gift. It must be pursued constantly and responsibly. Freedom is not an ideal located outside of man" (p.31).

As Friere points out, this sense of autonomy may not easily be achieved; it requires inner struggle that leads to outside action. Such action might begin with reauthoring ones narrative. Wimberly (1997) articulates the nature of this struggle as he describes the process of reauthoring one's narrative. Life narratives (Worldviews) emerge from the lived experiences of the narrator and are given meaning through the process of social interaction. They are often fixed and have a sense of ontological authenticity. Significant life transitions and crises however can challenge these narratives. Such crises can shatter the existing narrative and thus precipitate a restorying process which enables a person to meet new challenges or to explain a current situation that has great emotional significance. Re-authoring, re-storying, or re-editing one's narrative can open up new possibilities that otherwise might be hidden and not allowed to come forth. White and Epston (1990), describe this process as discovering hidden possibilities or "historically unique outcomes" (p.56).

As black professionals and students our movement towards liberating action would, therefore, involve narrative and cognitive methods that can help us cope with anger, frustration and stress. We can achieve this by challenging limiting narratives that habitually cause rage or stress reactions and develop more effective ways of coping with stress and anger through reauthored narratives and new behaviours. In this way some negative experiences can be re-edited or re-authored to produce more positive experiences.

We have to be extremely careful, however, not to believe or convey the belief that the problems facing black professionals and students can always be eradicated quickly, solely through a change of cognition or perceptions. Nevertheless, this approach does have empowering implications in its ability to enhance coping by countering negative internalised narratives or self talk. Of equal importance is that this approach can enhance self worth and move black professionals and students towards creating more

empowering (personal) narratives and a heightened sense of social and political consciousness and activity.

Our re-authored narratives could result in a capacity to see the world through the eyes of white professionals and white students and of white communities. This could increase our empathy with white professionals and students as well as enable us to challenge them. The outcome could be a challenge to an internalised, eurocentric perspective in favour of a more communal, egalitarian position which is more representative of a black perspective frame of reference. Such narratives can support the effort to understand of male/female relationships, black/black relationships and black/white relationships in new and more potentiating ways. It should promote a greater sense of connectedness to our history and struggles.

Another more crucial step in the process of developing interventions to support liberating action is mobilising black professionals and student's to change their context. Here, black academics and practitioners can help by facilitating the movement of black professionals and students towards transforming their lives and challenging limiting situations or personal and social problems which constrain or marginalise their potential. I shall go on in chapter 13 to expand on the role of the black academics in this regard. I shall now offer a summary of this chapter and a conclusion.

Summary

The emphasis, in this Chapter, has been on how critical social theory, critical consciousness, and a black perspective are important elements within the total gestalt of the critical educative approach. These theories help to contextualise the (individualised) meaning of the lived experiences of black professionals and students by locating our experiences within a specific historical, economic, political, and socio-cultural context. This is an important feature considering that black professionals' and black students' experiences are largely and objectively negative, oppressive, non-affirming and depotentiating. Hence, the need for interventions with black professionals and black students which are driven by a critical educative perspective which has to integrate the "deconstructionist" quality inherent the critical consciousness perspectives. Practitioners would need, therefore, to empower black professionals and students to become agents of their own choices by first encouraging them to tell their individual stories and then by helping them to deconstruct immobilizing and marginalising narratives and later reconstruct these stories in a way which empowers them. These re-storying processes

should also be directed at macro and micro levels of intervention in order that practitioners do not become co-authors of denial and "gatekeepers" of the status quo in their work with black professionals and black students. In the following two chapters I shall explore, in more detail, the application of this approach with black students and black professionals and the role of teachers and black academics in education for liberation. But in the meantime I shall conclude the following: -

Conclusion

Liberation in the context of the critical educative approach for black professionals and black students is not just a movement towards self-transformation, developing a sense of hyper-individuality, or achieving (ego) autonomy from the social order. Liberating action also involves the professional or student and practitioner in jointly developing strategies for the professional or student's connection to a communal perspective. The goal of intervention is to facilitate a connection with a black perspective worldview and with the existing latent and potential strength that resides within black communities.

Chapter 12

How should black students be empowered to learn in order that they may engage in personal and social transformation?

Introduction

In this chapter I discuss the application of the critical educative approach to teaching and learning with black social work students. I am advocating ways of working with black students so that their experiences can be more positive and empowering. In my discussions, I have included data from students who have been part of the action research into my practice and who shared their experiences, of teaching, learning and writing of academic essays in class discussions. I have also included feedback from students who have read drafts of this chapter and a chapter on writing which is not included in this thesis.

I want to suggest an approach to learning which is holistic in nature and which has a political perspective which could lead to individual empowerment that has the capacity for social change and transformation. A holistic approach that should involve developing a critical understanding of key concepts of 'oppression', 'racism and anti-racism', anti-oppression and a black perspective in social work education. It also calls the teacher to engage with the student at all three levels of learning, cognitive, affective and effective, and calls on the student to develop critical thinking.

Such an approach challenges teachers and learners alike to create a climate conducive to empowerment of black students in social work education. I have adapted Shor's idea of empowering education, which is: "A critical-democratic pedagogy for self and social change...The goals of this pedagogy are to relate personal growth to public life, by developing strong skills, academic knowledge, habits of inquiry and critical curiosity about society, power, inequality and change...empowering education invites students to become skilled workers and thinking citizens who are also change agents and social critics (Shor, 1992, pp. 15, 16).

Another challenge for teachers might be to work from a perspective that would be, in effect, black because the central task would be "... to confront the students' (black and white) previous socialisation and learning (which, having been brought up in a racist society, has been based on both the essentialisation and racialisation of such notions as 'normal', 'deviant', 'commonsense' and 'human nature'), not by some abstract concept but through the positive celebration of difference" (Singh 1996, p.41).

However, before getting to a position of celebrating difference, there are dynamics to be understood and managed in terms of the tensions, dilemmas and potential conflicts that sometimes arise as people engage in the process of acknowledging and accepting difference. Some teachers and students may not want to engage with the tensions and conflicts that working with difference sometimes brings because this may be too challenging.

A further challenge for teachers and students might be to understand the socio-political context of the students in terms of institutional racism in higher education and its impact on their learning. This would challenge teachers and students to examine their behaviours and practices and, for some, this might be a painful process. However, it would be a necessary requirement for working with the approach I am advocating.

An additional challenge would be to understand and rethink the ways students are socialised in learning and the impact of the traditional model of teaching and learning on black students. What models of socialisation have black students been socialised into? What are the socio-political factors that need to be understood in order to work with this holistic approach. I shall consider, below, some answers to these questions and then outline what the holistic approach would involve.

Socio-political considerations – black students position in the classroom

Black students enter higher education institutions in Britain and their voices have been neither heard nor welcomed in these institutions. A traditional role of the university is pursuit of truth and the sharing of knowledge and information; however, the prevalence of racism has distorted truth and the sharing of knowledge so that university education is no longer about the practice of liberation. The politics of race and gender within white, educational establishments grant white male teachers "authority" without their having to express the desire for it. Their belief is that they are intellectually superiority being white and male, and their experiences are more important than those of any other group; this gives them their right to their authority.

Such systems of domination in the classroom silence the voices of black students. Although some teachers actively seek to create a learning environment in which students from marginal groups are given a voice, most black students are not comfortable in exercising this right particularly if it means they must give voice to thoughts, ideas, feelings which go against the grain and are unpopular. In discussions with black

students, during my action research into my practice, when I was challenging students to use their voices one student said, referring to her general experience of higher education, **"I don't dare use my voice because I am worried about the feedback from some white lecturers. I know there will be a powerful 'comeback from them. I am frightened that what I have to say will not be accepted and that I would be rejected especially if I talk about racism. You can see from their reactions that it is a problem for them, I become a problem and they don't want to hear what I have to say or believe me when I speak of racist experience"**.

This censoring process is only one way in which white middle-class values of institutional learning over-determine social behaviour in the classroom and undermine democratic exchanges of ideas. hooks (1994) argues that black students in the university setting, who are unwilling to accept without question the assumptions and values held by privileged classes of teachers, tend to be silenced and deemed troublemakers. Such students often express to me their frustration, anger and sadness about the tensions and stress they experience when trying to conform to acceptable, white, middle-class, behaviours in university settings. They often take on being "objects" and assume a position of passivity. They behave as victims, as though they can be only acted upon. Some end up feeling they can only reject or accept the norms imposed on them. This often sets them up for failure because they feel that their ways of knowing are seldom either acknowledged or allowed to co-exist, in a non-hierarchical way, with other ways of knowing.

Propositional knowledge (Heron 1992) is often the dominant use of knowledge and can be used to silence. Many white male teachers bring into their classroom an insistence on the authority of propositional knowledge, one that enables them to feel that anything they have to say is worth hearing, that indeed their ideas and experience should be the central focus of classroom discussion. Some black students do not usually feel the need to compete because the concept of a white, privileged voice of authority predominates over the voices of black students wanting to tell their stories and share their experiences. Some of this silencing may also occur because of the internalisation of an ideology, in white racist educational institutions, which devalues black intelligence.

Devaluing Black Intelligence

Some of the beliefs and possible myths in the educational world about black people and our relationship to teaching, learning, writing, knowledge and intelligence are: *'we are not*

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conceptually able', 'we can't analyse or theorise'; 'we come from an oral tradition so we are better at telling stories orally'; 'we do not speak and write well in standard English"; 'we have grammatical problems with syntax and we mix up our tenses'.

Black students whose mother tongue is not English bear the brunt of the stereotypes of not being able to write or to conceptualise. In such cases what is ignored is that these students are able to think in their own language and dialect; instead they are judged as being intelligent thinkers according to the criterion of their ability to master the English language. His or her own language is viewed as inferior whilst English is viewed as powerful and superior. In some cases, black students are viewed as inferior human beings. Is it any wonder, therefore, that these students go to any length to master English. "Mastery of language affords remarkable power" (Fanon 1967,p18). So they might want to speak English because it is the key that can open doors.

Where did such myths about our intelligence come from? Some of these myths have been generated from an experience of everyday racism in Britain, as a way of dealing with perceived differences in educational abilities and performance between white and black people. A simplistic explanation for the writing ability black people, is then offered which lumps together the ability to conceptualise, intelligence, writing skills and linguistic problems in order to assist that black people are inferior to white people in their ability to write, conceptualise and make knowledge. If we differentiate and explore these different abilities them, we may well be able to see ways in which black people can conceptualise and have the ability to make knowledge, but have problems with writing; each requires different skills. A person's ability to write is not synonymous with their ability to conceptualise, for example. Writing skills can be learnt, and the ability to write requires practice.

Traditional academic education has constructed the notion of conceptualisation as ability to think, reflect, and make connections, having the mental faculty to generalise and originate new ideas. There is no proven evidence that black people do not have the mental capacity to do this, despite the fact that there is a plethora of research seeking to prove that; on average, black people score lower on 1.Q tests than white people. From this researche, conclusions are drawn that black people are inferior to white people in terms of intelligence scores. Cornel West addresses this conflict and the dilemmas that some black students face as a result. He states, "There is always the need to assert and defend the humanity of black people, including their ability and capacity to reason logically, think coherently, and write lucidly. The weight of this inescapable burden for black students in the white academy has often determined the content and character of black intellectual activity" (West 1991, p.157). However, there is evidence of other

contributory factors. Black people's socio-political and economic position in society may offer some explanations for possible gaps in our abilities

Socio-economic Factors

Black people are marginalised, considered culturally problematic, and impeded in social mobility (Essed 1991). Class oppression limits the economic resources and educational opportunities available to the majority of black people in Britain. Racial discrimination in the labour market 'undercuts the middle class benefits of education' (Essed 1991, p.34). These factors impede some black peoples' chances of high achievement in schools and of entering higher education. Those who have had the opportunity to enter higher education, in some cases through Access Courses, are again entering a process of unequal competition. They face a number of structural problems in higher education and in obtaining and keeping jobs. First, the lack of role models puts them in disadvantaged position compared with white students. Black people attending predominantly white universities, feel isolated from other black people because there are few black people in academic institutions in a position to support them. Black students are underestimated and people in authority have low expectations of them. The solution, of course, is to have better educational opportunities. However, many black people may not have had educational opportunities, or an equal opportunity to be educated.

Lack of equal opportunities in Education

The lack of 'good' education together with poor economic conditions have meant that some black people have been disadvantaged educationally. This notion of being disadvantaged means that some did hot have access to opportunities for learning, did not know how and where to find out information, or have access to good public libraries and resources for specialist information; or for acquiring study skills. Some may not have been able to afford to buy books in large quantities, and may not have been able to afford to travel extensively so as to broaden their horizons and knowledge. Some, owing to poor housing conditions, may not have had the physical space to study comfortably.

A black student, in her feedback to me on the first draft of this Chapter, commented in writing about her experience:

"When you write of socio-economic factors and inequalities in educational opportunities as explanations for why black students chances of high achievement within schools is impeded, I can agree with this point. I also feel that I have experienced some of these difficulties, poor resources within school, lack of finance to buy study materials etc., but I am still managing to achieve. I have begun to feel that it is possible to achieve despite not having these resources. What is clear is that

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there is a price to pay for this success in that: I have had to achieve against these odds".

I am not arguing that some black people do not experience difficulties with conceptualising, writing and linguistic skills. The direct impact of lack of educational opportunities has meant that some black people have not been able to develop the necessary range of skills to communicate, in writing, their thinking and experiences. However, it is another matter, to generalise and say that black people, in general, have these problems; that if we cannot write then we cannot think. We can write, although some of us may have language problems and in some cases our writing suffers from grammatical problems. Furthermore, some of us may not have had opportunities for learning and developing the skills for writing for the academic world. But as one student so eloquently states in her response to the draft of this chapter:

"Black people can think, can generalise, can make theory, but we would like to see some recognition of the fact that we can, some recognition of our knowledge and our achievements. We don't need external validation as a rubber stamp of approval, but as a recognition that we can and do have something to offer".

The myth that black people cannot conceptualise, cannot theorise in writing, has been generated partly out of the experience of everyday racism in white societies. These messages are introjected and remain deep in the black psyche. These values and beliefs create a barrier in the classroom, blocking the possibility of confrontation and conflict. hooks (1994) argues that black students are often silenced by means of their acceptance of learning values which teach them to maintain order at all costs. Even though students enter the "democratic" classroom believing they have the right to "free speech", most black students are not comfortable exercising this right to "free speech". One student told me during my inquiry into my practice, **"I am frightened to take the risk and voice my own ideas about things because I believe they won't be accepted as good enough, or as important enough as my white fellow students ideas, so I stifle my own ideas".**
There is a need, therefore, to recognise cultural diversity, to rethink ways of knowing, and deconstruct the old epistemology, to rethink what we teach and how we teach so that there can be more freedom in the classroom (hooks, 1994).

How have black students been socialised into teaching and learning?

Black students, like many other students, have been socialised in a model of learning that pervades our educational system and practices both in our schools and universities and

in all forms of training and development for adults. Vaill (1996) calls this "institutional learning which is as much a system for indoctrination and control as it is a system of learning". It is about learning pre-defined material which is often abstract generalisation and concrete application; It is about learning from someone, in an authoritative position relative to the learner, about something that is already known. So it assumes that the teacher had access to the material and the student did not.

The task of the teacher is to transfer the material into the minds of students via lectures, books and cases and the task of the student is to absorb the material. Success is judged by teachers' ability to transfer and students ability to absorb. Consequently, students learn that knowledge is something to be consumed. This resembles what Freire (1972) refers to as the banking concept of education where "knowledge is a gift bestowed by those who consider themselves knowledgeable upon those whom they consider to know nothing" (p.46).

This mode "negates education and knowledge as processes of inquiry" (Freire, 1972, p.46). Within the banking model the reading of texts is done without any critical comprehension of the social context to which they refer. "The learners are never called to think critically about the conditioning of their own thought process; to reflect on the reason for their own present situation; to make a new "reading" of the reality that is presented to them simply as something to which they should adapt themselves" (Freire, 1978, p.23). Learning under these conditions can be painful and breeds resentment, in some learners, of the regimentation and oppression that is built into it.

Within this culture of learning the mode of teaching used is very often authoritarian and oppressive and proceeds from people who deny their basic humanity and seek to over-control in trying to educate others. Some teachers use manipulative powers to dominate. Traditional teaching confuses the three kinds of authority Heron (1993) refers to as tutelary, political and charismatic. Basically, "tutelary authority" refers to the body of skills and knowledge, which the teacher has and communicates to the student through the written and spoken word. "Political authority" refers to the decisions that the teacher takes with regard to the content and process of learning. "Charismatic authority" refers to the style, manner and presence of the teacher as she exercises the other two types of authority. Traditional teaching assumes that because teachers are repositories of knowledge and cognitive authority they should exercise total political authority in hierarchical or directive ways, making all educational decisions for their students.

Traditional teachers make decisions about what students shall learn, when and how they shall learn it and whether they have learnt it in ways that are abusive of their power.

Students' autonomy is relegated to following of long lectures, answering questions and asking them, doing homework on prescribed reading, writing or practical tasks (Heron, 1989). Such teachers rarely rely on an experiential methodology. It is also assumed that they should exercise their charismatic authority in controlling ways, using their power to discipline, judge, mete out punishments and judge the learner's performance by acts of unilateral assessment.

I do not want to present too narrow a picture of the traditional educational culture or to polarise the argument. If we were to examine the theoretical tradition of adult education a great deal of variety can be seen, for example, the liberal tradition, progressive tradition, humanistic tradition, technological tradition, radical tradition and experiential tradition. However, lack of space in this thesis does not permit me to explore these different traditions. What I do want to go on to explore in relation to black students, however, is how they can socialised differently and how they should be empowered in the classroom.

Empowerment in the classroom

Many writers, such as Freire (1972), have argued for the need to see the education process as one of liberation, involving students and lecturers alike in moving towards mutual learning. It is crucial that every student learns to be an active participant not a passive consumer. Teaching and learning should be viewed as practice for freedom which encourages strategies for what Freire calls "conscientization" in the classroom. This term could be translated to mean critical awareness and engagement.

Rogers (1983) also advocated the development of learner-centered models maximising choice, self-direction and self-actualisation. Knowles (1978), despite being criticised for androcentric and ethnocentric approaches, has promoted the mutual diagnosis of core competencies, learning contracts, joint curriculum planning and building upon the learner's strengths, which has led to further movement towards empowering student learning (Humphries, 1998; Coulshed, 1993). Hence, more attention has been given to the student's self esteem, experience and needs, readiness to learn and orientation to learning, alongside a general move to an emphasis on learning from an emphasis on the teaching process.

Thus, recent developments have been accompanied by attempts to shift the balance of power in learning from the lecturer to the student. Such approaches have characterised much of social work education, where emphasis has been given to "setting clear objectives,

validating life experience, appreciating people's strengths, promoting confidence and autonomy, encouraging self-direction and using a person-centred, problem sharing orientation" (Coulshed, 1993, p.3). Student-centred, problem-solving learning has been most clearly exemplified by curriculum design which focuses upon 'inquiry and action' in relation to 'case' material drawn from social work practice (Burgess and Jackson, 1990; Burgess, 1992; Taylor, 1994). Students undertake much of their work in collaborative collectives, with lecturers acting as facilitators rather than 'experts' attempting to provide answers. However, such efforts have not been explicitly or directly built upon an empowerment base. The links between empowerment and the education of social work students have not been explored in terms of inquiry and action, learning and empowerment in specific and detailed ways.

I am advocating the need for specificity and detail so that empowerment conveys a sense of politics, which has a capacity for social change and transformation. I am advocating that teaching and learning with black students should include an emphasis on, what Freire refers to as "praxis" action and reflection upon the world in order to change it. Freire argues that the oppressed should be engage in reflection on their concrete situation because reflection can lead to action and that "action will constitute an authentic praxis only if its consequences become the object of critical reflection. In this sense, the praxis is the raison d'etre of the oppressed; and the revolution….is not viable apart from their concomitant conscious involvement. Otherwise, action is pure activism. To achieve this praxis, however, it is necessary to trust in the oppressed and in their ability to reason" (Freire, 1972, p.41). Freire advocates dialogue as the correct method for doing this to achieving conscientisation.

Engaging in dialogue, which might lead to conscientisation, would require paying attention to aspects other than the rational side in the classroom where emphasis is placed on being smart in book knowledge, which is not necessarily relevant for social interaction or political action. Indeed, rationalism in the classroom means that the idea of the intellectual, as someone who seeks to be whole and well grounded, is out of place in a context where there is little emphasis on spiritual well being, for example. The objectification of the teacher in universities seems to denigrate concern with and uphold the idea of a mind/body split, an idea that promotes compartmentalization. This means that the only important identity is our minds functioning – an objective mind, free of experience and biases.

This notion also reinforces the dualistic separation of public and private, encouraging teachers and students to see no connection between life practices and learning as a way

of being, that is learning by a whole person, which means feeling the learning as well as possessing it intellectually. It means a way of being in the world, a way of framing and interpreting all experience as a learning opportunity and learning process. So our experiences and biases are also important and learning should be encouraged about the non-rational side and also the political side of the classroom.

Applying the Critical Educative approach with black students

The critical educative approach requires a view of learning that is not only experiential but is also a) holistic; b) one in which students feel empowered in the classroom; and c) one in which their experiences are valued as a legitimate form of knowledge. I shall discuss each of these.

Holistic Learning

Heron's (1993) idea of learning how to be a whole person includes personal development in the intra-personal sphere, the interpersonal sphere, within the cultural realm of social institutions and also has a spiritual dimension. It also includes educational development, which requires the use of holistic methods to enhance the learning and teaching of different disciplines and an acceptance that personal development and educational development are not mutually exclusive.

Teachers engaging in holistic learning would need to see and treat students as whole human beings, with complex lives and experiences, rather than simply as seekers after compartmentalized bits of knowledge. This process of learning requires systemic thinking (Vaill, 1996). Vaill argues that 'systems' thinking requires the teacher to embrace complexity, contingency, and dynamism. This mode of thinking might take the teacher outside of her/his comfort zone and might exacerbate turbulence because it asks teachers simultaneously to hold the whole in mind, to investigate the interactions of the component elements of the whole and to investigate the relation of the whole to its larger environment. In systems thinking, the subject matter is a system, the learners are a system, the teacher and a group of learners are a social system, the teacher is systemically connected to other teachers and to the organisation and the learning process through which all these systems combine and interact is a system. Everything is connected to everything else and the more connections that are admitted to be of importance the more challenging it is for teachers. In systems thinking we cannot be sure

of what we are learning and what we have to talk about until all the propositions about systems are brought to bear on some real thing in the real world.

I believe that experiential learning, which takes at its starting point holistic learning which adopts systemic thinking, can go a long way to empowering black students, because students become aware that they can tap much greater potential in themselves which they might have been blocking by negative expectations and beliefs. This can lead to the creation of knowledge, which may bring about profound changes of consciousness, as a result of new patterns of responses, which can transform experience and social life, being adopted.

In order for this process to take place, teachers will have to be willing to reject the "banking" concept of education (Freire, 1972) and acknowledge a connection between ideas learned in university settings and those learned in life practices. They will also need to acknowledge a connection between the personal and the political. This does not mean allowing students to abuse that freedom in the classroom by wanting only to dwell on personal life-experiences. Different strategies should be created to give students opportunities to experience education as the practice of freedom. Strategies, which might entail the posing of problems of, black students in their relation with the world. Freire advocates a direct connection between 'problem-posing' education and the essence of consciousness. The practice of "problem posing" education takes place through dialogue through which the teacher and student become jointly responsible for a process. This happens within a medium of critical reflection by both teacher and students on the world.

Critical Thinking – process of ongoing Inquiry

Critical thinking would involve taking an approach of healthy questioning approach as part of an inquiry method. Inquiry begins with the situations that are problematic – those that are confusing, uncertain or conflicted and block the free flow of action. I am suggesting a form of inquiry that builds on and feeds back to modify what we already know about the problematic situation. This methodology can, with its impact of questions, demonstrate an appreciation of the potential of challenging and questioning for catalysing breakthrough in learning and transformation.

The spirit of learning inquiry is willingness and courage to practice 'not knowing' which is the key to breakthrough thinking. By assisting black students to adopt the principle of inquiry, students would be helped to become disciplined in adopting the practice of questioning assumptions about learning, about content and process, including all the

processes that shape the learning environment, for example, the educational institutions' structures, cultures and operations.

Black students need to appreciate that asking questions is essential for opening up new possibilities because questions provoke thinking. They generate new openings for action and can lead to more effective strategies for change, than statements and opinions do. For example, questions help students to learn how to learn, how to make sense of their experiences adopt a balanced approach to their learning in terms of positive and negative experiences, how to learn and develop as a person and make un-predicted things happen. Questioning is also vital when exploring students' experiences of racism and when challenging their thinking about and sensemaking of racist events. Asking questions is fundamental to resolving breakdowns in communication and relationships, particularly inter-racial and intercultural relationships.

A goal of the critical educative approach with black students, therefore, is to encourage the spirit of inquiry and the discipline of strategic questioning as a teaching and learning norm. It is important to consider here the factors that may work against this goal. Aside from the actual content of teaching, race and gender issues continue to affect what happens within the classroom. Social class, educational background, previous experience of social work are also important factors, alongside race and gender, in determining not just the contributions which students make but their willingness to question existing beliefs, express their beliefs and argue particular positions.

Moreover, it is common for many black students to fear not having the right answers and therefore fear 'not looking good' or 'looking stupid'. Black students are particularly sensitive to "looking stupid" is for as one of the racist stereotypes they have been socialised into is that black people are stupid because they are lower in intelligence. They may also fear asking questions for fear they won't like the answers they get, or for fear of what they may need to change. Furthermore, they may not ask because some of them may not be adept at *how* to ask. Students would need to be encouraged to develop the skills of asking questions.

While answers are important, many learners miss critical and pivotal questions by looking only for answers. Perhaps many of us as *black learners* are reluctant to challenge the *status quo* and are uncomfortable when faced with questions especially if we assume that we need to provide the right answers. In answer driven classrooms and institutions (those more committed to avoiding risk than pioneering new solutions), curiosity, creativity, risk

taking, challenging the status quo and even the willingness to be wrong would need to take a back seat. The prevailing cultures in such institutions, either implicitly or explicitly, call for rigidity, risk avoidance, protectiveness, defensiveness, and automatic routines and habits. Without the intentional discipline of questioning, a learner is reactive rather than proactive, surviving rather than thriving.

Transforming a classroom or learning environment into one devoted to the discipline of teaching and learning inquiry requires appreciating that questions as usually the most influential and creative aspect of speaking, listening, and thinking. Therefore, to be optimally effective in making inquiries of others and ourselves, we need to be able to 'question our questions'. This means developing the attitudes and skills to notice, analyse and revise our questions. It also allows for choosing the right kinds of questions and knowing how and when to ask them. It is not enough to rely on intuitive questioning abilities. Rather we need to include in our appreciation of inquiry an understanding of the practical importance of distinguishing between those questions that lead to success and change and those that can prevent it. This skill should be used to help students to critically reflect, on their experiences and knowledge and ask questions about ways in which black students experiences and ways of knowing are recognised and valued or, indeed, not recognised or not valued.

Valuing black students' experience as a legitimate form of knowledge

Some black students, particularly women, may feel that they have developed their skills and have some experience of education and training but that they do not always receive formal recognition for this learning. Some feel that there is a cultural devaluation of their experiences, practical skills and achievements, which contributes to them lacking confidence. The devaluing of experience is synonymous with devaluing the self because experience is the person rather than something that happens to the person (Knowles, 1990). During my action inquiry, some students cited the writing of academic essays, for assessment purposes, as a main source of lack of confidence in using their experience adding that essays were where they felt their experience was most devalued. At this point I would like to offer my journal reflections on how I have tried to build black students' confidence to use experience when writing academic essays.

Journal extract:

I am reminded of the times black students come to me as a black teacher, with essay plans and drafts, feeling embarrassed to display their scribbling and jottings but at the same time presenting them to me for

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help with grammar, form and structure and integration their experience. I try to help by first asking them to tell me their stories of the experiences, practice as well as life experiences, that they want to include not only what they think the assessor requires of them. I encourage the telling in a presentational form of their own choosing and in language that they feel is not restricting. Often, as we go about in our everyday life we show ourselves to be knowing-knowledgeable in a special way. Some of us often, cannot say what we know when we try to describe it, we find ourselves at a loss or we provide descriptions that are inappropriate. Some black students knowing might be tacit, implicit in their stories in their 'feel' for the experiences with which they are dealing and in their patterns of action. During the telling I assist them to appreciate that they are agents of knowledge by encouraging the expression of feelings and descriptions of their actions and valuing what they have to say, as important, validating their experience and encouraging them to write in the moment. Their internal and external judges are encouraged to be kept out. At this stage the linguistic skills are not commented on nor the quality and style of writing. I then ask them to read out what they have written and I offer supportive challenge to assist them to reflect with a critical eye and ear on the content of their stories as well as their experience of the process of their telling. So they arrive at their own sensemaking through acts of awareness, recognition of patterns, making connections and judgements. From my experience, it is the validation of their comprehension and their kinds of knowing that the students usually appreciate, at that stage. I then encourage them to write in those experiences into the essay. My approach is to provide encouragement for the integration between the oral with the written, to value both, and later offer help with grammar and structure where necessary.

The use of stories is very important in my approach as most black people use stories as a method of relating their experiences. These stories are the closest we can come to telling our experience. Historically, black people have had an oral tradition of sharing our experiences through stories. Such stories were used as a way of educating ourselves', and others who were new to our communities. In that sense our experience was the stories we lived and in the telling of them we modified them and created new ones which passed on from generation to generation. A community of experience was then generated which had individual and social qualities. It is important, therefore, that black students are assisted to make use of their experiences in presentational forms and other forms that are less constricting to them.

Some students appreciate being advised and supported to use their personal stories. Others, however, do not feel secure in my advice to them, which is to write 'from'

themselves and their experiences using their own form. In one student's feedback to me on the first draft of this chapter she said:

"You also say that when you teach black students and they approach you for assistance with grammar and structure, that you encourage and validate their experience, what they have to say from their base. As a black student I have experienced this advice of writing from my base, my experience, in my own way as problematic. I worry that I will not get the grade I feel I truly deserve if I use my personal experiences, because of the way in which my work may be interpreted. I question, will it be viewed as 'good enough', and if it isn't, what then? What will happen to me? The bottom line for me is that I cannot afford to fail. That is why it becomes a necessity to conform, to speak a particular academic language, to use words in particular ways; write in particular ways which at times is different from how I experience myself in my own environment".

Contained in this student's statement are issues, concerns and worries that are of an epistemological nature.

Epistemological issues

Some of what makes a black student writing about their personal experiences 'appropriate', has more to do with issues of epistemology than with the surface issue of form. That is to say the underlying assumptions about the nature of knowledge will affect the meaning given to 'structure', 'argument' 'grammar' and 'clarity', "use of self" and the pronoun 'I' for example, which are often the areas commented on in black student's essays.

Some successful university lecturers are likely to have spent many years developing acceptable ways of constructing their own knowledge through their own writing practices and what they consider as relevant experience to be included. These practices, then, are integrally related to the ways in which lecturers, constitute their own academic world-view and their own academic knowledge. Faced with writing that includes personal experiences, which does not appear to make sense within their own academic framework, they are most likely to have recourse to what feel like familiar, descriptive categories such as 'structure' 'argument' 'clarity' 'grammar' analysis' in order to give feedback on their students' writing and say little about the use and value of experience. In reality, their own understanding of these categories may be less meaningful outside of this framework and is therefore, not readily understood by students unversed in this particular orientation or in writing academic essays in higher education.

Some black students have internalised the language of feedback. They know that it is important to present an argument and they know that structure, academic language and grammar play an important part but some have difficulties in understanding when they have achieved this successfully in a piece of writing. Some black students come to me complaining that they do not understand why they have been given a low grade and fairly negative feedback. They often feel confused about what they have done wrong and some conclude that it is because they included their subjective experience.

Although students on our social work course in Brunel have guidelines as a departmental document on essay writing, and are encouraged to make use of experience, some find that this does not always help them to integrate their personal experiences in their assignments. Some understand the technical approach to writing academic essays but have difficulty grasping, for example, how to link specific subjective knowledge to course-based knowledge for practice. Encouraging and valuing the use of different representational forms would be helpful, in such cases, as how we are expected to write affects what we can write about.

Writing conventions hold symbolic power over students, as they constitute knowledge. In the wake of feminist, black theorists, post modernist critiques of traditional writing and qualitative writing practices, works have been appearing in new forms and with different representations. This writing transgresses the boundaries of the conventions in social science writing. Working within this ideology, questions are raised about how the author positions the 'self' as a knower and teller. This lead to issues of subjectivity, authority, authorship, reflexivity on the one hand, and representational form, on the other.

Post modernism claims that writing is always partial, local and situational and that our self is always present, no matter how much we try to suppress it; but it isonly partially present for in our writing we repress parts of ourselves too. Working from this premise, we are freed to write material in a variety of ways, to tell and retell. There is less of a struggle to 'get it right'. Experimentation with form allows the student to learn about the topic and about themselves, about what is unknowable, unimaginable. Even if students choose to write an essay in a conventional form, experimenting with format is a practical and powerful way to expand interpretive skills and make old material new.

Experimenting with form would allow for evocative experiences in the student and reader. The student might relate differently to her/his material and come to know it differently. The student could then attend to feelings, ambiguities, and blurred

experiences. She/he could struggle to find a place for themselves, including their doubts and uncertainties. Narratives of self could be produced revealing text in which the student tells stories about their own lived experiences. The student could plot events without interpretation, asking the reader to 'relive' the events, emotionally with the student. Writing these frankly subjective narratives would allow black students to be relieved of the problem of speaking for the 'other', or about themselves as 'other' because they are the 'other' in their text. They could then reclaim themselves subjectively and not objectify themselves.

This of course, raises issues about the privacy and ownership of learning. It is important to recognise, therefore, that the onus is always on the learner to disclose and make decisions about what will eventually go into the assignment, essay, or portfolio, for example. Often I see black students demonstrate good quality pieces of learning which readily match the criteria for the assignment, but they are reluctant to include their learning for fear of making themselves vulnerable, for fear of how it might be used or how they might be viewed. As implied earlier, some students do not have the confidence in placing the 'I', the personal, in academic pieces. Receiving conflicting advice from academic staff adds to the confusion. Different conventions are to be found around the use of the first person pronoun in student writing. Individual tutors have different opinions about when, or if, it is appropriate to use this. Such conventions are often presented as self-evidently the correct way in which things should be done.

Some students find this dis-empowering and have shared with me their experience of being disem-powered when they have attempted writing from the 'I' and from 'self'. One student said that she was scared to write, **"I think"** in an essay. She continued. **"Its scary to put the 'I' in the center because I have always been told never to say 'I' in an essay so I have had to rely on what the book says. But I find that white people write a lot of the books and they are not saying what resembles what I am thinking or feeling, as a black person. I know though that if I write what I think and feel it won't be seen as important as what a white person said in 'the' book".**

Another said: **"Being subjective, using my personal experience and talking from the 'I' is how I feel good about my essays. But I know that the powers that be won't accept it so instead I write in such a way that it comes across as being neutral, then where is my 'self'? I am lost. Its like I am writing my 'self' out as if I don't exist, I don't matter".**

From these statements, it is evident that these students want to be empowered to use the personal and are seeking to find a way of having their personal experiences validated. This is captured in this student's statement: **"I want to move 'to' instead of getting 'out' of my personal space".**

In such cases, I believe that it is important that the student own his or her learning and makes decisions on what can or cannot be included in her or his writing, as through evocative writing about their subjectivity it is possible for students to experience self-reflexive and transformational processes. Freire (1972) places stress on the importance of subjectivity in the process of transforming the world.

So learning methods and strategies would need to be developed to engage more fully the ideas and issues which seem to have a direct relation to black students' experience. Students would need to be assisted to explore ways in which they acquire knowledge about the experience they have lived. A supportive stance should be taken of affirming the specialness of those ways of knowing which are rooted in experience. Experience can be a way knowing and can inform how we know what we know. Combining the analytical and experiential is a richer way of knowing and we should not, therefore, relinquish the power of experience to help with the formulation of theory. However, experience is criticised for not providing appropriate theoretical data by those who support the frame of reference that defines acceptable knowledge and inquiry.

Use Of Experience – A Critical Standpoint
One criticism stems from the epistemological notion that meaning is contained in 'texts' and that the study of texts is the primary force for education. To examine experience however, may start a process of excavating suppressed and subjugated knowledge.

To give priority to privilege experience as a way into understanding black students' oppression can also hinder discussion and debate. So we need to be careful not to be too insistent on the reliance on experience lest that experience becomes privileged, and thus makes a claim to being an unchanging truth. Subjectivity should not be constructed in opposition to objectivity. Challenging objectivity with an emphasis on experience, however, questions the possibility of a value-free knowledge. The different ways in which different forms of knowledge are framed is an ideological issue rather than a matter of objective analysis. Personal experience is no more important than 'objective' knowledge; each can inform the development and commitment of the other. An understanding of the relationship between experience and objectivity is important so that one form of

knowledge is not privileged over another. Therefore, the processes that create hierarchies of knowledge need to be subverted.

It is important that we do not institute another form of essentialism, that is, essentialist practices that construct experience as absolute truths in a monolithic, excluding way so as to dominate and to assert subjectivity as a way of controlling. According to Said (1978) and Fuss (1990), it can be dangerous to base identity politics and essentialism on rigid theories of exclusion. However it is fair to say that it is not only black groups or women's groups who have employed this strategy. White male students often bring into the classroom an insistence on the authority of their experience, which they present in a way that enables them to feel that anything they have to say is worth hearing and that their ideas and experience should be the central focus of discussion. Such excluding behaviour may be supported by institutional structures of domination which do not criticise it.

It is worth noting that excluding tactics, used by marginal groups of students, are sometimes used as a survival strategy, in response to domination and oppression (hooks 1994). As a teacher, I have to remember this. I also have to remember that in many institutions and, in particular in educational institutions black students' voices are not heard or welcomed, whether they are discussing facts or experience. My experience as a black person going through the British education system has shaped my response to this reality and I encourage these students to use the "authority of experience" as a means of asserting a voice.

The use of experience in the classroom has also been criticised for not advancing discussion which provokes confusion that the injection of experiential truths kills debates and leads discussions to dead ends. Imbedded in this criticism, is disbelief that use of personal experience can be a meaningful addition to classroom discussions. I have witnessed ways in which essentialist standpoints have been used to silence and kill debates. However, speaking as a marginalised 'other', my experience in the classroom and my inquiry into my practice has shown me how the incorporation of experience in classroom discussion has deepened discussions and has led to more abstract constructs being linked to concrete reality.

Some black students need personal, experiential references to understand what is happening. However, engaging in the generation of this type of discourse, which focuses on experience, can sometimes lead to messy complexities as interests, events and

stories are revealed. Consequently, some students may feel that they do not know what they are talking about or tell themselves that what they are telling is not relevant. Some preparation is necessary, therefore, when embarking on this type of practice. Working with personal experience as a method of learning, teachers and students will have to be prepared to be open to a rich and sometimes to a seemingly endless range of possible events and stories, to be prepared to follow leads in many directions and to hold them loosely. Working with experience in this way might also pose some dilemmas of an ethical and political nature for some teachers.

Some dilemmas for Teachers

Some teachers face the dilemma of encouraging students, who want to share personal experience in the classroom, without promoting essentialist standpoints which exclude, and this requires them to have an awareness of the multiple ways in which essentialist standpoints can be used to shut down discussions. Some teachers may feel that they do not have this awareness or ability to create a learning process in the classroom which engages everyone nor do they have the ability to find ways of intervening critically before one group attempts to silence another.

The dimension of teacher/student relationship also poses some ethical dilemmas. In particular, the black teacher/black student relationship is highlighted here because this relationship can be very intensive and can require serious consideration of who we are, as black teachers/facilitators, in the stories of black students' when we become characters in their stories we change their stories. The generation of shared stories between black teachers and black students can often change the relationship and power dynamics so that the relationship is akin to friendship. As teachers we owe care and have responsibility to the students for how our teaching shapes their lives. When we are exposed to such rich stories about others' lives we cannot stop there, because our task is to discover and construct meaning from those stories and life events. We should assist students to learn how to ask questions of meaning and social significance. Very often the stories created in my classroom by black students, from their experience, tend to be descriptive and are shaped around particular events. Some black students, and other students from disadvantaged groups finds it a novelty to have often find the opportunity to talk about their life experiences and, more importantly, to be listened to they do not readily give this up. So, in the early stages, as they describe past experiences they can be reluctant to move from simply describing their experience to the more difficult task of analysing where significant learning has occurred.

Many black students have come to me for help with essays and other written assignments when teachers have commented on the lack of critical analysis of their experiences related in the essay. At times, some students have found it difficult to understand fully what is required and although they have sought help from the marker they have still remained unclear as to what is required to move to the next stage. In some cases, it can be because the teacher does not possess the skill to be able to assist the student to the next stage, the stage of reflection.

So a key skill for the teacher is to be able to encourage students to move through the various stages from description to reflection and meaning making. Reflection on knowing can lead to action and reflection-on-action as well as reflection-in-action could give rise to theory and new forms of knowledge which could be generalised to other situations and create change. Therefore the teacher needs to assist black students to make sense of these events by looking for patterns, narrative threads, tensions and themes within individual personal experiences or across their experiences. The search for patterns, themes, tensions should be made by the students and not by teachers placing their interpretations on the written material. This requires a lot of patience and a commitment to working with experience, including personal experience, as will skills in reflecting. Writing can be a useful tool and an aid to deeper critical reflection.

Writing as an aid to reflection and Learning:

An important contribution of writing is that it provides objectivity in relation to the initial learning experience. It can clarify the initial experience by removing it from the clouds of subjective feelings that can obscure it. It is a way of distancing the subject from the experience, which has the effect of clarifying it and fostering the ability to work with it, so that the learner can draw out potential learning. It can focus the student's attention on what actually happened in the initial learning experience. It helps distinguish what happened, or experience what actually happened. The use of writing also captures the initial event in a way that enables this to be the basis of continuing and more developed reflection.

I have found that the use of writing in the learning situation helps students recognise and take account of affective aspects of the learning process. It not only helps students to appreciate the role of feeling and clarify the feelings involved, it also helps them to name and own their feelings by expressing them in their own words. Therefore, whatever feelings are observed can be the basis of reflection which can lead to a deeper appreciation of the learning process and the student's way of experiencing. Sometimes,

however, the feelings which emerge in the initial learning experience actually obstruct further working with it. Until these feelings have been addressed, the student is not able to go on to become involved in reflection. Sometimes the recognition of obstructing emotions is sufficient to enable the student to deal with them the emotions can be taken into account as the reflection process begins and the student is sufficiently in control not to let them distort or obstruct learning. Sometimes what emerges in terms of 'self' knowledge is such that it takes great courage for the student to go on. The difficulty often lies not in working with such a knowledge, but rather in the student acknowledging it, appropriating it, owning it, and being willing to accept that this is the 'real me'. This stage often exposes the false images that students have of themselves and only when such falseness is acknowledged can the student really enter into the work of reflection and further writing.

Writing can also highlight gaps in a person's knowledge and help them to be in touch with the fact that they may not 'know' something. They may come to the realisation that they 'don't know' and to identify what they 'don't know'. This creates anxieties for some students. Such anxieties have to be acknowledged and worked with via containment and reassurances, that it is 'O.K.' to 'not know', that part of 'not knowing' is 'knowing' and that new knowledge (not knowing) is incorporated and integrated within.

Asking people to reflect in depth on their prior experiences and share these with others is challenging for all concerned. From the teacher's point of view it is important to know the limits of the exercise as well as its potential. Some students, reflecting on their experiences especially past ones, frequently disclose deeply emotional experiences, which have also been major learning experiences. Occasionally teaching exercises, group discussions or even reading for an essay may lead a student to confront an experience that has not been confronted before. In this respect, teachers or institutions should give the most serious consideration to what other support such as black informal networks and counselling, is available either within the institution or proximate to it.

From the students' point of view, being given opportunities to 'voice' and reflect on their experiences and engage in discussions that offer political clarity of what to produce, how to produce it and what its purpose is can and should be a liberating process. Here is education at its best, valuing rather than devaluing what the student brings to the learning process; having control over that process rather than being just its subject; and taking responsibility for learning rather than the much softer option of allowing others to make decisions about what constitutes real learning.

Concluding Comments

I have argued for a critical pedagogy that is based on my understanding of Freire's work on critical consciousness, interwoven with a black perspective, which has the potential for providing black students with opportunities to nurture their consciousness in ways that allow them true liberation of the mind, body and spirit. It is arguably only through such processes that black students can begin to develop practices that go beyond the narrow confines of a Eurocentric praxis, but involve the construction of new and different methods and models of knowledge centred on the uniqueness of black people's lives. This task requires the teacher to engage with the student at all levels of learning and, in this regard, I have suggested a holistic, pedagogical approach which pays particular attention to context, the institutions and societal processes within which black students learning happens.

Within this critical pedagogy, I have argued for efforts to be made to respect and honour the social reality and experiences of black students and to view these as a valid contribution to theorising and creating of knowledge. I have also considered some implications for students and teachers, particularly the changes teachers will need to make if their style of teaching and learning and their beliefs about writing academic work reflects a single norm of thought and experience which is believed to be 'white' and universal. No education is politically neutral and our political perspectives play a major role in shaping education. Values, beliefs, biases, issues of control, authority and power to control, including power and control to make changes in terms of paradigm shift, have to be examined.

Teachers will require help from the organisation to support any effort at education for critical consciousness, support in terms of seminars focusing on transformative classrooms and liberating education. Workshops and support structures for teachers to deal with their fears, disturbances, and for constructive confrontation and critical interrogation will also be necessary. Students will also need to be supported and given opportunities to engage in political discussions about a shift in paradigm so that everyone can contribute to the goal of creating more liberating settings and creating democratic processes within these settings so that the 'voices' of all students are heard. Transforming these settings is a great challenge for all those working in the world of academia and black academics are not exempted.

In the next chapter I shall examine the role of black academics with regard to their positions as change agents.

Chapter 13

The Role of Black Academics

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to explore the very important role that black academics have in to play in relation to the experiences of black students and black professionals' and considers the positive contribution they can make to the experiences of black learners. The writing in this chapter relates to the overall research aim in terms of the experiences of black professionals, academics and educators. Exploration of the experiences shared by black lecturers and students, during the Co-operative Inquiry, fueled my interest in exploring the role we play as black academics in the life of black students and in examining our positions as we engage with students, educational institutions and black communities.

Action inquiry into my practice as a lecturer also challenged me to ask, "What are black academics for?" "What role do I play in the classroom and in the wider system?" "What is my status, as a teacher, within the current bureaucratic constraints of the university?" This led to an exploration of my personal experiences as a black woman academic and an examination of my ambivalence and the dilemmas I have faced. I have chosen to explore my experiences as a social work educator by examining arenas in which I am located in my work: - the university, the social work department, the classroom and my professional identity.

In this account, I weave in my personal experiences as I explore the dilemmas that black academics face and present theoretical and practical representations of these dilemmas. I go on to explore the implications of these experiences for of the politics for change, which I have located within the approach I advocated in Chapter 11, a critical educative approach. My experience as an academic black woman is not unique because of the reality of black people's shared experience of oppression; on the contrary, it will be familiar to other black people working in academic institutions.

What are some of our dilemmas, Ambivalence and Contradictions?

Today, a small percentage of black people is teaching in universities in Britain. A smaller percentage yet teach on social work courses, and they are, in fact, still in the minority; in

some cases they either sit at the margins of the institution or are isolated in their departments or faculty. Some, among us, are radicalised, black, critical thinkers who have been silenced by various pressures imposed by a white, patriarchal, middle-class system of domination and, indeed, some of us have taken to silencing ourselves.

We are constantly negotiating the positions that we occupy and there is no distinct separation between 'us' and 'them'. Instead, we adopt different strategies in order to manage the contradictions of identity and to move within and across the borderlands of inclusion and exclusion. Thus, as an academic, I can simultaneously occupy a position of power and powerlessness (Simmonds 1992). This arises out of an 'in between' academic status of being simultaneously belonging and not belonging, insider and outsider, included and excluded. I shall explore this status from the 'ground' of my personal and professional experience in the world of academia.

Belonging/Not Belonging:

Most of my life in Britain I have felt like, what Wise (1997) describes as, an 'in-betweenie', never belonging to the environment in which I found myself. Stanley (1997) describes the experience of in-betweenies thus:

"Being 'in' and 'out' may be a state of mind deeply embedded in some of us, the in-betweenies, but for many more it is an actual interstitial state lying on the boundaries of academia... Academia, that strange world within a world, is also still life-changingly welcoming... The invitation is there with all its limitations and problems" (p.183).

In taking up its invitation, I have had to deal with the overwhelming feeling of confusion as a result of complex experiences of ambivalence and contradictions as a black woman. However I deal with these contradictions, with being an "in betweenie", it seems clear that they offer an interesting way of understanding my position in the social world and how ontology relates to epistemology.

Like others who share such an ontological position, I am constantly required to account for what I am doing here, what it means, for me, to be here. In what follows, I explore how I 'fit' in relation to my job of work as an academic, a site where the identities of black, feminist, working class and woman form an alien territory.

How do I 'fit' in relation to my job of work as an academic?

To be able to answer this question I want to explore my home self and my professional experience of being an insider/outsider, my identity and my experiences in the classroom.

Home and Work

The disjunction that I feel between myself and my role in academia has a physical and practical manifestation. Each day I embark on a one and a half-hour's journey from Brixton, an inner-city district, which is inhabited by a large proportion of black people, and which separates my home from work in Twickenham, a leafy suburb with predominantly white, middle class inhabitants my home self from my professional self. The journey home from work is a physical territory, a borderland. But this geographical space is also a symbolic space, one in which I try to make sense of the way that I live and the work that I do. Fiona Wise puts it well when she says:

"My 'work' self sleeps in a different bed, drinks different water, engages with different people, from my 'home' self. In this parallel universe I 'become' a different person because everything and everyone that I interact with, and define myself by, changes"(Wise1997, p.120).

I have been doing this journey for thirteen years now, and I know I am not alone in this situation. Many colleagues and black friends, some of whom are black managers and others who are in senior positions in white organisations, are leading such an existence, the 'Jekylls' and 'Hydes' of academia, of professional life. We have to go where the work is and in higher education the openings are few and the locations rarely convenient.

My Professional Experiences - Insider/outsider

Working in a university setting, I often feel very isolated as I work in an environment predominately occupied by white people. I, like some other black academics, confront a world that outsiders might imagine would welcome our presence but, from my experience, we are sometimes experienced as unwelcome. In the department in which I work, for example, our presence as black academics is desired and some of my white colleagues are comfortable with it. However, they are less welcoming of black women who present themselves as radically committed to change, who need institutional support, time, and space to pursue this dimension of their reality. As a result some of us experience isolation and turn to black communities for support.

Some black academics who take seriously the life of the mind, live in an isolated and insulated world. Some of us are caught in an ambivalent position of wanting to be an

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insider and an outsider simultaneously, wanting to be part of the institution but at the same time stay close to our communities. We sometimes face a grim predicament of being caught between the institution's expectations, their defined position of us as 'intruders' 'outsiders' and the black community's expectations. This experience can be fraught with fear and anxiety provoking.

When I made the transition from practice to academia I experienced a degree of isolation because I feared becoming too identified as an "insider" and felt that I might jeopardise my credibility within my community. So I chose to continue to work with black community groups, projects and organisations outside the university as a way of confirming my loyalty and commitment to them. Doing so was also one of the ways in which I got support and felt valued; I have found that my continuous involvement with my community has helped to sustain my beliefs and helped shape my action and change. This, I believe, is a necessary support mechanism for any agent of radical change. Meyerson and Scully, (1995) support this in their statement:

"The tempered radical's understanding of injustice can only be preserved by continuing to identify with outsiders. Identifying as an outsider reminds her of her own privilege as an insider" (p. 597).

However, experiences as outsiders in some black communities, can also be isolating if we do not fit into the needs and wants of the communities. The black community does not always conceive our contradictions in such a way as to offer us support that support, but instead, its conception of us can also contribute to our fear and isolation.

How do Black Communities' perceptions of us contribute to our fear and isolation?
There is a deep distrust and suspicion in some black communities, of black academics. This distrust is based on what is sometimes seen as black academics not remaining, in some visible way, organically linked with black cultural life. The black community lauds those black academics who excel as political activists and cultural artists whilst the intellectual life is viewed as solely short-term political gain and social status. This limited perception of intellectual activity is held by some black academics themselves. Given the constraints on black, upward, social mobility and pressure for status, power and affluence, many of us seek material gain and cultural prestige. This search requires some of us to immerse ourselves in the very culture and society, which degrades and devalues the black community from which we come. We tend therefore, to fall in two camps, crudely put: – "successful" distant from the black community, and "unsuccessful", disdainful of the white academic world. Both camps remain marginal to the black

community, suspended between two worlds with little or no black infra-structural base. The black community views both alternatives with distrust.

This situation has resulted in a major obstacle confronting black academics which is the relative lack of black community support; resulting in the suspended status of black academics and their isolation. Some of us choose, then, to deny our intellectual ability so as not to confront this reality. Others may choose to be academics but eschew the category "intellectual" or "academic". I too had engaged in this denial and for a while shunned the category of academic. In 1997, I reflected on my status and identity in my journal.

Journal Extract: Taking on the identity as an academic

I am always intrigued to hear others call me an academic. I work in the academic world and yet I am scared of academia. I remembered being in a car journey with my partner and his niece and him referring to me as 'the academic' in relation to himself. His niece tried to engage him in a conversation and prefaced her reasons for asking this with "you are the intellectual." and he replied "Agnes is the academic she is doing her PhD". I heard myself being described as an academic and I felt surprised. I certainly would not have chosen to describe myself as an academic because it did not fit with my notions of what an academic is.

My view of academics is that they can be exclusive and elitist and I don't view myself in that way. I did not plan to be a teacher or lecturer nor had visions of a career in an academic institution. I went to work in an academic institution with an implicit purpose of educating and training black students and I think that the university is a legitimate place to do that. I have little intention of getting into the fabric of the institution, of becoming part of the institution. I do not identify with it or become too identified with it for fear that I loose myself, my black identity. Nor do I want to be estranged or feel alienated from my community. My dilemma is, how can I continue to pursue my purpose explicitly without being in the university setting. For 'being in' do I need to have taken on the values of the university, the identity of an academic? If I do what would it mean for me, for black students, my family, my community? How will it affect my relationship with those parties? Will their view of me as a black person change? How can I avoid feeling I have compromised or that I have 'sold out'? I suppose I might have to accept that to many people, I am an academic.

Acceptance of this identity has caused me to reflect on the meaning of my identity, my relationship with the academy and with my students. As I become more and more involved in the life of the students and the developments in the department, I experience more of a pull to being on the 'inside' in the mainstream of the university. As my position changes I become closer to the centre of my department, where I have accumulated diverse experiences, as I strive to change social work education and to change social work practice by introducing an anti-oppressive and black perspectives agenda into social work.

The Meaning of my Identity - Multiple Identities

My identity as a black female lecturer is significant in determining the particularities of my experiences and in challenging the expectations of others with whom I work. My 'race' and gender are inseparable aspects of my identity and are configured in particular ways, which shape the specificity of my relationship with academia and with my students. In the context of my professional self, my identities not only structure how I feel about myself in my role as an academic, but they influence how others see me and respond to me. The 'others' who respond to my presentation of self are students, colleagues, including especially importantly black colleagues, and the wider academic community. In an interactionist sense how these others define me makes up a large part of who I am or am allowed to be. My own perception of my role is mediated by the social relations in which I operate; they both constrain and enable me to perform the social role of 'black academic'.

In the academic setting, my identity as a black woman with a 'working class' background predominates and deeply affects the way that I feel about the work that I do. This is because white people (other academics and many students), who speak differently, surround me and for all I know, think differently. Paradoxically, because I have used a similar educational institution to effect my own social mobility, and because I now work in such an institution, I am, to all intent and purpose, a member of the educated middle class. People, neighbours, family friends, and members of the black community, see me as middle class because they compare me with themselves, whereas colleagues, who might compare me with others in our institution, see me - how? In a way, how they see me isn't important, because what matters is how I see 'myself'. This has epistemological as well as ontological ramifications: It affects what I think I 'know', what I feel some certainty about knowing, and it also affects what I feel about this and accordingly, how I behave.

The way that I feel at work is that although I am 'in' I am not "of" the place and I have, therefore, a critical response to the institution which is embedded in those autobiographical structures and meanings referred to by the shorthand of 'identity'. Similarly, while I occupy the margins of the academy, along with women colleagues, my place on the margin is also fractured along the identity lines of race and class. In the margins my identity of being black and of working class marginalises me yet further, while, in the mainstream, my identity as a woman overlays these other identities.

The notion of working class identity implies a fixity and unity that aren't actually there when I think about this analytically. Analytically, I know that I always felt an outsider even before I got an education and, now I have it, there is no going back - I am not of that class and background anymore. Most of my students are women and a high percentage are black women rather than black men who have come into the university via non-traditional routes to higher education such as access courses. On one level, I identify with them and I can let them know that I, too, have struggled in a racist educational system and that, if I can do it, so can they. What are some of our commonalties?

My Experiences in the Classroom

There are many areas of commonality between my students and myself, which can create for me confusing and frustrating relations between us. I experience some students as having simultaneously high expectations of and, sometimes, little respect for me. Some students expect everything from me: I must be an expert in whatever fields the student needs to write on. I must be able to deal with the contradictory demands that some students impose, which include not only totally up-to-the-minute knowledge of the academic literature and debates on a very wide range of subjects, but also an overview of the current state of (all) spheres of social work practice. I must be able to give cutting-edge opinions on matters to do with race, racism and oppression. I think that black students would learn more from progressive, black literature because these students would then bring into the classroom the unique mixture of experiential and analytical ways of knowing. I do try and provide this, but their expectations are sometimes unrealistic with regard to my knowledge base and intellect.

While I am committed to teaching around the exploration of 'race', class and gender, I am not expert on all aspects of these subjects. Some black students expect me to be their role model in terms of understanding every aspect of racism. Some expect that I have a high level of consciousness of racism, especially internalised racism. They expect me to challenge racism among students and colleagues alike; to be knowledgeable about the

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latest titles of books and journals on the subject of race in social work. But I can't meet all these demands. I appreciate that the majority of black students who enter my classrooms have never been taught by black lecturers. However, I can't, simultaneously be the perfect academic and the perfect practitioner or the 'perfect black' role model - a conscious black teacher. As a black academic, I need to avoid becoming an 'expert' and slipping into a teacher-learner relationship of dependency

At the same time as they turn to me as an 'authority', some black students simultaneously deny that authority on the basis of the fact that "I am too much 'like them'". I, too, struggle with resisting and challenging racism and stick closely to my 'grass roots'. If I don't have "airs and graces", then I can't be a proper academic. Most important of all, if I don't dress things up in mystifying language and I am able to explain complex phenomena in everyday, accessible language, then I do not pass the 'real academic' test.

When confronted with a black female teacher, some students reassess not only my role as a teacher but also their own positions as students. I do not fulfil the expectations which many of the students, black and white, have of a black teacher and, therefore, my authority and knowledge are questioned. I do not always fit their conception of what constitutes the obtaining of 'good' education. Many of the students bring with them presuppositions based on colonial and neo-colonial epistemologies. For many students, black as well as white, those who possess the significant knowledge are white men. Some students seem to feel cheated by having a black teacher, feel that they have not got the 'real' thing. If the black teacher is teaching subjects such as race or black issues this feeling is compounded as these subjects are seen by some students as second class. Indeed, some black students boycott these sessions, if given the choice.

Elitism, here, is something which some black students have striven for, and to arrive at the university only to find that your 'own kind' are there before you in positions of authority is an extreme disappointment. How much more gratifying to find a world that *is* different and elitist, but one that you, too, can now join. For other black students, having a black teache, who does not put on academic airs and graces, is appreciated for exactly those reasons. It signifies for them that I as their teacher have not lost my 'roots', my black identity. My presence challenges the expectations which some white students have of a teacher. A black woman teacher is not the norm in British universities, so, for them, it is a challenge to the status quo. Therefore, I am not the only one who is required to re-assess and negotiate a space, since my very presence instigates a constant process of negotiation between the re-construction of stereotypes and their denial.

As a black woman in academia, I am not easily placed since my identity and my institutional role, appear and indeed are contradictory. The ambivalence in the ways in which I am perceived enables me to shift in and out of different positions in relation to my institutional role and my relations with students and colleagues. This greater flexibility in negotiating and reflecting on my identity and relationships would not be afforded to those who, by virtue of their 'race' (white) and gender (male), are more readily named and located.

As I shift across borders of 'us 'and 'them', at one moment I find allegiances with the experiences of my black female students in particular, and at other times I recognise the power inequalities marked by my position and identity. I often ally myself with my students when we share common experiences, usually in terms of 'race' and 'gender'. While I think that students from a similar background have all kinds of ambivalent feelings about me, I certainly have ambivalent feelings about them. I do not want to be their friend, nor their confidante. I do not want to be 'alongside' my students, but instead I want there to be very clear, explicit and agreed boundaries between us.

While black and female, I am also an academic and recognise the relative power this gives me. In this sense, I do not generally share the same experiences of inequality and powerlessness as my students. This is not to say that all students are in vulnerable and weak positions but they are represented in this way. It is not easy to negotiate this "in-betweeness" but it is something that I confront and consider daily.

I do not feel guilty about the fact that I am in a superior position to my students. Nor do I feel guilty that I have control over an important part of their lives (that is, what degree marks they get or whether they pass or fail the professional training) and that I can be a very influential figure in a black student's development. I do not deny the power that I hold, by making friends of my students and by devising means of not having to assess and evaluate their work, sometimes by going so far as to eschew evaluation altogether. This is all well and good on courses where marks do not matter, but it is totally inadequate for the vast majority of students in higher education. What they need, and what I need, are clear boundaries.

I am in a position of power and authority in relation to their lives and the only safeguard against exploitation of that role is for it to be clearly and unambiguously owned and stated. While they have to jump through hoops and I am the one holding the hoop. It is disingenuous of me to handle my authority through denial of its very existence.

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Similarly, some students place their black lecturers on an unreal pedestal, hanging on to their every word, taking all their courses, turning up with one 'problem' after another needing lengthy, sometimes tearful discussion. I have long since learnt to recognise the very vulnerable position that students place themselves in. For their sake, as well as mine, this is one of the clearest examples available where clear boundaries are absolutely essential, and where woolly notions of 'sisterhood' are totally inappropriate.

For all that, I have points in common with black students. These are points in common with a past which I can never return to and do not want to return to. I am helping them to escape from an identity which I escaped from myself, in an institutional setting where my current experience gives the lie to that possibility ever being completely successful. Since, despite my acceptance of my academic identity I am only partially accepted by the academy, and my acceptance is dependent on how much I consent to altering my position, my behaviour and identity.

"The discourse of power in the academy has shifted in the past decade from an exclusionary practice to one of selective inclusion, which inscribes certain positions of desire and success for those 'oppositional' elements who consent, perhaps unconsciously, to the position of alterity - a position that is sanctioned only as the exception"(Behdad, 1993, p.46).

Included/Excluded

Tokenised inclusion
I am aware of this selective or tokenised inclusion and have been made aware of it through my experiences in the academy and the daily contradictions of being a black woman academic. Tokenised inclusion does not necessarily signify that radical changes have shifted the balance of power within academia. In fact Behdad suggests,

"This tokenised inclusion renders the conservative grip more efficient and powerful, in that voices of resistance are now somewhat contained in the compartmentalised ghettos of the academy" (Behdad, 1993, p. 47).

While not agreeing wholly with Behdad's pessimism, sincere though it is, there *are* opportunities for black people and feminists within academia to challenge, resist and negotiate. However, he does raise an important issue for those of us who find ourselves in the borderlands of inclusion and exclusion, marginality and centrality. There are many contradictions in these borderlands. In particular, here, I am at the same time

marginalised institutionally, yet central in my position as 'expert' in (re) presenting the 'other'. Some of us have found different ways of confronting the issues of being in the borderlands. Some have chosen assimilation as a strategy for coping with the isolation that it brings. White educational institutions and welfare organisations have also chosen assimilation as strategies for providing social ligitimation.

Assimilation

There is an implicit demand that we assimilate to succeed. Assimilation, as a social policy, is attractive to some black people as it affords us success, that is, getting a job, acquiring the means to provide materially for our families and for ourselves. Economic distress has created a climate in which some of us have bought into the assimilation process and given up overt resistance to racism as a viable survival strategy.

However, some black academics feel that assimilation is a way of urging people to negate blackness and imitate racist white people. In our research inquiry groups, some of us spoke of discarding signs of militancy (natural hairstyles, dreadlocks, and African dress) when they took up senior positions in white institutions, especially in places where they were isolated and were the 'token' black. Some also spoke of reclaiming our militancy and told stories of how and when they had reclaimed it.

They spoke of how they had lost sight of their initial convictions. It had created a state of enduring ambivalence. For many black progressive academics the spirit of militancy and radical politicisation grows faint, and our spirit is assaulted by feelings of despair and powerlessness. I, myself, I find that I have to work hard to nourish it, to keep it strong. Such is the cost of seeking entry or incorporation into the liberal and conservative mainstream.

It is difficult to resist assimilation on material, psychological and political grounds, because some of us believe that the more formal power and security we have the more we will be in a position to effect change. However, 'It is difficult for black people to transform traditional university structures from within because of our experiences of marginality' and biculturalism, which, some writers have described as a tenuous balance between two cultural worlds:

"A *marginal person* is one who lives on the boundary of two distinct cultures, one being more difficult than the other, but who does not have the ancestry, *belief system*, or social skills to be fully a member of the dominant cultural group" (Park 1928, Stonequist 1937)(Bell 1990, p.463).

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As "outsiders within" we can access the "Knowledge and insight of the insider with the critical attitude of the outsider" (Stonequist 1937, p.155). While the insider status gives us the opportunity for change, the outsider status can cause us to take on a detached posture. It is possible, that at any one time, we may be experiencing passionate concern as well as detached concern.

hooks spoke of how being on the margin could be a source of creativity and transformation:

"Living as we did – on the edge- we developed a particular way of seeing reality. We looked both from the outside in and from the inside out. We focused our attention on the center as well as the margin. We understood both…Our survival depended on an ongoing public awareness of the separation between margin and center and an ongoing private acknowledgement that we were a necessary, vital part of that whole…This sense of wholeness, impressed upon our consciousness by the structure of our daily lives, provided us with an oppositional world view —a mode of seeing unknown to most of our oppressors, that sustained us….These statements identify marginality as much more than a site of deprivation; in fact, I was saying just the opposite, that it is a site of radical possibility, a space of resistance…..It offers one the possibility of radical perspective from which to see and create, to imagine alternative new worlds" (hooks 1984).

Working for Change

So our marginality can be to our advantage. It means that we can act as critics of the system and challenge the status quo. We may choose to work for change from within and we may even be able to take on a more radical approach to change or indeed critique radical change which can produce negative consequences.

I see my role as that of a radical political worker for change and transformation. I believe that, if the experiences of black students are to be different, then we have to use our positions as black academics to create change, despite the constraints although the experiences of doing so can be very wounding. A black woman professor, Patricia Williams, in her collection of essays, 'The Alchemy of Race and Rights', writes eloquently of the way in which black female students and teachers engage in critical thinking and intellectual work which threatens the status quo and makes it difficult for us to receive the necessary support and affirmation. hooks (1994) argues that naming racism and sexism as combined ensures that colleagues with narrow perspectives will see us as intruders. Black people working or socialising in predominantly white settings, whose structures are grounded in racism and white male domination, risk being crushed if we dare to affirm

blackness and a strong identity of black culture. If we insist in doing this then we do it at great risk.

In my early years in the university I experienced hitting my head against hard institutional structures, as I risked advancing notions of equalities and tried not to collude in reproducing inequality in my department. This was very wounding. I noticed that I kept repeating a cycle of putting energy into seeking new structures for change. I reacted to events by fighting at the front line. I had a direct, confrontational approach which was aimed at the power structures. My main mode of action was to be reactive, putting all my energies into fighting. Becoming aware of this pattern made me decide that I had to do something different. I kept working at one level only and found the experience frustrating and stressful and I had doubts about my ability to change structures from within.

My ambivalence led to self-doubt, which sometimes generated anger and left me debilitated. At times I blamed myself, and internalised that I was either doing something wrong or not articulating my views clearly enough. I took on some self-doubt. So much so that often on the car journey home I would check out with one of my female colleagues, her perception of me in meetings we both attended. I checked whether she understood what I had said and whether I had been too confrontational or too aggressive. She gave me honest and constructive feedback and at times we became engaged in conversations about some of my ideas as a black woman about teaching and learning and about supportive structures for learning, to which she brought a white Jewish woman perspective. I was inquiring into my behaviour in meetings so sought feedback from regular conversations with selected colleagues and friends about how they received my behaviour at meetings.

I began to notice how my own ways of speaking in departmental staff meetings and that of other women was different to our male colleagues. I began to realise that I shared being ignored and silenced with some other women. This, and other experiences, reminded me that often when the radical voice speaks about domination we are speaking to those who dominate. Language is also a place of struggle and I struggled to find the 'right' language to challenge in a way that I could be heard. My language was one of resistance and I was also met with resistance in another language; a language that was one of domination, and sought to silence me.

I was left asking questions, at times," Was I being "too black", "too political?" I told myself that if, by introducing experiences of black students that were different from those

constructed in academic writing, I was being "too black" or "too political" then I was comfortable with that. Unwilling to play the role of other, I tried desperately and painfully to create spaces within this culture of domination so as to be able to survive whole, with soul intact. I began to ask questions about my effectiveness. What happens to me when I react in this way? What happens to others when I react in this way? What do I do to my self, my well being? Do others listen, and if so, how? I realise, now, that by only responding reactively I may have solved some problems in the short term but my actions may have done nothing to alter the fundamental structure that caused the problem. To be most effective, I needed to consider a range of actions that moved beyond reactive through to creative. That sometimes means being less temperate.

The Cost of Working for Change

Some of us, who steer the Course towards change and who work for transformation, have found ourselves having to temper our radicalism. We are sometimes tempered by working within the confines of some oppressive organisations. Meyerson and Scully (1995) view tempered radicals as:

"People who work within mainstream organisations and professions and want also to transform them'....they have "become tougher by being alternately heated up and cooled down' and they are angered by oppressive values and perceived lack of social justice...Tempered radicals are individuals who identify with and are committed to their organisations, and are also committed to a cause, community, or ideology that is fundamentally different from, and possibly at odds with the dominant culture of their organisation. The ambivalent stance of these individuals creates a number of special challenges and opportunities" (p. 586).

Black scholars and critical thinkers (Bell 1990, hooks 1989, Collins 1986) have articulated the tensions and challenges of tempered radicals. They have given voice to the pressures that black professionals, especially women, face in conforming to professional standards and the dominant culture of white institutions as well as in living up to expectations of black communities. They have argued that black academics, who have become tempered radicals, have experienced role conflict and role ambiguity which some cases produces stress and burn out. We become frustrated with the rate of change being so slow and some may give up on the possibility of ever affecting change.

But change might come in different ways and by taking small steps. Meyerson and Scully (1995) remind us that we can create change in two ways, "Through incremental, semi-strategic reforms and through spontaneous, sometimes unremarkable, expressions of authenticity that implicitly drive or even constitute change" (p.594).

They suggest two change -oriented strategies – small wins and local, spontaneous, authentic action. Two other strategies they suggest are language styles and affiliations. They recommend using insider language to legitimate a change programme because, at a deep level, insider language can be used to challenge the assumptions and values of the organisation. Some change agents, in order to gain legitimacy in the system, have learnt to speak the language of the insiders. They stress that language has the 'capacity to rule out other forms of talk, thought and identity'. They also emphasis the importance of maintaining links with individuals, communities, or groups outside of their organisations. These outside affiliations can act as sources of information and support. So bearing these strategies in mind, what model of change could black academics adopt?

Advocating a model of change – incorporating a critical educative approach

We need a practical model of change which is linked to efforts to transform structures. Change is not just something an individual can do. It requires our collective responsibility to educate for critical consciousness. We also need to be engaged in ongoing, critical self-reflection, in changing our words and our deeds. In some ways it is our collective responsibility. It is not something that black academics can do in isolation; white people, showing willingness and commitment, can also play their part.

Black academics should make as many claims about our scholarship as white people do. This means writing papers, addressing conferences, reviewing articles, and, at times, not being available to perform the care-giving tasks which are expected of us. We should seek to influence the institution itself by playing a part in its organisation and structure. Universities have been slow in adopting equal opportunities policies. They are, therefore, unlikely to re-think higher education in terms of anti-racist practices unless there is a strong group committed to change working 'on the inside'

What we will gain, in the end, is the opportunity to influence the next generation of students, to raise their consciousness about inequalities in society, to encourage them to confront their own assumptions and to challenge the racist and sexist nature of the organisations in which they are working. There is also the possibility of exciting in them the joy of the potential of change and the urgency of the need for that change.

Black academics are important role models and, those of us who wish to transform our consciousness, need to engage in an ongoing critical self-reflection in changing our worlds and actions. To get such a balance will require us to seek self-determination.

This would require a process of decolonisation, which means choosing to examine ourselves critically, so as to divert us of internalised racism and sexism, and commit ourselves to politicisation. The process of politicisation and decolonisation requires critical literacy andeducating ourselves by studying the work of progressive thinkers, black and non-black, whose teachings are about resistance.

Education programmes designed to meet the needs of people from poor working class backgrounds should find their way into the community. We need to challenge our thinking that, because some black people are poor, they are illiterate or unintelligent. We have to find ways that will allow black people, irrespective of economic status, to gain access to the knowledge and skills necessary. We need to take the initiative to call for and demand progressive anti-racist, anti-sexist education where it has been taken off the agenda by conservative institutions in higher education, as evidenced in, the policy document produced by CCETSW – Diploma in Social Work paper 31. We need to insist on its place in the classroom and integrate the teaching in our syllabus.

Collective efforts to change structures should to be the priority and go hand in hand with individual struggles to change consciousness. Black academics can challenge the academic structure with our presence as, in many cases, we have greater access to systems. It is important that, as black academics, we help create new structures for expression and develop progressive strategies for transforming existing structures. If we are committed to diverse black communities then we should be concerned with a critical pedagogy which seeks to address black audiences as well as other people. This commitment should be connected to an effort to promote collective black self-determination.

Black Self-determination

At the heart of black self-determination is a political awareness that we should assume responsibility for constructively transforming our lives. An important goal of black self-determination is rooted in a conviction that it is possible for us, as black people, to create meaningful lives irrespective of our material conditions. Our mindset is more crucial than material privilege to achieving black self-determination. Black academics have a crucial role to play in helping with that educative process. An educative process that would help challenge and eradicate this internalised notion that the majority of black people live lives that are valueless because they lack material resources.

Black self-determination enables us to construct oppositional world-views, drawing on our history and the legacy of black resistance. Clearly, it is black people who have the most to gain from black self-determination so that many of the communities of resistance, including the classrooms and student communities, would be black even though they would not be based on a politics of exclusion.

It is difficult for black academics who believe in the need to develop forms of practice within the context of political action or within a radical education perspective. This, I believe, is because such educators like myself, while challenged by Friere's writings and those of black feminists', are working within 'stable' institutionalised education systems in which reform and not radical, political action is the way change is effected.

As a black academic, with my political commitment, I feel I need to guard against the danger of education becoming solely a political arena. I need to be mindful that too much emphasis on the political could lead to artificial polarisation and create unmanageable conflict. Political conflict can be healthy when managed well. However engaging in continuous conflictual situations, resulting from challenges to structures, has its personal cost for black academics. Nevertheless, challenges to traditional education and institutional learning need to continue. A challenge to adult educators, black and white, to examine their practice is important. As educators we should be challenged to commit ourselves to the liberation of the oppressed.

While black self-determination is a political process which first seeks first to engage the minds and hearts of black people, it can also embrace bridges across race. It also has to recognise the importance of black people learning from the wisdom of non-black people. The spirit of black self-determination includes diverse black experiences and diverse black communities.

If all of us, who are black academics, could agree upon our role and purpose and set out to pursue a common end, then we would still end up with very different results. This isn't because some are better at being black academic radicals than others, but simply that we each bring our own biographies into the academy and, like externally imposed constraints, these identities influence what we can and cannot achieve.

What therefore, is our role and purpose?

Concluding comments

Black academics play a central role in challenging eurocentric and male paradigms of knowledge. We are central to the creation of specialised thought, towards the development of theories that are liberating and reflective and which can aid the struggle in Britain against racism. We also play a big role in the re-articulation of our experiences and critical thinking about these experiences as an essential ingredient in empowering theories. This is because our concrete experiences as members of specific race, class and gender groups, as well as our concrete historical situations, necessarily play significant roles in our perspectives on the world.

Engaging with this research on the experiences of black professionals and black students, I have tried to play a part in the re-articulation of our experiences and sought to make a contribution to the positive development of some of the participants. In my role as an academic/researcher, I am involved in the construction of such specialised knowledge through teaching, research and publishing. In this position, I have the opportunity to challenge masculine and eurocentric discourse. I also have the opportunity to offer alternative visions of teaching/learning which are conducive to intellectual development, personal/professional development and social change. This is taking place in the context of what is increasingly becoming a tough and competitive institution in which certain masculine and eurocentric forms of knowledge and ways of communicating persist, but they no longer remain unchallenged.

From my experiences and the knowledge gained through my research, I would like to begin the conclusion of this thesis by stating that black professionals, including academics and black students, have a crucial role to play in the development of our thought and knowledge, knowledge that could lead to transformation and change. I have three reasons for saying so: -

Firstly, our experiences as black people in Britain provide us with a unique position in respect of welfare agencies and academic institutions. It is more likely for black professionals and black students, as members of an oppressed group, to have critical insights into the condition of our own oppression than it is for those who live outside these structures. The importance of the leadership of black academics' in producing knowledge and theories does not mean that others cannot participate. It does not mean that the

primary responsibility for defining one's own reality lies with the people who live this reality, who actually have these experiences.

Secondly, black academics can provide unique leadership for black students and other black professionals in empowerment and resistance. We play a major role in helping to make the connections between self-definition, empowerment and taking action on one's own behalf. We can help to assist black students and practitioners define their reality, tell their stories, name their history and shape their identity. The power of self-definition is a key to individual and group empowerment. Black professionals, academics and black students can assist in the development of an epistemology that allows for the power of self-definition to be developed. By 'self' I mean our own groups rather than 'other' groups, which might perpetuate black oppression.

Stressing the central importance of black professionals, academics and students to a black epistemology does not mean that all black professionals, academics and students exert full responsibility. Whilst being in white welfare organisations and academia generally provides the experiential base for a black consciousness, these same conditions suppress its articulation. Black professional consciousness is not acquired as a finished product but must continually develop in relation to changing conditions the consciousness of black professionals, academics and students emerges and is part of a self-conscious struggle to merge thought and action. It is also part of a self-definition. However, autonomy to develop a self-defined, independent analysis does not mean that black epistemology has relevance only for black people or that we must confine ourselves to analysing our own experiences

While theories and knowledge emanating from a black experience may originate with black professionals, academics and students, they cannot flourish in isolation from the experiences and ideas of other groups. The dilemma is that we must place our own experiences and consciousness at the centre of any serious efforts to develop black epistemology whilst not becoming separatist and excluding with this knowledge. Black professionals, academics and students are central in producing black perspective thing and should remain central to its full articulation; however collaboration with other groups is also required.

Such collaboration requires dialogue in the first instance, between us and within the larger black communities so that we can find ways of handling difference, internal dissent and conflict. We could then use our position in organisations as "outsider-within" as a

position of strength in building effective coalitions and stimulating dialogue. Our challenge then, as I discovered in my research inquiries, is developing dialogues based on a commitment to principled collaboration and authentic dialogue about our actual need for each other rather than on expediency.

From a solid base of strength we could deal with other kinds of people, a multiplicity of issues, and with difference. It is necessary, in order to further our development, to have dialogues with and to collaborate with a range of groups, each with their own distinctive sets of experiences, and specialised thought embedded in their experiences, of the larger system of political and intellectual discourse. The usefulness of collaboration with other groups, both as scholarls and activists, offers us opportunities to develop new models for social change.

Chapter 14

Transformation – my being

Introduction

I write this concluding chapter about my transformation by way of closure and not an end
to the work I have done. In writing this thesis, I was particularly interested in my internal
conditions of voice, personal growth and development as a researcher. What follows in
this chapter is my attempt to reveal myself as researcher and my learning and my
vulnerability as I lived my inquiry. I want to show how engaging with my research has
been a continuous process of learning and development and how I have been engaged
in, what Torbert (1991) refers to as, 'transforming power' which is to show how I have
gained power through personal transformation. In so doing I attempted to assist others to
gain power to transform their lives. I have also developed my ideas about change and
transformation, which I shall present.

The real task of transformation was to discover for myself who I am, but part of this
discovery entailed a dialogue with my history and with the developmental influences
which have affected me as a whole person, politically, culturally and spiritually. I needed
to reflect on the relationship between my research and my life, and on how my emotional,
spiritual and professional growth have been affected; in particular, on how my research
and practice have been affected by the research itself. I, therefore, engaged in self-
examination of my learning, growth and transformation as a black professional as I lived
with my research and faced challenges as a researcher. I did this through a process of
reflection. I used reflection as a personal process which involved quiet contemplation of
issues that were primarily of interest to my 'self' and my development as a researcher. I
stopped to think and to reflect in order to take stock of what had happened in my life as
the researcher both prior to embarking on the research project and during the research
itself.

Through the process of reflection, I embarked on a search for knowledge by engaging in
a dialectic process of self-reflection, looking inward at my feelings and thought processes
and outward at the situation in which I found myself. I believe that a personal self-
reflective approach to research does not just overplay the inner world but is appreciative
of the relationship between the inner and outer world, between the individual and the
social world, so I also reflected on the actions that I took.

I am convinced that this self-reflective method of constructing knowledge is more compelling and reliable than standard, detached ways of knowing. I view the personal as making a significant contribution to our understanding of the world and my approach to research takes the involvement of life learning into account. In this regard the interweaving of biography and research should be taken seriously. Like Marshall (1992), I believe that research inquiries would be more rigorous if underlying biographical issues were appreciated and worked with as knowledge making. Both Griffiths (1994) and Marshall (1992) suggest that biographies should be taken seriously. Marshall concluded in her paper "Researching Women in Management as a Way of Life:"

"my researching is also a way of life, I and 'it' have to continue to grow and develop, otherwise my life will become stuck; and I have to be able to apply what I take from my research as learning. Intellectual knowledge is insufficient on its own; it is best mirrored in action and being. My research is also my life. At their best, knowledge-making and personal development interweave, each sustaining and deepening the other (Marshall, 1992 p. 289).

Griffiths states that autobiography is a method of gaining reliable knowledge for the teller and the listener. She further states that for a piece of work to count as a critical autobiography, the individual's experience has to be there because their personal view is important. She adds that writing about ones own story is important in action research and this also includes the final writing of the thesis. The researcher's professional development and personal experiences are important narratives to include. So I began the thesis by writing, in Chapter 2, my autobiography, which represented an historical voice and, primarily, voices from my early years and I am ending it with aspects of my biography which represent some history but, primarily, a current voice.

Transformation, I believe, begins with power and with my understanding of power and empowerment, and I shall present how I became empowered.

Empowerment Begins- *what has the process of therapy done for me?*

During the early nineties I was going through separation and divorce and I needed to take care of my emotional well being. This meant reflecting on my personal and professional life and examining ways in which I worked for change. In the past, I had been more interested in the macro issues of change related to bigger structures and wider systems. In terms of my early experience as a community social worker and the experience of my initial years at the university, I began to notice a pattern in the way I worked for change. I kept repeating a cycle of putting energy for change into seeking new structures. I

reacted to events by fighting at the front line. I had a direct confrontational approach that was aimed at the power structures as, for example, in my campaigning work in the community.

I felt as though, in those earlier years, I was dressed in armour, cut off from my centre as I engaged actively in angry fighting because I was also full of rage at the injustices towards black people in society. Rage can be an act of assertion which sets limits and establishes identity by saying "I won't take anymore of this, I defy racist society" (hooks 1995). I experienced working in that way as extremely stressful. The messages I had given myself was that my emotional needs were not as important as the collective struggle to resist racism. I began to realise that I needed to find the balance between the necessity for confronting racist structures and the need of comfort for myself. I needed to find a way of knowing that my emotional well being was just as important as the collective struggle to end racism. I had done what hooks (1993) described so well when she said:

"Often we replace recognition of inner emotional needs with the longing to control. When we deny our real needs, we tend to feel fragile, vulnerable, emotionally unstable, and untogether. Black females often work hard to cover up these conditions" (p.139).

This is what I had done for many years, covered my real needs and hidden my vulnerability. So I decided to come away from fighting for change on the front line, at the barricades, and try to fight for change from behind taking more care of myself in the process. I knew that I had a difficult time ahead of me and sought help to be able to cope. I went into therapy. I chose Gestalt therapy because of its principles of holism, working with mind, body and person-in-environment. I also liked the fact that it was a process -oriented therapy, which stressed the importance of dialogue.

In therapy, I was confronted with having to examine my life, my 'self'. I questioned in what way I experienced 'self'. Was it as a 'way of being', or as a 'way of doing'? Did my experience contradict what I was doing, my practice, my beliefs, my values, and my politics? Exploring possible answers to these questions brought with it some discomfort but had positive outcomes in terms of the way I now think about my relationship with the world. I was interested in helping other black people to ask similar questions so as to develop our understanding of our own processes, develop our abilities to let in positive feelings, adopt positive thinking and allow spontaneity. Some black people fear that too much positive thinking is unrealistic. Although I agree that we cannot truly counter the

negative by changing thought patterns I believe it is important that we name our benefits. So as hooks (1993) questions:

"What would it mean for black people to collectively believe that despite racism and other forces of domination we can find everything that we need to live well in the universe, including the strength to engage in the kind of political resistance that can transform domination?" (p.63).

I was interested in how we could operate from a place of strength. These are all essential in effecting change. During my time in therapy I was enabled to rethink some of my attitudes about positive thinking and, two years into therapy (1994), I embarked on this research project with Cathy, with one of its aims being to focus on the positives in our experiences.

During therapy I was faced with many challenges to do with needing to create a more healthy relationship with my 'self'. Some of these challenges extended into the Co-operative Inquiry in which I was challenged to develop authentic dialogue. I had to pay more attention to my authenticity and integrity. As I listened to the stories and to the experiences of others I became focused on my story and my experiences and considered possibilities of making a difference both to my life and to the lives of others. I became aware that I needed to make some changes in my life which might improve my practice and through the passage of time and, in keeping with my need for integration and well being, in 1996 I undertook some life changes, which contributed to my empowerment. What were some of the changes I made? I began by paying attention to my 'well being'.

The Art of My Wellbeing

I opened my life to a shift of form. Two years into my research and four years into therapy I decided to pay attention to the way I was living my life and focused of living more healthily. I was curious about the way I presented myself in the world psychologically, spiritually and socially and I embarked on radical change towards more groundedness and, transformation. I confronted questions like, how I could connect with my power and vulnerability without being threatened and terrified of them?

I began with a focus on the physical side to my health. I changed my diet and the way that I ate by moving towards a healthier diet, and became a vegan. I had always exercised; but instead of being more concerned with body image I became more committed to healthy exercise and became more disciplined in the way that I exercised. I

was now interested in the "wellness" of my internal organs. Also included was the "wellness" of my soul and spirit, so I learnt relaxation techniques to manage my stress better, engaged in my own self-therapy by writing a journal every morning and continuing to work on my psychological issues in therapy. I was concentrating on making changes to my internal and external functioning.

This new way of living supported me in integrating the teacher, researcher, political activist, therapist, and mother. The more I focused on my personal and professional growth and change, the more changes I witnessed in my research, in my work with clients in therapy, with clients in organisations and in my practice with students. I noticed that I paid more attention to their physical and psychological well being. I was also becoming more of a reflective practitioner, widening my lenses to take in more possibilities and noticing contradictions in my life and in my practice. My life was becoming a living inquiry.

I was supported by friends and colleagues who understood the notion of living inquiry but It was not always a comfortable process for some of my friends, family, and colleagues or for me. My change of life style frightened some of my friends and family. My shift from the macro to the micro was clearly reflected in the courses I taught and this was disturbing to some of my work colleagues. This was much so, that one of my colleagues challenged me for taking on a therapy training and for teaching therapeutic skills to students, accusing me of having 'sold out'. She thought I had 'sold out' because we shared, in common, our interest in political activities in the community in relation to had women's' issues and together we taught a module on community work. I had moved on to teach therapeutic work whilst she continued to teach group work in a community context. She viewed my shift as taking on an individualist model at the expense of a group/community model. I was able to say to her that I had not 'sold out' but broadened my possibilities for helping oppressed people.

I did so in the belief that groups of oppressed people needed change not only in the external world, in social structures, but also in their internal worlds, personal life structures and systems, in order to get the best out of their lives. This would allow them to get in touch with latent aspects of themselves which served as new avenues through which they could achieve a greater capacity for positive potentiality and change. I believe that if we can be in touch with our human reality maybe we can build communities appropriate to who we are.

I was experiencing a sense of agency and was using the experience of my change to help others to take on the changes they needed to make in their personal lives in order that they might feel empowered to influence changes in oppressive structures. hooks (1993)states:

"A culture of domination undermines individuals capacity to assert meaningful agency in their lives... Living without the ability to exercise meaningful agency over one's material life is a situation that invites addiction"(p.68)

Learning to be a Whole person

The real challenge for me was learning to be 'whole'. I needed to reclaim my ability to live heart-whole and I began to work at restoring myself to my totality, towards a balance between mind and body. I wanted to bring the different parts of my life together into an integrated whole, although not whole in the purest sense, as I believe that tolerating my fragmented parts is also important.

According to Heron (1993) learning to be a whole person means "dipping down into the deeper reaches of yourself in order to integrate with them" (p.92). For me this involved paying attention to what Heron describes as the intra-personal, that is, what goes on in my psyche; working towards integrating thinking, feeling and action; the interpersonal, that is, my awareness of my face-to-face interactions, exploring ways in which I have related to others through projections, for example; the cultural level, that is, examining the ways in which my beliefs, values and roles interconnect to inform my relationships to social structures and inform social change. This involved a process of being clear about the sources and processes of social oppression and how I have attempted to understand social structures and how to challenge for change (Heron 1993). So my reasons for learning to be a whole person extended from the intraphychic through the interpersonal, to organisational and political change and development. It was looking at both internal and external relationships.

I was interested in learning in a holistic way not only for personal development but also educational, political and social development. I also believed in the importance of this way of learning for facilitators, researchers and educators, who engage in and with the learning process. I paid particular attention to the learning I was gaining from being in therapy and the ways in which mind and body, thoughts and feelings contributed to

learning. So I began to pay attention to how students could learn holistically and whether, as a facilitator and teacher, I was working holistically.

Integration of the internal and external, mind and body was an emerging process, which impacted on my research.

The impact of my emerging integration on my research:

During my time in therapy and with my research I never lost sight of myself as a black woman living in a racist society. The internal and external marriage was close to my heart. I believe that in every thing I do, the two should be moving towards integration and that part of my essence of living is contingent on this integration. I continued to be politically engaged and committed, in my work with black students and social work professionals, in trying to educate for critical consciousness.

As I lived and grew I began to see ways in which my research was also a living organism which was also living and growing. I reflected on this process in my journal:

"As I continue with my journey through my research, my research is never out of my thoughts as I interact in daily life and in my practice. So every group I teach I note my process, I pay attention to my emotional reactions and actions. I am aware of the different levels at which my inquiry is happening emotionally and academically. My whole life feels like one big inquiry. I feel as if I could inquire into everything. I have so many questions that need answers, at what point do I stop? It is not possible to stop asking questions, stop inquiring. I am reminded of my training and practice as a Gestalt therapist and my learning about awareness, how once you become aware it does not go away, neither is it possible to become unaware.. Similarly once you know it is difficult to 'unknow' unless you choose to forget or there is memory difficulty. Also if you develop consciousness about something or self-consciousness, that consciousness could remain for life. My inquiry bears the same resemblance. So as I go on my life journey, my research is now an integral part of me".

I was living with and through my research differently, opening myself up to its emotional demands and asking questions which resulted in personal change. I was particularly attentive, along with other inquiries, to thinking, feeling and sensing ongoing experiences in my life as well as to facing the unknown. I began to focus more on myself as the inquirer, on my process as a practitioner, on my changes and on the ways in which I was

living my inquiry. I engaged in a type of appreciative inquiry, which allowed me to be immersed in one way of being, with the research and my thesis, letting things emerge. I was staying engaged when I was able to engage, noting down my feelings and what was happening to and for me. I was not making things happen. I had a gentler energy, and was more reflective. I shifted my focus from over-functioning, needing to function well as a researcher and worked towards replacing it with 'being' well with the research.

As a result a different form of energy was shown up in the way in which I was doing my research and in how I was engaging in writing the research text. My research took on a life which was not only 'about' the generation of knowledge or of my working towards the pursuit of knowledge, but also creating knowledge from 'self' and 'collective selves'. Self in this sense, being 'I' and 'collective selves' being the other co-researchers. I began, for example, to notice how my approach to the Co-operative Inquiry was changing. My focus was not only on what was being generated, as I asked questions 'about' but also questions 'from' the research and from myself; I began to ask questions that would assist people to speak 'from' themselves rather than 'about' themselves.

I even began to notice, in my writing of the research text of the Co-operative Inquiry, that I wrote 'about' the events. I realised that I had focused on the doing, on what had happened in terms of action and less on how people had been in the groups and that I had even excluded myself from the writing of the research text. I noticed ways in which I represented the participant's voices which was less about their subjectivity. I noticed some distancing of myself. This journal extract reflects this:

It is as I enter this process of reflection that I realise the missing parts from my writing of the research text. Why is it that these are the parts that are missing, the voices of the participants and their reflections? I have their voices, in the process of their reflections about their experiences', captured in the writing of the data from the co-operative inquiry, but not their voices on their reflections of the research process and the process of telling their stories. I am really curious as to how I came to be writing only 'about' what the participants said and yet the material came from their heartfelt experiences. I feel sad as I realise now how I have left out some of their passion and how they made sense of their experience of 'being' in the inquiry groups. I am now interested in finding out their reflected thoughts on the process. In fact, if I do that I would be engaged in two parallel tracks in this inquiry, inquiry 'about' and inquiry 'from'. I am interested in finding representational forms in my writing that would be writing 'from' and

writing 'about'. So I will return to some of the participants and ask them to tell me about their experience, of their learning from the collaboration and find a way of writing it 'from' their standpoint.

I believe I was protecting myself from feelings of sadness connected to the stories of participants. I became more aware of wanting to hear their voices in different ways. I became less engaged in what the inquiry generated in terms of data and more interested in what I was doing and what this was about, questioning more and more what I did and the effects it had. I became curious as to whether participants had experienced life changes as a result of their engagement in the Co-operative Inquiry. It was as a result of noticing my life changes that I became curious about theirs and asked some of them about this. Evidence of their learning and change has been reported earlier in the thesis.

What has been my learning as a result of reflection on my process of change and development? What sense have I made of it all?

Reflecting and making sense

I have come to realise how in order to work for change in a very fundamental way, we not only have to work at the multiple levels – systemic; structural, cultural - but we also have to inquire deeply into ourselves, and our sense of being in the world. We need to gain insights into how we hold our values in place in relation to change. We have to examine the different ways in which we hold the world by pushing back into our 'self' to explore the politics and multiplicity of self. I began my life career as a political activist in the 1980's in the material world and in the last few years I have sought to politicise the self. Politicisation of self and transformation, have for me, been a process of learning how to be a whole person.

I have emerged with diverse ways of knowing which I now use to inform my ideas of self and identity from which I have generalised to help me make sense of the position of other black professionals from the standpoint of the particular structure of racism and oppression. Now, I seek to find a constructive point of connection between material struggle and metaphysical concerns.

I have taken this concern into my work with black students, for example. I see my work as helping them to understand the 'ground' of their experience before thinking about what must be done to gain personal power and transform their experience. This work is

different from the effort to raise their consciousness about personal experience even though the two are linked. It is important to name and give voice to one's experience but it should be stressed that this is only part of the process of politicisation.
hooks (1989) states:

"Politicisation of the self can have its starting point in an exploration of the personal wherein what is first revolutionised is the way we think about the self. To begin revisioning, we must acknowledge the need to examine the self from a new, critical standpoint. Such a perspective, while it would assist on the self as a site for politicisation, would equally insist that simply describing one's experience of exploitation or oppression is not to become politicised. It is not sufficient to know the personal but to know - to speak it in a different way. Knowing the personal might mean naming spaces of ignorance, gaps in knowledge, ones that render us unable to link the personal with the political" (p.107).

She further argues that the process should also include education for critical consciousness which teaches about the power structures of domination and how they function. She confirms: "It is understanding the latter that enables us to imagine new possibilities, strategies for change and transformation (hooks, 1989, p.108).

Transformation could come from widening our understanding of the kinds of power going on around us and uncovering a wider range of possibilities for embracing power. These can be learnt by unveiling the unconscious feelings surrounding the idea of power, expanding our ideas first, which could then lead to widened practice. Gaining personal power in terms of psychological recovery, for example, can be viewed as only a halfway measure. The psychology, or the soul, of communities also needs recovery too if transformations are to happen. Dysfunctional ideas and not only the victims or bearers of these ideas require a therapy too. Therefore, no matter how sincerely I work through my feelings in regard to power, in therapy, if my mind is entranced by ideas of control, authority, leadership and prestige implanted in society, I will remain twisted in my daily struggles with the operation of power in the actual world. Ideas of power, in society, impinge on my soul and psyche, and I become unwell if society is unwell. Also if I am well or unwell then it is possible that this will have an impact on my research, on my practice. It is also possible that I may also experience myself behaving in inauthentic ways.

Some of the changes in me were enhancing my authenticity but I was sometimes left feeling uneasy, questioning whether I was being truly authentic. I questioned myself because when I began to make life changes and focused on my inner world, I noticed that I became more and more tempered in the way in which I challenged in organisations

and appeared more rational and cool-headed. I also became more worried about threats to my identity and questioned my authenticity and my personal and political integrity. I began to question whether I was 'playing the game', whether I had 'sold out', or was a 'fraud'. According to hooks (1984), threats to personal identity can bring about feelings of fraudulence and even passion and rage and I have become more mindful of that.

I have grown to appreciate that authenticity is a continuing process, one that requires constant effort because it involves difficult struggles. It requires a person to be alert to discovering themselves in a number of different ways, not only through introspection but also through reflection. It also requires paying attention to decisions and choices, how these are made, and the context in which they are made and being mindful about the fact that some decisions and choices are made against a shifting background.

Concern with authenticity engages you in worries over what is a real 'self', over which bits of oneself are the real self. I have also come to realise that there exists no unity of the self, no unchanging core of a being since 'self' is always changing. To be truly authentic and work for change means undertaking assessment and reassessment within a changing context of self. From my experience, this process has required negotiation, tolerance, re-assessment and change as I acted in the present and at the same time reflected on my own incoherence. This dual process of action and reflection offered me a source of insight and further change. I have learnt that it takes courage to instigate self-reflection, which calls one's self into question. Openness to oneself is not always a comfortable process, anymore than is the process of openness to others.

Concluding comments

In this thesis I have opened up to others my story as an inquirer, my practice as a teacher and how I chose to bring about change through the process of education, educating others and myself. I chose therapy, friends and family to help me with personal understanding which resulted in a change of life, chose to stay with exploring a deeper understanding of what I do in the classroom, chose to research with a focus on micro issues on an inter-subjective level. These choices have expanded my personal knowledge and contributed to public knowledge.

The position I am at now is that I have been sharpening my focus by paying attention to how I bring about change in organisations, working as an organisational consultant. However, I mindfully and actively choose the type of work I now take on in organisations,

so that I keep paying attention to my health and well being. In terms of my practice with students at the university, I am still working to effect change at Brunel's with a proposal, stemming from Cathy and my research work, for setting up a Centre for Black Professional Practice.

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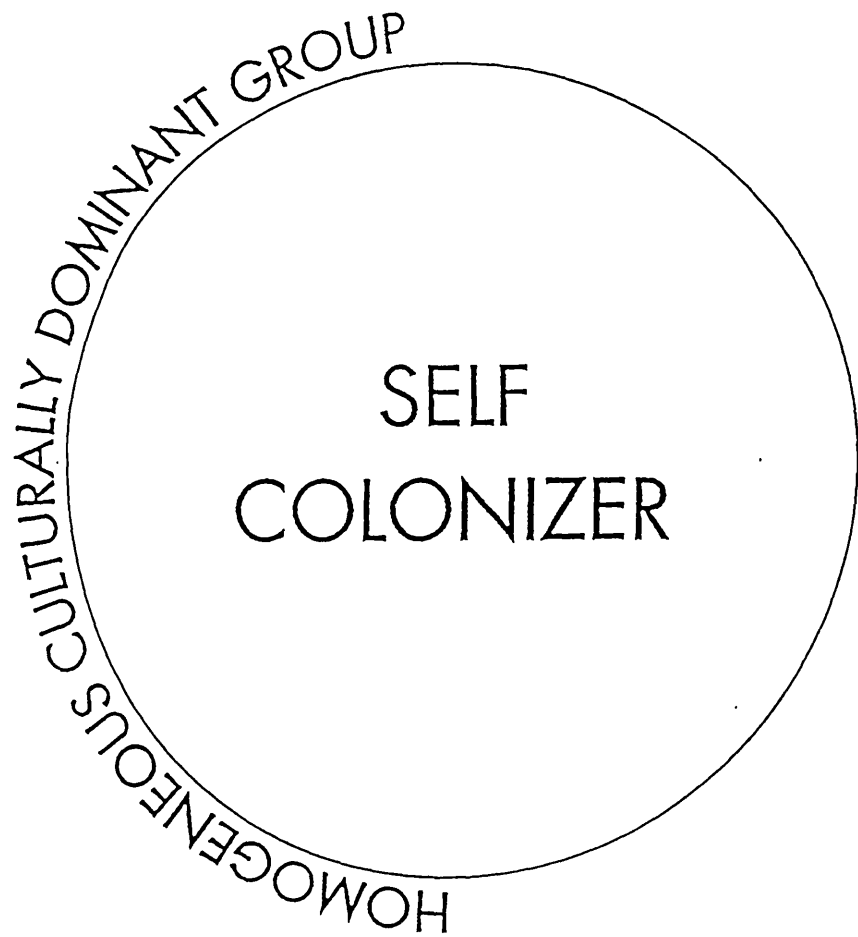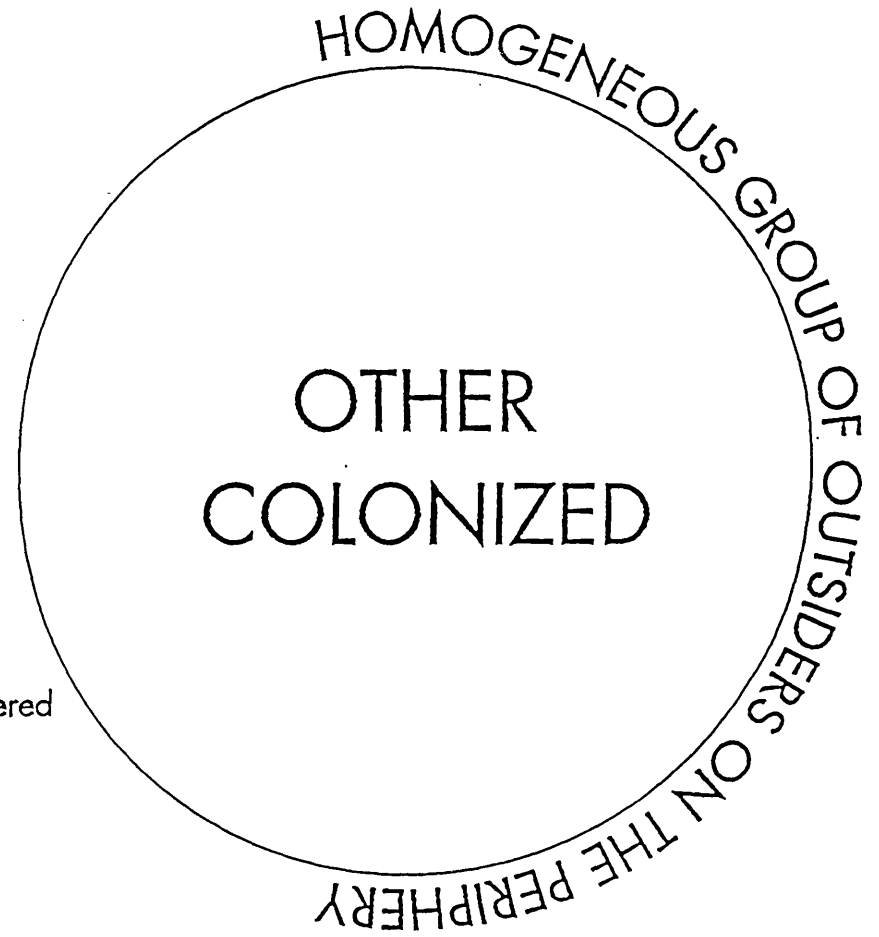
FIXED IDENTITIES

DICHOTOMOUS

CATEGORIES

OPPOSITIONS

(Defined out of
cultural, ethnic,
racial and gendered
differences)

SELF
COLONIZER

OTHER
COLONIZED

HOMOGENEOUS CULTURALLY DOMINANT GROUP

HOMOGENEOUS GROUP OF OUTSIDERS ON THE PERIPHERY

DISCOURSE OF 'OTHER'

NOT FIXED CONSTRUCTION

FLUID CONSTRUCTION

SELF

OTHER

PERSPECTIVES HISTORY POLITICS

POLITICS HISTORY PERSPECTIVES

CONFLICTING

DECENTRED

OVERLAPPING

IDENTITIES

CONTRADICTIONS